

A LEVEL OF INQUIRY

HOW obscure, how elusive, is the boundary between feeling and idea, yet how clear and unambiguously polar we find them in principle! All speech, or any representation, as in a picture or a song, requires both feeling and idea, but to speak about a *feeling* gives it more the character of an idea than of feeling. Speaking is a conversion process for feeling. Analytical speech drains its essence. For ideas gain their identity or meaning through limits, and feeling lacks definition; feeling is rather an energy, a motive-power; dimensionless, not spatially defined, it loses power by vague diminution, wasting away like the edge of a cloud or a vibrating echo. The precisions we apply to ideas are more imposition than representation when it comes to speaking of feelings.

The rules of visual portrayal may be of little use in the communication of feeling. Metaphors which invoke the memory of past feelings usually serve far better. To tell about a chord of longing in the human heart, one seeks an emblem of imagery sounding certain notes reminiscent of similar feeling-experience in the past. This is more than a grouping of finite materials—the imagination is projected on a search for appropriate symbols, ranging about with its unique attractive power. And sometimes the imagery comes, like a genie obeying the call of a magician, to accomplish the bidding of the artist.

To talk of feeling, we need both the language of a designing will and the stir of evocative desire, to call up responsive awakenings of sense and sensibility. For what we attempt is in its way an act of creation, which always begins in desire. Then there is need of idea. Idea proclaims limit and difference. Not this, but that. William Blake, a master in recreating and conveying feelings, made them speak by an inward sense of control. An artist becomes more than a happy enthusiast, a

breathless champion of indefinables, by knowing how to set limits. For all communication depends for its clarity on fine differentiation, even if the power comes from the feeling now in harness. Harold Goddard, writing of Blake's art, put it well:

He hated nothing on earth as he did the blurry, the indefinite, the merely general. "The great and golden rule of art, as well as of life, is this," he says: "That the more distinct, sharp, and wirey the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art." "Truth has bounds, Error none." "Nature has no Outline, but Imagination has."

We learn something about ourselves from men like Blake. At their best humans are the beings who continually unite the incommensurables of feeling with the rhythmic measures of thought, being careful never to enclose tightly what ought to be open, and to contain and trim what should never be left fuzzy or indistinct. In this way we put together constellations of related meaning, microcosms of thought, and little by little we come to understand the world.

The understanding of feeling is very close to the understanding of self. But understanding is dependent upon some kind of objectification. We can't just "feel." The classic means of this objectification is myth. In myth are gathered the major polarities and tensions of feeling. They are drawn together in the ratios of heroic action—focused in the men and gods whose acts and strivings become archetypal of human behavior. Myths help us to shape our conceptions of purpose. If they are good myths, they nourish ennobling moods and longings, inducing in us motivations that work toward heroic goals.

Thoughtful educators invariably discover the importance of myth. As dramatic stories which deal with cosmic origins, life, love, and death, the

myths, Charity James says in *Beyond Customs* (Shocker, 1974), "must be treated as a living source of wisdom, not as a corpus of information to be dissected and then tidied away in a coffin at the end of a semester." She notes the deprivation of American children who grow up in a non-traditional culture which prides itself in ruthless demythologizing and disdain for symbolic insights. The resulting "fear of profound truths"—a sickness of our society—enfeebles the imagination. Then, without strength of imagination, the mind grows careless of facts. Often what teachers call a "good discussion" is no more than the wanderings of unleashed fancy. It is animated poppycock, signifying only unguided impulses.

Required is the controlled union of feeling and idea. The natural development of such capacities goes against the grain of habit in our culture, which prizes flashy substitutes for individual growth. Charity James says:

Originally there existed the oral tradition, in which one learned through listening to storytellers, bards, and preachers; much later came the printed word, then radio. All these permit a stream of images to come into the mind. Much of the power of the great mythmakers and the simplest storytellers has been to encourage our sense of actuality by helping us to create our own figures in our own scenery. It is similarly important in dealing with more discursive or factual material to envisage the content, whether it is, say, historical narrative, biological detail, numerical and spatial relationships, or relationships between ideas. If everything comes to us in television, film, cartoon, or direct physical encounter, this vital capacity to imagine is not strengthened by practice and cannot easily be called on by an act of the will. Ideas become simple, vague, and unreal, and facts lose their keen significance.

Here is the real reason for the restoration of simplicity, a reason far more important than portents of economic disaster. The resources of our intelligence to deal with disaster are diminished by the lives we presently lead. The blinders—not just buffers—we have erected between ourselves and the forces of nature are obstacles to our development as thinking beings.

Many people now devote themselves to studying the requirements of a wholesome environment, but only a few are working for the development of human beings for whom a wholesome environment will be acceptable.

Suppose, for the moment, that the entirety of experience is made up of varying combinations of feeling and idea—or, of energy and form. The energy is life seeking its destinations, while form identifies the way-stations on the journey. This outlook is more than hypothesis, since we "read" all our experience in terms of feeling and idea, or energy and form. Take for example our knowledge of the world of physical forces. If we use Galileo as the type of our reader, and consult Karl Pearson on how he read, we find that, "Conceptually all motion is the motion of geometrical ideals, which are so chosen as best to describe those changes of sense-impression which in ordinary language we term perceptual motion." Herbert Read believed that the ancient Greeks based their conception of harmony, of balance and proportion on the fact that the world is structured by geometrical figures expressive of mathematical harmonies—a vast, living arithmetic. The ceaseless motion of life is the energy of existence, while shaping limits are set by the mathematics of form. This movement toward realization in form—which to us becomes tangible or expressed idea—has been named by Lancelot L. Whyte the *morphic principle*, and in his last book, *The Universe of Experience*, he contended that all the sciences should be reorganized around this principle—"the concept of morphic or ordering processes." All the workings of nature are understood in terms of this principle, and in mind the morphic tendency is apparent in the expression of feeling in forms shaped by idea. Whyte expected the science of the future to comprehend the universe of experience as "a hierarchy of levels of morphic process."

The educational psychology of Piaget easily submits to this mode of analysis, since for Piaget "The essential functions of intelligence consist in

understanding and in inventing, in other words building up structures by structuring reality." The structures in the mind are facsimiles of the structures in nature. And these structures of knowing, which are erected through the internalization of experience, are hierarchical, each one resting on a prior structure. Doing and experiencing make the foundation of learning, and in both activities the motive power is directed by imagination—a focus of feeling—while practical experience brings knowledge of limits or "definition." Vital or felt imagery is essential to the sort of learning which develops capacity for growth. Charity James says: "Until we literally incorporate thoughts so that they become part of our physical being we don't fully comprehend their meaning and we can't act upon them; and until we can move imaginatively into the world we perceive with our senses we can't truly associate ourselves with it and it is likely to seem external, mechanical and quite possibly hostile."

The hierarchical character of thinking is readily apparent when regarded in its moral phase. The work of Lawrence Kohlberg has been especially valuable in outlining the ascending levels of moral decision, starting from the base of simple self-interest, moving step by step upward to reach, finally, action guided entirely by ethical principle. In Kohlberg's scheme six levels of motivation are involved. From avoidance of pain and punishment and the search for satisfaction of needs (the two lowest levels) one goes to the imitation of some ideal—an Achilles or a Daniel Boone; and then, at the next stage, there is adherence to a law-and-order system handed down by authority. At the fifth level, according to Kohlberg, comes recognition that authority systems are initially derived from some theory or doctrine of righteousness, amounting to a social compact with which one can agree, or dissent from to look for a superior system. The highest level in this hierarchical ascent is characterized by the wisdom of the sage, one who sees the comparative usefulness of the lower levels, recognizes the human need to grow through them,

and then to reach up to the highest stage through individual discovery and perseverance. The development of the child through these stages—and not all those studied reached the sixth level, typified by Buddha or Socrates—became for Kohlberg the paradigm of general human development. Essential to rising in this hierarchy of moral awareness is the capacity for transcendence—of using the imagination to transform and elevate the idea of the self—along with corresponding transformations of the idea of others and the world.

To what form of human expression shall we turn to clarify this idea? Pictures might help. The last photograph in a published collection of the work of David ("Chim") Seymour (*Paragraphic*, Grossman, 1966) is of a mother holding a child in a Kibbutz nursery. You look at the mother's face, a blending of contentment and longing—of melancholy and hope, of love and pain, of warmth, affection, and saddening memory—you see this face and feel that, in that moment, the mother is living at the height of her being. All her ranges of emotion and idea are inscribed in this exquisite composition of planes, lines, and tones, generating feeling that can have no expression save in purely human terms. There is a wholeness which doubtless has limits, yet the wonder of a being fully occupying those limits makes a beauty that overflows its form.

Well, that is one picture. We think of another—copied from a fresco in a cave at Ajanta. We borrow René Grousset's description of the portrayal of a Bodhisattva:

The shoulders of Olympian breadth, the long, slender, flawless torso, the Apollonian nobility and serenity of the face all bespeak the "Conqueror" in the fullness of his power. There is something of the Prince Charming too, of the hero of a Hindu folk-tale, in the sovereign elegance of his gestures: the right hand delicately holding up the symbolic blue lotus, the left arm hanging straight down with the hand resting lightly on the hip. His solemn, searching countenance is imbued with infinite gentleness. His eyelids are half-closed and his gaze curiously distant, turned upon the world's sufferings. The head is tilted

slightly toward the right shoulder and the face is inclined in an attitude of mercy and tenderness. Lastly the mouth, clearly and firmly drawn, presents an expression of great complexity, ranging from divine serenity to human sadness before all the suffering glimpsed by the eyes, the overall impression remaining one of great pity. This is truly the "hero clothed in modesty and virility" of whom we read in Asanga, and indeed were all the scriptures of the Mahayana to disappear this pleasing, manly figure would suffice to bring back to us the spirit of those distant times and the great compassion of Buddhist teaching.

Here is a reading of a work of art rich in comprehension. It is all there in the picture—as anyone who has seen this often reproduced fresco will know—yet how well Grousset renders it into words, recapturing something of both feeling and idea. With his help we enter a capacious continuum of thought.

A high quality of feeling has pervasive power—sometimes even a momentary omnipotence. We give this experience characterization as best we can. We frame and interpret our feeling with metaphors to give them place in life and literature and art.

Understanding is an undertaking for which we have only the tools of feeling and idea—the means to make comprehensible the conflicts and tragedies of an age. In a recent novel, Wilma Dykeman's *Return the Innocent Earth* (Signet, 1974), a businessman in a Southern town tries to understand his people—his family who made the setting of his life.

They believed in the white clapboard church. It sat on hill flanked by a cemetery on one side and a grove of poplars on the other. . . . The stones record death and spoke of life: "She Is Gone But Not Forgotten." "We Shall Meet On That Beautiful Shore." For all their certainty of heaven and simplicity of statement they revealed anxious fears and sorrows.

They believed in the concrete courthouse. . . . Inside, the rooms were saturated with stale smells of human bodies and old paper. On the once-varnished shelves rested documents of boundaries, ownership, wedlock, inheritance, as well as murder, theft, and

countless variations of petty and monumental evil brought to judgment. . . . On the top floor rested the county jail. The bars across its windows gave the building a top-heavy appearance of grandeur masked, of majesty hoodwinked.

They believed in the rock-veneered bank. . . . The bank's doors opened and shut more regularly than clockwork. The men in high collars who sat behind its desks and stood behind its counter-windows appeared as imperturbable as the fixed countenances of G. Washington and A. Lincoln on the paper they handled each day.

These were the boundaries of . . . belief, translated into wood and solidified into mortar. Family. God. Law. Money. And these translated into the big slippery words: love, purpose, order, security.

I try to understand how the rightness of their faith was also error, why it did not create for my children . . . a world less destructive and corrupt. Was their vision limited as mine is? Family as refuge. God as scorekeeper. Law as vengeance. Money as life.

They believed in the words and in the institutions. And from that belief they drew strength. I grew up surrounded by that strength. It was as familiar as the drone of my family's voice in the yard on a summer evening. . . . I could receive the strength, but it was not my father's strength because I could not also receive his belief. That is an anchor each one puts down for himself.

Is there anyone who grew up in the mountains, the South, America, as I knew them, who did not experience a crisis of belief? Perhaps so. It is not easy to question in the midst of total acceptance. It is not easy to strike through the thorn bushes when the highway has been cleared and smoothed by so many ahead.

A while later, after arguing with his brother, he muses:

I see in my brother tension between what he has been taught is "right" by the church he accepts and what he observes is "necessary" by the company he also accepts—and it is a tension resulting in paralysis, a limbo avoiding responsibility. He risks neither mistakes nor evil himself, he is free to observe others' failures—perhaps my own this very week.

We cannot experience the thoughts of other men save by the feelings we find in ourselves, and

we cannot know the boundaries of other minds except by the idea-containers of feelings, directing and delimiting their flow. The power which gives penetration to feeling comes from the natural skill we have acquired in the use of imagination. The true definition of human progress lies here.

Our conceptions of the universe and of one another are formed by thought which embodies feeling in idea. Our social world can have no better definition than the self-conceptions of human beings will allow. These self-conceptions differ, varying with cultures, places, time. While redefining human problems in terms of the ideas men hold about themselves may not alter the natural rates of progress in self-development—of which we know little—it would soon put an end to false solutions, to the punishing of scapegoats, and to conspiratorial theories of history.

For with this discipline of mind, we would no longer angrily inquire: What have these men done? We would ask, instead: How do they think of themselves, and why? What do they believe, and what are the inevitable tensions between their profession and practice?

Was there ever a race, a nation or people without such inconsistencies? And is there a process of self-education, slow but sure, by which such inconsistencies are seen and overcome, or made irrelevant by new foci for the flow of human energy?

REVIEW

SOLZHENITSYN'S "ANACHRONISMS"

THE themes developed in Paul Avrigh's *Nation* (Oct. 16) article, "Solzhenitsyn's Political Philosophy," deserve appreciative attention. Solzhenitsyn first gained the attention of American readers by reason of his courageous criticism of Stalinism in Russia, along with his mastery of the story-teller's art. He was also the living demonstration of an awesome integrity—something to wonder at in these days of passive submission to authority.

From books like *Cancer Ward*, *First Circle*, and *Gulag Archipelago*, we know what Solzhenitsyn was against. He was against crimes in behalf of the state, justified by ideology. Mr. Avrigh heads his essay with a quotation from Rosa Luxemburg—"The remedy invented by Lenin and Trotsky, the general suppression of democracy, is worse than the evil it is intended to cure"—and he shows from Lenin's policy of imprisoning anarchists and events such as the Kronstadt rebellion that the Bolshevik program was from the first an authoritarian regime, which Stalin later perfected. During his long years in prison Solzhenitsyn came to realize where the roots of the Stalinist evil lay.

But what is Solzhenitsyn *for*? To answer this question, Avrigh turns to the fact that the novelist's father "was a Tolstoyan anarchist whose philosophy made a lasting impression on his son."

The Tolstoyan ethical code, based on truth, honesty and the primacy of individual conscience, echoes through all of Solzhenitsyn's writings. Solzhenitsyn's beard and humble dress, his disdain for material possessions and strongly ascetic style of life, his abiding faith in the Russian people and concern with their suffering are all fundamentally Tolstoyan. In his present surroundings he continues to exhibit a marked ascetic streak and a severe, self-disciplined integrity, without any airs or pretensions, traits that are reflected in his literary work. He has a scorn for gourmets and dandies. He is attached to old clothes and possessions—a battered hat, a threadbare

coat, a dilapidated suitcase that he has saved from his days in prison.

For evidence of his positive thinking about political matters, Avrigh quotes briefly from dialogue in *Cancer Ward*:

Shulubin: Young man, don't ever make this mistake. Don't ever blame socialism for the sufferings and cruel years you've lived through. However you think about it, history has rejected capitalism once and for all! . . . Capitalism was doomed ethically before it was doomed economically, a long time ago.

. . . Nor can you have a socialism that's always drumming on about hatred, because social life cannot be built on hatred.

Kostoglotov: You mean Christian socialism, is that right?

Shulubin: It's going too far to call it "Christian." . . . I should say that for Russia in particular, with our repentances confessions, and revolts, our Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Kropotkin, there's only one true socialism, and that's ethical socialism. That is something realistic.

"Ethics first and economics afterwards?" asks the young man, and Shulubin answers, "Exactly."

Commenting, Avrigh says:

If these sentiments reflect Solzhenitsyn's own thinking, as they indeed appear to do, then he is an exponent of ethical socialism as opposed to the amoral revolutionism of the Bolsheviks. He ranges himself with Herzen and Kropotkin against Lenin and Stalin and the associates who as Kropotkin observed, failed to inspire a true social revolution because they lacked a genuine Socialist morality. He sees the Bolsheviks in effect, as heirs to the tradition of Sergei Nechaev, the unscrupulous 19th-century revolutionary, for whom expediency overrode all ethical considerations and for whom decency, honor and integrity must be cast aside in the name of revolutionary necessity.

Other currents in Solzhenitsyn's thinking are commonly found less acceptable in the West. Avrigh shows the strength of his Slavophile tendencies, his rejection of "foreign innovations," his idealization of Russia before Peter the Great, who pressed Russia forward according to the European pattern, and his distrust of

parliamentary government. "In his letter to the Soviet leaders of September 1973 he scorns Western democracy as a system that, like Bolshevism, is lacking in moral foundations."

Solzhenitsyn's Slavophile orientation, his quest for Russia's salvation in its own unique historical traditions, sets him sharply apart from many other Soviet dissidents who favor a Western conception of democracy and constitutional freedom. To such men as Andrei Sakharov, many of Solzhenitsyn's ideas, religious as well as political, seem outmoded and anachronistic, if not downright reactionary.

Mr. Avrigh provides a balanced discussion of these ideas:

Much of this is indeed disturbing. Solzhenitsyn's political philosophy, a mixture of Slavophilism, Populism and ethical socialism with elements of technocracy and benevolent despotism, is in many ways a throwback to the 19th century. Yet to call it reactionary would be misleading. For it is a far cry from the xenophobia, anti-Semitism and philistine obscurantism to which so many Soviet conservatives adhere. His disdain for representative democracy, moreover, is part and parcel of a tradition of which Herzen, Tolstoy and Kropotkin were all exponents; and his warnings against unbridled industrial growth and his evocations of the beauty of Russia's ancient villages and towns, now invaded by blocks of ugly apartment houses and the "poisonous internal combustion engine," parallel the arguments of the most enlightened ecologists in the West.

Nonetheless, many readers like Solzhenitsyn most when he is telling us what is wrong with Communism. When it comes to what *ought* to be—what we should put in the place of the ugly Stalinist system—we see him as a writer with weaknesses and dated ideas.

But is this really Solzhenitsyn's shortcoming, or rather the common problem of all writers who try to go beyond criticism, who accept the responsibility of proposing what men ought to do with their lives? After all, it is easy enough to find dramatic examples of what is wrong. But where do you look for examples of what is right? Most of the time, illustrations of social goodness seem little more than incomplete tokens of desirable conditions. So the writer who wants to move

from futurist dreams to practical activity becomes an easy target of criticism. Apparently, we expect him to do the impossible—to point to excitingly complete illustrations of what he is talking about. He cannot do this because they don't exist.

Human beings are woefully unfinished products of evolution. Goodness is a rare, mostly individual achievement, and social applications of high principles are notoriously inadequate. The writer, then, must take his illustrations where he finds them, hoping for patience and intelligence in his readers. The illustrations are bound to be imperfect, good only for making a point or two. What, for example, is the American version of rural life and non-technocratic simplicity? Well, for easy and quick illustration, take the communes. So we look at the communes. In *Celery Wine*, a book about the Saddle Ridge Farm, Elaine Sundancer says:

When I first came out to the country I felt as if I was moving out into a new space, a new territory, a space of our own, a protected space where it was safe to make new discoveries. I was moving in a new direction, and I thought I could keep on the move forever. But now I see, sadly, how much we are a part of the world we left behind. The kerosene in our lamps is distilled by Standard Oil. . . . When I get in this mood, Mike says, "We don't have to be perfect. What matters is the direction we're moving in. About our direction there is no question. By and large, we've dropped out of the gross national product. We are building the fertility of a small piece of land, and we'll know how to build the fertility of a larger piece of land if we ever get a chance. . . ."

When Solzhenitsyn says that Peter the Great "diverted Russia from its natural path and . . . set it on an alien course that spelled disaster for the common people," he may have been right. In his latest book, *Development Without Aid*, Leopold Kohr points out:

. . . the simplest way of raising the level of any given standard is not by switching to an imported variety dependent on values shaped outside the native tradition, but by ascending the rungs of the local standard as they naturally arrange themselves one above the other within the heretofore neglected framework of a long familiar pattern. In other words,

the simplest development method for Trinidad is to rise in Trinidadian, not American, fashion; for Cuba to proceed on Cuban, not on Russian legs; for Martinique to become a better Martinique, not a greater France; for Antigua a sunnier Antigua, not a linear descendent of good gray fog-bound England.

Years ago a well-known Japanese novelist reflected:

I always think how different everything would be if we in the Orient had developed our own science. Suppose for instance we had developed our own physics and chemistry: would not the techniques and industries based on them have taken a different form, would not our myriads of everyday gadgets, our medicines, the products of our industrial art—would they not have suited our national temper better than they do? . . . The Westerners have been able to move forward in ordered steps, while we have met a superior civilization and have had to surrender to it, and we have had to leave a road we have followed for thousands of years.

The Japanese, he reflected, might have gone forward much more slowly without the prodding from the West, but they would have developed naturally, undistorted by artificial stimulus. They would have had "no borrowed gadgets," evolving, instead, "the tools of our own culture, suited to us." This is another version of Solzhenitsyn's outlook, applied to a very different country and by other words, but from the same sense of fitness. As for Solzhenitsyn's "distrust of parliamentary democracy," it is more pertinent to turn to a writer like Jayaprakash Narayan on the failures of representative government than to object to the novelist's wonderings about other forms of rule. He is redressing balances, thinking about the qualities of better ways of life much more than advocating political systems of times past. Again and again, we see that the qualities which arouse criticism of the Russian novelist spring mainly from the inadequacies of the illustrations he proposes. Ideal examples of the kind of social order he and others long for have yet to be achieved.

Concluding his musings about Solzhenitsyn's "political philosophy," Avrigh says that his

expulsion from the Soviet Union was "a victory of freedom over authority, of the individual over the state." Finally, he points to the quality of the man:

In one of his best stories, *Matryona's House*, Solzhenitsyn describes the main character as that person "without whom no village can stand. Nor any city. Nor all of Russia. Nor the whole world." Such a man is Solzhenitsyn.

Political criticism which omits this first principle is hardly worth inspection.

COMMENTARY

THE HUMAN EXCELLENCE

AN idea implicit in this week's lead article is that every living thing is a whole-maker. Even minerals have this tendency, as in the symmetry of crystal formations. But the best example of irrepressible whole-making—endlessly adaptable to both circumstances and psychological conditions—is the human mind.

Each human life is a unique endeavor in whole-making, which means finding a balance for the process of growth or becoming. And each natural level of becoming has its own beauty and excellence. The pictures referred to on page 2 of this issue demonstrate this wonderful collaboration of feeling and idea, each showing the equilibrium appropriate to the feelings involved.

Another way of thinking about whole-making is suggested by the role of feeling in shaping human attitudes. A transforming feeling sweeps through the psyche, for a time occupying the whole being, and unless it is displaced by some other feeling the mind adds conceptual dimensions of meaning, creating a system of "rationalizations." This, in its way, is the making of a whole—either an inclusive or a limiting whole. The response to a partisan feeling will tend to be a closed system of ideas, while a high and ennobling feeling generates a field of ideas worthy to be called a philosophy of life.

The six stages of moral attitudes described by Lawrence Kohlberg illustrate the natural passage from one level of whole-making to a higher one. It is only when a system of ideas breaks down, or is outgrown, that the feeling on which it is based weakens, giving way to a more encompassing sense of unity and relationship. Yet each level, regarded by itself, is an attempt to make a whole, to achieve a balance, to reconcile differences.

Human whole-making is distinguished from the formations achieved by other forms of life by the inevitable and periodic disturbance of

existential unrest. Each system of wholeness developed by humans becomes, in time, the natural matrix of a fresh longing for transcendence. So even in fulfillment, truly human wholeness will always have its static satisfaction upset by an insistent longing to reach beyond, to extend the radius of awareness. It is in the process of growth, then, and not in the limiting achievement, that peculiarly human excellence is to be found.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves WITH EMERSON'S HELP

COMPARING the use of language by leading eighteenth-century Americans with present-day expression, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., says in the *Autumn American Scholar* that the Founding Fathers lived "in an age when politicians could say in public more or less what they believed in private." He means that they didn't feel obliged to dilute or vulgarize their public utterances. "*The Federalist*, for example, is a work notably free of false notes." Their influence, in other words, was in terms of their best thinking. This writer's point is clear when we reflect on what politicians now say among themselves—in conversations held "in private" not because of their too elevated, non-popular content.

Mr. Schlesinger's article is titled "Politics and the American Language." Using the quality of speech as a test, he describes the language of nearly two hundred years ago:

This was the age of the Enlightenment in America. The cooling breeze of reason tempered the hot work of composition and argument. The result was the language of the Founding Fathers—lucid, measured and felicitous prose, marked by Augustan virtues of harmony, balance and elegance. People not only wrote this noble language. They also read it. The essays in defense of the Constitution signed Publius appeared week after week in the New York press during the winter of 1787-88; and the demand was so great that the first thirty-six *Federalist* papers were published in book form while the rest were still coming out in the papers. One can only marvel at the sophistication of an audience that consumed and relished pieces so closely reasoned, so thoughtful and analytical.

Mr. Schlesinger says he will launch no campaign "to resurrect the stately rhythms of *The Federalist Papers*," urging, instead, that writers and teachers "meet the standards they would impose on others and rally to the defense of the word." They should, he says, "expose the attack on meaning and discrimination in language as an

attack on reason in discourse." Why not, then, use the *Federalist Papers* in the schools to illustrate the dignity in thought—in reason—of which early Americans were capable? That we once had public men of this caliber is likely to come as a surprise to many students.

Responsible thought is the only conceivable parent of good language. Mr. Schlesinger seems aware of this. He quotes Emerson frequently to set the level of discussion and to establish his generalizations:

"A man's power to connect his thought with its proper symbol, and so to utter it," said Emerson, "depends upon the simplicity of his character, that is, upon his love of truth, and his desire to communicate it without loss. The corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language. When simplicity of character and the sovereignty of idea is broken up by the prevalence of secondary desires, the desire of riches, of pleasure, of power, and of praise . . . words are perverted to stand for things which are not." . . .

So words, divorced from objects, became instruments less of communication than of deception. Unscrupulous orators stood abstractions on their head and transmuted them into their opposites, aiming to please one faction by the sound and the contending faction by the meaning. They did not always succeed. "The word *liberty* in the mouth of Webster," Emerson wrote with contempt after the Compromise of 1850, "sounds like the word *love* in the mouth of a courtesan."

Continuing Emerson's analysis, Mr. Schlesinger turns to the present:

The rise of mass communications, the growth of large organizations and novel technologies, the invention of advertising and public relations, the professionalization of education—all contributed to linguistic pollution, upsetting the ecological balance between words and their environment. In our own time the purity of language is under unrelenting attack from even, side—from professors as well as from politicians, from newspapermen as well as from advertising men, from men of the cloth as well as from men of the sword, and not least from those compilers of modern dictionaries who propound the suicidal thesis that all usages are equal and all correct.

Mr. Schlesinger seems to think that the chief affliction brought by the degradation of language emerges in politics. Watergate is his most horrible example. Yet "Democracy," he says, "always has the chance to redeem its language," and this, he adds, "may be an essential step toward the redemption of its politics." But if we take seriously another of his quotations from Emerson, the remedy surely lies deeper than language. "A man cannot speak but he judges himself." His language is something he cannot change without first improving his character. "The louder he talked of his honor," said Emerson, "the faster we counted our spoons."

So, while we may need to work on our language, learning to connect thought with its proper symbols, a higher priority attaches to simplicity of character, love of truth, and the desire to communicate it without loss.

We might note that contemporary writers find it difficult to say things of this sort, and often call upon Emerson to say them—because, perhaps, only an Emerson can carry it off. Emerson might tell us that we can't say such things well in our own language because we don't have enough simplicity of character. But how can anyone have simplicity of character without simplicity of life? And how can we simplify our lives, when the strong momentum of the times, except for a small minority of counter-culture enthusiasts, is in the opposite direction?

It seems right to say that the things Mr. Schlesinger complains about are only the froth and heavy fumes of lives devoted to petty ends. His own clearly expressed diagnosis has this implication.

Social fluidity, moral pretension, political and literary demagoguery, corporate and academic bureaucratization and a false conception of democracy are leading us into semantic chaos. As Emerson said, "We infer the spirit of the nation in great measure from the language."

Well, if it is the spirit of the nation that needs changing, then what do we really know about the

nuts and bolts of change? We need a large company of inventors to show us in practical terms how to make life simple, and how to stand firm against the built-in tendency to complexity.

At the level of moral generalization the project is unambiguous: we need to put an end to "the prevalence of secondary desires, of riches, of power, and of praise." We probably shouldn't have dismissed the counter-culture in a phrase, since its unassuming leaders are trying to do just that. They set a fine if limited example. But having only a single illustration of what people can do in practical terms is poverty indeed.

Maybe a reformed diet of thinking has to provide nourishment before versatility and inventiveness in simplicity can be widely born. So we might read some in the *Federalist Papers*, just to get the hang of how serious men once talked and argued among themselves, in the days before "image" politics. And read Emerson, too, who serves Mr. Schlesinger so well. And also Emerson's friend, Thoreau, who has been a great strengthener for direction-changers. The best help for changing direction comes from the people who were able to change their own, against odds. Every man who succeeds in this way improves the odds.

We owe much to people who do what they can in making even small practical changes. Often a tone comes into their existence that you don't encounter elsewhere. When the young begin to *feel* that tone, and to savor it, they may be on their way. They may even prove more inventive than the previous generation. There may be a "take-off" point for the slowly gathering movement toward simplicity.

FRONTIERS

Ecologists Instruct Economists

A MAN whose name keeps coming up among people knowledgeable about energy, ecology, and humanist economics is Howard T. Odum, who teaches at the University of Florida in Gainesville. In MANAS for May 29 of last year we gave brief attention to his paper, "Energy, Ecology, and Economics," published in the Spring 1974 *CoEvolution Quarterly*. (It first appeared in 1973 in *Ambio*, a journal issued by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.) The importance of this paper on man-environment relationships is confirmed by another reprinting in the July issue of *Man-Environment Systems* (Orangeburg, N.Y.), a forum of research communications concerning the socio-physical environment.

Prof. Odum is one of the embattled few who are doing what they can to restore the theory and practice of economics to the region of common sense. This paper elaborates in particular ways the folly of assuming that modern industry has "solved" the problem of production. As E. F. Schumacher points out in *Small Is Beautiful*, "A businessman would not consider a firm to have solved its problems of production and to have achieved stability if he saw that it was rapidly consuming its capital." We take fossil fuels for granted as income, failing to recognize them as capital. But they *are* capital, and are rapidly being exhausted.

Why do we tolerate this sort of bookkeeping? Because, when our accounting methods were developed, the dominant idea was "every man for himself," and it was commonly believed that natural resources are inexhaustible. Economics began as the science of making money out of the status quo. It is by no means a study of the long-term symbiotic relationships between man and nature. As a result, as Schumacher says: "All goods are treated the same, because the point of view is fundamentally that of private profit-making, and this means that it is inherent in the

methodology of economics to ignore man's dependence on the natural world." Prof. Odum's paper is an attack on the folly of this prevailing attitude.

He starts by offering a view of experience far more extensive than the few hundred years on which modern economic theory is based. Our present theories grew out of a comparatively brief period of rapid expansion, growth, and exploitation of resources, in contrast with the steady-state relationships which are governed by other laws and have another sort of fruition and natural balance. As an ecological scientist, Prof. Odum illustrates his point with a simple analogy from nature:

We observe dog-eat-dog growth competition every time a new vegetation colonizes a bare field where the immediate survival premium is first placed on rapid expansion to cover the available energy-receiving surfaces. The early growth ecosystems put out weeds of poor structure and quality which are wasteful in their energy-capturing efficiencies, but effective in getting growth even though the structures are not long-lasting. Most recently, modern communities of man have experienced two hundred years of colonizing growth, expanding to new energy sources such as fossil fuels, new agricultural lands, and other special energy sources. Western culture, and more recently, Eastern and Third World cultures, are locked into a mode of belief in growth as necessary to survival.

Continuing the analogy, Prof. Odum points to the fact that when a natural ecosystem reaches a climax phase, it then alters its processes to accommodate steady-state conditions. This is not a decline, but brings various advantages in the quality of life. "Our system of man and nature," Odum says, "will soon be shifting from rapid growth as the criterion of economic survival to steady state non-growth as the criterion of maximizing one's work for economic survival."

Why isn't this better understood?

Ecologists are familiar with both growth states and steady state, and observe both in natural systems in their work routinely, but economists were all trained in their subject during rapid growth and most

don't even know there is such a thing as a steady state. Most economic advisors have never seen a steady state even though most of man's million-year history was close to steady state. Only the last two centuries have seen a burst of temporary growth because of temporary use of special energies that accumulated over long periods of geologic time.

A rapidly growing society develops methods and attitudes which apply only so long as the growth can continue. When the growth slows down, then stops, frantic efforts to keep it going become self-defeating and destructive. Spending more and more money to develop new energy-sources makes the energy so expensive that, instead of an actual gain, losses ensue. The only legitimate way to measure energy gains, in any case, is by the *net* gain in terms of cost, not by gross production figures.

Many pump-priming properties of fast-growing economies have been naturally selected and remain in procedures of government and culture. Urban concentrations, high use of cars, economic subsidy to growth, oil depletion allowances, subsidies to population growth, advertising, high-rise buildings, etc., are costly in energy for their operation in maintenance, but favor economic vitality as long as their role as pump-primers is successful in increasing the flow of energy over and beyond their special cost. Intensely concentrated densities of power use have been economic in the past because their activities have accelerated the system's growth during a period when there were new energy sources to encompass.

The pattern of urban concentration and the policies of economic growth-stimulation that were necessary and successful in energy-growth competition periods are soon to shift. There will be a premium against the use of pump-priming characteristics since there will be no more unpumped energy to prime. What did work before will no longer work

and the opposite becomes the pattern. All this makes sense and is commonplace to those who study various kinds of ecosystems, but the economic advisors will be sorely pressed and lose some confidence until they learn about the steady state and its criteria for economic success. Countries with great costly investments in concentrated economic activity, excessive transportation customs, and subsidies to industrial expansion will have severe stresses. . . . Because energies and monies for

research, development, and thinking are abundant only during growth and not during energy leveling or decline, there is great danger that means for developing the steady state will not be ready when they are needed, which may be no more than 5 years away but probably more like 20 years.

In his conclusion, Prof. Odum wonders: "Are alternatives already being tested by our youth so they will be ready for the gradual transition to a fine steady state that carries the best of our recent cultural evolution into new, more miniaturized, more dilute, and more delicate ways of man-nature?" Well, the language is flattering: we must hope it is at least partly deserted.