

## THE REALLY GOOD IDEAS

THESE are days of shake-up—ecological shake-up, social shake-up, moral shake-up, and intellectual shake-up. Sometimes the ecological disasters on the horizon seem the most threatening because it is so difficult to get going what needs to be done. Quite evidently, to have a real effect, *everyone* needs to reform his ways, but the issue of "personal freedom" stands in the way of compelled reform, and most people are preoccupied with what seem to them more immediate personal objectives. Then there is the frustrating fact that nature is unresponsive to our most familiar modes of action. Getting something done, to our way of thinking, requires raising an army, constructing a bomb, holding a hearing, or mounting a public relations campaign. We try to scare people or tempt them, or use logic to win their minds over to the right side.

Nature, however, remains indifferent to these techniques. She has her own rules and a language for explaining them that we are hardly able to read. Momentous philosophical issues are involved. For generations the heavy thinkers have insisted that nature speaks only in the language of physics and chemistry, which is to say that it doesn't "speak" at all, but only reacts, more or less mechanically or energetically. Master the scheme of those reactions, it was said, and you can do anything you like, within the limits of the scheme and your knowledge of it. The modern world followed this counsel, with increasing enthusiasm and confidence, for about three hundred years. It is the vulgarized credo we have made of the Enlightenment faith in the independent powers of self-reliant human beings—people who free themselves from bondage to tradition, study the laws of nature, and use their heads.

Today the popular version of the Enlightenment faith—progress, unending progress, through science applied as technology—

is subject to questioning and challenge. What, more and more people are asking, have we left out? Why are we in so much trouble? Is there some other language that we need to learn?

The fundamental question is well embodied in a recent paper by Henryk Skolimowski:

We are becoming increasingly aware and persuaded that the period of the explosive material growth is coming to an end and this definitely means the end of the period of incessant external change, thus the end of further change as a vehicle of progress, thus indirectly the end of the myth of progress. (*Michigan Quarterly Review*, Spring, 1977.)

This statement suggests what has actually happened in our thinking. Nobody challenges the "laws of nature." You obey them, learn them, use them, but you don't argue with them. Natural processes are not negotiable. Henryk Skolimowski is not, however, challenging the laws of nature, but the way we identify, interpret, and use them. This is not science but philosophy, and philosophy is always open to question. There is no *human* advance without questioning. The beginning of a change in outlook is initiated by the asking of questions. Real questions cannot even occur until what we question has become "objective," capable of being *looked at*. Even just the looking may begin a change. Prof. Skolimowski says:

The increasing awareness that Western civilization may be breaking has made us search for the causes and links which we have hitherto ignored, neglected and overlooked. In the phenomenon of technology we find a focal point, for here many paths converge. To grasp these converging paths is to grasp the main configuration of the network through which our civilization operates. By these converging paths I mean such concepts as "progress," "nature," "invention," "rationality," "efficiency." The philosophy of technology is, in other words, the philosophy of culture, or the philosophy of man in a

civilization which has found itself at an impasse, which is threatened by excessive specialization, fragmentation, and atomization and which is becoming aware that it has chosen a mistaken idiom for its interaction with nature.

How did we become aware of all this? *Silent Spring* began the catalogue of the ways in which we became aware. New ways become apparent and are listed practically every day. For example, in the October *Harper's* George Sibley writes twenty pages on the diminishing water supply of the American Southwest. Seven states—populous California in particular—simply don't have enough water for their projected needs. It doesn't exist, and there even is talk of some day piping an adequate supply down to the Southwest from Alaska "in canals 700 feet wide to reservoirs 500 miles long." Meanwhile there is less and less water right now, due to expanding usage and the two-year drought. At present Los Angeles is using *all* it can get and the Metropolitan Water District is asking for a 10 per cent "mandatory conservation" program in order to maintain sufficient reserves for the city. At the same time the water drawn from the Colorado River to irrigate the Imperial Valley is getting saltier and saltier, an increasing threat to the fertility of the soil. Add the drought, and the "emergency" is plain enough.

Commenting, Mr. Sibley shows that he agrees with Prof. Skolimowski: not just our planning and engineering—really impressive technical achievements—are at fault; the "philosophy" back of it all has been wrong

. . . the truth is, we would eventually have come up against this problem, even if the river ran an average of 20 million acre-feet, due to the nature of our religion—which we of course denied as being a "religion" at all, and thereby never examined for flaws of faith. But our faith in technology, science, and rationalized economy has a profane and tragic flaw: we have assumed an infinity of supply, capable of fulfilling an infinity of demand, if we can come up with the technology of production.

Where we came up with such a notion, God only knows everyone else in the world is not so deluded. Perhaps it, too like the ideal of individualism, is

rooted most deeply in the fertile soil and humid climate of the North Atlantic world where no one has even known what it is to want for water.

The costly (in money and water) problem of desalinization—required for the needs of the Imperial Valley farmers and for the water we are under agreement to deliver to Mexico—is becoming acute. Mr. Sibley calls this a "second-order problem." First you get the water, but then you have to get rid of the salt left concentrated by evaporation:

. . . if you would call the Lower Colorado River the solution to a problem, then the eventual string of desalinization plants along the river would be "solutions to the problems caused by solutions." And when you look into the power requirements for any of the desalinization processes, it becomes obvious that the solution to the second-order problems will eventually become problems requiring solutions in the third order . . . et cetera. What we are beginning to learn about this business of technology as a cure-all could probably be formalized into a law: technological problems increase in exact proportion to technological solutions.

The more complex the layers of this vast pyramid of interrelated problems-and-solutions, going up tier upon tier, the more precarious becomes the stability of the entire structure. And all the integrated moving parts of the great socio-technological mechanism are vulnerable to unpredictable breakdowns which could easily throw the system into malfunctioning disorder. (Last summer's blackout in New York is an example.) As more and more natural relationships are replaced by man-made systems, the managerial responsibility becomes overwhelming. This is why Amory Lovins does not exaggerate when he speaks of the threat of dictatorial state control of many more aspects of human life, simply in order to maintain conditions of survival.

Not being a scientist, Mr. Sibley is free to philosophize. Instead of a physical generalization he proposes a metaphysical one—about what happens to systems which ignore the possibility of an underlying natural order: "Technological

problems increase in exact proportion to technological solutions."

Richard Goodwin made a related philosophic generalization about social remedies which are based on the same physicalist approach to life in general. Since no values are recognized in scientific natural law—

What is to be valued inevitably becomes, or seems to become, a matter of opinion—a situation that infuses life, work and human relations with enervating confusions, cripples the commitment necessary to the fulfillment of existence, and imposes on each individual the enslaving and impossible task of legislating an entire ethic.

We *can't* invent and then legislate an "entire ethic" as a continuous ad hoc necessity in a world where facts continually change. We don't know how. It's too big a job. When everything we do has first to be externalized, then inspected and approved by authorized empiricists who recognize only the objective world as real, not only the moral world, but the physical world, also, must eventually collapse, just as Nietzsche predicted. Empiricism, the genius of the "practical" approach to ordinary, human-scale problems, when applied to complex systems, becomes the desperate management of built-in disorder.

All this may stand for the critical awareness that is emerging in our time. Another recent magazine article, "Tinkering with Sunshine," by Tracy Kidder, in the October *Atlantic*, reviews the prospects for solar energy—revealing another sort of awareness. There is hardheaded economic analysis together with a lot of optimism reported by Mr. Kidder. As a brief survey of what is being accomplished by solar energy pioneers, his article may be the best yet. Still more important, however, are the hints and suggestions concerning the quality of the human energy behind this growing movement. While the philosophy of a man-and-nature symbiosis is low key—perhaps, at this stage, it should be—the assumption, explicit or not, that nature will support and contribute to a man-and-nature harmony is at the foundation of the movement.

A happy revival of self-reliant Yankee pragmatism is also getting in its licks. William Shurcliff, who probably knows as much about the varieties of solar-heated homes as anyone in the country, talked to Mr. Kidder about the future:

Shurcliff seems a careful man. He approaches the future cautiously, by asking questions. But five and a half years of studying the designs that now fill his books and filing cabinets seem to have left him in a state of controlled excitement. "We deal, indeed, with a ferment," he writes. In his little office, it is 1905, and a new industry is stirring. There are hundreds, maybe thousands, of people banging metal in their backyards, trying to build automobiles. Just which of these contraptions is the ill-fated Hupmobile and which the Model T is hard to say. But Shurcliff has seen a great many small ideas, and also some complete systems—maybe 3 or 4 per cent of the total—that show definite promise. They look cheap and they work, though some seem "crude" today. No single one seems perfect for all climates, but that is no real problem.

"I'm willing to go out on a limb," Shurcliff told me. "I think there will be dozens of winning schemes."

Commenting, Kidder says:

One thing many promising solar-heating systems seem to have in common is that their inventors are not connected with big companies. For the most part they are a gang of small entrepreneurs and lone wolves. They have worked with their own money; only a few have gotten support from ERDA. Perhaps that gave them a head start in the quest for economy.

Kidder talked to eight or ten inventors whose work is often "a testimonial to the low technology approach." Only one of the persons interviewed was openly philosophical, although his thinking would probably be acceptable to most of the others. He is William von Arx, a consulting scientist and teacher at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. At present he works with and counsels the New Alchemists on Cape Cod, and has become, Kidder says, one of this amorphous movement's "eloquent and credible spokesmen."

He says he is looking at energy "from a global point of view. His sinuous argument reproduces the Lovins and the E. F. Schumacher small-is-beautiful line, but from a naturalists and space explorer's perspective. Ever since the Crusades, von Arx believes, mankind has treated the planet as if it were an open ecosystem." To him, nuclear energy is merely another attempt to perpetuate this dangerous violation of "the limits to natural abundance." We must use less energy absolutely, he feels, and much more of what we use must be of the renewable kind. This would be the ideal: "To live by the natural regimen of the sun."

What about the problem of getting more people—enough people—to ask the right questions and to begin thinking along these lines? The journalists of today seem to be doing their part, and *Harper's* and the *Atlantic* and other serious magazines are at last giving some attention to important currents of change. Actually, a great restoration of both philosophical and practical thinking may be going on before our eyes. It is now virtually impossible to investigate human welfare and well-being without devoting equal attention to the welfare of the planet and the care of the world. This is a basic change in the stance of modern thought, establishing a living-with and working-with point of view instead of the familiar get-the-goodies drive qualified by nagging how-shall-we-provide-them-afterward? prickings of conscience.

Nature, in short, is back in the picture as a living reality, recognized as part of our lives. Nature is either partner or opponent in whatever we do. *We* make the decisions about this.

What happens when Nature is restored as a pervading principle of balance—even if only in terms of theory and longing? We begin—if at first only in theory and longing—to reverse a historical process which began three hundred years ago—a process which barred human intelligence from the "real" world and reduced nature to a vast collection of potentially manageable particles existing in exploitable combinations.

This centuries-old philosophical *and* practical reduction had devastating cultural effects. As Richard Goodwin put it:

The elimination of nature from our daily life loosens the ties of community through its effect on our emotional capacities and by removing a traditional bond of shared experience.

The fragmentation of social existence, having destroyed previous forms of authority, also makes inconceivable the establishment of an accepted system of values and moral conduct.

As we begin thinking of ourselves as part of nature, our spontaneous feelings about values once more have opportunity to come to the surface. The resonances sensed by poets are no longer merely "poetic," but begin to be understood as the lines of force which structure the deeper dimensions of our lives.

These are clear possibilities, but there are also barriers raised by the translation of the technological philosophy into the jargon of a commercialized "inner life." The habits of consumer thinking are with us yet. A great many people have difficulty in recognizing any idea as "real" until its residues have been bottled or packaged and offered for sale. "Meditation" is something some expert teaches you for a substantial price—"transcendence" is worth something, isn't it? Instead of going to a weight-reducing center and paying to take exercises and perhaps sensible advice, now you can go to a growth-center and buy uplifting treatment for both body and soul. You pay more, but this, after all, is a *spiritual* thing! Maybe your secret creativity will get turned on and go into production. And since we have pills to wake up and pills to go to sleep and pills to offset other pills, why couldn't someone develop a tablet that will make Voluntary Simplicity seem really desirable to everybody who can *afford* it?

Earlier we spoke about the new "awareness" that seems so promising. But obviously one must be careful in using such terms, since there is already a considerable "awareness" market. In the

*Saturday Review* for Sept. 3, Thomas Middleton quotes a paragraph from Cyra McFadden's *A Year in the Life of Marin County*, showing the do-business popularity achieved by "awareness":

Now Rita lived out in Woodacre with her old man, some other congenial freaks, and a kiln. Deeply involved in the human potential movement, she had *mutated* over the years through Gurdjieff, Silva Mind Control, actualism, analytical tracking, parapsychology, Human Life Styling, postural integration, the Fischer Hoffman Process, hatha and raja yoga, integral massage, orgonomy, palmistry, Neo-Reichian bodywork, and Feldenkreis function integration. Currently she was commuting twice a week for "polarity balancing manipulation," which, she-reported through her annual mimeographed Christmas letter, produces "good thinking."

This, it seems clear, is the froth—inevitable in a mass society kept alive mainly by sales promotion—carried on the surface of the rising tide of change. In time the froth will dry, settle as dust, then blow away. But meanwhile there is danger in hoping to get a free ride for important ideas by dressing them up with fashionable labels. The chief result of this policy is that originally good ideas are converted into slogans—like dead butterflies pinned on a board. So, little by little, it is becoming evident that you can't get the right things done for shallow reasons.

If we knew more about how the subjective side of life works, we'd probably do better at spreading good ideas around. For most people, the great ideas begin with high and ennobling abstractions—logically, that is, they begin at this level. Then they work their way down, acquiring at each level a distinctive spread of implications and consequent applications. If we were able to trace this line of descent from the original inspiration down to some practical level—the level, say, of intermediate technology, solar heating installation, cooperative buying and selling, everyday nonviolence, and spontaneously friendly relations with others—we'd know more about what to say to each other about these things. Total abstractions reach almost nobody—they're too easy to repeat and too difficult to

feel—while need-meeting practical proposals have only a narrow, ad hoc range of influence and may soon lose the moral inspiration they had at the start.

This may be a problem best left to "nature" to resolve—nature in this case being actual human performance in the present, as illustrated by the articles in *Harper's* and the *Atlantic* for October and by the advocates whose thinking and action they describe. The best ideas undoubtedly come from persons able to dramatize some aspect of reality that has been neglected, showing what kind of attention it deserves. This is what the people who are demonstrating the potentiality of sunlight are doing, with the extraordinary by-product of showing, also, the rich promise of individual resourcefulness. The really good ideas are those which attract a matching investment from the rest of us. That, indeed, should be the test.

## *REVIEW*

### A LIFE AND A BOOK

E. F. SCHUMACHER, who died suddenly of a heart attack while traveling to Switzerland on Sept. 4, was a man who knew how to do practical, everyday, and much-needed things in the light of the eternities. His life was illuminated and directed by the thrust of an uncompromising moral vision which he put into practice for the benefit of people in desperate need. He also had the ability to dramatize in simple language—familiar, widely acceptable language—the common-sense justification (uniting the moral with the practical) of his approach to the solution of economic problems. He was a kind of Tom Paine for the twentieth century, uprooting just those delusions which need exposure and offering a course of action that will make men free—or, at any rate, much freer than they now are.

Why was his aim so good? First of all, as an economist he was a master of his discipline. He knew what economists are supposed to know—his association with Keynes and Beveridge, his managerial relationship with the British Coal Board, and his role as economic adviser to Burma and India are sufficient evidence of this. But he never let the bias in the imposing mass of modern knowledge distort his thinking. For him economics always remained the science of serving practical human needs—food, clothing, shelter—and what supplying these involves. He never let the dubious abstractions of this science obscure the reality of those needs, nor would he allow preoccupation with the inordinate complexity of modern economic services to displace in his thought those other, non-material activities which give human life its true character and definition. He found a great many of the things people do in the name of economic science (or necessity) to be out of scale with normal, healthful human life. He saw that this resulted in the impoverishment of vast numbers of people, leading to misery, hunger, and demoralizing hopelessness. But he also saw that the only way out of the conditions of misery

is through intelligent and resourceful self-help. His writing is an extended exposition of how economic self-help works, and must work, giving illustrations. The work of the Intermediate Technology Development Group in England, which he founded twelve years ago, is to inspire and help make possible self-reliance by pointing to the logic and instructing in specific modes of self-help. Often the latter turn out to be something somewhere between elaborate machines and primitive tools—*intermediate* technology. Schumacher's enormously successful book, *Small Is Beautiful*, develops the theory and practice of Intermediate Technology.

Sometimes the more general term, Appropriate Technology, is used. The appropriate technology is the technology that *fits*—fits in a societal economy based on the idea that people matter. An economic method or a machine which for a time enriches a few people while making a lot of others poor is a vicious system or device. Schumacher saw this out in the field, working as a consultant, and the caliber of his character was such that he went home and did something about the terrible mistakes that were being made in the name of economic aid.

In the book published just before he died—*A Guide for the Perplexed* (Harper & Row, \$8.95)—he set down what seems his retrospective thinking about how he has guided his decisions in life. For him, this is plainly the most practical book in the world. It is a conscious ordering of the levels of human experience and human capacities—the map he has made of the outer and inner scenery of the odyssey of man's existence. Writing it was for him an act of restoration. The wisdom we need, in his view, is in the world and has never been absent, although the maps which have been authoritative in Western thought for centuries—since, say, Bacon and Descartes—have left out the most important landmarks of orientation for human beings.

*Guide for the Perplexed* has distinctive value in showing how Fritz Schumacher thinks—alas,

thought. (Curiously, it is not easy to regard him as "dead." The works of his mind are so alive today that he seems very much with us.) His method may be briefly illustrated by quotation from a concluding chapter, "Two Types of Problems," which he names as "Convergent" and "Divergent."

First, let us look at solved problems. Take a design problem—say, how to make a two-wheeled, man-powered means of transportation. Various solutions are offered which gradually increase and converge until, finally, a design emerges which is "the answer"—a bicycle—an answer that turns out to be amazingly stable over time. Why is this answer so stable? Simply because it complies with the laws of the Universe—laws at the level of inanimate nature.

These are our practical certainties, the things we really know. We shall undoubtedly add to these certainties as we improve our applications of what we know, and increase it in various ways. The method we follow "consists of eliminating all the factors which cannot be strictly controlled or, at least, accurately measured and 'allowed for'." A practical solution is the construction of a closed system which meets all the conditions of the problem. It is the finite answer to a finite need. The solution has a certain elegance and also supplies information—it *proves* something about the isolated system, but nothing at all about matters outside and beyond it."

Divergent problems are of an entirely different sort. They are problems in which *all* the factors cannot be assembled or accounted for. In Schumacher's view divergent problems have not and are not meant to have finite, definable solutions. An example is: How should we educate our children? Every attempt at a fixed answer results in a monstrous system that eventually does more harm than good.

The answers tend to diverge and the more logical and consistent they are, the greater is the divergence. There is "freedom" *versus* "discipline and obedience." There is no solution. And yet some educators are better than others. How does this come about?

How are good teachers able to find some kind of balance between the contradictory definables which must enter into any educational process? The question compels the introduction of certain terms of great generality which we are constrained to use because we can't systematize the principle of balance in human choice. There is an *x* factor in human beings, so there must be *x* factors in the help we give to one another.

Love, empathy, *participation mystique*, understanding, compassion—these are faculties of a higher order than those required for the implementation of any policy of discipline or of freedom. To mobilize these higher faculties or forces, to have them available not simply as occasional impulses but permanently, requires a high level of self-awareness, and that is what makes a great educator.

The critical side of this book is devoted to showing that the great delusion of modern times is the belief that it is possible to convert all problems into convergent problems. We redefine the problems as technical and then apply massive doses of technique. It doesn't work.

That is, doing this can be made to seem to work only by the dehumanization of man.

To undo the effects of widespread dehumanization in the present, we need to begin to think at the level of reflective self-consciousness and figure out what is right and good for human beings. We need to become philosophers, even as Plato declared.

How did we get into our present mess?

Divergent problems offend the logical mind, which wishes to remove tension by coming down on one side or the other, but they provoke, stimulate, and sharpen the higher human faculties, without which man is nothing but a clever animal. A refusal to accept the divergency of divergent problems causes these higher faculties to remain dormant and to wither away, and when this happens, the "clever animal" is more likely than not to destroy itself.

This is Schumacher's diagnosis—his eminently practical wisdom. When he speaks for himself, using the general ideas he has himself

evolved to illuminate his own map, the book comes alive with his distinctive genius—which is to say things which are true as simply and persuasively as possible, without diluting their meaning or diminishing their force. The power of Schumacher's thinking is most evident at the practical level, where its validity is tested both by application in the field and by immediate moral intuitions concerning what is right and good. Hence the immeasurable influence of *Small Is Beautiful*.

This brings us to a difficulty some readers will experience with *Guide for the Perplexed*. Schumacher has not found it necessary to conduct the various medieval expressions of spiritual wisdom (on which the logic of the book often seems founded) past the Scylla and Charybdis of modern skepticism and disillusion. In his searching as well as appreciative review (*Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 11), Theodore Roszak notes the inadequacy of even such majestic thinkers as Aristotle, Dante, and Thomas Aquinas as present-day guides:

It does no good at all to quote them at length, to celebrate their insight, to adulate their wisdom. Of course, they are wise and fine and noble, but they stand on the other side of the abyss. They have not, with Conrad's Mr. Kurtz, looked into the heart of darkness and seen "the horror." No, not even Dante, who traveled all the circles of hell, but always knowing there was a way down and out and through.

Similarly, it is naive to summon us to self-knowledge without acknowledging that the deepest self-knowledge of our time begins in the experiencing of radical absurdity and cosmic abandonment. Self-knowledge for us must go through Nietzsche, Kafka, Sartre, Beckett, not around them. Where does serious philosophy begin with us? With the truth that Schumacher does not once face in these pages, that religious tradition has failed us. It has withered in our grasp. At some point in the drama of the modern world, the vertical dimension failed to provide a sure purchase upon the need for personal autonomy and common decency that people have come to yearn for desperately.

Schumacher seemed unaware of this besetting difficulty of our time. Strong personal intuition

and intense concern with obviously needed action led him quickly through the maze of recent psycho-moral history, showing him what to do with his life. As a result, what he did is far more valuable to us than his retrospective tracing of the logic behind it. As Roszak says, Schumacher's final masterpiece—for which so many have been hoping—remains unwritten. This is indeed the case, but we ought perhaps to add that there seems a sense in which this man's *lifework* is nonetheless complete—complete by reason of the spontaneously spreading understanding of both the goal he pointed to and the method he showed for reaching it. The book "we were waiting for" must now be written by the rest of us, through the collaboration of many hands.



**COMMENTARY**  
**AN AVAILABLE ANSWER**

A DEEP dilemma of the modern world seems crisply expressed by Richard Goodwin (see page 2). He speaks of present ways of thinking as imposing on us "the enslaving and impossible task of legislating an entire ethic."

This parallels the point made by Herbert Spencer concerning the failures of nineteenth-century reformers (in *The Man Versus the State*). It is one thing, he said, to adjust traditional inequities and remove restraints, but quite another to try to guarantee equality by law. We don't know enough and it doesn't work. He was right, of course, on the evidence presented, but morally we can't *stand* his conclusion. Nature, as he conceived it, is ruthless and cruel, and Social Darwinism is inhuman. We *must* be able to do better than that!

So there are two problems: We have to "accept" Nature, but also to try to improve on her. Nature is hierarchical, but accepting hierarchy in political systems leads in our time to power-enforced egotism and ratified exploitation. That death comes to all living things is a law of Nature, but since death is feared and brings pain and grief, medicine wars against it—a losing game. Yet would you tell the doctors to stop opposing death?

How can we make our laws harmonious with the laws of nature? Thoreau and others proposed, instead, that the best government is the least government. In other words, Don't try to do too much. If you do you'll have nothing but trouble. And Hippocrates warned: At least, doctor, do no harm.

Well, today we have nothing but trouble. We may indeed be trying to do too much. But a realistic comment might then be: "Perhaps you are right, but now things have gone too far and we *can't stop* what we're doing."

Yet to try to impose ethical controls on behavior patterns growing out of mistaken assumptions about both nature and man may be, as Goodwin says, quite impossible. On the other hand, we feel the moral impulsion to do something. But what? Nature is amoral but in some sense right, although apparently "inadequate." Man is both moral and immoral, and he typically dreams of doing what is right, while at the same time demanding what is wrong. If ideology cannot resolve these contradictions, what will? The *x* factor referred to in Review may be the only presently available answer.

## CHILDREN

### . . . and Ourselves

#### MORE ON THE ARTS

IN an essay the value of which we shall probably never exhaust ("Thinking and Moral Considerations," *Social Research*, 1971), Hannah Arendt says that the thinking of Socrates was "resultless." It had an effect—a great effect (which everlastingly continues)—but it was nonetheless resultless thinking for the reason that it served no immediate, practical purpose. It prepared no materials for an act of consumption. In the eyes of a good many Athenians, this made Socrates either a ridiculous or a dangerous man.

The arts have this "resultless" quality in common with philosophy, which very often causes indifference to them, if not ridicule and antagonism. It is of interest that there is nothing in human life which *compels* understanding and participation in either philosophy or art. This seems of extraordinary educational importance. How should a teacher think about the arts? What is his responsibility toward matters that can be so blamelessly ignored?

As for philosophy, the Mogul emperor, Aurangzeb, a famous conqueror, paid these respects to the tutor of his youth:

You told my father Shah Jehan that you would teach me philosophy. Tis true, I remember very well, that you have entertained me for many years with airy questions of things that afford no satisfaction at all to the mind and are of no use in humane society, empty notions and mere fancies that have only this in them, that they are very hard to understand and very easy to forget. . . . Have you ever taken any care to make me learn what 'tis to besiege a town, or to set an army in array? For these things I am obliged to others, not at all to you.

What can one say about such a fellow? Beyond melancholy agreement with Coleridge that there are many who simply have not yet evolved a philosophic "organ" and are unable to think in a "resultless" way? This, of course, is an aristocratic theory, but we can probably get away

with repeating it in application to the now unadmired Aurangzeb. Only since Gandhi described the superior man as one who totally rejects power over others has it been possible to discuss such possibilities without eliciting indignant charges of "elitism."

A passage from Paul Valéry's *The Art of Poetry* reveals the similarly resultless character of art. He contrasts poetry, an art of language and feeling, with the practical matters in which art sometimes seems bound up. For example, one needs fire for a variety of urgent reasons—casual reasons, too, but still practical, such as getting a light for a smoke.

*I ask you for a light. You give me a light: you have understood me.*

But in asking me for a light, you were able to speak those few unimportant words with a certain intonation, a certain tone of voice, a certain inflection, a certain languor or briskness perceptible to me. I have understood your words, since without even thinking I handed you what you asked for—a light. But the matter does not end there. The strange thing: the sound and as it were the features of your little sentence come back to me, echo within me, as though they were pleased to be there; I, too, like to hear myself repeat that little phrase which has almost lost its meaning, which has stopped being of use, and which can yet go on living, though with quite another life. It has acquired a value, and has acquired it *at the expense of its finite significance*. It has created the need to be heard again. . . . Here we are on the threshold of the poetic state.

We continue in this somewhat promising direction with quotation from two pretty old books (which often come in from friendly readers who are moving or have space problems, or simply want to share their treasures), one forty years old, the other thirty. In *Common Sense About Drama* (Knopf, 1937), L. A. G. Strong discusses the hazard of presenting tragedy to modern audiences:

The newspapers, by speaking of any and every death as a tragedy, have debased the word for us. . . . Pathos is as far as the average sentimental playgoer cares to venture. . . . The average playgoer wants to be reassured about the world. He wants its comforts

magnified and its misfortunes prettified. He wants above all to be assured, by implication, that he is competent to deal with the world, and that his way of going about life is the right way. To him tragedy, real tragedy, is unsettling and shocking. It intensifies the risks of life. It shows man balanced precariously on the tight-rope between good and evil. It shows him people who think for themselves, or who meet terrible penalties for failing so to think. . . . It overturns the safe wooden seats which he and his kind have laboriously succeeded in erecting, and points to the quicksands beneath. All real art does this, and the timorous man dislikes it accordingly: but tragedy, which shows men paying the penalty, terrifies him. "Because of its appeal to imaginative reason," says M. Komisarjevsky, "a real work of art cannot be appreciated immediately by the ordinary person who usually lacks both imagination and knowledge, and he cannot help very often even disliking it at first."

Coleridge's theory, again. That some people are more aware, have more sensibility, are wiser, kinder, more useful, than others seems an absolutely undeniable fact of life, yet one we find difficult to explain and comfortable to forget. But happily there is a crucial qualification to be added to all such arguments. Mr. Strong now writes a Tolstoyan defense of the "uninstructed masses," the people regarded as less fortunate than the literate and sophisticated minority who make the cultural fashions of the time:

Simple people—people who are literally uninstructed—have no prejudice against real works of art. It is the half-educated who find difficulty. Every summer a company of undergraduates tours the villages of Oxfordshire and Berkshire with a translation of a Greek play. Nothing, you might say, could well be further from the comprehension of an unlettered countryman. Yet the performances are crowded: and, when misunderstanding occurs, it is not the "yokel" who giggles, but the vicar's daughters. The success of the Old Vic is a triumphant instance of the power of real art to find a hearing and hold an audience. No: the town masses are not so much uninstructed as misinstructed. They suffer from a teaching which obscures the natural simplicity of the mind, which satisfies the child's curiosity with ready-made answers, and offers, through the cinema and popular drama a comfortable, wish-fulfillment, dreams-come-true escape from the difficult questions of life.

Great art requires no justification: it exists in its own right. But, if we are going to face life's difficulties, if we seek reality and wish to think for ourselves, if we want real courage in adversity, instead of the false mass escape that consists of putting our heads in the sand, then tragedy is going to help us as nothing else can, *and help us in the only way that is of any use*. It will never give us a ready-made answer. It will never say "do this" or "don't do that." It will merely fortify and make supple our spirits for the eternal task of deciding for ourselves.

Gloriously resultless.

Replying to a critic (Max Eastman) who insisted that the poetic theater ought to accomplish something practical for the world—set out how "to solve the problems of life on this planet"—Maxwell Anderson wrote in *Off Broadway* (Sloane, 1947)

Never in the history of the world has poetry of any excellence thrown its weight toward the practical or scientific reorganization of the affairs of men. Poetry is just as unfit for that business as for making up the accounts of a brokerage house. As for plays, even a play in prose loses its franchise over an audience the moment it begins to discuss the blueprints for an almost perfect state.

In short, what one learns from art is always either a self-generated lesson or a fraud. Nothing humanly valuable can be compelled. Justice cannot be compelled. Peace cannot be compelled. There is a sense in which the artist or the philosopher is able only to hold dialogue with himself, inviting people to see and hear. He can do no more, since the sort of thing he is communicating—filled with incitements and reproaches—is decent only as soliloquy, available to others only when they choose to overhear.

## *FRONTIERS*

### Therapy for Psychotherapy

THE chief activity on the present-day frontier of the human adventure is the dismantling of the imposing structures of external certainty by which the world has lived for hundreds of years. This is not the first time in Western history that human beings have made a concerted effort to free themselves from the shackles of the past. The scientific movement, from Galileo to Darwin, broke the hold of authoritarian theology on the Western mind. The church had ignored both the resources and the essential autonomy of the human mind and spirit, promising salvation in the next world as the reward of conformity in this. It became obvious to thinking people that, whether or not there is another world, suppression of moral independence in this one is a timeless evil that can lead to no good either here or hereafter.

It is a major irony that the scientific movement, originally the work of a heroic breed of discoverers and independent thinkers, in time created another sort of institutional authority whose externalizing rules now control the decisions of society as much as theological claims dominated the Middle Ages. So, today, there is a major struggle at all levels of activity to restore the moral autonomy of the individual.

Quite frequently the best reformers are professionals who work to replace the assumptions and transform the methods of the fields in which they were trained. Ivan Illich and John Holt, both teachers, have been effective in razing the superstructures of pseudo-certainty in education. A determined band of farmers is laboring for a similar revolution in agricultural assumption and practice. Ecology—barely a century old—is a science now recognized as "subversive" of an entire range of taken-for-granted notions about the resources, stability, and durability of the natural world. Physicists and cosmologists are looking at their basic assumptions with a disenchanted eye, asking

existential questions. There is a revolution among economists, led by thinkers such as E. F. Schumacher and Leopold Kohr, with increasingly evident effect. The impact of the work of A. H. Maslow and some others continues to wear away at conventional assumptions in the psychological and social sciences.

In keeping with and deepening this trend is an examination of "The Nature of Psychotherapy," in *Tract 23*, by Peter Lomas, a British doctor (general practitioner) who knows psychoanalysis and is a practicing psychotherapist, now associated with people "teaching themselves to work in the psychotherapeutic field." Target of Dr. Lomas' criticism is the "medical model" of orthodox psychiatry. His hope is that, once the misconceptions of this approach are removed, another kind of thinking about the causes of mental illness and the laws of subjective health will emerge and gain strength. He begins with vigorous questioning—rejection, really—of the idea that psychotherapy is any sort of definable scientific specialty:

Psychotherapy is the word used for current attempts to heal what we once called the soul and now call the personality. Because it is a product of the age it is, by and large considered to be a scientific and technical procedure, a means of making personality changes in controlled conditions, with results that are quantifiable. And because the concept of mental health has replaced that of spiritual well-being, and the doctor has replaced the priest, psychotherapy is regarded as a subdivision of psychiatry. . . . it will, I am sure, be clear to the reader that my stance depends, in no small degree, on an opposition to the belief that psychotherapy is a science which can be learned and practiced in the manner of, say clinical pathology.

Next some basic questions:

May the healing which occurs—and which presumably gives psychotherapists the heart to continue practicing and which I am assuming to be something more than a facile illusion on the part of therapist and patient—be due in significant degree, to facts other than the technical ones?

What are the implications of the idea (if it has merit) that the main factor in psychotherapeutic

success is not specialised knowledge? May it mean that not only must we alter our views on the teaching and practice of psychotherapy but that we need to rethink our whole attitude towards the way in which help can be given to those in anguish, confusion and despair?

The sum and substance of this inquiry, which reviews various cases and alternative attitudes toward them, is that any act of helping, whether of parent with child, teacher with pupil, or therapist with patient, depends essentially on what the helping individual has "learned in 'the school of life'; or, to put it another way, his capacity to help depends more on being able to apply a realistic experience of ordinary living to the special situation of psychotherapy than on any other factor." This outlook, Dr. Lomas believes, is all-important." If he comes to believe that the efficacy of his specialised experience (or, worse, that the rigour of his scientific theory or technique) can supplant or transcend the application of his ordinary experience of people, then the whole endeavour is threatened."

Specialized experience has its value, and what may be learned from books can be put to work, yet all this, as training, cannot replace the indefinable requirements of a relationship which, Dr. Lomas says, "is as elemental and varied as, say, that between friends and lovers, marriage partners or parents and children."

It will be creative, sterile or destructive depending on the degree to which certain virtues enter into the relationship; and what is or is not a virtue is, of course, a question to which man has sought an answer since the beginning of history and for which there appears to be no foreseeable consensus of opinion. It is the eternal question: "How should a man live?" There are no definable, formal qualifications that enable one to answer this question, and therefore there are no definable, formal qualifications that enable one to practice psychotherapy or even to define the aims of therapy. One can only give an opinion that certain human qualities and certain experiences are likely to be helpful. . . .

We do not know how best to live. Men and women have tried, in their daily lives or in the

building of philosophical and religious ideas, for as long as we can imagine, to find how best to live. And we can only grope our way towards helping others to live, even those who seem more anguished than the rest of us.

Here, truly, is therapy for therapists.

*Tract*, a quarterly, is available by subscription for about \$6.25, with single copies at \$1.75, from Gryphon Press, 38 Prince Edwards Road, Lewes, Sussex, England.