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OCTAVES OF AWARENESS

IN an epitaph intended for Sir Isaac Newton, Alexander Pope wrote:

> Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night:
> God said, let Newton be! and all was light.

There were others, of course, who added to the light, and later physicists who made our knowledge of the world of nature more comprehensive, but the point of Pope's couplet is that as a result of these discoveries we have a sense of knowing what we are doing, and of how things work, in the physical world. A vast confidence in man's practical capacities grew out of this sense of knowing, and from that confidence came the definitions of knowledge, purpose, and fulfillment which have shaped the affairs of men until the present. While positivist spokesmen may claim that scientists do not pretend to be "philosophers" or definers of meaning—that the contribution of science is only "know-how," not "know-what"—still, Northrop Frye was right when he declared that science always becomes a part of human culture in the form of myth, and the modern world has been effectively a believer in the myth of science and its conception of reality for at least the past hundred years.

But now human attitudes are rapidly changing. "Nature" is no longer the magic word, but "Consciousness," and consciousness includes a diversity of phenomena far greater than all that can be found in the natural world, since consciousness brings awareness of both the subjective and the objective universe. But there is no Newton of the laws of consciousness—at least, not yet. And there may not ever be, although someone may come along with knowledge of the inner world that seems to parallel Newton's insight. In Newton's case, however, public demonstrations of the validity of the laws of motion could be provided, and how could you externalize the realities of subjective experience without turning them into something else?

This is the barrier which stands in the way of conventional scientific recognition of subjective reality. In order for a proposition about the nature of things to be accepted for examination in science, it has to be *testable*, which amounts to saying that the proposition must submit to the tests science knows how to make. This was Cassandra's problem, since she had the gift of prophecy from Apollo. She could make true predictions, but no one would believe her. It is also the difficulty of all soothsayers, sibyls, clairvoyants, and telepathists. Even when ESP demonstrations are statistically impressive, the tough-minded scientist is likely to insist that he be offered a testable *theory* on how thought transference or some other psychic skill works, so that independent verification can be attempted. And modern ESP investigators quite candidly admit that they have no theory of psychodynamics; all they have is a vast amount of empirical data showing that these things do happen, no matter how they are explained. This insistence on "theory" makes the boast of science to be invariably empirical at the outset of an investigation break down completely, since the evidence in behalf of ESP is really overwhelming.

By reason of this barrier, then, there has been no science of consciousness evolved in the West, so that the spontaneous interest in the regions of subjective experience which has been bubbling up for several generations has passed science by, with consequences of the sort described by Jacob Needleman in *The New Religions* and by numerous other writers.

William James, unlike his more cautious successors in American psychology, set the problem well:

> . . . there is a continuum of cosmic consciousness against which our individuality builds but accidental fences, and into which our several minds plunge as into a mother-sea or reservoir. Our "normal" consciousness is circumscribed for adaptation to our external earthly environment, but the fence is weak in spots, and fitful influences from beyond leak in, showing the otherwise unverifiable connection. Not only psychic research but metaphysical philosophy, and speculative biology are led in their own ways to look with favor on some such "panpsychic" view of the universe as this. Assuming this common reservoir of consciousness to exist . . . What is its own structure? What is its inner topography? . . . What are the conditions of individuation or insulation in this mother-sea? To what tracts, to what active systems functioning separately in it, do personalities correspond?

Reflecting on the implications of these questions, we see the difficulty of separating psychology from the religious quest, and also the reason for the elaborate metaphysical systems developed by early Western thinkers who had the Platonic instead of the modern conception of science and its undertakings. Neoplatonism has been justly called "a complete system of rationalism," although in the higher reaches of the soul's seeking for union with the divine the intellectual is lost in the mystical, through the fusion of subject and object.

Practically all the doctrines of Christian mysticism were borrowed from the Neoplatonists, through the writings of pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, as any good text will show, and their transmission by Erigena in the ninth century led to a ferment of liberating ideas in Europe which three hundred years later disturbed the guardians of Catholic orthodoxy so much that they publicly burned Erigena's book, *The Division of Nature*. Inward sources of inspiration often have this effect, since the reference-points of truth are made subjective, and dogma becomes ineffectual as a result—an obvious threat to religious authority.

There are certain parallels between the Church's antagonism toward mystical heresy and the scientific rejection of subjective reality and truth. In both cases, the entire structure of acceptable knowledge is threatened. As we know, Luther published the treatise of mythical devotion, *The German Theology*, and mystical thinking was everywhere behind the moral awakening that led to the Reformation. Established authority crumbled in the face of these emancipating doctrines, and while the reformers organized churches of their own which gained independent authority, the fragmentation of monolithic Christianity had begun and has never stopped since that day. Today the burgeoning revival of inwardness in human life has much more diverse forms. It is religious and æsthetic and sometimes wildly hedonistic, with frequent emphasis on "creativity" and egoism. Like other great historical changes, it is both shallow and profound. But in almost all its relations it constitutes a threat to the assumptions, practice, and organization of the existing society.

In an article in the *New York Times* for April 12, Theodore Roszak points to the early editions of the *Whole Earth Catalog* as marking a distinct turning point in attitudes, especially among the young. What was really a powerful *tide* in the movement of thought and feeling then became apparent:

> The zany mosaic of how-to books, tools, agrarian lore, handicrafts and human-scale machinery that filled the Catalog was only the most visible expression of a search that was already well under way, an effort to pry oneself out of megalopolis and its technocratic vices, without becoming an incompetent barbarian or a contemptible parasite. By the time the Catalog appeared, it had become clear to many radicals that no movement which pitted itself against the world-dominant urban industrial culture could be launched from the university campuses. Instead, one had to pioneer the inner frontiers of urban and rural America by way of exemplary experiment. One had to prove that there were better and freer ways to live, and in so doing begin to sap the foundations of the technocracy by a steady, workaday withdrawal of allegiance and dependence. A long-term project, though history happens with startling speed in our time. In any case, the decisive factor in any revolution is not that it change things suddenly, but that it change them deeply—and make the changes last.

In Roszak's view, this movement among the young is at root a turning away from the mechanistic, acquisitive outlook that developed from the optimistic materialism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and a response to strong inward leadings which find expression in the return to the land, in deliberate and proud subjectivism, and in a deep suspicion of the science that has lent its extraordinary abilities to the military destructiveness of the nation-state. The revolt comes from the deeps of man's nature:

> With William Blake, I believe that our obsession with bigsystem productivity—along with its accompanying passion to accumulate exact quantities and hard data—arises from a repression of the visionary faculties. It is the desperate, demonic business that replaces meaningful activity for those who live in a condition of alienation so chronic that it finally begins to feel normal. And that obsession becomes no less unholy when the "dark Satanic mills" acquire air conditioning and Muzak.
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> I confess that, lacking the powers of a Blake, I have found no very cogent way to deal with those who refuse—on principle—to recognize the essential good health of the rising interest in the expansion of visionary awareness. Of course I realize how often such inner explorations can be flawed by an awkward amateurishness. Our society is sadly out of touch with the traditional disciplines of psychic growth. We are at the stage now of importing them into our culture like exotic wares and are often as unskilled in their use as any primitive people would be at handling a computer. So much one must admit. It is quite another matter to disparage every deviation from academic intellect as if it were the prelude to a Manson case.

These considerations might well be expanded through discussion of a large range of "religious" practices, uncritically welcomed simply because they are from the "East," or because of the glamor of psychic powers said to be a result of certain disciplines. It is quite possible to abandon the ugly features of technology, yet retain the expectations of "instant" results which a sales promotional culture has sedulously fostered in behalf of merchandising programs. Subjective "thrills," even when labeled "spiritual," may not be the best replacement for boredom with material plenty. A "how-to" book on yoga, whatever the brand, can be quite as fraudulent as a "how-to" book on the way to become another Dostoevski or a Picasso. There are some things which are best discovered by and for oneself, such as the meaning of love, or the way to truth, and the best treatises on the inner life may be written in a code that requires careful deciphering, as one of the means of *earning the right* to practice the discipline. What Polanyi says about "maxims" in *Personal Knowledge* almost certainly has application here.

After noting the fears of anxious liberals concerning subjective sources of knowledge, Roszak concludes with a suggestive observation:

> But perhaps that is the measure of how tenaciously what Blake called single vision grips us—that so many of the best minds among us can only experience the movement of transcendent energies within them as a diabolical summons. What can one do to quiet their fears? Stroke their fretful brow, perhaps, and remind them that this very passion for truth and human kindness which they call the life of Reason has been smuggled into their personalities from the depths of the irrational. It is what survives in them of an ethical conviction long ago implanted in human culture by numberless prophets, seers and sages, who did not compute their way to the Good.

It is not at all difficult to demonstrate the accuracy of this tracing of the idea of Reason to transcendental origins. For Plato, as Cornford remarks in *Before and After Socrates*, the true self in man is *Nous*, often translated Reason, yet which differs in meaning since in ancient Greek usage *nous* is not only the thinking faculty but also *wills.* And will, after all, has no place in the naturalistic rationalist's vocabulary. The very idea of a moral agent we owe to Socratic teaching, since in Western thought except for the doctrines of Pythagoras and perhaps the Greek Mysteries—Socrates was the first to give explicit formulation to the soul as a being independent of circumstances and conditioning. It seems likely that Plato felt it to be his mission to put into articulate, rational form some of the religious ideas of the mystery dramas, then in cultural

decline, as the basis of a civilization which was rapidly changing from an oral culture into a society habituated to the use of written records.

The Platonic revival in Florence at the end of the fifteenth century led to the spread of humanistic and liberal doctrines, later diluted and then inverted in significance by the influence of Karl Marx. Virtually all the utopias ever written had their original inspiration, directly or indirectly, in Plato's *Republic*. What may be thought still more remarkable, even the scientific discoveries of antiquity are plainly traceable to the philosophical idealists. This is remarked by Frederick Lange in his *History of Materialism* after a long summary of the scientific achievements of the classical age. Something similar may be said of the scientists of the seventeenth century, who were not then known as scientists, but as "natural philosophers." Newton, for one, drank deeply at the fountain of the Platonic revival in England, in which Henry More was a leading figure. Margaret Bailey (in *Milton and Jakob Boehme*, Oxford University Press, 1914) speaks of his influence:

> Henry More (1614-1687), in whose writings the most distinctive traits [of the Cambridge Platonists] are best shown, read Proclus and Plotinus; Dionysius the Areopagite was one of his dearest friends; he was steeped in the sincere mysticism of the *Theologia Germanica.* His school was purely intellectual in character, it sought no followers, it formed no sect; in later days it even led men back to the Established Church as to a refuge; yet in spite of this, its teachings helped to swell the tide of opposition to religion at second-hand, to forms and ceremonies, to a clergy skilled only in affairs of the intellect and not of the heart and soul.

It has been said that Newton adopted More's idea of the Divine Sensorium as the background of his conception of space.

By 1644 the interest in Jakob Boehme in England was beginning to spread, and his mystical teachings stirred great fervor for inward search. But interestingly enough, his effect on Newton was not only "spiritual." William Law, the famous English disciple of Boehme, wrote in a letter:

> When Sir Isaac died, there were found amongst his papers large abstracts out of J. Behmen's [Boehme's] works, written in his own hand. . . . It is evidently plain that all that Sir I. has said of the universality, nature and effects of attraction, of the first three laws of nature, was not only said, but proved in its true and deepest ground, by J.B. in his Three first Properties of Eternal Nature. . . . Sir Isaac was formerly so deep in J.B. that he, together with one Dr. Newton, his relation, set up furnaces, and for several months were at work in quest of the Tincture, purely from what they conceived from him. . . . Sir Isaac did but reduce to a mathematical form the central principles of nature revealed in Behmen.

While Law was an ardent follower of Boehme, and many be thought to have been too enthusiastic in his claims, a writer in the *Cambridge History of English Literature,* possibly more impartial, remarks that "it is almost certain that the idea of the three laws of motion first reached Newton through his eager study of Boehme." In any event, it begins to be evident that a case could be made for the claim that the secret of advance in scientific discoveries may lie with those who have found access to higher levels of inspiration within themselves. There is confirmation of this idea in a letter by Jean Paulhan to Wallace Stevens:

> It comes to this that philosophers (particularly the philosophers of science) make, not discoveries but hypotheses that may be called poetic. Thus Louis de Broglie admits that progress in physics is, at the moment, in suspense because we do not have the words or the images that are essential to us. But to create illuminations, images, words, that is the very reason for the being of poets. (See Herbert Kohl's *The Age of Complexity*.)

How does inward or mystical inspiration take place? There are books on the subject, but probably none of them equal to the account given by Plotinus in the closing section of the *Enneads,* in which he begins by warning the reader: "The divine is not expressible, so the initiate is forbidden to speak of it to anyone who has not been fortunate enough to have beheld it himself." What follows is probably the most eloquent description of the rise of the individual consciousness to the state of the One that exists

anywhere in Western literature. Meanwhile, it is of interest that Plato also warns against false expectations based on what is set down in books. However, in his seventh epistle, while discussing the pretensions of Dionysius, the tyrant of Syracuse, Plato writes briefly on the character of inward awakening, and on its occasion:

> The instruction that I gave to Dionysius was accordingly given with this object in view [involving continued hard work by the student]. I certainly did not set forth to him all my doctrines, nor did Dionysius ask me to, for he pretended to know many of the important points already and to be adequately grounded in them by means of the secondhand interpretations he had got from the others.
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> I hear too that he has since written on the subjects in which I instructed him at that time, as if he were composing a handbook of his own which differed entirely from the instruction he received. I do know, however, that some others have written on these same subjects, but who they are they know not themselves. One statement at any rate I can make in regard to all who have written or who may write with a claim to knowledge of the subjects to which I devote myself—no matter how they pretend to have acquired it, whether from my instruction or from others or by their own discovery. Such writers can in my opinion have no acquaintance with the subject. I certainly have composed no work in regard to it, nor shall I ever do so in future, for there is no way of putting it in words like other studies. Acquaintance with it must come rather after a long period of instruction in the subject and of close companionship, when, suddenly, like a blaze kindled by a leaping spark, it is generated in the soul and at once becomes self-sustaining.

It is hardly remarkable that the reports of inventors and discoverers in science very nearly all confirm this classical account of Plato's. One may think, therefore, that there are *octaves* in the "visionary awareness" that may reach the individual who has not shut himself off from the sources of the inner life. "Hard work," we are told, "invariably precedes the flash of inspiration," but that the actual discovery comes only after "a season of complete mental rest." This was the conclusion of the engineers who worked in research with C. G. Suits at General Electric, years ago. The inventors had highly fanciful theories as to how the process worked, but they seemed to agree that a flash of intuition was involved. In any event, the explanation remains mysterious, and perhaps ought to for a considerable time, since a mechanistic account of how "creativity" is aroused would probably be the quickest possible way of erecting barriers against an authentic inner life.

Meanwhile, a new spirit of inquiry concerning this life has come into the world. The development may prove widely fruitful, and therefore heartening, although it may soon be possible to say of the present what Margaret Bailey said of the middle years .of the seventeenth century in England:

> In its passionate quest for truth the seventeenth century did not discriminate. It made no distinctions. It drew no line between (1) theosophy, or religious and ethical teaching, (2) alchemy, or the relation of the material to the spiritual and the transmutation of the material into the spiritual, and (3) magic, or the employment upon the physical plane of the higher powers latent in man. To find a clear-cut division between these three elements is always difficult enough, but never more so than in the writings of this period.

REVIEW
EXPOSING ECONOMIC FALLACIES

WE have lately been reading in two excellent books on economics, and find ourselves driven to the conclusion that they are really treatises on human nature. The good books on economics do not attempt to disguise this fact, while the bad ones claim to expound an independent, objective science.

In what sense are economics books about human nature?

Someone has remarked that the only way politics can cope with moral problems is by bureaucratizing them. That is, behavior must be classified in categories before it can be dealt with by either legislative or executive design. This means that statistics are the major tool of all bureaucratic operations. Problems come to the attention of bureaucratic authority in terms of numbers. In this way, numbers are made the basis of the study of human behavior. If the patterns of behavior can be shown to be fairly constant, then those patterns, in association with their "causes," tend to achieve the status of "laws of nature." In this way the habits of a particular population may come to be regarded as natural and even unchangeable phenomena.

So, human behavior, as reflected in man-made institutions, is made the foundation of a science and a vast superstructure of theory is erected thereon. The human aspect, having been depersonalized by statistics, is practically forgotten and the subject, therefore, becomes exceedingly dull.

However, the books we have been reading, *The Costs of Economic Growth* (1967) and *21 Popular Economic Fallacies* (1970), both by E. J. Mishan, and both published in the United States by Praeger, are not at all dull. Even so, they might give the general reader plenty of reasons not to pursue a serious study of economics, unless it be for the purpose of reforming the discipline or changing it all around. For Prof. Mishan shows in these books how easy it is for economists to be both confusing and misleading to their readers and to the public, and how far-reaching in effect are the preconceptions of economists. The abstraction of the subject from the area of common sense and the intuitions of the ordinary person makes it practically inaccessible to all but those who are specially trained. A particular virtue of Prof. Mishan's books is that he partially initiates the reader into fairly recondite matters in order to show how the language of expertise may not add in the least to the understanding of economic (or human) problems.

In the preface to the first published of these books, he tells how he had become apprehensive about the doctrine of economic expansion and growth almost twenty years ago, when he began teaching at the London School of Economics. As the years passed these feelings matured and toward the end of the '60s he was moved to write *The Costs of Economic Growth.* He made it "technical" enough to serve the undergraduate student of economics, and offered this explanation of why he wrote it:

> The skilled economist, immersed for the greater part of the day in pages of formulae and statistics, does occasionally glance at the world about him and, if perceptive, does occasionally feel a twinge of doubt about the relevance of his contribution. True, there is at the tip of his mind some faltering image of the blessings heaped on mankind as a result of rapid economic growth—a growing assortment of automobiles, television sets, vacuum cleaners, refrigerators, washing machines, electric tooth brushes and other anti-drudge devices, also increased education, increased air travel, antibiotics, pesticides, and reduced infant mortality. And yet, glancing at the irresistible spread of steel and concrete, at the plague of motorized traffic, at the growing impatience and tenseness of people, his thoughts may catch at a deeper apprehension of reality. For a moment, perhaps, he will dare to wonder whether it is really worth it whether economic progress over the last couple of centuries has succeeded only in making life increasingly complex, frantic and wearing. The speed of travel grows from year to year, and from year to year more time is devoted in moving from one

> place to another. Physically, however, we are more idle and our lives are more sedentary than our fathers. We know the world's business from minute to minute, and practically nothing of the people who live in our neighborhood. Far removed from the forces of nature, denizens of the new subtopia, we are degenerating into a breed of passenger-spectators whose first impulse on awakening is to reach for a switch.

Prof. Mishan goes on to say that such apprehensions, at first, have no way of getting into the economist's "practical recommendations." Their terms do not fit into the language he is familiar with. And how can he be "scientific" and voice such subversive doubts? In a way, this portion of Prof. Mishan's preface is reminiscent of Daniel Ellsberg's musings in *Papers on the War*, as he tells of the slow process by which he finally decided to declare himself by bringing the documents marked "top secret" to the *New York Times* (which were later published as the *Pentagon Papers*). Only after a time of painful soul-searching is the point reached where the "conventional wisdom" breaks down entirely and a fair-minded man must speak his mind.

This seems to be the case in a great many areas of modern life. Today the "conventional wisdom" is breaking down all over. In consequence, we are experiencing a rebirth of authentic culture through a widespread return to honesty and common sense. The change came first, of course, among the uninstructed young, and whatever their mistakes and missteps, a great debt is owed to them for their uninhibited break with the past and for the moral atmosphere they created, which has opened the way for others to begin similar changes at more complex levels of our society. For the fact remains that our society *is* complex in its organization and interdependencies, and the movement toward simplification must often be a step-by-step substitution and wearing out of old forms, rather than a program of sudden destruction. So, as men of undoubted ability and responsibility point to the follies in present policies, long-term trends may be reversed as public opinion grows more enlightened.

In sequence, Prof. Mishan considers the mania for growth, various "diseconomies" which are not commonly figured as part of the costs of economic expansion, the flaws in the assumption that more economic growth will increase the choices people have for what they buy, and the menace of obsolescence. He says in a final section on "Efficiency":

> If the moving spirit behind economic growth were to speak, its motto would be "Enough does not suffice." The classical description of an economic system makes sense in today's advanced economy only when stood on its head. Certainly the American economy presents us with a spectacle of growing resources pressing against limited wants. . . . Once we move away from the economist's frame of reference, other factors bearing on social welfare loom large. Expanding markets in conditions of material abundance depend upon men's dissatisfaction with their lot being perpetually renewed. Whether individual campaigns are successful or not, the institution of commercial advertising accentuates the materialistic tendencies in society and promotes the view that the things that matter most are the things money will buy—a view to which the young, who have plenty of need of the wherewithal, if they are to avail themselves of the widely advertised opportunities for fast living and cool extravagance, are peculiarly vulnerable and which explains much of their vociferous impatience and increasing violence. . . .
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> Swifter means of communication have the paradoxical effect of isolating people; increased mobility has led to more hours commuting; increased automobilization to increased separation; more television to less communication. In consequence, people know less of their neighbors than ever before in history.
>
> The pursuit of efficiency, itself regarded as the lifeblood of progress, is directed towards reducing the dependence of people on each other, and increasing their dependence on the machine. Indeed, by a gradual displacement of human effort from every aspect of living, technology will eventually enable us to slip swiftly through our allotted years with scarce enough sense of physical friction to be certain we are still alive.

As a curious instance of the accidental beneficence of an occasional "inefficiency," Prof. Mishan says in a footnote:

> The recent electric-power breakdown in New York (1965), obviously to be deplored on the grounds of efficiency, broke the spell of monotony for millions of New Yorkers. People enjoyed the shock of being thrown back on their innate resources and into sudden dependence upon one another. For a few hours people were freed from routine and brought together by the dark. Next-door strangers spoke, gladdened to help each other. There was room for kindness.

"This should happen every month," was the comment of a dweller in Manhattan.

The other book, *21 Popular Economic Fallacies*, is the one we thought might help to free the reader from any desire to take conventional economics seriously, even though the London *Economist* declared in a review that it was the perfect book "for anyone wishing to start the study of economics."

A sample of how the author attacks the shibboleths of economics or pseudo-economics should be ample to show the mood of this book. Fallacy 7 is that "Consumer Choice Rules the Market," which implies: "that a person freely chooses to buy a good is prima facie evidence that he is better off with it than without it." The opening discussion:

> In a certain sense this can be necessarily true. If a man puts a pistol to my head and threatens to shoot unless I drink a glassful of castor oil then I will, if I believe him to be in earnest, gulp it down without further ado. I may then be said to have chosen to drink it of my own free will, for it was not forcibly poured down my throat and I could, of course, have refused to drink it. It follows also that, in my own estimation, I am better off than if I had refused to drink the castor oil. For had I not chosen to drink it I should have been shot dead. One may then legitimately infer that being alive with a tumblerful of castor oil inside me is, for me, preferable to being shot through the head.
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> What must not be inferred, however, is that I positively enjoy drinking castor oil by the glass.

This extreme example is moderated by the argument that follows, but Prof. Mishan's point, that our choices may be severely restricted by economic growth, is inescapable. There are, he makes clear, a great many fine things we can neither buy nor have at any price, any more, under the confinements of economic growth as conceived by the "conventional wisdom."

COMMENTARY
BURMESE COMMON SENSE

ROBERT MCCLINTOCK'S recollection of Rousseau's view of the old regime, under which one could not "educate himself to be both a good man and a good citizen," suggests a remark by Thoreau while on his visit to Canada. In Quebec on a walking tour late in 1850, he happened on the review of a Highland regiment. He watched the marching men for a while, then said, "It is impossible to give the soldier a good education, without making him a deserter." Thoreau didn't think much of military training, and as for the soldier—"His natural foe is the government that drills him."

These, again, are themes which come to mind after reading Norman Cousins' editorial, "What Is Happening to Us?" in *World* for May 8. After speaking of our casual tolerance of violence, the Vietnam War, and Watergate, he recalled the ideals of men like Jefferson and Paine and Madison, and the sort of influence they hoped the Government of the United States would exert on the people. It is different, now, as Mr. McClintock says. Not the Platonists, but the Machiavellians who want power, are setting the example. Norman Cousins writes:

> The individual has to assert his natural goodness against the society itself. Trust is an essential precondition for a rational and functioning society, but government has behaved in a way that promotes suspicion rather than truth. The individual tends to become hardened to the fragility and preciousness of life around him and all the possibilities for upgrading human existence.
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> It is probably more difficult for the natural goodness of man to rise and shine in today's world than at any time in the past several hundred years. But to lose faith in that natural goodness is to lose the greatest single instrument human beings possess for keeping their society from going into a downward spiral.

Mr. Cousins is right—it is difficult, today, to believe in human goodness, but a large part of that difficulty comes from believing that only political authority and political power can be effective instruments for human good. We make confidence in the good of man hard for ourselves by supposing that constructive effort must be funneled through "official" channels. Life might prove much easier if we could accept the wisdom in the old Burmese proverb that of all the evils suffered by mankind, "officials" are among the worst, and get on with the task of improving our lives without their help. Even officials might be able to improve themselves if people gave them less power and responsibility.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE ONLY REASONABLE THING TO DO

IN the *Center Magazine* for January/February, Robert McClintock (of Columbia's Teachers College) examines the promise of "Universal Voluntary Study" in contrast to the present system of compulsory schooling. After pointing to the unlikelihood that an attempt to suspend the compulsory education laws could be successful, without prior convincing evidence of the superiority of some other system, he lifts the argument to another level by taking the learning process out of its familiar institutional framework and regarding it as wholly natural and quite unavoidable. He says:

> Whatever the laws, education is vitally compulsory. This is not to say that to get ahead in life a person needs a particular kind of education. Rather, it is to say something much more fundamental: To live is to be compelled to acquire an education, be it good or bad, adequate or insufficient. Life is a compulsory education. There are no exceptions to this law. The child is born immature. To live, he must give himself form he must learn continuously; he must acquire the makings of a sage or a fool, a saint or a sinner, a citizen or a subversive, a hero or some variant of the muddling mean. And the community is deeply involved in this education.

But here Mr. McClintock is not talking about what is deliberately programmed by the community. He means what could be called the inevitable and involuntary influences the community exercises. He means what Harriet Johnson was talking about in *Children in "The Nursery School"* when she said:

> Parents often say that they do not want their children to be vain or self-conscious but if they spend a great deal of thought over their small daughter's clothing and adornment, if they call upon their son and heir and show how nicely he can say a nursery rime or how he can do his daily dozen self-consciousness and a desire to appear before the public eye will be fostered.

He is talking about the young defendants who come before the criminal court in Manhattan, most of whom have seen no examples of "success" in their lives except "gamblers, pimps, numbers-runners, narcotics dealers." And he is talking about the deep cultural contradictions to which the young have been exposed, listed by Karen Horney (in *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*) as—

> competition and success on the one hand, and brotherly love and humility on the other. . . . We must be not only assertive but aggressive, able to push others out of the way. On the other hand, we are deeply imbued with Christian ideals which declare it is selfish to want anything for ourselves, that we should be humble, turn the other cheek. . . .

So, as Mr. McClintock says:

> Profound educational effects result from the social circumstances that each experiences. Hence, in an enlightened community efforts will not be spared to make these circumstances as elevating as possible. More than anything else, the character of each person's compulsory education is infused into him by the diverse public realities pressing upon him. . . .
>
> Each person is born to particular parents, who possess a definite station at a particular time and place, who strive to solve certain challenges by means of their peculiar capacities. Compelled to begin from a definite point in time and space, each person ineluctably meets his mother tongue, social customs, civic aspirations, class expectations, basic style of life—all of which he must let be pressed upon him before he can try to transform his personality according to a consciously chosen pattern.

A country's laws are obviously a part of this vital compulsory education—a man-made part. For this reason, long before there were compulsory education laws, "all laws were a part of compulsory education." Then—

> As a consequence, such theorists as Plato perceived the importance of judging all legislation, customs, and efforts to persuade, by their educational effect, to see what a well-intentioned man would be likely to learn from the various principles and practices he would encounter in the school of life.
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> As long as political theorists aspired to bring into being the good citizen who might populate the

good state, pedagogical concerns were central in it. As political theorists have given place to political scientists, however, the Platonic concern for the character of the good citizen has been eclipsed by a Machiavellian interest in getting and keeping power; and in the United States not since the founding fathers has there been much profound comment on the educational effect of the polity on those who mature in it.

At the same time, the total environment is increasingly man-made:

> In times past, a man could ascribe much of what he experienced, when it served either to elevate or demean him, to either good or bad fortune. But now almost everything that happens in the public realm is supposed to happen under the sway of policy. Now a man must see everything as purposeful. If he experiences almost everything he meets as a hideous assault on his integrity, he cannot be expected to learn from it the virtue of stoic fortitude in the face of innocent misfortunes. He will learn instead a drugged despair over his powerlessness or a brutal resentment against his exploitation. . . . One need not be a misanthrope to feel that much in our public world is not suited to bringing out the best in people, yet it is a powerful educator of the public, with great effects whether we like them or not. . . .
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> In any community where there is a vital concern for the quality of the compulsory education that life imposes on its members, there will be a steady effort to make the social circumstances that each experiences as inspiring as possible. To what degree American civic life is now experienced as degrading or as elevating must be left as moot. Suffice it to observe that wherever the over-all civic influence is degrading, even the best provisions for formal education will probably have little constructive effect; wherever the contribution is elevating, even mediocre schooling opportunities may elicit significant achievements.

For Mr. McClintock, conditions of this sort constitute a far-reaching challenge. Have we, he asks, reached a stage in our common life similar to that recognized by Rousseau, who lived under the *ancien regime*—a stage where it had become evident that "one cannot educate himself to be both a good man and a good citizen"?

Whatever the answer to this question, it is time to consider an alternative to compulsory education—universal *voluntary* education. The education of the early grades might not change very much, but with the coming of adolescence students would begin to choose their studies.

> Significant numbers might seek early entry into the labor force through apprenticeship study. Many would seek a predominantly academic training not unlike that now available, although the frequency of intense, early specialization might well increase. In addition, some might concentrate early on the performing arts, others on sports, some on what are frequently considered hobbies. And a number might drift, studying little or nothing and searching instead for a good time. With a system of comprehensive voluntary study, opportunities for secondary education would not be experienced by adolescents as a now-or-never matter. It might even be healthier if a lower percentage of the age group opted for formal instruction. With the new system, those who dropped out would find no difficulty returning later, more mature and richer in experience; with a sense of purpose, they would profit more from their opportunities.

The idea behind this voluntary program is lifelong opportunities for education, so that what is lost "by renouncing compulsion is recovered by providing people with multiple chances," and in a much freer way, according to their own option. Mr. McClintock believes that the voluntary system would equalize the benefits of taxes for education, since free evening classes would be open to all, broadening opportunities for everyone. He says further:

> Provision for universal, voluntary study would not impose pedagogically a common culture, but then neither has compulsory schooling been able to do that. And taking culture, not as a least common denominator, but as a vital tension between diverse excellences, each of which has been consciously brought to a high level of fulfillment, voluntary study would conduce to a much more developed culture than does a compulsory schooling.
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> A voluntary system would have two other effects. It would break the scholastic lockstep that is used to certify the qualifications people possess; as a result, prospective employers would have to consider more closely, not the institutional credentials, but the actual personal qualities of would-be employees.

> More importantly, insofar as open study would broaden access to specialized knowledge, it would significantly democratize access to power in our society.

One thing more: such a system would have direct correspondence to the natural learning process that goes on all the time, since it would be the result of individual response to felt need.

Toward the end of his paper Mr. McClintock says:

> Were we to choose to create a system of universal voluntary study, we would be embarking on an undertaking of such magnitude that we would be choosing to end the drifts; we would be re-creating a common purpose in our community, giving a cultural incarnation to the ideal of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We would be recognizing in deed, not merely word, that self-formation is the life-long concern of every person.

Mr. McClintock speaks of such a system as being the responsibility of the state, but this, it seems to us, puts his essay in a utopian category. If it is right and necessary, the change must be accomplished by the people who see the need for it—first, perhaps, in their own lives. This, after all, is what the autodidacts have already done. Next, the task would be to devise ways to make the life of the autodidact a little easier, so that more people could educate themselves, until, some day, the whole community is redesigned around the learning process. It doesn't matter much how long this will take, if we think it is the only reasonable thing to do.

FRONTIERS

Ecological Issue in Canada

THE James Bay Development is a hydro-electric project planned for the northern part of the Province of Quebec, in Canada, which extends into Hudson Bay. James Bay is a narrow body of water at the south end of Hudson Bay which divides the northern portion of Quebec from northern Ontario. The vast land area of Quebec to the east of James Bay is heavily forested and occupied almost exclusively by the Cree Indians, who number from 5,000 to 7,000. Winters are severe in this region, lasting about six months. There are many large rivers, lakes, and streams, and game is plentiful.

In 1971, Robert Bourassa, premier of Quebec, announced that his government was committed to the construction of a series of dams and artificial lakes, exploiting the rivers of the James Bay area for the production of electrical power. Ignoring the objections of environmentalists and ecological scientists, and the solid resistance of the Cree Indians, who maintain that the land is theirs, the James Bay Development Corporation has already begun initial construction in the northern sector of the project, involving the area surrounding the La Grande River basin. Matters such as the possibility of Wall Street financing to the extent of perhaps 10 billion dollars, the cost of the electricity after the power plants are built at enormous expense, and whether so much power is actually needed are of immediate interest to Canadians, but still more important, not only to Canadians, but to us all, is this latest manifestation of the mania for further economic development in the name of public service.

All these considerations have attention in the recently issued Sierra Club paperback by Boyce Richardson, *James Bay—The Plot To Drown the North Woods* ($2.75).

It is a great temptation to devote all our available space to Mr. Richardson's intimately knowledgeable account of how the Indians regard and care for the land and its natural inhabitants in this beautiful region. As is now becoming recognized, Indians are expert ecologists who understand the cycles and balances of nature. They never hunt to excess or over-kill. They regard the land and its welfare as a trust. A McGill anthropologist, R. F. Salisbury, has suggested that the managers of the James Bay project listen to what the Indians could tell them about the effects of the dam construction. "The Indians," he said, "have a close awareness of specific relationships which biologists are only now finding to be accurate." He continued:

> We ought not to forget that the Indians have much greater knowledge of the ecology of the region than anyone else, and they also have the greatest interest in knowing the changes that will occur. . . . The knowledge of Indians of the behavior of the beaver, of the succession of vegetation in burned areas for example, is not expressed in terms employed by scientists. But a program of ecological research done by the Indians could have an extraordinary importance both long and short term.

It becomes clear from Mr. Richardson's analysis that there was never any question raised by the proponents of the James Bay project as to the possibility that "environmental considerations" might make the undertaking undesirable. There was apparently little or no research on the question, and the negative opinions that were offered did not appear in the final reports.

Meanwhile, these things are known: that the Cree Indians, who have always occupied the region, now obtain fully half their food from the land, by hunting and fishing, and that this means of self-support will be largely if not entirely destroyed by the dislocations brought by extensive flooding behind the dams. No one can predict what the long-term effects of the ecological changes will be. Concerned ecologists warn against proceeding without extensive research by pointing to the failure of the Russian engineers to anticipate the disasters which resulted from the high Assuan Dam in Egypt, causing complex economic disorders below the dam and the spread of scourging infectious disease above it.

What is involved in the James Bay project? A brief answer was given by an article in the *Ottawa Journal* for Dec. 9, 1972:

> The scheme is stupendous. Five to seven rivers, with a quarter of Quebec's land mass in their watersheds,

> eventually may be involved. It calls for 5 to 10 of the world's largest dams, two new airports, one new ocean port and 500 miles of new roads in the wilderness. The first phase will see two rivers diversed into a third, and flooding 1,700 square miles of forests. Power output from this phase is expected to total 5,545 mega watts, at a cost of $4.1 billion. Development of another two rivers could cost $7 to $10 billion.

In one chapter in his book, Mr. Richardson shows that the Indians are already managing land to be involved in this project to perfection, yet the James Bay Development "is conceived and designed as if the Indians did not exist." In *Save James Bay*, a pamphlet compiled by the Canadian Association in Support of the Native Peoples, Mr. Richardson says:

> These Indians are not interested in money. They do not acquire goods. I travelled through the James Bay area recently and talked to as many as I could, to as varied a selection as possible, and I found running through their responses, from young and old, a number of common, invariable themes. If you destroy the land, you destroy the animals, and if you destroy the animals, you destroy the Indians.
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> "Money? We do not want money. Jobs? How long will these jobs last? Money and jobs are impermanent. They disappear. They do not last. When they are gone, the land will still be there. If the land is not destroyed we can return to it, live off it as we have always done. That is the only way we know how to live."

It remains to be seen whether the Canadians, who are becoming aroused by the folly of this project, will be able to stop its progress. Meanwhile, there is profound irony in the fact that some of the most thoughtful members of the white civilization to the South are beginning to think like the Indians in relation to what they want to do with their lives. There is a sense in which Western civilization has gone full circle and is now returning to attitudes which were left behind many hundreds of years ago. One could even say that if what is *good* about the cycle of Western growth is to be retained, we shall have to jettison what is now proven not only foolish, but anti-human and anti-nature. Learning how to do this is our problem.