VOLUME XXIX, NO. 47
NOVEMBER 24, 1976

LEARNING FROM THE PAST

LAST week we quoted and discussed Paul K. Feyerabend's critical analysis of the idea that there is "one true" scientific account of the natural world. He showed that the spurts of scientific progress always result from consideration of a variety of theories. He said that this pluralism in theory ought not to be regarded as valuable only in a time of crisis and change in scientific thinking. Remaining open to various possibilities at all times would prevent dogmatism in science. He also argued for deliberate use of metaphysical ideas as the sources of scientific discovery.

There are signs that a similar spirit of openness to diversity may eventually replace the hard ideologies of present-day social doctrine. The uncertainties of the present—indeed the *crimes* of the present—have led to fresh examination of a past which has been scornfully neglected as properly and happily replaced by the modern, progressive way of doing things. The temper of the new attitude is well expressed by the Italian historian, Franco Venture:

> An idea that appears to look backward in time, remolds itself on the past, seems to prefer what has been, and to eschew what will be—does really such an idea, whose function is destined to be negative, constitute a utopian, retarding factor in economic and social development? Or does it not rather, at least at times, represent . . . a fruitful attempt to preserve the most precious aspects of the past in order to transmit them to the future? History is not made just by looking forward, but, I should say, by looking both forward and backward.

In the Autumn 1975 *Yale Review* Abbott Gleason cites this statement in justification of Solzhenitsyn's thinking. Defending the Russian novelist's apparently "romantic" preoccupation with the primitive ways of Russians before the progressive reforms of Peter the Great, Mr. Gleason shows that certain spontaneous concerns of the Slavophiles (admirers of peasant virtues) can now be recognized as virtually identical with the values having the highest priority in the eyes of ecological and environmental thinkers. Solzhenitsyn champions the rural and religious communalism of mid-nineteenth-century Slavophiles in contrast to the materialistic rationalism and bureaucratic absolutism of the present Soviet outlook. "Any graybeard in the Ukraine or Russia," he declares, "could have explained to the progressive commentators ages ago . . . that if the earth is a finite object, then its expanses and resources are finite also, and the endless, infinite progress dinned into our heads by the dreamers of the Enlightenment cannot be accomplished on it." He added: "A civilization greedy for 'perpetual progress' has now choked and is on its last legs." Summarizing Solzhenitsyn's 1974 "Letter to the Soviet Leaders," Mr. Gleason says:

> Although he does not discuss the decline of the West" in detail, Solzhenitsyn dearly sees it as the culmination of a long process of inner moral decay, "affecting," he writes, "the entire culture and world outlook which were conceived at the time of the Renaissance and attained the acme of their expression with the eighteenth-century Enlightenment." In a manner akin to the Slavophiles, he clearly means secularism, individualism, and science, conceived as a kind of *Gestalt.* And Russia, too, has become a part of this insidious process. In the time of the Slavophiles, Russia had become Fourierist and Heglian; now she has gone on to Marx and Lenin. . . .
>
> Marxism-Leninism, then, is Russia's particular form of false consciousness, and Solzhenitsyn . . . is particularly concerned with his homeland. Marxism-Leninism, in his view, has had a number of baneful consequences. It has destroyed the legitimate national basis of Russian civilization. It has created the imminent possibility of a war with China. And finally, the industrialization-modernization component so strongly marked in late imperial Russian and particularly Soviet policy, is in grave danger of destroying the earth.

Mr. Gleason is writing to make clear that Solzbenitsyn's revival of Slavophile ideas—commonly branded "reactionary, crazy, utopian"—is really showing that these past ideas have direct and needed application today:

> So the connection between the Slavophile theme in Solzhenitsyn s Letter and the ecological theme is by no means so eccentric as it may initially appear to a Western reader who is unaware of the Slavephiles, the terminology they provided for Russians, the elements they introduced into Russian culture. Both themes would suggest that the bureaucratic and technological civilization that began in Europe with the scientific revolution and has steadily developed into our own time may now be nearing the point where major "radical" changes in the relationship between man and man and man and nature are called for. The Club of Rome, mentioned by Solzhenitsyn, and Robert Heilbroner (*An Inquiry into the Human Prospect,* New York, 1974) tell us that a no-growth economy is not merely desirable but necessary for our survival. René Dubos, Barry Commoner, and Loren Eiseley have in various works pointed out that man is literally not able to dominate nature because he is a part of it. . . . the importance of Solzhenitsyn's message, both to Soviet and Western readers, lies in his fundamental point, related both to the Russian Slavophiles and contemporary environmentalists—that the egoistic, restless, dominating rationalism of modern man is offensive not only to certain important older values but perhaps to life itself.

There are, in short, essential things to be learned the old-fashioned Slavophiles who "called upon us to keep horses even after the advent of the motor car, not to abandon small factories for enormous plants and combines, not to discard organic manure in favor of chemical fertilizers, not to mass by the million in cities, not to clamber on top of one another in multistory apartment blocks."

In the area of political criticism, scholars are now demonstrating the formidable consequences of submitting to the idea that there is but one true ideological faith. Reviewing two books on the origins of Bolshevism in the *Saturday Review* for Sept. 4, Simon Karlinsky points out that the tenderness of Western socialists and liberals for the Bolsheviks was responsible for widespread misunderstanding of what was actually happening in Russia. When those who sincerely work for freedom and justice adopt a monolithic ideological faith, they "will readily accept as allies those whose aim is to dominate and enslave." Prof. Karlinsky says:

> It was the essence of Lenin's genius to have realized that he could get away with abolishing every civil right and every democratic freedom that the Russian people had won through the reforms of the 1860s and the revolutions of 1905 and of February, 1917—provided those rights and freedoms were abolished in the name of the very revolution that was meant to extend them, and done under the cover of humanitarian and Marxist slogans. The two remarkable women revolutionaries, . . . the anarchist Emma Goldman and the Marxist Vera Zasulich, returned to Russia from exile after Lenin and Trotsky's coup d'etat. Both Goldman and Zasulich quickly realized, as did Lenin's onetime mentor, the grand old man of Russian Marxism, George Plekhanov, that the new regime had nothing to do with liberation or with achieving a genuinely socialist or Marxist society. But for thousands of socialists and libertarians all over the world the October Revolution was a triumph of Marxism, the way of the future—and it just *had* to work.

In this way the authentic moral emotions of countless well-meaning people are turned to the support of self-betraying activities because their feelings have no focus but the narrow, single-truth doctrine of a dogmatic ideology. As Karlinsky says:

> In each generation since that time, millions of people in the West have seen through the sham essence of the Leninist adaptation of Marxism, but in the meantime, other millions have been born who have enthusiastically embraced the rhetoric and propaganda without noticing that the reality of Leninist practice has replaced the triad of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity—the great eighteenth-century motto of the French revolution, to which all subsequent revolutions have nominally subscribed—with the opposing triad of Autocracy, Orthodoxy, and Nationalism, a motto, coined by a reactionary minister of Czar Nicholas I, that guided the Romanov dynasty in their efforts to suppress dissent and in their ugly persecutions of religious and national minorities.

This harking back to the ways and attitudes of other times—benighted times, in the opinion of most moderns—is gradually becoming recognized as a good and necessary thing to do. There have been various pioneers in making such comparisons—one, for example, was Ananda Coomaraswamy. In *The Bugbear of Literacy,* in a section deploring the impact of Western industrialism on the East, he remarked:

> The disintegration of a people's art is the destruction of their life, by which they are reduced to the proletarian status of hewers of wood and drawers of water, in the interests of a foreign trader, whose is the *profit.* The employment of Malays on rubber estates, for example, in no way contributes to their culture and certainly cannot have made them our friends: they owe us nothing. We are irresponsible in a way that the Orientals are not yet, for the most part, irresponsible.
>
> Let me illustrate what I mean by irresponsibility. I have known Indians who indignantly refused to buy shares in a profitable hotel company, because they would not make money out of hospitality, and an Indian woman who refused to buy a washing machine, because then, "What would become of the washerman's livelihood?". . . . as I have said elsewhere, if there are any occupations not consistent with human dignity, or manufactures however profitable that are not of real *goods,* such occupations and manufactures must be abandoned by any society that has in view the dignity of all its members. It is only when measured in terms of dignity and not in terms of comfort that a "standard of living" can properly be called high.
>
> The bases of modern civilization are to such a degree rotten to the core that it has been forgotten even by the learned that man ever attempted to live otherwise than by bread alone. . . .
>
> How can this world be given back its meaning? Not, of course, by a return to the outward forms of the Middle Ages nor, on the other hand, by assimilation to any surviving, Oriental or other, pattern of life. But why not by a recognition of the principles on which the patterns were based?

This is indeed the point of this sort of "comparative cultural anthropology."

Material for the comparisons can be found almost anywhere. One has only to take note of it. For example, in *The Sociology of the Bay Colony* (Philosophical Library, 1976) by Morris Talpalar, a valuable study of the shaping of the Puritan mind in America, there is an account of the feudal attitudes of the landowners of pre-eighteenth-century manorial times in England. Interestingly, it turns out to be a mix of qualities we think we are well rid of with other qualities we long to regain, although then in another framework of social relations:

> Their society being based on "birth," vertical fluidity among the classes was precluded: with their property and social position assured by the state there was no need for individual initiative and efficiency, the manors were largely haphazardly directed, and with the constant price fluctuation and the absence of definite money standards and of specie most of the proprietors were hazy on what they owned and owed. Land ruled over finance, and entail precluded speculation and turnover. Commerce was outside their milieu, they were characterized by the traditional "scorn of trade," and capitalistic promotion was an alien activity: they were without the profit motive, there was no concern with investment and they had no brokerage—and no money lending with all of its implications; "business"—economic endeavor with its subordination of everything to work, was no part of their way; they did not have the ledger—the dichotomous type of mind, and did not think in terms of "assets and liabilities" rationalization, the intent to get the most for the least, was alien to the patrician mind—and they could never see the importance of exact calculation, were indifferent to precision concerning estate boundaries, and were unfamiliar with bookkeeping and accounting. They eschewed the state of mind which could not see life beyond profits; there was no "strife between wealth and virtue"—and they were never blinded to human values by the dividend mania; and they regarded the exploitation of people by one another—the mind to use, as petty and anti-social. Their relations were always social never economic; they did not live off one another, were not out to "make money," had nothing to sell, never thought in terms of "driving a bargain," did not view their fellows as customers, and there was never a cash nexus in personal relations. The tendency to cupidity was nonexistent, the habits of thrift and close-fistedness were unknown they never produced a miser, and they created the tradition of quality hospitality. . . .

> Cultural endeavor received top appreciation, and everything was subordinated to the values of creativity: they were fully aware of the difference between creativity as value and as achievement; they were convinced that the classical work is really the center of the universe and its attainment is beginning of life—and aristocracy is the medium through which its light flows and finds expression. Their exaltation and emulation of the Mediterranean culture latinized English, which raised it to the status of a classical language and the revival of learning in England attained eminence in literature and in philosophy. And the traditional religion was losing prestige with the cultural elite, as its doctrines could hardly compete with the charm of reviving pagan thought.

The all-pervasive rule of this outlook began to fade during the reign of the Tudors; it was obviously vulnerable to the slow rise of trade, the birth of industry, and the gradual supremacy of bourgeois values which became the animating principles of the modern nation-state. The elitism and inequalities rigidly maintained by the manorial system are plain enough, but in congratulating ourselves on their elimination we might also remember that the Elizabethan world-view had splendors of thought and conviction that we search for in vain in our own time. What generative principles of that age are deserving of fresh and respectful consideration?

Still another perspective on the past is provided by W. J. Eccles in his volume, *Canadian Society During the French Regime* (Harvest House, 1968), a work which discloses that for all his vanities and wasteful wars, Louis XIV of France was in some respects a conscientious monarch who took the responsibilities of ruling the enormous colony of Canada very seriously. Prof. Eccles begins by pointing out that to identify the institutions of "New France" simply as "feudal" obscures more than it explains. When the Crown assumed control of the colony Louis decided to order its affairs in ways that were not possible at home in France. What he accomplished with the help of his minister Colbert was, Prof. Eccles says, "an excellent example of an intelligent use of resources for the development of an undeveloped area." The king and his minister established basic governmental institutions which are now hardly remembered:

> The usual impression held by latter-day Canadians is that government in New France was arbitrary, despotic in fact, whereas that of Britain and her colonies was democratic. Much is made of personal freedom under British law, the act of habeas corpus coming in for its due quota of praise. It is usually overlooked that in 1679, the same year Parliament in England enacted habeas corpus, an edict was registered at Quebec forbidding the arbitrary arrest and imprisonment of anyone in New France except for sedition or treason, which crimes, the Minister stated, "hardly ever happen." In New France there was, of course, no such thing as parliament or assemblies such as existed in the English colonies, and since direct taxes were levied in New France only on very rare occasions there was no great need for exactly the same institution. But New France did have assemblies and they operated in a distinctly democratic fashion. Before enacting legislation that affected the people directly, or when there was a cleavage of opinion in the Sovereign Council on how best to deal with a problem; for example, whether or not to impose price controls in times of acute shortage, a public assembly was called, the question was submitted and discussed, a vote taken and the legislation enacted according to the majority's expressed wishes.

For this and other reasons, Prof. Eccles suggests that the people of New France "had a much greater say in the ordering of their affairs than the great voteless mass of people in Britain had in theirs under the rule of Parliament, where only property holders had political rights, hence only about one person in forty had a vote." The record of Louis and Colbert in the area of welfare services is impressive. There was carefully supervised attention to the needs of the sick and the aged, no pauper population was allowed to develop, hospitals were established for persons with incurable diseases, and homes for foundlings. There is a sense in which the organization of Canada under Louis created a well-run welfare state, and while wholly paternalistic, it was responsibly and fairly administered.

With the military victory of the British over the French (1763), making New France a part of

their Empire, the alien values of eighteenth-century Britain supervened, gradually turning Canada into "a pawn on the chessboard of imperialism." Mercantilism was made to dominate. Prof. Eccles concludes:

> Men's worth came to be measured mainly by the success they achieved in the market place. The bleak philistine society that this produced is in marked contrast to that of the old regime. It also contrasts with the society that is coming into being today. Present-day values are becoming more akin to those that prevailed in mid-eighteenth century Canada as they react against and reject those of the nineteenth. It may well be that historians of the future will regard the Canadian ethos of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as merely a lengthy aberration. Samuel Butler would not today have written his scathing lines, "Oh God, Oh Montreal." Nor would he have done so had he visited this country two centuries ago.

It is our habit, when looking at the past, to form easy moral judgments based on the values of the prevailing ideology. But if there is anything to be learned from history it is that while ideologies begin by declaring admirable goals, in time they always crystallize into a complex of barriers to other values which, because they were once internalized and all-pervasive, have been taken for granted. Then, when these values no longer give their invisible but very real support to common human life, they are at last re-invented and declared as great new discoveries by a fresh generation of pioneers. But recovering them may largely depend upon understanding how they were lost. While we cannot of course return to the outward social forms which once acted as host to those values, it should be possible, as Coomaraswamy says, to recognize and learn from "the principles on which the patterns were based." This would amount to the functional pluralism so evidently needed in all departments of modern thought.

REVIEW
ECOLOGICAL RECOLONIZATION

UNTIL quite recently the prescriptions for deliberate change in ways of thinking and acting have come mostly from remarkable individuals—pioneers such as Rachel Carson, E. F. Schumacher, Howard Odum, and Wendell Berry. We are now able to say that the collective outlook represented by these pioneers has grown up and filled out to make a cultural plateau. There is unity, coherence, and vision in this outlook, and it is closely related to experimental practice showing the actual modes of change. The area involved is the earth—where our most obvious troubles have appeared—and the change is in how we relate to and use the earth. An impressive example of the comprehensive maturity of thinking in this cultural outlook is the just published *Radical Agriculture* (Harper & Row, 56.95) edited by Richard Merrill. Among the contributors are Murray Bookchin, Wendell Berry, Peter Barnes, Michael Perelman, Paul Relis, and John Todd. All are accomplished writers able to put the fruits of recent experience and research in language appropriate for the general reader.

The past twenty-five years have been a time of sudden acceleration in the misuse of the land by (some) and of sudden realization (by others) that we are on a disaster course. While the book is filled with specifics—accounts of particular mistakes and nuts-and-bolts descriptions of steps taken in the opposite direction—there is also an all-pervasive mood of deep regard for all living things and all earth's inhabitants. There is thorough awareness that the spirit of conquest and of buying and selling to the practical exclusion of all else has brought us to where we are. Naturally enough, the contrasting motives and attitudes of the new spirit generate feelings and a moral sensibility implying some sort of intuitive pantheistic ground: "holistic" and "ethical" are terms which recur with greatest frequency. The book, you could say, is both hardheaded and tender-hearted.

In his preface Richard Merrill describes the acceleration toward disaster:

> Since 1948 over 25 million people have been relocated to urban centers by high technology and agribusiness economy. In less than two generations there has been a revolutionary change in the means of food production in this country.
>
> The abandonment of farmlands and the separation of people from their land and food resources have become symbols of our social "progress." According to this view the success of our society can be measured by the degree to which our rural culture becomes a labor force for the urban machine and ceases to be a steward of the rural environment. But it is by no means obvious that the emigration of rural communities and the industrialization of agriculture have produced a just, stable, and fulfilling society. In fact, as this book suggests, there is much to indicate just the opposite, and that we have become affluent at the expense of agriculture, not because of it.

The urban machine is no longer working well; in fact, the cities of the United States, especially the larger ones, are on the edge of ruin, while New York was obliged to advertise its disaster some years ago. What is the meaning of such breakdowns at the very moment of our greatest "success"? The answers to such questions are amply provided—by Peter Barnes on the need for land reform, by Nick Kotz on agribusiness, by Sheldon Greene on the decline of the family farm, and by Michael Perelman on the economics of energy-use in agriculture and the green revolution. Much of the book is analytical and intensely critical, but much space is given, also, to the strengthening movement in another direction—a movement in which imagination and vision are linked with the know-how of actual projects on the land. The projects are small. You could say that they *have* to be small, since smallness is a part of the prescription, and because all new things work best with the independence smallness makes possible. But these modest beginnings embody a moral energy that has the power to touch and reanimate the somnolent longings and quiescent hopes of countless ordinary people around the country. Just when and how quickly the

awakening will come remains to be seen. Perhaps the great rush and sweep of change will begin when enough of these people see that there is really nothing else left to do.

In the title essay Murray Bookchin draws parallels between ancient and primitive reverence for the land and its creatures and the new holistic science which recognizes and has begun to trace the vast web of ecological interdependencies that make life on earth a going concern:

> Radical agriculture's respect for variety implies a respect for the complexity of a balanced agricultural situation: the innumerable factors that influence plant nutrition and well-being; the diversified soil relations that exist from area to area; the complex inter-play between climatic, geological, and biotic factors that make for the differences between one tract of land and another, and the variety of ways in which human cultures react to these differences.
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> Accordingly, the radical agriculturist sees agriculture not only as science but also as art. The food cultivator must live on intimate terms with a given area of land and develop a sensitivity for its special needs—needs that no textbook approach can possibly encompass. The food cultivator must be part of a "soil community" in the very meaningful sense that she or he belongs to a unique biotic system as well as a given social system. . . . A truly ecological outlook . . . sees the biotic world as a holistic unity of which humanity is a part.

Mr. Bookchin emphasizes the fundamental importance of "the *overall* attitude and praxis the food cultivator brings to the natural world as a whole." "Radical agriculture," he says, involves, not "a fanciful flight to a remote agrarian refuge but . . . a systematic recolonization of the land along ecological lines."

John Todd, a founder of the New Alchemy Institute, works toward precise definition of some of the steps of recolonization. As a scientist, he is attempting to adapt the disciplines of the life sciences to the small-scale needs of people who want to participate in the change. He begins his contribution with a comparison of the two major tendencies in the modern world—the old and the new:

> A single overview is increasingly dominating human affairs while diversity and indigenous approaches are being set aside with the flourishing of modern science and technology. If the present trend continues, the world community will be shaped into a series of highly planned megalopolises that are regulated by an advanced technology and fed by a mechanized and chemically sanitized agriculture. This future course is countered largely by the tenacity of many people throughout the world, including many indigenous peoples, marginal and peasant farmers, traditional craftsmen, and new generations seeking alternatives to the modern industrial state. . . . It is necessary, before describing a way of reviving diversity, to evaluate how its loss threatens the future of man. Suppose some wise alien from another planet were commissioned to investigate earth. He would no doubt be dismayed at the outset by the tendency of the dominant societies, whether "communist" or "capitalist," to be constantly selecting the most efficient or profitable ways of doing things. Our visitor would ascertain clearly that our narrow approaches are reducing our options and that people are being conditioned and habituated to the options that remain. To him it would represent an evolutionary trap, and after his survey of energy use and agriculture was completed, he would confidently predict a major catastrophe. There would be no need to go on to industry, the university, or government, despite the fact that much ecological insanity resides in them also. . . .
>
> A number of biologists and agricultural authorities are cautious about the future, as they foresee environmental decimation which will offset the agricultural gains before the turn of the century. Among some of them, there is a disquieting feeling that we are witnessing the agricultural equivalent of the launching of the *Titanic,* only this time there are several billion passengers.

On the needs of the future:

> A few people working at a handful of centers cannot alone affect the course of human events. The elitism underlying contemporary science must be eliminated and a reconstructive science created. Knowledge should become the province of many, including all those struggling to become pioneers for the twenty-first century. If responsibility and diversity are to be established at the level of the individual then individuals with a wide array of backgrounds and experiences should take part in the discovery of the knowledge and techniques for the transformation ahead. A lay science, addressing itself

> to problems at basic levels of society, could restore diversity to the human sphere and establish an involvement for many in the subtle workings of the world around them. . . .
>
> Already it is apparent that an alternative science is evolving on a world-wide scale, and will continue to grow. There are common threads weaving the tapestry that underlies the lives of the new pioneers and scientists; among these are a strong sense of the human scale, a desire to comprehend the forces of communitas, and a passion for ecology and its teachings, which imply ethics and awakened sensibility and morality. These are forces in their own right, and though pitted against the shadow of technological man destroying man and nature, and a science operating in a moral vacuum, they may still represent the beginning of a hopeful path along which we may one day travel.

We have quoted only general ideas from *Radical Agriculture* in order to show the inclusive purview of the new cultural plateau. The book, however, gives detailed attention to such areas as the use of solar energy by individuals and its application for small communities. There are chapters on the general importance and implication of organic gardening, a discussion of the use of insects for pest control, a survey of present efforts at land reform, an account of the social and educational work of the National Sharecroppers Fund, and of the vision of Cesar Chavez and the struggle of the United Farm Workers.

COMMENTARY
FUSION OF FACT AND VALUE

A LIFE-LONG interest of Arthur Morgan was education—or the formation of character. For him the two were practically the same thing. In 1921, when he took over and resuscitated Antioch College, Morgan saw not only that Antioch was a sick college, but also one reason why—Yellow Springs, Ohio, where it was located, was a sick town. A good college, he believed, must have a good surrounding community, so he used resources of the college to restore the town. Very nearly everything important that is now being said about the effects of the massive trend to urbanization (noted in this week's Review) was anticipated by Morgan, directly or indirectly, in the positive action he set in motion to make Yellow Springs a good town. The steps he took and what they accomplished are described in detail in his *Industries for Small Communities,* a book published by Community Service, Inc., Box 243, Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387. (The price used to be $2.50, and probably still is.)

The point is that a strong imaginative program of constructive action to improve a fundamental activity—like education—in human life tends to bring everything else into line. This is better than "problem-solving." The problems are dissolved naturally by the flow of activities which generate their own health-giving fields. A paragraph in the chapter on the size of industries has direct application to the urbanization referred to in Review:

> If the genius of America had been more generally directed to discovering and achieving the optimum size of industry, rather than the maximum size, it is strongly probable that the structure of industry and the distribution of population would now be very different. If conscious study had habitually been made as to what are the basic needs and desires of men, and of the ways in which these needs and desires could best be met in communities of human dimensions, it probably would have been possible to combine wide distribution of population, and in many more fields decentralization of industry, with a high order of well-being. Not only it "would have been possible," but it still is possible to the extent that a clear mental picture exists as to what is desirable and possible.

Morgan's book provides one clear picture, *Radical Agriculture* another. The sheer simplicity of what needs to be done comes out in these books. The complication of doing it is entirely due to things we have done wrong. Seeing this mental picture begins the fusion of fact and value in human beings—the only place where it occurs.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
REVERSING GRESHAM'S LAW

A GOOD school is a place where older and younger human beings come together on the basis of cooperation and trust. In other words, the good school has most or all the attributes we idealize when we speak admiringly of the small community. Learning, as Arthur Morgan has shown, goes on most naturally in the small community. After a lifetime of study of the educational process and the formation of human character, Morgan was completely convinced that there is no way to lay the foundation for a good society except through the re-establishment of small community life. More and more people, today, are recognizing the essential truth in this claim.

But the small community—the good school—is exceedingly vulnerable. Understanding this vulnerability may be an important step in the difficult task of strengthening essential elements of community life. In *Earthwalk,* Philip Slater describes the breakdown of community:

> I dwell on the simple community only because the relation between what we have lost when we gave it up and our present crisis is so poorly understood. Our cultural history tends to be presented either as an uninterrupted ascension into paradise (not quite yet achieved, but just around the corner) or as a brave venturing forth from comfortable dependency to lonely but admirable freedom. . . . Let me return, then, to the simple community and the reasons for its rejection. . . . What impresses non-Western peoples most about our culture is its power. Guns, bombs, bulldozers, helicopters—all express the power of the colonialist. There is no question of Western culture providing more pleasure more wisdom, better relationships between people or with the environment—only power. Few people would argue seriously that a volcano is better than a flower, but human beings have always been more inclined to worship volcanoes than flowers. When someone comes and repeatedly hits you with a club, you respect and envy his club and his power to get away with that hitting, and try to emulate it, or no other reason than self-protection.
>
> Cooperative assumptions always give way to competitive ones when one powerful body begins to play by its own competitive rules. This is all it takes to destroy trust and give rise to a competitive system. The history of the West is simply the progressive dissemination of this infection: A dominant society brutalizes a simple one, which ultimately overwhelms its oppressor and becomes itself an oppressor.

What, then, must happen if small cooperative communities are to gain more capacity for survival than competitive societies, and good schools develop inherent strength so that they, too, will survive and multiply? The answer is simple: Competitive assumptions must give way to cooperative ones. The only way to help such a vast change to come about is through continuous demonstrations that cooperative assumptions work better for both individuals and society than competitive ones, and through continuous and articulate testimony reporting the evidence that cooperative assumptions *do* work better. The change will of course take time. The mental habits of an entire civilization are involved.

All his life John Holt has been generating and gathering this testimony and presenting it. His latest book, *Instead of Education* (Dutton, 1976, $8.95), argues that we should give the word "education" a rest for the reason that it has become so identified with competitive assumptions that efforts at reform of education always become infected with them, so that the reform either dies out or becomes another betrayal of the young. He says at the outset.

> The chances are we will have universal compulsory education and compulsory schools for at least another generation. Do not waste your energy trying to reform all these schools. They cannot be reformed. It may be possible for a few of you, in a few places, to make a place called a school which will be a humane and useful doing place for the young. If so, by all means do it. In most places, not even this much will be possible. . . . We need to say to people, "If you want to have compulsory education and compulsory schooling, you can have them. But don't be fooled by the advertising and the label on the package! Understand what it is you're getting." Perhaps within a generation or so most people will indeed understand, and decide they want no more of it.

Mr. Holt's book has two sides. He shows what the fear inspired by competitive requirements does to people, and what it does to children as a result. The multitude of consequences in "education" which come out of the competitive, dog-eat-dog way of life are described in agonizing detail. Low-grading judgments about the nature of man, and therefore of children, are at the root of the crimes in the name of education. We show what we believe by what we admire and support:

> Much of what we call History is the success stories of madmen. How many times, on their various roads to glory, power, empire, etc., must these men and their armies of thugs and killers have wiped out societies far more sensible and humane? And this must have happened many more times in the long years of pre-History than in the relatively short period of which we have some record. Our history books still speak admiringly of Rome and our debt to Rome, the most greedy, destructive, cruel and enduring tyranny the world has yet seen. Thinking of ourselves as history's glorious final product, we like to say that it illustrates what we call the law of the survival of the fittest. It would be truer to speak instead of the survival of the morally least fit. . . . Perhaps there has been for a long time something like a Gresham's Law among human societies. It may well be that many or most of the kindest and most sensible societies that humans have ever formed have long since disappeared unknown.

We talk, Holt says, about the mean, tough, and dangerous traits of human nature. But to what extent are these fearsome qualities the direct result of assuming that people are inevitably mean, tough, and dangerous, and of treating them that way? Have we given human decency a real trial?

We don't have many "samples" of generous, kindly, and friendly people developing in small communities, but we do have *some.* We don't have many examples of good schools to point to, but a few can be found. There may be some risk in beginning with the idea that people can be trusted, starting when they are children, but the real point, today, is that this risk cannot possibly be as great as the danger in assuming that ("other") people are preponderantly bad in nature and evil in intention. And, as Mr. Holt says—

> There is no way to find out how much good or kindness there may be in human nature, except to build or try to build a society on the assumption that people are or would like to be good and kind, a society in which to be good and kind is at least not a handicap. Until we are able to do this, it would be more wise and fair and even prudent, to give human beings the benefit of the doubt.

In effect, Mr. Holt proposes a concerted effort by those who see the desirability—the necessity—of doing it, to make Gresham's Law *work backwards.*

A good school is a place where the good things drive out the bad. This means that the school is not set up according to what we have believed to be the statistics of experience. The idea is to *change* things, not imitate the past or assume that the past must repeat itself. This is the reason why good schools are almost always *small.* Big places can't be run without bureaucracy, and bureaucracy must rely on the statistics of how things have been done and happened in the past. Changes, therefore, require small beginnings, in places where originality, vision, and innovation have at least a chance. It isn't that there are no good people in big institutions, but that the bureaucratic system limits so severely the good they can do.

There is a lot in *Instead of Education* on how to do things right, and something about good schools or places where learning has some chance. The following autobiographical passage by Mr. Holt may be interesting to those who wonder why he does what he does:

> I became a teacher not to make a better society, or end poverty, or help children, or find the truth about learning, or change the schools, or reform education, but only because I thought it might be interesting and pleasant work to do. I had no quarrel with traditional education. If someone had said to me much of what I have said in this book, my answer would have been, "Baloney!" I agreed without question that students should be made to learn English, Math, History Science, and so on, and flunked if they did not. But I did not blame them for not learning it was my job to find ways to teach such that they would learn. During most of my teaching years, this is what I spent most of my time thinking about—immediate, concrete, practical matters. Not, how can I make schools better, or even help children learn better, but how can I help *this child* to learn to spell *this word* or do *this problem?* All of my ideas about education came out of that kind of experience and those kinds of questions.

FRONTIERS

The Call To Duty

A READER now abroad—a careful reader—writes to say:

> The problem of the "rights" which are inherent in citizenship, and the "duties" which should accompany them, is one that concerns me very much. How much should a citizen expect from his government, and how much in return should be expected of him?
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> MANAS has discussed this problem again and again, giving me much to think about and approve, but I have recently run into an apparent contradiction.
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> In the Sept. 24, 1975 issue the Goodwin book is mentioned approvingly. " . . . participation in a common life is more than a condition of freedom—more than an alternative to external coercion." You speak, too, of a "society in which what ought to be has the possibility of realization," and working toward "establishing the nuclear beginnings of community."
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> Nov. 12, 1975: Here Mazzini is quoted as saying that a "declaration of the rights of man" is not enough. What is needed is "the collective life of humanity"—and a common end towards which we ought to strive. . . . "Right is the faith of the individual. Duty is the common collective faith."
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> December 17, 1975: You again mention Mazzini and say "we should have graduated from demanding rights to the stance of Broad Responsibility, from which all Rights are born." The call is for a "new social order founded upon the idea of duty."
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> But then, in the April 7,1976 issue, the entire message of duty and responsibility seems taken back, and I might even say, shown to be corrupt and dangerous. First, Saint-Exupery is criticized because of his suggestion that men should get together to build a tower. Suddenly the idea of "duty" and human cooperation becomes a matter of "management" and coercion. It becomes dangerous for men to submerge themselves in some "worthy project for the common good." And then, just in case this is not clear, MANAS goes on to shake its head (by quoting Milton Mayer's dubious remarks) on the Kennedy statement—"ask not what your country can do for you; ask, rather, what you can do for your country." I am no great admirer of Kennedy, but I do think it is very poor form to repeat Mayer's charge that the Kennedy remark could just as well have been uttered by Adolph Hitler and Joseph Stalin. If all calls to duty and common cause are totalitarian, how can we ever hope to improve the world?

It seems true enough that the quotation from Milton Mayer comes into the discussion rather abruptly, but an effort was made by the writer of "Reason and Rationality" to show that Mayer was discussing "Collectivist Tyrannies," and that his intent was to suggest that the call to "Duty" can be misused.

The entire passage in the MANAS article appears to have been written in order to distinguish between duty to a true social whole and duty to an institutionalized and politicalized version of society. The obligation of duty itself is not in question; the definition of duty is being examined.

Take for example the issue of conscientious objection.

War objectors are commonly condemned as rejecting their duty to their country. They often reply by saying that in refusing military service they are responding precisely to *their* feeling of duty and obligation to society. If their rejection of military service includes acts of civil disobedience, they accept the penalties of the law, often letting those penalties stand as symbolic of their moral determination and integrity.

Socrates makes a good example of a man thoroughly aware of this situation. In the *Crito* he shows himself ready to submit to the death penalty as an expression of his loyalty—his duty—to the Athenian state. But he precipitated the death penalty against himself by his refusal to stop questioning the youth of the city concerning what they believed to be the meaning of their lives. This, he felt, was his duty to his fellow human beings, more important than the state and even life itself. Yet he would not evade the decision of the state in respect to punishing him, although, in the *Apology,* he told his judges it was *their* duty to reward him with a pension!

Various issues come together in this discussion. What did Mr. Kennedy mean by "your country"? Did he mean the nation-state, or did he mean the society of human beings who, from habit, consent, and common expectation, use our political forms to order their lives? We live at a time when many of our best thinkers are saying that the nation-state has worn out its usefulness, although, admittedly, there is less certainty concerning what ought to be put in its place. There is probably more consensus on the decentralist goal of self-governed small communities, perhaps federated in regions economically and geographically defined as natural units, than on any other alternative to the present sort of national organization. But this obviously will involve making an end to war, since for present-day military operations enormous centralized power and authority is an absolute necessity.

It seems evident enough that the transition from government by vast, centralized authority to an order of federated small communities will confront people with a great many paradoxes and painful contradictions. How does one withdraw the authority delegated to a political system without weakening that system in some of its perhaps useful functions? Systems, even comparatively good systems, relinquish authority with great reluctance. The self-perpetuating tendency of bureaucracy is well known.

The wisest counselors on this extremely difficult aspect of transition usually suggest that individuals need to join together voluntarily to perform the social services so poorly executed by the State. Danilo Dolci's "strike in reverse," which involved building a road to the sea (in Sicily), without "official" permission, might be taken as an example of the replacement through community cooperation of a failed or neglected function of the state. Dolci was prosecuted and convicted, but he gained the moral admiration and support of some of the most thoughtful people in the world.

The State claims to *be* the people, but is it? Is it wrong to question its moral pretensions? Aristotle declared that man's nature is exhausted in the performance of his duties to the State. Was he right? If not, then the appeals of the state concerning duty need to be examined, questioned, and sometimes rejected, although never casually or frivolously. The State is of our own making, and it has in the past embodied certain high human intentions. But the fact is that political forms degrade, and this inevitably relocates the areas of moral responsibility. Pain, confusion, and the loneliness of independent decision are the result.

As for the fine spirit which results when people work together, this is indeed a source of moral strength. Yet the *use* of that generated unity always needs our close attention. The film, *The Bridge Over the River Kwai,* was a delightful illustration of what may happen when *esprit de corps* is regarded as the highest good.