

KEEPING IDEAS ALIVE

IT is easy to answer the question: What are the main problems of the modern world?

The answer is: Energy and Food. This is obvious. If you read at all in the serious writing of the present, these are the subjects that get the most and the closest attention. Books, articles, papers dealing with them come out in a continuous stream. There are doubtless more words in circulation on these questions than any one person can read. Yet it seems safe to say that a discriminating choice of reading matter will soon lead to a fairly clear understanding of these problems and of their most probable solutions. In short, "we" know what to do. To avoid confusion and argument, we shall leave "we" undefined. Included in "we," let us say, are the intelligent and responsible people of the time. There are always such people, and they are always comparatively few.

So, we must add a third problem: To keep flowing the ideas of intelligent and responsible people. It is not enough, today, to succeed in getting published a good book on energy or food. The publishing "industry," alas, is not seriously engaged in keeping good or great ideas alive. It is in business to sell books. Books, we might say, are intellectual material—"items" relating to meaning, with all that this implies—yet the distribution of books is an economic enterprise, subject to the rules or laws of what we call "merchandising," an activity that has little or nothing to do with the mind. So books are treated in the marketplace something like soap powders or clothespins or pots and pans, and sometimes like perfumes or cosmetics to adorn conversation. We don't have handy any figures but it seems likely that the best of current books cannot be expected to "sell" for more than a few months after they come out. After all, the publishers have other books which must be promoted and sold,

and to keep going they must displace last year's books in the stores. That or fail in business. One could say, with some justice, that a conscientious man who tries to be a publisher is always in danger of going out of business. He needs to issue a little trash in order to have the money to publish something good that comes along. He needs to be a sort of Elbert Hubbard—a bit of promoter along with being a thinker of sorts.

This, then, is the setting for the third problem: keeping good and vitally important ideas alive. Our discussion of this question must be restricted since it suggests a wide variety of possible answers. We shall consider the intellectual survival of fine writers and their best books. Again we restrict, naming four such writers only for illustration from among those of the past century and a half: Tolstoy, Tawney, Ortega, and Camus. Other candidates crowd for inclusion—say, Hannah Arendt and Simone Weil, but we must stop somewhere and the problem is the same for all. The solution, apart from organized efforts such as forming clubs and associations to keep the ideas of some writer going—a Shakespeare society, for one, a Plato group, for another—is simple enough. Readers who want the nourishment of ideas from intelligent and responsible people must do their part, and regard doing it as an *obligation*. They need to keep the books in print by *using* them in all the ways good books can be used. If this is done, publishers will be encouraged to keep them in paperback print. An example of painful neglect of a very good book is in the fact that W. Macneile Dixon's *The Human Situation*, first published in England in the 1930s, is now out of print (for a while an OUP Galaxy paperback edition was available) except for two elite editions' one \$50, the other \$75 (according to a reader who searched for a copy). *The Human Situation* may be the best book on

philosophy that has come out during this century, and you can't find it in the stores.

Why should such books be kept alive? Because they deal with the mind of the age in both critical and liberating terms. Because we *need* what is in them. How much worse would the world be, we might ask, if there had been no Tolstoy? The study of Tolstoy's influence would take practically a lifetime, there has been so much of it in so many ways. Something similar might be said of the much more recent writings of A. H. Maslow. He was a psychologist who worked in a university, but he was no "academic"—in the sense that the general public discovered his books and bought them, learned from them, was affected by them. His books demanded attention as "trade" books. They were always more than "textbooks."

The point is that the rate of turnover of books in bookstores is no measure of anything important going on in the mind and culture of the times. Yet people who buy the "new" books that have just come out are misled into thinking that what is new is the only thing to read. This becomes a habit, and because it is a habit of a mass society, there is no hope of breaking it. But perhaps it can be a little reduced. Perhaps there can be a "saving remnant" in the continuous reading and use of good books—enough to keep more of them in print. An out-of-print book may be a work of genius, but if it can't be read except in the library, its influence is enormously reduced. Only good habits of reading can overcome a little the bad habits of the mass society.

Another point might be considered. When some unusual writer says valuable and important things, and says them so well that they "catch on," he inevitably starts a "trend"; indeed this was among his purposes. Then there are a host of developers and imitators—additional makers of the trend. Why not? Think of the number of writers who have been echoing Tom Paine for about two hundred years! They may dilute, but a dilution of Paine's writings does far less harm than

dilutions and echoes of bad books which also catch on. This is a principal process by which the thinking of the whole world changes. The best brief account of this process may be one found in Henry T. Buckle's nineteenth-century work, *The History of Civilization*, probably out of print for many years, and surviving only in quotations made by thoughtful writers and readers of the past—where we obtained the following:

Owing to circumstances still unknown, there appear from time to time great thinkers, who, devoting their lives to a single purpose, are able to anticipate the progress of mankind, and to produce a religion or a philosophy by which important effects are eventually brought about. But if we look into history we shall clearly see that, although the origin of a new opinion may be thus due to a single man, the result which the new opinion produces will depend on the condition of the people among whom it is propagated. If either a religion or philosophy is too much in advance of a nation it can do no present service but must bide its time until the minds of men are ripe for its reception. . . . Every science, every creed has had its martyrs. According to the ordinary course of affairs, a few generations pass away, and then there comes a period when these very truths are looked upon as commonplace facts, and a little later there comes another period in which they are declared to be necessary, and even the dumbest intellect wonders how they could ever have been denied.

People attempting to be "change-agents" need to give reflective attention to what Buckle says. They need a sense of what are the ideas "whose time has come," and to understand why, in order to use effectively the current of progress they are able to discern. The idea is to be persuasive without over-simplification—a most difficult art. This may mean to be content to plant some seeds, without trying to give blueprints for their development. The making of blueprints is another difficult art, best attempted at a later, often more appropriate time. To emphasize the importance of Buckle's generalization, we quote from a contemporary educator (teacher) another version of the same basic truth. In *On Teaching* (Schocken, 1976) Herbert Kohl says:

Young people are no different from adults. When faced with new possibilities they want

something old and predictable to hold on to while risking new freedom. Inexperienced teachers often make the mistake of tearing down the traditional attitudes their students have been conditioned to depend upon before the students have time to develop alternate ways of learning and dealing with school. In their impatience they become cruel to students who do not change fast enough or who resist change altogether. One just cannot legislate compassion or freedom. Teaching as a craft involves understanding how people learn; as an art it involves a sensitive balance between presenting and advocating things you believe and stepping away and encouraging your students to make their own use of your passion and commitment.

We come now to a writer who had sixth-sense perception of what both Buckle and Kohl have said and who was skillful in both the seeding and preliminary blueprint functions, and was animated by vision and practical intelligence—one who had the command of language to get his ideas across to readers in everyday forms of persuasion. We speak of E. F. Schumacher. That Schumacher was astonishingly successful in starting a "trend" is the best possible reason for going back to his writings, even soaking in them, in order to learn some of his skills. That there are dozens, even hundreds of writers now furthering his ideas is not a reason for no longer reading him. There is a sense in which he was unique, and will continue to be unique for a long time. His books, in short, should be kept alive. While we haven't asked Harper & Row how many a year they are still selling of *Small Is Beautiful*, there are bound to be otherwise sensible people who suppose that the contents of that book are now a bit "dated." They aren't. Nor are his other writings. His discussions and arguments have a mood and twist which touch the nerves of modern life. His "moralizing," which is always tasteful and appropriate, speaks to the unspoken longing of a great many people. His clear thinking has *power*, his analogies are valid, his jokes amusing, his points precise. As a writer intent on speaking to the intelligent of the age, in the area of his concern, he is practically without a rival—still.

We should point out here that *Small Is Beautiful* is not the only work he has left us. A great stack of his papers, written, say, during the last twenty years of his life, are concealed in the pages of back numbers of magazines; there were many lectures before particular audiences, which got printed in little pamphlets, and articles in technical journals dealing with aspects of his work. Some of these papers are available in posthumous books, such as *Good Work, Small Is Possible* (by George McRobie, a colleague) and, most recent, *Schumacher on Energy* (Jonathan Cape, 1982), edited by Geoffrey Kirk, another colleague of long association. This book is made of material taken from about fifty of Schumacher's articles and speeches, put together by a friend who worked with him for more than twenty years. It was while reading in this book that we began to feel again the importance of keeping Schumacher's ideas alive, in the form that he expressed them. The impact of these articles is both forceful and friendly, even though they have been of necessity condensed, with some of the liveliest writing left out in order to provide a greater variety.

While reading what he said in excerpts used in a review is better than nothing, a great deal of the strength of his mind and prose is lost in this way. So, before quoting from Mr. Kirk's collection, we turn to Theodore Roszak's Introduction to *Small Is Beautiful*, a brief masterpiece of informing and clarifying generalization. What was Schumacher about; what did he set out to do, and more or less accomplish? Roszak says:

For those to whom economics means a book filled with numbers, charts, graphs, and formulae, together with much heady discussion of abstract technicalities like the balance of payments and gross national product, this remarkable collection of essays is certain to come as a shock or a relief. E. F. Schumacher's economics is not a part of the dominant style. On the contrary, his deliberate intention is to subvert "economic science" by calling its every assumption into question, right down to its psychological and metaphysical foundations. . . . Schumacher's work belongs to that subterranean

tradition of organic and decentralist economics whose major spokesmen include Prince Kropotkin, Gustav Landauer, Tolstoy, William Morris, Gandhi, Lewis Mumford. . . .

"The great majority of economists," Schumacher laments, "are still pursuing the absurd ideal of making their 'science' as scientific and precise as physics, as if there were no qualitative difference between mindless atoms and men made in the image of God." He reminds us that economics has only become scientific by becoming statistical. But at the bottom of its statistics, sunk well out of sight, are so many sweeping assumptions about people like you and me—about our needs and motivations and the purpose we have given our lives. . . . what sort of science is it that must, for the sake of its predictive success, hope and pray that people will never be their better selves, but always be greedy social idiots with nothing finer to do than getting and spending, getting and spending? It is, as Schumacher tells us: "when the available 'spiritual space' is not filled by some higher motivations, then it will necessarily be filled by something lower—by the small, mean, calculating attitude to life which is rationalized in the economic calculus."

If that is so, then we need a nobler economics that is not afraid to discuss spirit and conscience, moral purpose and the meaning of life, an economics that aims to educate and elevate people, not merely to measure their low-grade behavior.

Who was Schumacher? No upstart radical, he was born in 1911 in Bonn of a father who was professor of economics at Berlin University. After studying economics and political science in a German university, he was awarded the first post-war German Rhodes scholarship and went to Oxford for two years, and then to Columbia in New York, where he eventually became a lecturer. Then, for a few years, he worked for banks and financial institutions. In 1934 he decided to take a doctoral degree at a German university, but for reasons perhaps obvious, then and now, he instead emigrated to England, where he worked in investment finance. When the second world war began, he was of course an "enemy alien" in England, and was employed as a farm laborer. Meanwhile he was writing papers on economics, one of which came to the attention of John Maynard Keynes, who adopted some of

Schumacher's ideas. Next he was appointed to assist Lord Beveridge in producing his influential report, *Full Employment in a Free Society*. Meanwhile he was writing lead articles for the *London Times*, the *Observer*, and the *Economist*. After the war he became a British citizen and was sent by the Government to help restore the German coal industry. In 1950 he began his term of twenty years of service as Economic Adviser to the National Coal Board of Britain, later becoming Head of Planning for this largest economic enterprise in the nation. The British government twice sent him overseas to advise developing countries, to Burma in 1955 and to India in 1962. Experience in these countries taught him that aid to these countries *had* to be in terms of the capacities of the people, and in 1965 he founded in London the Intermediate Technology Development Group, which became the practical instrument for developing and applying in a number of developing countries the methods of production to which they were best suited. *Small Is Beautiful* grew out of this intensive experience in the field. One additional note: While Schumacher had both theoretical and practical knowledge concerning the production of energy, he gave basic attention to the problem of food, becoming the President of the Soil Association of Great Britain in 1970. He was father of eight children, four by his first wife, who died, and four by his second, Verena, who survives as his widow. Altogether, four boys and four girls.

As much as possible, when home, he ate out of his garden. Not unimportantly, he was loved by all who came to know him well. He died of a sudden heart attack in September, 1977. His work, one might say, was done; a great foundation for change was established, and numerous nuclei of activists working to understand intermediate and appropriate technology had been brought into being.

We take from Mr. Kirk's book the following extract from a 1963 lecture by Schumacher on Clean Air and Future Energy:

If an activity has been branded as uneconomic, its right to existence is not merely questioned but energetically denied. Anything that is found to be an impediment to economic growth is a shameful thing, and if people cling to it, they are thought of as either saboteurs or fools. Call a thing immoral or ugly, soul-destroying or a degradation of man, a peril to the peace of the world or to the well-being of future generations; as long as you have not shown it to be "uneconomic" you have not really questioned its right to exist, grow and prosper.

. . . I am asking what it means, what sort of meaning the method of economics actually produces. And the answer to this question cannot be in doubt: something is uneconomic when it fails to earn an adequate profit in terms of money. The method of economics does not, and cannot, produce any other meaning. Numerous attempts have been made to obscure this fact, and they have caused a very great deal of confusion; but the fact remains. Society, or a group or individual within society, may decide to hang on to an activity or asset for non-economic reasons—social, aesthetic, moral, or political—but this does in no way alter their uneconomic character. The judgment of economics, in other words, is an extremely fragmentary judgment; out of the large number of aspects which in real life have to be seen and judged together before a decision can be taken, economics supplies only one—whether a thing yields a money profit to those who undertake it or not. . . .

It is not surprising, therefore, that all around us the most appalling malpractices and malformations are growing up, the growth of which is not being inhibited, because to do so would be uneconomic. Something like an explosion has to occur before warning voices are listened to, the voices of people who had been ridiculed for years as nostalgic, reactionary, unpractical and starry-eyed. No one would apply these epithets today to those who for so many years had raised their voices against the heedless economism which has turned all large American cities into seedbeds of riots and civil war. Now that it is almost too late, popular comments are outspoken enough. "Throughout the US the big cities are scarred by slums, hobbled by inadequate mass transportation, starved for sufficient finances, torn by racial strife, half-choked by polluted air." And yet: "The nation's urban population is expected to double

by the beginning of the next century." You might be tempted to ask, Why? The answer would come back: Because it would be uneconomic to attempt to resettle the rural areas. The American economist, John Kenneth Galbraith, has brilliantly shown how the conventional wisdom of economics produces the absurdity of "private opulence and public squalor."

This book on energy should be of particular interest to businessmen charged with managerial responsibility. After reading Schumacher on the problems of running the British coal industry, they will have nothing but respect for his hard-headed sagacity, and begin to take seriously everything he says.

REVIEW

SOME ANARCHIST WRITERS

LYING on the table, waiting for attention, is a book called *Why Work?*—the rest of the title being, "Arguments for the Leisure Society." Well, we thought: Don't those people know that we are going to run out of oil, and that, probably sooner than we think, we shall all have to work very hard to get enough to eat? And that this will continue until we grasp the joys of simplicity, of having less and needing less, because nature has reduced us to a life of essentials, which may prove the best life of all.

But then we picked up the book and looked through it, recognizing that the publisher is an anarchist publisher, Freedom Press, 84B Whitechapel High St. London E. 1., 7QX, U.K., and that the contributors are all worth reading. They start with Vernon Richards' editor's preface, then comes Bertrand Russell, then William Morris. Others are George Woodcock, Peter Kropotkin, and Colin Ward, and the writers we haven't heard of seem as good as the ones we have named. The thing that most anarchist writers have in common is intelligence. Their social ideal is a vision rather than a program, and while some of them seldom seem to get over being angry, if you read them you see that the provocations are great. They are writers who are able, eager, and determined to think in unconventional ways. Much of what they say is unsettling to ordinary minds. But they are so right in some of the things they say that it is hard to have health of mind without reading them. They provide thinking you will almost never find in the daily papers—facts that the papers by policy neglect.

You don't have to become an anarchist to profit by what they say, but you may find their intelligence infectious. Put it this way: Anarchists are among those thinkers who have no stake in the existing system, and who openly declare that it should be either abolished or radically changed. They sometimes talk with relish of "the

revolution," but by this some of them mean the Gandhian way of trying to institute change. Then, others of them believe (or used to believe) that we need one last, great, political revolution to make politics never again necessary. We doubt if that could be made to work, but such theoretical weakness in no way reduces the force of the anarchist criticism. We suspect that if enough people come to accept the validity of this criticism, the kind of society they dream of will at least have a chance to come into being.

A sample of the criticism from the editor's preface:

What no Western government is able to tackle (assuming it intended to) is a planned economy based on production for needs and at the same time a redistribution of wealth. What no Western government has the courage to say is that the average living standards for the affluent quarter of the world's population are already much too high if the living standards of the other three quarters of the world's inhabitants are ever to be raised to levels which ensure that they enjoy just the basic comforts of life.

It is estimated that the world has consumed more commercial energy in the last 40 years than in the whole of its previous history. And this is the consequence of demand for energy increasing at the seemingly modest rate of growth of 5.3 per cent every year since 1945, but even so this means a doubling of demand every fourteen years. So long as the main sources of energy are non-renewable fossil fuels this profligate use of energy cannot go on. But observe how consumption is distributed among the have and have-not countries. Rising standards are invariably accompanied by an increase in the consumption of energy. Consumption of commercial energy per person per year has been calculated in kilograms of coal equivalents: U.S.A. 12,350, U.K. 5,637, Spain, 2,822, Brazil 1,062, China 835, Egypt, 565, India 242, Kenya 180, Bangladesh 41, Uganda 39, and 20 in Ethiopia.

The media, the politicians and a lot of the brainwashed public prattle on about the food mountains, the oil glut, and the coal surpluses. Quite apart from the fact that we know, according to Oxfam, that 90,000 people a day are dying in the world from starvation or malnutrition, imagine what would happen to the oil and coal reserves if the Third World were to demand living standards similar to

those enjoyed in Spain, for instance? This is another rhetorical question for they can go on demanding until they drop dead because in the capitalist world what they cannot pay for, they will not get unless . . . unless there is a change of heart among the people of the affluent, consumerist nations of the West. And I cannot see this happening so long as there is no redistribution of wealth within the affluent nations themselves (and on a smaller scale between the new rich rulers of the emerging nations and *their* people).

In general, the anarchists seem a prickly bunch, somewhat disinclined to muse about the ways in which the "affluent people" may be induced to undergo a "change of heart." On the other hand, it is of some importance to consider how few there are who are spontaneously drawn to take seriously the suffering in the world and who act on their view of what needs to be done. While the affluent are wondering if they can afford a second automobile, pay off the mortgage, and perhaps acquire a cabin in the pines for summertime, and feel themselves to be decent, moral people who pay their bills on time, the anarchists worry only a little about their personal condition and give their energies to concern for the downtrodden, the hungry, the oppressed, and, indeed, the "brainwashed" of the world. It may be time for all of us to recognize that there can be no real improvement in the world without a foundation of concern of this sort. And it might be remembered that however blunt, irritating, sarcastic, and impatient the anarchists are, they do *not* believe in acquiring political power (including guns and ammunition and bombs) to *make* people do as they ought.

How to institute change is an anarchist problem, of course, and their best writers do not neglect it; but it is not only an anarchist problem: a time is soon coming when we shall all be forced to think about the means to change without supposing a need to blow up half the world. That is one good reason for reading the best of the anarchist writers, in some respects way ahead of the more conventional "radicals" who are still preoccupied with the methods of the French Revolution, repeating the old slogan, "If you want

to make an omelette, you have to break eggs." An anarchist writer may quote some thoughtful commentator, using his revealing facts, but then jeer at him for getting his own living in conventional ways from "the system," but they nevertheless help to spread common sense and inform the public. And it is a fact that a world without the works of Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Read, and George Woodcock would be a much more doleful place.

This book, *Why Work?*, goes a long way toward demonstrating this. The anarchists, one could say, have in some instances combined the wisdom of the heights with the wisdom of the depths. They have, it might be conceded, 51 per cent of the truth, and it seems a bit foolish to refuse to listen to them because, like the rest of us, they are confused and uncertain about the other 49.

The contributors are best, perhaps, at exposing common illusions. Bertrand Russell says:

Suppose that, at a given moment, a certain number of people are engaged in the manufacture of pins. They make as many pins as the world needs, working (say) eight hours a day. Someone makes an invention by which the same number of men can make twice as many pins as before. But the world does not need twice as many pins: pins are already so cheap that hardly any more will be bought at a lower price. In a sensible world, everybody concerned in the manufacture of pins would take to working four hours instead of eight, and everything else would go on as before. But in the actual world this would be thought demoralizing. The men still work eight hours, there are too many pins, some employers go bankrupt, and half the men previously concerned in making pins are thrown out of work. There is, in the end, just as much leisure as on the other plan, but half the men are totally idle while half are still overworked. In this way, it is insured that the unavoidable leisure shall cause misery all round instead of being a universal source of happiness. Can anything more insane be imagined?

Oh yes, easily. The pin manufacturers can and do retain an advertising agency to figure out how to perfume the pins and make them into a

fashionable must, converting people to the view that unless they wear far more pins than those needed, they are not "up-to-date," and so on. It is a law of marketing that the demand for unnecessary things must be continually increased, or the whole machine will grind to a stop and we'll all be out in the cold. So the advertising men hold conventions and explain to each other what splendid Jack Horners they are—they keep the machine going for *everybody*—but not really everybody, of course, just for the people who count, the people with money.

No wonder the anarchists, who were never subject to such illusions, say so many cutting things about the publicists and others who believe it their duty to support and spread such beliefs.

What is anarchist optimism like? Tony Gibson answers this question:

If through a revolutionary breakdown of capitalist society, the compulsion to go to the accustomed place of wage-slavery is no longer operative, then the disoriented people will have the chance to turn to production for use to satisfy their own needs for work. It is usually assumed that the great problem is what ulterior incentives or compulsions to work must be instituted to satisfy the demands of the consumers. We tend to forget that it is as natural for men to produce as to consume. In any society where the producers of wealth are not subject to coercion, the demands of the consumers must follow what it is the nature of that society to produce, every adult being both producer and consumer. That this is hard for many people to realize, I know, for we are accustomed to think of there being a class of "workers" in society, whose function it is to do as they are told. If the "consumers" demand televisions, battleships, Coca Cola and coal, then the "workers" have no say in the matter—they *must* produce them. It is time we tried to conceive a society without the coercion of the worker by the consumer, for as long as we have this picture engraved on our minds it is impossible to think in terms of practical anarchy.

The simplest meaning of "practical anarchy" is self-rule. Who can be against that? Well, it is expensive from a human point of view. It means the acceptance of responsibility, throughout the

gamut of life. So the anarchists are really moralists—but they are *impious* moralists, which is often a great relief.

COMMENTARY AT LOSS FOR WORDS

WE are editorially unable to leave out of this issue a further passage in Berry's "Standing by Words" since it applies so well to the subject of this week's "Children" article.

Like both Middleton and Barzun, Berry pays his respects to the linguists, quoting a text by one of them, W. Ross Winterowd's *The Contemporary Writer*. This author wants to make the study of language an "objective" science, which eliminates the issue of quality.

Mr. Winterowd asserts that "the language grows according to its own dynamics." He does not say, apparently because he does not believe, that its dynamics includes the influence of the best practice. There is no "best." Anyone who speaks English is a "master" of the language. And the writers once acknowledged as masters of English are removed from "the world of reality" to the "world of fantasy," where they lose their force within the dynamics of the growth of language. Their works are reduced to the feckless status of "experiences": "we are much more interested in the imaginative statement of the message . . . than we are in the message . . ." Mr. Winterowd's linguistic "science" thus views language as an organism that has evolved without reference to habitat. Its growth has been "arbitrary," without any principle of selectivity.

Here one recalls, however, the misuse of a "principle of selectivity," as exposed by Oliver Postgate in a comment on the language of present-day diplomacy and strategy. In the Menard pamphlet, *The Writing in the Sky*, he speaks of "The use of grey words like 'take out' for 'kill' and the use of deliberately convoluted euphemisms like 'strategic response activation' for the burning to death of billions of people." Such terms, he says, have been "the commonplace of strategic language ever since we gave up publicly glorifying carnage."

For his own illustrations, Berry examines the language of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in planning how to tell the public about what had happened in the nuclear accident at Three Mile

Island. The only language they knew was a technical jargon which hid the terrible meaning of that ghastly event. "What is remarkable, and frightening, about this language," he says, "is its inability to admit what it is talking about." His point is that these atomic scientists had lost the capacity to speak intelligibly to other human beings. Like the linguists, they have no words representing *value* in their vocabulary.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves MATTERS OF WORDS

SINCE this is 1984, not remarkably, some of George Orwell's predictions are upon us. While they aren't as awful as he anticipated, they are bad enough. Consider the use or misuse of language. In the last September-October *Saturday Review* (which a courageous publisher has started up again, with Norman Cousins doing the editorials), that sturdy defender of taste and sense in putting together words, Thomas H. Middleton, examines current usage:

The mess has many more ingredients than a distressingly widespread inability to read. For a couple of decades, we've been buffeted and tossed by a stormy sea of "ya know," "like I mean," and "wow!" There's one basic reason for "ya know," which is that the speaker is unable to express himself in the articulate language of human beings, so he tells you that you know his meaning without his having to express it. That you might not have the vaguest idea of what he means is beside the point. The point is that he himself probably doesn't know what he means. There's a line I value: "How do I know what I think until I've put it in writing?" One whose skill with words is minimal will probably not know precisely what it is he means beyond a range of feeling: well-being, ill-being, joy, resentment, envy, anger—that sort of thing. If words were important to him, and if he had learned how to string them together in a comprehensible fashion, it would be a safe bet that he'd say what he meant and would not have to say "you know"; you really would know.

It is good for us all to read Mr. Middleton; we might do something in the way of cleaning up our everyday speech, sounding less like echoes of clotted phrases. And it would be salutary, for example, to read often some of Lincoln's prose, and Emerson's and Thoreau's. Better speech would certainly result.

Mr. Middleton goes on:

It is absurd to blame the sorry state of linguistic skills among our youth entirely, or even mostly, on the educators. Still, they are not entirely blameless. The problem probably started, at least in part, with

the great modern interest in the admittedly important study of linguistics. Linguistics deals principally with spoken language, as opposed to written language. Unfortunately, some linguists went overboard and made the outrageous claim that written language isn't language. Only spoken language counts.

Mr. Middleton continues, usefully and to the point, but we turn to another discussion of the same subject by Jacques Barzun, editor of our edition (1966) of Follett's *Modern American Usage*, in his introductory chapter. His indictment of linguistic assumption gives its origin and specious justification:

Within the profession of linguist there are of course warring factions, but on this conception of language as a natural growth with which it is criminal to tamper they are at one. In their arguments one finds appeals to democratic feelings of social equality (all words and forms are equally good) and individual freedom (a man may do what he likes with his own speech). These assumptions further suggest that the desire for correctness, the very idea of better or worse in speech is a hangover from aristocratic and oppressive times. To the linguists change is the only ruler to be obeyed. They equate it with life and accuse their critics of being clock-reversers, enemies of freedom, menaces to "life."

Somewhat inconsistently, the linguists produce dictionaries in which they tell us that a word or expression is standard, substandard, colloquial, archaic, slang, or vulgar. How do they know? They know by listening to the words people use and by noticing—in conversations, newspapers, and books—how and by whom these words are used. Usage, then, is still real and various, even though the authorities refuse to point openly to a set of words and forms as being preferable to others. "Standard" gets around the difficulty of saying "best" or "correct."

"It is," he then says, "nonetheless the best usage that decides the meaning of words," and he proceeds, in what amounts to an excellent essay, to show how and why. Follett is a book on usage, so that this introduction is appropriate and needed. One point of value is that dictionaries, while necessary, are of little help in matters of taste. As Barzun says, "a dictionary does not give reasons even when it gives examples of varying usage in one or two brief quotations."

Often, what makes a word preferable is its relation to others in a passage. The narrow context of a dictionary sentence gives too few clues to the force and versatility of a particular word. This discussion draws its authority from the principle that good usage is what the people who think and care about words believe good usage to be. . . .

That seems to us to be about the last word on this subject. What else can you say? Mr. Barzun, however, adds something worth repeating:

The claim of scientific objectivity about usage begs the question. How can science know who the cultivated are and what number suffices to make them many? The "scientist" here goes by just the same impressions as his opponent. In opinions on usage, cogency and reasoning, not numbers, are what give weight to the decisions arrived at, just as in judicial opinions. And since in the realm of usage there is no police power to enforce the right, no one suffers, except perhaps in skill, by ignoring it.

This last statement might be questioned. At any rate, Wendell Berry would question it on the basis of his essay, "Standing by Words," in which he finds the disintegration of communities and the disintegration of persons closely related to the disintegration of language. The essay presents the evidence—evidence that we *all* suffer from irresponsible use of language. He says:

My impression is that we have seen, for perhaps a hundred and fifty years, a gradual increase in language that is either meaningless or destructive of meaning. And I believe that this increasing unreliability of language parallels the increasing disintegration, over the same period, of persons and communities.

My concern is for the *accountability* of language—hence, of the users of language. To deal with this matter I will use a pair of economic concepts: *internal accounting*, which considers costs and benefits in reference only to the interest of the money-making enterprise itself; and *external accounting*, which considers the costs and benefits to the larger "community." By altering the application of these terms a little, any statement may be said to account well or poorly for what is going on inside the speaker, or outside him, or both.

FRONTIERS

Bucky Fuller

A FEW years ago, when both Buckminster Fuller and Norman Cousins were part of an American delegation to Soviet Russia "for the purpose of exploring issues between the two countries," one of the Russians suggested a break from their regular sessions—to hold a debate on what the world would like in the year 2000. Eugene Fyodorov, meteorologist and futurist, would be the Russian debater, and Bucky Fuller the American. Each would speak for exactly fifteen minutes. Norman Cousins groaned and laughed to himself. No one had ever got Bucky to stop talking in less than two to four hours; of course, no one wanted to. But what would happen here?

As Mr. Cousins tells it in "Memories of Bucky," *Saturday Review* for last October, the Russian debater developed his conception of the future systematically, in fifteen minutes on the dot, winning substantial applause. Then—

Bucky started to speak. Within three minutes, he cast a spell over the entire group. The Russians sat forward in their seats. The world's greatest resources, he said, were to be found in human intelligence, ingenuity, and imagination. He identified the principal problems of the riders on Spaceship Earth and gave the reasons for his belief that these problems were well within human capacity to solve. His earnestness, enthusiasm, creativeness, and knowledge were beautifully blended.

Bucky sailed through the fifteen-minute barrier with the ease and confidence of Roger Bannister going through the four-minute mile. As chairman of the evening session, I started to rise to inform Bucky his time had expired. I felt a restraining hand on my arm. "Please let Mr. Fuller continue," Professor Fyodorov said. "He is magnificent, absolutely magnificent. You must not stop him."

I settled back in my seat. Bucky continued for almost an hour. The Russians were mesmerized. In the midst of the applause following his talk, Professor Fyodorov whispered in my ear: "It was no contest. Mr. Fuller is the winner. Never in my life have I heard anything so wonderful. I am sorry he stopped so soon. Tell me, what did he say?"

The question made complete sense. Anyone who has heard Fuller speak would understand. You hear what he says, but its meaning extends out into space—Fullerian space. Cousins says:

Audiences all over the world have had the same experience. They may not have known or understood quite what Bucky was saying, but they felt better for his having said it. He gave people pride in belonging to the human species. He gave them confidence in their innate abilities to overcome the most complex problems. He made them feel at home in the cosmos. . . . I have known very few people who after meeting Bucky, did not forever feel a sublime wonder when looking at a starlit sky.

Fuller was undoubtedly a genius (he died last year at eighty-eight). See anything he wrote, especially, perhaps, *No Second-Hand God*. He was a technologist par excellence. He wanted to enclose Manhattan island in a plastic bubble to control the weather; he wanted people to live in prefabricated cell-like homes hung from poles; but these weird ideas don't matter at all. His most important influence was the freeing of minds. He had respect only for past knowledge he had been able to duplicate in himself. He would sail into plausible but false assumptions like a phalanx of Valkyries and leave you quivering but free in mind. Literally hundreds of young men, many of them architects, were liberated by Bucky Fuller. Agreeing with him had little to do with his gift, which was as Norman Cousins says. All by himself, Fuller was a great frontier. One would like to say, "His soul goes marching on," and so far as he is concerned, we have complete right to say it.

According to a *New Yorker* profile (Jan. 8, 1966), in 1965 Fuller spent some hours in New Zealand with a friend, a cultural anthropologist who was also Keeper of the Chants of the people he belonged to, the Maoris. The chants are fifty generations old and amount to an oral Maori history. Intensely interested, Fuller told his friend they should be taped, but the Keeper of the Chants said that by tradition only Maoris were permitted to hear them. Fuller challenged this withholding of valuable records, declaring—

that the Maoris had been among the first peoples to discover the principles of celestial navigation, that they had found a way of sailing around the world from their base in the South Seas, and that they had done so a long, long time before any such voyages were commonly believed to have been made—at least ten thousand years ago, in fact. In conclusion, Fuller explained, with a straight face, that he himself had been a Maori, a few generations before the earliest chant, and that he had sailed off into the seas one day, lacking the navigational lore that gradually worked its way into the chants, and had been unable to find his way back, so that he had a personal interest in seeing that the chants got recorded. We have Fuller's assurance that the anthropologist is now engaged in recording all the chants, together with their English translations.

Another of the shapers of the emerging frontier of growing wariness of "more technology" is Jacques Ellul, who wrote *The Technological Society* (Knopf, 1964), and now offers another book, *Perspectives on our Age* (Seabury Press). Something of its content may be suggested in an interview with Ellul in the Summer 1983 *Et cetera*. Asked if he expected "Big Brother" to take over (as Orwell predicted for 1984), he said:

Oh, no. You know, I think the most probable thing is that we are going towards a crisis, a break. The most likely, in my opinion, will be bankruptcies. I don't believe there will be an atomic war. I don't believe it at all. Because everyone's too afraid. It could happen by accident. But I don't think the government has the courage to push the button. Everyone is too afraid. The Russians also. But what is certain is that there will be confusion, extraordinary confusion, disorder.

Today, the interviewer said, "you are less sad and pessimistic than you were twenty years ago. What has changed?"

I am less pessimistic. I mean, I am more human. Thirty or forty years ago I was rigid. What's changed? I've changed. I changed in relation to other people. Thirty or forty years ago everyone was sure that the world was progressing. Everything was tremendous, life was wonderful, etc., etc. At that time, I said, "no." Be careful. Now everyone I meet, especially young people, are uptight, nervous, afraid. In this environment, and relating with these people, I tell them to listen, that there is a chance. There are

few possibilities, but one should never lose hope. What has changed is the people for whom I write, the people to whom I talk.