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A DEFENSE OF METAPHYSICS

GIVING an account of ourselves as human beings—saying what it is to be a man—is the one enduring activity in human history. The most useful statements always seem to be dialectical. We learn more, that is, from the tensions than from the resolutions or composures in our lives. It is true enough, for example, to say that the attractions of history and biography illustrate the continuous interest we have in the capacity of human beings to reveal themselves, but this remains a flat and unstimulating observation unless we add that no matter how perceptive the biography, how complete the history, the essential mystery of identity, of human meaning, always eludes the spoken or written word. We can say a great many things, but no *final* things, about the nature of man. All conclusions, even lasting and good ones, eventually need restatement from some fresh point of view.

What do we know about this process? There is at least an identifiable sequence or mode. For example, there is the old joke about the post-adolescent who found reason to remark, as he approached nineteen or twenty, that his father had suddenly grown much wiser during the past couple of years. We move from innocence to confidence, after that to questioning and uncertainty, and then, sometimes, even if rarely, to the renewal of innocence, to which has been added a patient sagacity. Theories of knowledge and cultural expressions of religious conviction also pass through these cycles. Epochs of affirmation give way to questioning and recognition of the relativity of knowledge. Advocates of faith are replaced by champions of doubt, which is said to be the beginning of wisdom. But an epoch of nothing but doubt brings cultural decline and moral disintegration. At a time of urgent national decision, the poet, Archibald MacLeish (in the *Nation* for May 18, 1940), expressed outrage at the moral indifference of men of learning:

> The irresponsibility of the scholar is the irresponsibility of the scientist upon whose laboratory insulation he has patterned all his work. The scholar in letters has made himself as indifferent to values, as careless of significance, as bored with meanings, as the chemist. He is a refugee from consequences, an exile from the responsibility of moral choice. . . . It is not for nothing that the modern scholar invented the Ph.D. thesis as his principal contribution to literary form. The Ph.D. thesis is the perfect image of his world. It is work done for the sake of doing work—perfectly conscientious, perfectly laborious, perfectly irresponsible.

More temperately, an eminent biologist, Edwin Grant Conklin (in his address as retiring president of the A.A.A.S. in 1937), wondered about the effects of the professional agnosticism of scientists:

> In spite of a few notable exceptions it must be confessed that scientists did not win the freedom they have generally enjoyed, and they have not been conspicuous in defending this freedom when it has been threatened. Perhaps they have lacked that confidence in absolute truth and that emotional exaltation that have led martyrs and heroes to welcome persecution and death in defense of their faith. Today as in former times it is the religious leaders who are most courageous in resisting tyranny. It was not science but religion and ethics that led Socrates to say to his accusers, "I will obey the god, rather than you." It was not science but religious conviction that led Milton to utter his noble defense of intellectual liberty, "Whosoever knew truth put to the worst in a free and open encounter. . . . " The spirit of science does not cultivate such heroism in the maintenance of freedom. . . .

Much more recently Gregory Bateson (see *Harper's*, November, 1973) spoke of the weakening in learning and serious inquiry among students in the present, attributing it to the absence of any sort of strong beliefs. People without positive convictions, he said, won't

wrestle determinedly with paradox and contradiction. As he put it in his interview with Stewart Brand:

> "Now you've got data on one side and a stubborn epistemological assertion on the other, and you wrestle with those two somehow. My complaint with the kids I teach nowadays—graduate students and such—is that they don't really believe anything enough to get the tension between the data and the hypothesis. What they may find out doesn't really impact on theory, because they don't have any theory they're willing to hold tight enough to get an impact. It *slides* all the time."

A similar comment in relation to personal life was made twenty years ago by Simone de Beauvoir. She told of an ailing young woman who, when urged by friends to "get well" as the only thing of importance, replied, "But nothing is important, so why should I get well?" Simone de Beauvoir observes:

> She was right. For this world to have an importance, for our undertakings to have meaning and merit sacrifices, we must affirm the concrete and singular density of this world the singular reality of our projects and ourselves. . . . if the individual is affirmed as a singular and irreducible value, the word sacrifice regains its full meaning; what a man loses in renouncing his projects, his future, his life, no longer seems negligible.

These several quotations suggest that a melancholy sort of critical maturity has been reached in modern thought—a realization that what has been esteemed as "knowledge" and measured as progress is lacking in some crucial way. As a result, scientific thought may be regarded as having reached its post-adolescent phase. What major assumption, then, held almost without question for hundreds of years—the shaping principle of our conception of knowledge, the source of our optimism, the parent of practically all modern conceit—is now under direct and unceasing challenge?

It is the claim that by following the method of empiricism—by collecting facts and *only* facts, by forming the conclusions that facts dictate, and finally by verifying those conclusions—we create a central core of indisputable scientific knowledge or truth which stands independent of all human fallibility, prejudice, or the will-to-believe. The idea has been that, armed with this core of primary certainties, we are able to test the validity of all proposals, theories, and even ideas of philosophy. Never again, the claim continues, need we be deceived by wishful thinking or artful lies. No mere intellectual doctrine can shake the authority of objective fact.

Only recently has there been criticism leading to frontal attack on this claim. First came the slow realization that even while our theoretical understanding of the physical world grew increasingly impressive—impressive in terms of technological mastery of natural forces—our lives were becoming increasingly unsatisfactory. Science, people began to say, is only one kind of knowledge. But the established monopoly of the method of science as the only familiar means to certainty—generating habitual disdain toward all other approaches—made any alternative means to knowledge seem weak indeed. Even while science was being severely questioned, its methods of testing for certainty were retained.

But during this process of disillusionment a revealing line of historical discovery and cultural analysis has been going on. Claude Lévi-Strauss, in *The Savage Mind*, shows that another sort of "science" was evolved thousands of years ago—a science which did not depend for its validity on a mathematical theory of the universe, and was without the reductive abstractions of Galileo and Newton. This ancient science, Lévi-Strauss says, had a background of myth, yet was in its way quite successful in practical terms:

> It was in neolithic times that man's mastery of the great arts of civilization—of pottery, weaving, agriculture and the domestication of animals—became firmly established. No one today would any longer think of attributing these enormous advances to the fortuitous accumulation of chance discoveries or believe them to have been revealed by the passive perception of certain natural phenomena.

> Each of these techniques assumes centuries of active and methodical observation, of bold hypotheses tested by means of endlessly repeated experiments.

Lévi-Strauss calls this ancient science the "science of the concrete" and devotes most of his book to demonstrating its numerous achievements. Why is there so great a gap between ancient and modern science? The writer does not really explain, but offers this comment:

> There is only one solution to the paradox, namely, that there are two distinct modes of scientific thought. These are certainly not a function of different stages of development of the human mind but rather of two strategic levels at which nature is accessible to scientific inquiry: one roughly adapted to that of perception and imagination: the other at a remove from it. It is as if the necessary connections which are the object of all science, neolithic or modern, could be arrived at by two different routes, one very close to, the other more remote from, sensible intuition.

In defense of the first route he says:

> Myths and rites are far from being, as has been often held, the product of man's "myth-making faculty," turning its back on reality. Their principal value is indeed to preserve until the present time the remains of methods of observation and reflection which were (and still are) precisely adapted to discoveries of a certain type: those which nature authorized from the starting point of a speculative organization and exploitation of the sensible world in sensible terms. This science of the concrete was necessarily restricted by its essence to results other than those destined to be achieved by the exact natural sciences but it was no less scientific and its results no less genuine. They were secured ten thousand years earlier and still remain at the base of our own civilization.

Something of the natural foundation of this sort of science is conveyed by a passage Lévi-Strauss quotes from a spokesman for the Carrier Indians of Canada:

> We know what the animals do, what are the needs of the beaver, the bear, the salmon, and other creatures, because long ago men married them and acquired this knowledge from their animal wives. Today the priests say we lie, but we know better. The white man has been only a short time in this country and knows little about the animals; we have lived here thousands of years and were taught long ago by the animals themselves. The white man writes everything down in a book so that it will not be forgotten, but our ancestors married the animals, learned all their ways, and passed on the knowledge from one generation to another.

Then, an Osage told a white interrogator: "We do not believe that our ancestors were really animals, birds, etc., as told in traditions. These things are only *wa-wi-ku-shá-ye* (symbols) of something higher." An ethnologist studying the Dinka tribe in Africa reported: "When I asked what I myself should invoke as my clan-divinity, it was half-jokingly suggested that I should invoke Typewriter, Paper, and Lorry, for were these not the things that had always helped my people and which were passed on to Europeans by their ancestors?"

The characteristic feature of the savage mind, Lévi-Strauss says, is its "timelessness," and the mythic background of its beliefs gave meaning to all that was done. In contrast, the "scientific *praxis,"* he says, "among ourselves, has emptied notions of birth and death of everything not corresponding to mere physiological processes and rendered them unsuitable to convey other meanings." These existential aspects of experience—birth, death, puberty, marriage, divorce, and illness—represent the roles through which all human beings pass, involving responsibilities and psychological states, and in the "primitive" mode of thinking are the means of "the progressive spiritualization of the person throughout the life cycle," as Stanley Diamond has put it. (*Tract*, No. 18.)

Such recent researches and conclusions, while slow-acting in effect, help to bring the modern mind to new levels of reflection about science. What may eventually prove to be the most effective criticism of the conventional outlook is that offered by Paul K. Feyerabend in a substantial essay, "Problems of Empiricism," in *Beyond the Edge of Certainty* (Prentice-Hall, 1965), edited by Robert G. Colodny. This writer contends that the idea of a central core of objectively verified

knowledge as the foundation of scientific progress and a necessary safeguard against misleading or fanciful belief is a fundamental error which is likely to have an effect exactly the reverse of what is expected. The trouble with the "core" idea is that it shuts out as a matter of course conceptions or proposals which are inconsistent with the assumptions of the core. This leads to flat denial of the desirability of a change which might prove an important step of progress, while at the same time upholding abstract faith in scientific progress. Feyerabend points to the fact that in times of crisis in the evolution of science, a plurality of possible solutions is required:

> The one theory that guided research in the preceding time of normal development has broken down. A great variety of attempts are made to find a new theory that is no longer beset by the difficulties of its predecessors and will be capable of playing a similarly singular role in the future. Theoretical pluralism is the most decisive feature of a crisis.
>
> Now it is commonly assumed—and this is where the evaluation starts—that crises are, or at least should be, transitory stages in the history of thought, that they are periods of disorder and embarrassment which are voids of knowledge and provide no suitable basis for methodological discussions. Only science at its best contains genuine knowledge, and science is at its best in those sometimes very long periods when a single point of view reigns supreme.

But *why?* Much of this essay is devoted to showing that the establishment of a single point of view in science by no means arises from the persuasion of impartial facts, but results from the imaginative invention of a powerful theoretical intellect. The conception is always *connected* with facts, but its force lies in an idea. Actually, there are no "naked" facts unassociated with prior theories or assumptions. The "omnipresence of experience" is such that we would be submerged in infinite diversity if we did not select our facts by means of some kind of theory, usually metaphysical in origin. Metaphysics is commonly the origin of scientific hypothesis. It may be regarded as itself a "primitive" or undeveloped form of science, Feyerabend says. Newton, who did much to popularize the idea of total reliance on "facts"—the outlook which Feyerabend calls "radical empiricism"—was far less empirical than he thought or claimed. It was this masquerade of an idea-system as a collection of indisputable "facts of experience" that established the delusive infallibility of the scientific method. As Feyerabend says:

> Certain ideas (the ideas constituting the phenomena in Newton's sense) are accepted not for what they are (viz., ideas, *good* ideas, perhaps, but still *fallible* ideas); they are presented as an immediate expression of fact. The circumstances of their origin (that an immense feat of the imagination was needed, an ability to think in as yet untried categories) are covered up. Praise is applied for the wrong reasons (Newton was an excellent *observer*). Hypotheses are entertained for the wrong reasons. And history, which in any case is full of fairy tales, is enriched by the narration of a few more fictitious events.

The actual ground of Newton's achievement, Morris Cohen shows in *Reason and Nature*, included the "daring and unorthodox speculative idea (which Newton derived from Boehme and Kepler) of a parallelism between the celestial and terrestrial realm." And the earlier scientists on whom Newton relied, Cohen points out, also drew on metaphysical sources:

> Similarly we know that it was the Pythagorean conception of the book of nature as written in simple mathematical terms that led Galileo to look for and ultimately see the simple law connecting the increased velocity of a falling body with the time of the fall. Tycho Brahe's astronomic tables did not in themselves show Kepler's laws, indeed, they suggested quite different laws to Brahe himself. Kepler could see those laws only after he brought to his vision certain speculative ideas of Apollonius (on conic sections) and of Plotinus. To be sure, all these cases . . . show a most painstaking checking up of preconceived ideas by accurately determined or measured facts. But without the well-reasoned ideas, the inquiries could not have been initiated, for there would have been nothing to verify.

Feyerabend argues for open recognition of this metaphysical foundation of scientific hypothesis. The fruitfulness of the crisis periods

of science, when a variety of possibilities gain attention, leading eventually to new discovery, is evidence of the value of this open-mindedness; and why, Feyerabend asks, should this productiveness, so noticeable in a time of transition, be later abandoned because of the belief that there is only "one true" account—the one we decide to adopt—of the world of natural law? He says:

> This, then, is the methodical justification of a plurality of theories: such a plurality allows for a much sharper criticism of accepted ideas than does the comparison with a domain of facts that is supposed to be given independently of theoretical considerations. The function of unusual *metaphysical* ideas is defined accordingly: they play a decisive role in the criticism and development of what is generally believed and "highly confirmed," and they must therefore be present at any stage of the development of our knowledge. A science that is free from all *metaphysics* is on the way to becoming a *dogmatic* metaphysical system.

Feyerabend adds:

> Indeed, it is my contention that once the scientific method has been freed from certain dogmatic elements that still reflect its past involvement with the philosophical tradition, it will provide a basis for the discussion and the solution of *all* philosophical problems dealing with matters of fact.

This is a highly appropriate comment since it seems quite evident that the misconception of science as an independent, indisputable authority which gives rulings based upon unchanging, objective fact has distorted many aspects of modern life. The common habit of mistaking preconception for fact, and then elevating the preconception to the position of absolute dictator, has had paralyzing effects on the modern imagination, not the least of which is the shutting out of a wide range of metaphysical possibilities in connection with, for example, birth and death, as the cultural anthropologists point out.

It is most important of all, perhaps, to take note of the fact that Feyerabend is here a critic of the *scientific* idea of knowledge. There is a clear distinction to be made between what is legitimately called scientific knowledge and other areas of human inquiry. Scientific knowledge is by definition *public* truth. It is to be distinguished from areas entered by a questing intelligence deliberately reaching beyond the scope of public demonstration. There may be areas of the subjective region of experience which will some day be made objective, but where, in the present, confirmations concerning the meaning of experience must remain an individual, even a private, affair. What is said about this aspect of human life may have logical and intuitive support, but immediate conscious experience of it is indeed subjective, and not, therefore, "scientific." We should note, however, that the highest feelings about meaning and value seem to derive from this region.

By the fact that such achievements of human awareness must await scientific demonstration in the unforeseeable future, we are helped to recognize that in all significant matters of religion and philosophy, human beings are *on their own.* There can be no public verification of such theories, although a body of philosophic testimony or metaphysical demonstration concerning their truth may become available. The inspiration leading people to consult this testimony is intuitive, while the discipline of its critical investigation is the logic of metaphysics.

This is not (yet) science, even though, as Feyerabend shows, the roots of all science are, or need to be, metaphysical.

REVIEW
ACTS OF LOVE

PEOPLE who do terrible things, violent things, selfish and cruel things, sometimes prove capable of completely opposite behavior—of turning their strength, which may be considerable, to intelligent, kindly, useful, and sometimes heroic acts. During the past twenty years or so, some rather extraordinary individuals have come out of the woodwork and generated fields where changes of this sort in human beings actually happen. We have in mind what are called "halfway houses," but this classification is no help at all in understanding what goes on in the best of these places, and how their influence works.

We are thinking of places like Synanon—to which, some years ago, MANAS gave close attention—and of the Delancey Street Foundation, of San Francisco, which has acquired an excellent description in Charles Hampden-Turner's latest book, *Sane Asylum* (San Francisco Book Company, $10.00). Actually, the Delancey Street Foundation could be called an offshoot of Synanon, but this would also be misleading, since the prime ingredient in these places is a quality of human being, not the "system," even though system is not without importance. Systems wear out, lose their growing tip, cease to be effective. This is not true of the human beings who know how to ring continual changes in systems to maintain their usefulness. It's like turning a kaleidoscope.

The jacket summary gives a concise account of the contents of *Sane Asylum:*

> Take several hundred ex-convicts like these—dope addicts, prostitutes, thieves, murderers—and their friends and put them all together in one house, then watch them tear each other apart: it could be utter chaos, but at the Delancey Street Foundation in San Francisco, it is pure sanity. Unquestionably the most promising hope for criminal rehabilitation in the country, Delancey is both a dumping place for "society's garbage" and a shining example of *true* rehabilitation at work. Residents own and operate their own businesses, maintain their own credit union and accredited high school, and, under the visionary direction of John Maher, himself an ex-con and ex-addict, they loudly take sides on controversial political issues.

For one thing, they side with and help Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers. Chavez has said of the Foundation:

> I look around here, and I think perhaps this is how it will be, this place is the shape of the future, if there is to be one. We haven't had much success . . . living by ourselves . . . each tiny family the hostage to some business or the state. You don't have to be long in this house to sense that the people here are alive, because they know what it's like to live for each other. In a way I envy you, because we Farm Workers ask for and receive far more help than we can ever return, and sometimes I think how can we ever pay these people back? But you have worked out a way to give even when you have only a little yourselves and that is what gives you a stature and pride that poor people can gain only with difficulty.

As at Synanon, the Game is the instrument of self-discovery. Any question, any kind of language, is permitted in the Games, but no violence. The success of the Game rests on *good faith*, which is forged as a community achievement. The purpose of the Game is iconoclastic—to smash self-deceptions. Mr. Hampden-Turner reproduces the dialogue of a number of the Games. In one of them, "Bryant, a tall, middle-class black youth with large sad eyes" asked that the Game focus on him. This started his ordeal:

> "Did you hear an unpleasant noise?"
>
> "Something's crawled out from beneath a stone. It's rattling."
>
> "At least let me speak!" Bryant blazes. "How can you hope to do justice if you won't hear me?"
>
> "Justice, ha! If you'd got what you deserved, you'd be . . . *dead."*
>
> "Let's hear him. Tell us why they shaved your head, Bryant."

Headshaving at Delancey, as at Synanon, is a fairly severe punishment. Bryant requested it, claiming that he had shown disrespect to the house and had failed to convince his brothers that

he hadn't been using dope. At this point in the Game a participant recited the evidence against him, then said:

> "So now we have this minicop, this utterly transparent pretense that he is punishing himself more severely than we would wish because he holds himself to higher standards. Trust Bryant to shave his head while trying to escape the meaning of doing so!"
>
> "Know why I resent you, Bryant?" One of Delancey's best business managers is into the ring.
>
> "I resent the hell out of you college educated middle-class_____. You're the real niggers, with your bongo drums, your tribal hats, and your protoculture, when the truth is you've maimed and crippled and worn down more black men and women than the biggest white bigot in this town. We uneducated slobs keep repeating to ourselves, 'gotta educate our children and ourselves and prepare for the day.' Then we look at you or Josh over there, and we think 'wait a minute! I could graduate from college and *still* be a slave. I could end up like Bryant—the most erudite liar that ever tied himself into supersophisticated knots and used his brains against his own life.' Ain't *no one* here believes you but yourself !"
>
> "Wrong! His Lordship here believes him, don't you?

At this point the author, who was present, became involved. (Hampden-Turner grew up in England.)

> "What I *said,"* I hasten to explain myself, "is that the behavior of someone who is ostracized can become very similar to that of a person who is genuinely guilty. All the incidents cited as evidence of Bryant's guilt—the rumors, the additional witness, the end of his relationship, even his own moralistic pronouncements—are possible reactions to his rejection by the community."

For a moment or two the fire is turned on HampdenTurner:

> "God, what a *bore*!"
>
> "Save it for a lecture!"
>
> "He thinks Bryant is beautiful! Don't you Charles? *All* blacks are beautiful, especially when they stand alone, sad and dignified, surrounded by a mob! Saint Charles to the rescue! He gallops to the scene tilting his mighty pen at the ugly institution! Will his Lordship save his faithful servant Black Abstraction? Can he make the world safe for scribblers? Don't forget to tune in to our next installment of 'Have Guilt Will Travel,' the saga of a solitary psychologist."
>
> "No, no! You've got Charles all wrong. He doesn't believe or disbelieve Bryant. He is open minded. His mind and his mouth will be yawning open at the sound of the last trumpet. His kind are never wrong 'cause they never
>
> "Let *me* ask Bryant a question," I say, trying to stem the flood of derision. "Now Bryant, assuming your innocence for the sake of this question, how do you feel about the roommates who falsely accused you?"
>
> There is a pause. Bryant is sitting alone, his bare head bowed, hands clasped together, a suffering captive in an art exhibition of socialist realism. He answers quietly:
>
> "They both did what they thought was right. They acted like brothers . . . trying to help me . . ., but they were mistaken . . ., " and he breathes a sigh.
>
> "BULL!" roars his barber. "Are you impressed, Your Lordship? Is that sentiment *pure* enough for an Oppressed Person? You liberals! Who else d'you think taught him this crap?"
>
> I shake my head. "You're right—it's too unctuous. I'm sorry Bryant, your last supporter is wavering."
>
> Three weeks later in a Dissipation [a Game that goes on night and day for several days] we heard the full confession: the price of the drug, the dealer's name. It all checked out.

Once, years ago, a visitor touring Synanon on a Saturday night asked the guide whether the people at Synanon were "competent"—had the necessary training—to treat or give therapy to drug addicts. The answer, which came after a snort, was that the "professionals" had had endless opportunities to show what they could do, and Synanon was populated by their failures. But at Synanon they were clean, and living useful lives. What *is* competence? How do you tell? Can you believe in diplomas?

After being asked similar questions, John Maher, Delancey's founder, summed up with this response:

> "We didn't build America by stopping cowboys in Wyoming and asking them if their lives were stabilized! We just sent an avalanche of them. If you'd gone to Plymouth Rock with your clipboard and pencil a year after the Pilgrims landed and asked them, "How many of you are leading constructive lives?" what do you think they'd have said? 'Well, half of us were frozen dead the first winter and the rest of us are just thawing out.' But those who endured went on to found a culture that produced Hawthorne Melville, Emerson, Thoreau, Paine, and Margaret Fuller. That's the way we're gonna be."

There is no way to convey the wonderful mix of radical and conservative elements in the daily practice at Delancey—not in a brief review—but Mr. Hampden-Turner does very well in 296 pages. The old-fashioned virtues are nearly all there, but in unfamiliar dress. When starting out with this account of the book, we thought of calling it a study of the wisdom of the depths. There is the razor-edged sagacity of the streets, the tired awareness of failure and betrayal, but also a great deal more. A disguised but deep concern for one's fellows keeps outcropping as a basic principle in such places as the Delancey Street Foundation. Put that concern together with firsthand knowledge of the seamy side of life, add a highly sophisticated exposure of the pompous pretensions of institutions, and then a concerted determination to make an ad hoc, going-concern-type community for people who are ready, even if somewhat reluctant, to remodel their lives, and you have the essential ingredients. But to make them jell you need an extraordinary individual who has evocative power and knows how to put them together—knows when and why even jeering may be an act of love.

This is as much "explaining" as we want to attempt.

COMMENTARY
ANOTHER TIME AROUND

REINCARNATION has always seemed an engaging doctrine, but now we are confronted by really persuasive evidence—Savonarola, the hero monk of the late fifteenth century, has returned as the hero monk Ivan Illich. Savonarola took on the reform of the then civilized world—Florence, of course burning in the market place the "vanities" of the day and exposing both the sins of the laity and the corruptions of the hierarchy.

Dr. Illich is as arduously unmasking the sins of today's civilized world, baring the pretenses of our several hierarchies. In an address in Canada last October, he predicted the end of the Age of the Disabling Professions. It will, he said, be remembered as the time "when people had problems, experts had solutions, and scientists measured both abilities and needs."

> The age of professions will be remembered as the time when politics withered, when voters guided by professors entrusted to technocrats the power to legislate needs, the authority to decide who needs what, and a monopoly over the means by which needs shall be met. It will be remembered as the Age of Schooling, when people for one third of their lives were trained how to accumulate needs on prescription and for the other two thirds grew into discerning clients of prestigious pushers who managed their habits. . . . [The backward-looking foresight fades and Illich returns to the present.] I do not believe that this descent into techno-fascism is unavoidable; a return to participatory politics is possible but only under condition that (1) the nature of prolessionai dominance, (2) the effects of professional establishment, (3) the characteristics of imputed needs be dearly understood.

When Lorenzo the Magnificent was on his deathbed, he summoned the prior of St. Mark to shrive him:

> Savonarola reluctantly came and offered absolution on three conditions: Lorenzo asked in what they consisted. First, "You must repent and feel true faith in God's mercy." Lorenzo assented. "Secondly, you must give up your ill-gotten wealth." This, too, Lorenzo promised, after some hesitation; but upon hearing the third clause, "You must restore the liberties of Florence," Lorenzo turned his face to the wall and made no reply. Savonarola waited a few moments and then went away. And shortly after Lorenzo died unabsolved.

Our only doubt results from the expectation that Dr. Illich may enjoy a more fortunate outcome from his endeavors.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
SOME INFORMATION, SOME HISTORY

FROM the first issue (May, 1976) of *Doing It!* (issued six times a year by the Urban Alternatives Group, Box 303, Worthington, Ohio 43085):

> An alternative school in Mississippi found its new principal in Sudbury, Mass. A new community service college in New York City found its staff in Sudbury. Drug centers, drop-out prevention centers, public and private alternative schools all around the country, a free school in Maine and a public school administrator in Washington agree that Sudbury is the place to go for teachers and staff. And the teachers' grapevine points to the same place as the source of information on non-traditional jobs. The organization which is the hub of all this activity is the Teacher Information Center (TIC).
>
> TIC (or Teacher Drop-Out Center as it was known until the spring of '76), was founded by Leonard Solo and Stan Barondes in 1971, when they were both doctoral candidates at the University of Massachusetts and coming face to face with the problems of job hunting in earnest. It was then they began compiling lists of alternative schools around the country. . . . Now Len Solo, himself the principal of an alternative school, has taken over prime responsibility, together with his wife Deanna, and they have changed the name of the enterprise, but the object remains the same: to serve as a national clearing house for teachers and schools, from preschool to college, who are involved or interested in alternative education.
>
> TIC (or TDOC) has been in existence for seven years. They maintain contact with 4,000 innovative schools or programs and have earned high praise for their work. Administrators write job descriptions for them, and some have stated that they look no further for their staffs.
>
> Teachers pay a yearly fee of $18. For this they get a monthly newsletter listing job openings and references to directories and other sources available in various parts of the country. . . . TIC will also do personal job pfacement whenever possible. Teachers are asked to submit more than the traditional resume. The usual mechanical kind of information on degrees and number of years of experience is insufficient for the kind of jobs TIC staffs. What they need to know is "where you are" as a teacher and as a person so that a connection will appear between a particular individual and a particular job. . . . Their address is Teacher Information Center, 61 Surrey Lane, Sudbury, Mass. 01776.

The foregoing seemed a good introduction to Len Solo's brief article in the TIC newsletter for last March, on alternative schools:

> Several thousand new, alternative schools have grown up in this country in the past four or five years. One of the great dangers that these schools now encounter is the attempt to fashion them into a single image, into a Movement. . . . The Free School Movement Syndrome was created mostly by euphoric articles in many magazines and newspapers. . . .
>
> A majority of the new alternative schools have been in existence for only a few years, most are only one or two years old. This has been a time of rapid growth, expansion, and exhilaration in breaking free from some of the bonds of traditional, repressive education and voyaging into new, uncharted lands. It has been, in Alfred North Whitehead's words, a Romantic period of development. So, the Movement Syndrome is partially understandable.
>
> But I find that many who shout Movement are those who have fled the oppressive traditional schools out of weakness, not out of strengths. They shout for a Movement because they do not know how to be constructively and creatively with themselves and with children, once they are "free." George Dennison talks about this when he says:
>
> "I've seen a good many free school teachers in the past two years. Some few have been truly impressive people. Almost all have seemed to me to be decent people, many of them good-hearted and brave. Yet most of them seem to have turned to free schools in a more or less desperate effort to do something meaningful and to solve their own problems. And this means—it is really an axiom—that for a time at least they will inevitably exploit the children . . . they will use the children to create for themselves an image of a better world."
>
> About thirty per cent of the new schools started by these people have failed and I'd estimate that another fifteen per cent are in shaky positions. Happily, though, several new books on particular, successful schools have been recently published (or republished) and each seems to be saying, "Here's our school. But we're not a 'free' school, we're not Summerhill. This is the First Street School, this is the School in Rose Valley, and that's the New School

> for Children. We're each different, unique, we haven't been fashioned by any Movement."
>
> These books not only give the lie to the Movement Syndrome, they tell something about what I've suspected for years: many of the founders of these schools that survive are individuals who are strong and quietly confident in themselves, know who they are, know what they want to see happen and work long, hard, and lovingly at helping small numbers of children learn.

Len Solo then tells about his visit to the Early Learning Center in Stamford, Conn., begun by Margaret Skutch, who wrote *To Start a School.* He lists other books he has found worth while: Dennison's *The Lives of Children,* Kozol's *Free Schools,* Herndon's *How to Survive in Your Native Land,* Platt's *I Learn from Children,* Rotzel's *The School in Rose Valley,* Dewey's *Schools for Tomorrow,* Snitzer's *Children Are for Today,* Ashton-Warner's *Spearpoint,* Graubard's *Free the Children,* Bremer's *The School Without Walls,* Bhaerman and Denker's *No Particular Place To Go,* Silberman's *Crisis in the Classroom,* Gross and Osterman's *High School,* Featherstone's *Schools Where Children Learn,* Rothman's *The Angel Inside Went Sour,* O'Gorman's *The Storefront.*

These books are by and about people who care about children, as distinguished from those who, as Len Solo says, "want to *use* the free schools as a basis for changing all of education, all of society, with making *the* revolution." As distinguished from people concerned "with great and big things, great institutions and big success," for whom the children seem to be little more than tools for their revolutionary projects.

In the May *Yankee,* a monthly magazine about New England, past and present, Judith Edwards tells about a unique school in Bath, Maine, where you can learn how to build a low-cost home. "Most houses," says Pat Hennin, who founded and teaches at the Shelter Institute, "are $35 to $40 per square foot; here we're talking about $7 to $8 per square foot." The students are from twenty to forty years old. At the outset they take a basic course in the theory and physics of building, which includes explanation of why home construction costs far more than it needs to. There are some economies which have not been adopted, others which have been abandoned. The basic text is Rex Roberts' *Your Engineered House* (reviewed in MANAS for Sept. 24, 1975)

Pat Hennin told the *Yankee* writer:

> I've been building things all my life. That's how I supported myself through college—Tufts University and the University of Maine Law School—by building houses. One summer I cut timber in Idaho. That's where I realized how inefficiently we use building material. A good 25% of what we cut was never hauled out of the woods. Speed was the criterion, and the small wood was crushed. And this was in a national forest! At Shelter Institute we're encouraging home builders to use everything. In America we can't forever use our resources as if there were no end to them. In Europe forests are tended like vegetable gardens; they still use mostly horses to draw wood out. The use of large machinery prohibits great care.

Building codes, he pointed out, often establish rules that keep poor people from building their own homes. Insisting on concrete foundations instead of pilings is an example. But pilings are good, in some respects better than concrete, cost less, and they don't require big ready-mix trucks and a lot of gas to run them.

Already, in the neighborhood around Bath, there are forty individually designed owner-built houses that had their inspiration from courses at Shelter Institute.

FRONTIERS

The Words of Change

How do great historical changes come about? This is important to ask again and again, since we seem to be in the midst of one of them. Years ago, in *Secret Societies and the French Revolution* (John Lane, 1191), Una Birch asked a similar question:

> Was the great Revolution a mere accident, or was it the inevitable result of coordinated ideas in action? Taine was of the opinion that the doctrines propagated themselves, carried like thistle-down upon the winds of chance. . . . It is making too great a demand on human credulity to ask man to believe this, and many significant facts witness to the hitherto unestimated work of the secret societies in furthering the cause of popular emancipation. Ideas are not suddenly converted into swords. Men must have hammered patiently and hard upon the anvil of the national soul to produce the keen-edged, swift-striking blade of revolution.

There are clear parallels between the closing years of the eighteenth century and the present, but also dramatic differences. The parallels include an apparently sudden outpouring of idealism, visionary speculation, warm-hearted regard for one's fellows, and countless schemes and proposals for human regeneration and social reform. (See, for example, Robert Darnton's *Mesmerism,* Schocken, 1970, for an account of the extraordinary uses to which Mesmer's ideas were put by the enthusiasts and radicals of eighteenth-century France.) The differences are equally impressive. As in the eighteenth century, there are today numberless small groups and associations actively spreading new ideas, but hardly any of them are "secret." Nor do they look toward violent political revolution. One could say that the ideas of today are far more likely to be hammered into plows than made into "swords." Several present-day themes have brief expression in a recent address by Mulford Sibley (printed in *North Country Anvil* for May-June). On the subject of revolution this socialist and anarcho-pacifist said:

> We're just beginning to explore the possibilities of nonviolent resistance in this country, or any part of the world. When I use the word "revolution," even you will probably think of guns. We're going to have to develop the image that *all violence is counter-revolutionary*. . . . I don't think the vehicle for social change is any one class or group of people. I think the Marxist notion that social salvation comes from the working class is nonsense. It didn't turn out this way in the Soviet Union, even. . . . I think that human history is much more complex than the economic determinists would suggest. There are many things that motivate human beings and we're going to have to marshal! all of them for change.
>
> I think once you get a very widespread consciousness or awareness of what this problem is, then the existing structures can collapse—if you're willing to act on that consciousness—if you can get agreement among millions of human beings. It doesn't have to be a majority, but a very substantial minority. Until you get that, it's very, very difficult to change things.

Increasingly, it is recognized that ignorance, not political enemies having to be attacked with swords or guns, is the cause of present social and environmental disintegrations. In his *Environmental Design Primer* (Schocken, 1976), a book reflecting many elements of the new spirit, Tom Bender quotes from Roy Rappoport the sort of critical analysis we are now absorbing and slowly adopting:

> When exotic energy sources such as fossil fuels are available, such pressures that can be brought to bear on specific ecosystems are no longer limited to the energy that the ecosystem itself can generate. . . .
>
> As man forces the ecosystems he dominates to be increasingly simple, however, their already limited autonomy is further diminished. They are subject not only to local environmental stress but also to extraneous economic and political vicissitudes. They come to rely more and more on imported materials; the men who manipulate them become more and more subject to distant events, interests, and processes that they may not even grasp and certainly do not control. National and international concerns replace local considerations, and with regulation of the local ecosystems coming from the outside, the system's normal self-corrective capacity is diminished and eventually destroyed.

Here, in abstract language, is basic explanation of why, despite good intentions and conscientious effort—and we do not always have these qualities behind our enterprises—things work so poorly, these days.

How do better ideas begin to take hold in a way that will eventually create the "substantial minority" that Mulford Sibley speaks of? The work of E. F. Schumacher makes a fine example of one answer to this question. While his book, *Small Is Beautiful* (published by Harper in December, 1973), sold only 17,000 copies the first year, *Newsweek* last spring (March 22) noted that sales then totalled 110,000, and were continuing at the rate of 12,000 copies a month. Public attention to the book by such eminent individuals as Ralph Nader, Elliot Richardson, and California's Governor Brown has helped to attract readers, and good reviews keep on blossoming in magazine after magazine.

Interestingly, while Schumacher practices what he preaches—he is responsible for numerous ingenious applications of intermediate technology, bringing practical help to various developing countries—when he writes or talks he concentrates on general ideas. A reviewer in the June *Sierra Club Bulletin* says:

> As he sees it, our present economic emphasis is on the product rather than the person. This obsession with products is destroying both people and the earth. His metaphysics leads him to reverse the consumer ethic: "Since consumption is merely a means to human well-being, the aim should be to obtain the maximum of well-being with the minimum of consumption." . . . Schumacher is content to sketch broadly the outlines of a decentralized, fully employed, nonviolent society. He evades answering most questions about details. Not, I believe, because he does not have answers, but to keep from getting bogged down in the irrelevant. Heal the center, he is saying, and all other good works will follow naturally.

Schumacher concentrates on basic assumptions, on the issue of ends, and then talks about appropriate means. This focus makes another parallel with the eighteenth-century revolution. Paine concentrated on basic assumptions, too—people, he declared, are able to govern themselves: they don't need a king. At first a lot of the colonists were shocked, but the idea was a true one and it took hold. Schumacher's ideas, which go further, are also true, and they are taking hold.