VOLUME XXIX, NO. 36
SEPTEMBER 8, 1976

THE ART OF THE PHILOSOPHER

EVEN a great truth is shaken when confronted by its opposite. Yet it can only be shaken, not destroyed.

There is a line in the *Katha Upanishad:* "Who sees the variety and not the unity, wanders from death to death."

This seems undeniable, since to be blind to the underlying unity of all that we see is to be shut out from knowing *what* we see. And that is indeed death. Death shuts us out from the experience of graded unities.

But what about not seeing the variety? If you don't see variety, you don't enter life at all, and the very idea of unity will remain unknown to you, since unity gains meaning only in contrast with variety. So we might bracket with the Upanishadic truth a balancing statement: "Who sees the unity and not the variety, sees nothing because he has not been born into life."

This makes things simple: You have to see both!

But a question remains: When you look at unity, isn't it at the expense of diversity, and if so, won't the meaning of unity lose its substance as a result? And vice versa?

Reflective analysis gets us this far, but no farther. We have this will-to-be, this longing or determination to be born into a world of differences that can hardly be suppressed. Seeing only unity would really suppress it, but obviously we are not ready for that. Going home to final unity—doing it, that is, successfully—would mean knowing all there is to know about the variety of the world, dissolving its "otherness," so to speak, by making it part of ourselves. And then, when relation turns into identity, the unborn unity without an opposite has been regained.

This is only a psychological account of human experience, but is there really any other?

We are now ready for an argument with Galileo—or, at any rate, Descartes. They both declared that the physical elements of experience are not dependent on what we think or feel about them. There are, they argued, "things" out there which behave according to physical rules, not mental ones, and we must, in order to deal with them intelligently, learn the physical rules. But what those things really are, in themselves, Kant added, we can never know. We may learn what they do and how they do it, but not what they *are.* They, in other words, are not *us.* They are something added, but on the outside of us. And since in order to live we have need of outside things, lots of things, they are very handy to have around.

The variety of the world, in short, is irreducible to unity. This is the contention that you can't understand variety by thinking about it, but only by measuring it. You do produce a kind of unity this way. By measuring things and taking them apart, in theory or in fact, they break down into ultimate "thing" particles. The trouble with this is that the particles get so small they become quite invisible and their motions can no longer be measured; actually, they can't even be located when you try to measure their motion, which is practical defeat; and they also subdivide into smaller and smaller particles, finally becoming something called "energy," which is not really a "thing" at all.

This is approximately what has happened in modern physics, with the result that physicists are now wondering if the entirety of their science may be some kind of movie they have made up about the world. They don't ask if the world is really there—which would seem a ridiculous question—

but they ask whether the movie they have devised is a picture of the world or of an intellectual process reflected in the world, and then reflected back in what turns out to be a deceptive kind of "objectivity."

The very question, you could say, requires seeing a kind of unity in all the diversity of the physical world: the unity of the mind. What could happen to physics as a result? It might become a division of psychology.

But this, it must be admitted, is far too easy a settlement. The world is still out there, we are not on speaking terms with atoms, and the laws of motion, and subsequent developments thereof, actually *work.* The cars run, the lights go on, and the bombs explode.

Philosophic questions do not seem to daunt mechanical authority.

Yet mechanical authority is being daunted these days. The machines of men do not seem so well coordinated with the great machine of the world in their collaborative running. Apart from what preoccupation with successful machines has done to our minds and how we use them, the *unity* of the machine-dominated world is exhibiting symptoms of deep disorder. There are, as we might say, more breakdowns than breakthroughs in our time. We can fix the parts but there are wholes we haven't paid any attention to and don't know how to fix: we don't even know how to define these wholes, whose presence is gradually becoming evident but whose dimensions and operating principles remain obscure. The reality of these hidden wholes is looming on the horizon like an ominous thunderhead. It even rumbles a bit.

A whole is a unity. How many of the books published this year are devoted to saying, in one way or another, that if we don't give more attention to the unity these wholes represent, we shall "wander from death to death"?

What grows out of seeing variety? Action grows out of it. We call the action "problem-solving." There isn't—there can't bc any action without variety. In unity there's no place to go, nothing to do. Naturally, people love variety. It is not just the spice but the condition of life.

Seeing variety results in knowledge of variety. Treatises on "Becoming" are an expression of this knowledge. They are mostly "how to" books, very useful for those who want to make something become, and then themselves become along with it—ride it around—or behave like a bird or a fish, or the king of some mountain.

What grows out of seeing unity? Meaning. Unity in the world means that things have inner connections. They are related, ultimately *everything* is related. Is, then, the discovery of meaning some sort of *Un*becoming?

This is a terrible question. It really ought not to be answered. It shouldn't be answered until we find some way of repealing the second law of thermodynamics as it applies to *us*. Unbecoming, in physics, means motion without form, existence without being, which is really nonexistence. Entropy is the word. Entropy means random, effectless or senseless motion in physics; for humans it means loss of meaning.

We are able to see this by recognizing entropic states of mind. When one looks for meaning, but finds only emptiness, one has been reduced—or has reduced oneself—to an entropic state of mind. Macbeth found himself locked in such a state:

> Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
> To the last syllable of recorded time
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
> Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more: it is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.

That was Macbeth's report on the world out there—the kind of report that Galileo and Descartes said wasn't worth listening to, wasn't worth making. No measurements, no account of how the machinery works.

Were they right?

Well, if we take Macbeth seriously—and since people do get into states of mind like that, sometimes doing terrible things while in them, we ought to take him seriously—the question needing to be asked is: Is he right? Is that what the world of experience, of variety, adds up to? Exactly nothing at the end?

Macbeth's movie of the world reached the conclusion that life isn't worth living. He is saying that the bright, morning promise of his life was a fraud, and that later on the witches on whose predictions he depended *lied* to him. The unities, harmonies, and meanings he pursued all let him down. He strutted his hour, but then—nothing.

The world, you might say, succeeded in shutting him out. But the audience would say that he shut himself out, and that his report on the world was simply sour grapes. He gave a vivid account of entropic unity. Nothingness.

Is there a possibility that we have to make the world mean something in order to achieve meaning for ourselves? That it has to be going some place, seeking some destination, in order for ourselves, who are in the world, somehow bound up with its fortunes, to find meaning in our lives? We have relations with the world, and can a human who lives by meaning have relations with a meaningless world?

Whatever the answer to this question, we know that we inevitably make up attempts at answers—we make movies or reports, and then in some measure we act upon the reports.

Galileo made a report which left out human beings. So, to complete his report, we added the Old Testament testimony that the world is there for our enjoyment. "Christianity," says Lynn White, Jr., "in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism), not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends." But after Galileo and his numerous successors showed us *how* to exploit nature in ways nobody dreamed of a few centuries ago, we decided that our own ingenuity, not God's will, had made all this splendid becoming possible. There were dissenters, of course, but their movies played to very small audiences.

The point of the really popular show was that the meaning of the variety is the *fun* it gives us. We are fun-loving people, and things, used as we have learned how to use them, are simply there—no matter how they got there—for us to enjoy. That's meaning enough, people said. Who needs metaphysics? they said. Unity is just a word that mystics play around with. This is a pluralistic universe in which diversity is the ruling principle. That the rule of diversity might break down when unity is forgotten was a possibility that variety-loving people could ignore because they didn't pay much attention to their *feelings* about unity. When pain from some violated unity interfered with enjoyment, people took something out of a bottle that made the pain go away. They solved the problem. The liquids—or the pills—shut out the pain. Pain was made to suffer a temporary death.

But not everyone resorted to bottled goods. Tolstoy reached something like the desperation and feeling of meaninglessness that overtook Macbeth, but without having all the world's processes turned against him. On the contrary, the world was doing its best to please Tolstoy with rewards and praise. But the variety palled. His pleasure turned sour.

> I was [he wrote in his *Confession*] delighted to look at life through this little mirror of art; but when I began to look for the meaning of life, when I experienced the necessity of living myself, that little mirror became either useless superfluous, and ridiculous, or painful to me. I could no longer console myself with what I saw in the mirror, namely, that my situation was stupid and desperate. It was all right for me to rejoice so long as I believed in the depth of my soul that life had some sense. At that

> time the play of lights—of the comical, the tragical, the touching, the beautiful, the terrible in life—afforded me amusement. But when I knew that life was meaningless and terrible, the play in the little mirror could no longer amuse me. . . . I was like a man who had lost his way in the forest, who was overcome by terror because he had lost his way. . . . And, in order to free myself from that terror, I wanted to kill myself.

But he didn't kill himself. Instead, he asked Galileo, Descartes & Co. a question:

> "What is the meaning of my life?".
>
> I received an endless quantity of exact answers about what I did not ask: about the chemical composition of the stars, about the movement of the sun toward the constellation of Hercules, about the origin of species and of man, about the forms of infinitely small, imponderable particles of ether; but the answer in this sphere of knowledge to my question what the meaning of my life was, was always: "You are what you call your life; you are a temporal, accidental conglomeration of particles. . . ."
>
> With such an answer it appears that the answer is not a reply to the question. I want to know the meaning of my life, but the fact that it is a particle of the infinite not only gives it no meaning, but even destroys every possible meaning.

Well, he goes on thinking about the meaning of his life—*My Confession* has about eighty-six pages—and two thirds of the way through reaches the conclusion that his loss of meaning was due to the way he had lived his life, what he *thought* it was for.

> I saw that the truth had been veiled from me not so much by the aberration of my mind as by my life itself in those exclusive conditions of Epicureanism, of the gratification of the appetites, in which I had passed it. I saw that the question of what my life was, and the answer to it, that it was an evil, were quite correct. What was incorrect was that the answer, which had reference to me only, had been transferred by me to life in general. . . .
>
> I saw that in order to comprehend the meaning of life it was necessary, first of all, that life should not be meaningless and evil, and then only was reason needed for understanding it. I comprehended why I had so long walked around such a manifest truth, and that if I were to think and speak of the life of humanity, I ought to think and speak of the life of humanity, and not of the life of a few parasites of life.

The "life of humanity" is a unity. Thinking about it saved Tolstoy from dying a dusty death.

People reach this confrontation with the issue of meaning—which is truly a life-and-death issue—by different routes and at different times. Some few seek it, but most of us are overtaken by it. Conceivably, the whole world is being overtaken by it, at some level of unity/variety, during these difficult and painful years. How do the people who suffer this confrontation fare afterward? We know a little about what Tolstoy made of his ordeal. Macbeth had only the agony of passive self-recognition—the pain of entropy without its dissolution; real entropy would wipe out pain along with consciousness. Macbeth might have decided, if he had a choice, that pain is better than nothingness. The love of life is very strong. To the insensible man, feeling pain might be a delight. Any contact with experience from the outside is *some* kind of promise that a lost fragment of unity may some day find its way home.

Ortega wrote about this confrontation in *The Revolt of the Masses*. He must have had his own or he could hardly have stated its uncompromising terms with such extraordinary clarity:

> Take stock of those around you and you will see them wandering about lost through life, like sleep-walkers in the midst of their good or evil fortune, without the slightest suspicion of what is happening to them. You will hear them talk in precise terms about themselves and their surroundings, which would seem to point to them having ideas on the matter. But start to analyze those ideas' and you will find that they hardly reflect in any way the reality to which they appear to refer, and if you go deeper you will discover that there is not even an attempt to adjust the ideas to this reality. Quite the contrary: through these notions the individual is trying to cut off any personal vision of reality, of his very own life. For life at the start is a chaos in which one is lost. The individual suspects this, but he is frightened to find himself face to face with this terrible reality, and tries to cover it over with a curtain of fantasy, where everything is clear. It does not worry him that his

> "ideas" are not true, he uses them as trenches for the defense of his existence, as scarecrows to frighten away reality.
>
> The man with the dear head is the man who frees himself from those fantastic "ideas" and looks life in the face, realizes that everything in it is problematic, and feels himself lost. As this is the simple truth—that to live is to feel oneself lost—he who accepts it has already begun to find himself, to be on firm ground. Instinctively, as do the shipwrecked, he will look round for something to which to cling, and that tragic, ruthless glance, absolutely sincere, because it is a question of his salvation, will cause him to bring order into the chaos of his life. These are the only genuine ideas; the ideas of the shipwrecked. All the rest is rhetoric, posturing, farce. He who does not really feel himself lost, is lost without remission; that is to say, he never finds himself, never comes up against his own reality.

Are there rhythms in these confrontations, with varying degrees of direct encounter? How much of reality, after all, can a human being endure? Who can stand being stripped of all his illusions before he has constructed some vital organism of true ideas to live in, while he is getting used to the real world? True ideas, one must suppose, are about relative unities—unities in combination with varieties. Our separations and differences are always tempered by connections with other things, other lives, other beings. We are always going out and coming back, finding new radii of awareness, deeper bonds of unity encompassing wider circles.

On this matter of going from death to death because we get stuck in enjoyment of variety—it may be small consolation, yet it seems a fact, that we have to die anyhow, no matter what. Getting loose from the grip of variety for its own sake very nearly killed Tolstoy. He died without dying, you could say. The art of the philosopher, Plato said, is in learning how to die easily.

This all sounds pretty grim. Well, the clubs for abolishing grimness have a big turnover in membership. The longing for relief lasts, but not the solutions.

There seems a strong likelihood that when becoming—experiencing variety—is spontaneously recognized as widening awareness of the endless diversity in all conscious unity, the joy in becoming balances out the pain.

REVIEW
YOU CAN GO HOME AGAIN

IN the last chapter of *Home, Inc.* (Doubleday, 1975), subtitled "The Making of a Non-Economic Society," Scott Burns sums up the present state of mind, pre-eminently the American state of mind:

> Economic thought is the language of the time. It is our metaphor; it is the logical calculus upon which the metaphysics of industrial society must rest. We are in love with the law of supply and demand, the idea of economies of scale, and the rule of diminishing returns. We are fascinated with the power implied in the process of compounding. We look forward to ever more.
>
> We seek out those few who can subject themselves to the discipline and magic of numbers and charge them with the task of finding and enlarging that which is written on the bottom line. So it is that the nation supported the efforts of some seven hundred thousand accountants and auditors in 1970; whatever color the ink, there is always much to be writ. "Accountability" strides forth and becomes the rule of the day. It will prevail everywhere. Even in education. Nay, even in government, we have promises of accountability (but *only* promises). We shall find a bottom line in everything and it—the notion that somewhere, some entity such as the bottom line exists—will yet come to be known as the Rosetta Stone for the twentieth century.

Mr. Burns doesn't believe in any of this. He thinks the conversion of all value into economic terms is ridiculous, nonsense, a delusion, and that already the assumptions on which this outlook is based are being disproved by changes in human feeling, human action, and in visible tendencies in even the economic processes which are supposed to confirm them.

Curiously, home is the place where the language of economics, which deals with production and consumption, buying and selling, and profit and loss, stops making sense. Out in the world, which for us means the market place, the difference between production and consumption is clear cut and easily defined. This is not true of the home:

> As a consumer, I buy cars, dishwashers, and washing machines; as a member of a family, I use these goods to produce needed services that would otherwise be purchased in the market economy. The fact that these services are not purchased in the market economy does not mean they do not exist. I wear clean clothes. I eat from clean dishes. I move from one place to another at my convenience. The producer produces for the household; the consumer produces *within* the household. That is the real difference between producer and consumer. . . .
>
> Everything I do for myself or my family and everything they do for me are excluded from accounts of national product and income. Everything I do for money, however dubious its intrinsic worth or utility, is added to GNP and national income. The value of a friend's services on his own car is excluded from GNP. But the cost of his accident ambulance ride, and hospital stay is not. Indeed, a multitude of entirely negative economic events—the cost of police prisons, pollution, accidents, etc.—are included in GNP while the value of home production, volunteer work, and the services of consumer-owned capital are excluded.
>
> *Most of our economic statistics do not exist to demonstrate and quantify our real economic product but to trace the growth of exchange, of the market economy.*

Mr. Burns is saying that the best things in life are not only free (not paid for in wages for their production), but also invisible (in economic terms). The irony of all this is that the vast apparatus of the market economy came into being to serve the needs of human life, and these needs have their natural focus in the home. Home is what all this working for wages and buying and selling for profit is *for,* but the happenings, the fulfillments, the values generated in the home never get into the figures. Only in pious expressions safely unrelated to practical activity do we admit that what happens in the home gives meaning to all those outside transactions. Since we have figured out how to make the outside activities measurable, we say that they are *real,* while what happens in the home is not really measurable—or measurable only artificially, by an awkward sort of translation into monetary terms—we let it be tacitly understood that what happens in the home is not real, not economically real, that is.

To explode this dehumanizing self-deception, Mr. Burns performs a *tour de force.* He converts what happens in the home into economic terms, showing that if you put home production of goods (such as food) and services (care, etc.) on a dollar basis, enormous monetary values develop for the home economy. Apparently, there are several studies along these lines. One by Chase Manhattan Bank, for example, reveals that the average homemaker (a woman, of course) devotes about 99 hours a week to household tasks, and if this work is valued at $2.00 an hour, the some thirty-five million married women who "work" at home produce goods and services worth $350 billion. Divorce lawyers, Mr. Burns notes, find this figure fascinating.

A lot of guessing and arbitrary assigning of values is involved in such projections, so that there are big differences in the conclusions arrived at. Another set of calculations (which included home work by all members of the family) indicated "that the total household income in the United States was some $212 billion in 1968," of which "women were responsible for almost 75 per cent, $155 billion." Mr. Burns frames these estimates with conventionally available statistics:

> We can put these enormous sums in perspective by comparing the earnings of the household economy with those of various sectors of the market economy.
>
> In 1968, gross personal income in the United States amounted to $465 billion. Some $98 billion in income taxes were paid. Thus, the value of household labor is worth almost 50 per cent of the sum of *all* the after-tax labor income in the United States.
>
> The largest single market source of labor income was (and is) manufacturing, which paid out $146 billion in wages and salaries in 1968, *a sum smaller than the value of women's work in the household.* While the American housewife who did not work outside the home was worth some $124 billion to the household economy, all the employees of the federal, state, and local governments were paid only $96 billion; all the wholesale and retail workers were paid only $75 billion; and all the service workers were paid only $56 billion.
>
> In the same year, all the corporations in the United States paid out gross wages of some $320 billion. *The next-largest single source of income is the household economy,* at $212 billion. Yet its contribution never appears in government statistics.

These figures, while indeed wonderful, should not be allowed to dominate our thinking. Their best use is in demonstrating the distortions which result from making the rules of the market place not only the laws of our lives but the source of our values as well. Mr. Burns contends that home thinking not only ought to dominate our lives but will surely do so, for the simple reason that, with the diminution of resources, more and more functions of support will be returned to the household, where production and consumption are inextricably related activities and where there is no point in trying to separate them. Money doesn't, shouldn't, enter in, at this stage.

Moreover:

> The market economy is not a creature suited to an environment where materials and energy are increasingly scarce. The market is geared to "more and more," not to more from less. Yet the reality of our limited natural resources requires precisely that: more from less. The household, not the market, is the institution for such a condition.
>
> It would be difficult *not* to describe our future society as a utopia, because it contains virtually all the elements prescribed by those who have wished for utopias. There will be peace, freedom, a general improvement in human relationships, leisure, economic efficiency, and a real—if peculiar—variety of luxury. What more could we want?

We used to wonder if there would ever be a time when the Tom Paine sort of lucid simplicity would again be possible—when what people really need to do could be declared and urged in a language everyone can understand. Look, Paine said: You can run your own lives. You don't need a king. Kings are useless rascals, as any history book makes plain. Moreover, this king you have is a tyrant who is costing you not only money but self-respect. Get rid of him! And look: the

Redcoats are here! They are shooting at you. The time has come to drive them back across the ocean to where they belong.

For Paine, the strength needed by the people was within, the enemy was without. Pointing out the enemy stirred the strength into action. For us, both the strength and the enemy are within, which makes marshalling the energy difficult. But now there are writers who are successfully turning the enemy into something visible "objective," as we say. Two books do this very well: E. F. Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful* and Philip Slater's *Earthwalk.* Another such book is *Home, Inc*.

All through Mr. Burns's book we kept hoping he wouldn't try to put a dollar value on a mother's soothing caress of a fretful child. You can imagine where pricing such services might lead! But he didn't do it. His book has many good sides, including diverse critical and constructive values we haven't mentioned at all.

COMMENTARY
UNSPOKEN BALANCE

HOW is it possible for a human to die without dying? There is a sense in which Tolstoy died without dying (see page 8). How did he manage it? We could say that he had the sort of "faith" that devastating analytical consciousness could not destroy. Analysis *almost* destroyed him, but Tolstoy had a heroic streak—an indomitable conviction that there must be meaning in human life.

Can the heroic spirit be reborn in our time, as it was in Tolstoy, despite our critical sophistication?

It will be necessary, it may be, to look at birth with the same wide-open eyes that we turn toward the death we see all about. There is great preoccupation with death, these days—a psychic absorption corresponding to the physical preoccupation with the second law of thermodynamics. A contrasting focus on birth would amount to revival of the visionary reach of the great romantic poets, but intensified by a rigor of intellectual penetration hardly possible in the nineteenth century.

Wordsworth wrote:

> Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
> The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
> Hath elsewhere had its setting,
> And cometh from afar:
> Not in entire forgetfulness,
> And not in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory . . .

What are the tools and materials for building under such a conception a foundation of faith (or something better than faith) that death merely confirms?

Another pole of certainty was given expression by the Buddha. After his enlightenment he addressed the personified drive which makes life in bodies an imprisonment—

> I know thee! Never salt thou build again
> These walls of pain,
> Nor raise the roof-tree of deceits, nor lay
> Fresh rafters on the clay
> Broken Thy House is, and the ridge-pole split!
> Delusion fashioned it!
> Safe pass I thence—deliverance to obtain.

A measure of balance between these poles—as yet unspoken—may be the evolutionary task of the present.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN AND CAN'T DO

THE fact that far too many books are published about education and teaching ought not to prevent discovery and appreciation of the good ones, but of course it does. This can't be helped. Our *toujours plus* (always more) society produces too much of everything—more gadget conveniences and luxuries than anyone has money to buy or time to enjoy (or is able to get fixed when they break down), more books than anyone can read, more tasty desserts than anyone ought to eat.

For an editor this problem emerges as a stack of unread books on a table on the other side of the room. They ought to be an invitation to some kind of pleasure or an opportunity to do a little good work. But as Ivan Illich has pointed out, when technology—and publishing is deeply infected with the ills of technology—reaches a certain point in dominating the patterns of human life, it begins to work backward: what was once a labor-saving blessing, a wonderful extension of human capacity, is now producing a surfeit of unnecessary goods which gets in the way of our lives.

You think of such things when moving along at ten miles an hour—or just sitting still—in a bumper-to-bumper line of cars on the freeway, wondering how long it will take to get home. You wonder, also, how it would be if we had no cars, no phones, and only one-room school houses in every neighborhood.

You wonder, vaguely, whether or not there is a "moral law" which governs this side of human life, and whether, after a long period of having too much of everything (not really "everything"), there will inevitably come a time when we don't have enough of anything (but enough of certain important things, if we have the sense to recognize them). Fuzzy thoughts. Not at all tough-minded thoughts. But probably true thoughts, even if people who act on them are regarded as eccentric, romantic, or impractical.

Meanwhile, those books—all those beautifully printed, often well-written books—are waiting on the table. Well, there are worse threats in life. When you get into one of them, the contents may once again push aside the disenchantment. The positive side of human experience has not been lost, just covered up, and an effort will uncover it. Sometimes the jacket gives a clue. For the book we have for this week's discussion, the clue was the name of John Blackie, who contributes a prefatory note to *Activity and Experience* (Agathon, 1976, $12.00) by Lydia A. H. Smith. Mr. Blackie's brief connection with the book suggests it is worth reading. He is a teacher with a lifetime of experience as an inspector of English schools—which means a career in the cross-fertilization of teaching ideas and practice. He wrote one of the best available books (*Transforming the Primary School*) on elementary schools in Britain. *Activity and Experience* is about the Infants Schools ("infants" means children from four or five to seven), and is very good. It tells what the teachers in these schools do, and why, with comments interspersed by the author. Speaking of American interest in the English achievement, Lydia Smith says:

> One possible side effect of taking such ideas seriously is that we may develop smaller schools, on the English model. If what matters is the relationship between people in a school, then large, impersonal schools hamper children's growth, however much they may seem to increase efficiency. Similarly, we must think through all the consequences of putting the child first, and plan our expenditures and arrangements to suit that aim.
>
> Careful study of what we know about children's development can teach us that the first demand made of *schools*—to serve society's ends—has not worked and cannot work. The strategies we have planned to produce the attitudes which we approve do not follow developmental lines. They are constructed by adults and implanted in children, with some hope of success. But unless the learner participates in the learning, unless he *is* the self-aware agent of his learning, such learning remains verbal only. Citizenship for instance, cannot be directly taught, although a classroom which embodies democratic principles of personal and social behavior can do much to embody democratic attitudes. One cannot hope to produce future citizens by teaching them about governmental organization; rather, one must help them see what it

> means to be a citizen in the classroom they inhabit every day.

What do democratic attitudes and principles come down to, in the final analysis? *Fairness* seems a good common denominator. Children have an instinct for fairness, but practically always it needs development. The other side of fairness is the regulation of self-interest—for the sake of fairness and because "order" is necessary. But order can develop from within only when there is fairness. And even then it is no sure thing. Intensity of interest and involvement produces one kind of order, rules and fear of punishment another. Yet rules may serve without support from fear of punishment. They can be neutral tools, justified by simple statement of how things work when they are for the common good. Good teachers seem able to get such things across to children without preaching.

Another part of the book points out what every good teacher surely knows—that not much learning can take place unless the children *like* the teacher. And the teacher can't be liked unless she likes children. Unhappily, not all children are likeable. The impressive thing about good teachers is that they manage to like them anyhow, without indulging their weaknesses or ignoring their unpleasant tendencies. Unlikeable children can be threats to teachers. The question is: Does the unruly child challenge the teacher's "authority" or her resourcefulness? Another question is: Is the misbehavior bad because it is "sinful" or because it interferes with learning, including learning by others?

If we can't and shouldn't try to make children into "good citizens" who serve "society's ends," what are the goals? Decision and control from within is a good way to put the main goal. That seems to be the process, anyhow. From kindergarten on the children are gradually subjected to more and more rules and regulations, and then, as they get older, the rules become fewer and fewer, until, finally (by hypothesis), the student is on his own. Maturity means self-guidance.

This is the evident rule of life, at any rate, and schools try to imitate life. Recognizing that they can never be more than imperfect imitations seems quite important. We probably can't do without schools—not until whole communities do their job—but we will hardly do well *with* them until we admit that they can't do everything, and recognize that when we try to make them do everything they either break down or turn into jails. Lydia Smith says:

> There is one particular myth which Americans have long held about the effect of schooling and which is now being destroyed, namely, that equalizing educational opportunity for children will result in greater social mobility and higher income for them when they are adults. Again, the emphasis is on the hoped-for results of the school process, not on the process itself. Evidence is mounting that this myth is quite far from an accurate picture of what happens to children when they leave school. On the contrary, the best predictor of a school's effect in later years, when measured in terms of status and income, is the background and status of the children who come there in the first place.

Schools, one is obliged to say, both are and are not an "investment" in the future.

> This is not to say that schools do not matter but only that they do not and cannot serve at least one function which has long been assigned to them. It is time to stop measuring the success for schools in terms of later results, especially material ones. . . .
>
> When schools and teachers refuse to be used as means for distant social goals but see education as an end in itself, then they can be free from distractions, impositions, and all the pressures that force them to do work they cannot do. Schools cannot eradicate poverty and inequality; but they can be sane, understandable places fundamentally concerned with the sound development of the children they serve. The best preparation for an uncertain and changing future, on this view, is a fully developed life in the present and at every stage.

This seems a conclusion so fundamental that it probably belongs to the set of crucial ideas or attitudes that grow only from the inside of people's minds, and are almost wholly unaffected by the findings of "research."

FRONTIERS

Ecoregions: A Proposal

ALL nations have been created by force, including your own, to satisfy the lust for power of a man, or of a small group of men—whatever the lofty principles, constitutions, codes or ethics with which those ambitions have been disguised to pass muster. My thesis is based on the recognition that the Nation was a useful unit on the evolutionary distance to be covered between the tribe and the planetary community—but that it is no longer of any use. I see most of our ills coming from that artificial structure, which prevents us from getting to the next step.

I was a European federalist in the 'thirties, as a kid, and my faith in the ultimate goal of a world government has never varied since then. But one thing I have come to understand now, which I did not see before, is that, in order to reach that goal, we have to travel first in the other direction, and base world systems not on federation of nations, but really a confederation of regions. Why?

Because a region is the geographical unit in which we truly live—not the nation. A nation-state performs all the wrong and oppressive functions; it sends us to fight useless and criminal wars, it imposes on us systems invented by Strangelovian bureaucrats, it plagues us with its artificial problems, it expects us to choose between Ford and Reagan with a hysterical urgency which would be laughable if the issues were not so damned serious. But they are. It seems incredible that we should still have to spend so much energy keeping alive a democracy which produced the Algerian and Vietnam wars, Watergate, Nixon and de Gaulle, and all other attending disasters. Yes? No?

And so I suggest the ecoregion as a remedy. The ecoregion: in other words, a natural, self-defined human community established in a territory defined by a number of factors, and in a flexible manner. The factors being geographic, ethnic, linguistic, economic, religious, ecological, historical, and probably a few others as well. The European Lands or Provinces are such strongly-defined ecoregions that they have survived through two centuries of national unification. On the other hand, in America, it is also a fact that regional realities have been growing faster than national ones; physical conditions have determined the directions in which very individualistic cultures are fast growing from East to West. Energy problems have accelerated that evolution in recent years, and they alone will probably force into being a number of local federations of states, from which new ecoregions will emerge quite naturally after a few generations have come and gone. In other words, I see two types of ecoregions: the traditional ones, which have been repressed or adumbrated by the central power of the nation-state; and the new ones which are now taking shape in all the "new countries."

Going from the nation to the ecoregion is not regressing: it is simply a practical choice intended to restore reality to the democratic ideal. In an ecoregion the issues are clear, and every member of that unit is able to debate them in a concrete and knowledgeable manner; for instance, for the citizens of an ecoregion to be able to vote for or against the installation of a nuclear plant rather than a fishery is a simple and realistic way to restore functional democracy.

It also gives much greater flexibility to human organization. Brittany, Wales, Ireland, Scotland may decide to form a Celtic federation for cultural purposes, without interfering with their existing links with France and Britain. Northern barons crushed the Provençal society in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to enlarge the newly formed kingdom of France; this caused the truly inspired culture of the South to be repressed by a much more primitive civilization. The loss suffered by France, and by the entire world, has been tragic, immense, and irreparable. The culture of the Troubadours has been eradicated, but the people who created it are still there, silent, humiliated, and reduced to an eternal dependency. Why wonder, then, that France has felt so uncomfortable for so long? It is still possible—easy, today—to respond to all the aspirations of the Provençal peoples, restore their pride and originality, and let the unique genius of the *langue d'Oc* rise again, and impregnate mankind with its radiant message.

The Basque and Catalan "problems" are of the same nature; there again, you can easily conceive a Basque "cultural ecoregion" developing on both sides of the Pyrénées without any loss being suffered by either France or Spain. The "problems" of Ireland, of Corsica, of Palestine, point in the same direction, and to the same solution.

An important point: the recognition, definition and development of the ecoregion is entirely compatible with the nation as an entity—even if it implies a massive decentralization which will diminish the powers of the central government. But the ecoregion can be brought to existence without in any way disrupting the present political order, at least not in a sudden and violent manner. The division of a country into five, or twelve, ecoregions may cause a reduction of the central power, but not of the national image, or the national genius. It can only enrich the national community by giving it more wealth and diversity. And in any case those ecoregions are in fact already here, even if they are made invisible by virtue of being repressed, or unrevealed. With the ecoregion, you won't have to highjack planes any more and kill innocents to proclaim to the world that you are a Moro, a Kurd or a Tamil.

Within the ecoregion everybody participates in all the decisions of public life in a manner which is immediately applicable, and produces results that are instantly visible.

Between the ecoregions of different countries or continents, direct exchanges are being carried out, economic, touristic or cultural, giving a new dimension to international exchanges.

Ecoregions will put a stop to the sterilizing uniformization of all societies from East to West. This deserves serious attention, because our present problem is not only that: within some thirty years, or forty, the world population will have jumped from 4 to 8 billions, and those 8 billions will be looking at the same television program. And that's no joke; no joke at all!

But one could go on like this for a long time, listing all the virtues of the ecoregion. I am more interested in speculating about the manner it can be projected into reality. The first step, which I am presently taking, is to try the concept on the MANAS audience, inviting readers to give their opinion.

The second step is probably to develop the theme in the form of a book, covering all the various aspects of the ecoregion in succinct form for the general public. With the proper backing, such a book could be sufficient to launch the idea internationally.

But it seems that the next and most effective step would be to publish manuals for each ecoregion (which of course implies a general agreement between the protagonists as to the geographical definition of those ecoregions). Such a publication should be written in very accessible language and sold locally at low price. It would present the ecoregion with all its present problems, and for each one offer a choice of solutions, with a clear rationale for each. The readers would be invited to send in opinions, to participate in polls concerning the major options of the ecoregion to which they belong. People must understand that they can become personally responsible for the determination of their own future, and their children's future, in all its aspects.

My hope is to find people who would be interested in participating in the elaboration of such studies—which would cover the most diverse items, from agriculture to education, religion to folk art, crafts to industries, etc., etc.

MAURICE GIRODIAS

95 Grand Street
New York, N.Y. 10013