

A CHARACTERISTIC STATE OF MIND

IN mid-December of last year the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* summarized a report to President Carter by the Commission on World Hunger. Predicting serious food shortages around the world during the next twenty years, the commission called upon the United States to increase its foreign aid. The *Guardian* story is concise:

The report estimated that about 500 million people throughout the world live in abject poverty and starvation. To meet their needs within the next decade would require an additional 32 million tons of grain, or roughly 2 per cent of the world supply. "If that amount must be imported by food deficit countries, however, it represents nearly 20 per cent of the present world grain trade."

One alarming trend is that the food-growing capacity of the world's poorest countries is steadily declining. They now grow about 87 per cent of their needs but by the end of the century, on present performance, this will have fallen to 74 per cent. Even now, some of the countries must spend nearly three quarters of all the aid they receive on buying food on the open market.

Stories like this one appear with increasing frequency. You read it, are bewildered and made sad, and feel helpless. The mills of the gods, apparently, are grinding the world's poor out of existence. When, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the poor of Europe had no land and not enough to eat, they began to migrate to America. They learned how to farm the new country and were able to live well, or a lot better than they had in Europe. After a time Americans began to feel that they ought to tell the rest of the world how to be well-fed and comfortably off. You just have to work hard, save your money, and teach your children to do the same. But today, the people in the "underdeveloped" countries don't seem able to do what we did; and, as a matter of fact, what we did isn't working as well for us as it used to. Back in Jefferson's time,

or Andrew Jackson's time, or Abe Lincoln's time, we were a nation of farmers, most of us small farmers, and while industry was coming along, with lines of conflict beginning to show, a man could still support his family on the land.

The story of what happened to American agriculture is well told in Wendell Berry's book, *The Unsettling of America*—a tale of commercial or industrial triumph and cultural and human decline. Anyone who cares about the future of this country and of the world should read this book. Meanwhile, thinking about the hunger existing and predicted for "the world's poorest countries," we turned to Lappé and Collins' *Food First*, finding in it a section titled "World Hunger as Big Business." What does that mean? A passage on Iran is pertinent and timely:

In 1962 the Shah of Iran declared a substantial land reform that irrevocably broke the political power of large landowners. "Land to the tiller," however, was taken literally. If a family was not well-off enough to own a plow and a draft animal—and many were not—they could not qualify for the broken-up estates.

Throughout Iran, farmers who did receive land began to produce food. In the Khuzestan province, bordering on Iraq and the Persian Gulf, the farmers' productivity was extraordinary, especially considering the lack of technical assistance and irrigation and the 98 per cent illiteracy. Traditional farming methods provided ample work for all.

Also during the 1960s, the government began to construct several large dams under the supervision of David Lilienthal, Franklin Roosevelt's designer of the Tennessee Valley Authority. [But on who really designed TVA and its dams, see Arthur Morgan's book, *The Making of the TVA*, Prometheus, 1974.] The largest dam is on the Dez River in Khuzestan. It offered the prospect to the small farmers of over 200,000 acres of irrigated land. It sounded promising. Then, just when the dam was being completed, the shah and his elite advisors decided

that what Khuzestan needed was foreign agribusiness corporations.

Today the farmers in Khuzestan no longer speak of land reform. . . . Khuzestan today, instead of being an area of many small farms, utilizing the new irrigation, is a province dominated by large-scale (12,000 to 50,000 acres) highly mechanized, capital intensive, cash crop units. Some 17,000 Iranians have been pushed off their lands. Hawaiian Agronomics has boasted, "Land Barren for 23 Centuries Now Producing Food, Supporting Liveskock", The fact that peasants produced food there before the coming of agribusiness is ignored. Even more significantly, it was the massive irrigation system installed at public expense *before* agribusiness moved in that really made the parched lands productive. . . .

And how are the people of rural Khuzestan doing? Most are landless and jobless. Some see no alternative but to flee to the already crowded urban slums. Many of these refugees are in their teens and twenties. They would gladly farm if they had their own plots, their real skills are those of small rice farmers.

Wherever there is land available with cheap labor, agribusiness is moving in:

Del Monte is operating Philippine plantations to feed the banana-starved Japanese; contracting with Mexican growers to feed asparagus-cravers in France, Denmark, and Switzerland; and opening a new plantation in Kenya so that no Britisher need go without his or her ration of jet-fresh pineapple. Del Monte finds that a pineapple that would bring only 8 cents in the Philippines (still a significant portion of a worker's pay) can bring \$1.50 in Tokyo. No wonder Del Monte exports 90 per cent of its Philippine production. Yet the average Filipino has an even more inadequate calorie intake than the average Bangladeshi and serious protein-calorie undernutrition affects an estimated half of all Filipino children under four—one of the highest rates in the world.

There is really nothing new in food being grown for those who can afford to buy it. What is new is the agribusiness notion that *all* the world can be one Global Farm. Production of many low-nutrition crops that can fetch premium prices for the seller is being shifted out of the countries where most of the buyers live. These overseas production sites, in many countries with vast undernourished populations, are becoming mere extensions of the agricultural systems

of countries such as the United States and Japan. . . . This historic shift is occurring in our lifetime.

Another example is the shift of American agriculture to Mexico, where contract field workers are paid 23 cents an hour:

Mexican soil and labor are already supplying one half to two-thirds of the United States market for many winter and early spring vegetables. The rate of increase has been phenomenal. . . . Here are a few examples of the shift in Mexico from cultivation for local consumption to production for the United States. Most are operations contracted and financed by American firms. From 1960 to 1974, onion imports from Mexico to the United States increased over five times to 95 million pounds. From 1960 to 1976, cucumber imports soared from under 9 million to over 196 million pounds. From 1960 to 1972, eggplant imports multiplied ten times, and squash imports multiplied forty-three times. Frozen strawberries and cantaloupe from Mexico now supply a third of United States annual consumption. . . .

As obvious as it may sound, we must remind ourselves that land growing crops for the Global Supermarket is land the local people cannot use to grow food crops for themselves. Higher prices of basic staples due to distortion of production priorities are making even beans a luxury Mexico's poor can no longer afford.

It isn't only the poor of other countries for whom this destiny awaits. Small American farmers are up against the same fate. Lappé and Collins describe what has happened to the poultry business in America during the past twenty-five years. Today most poultry farmers have only nominal control over the enterprises they own. They are dependent on their big-business suppliers:

The production contract was the tool by which corporations like Ralston Purina, Cargill, Pillsbury, and Continental Grain took control of chicken production in the United States beginning in the late 1950s. Since at that time prices were only a few pennies a pound, an offer of credit from the corporation was one a hard-up independent farmer could hardly refuse. These same corporations controlled the feed-grain market and, sure enough, the contract required the farmer to use only his creditor's feed.

Within ten years the percentage of United States chicken production under contract went from 4 per cent to 92 per cent. USDA [United States Department of Agriculture] nonetheless insists on calling these contracted farmers "family farmers." In reality they are little more than hired hands in a corporate factory. Only there is one big difference. It is they who must go into debt to build the "factory" and put in new equipment. As an official of the Mississippi Farm Bureau told USDA researchers, "Today a Mississippi farmer couldn't sell broilers in the market if he wanted to produce them. Farmers do not own the birds. They furnish only the labor and the houses. They do exactly what they are told."

In *Sowing the Wind* (Grossman, 1979), Harrison Wellford cites a Department of Agriculture study which estimated that Alabama chicken growers were making "minus 36 cents an hour" for their service to the corporations:

The same USDA study in 1967 concluded chicken farmers were pauperized because of their lack of bargaining strength in dealing with the corporations. In 1962, some poultry growers in Arkansas under contract to processing companies tried to organize an association. The companies blacklisted the growers and ruined them by making certain that they could never again receive a contract. . . .

Tens of thousands of American farmers, hardly naive to the ways of the modern world and living in a country with an array of antimonopoly and fair trade laws as well as regulatory agencies, have not been able to protect their interests against a few powerful poultry supply and marketing corporations. What then is the likelihood that farmers even the better off, in countries like Pakistan, Mexico, Colombia, and Thailand will fare any better?

How do people generally think about present and impending food shortages, and the exploitation and injustices recounted in *Food First*? They don't really think about all this; they are simply appalled. They are only spectators, not actors, of this drama of progressive ruin, although, if policies and trends continue the way they are now going, more and more people will begin to feel the impact of economic processes that are wholly indifferent to human suffering, privation, and actual want. Meanwhile, we don't know how

to get *at* these problems. They have no handle. The solutions available from our cultural tradition for dealing with such social issues are all known failures. Angry and bloody revolution does not work; we know that now. Adam Smith's "invisible hand" theory does not work because, as Gandhi said, while there is enough food for the needs of everyone in the world, there is not enough for everyone's *greed*. Greed destroys the balance of a sensible, humane economy. Public education does not work—or does not seem to—because people devote only fragments of themselves to understanding what needs to be done for the common good. Most people are now all stretched out just getting enough to support their families. They worry about having enough gas to get to work, about having enough money to buy nutritious food, and they feel obliged to stop dreaming about owning their own homes, since this is rapidly becoming a luxury only millionaires can afford.

Solvable problems must lie within the competence of human beings to act, and world hunger does not seem to be such a problem. At any rate, the present direction of "economic development" promises to make it impossible for more and more people to have enough to eat. This is not to suggest that no one knows what "ought to be done" to put an end to the possibility of large-scale famine. Solutions are known and well publicized in books like *Food First*. But real solutions run counter to the ingrained habits and interests of the present proprietors of industry, who find themselves unable to believe that what they have been doing all their lives—what they learned from their parents and from nearly all cultural influences, over the years—which was once so right and so good, is now so wrong, a course, as their critics say, to total disaster. How do *these* people think about world hunger and other problems?

In 1974 a banker told a conference assembled to consider "Feeding the World's Hungry: The Challenge to Business" that the "diminished self-

sufficiency" of the underdeveloped countries can be reversed by applying a "systems approach" in which "multinational business can play an essential role." Another banker asserted that the technological revolution which has transformed "American agriculture into the most amazingly productive system on earth" needs to be introduced in the countries where want exists. Then everything will be all right.

It is not really a change of subject to turn to an article by Robert Stuart Nathan in the January *Harper's*, titled "Coddled Criminals," in which the writer describes an action against the president and board chairman of the Fruehauf Corporation, a manufacturer of trucks with sales of \$2 billion a year. The charge was a felony—evading "more than \$12.3 million in corporate federal excise taxes." The two men were convicted, fined \$10,000 each, and sentenced to jail for six months. While the sentences were later suspended, the real question, as management saw it, was: How could the images of these top executives be restored to respectability so that the men could go on running the company on a "business as usual" basis? What the Fruehauf management wanted to get across to the shareholders was that serving the company's interests is the natural duty of its top employees and officers, as legitimate and American as apple pie. So—

The Fruehauf Corporation, in its 1979 "Notice of Annual Meeting of Shareholders," published a list of twenty-eight American executives who, during the period 1971-1978 had been indicted for or implicated in some sort of crime. Corporate crime does not shock anyone these days, so what is most surprising about Fruehauf's list is not its contents, but rather the circumstances under which it was compiled, annotated, and published.

With equal reason Mr. Nathan could have said that publication of the list was not surprising at all, but a really effective way of persuading the stockholders that the president and the chairman of the board were only doing what a lot of other conscientious executives were doing to protect

the true vocation of America—which is business—from the attacks of a voracious bureaucracy and its profit-eroding taxation. When, at the shareholders' meeting, one stockholder objected to the board's intention, saying that reinstatement of the convicted felons as officers would mean that "the American business system is rewarding criminal behavior," the board replied: "We believe that equally valid principles of morality require the Board to seek the preservation of the best interests of the Company." The board won overwhelmingly, and the two men are back in management, with the president again running the company.

The "innocence by association" gambit was effective. As anyone can see, businessmen have to do these little things to make our system work. After all, one could argue that tax evasion is no more reprehensible than the smuggling done a century or so ago by some of our best families. It's part of the American game. The *Harper's* writer, however, draws another conclusion:

Tarring twenty-five companies with Fruehauf's brush was, of course, a dirty trick on Fruehauf's part, for the list the company published included with the guilty a number of corporate innocents—companies that had acted with dispatch to terminate the employment of the besmirched officers. But the net effect of the list is to make Fruehauf seem to vanish in the crowd. It also serves, disingenuously, a social theory that is Fruehauf's very own: To reform a criminal, send him back to do what he was doing before he was convicted. This should also work with bank robbers and muggers.

Whatever the merits or fairness of this contention, "the public" in the persons of the voting shareholders agreed with the Fruehauf management: "We believe (the two officers) acted at all times in what they perceived to be the best interests of the company." And the president probably gave the sense of the meeting: "The worst that can be said is that we worked too hard for Fruehauf and its stockholders."

Is there any connection between this attitude and the prospect of hunger all over the world? It

would be both reasonable and unreasonable to answer yes. At issue is the idea of what is good and worth working for. The hunger in the world—and all the other problems we can't find handles for—are almost certainly divergent problems which spring essentially from a characteristic state of mind. We can't find handles because there *aren't any*, so long as we remain in that state of mind. Wendell Berry put the matter clearly in other words:

I cannot think of any American whom I know or have heard of, who is not contributing in some way to destruction. The reason is simple: to live undestructively in an economy that is overwhelmingly destructive would require of any one of us, or of any small group of us, a great deal more work than we have yet been able to do. How could we divorce ourselves completely and yet responsibly from the technologies and powers that are destroying the planet? The answer is not yet thinkable, and it will not be thinkable for some time—even though there are now groups and families and persons everywhere in the country who have begun the labor of thinking it. . . .

People who thus set their lives against destruction have necessarily confronted in themselves the absurdity that they have recognized in their society. . . . Once our personal connection to what is wrong becomes clear, then we have to choose: we can go on as before, recognizing our dishonesty and living with it as best we can, or we can begin the effort to change the way we think and live.

There may be a better way to say this, but we have not come across it.

REVIEW

ON SYSTEMS ANALYSIS

AN inquiry by a reader about "systems analysis" drove us to the library to borrow a small but good book on the subject—*The Systems Approach* by C. West Churchman, published by Delta in paperback in 1968. Not remarkably, the author says at the end that he thinks the systems approach is "not a bad idea." This modestly expressed conclusion, however, has point because all through the book the author has been illustrating the mistakes systems practitioners make. He finds that there is no one true system, and that the worst thing that can happen to a systems analyst is for him to imagine that he has discovered it. There can be no bigger delusion, in his case reinforced by impressive technical elaboration. System analysis, then, is a way of structuring self-deceptions, but it is not *only* that. It is also the means of seeing things we couldn't see before the method was applied.

How does Mr. Churchman reach this interesting conclusion? He gets there by showing the reader that everything is connected with everything else, as philosophers have long maintained. This means that, in theory, once you begin a systems analysis it should go on forever. Since this is impossible and ridiculous, the unembarrassed analyst points out that he deals with finite problems. Vendors come to him with questions like "How can I sell more of my expensive coffee to more people?" They won't pay him anything to raise such questions as "But should people drink coffee at all?" Or, they ask him for a design of traffic management at an airport, and while it may occur to him that maybe people might have better lives if they didn't fly around so much, he is not likely to say this to his prospective client. Instead he will think about the right number of landing strips and their arrangement. The men running the airport want an answer, not a moral.

But those questions, and a lot of others, are nonetheless pertinent from *some* point of view—which may eventually prove to have been *the* point of view. But not now, so the analyst limits the system to what seems "relevant." In short, the objective observer of how systems analysis works discovers that *every* system exists within some larger system, so every analysis is by definition imperfect in that, in order to be "practical," you have to stop your inclusiveness somewhere.

Mr. Churchman puts his rather philosophical conclusion in the last chapter:

Well, then, what is the systems approach? On the one hand, we must recognize it to be the most critical problem we face today, the understanding of the systems in which we live. On the other hand, however, we must admit that the problem—the appropriate approach to systems—is not solved, but this is a very mild way of putting the matter. This is not an unsolved problem in the sense in which certain famous mathematical problems are unsolved. It's not as though we can expect that next year or a decade from now someone will find the correct systems approach and all deception will disappear. This, in my opinion, is not the nature of systems. What is in the nature of systems is a continuing perception and deception, a continuing re-viewing of the world, of the whole system, and of its components. The essence of the systems approach, therefore, is confusion as well as enlightenment. The two are inseparable aspects of being human.

The systems analyst may discover that he is often cast in the role of a missionary. If someone comes to him with a problem—apparent waste and lost time in doing a particular job—and asks how he can use his equipment more efficiently, the analyst may be obliged to say that perhaps an entirely different way of getting the job done would be far better than more "efficiency." The obligation of the systems analyst is to raise such questions. Then he discovers that the brother-in-law of the plant owner makes the existing equipment, and the owner is not about to destroy the market for his brother-in-law's product. The analyst has then to add a relative as a factor in the system, which makes things a bit more complicated. You can see why tough-minded

people who really believe in systems analysis might get around to adopting some Final Solution.

Mr. Churchman has a less disturbing illustration. Suppose the problem is getting a better automobile. Well, the analyst won't just look at the automobile, but will insist on considering what an automobile is supposed to do. *Transport* is the mission of the automobile.

The way to describe an automobile is *first* by thinking about what it is for, about its *function*, and not the list of items that make up its structure. If you begin by thinking about the function of the automobile, that is, what it is for, then you won't describe the automobile by talking about its four wheels, its engine, size, and so on. You will begin by thinking that an automobile is a mechanical means of transporting a few people from one place to another, at a certain prescribed cost. As soon as you begin to think in this manner, then your "description" of the automobile begins to take on new and often quite radical aspects. That's the systems approach to automotive transportation.

What about some sort of hovercraft instead of a wheeled vehicle? If we could float around a few feet above the surface of the earth, we wouldn't ever have flat tires. "And floating automobiles may be technically feasible in the future," says Mr. Churchman.

Definitions are vitally important to the systems analyst. What then is a system? It is, the author says, "a set of parts coordinated to accomplish a set of goals." The job undertaken by the analyst is to identify all the parts of the system, decide what is in the system and what is not—the "environment" is not—and discover how all the parts work and what lubricates their motion, and what gets in the way of accomplishing the goal of the whole system. Both hardware and software (people) are involved in this.

The management scientist is normally a very careful person, and he knows how difficult it is to determine the system's environment and that the problem needs to be reviewed systematically and continuously. Often systems fail to perform properly simply because their managers have come to believe that some aspect of the world is outside the system and not subject to any control. I was recently

watching a television show whose theme was that the poor pay more than the rich for home products. The purpose of the show was to indicate how stores increase prices in poor neighborhoods, and specifically how credit agencies often require the poor to pay far higher interest rates than do the rich. In its thinking about how to overcome the community difficulty, the program urged an education of the poor, so they would not be duped by salesmen of freezers, television sets, and the like. In its analysis of how it comes to happen that the credit system is so unfair to the lower-income groups the program described how the credit system is controlled by banks and ultimately by policy makers on Wall Street. But the program designers did not even think it desirable to educate any of the banks and Wall Street with respect to the impact of their policy on the poor communities of cities. In other words, the program designers had taken the policies of the banks and of Wall Street to be in the environment of the credit system, and hence not subject to any change. From the management scientist's point of view, it's clear that some mistake may have been made here. It might in fact be possible, if one were to employ a systems approach to credit policies, to show how the rather rigid policies with respect to low-income groups generate a series of community problems which themselves badly affect the operation of the community and hence increase the costs of operation of large industries and even of the banks themselves.

Pages are devoted to the sort of problems that arise for the systems analyst when he is asked what might be done to reduce alcoholism.

Suppose, for example, that the school systems begin to initiate courses in alcoholism for youth; then the requirements table will show a large demand for education in the prevention program for those under twenty. But one might find that these educational programs are of no benefit whatsoever, because the causes that drive the youth into drinking are of such a nature that the mere existence of courses available to them in high schools will mean nothing in terms of their decision either to drink or not to drink. Consequently, the mere size of the requirements from any sector of the citizens of the state does not indicate a true measure of performance, and a more precise analysis of benefit is demanded.

And now the management scientist must consider the feasibility of research: Will the state undertake and pay for it? How much money does the state have for all its research—into health,

education, law, and other matters—and how much claim on these funds has alcoholism?

At the present time the management scientist has no technical means to assess the social benefits of research activities, even though the issue is one of critical importance. Thus in the United States, the federal allocation of research funds may be entirely wrong. About 60 per cent of the federal government's expenditures in research and development go to the military, the space program, and to the nuclear research program.

As Mr. Churchman comments: "The management scientist is apt to find himself swept out to sea . . . far from the dry land of feasibility."

The value of this book is in its clear exposition of the way in which a great many intelligent people are trying to think, these days. The systems expert is one who is determined to leave as little as possible out of his calculations. He may have his own sins of omission, but they are or ought to be either deliberate or unavoidable.

COMMENTARY

SCHUMACHER'S MAIN POINT

IN last week's lead article, Philip Morrison was quoted as saying that "societies have means of interacting now which are just not within the experience of the average person." He is speaking of preparations for war but the comment also applies to the operations of large-scale economic enterprise, where, again, we can have only "a very vague understanding of what these interactions mean."

This is certainly the case with respect to the impact of agribusiness on some small farmers in Iran (see page 1). We didn't know that seventeen thousand Iranians were being "pushed off their lands," and we didn't know, either, that chicken growers in America have been reduced to peons by the suppliers of poultry food grain. And we didn't know that the Red Cross and UNICEF were being told last year by Washington not to mount a relief program for the three and a half million Cambodians who the CIA predicted would starve. (See *Frontiers*.)

It is not just that the "national interest" is involved in such goings-on, and that policy-makers get into the habit of dealing in the abstractions of *realpolitik* and forget almost altogether about *people*. We have conscientious watchdogs who keep track of such things and do what they can to spread awareness of objectively immoral happenings. The fact of the matter is that a few paragraphs in papers that reach only a few readers can't have much influence. The great majority are inevitably shut out from any real experience of the effects of "national decision." Everything has become far too complicated, while the symbols which responsible reporters use to tell us about these things, although the best they can find, are just not powerful enough—and perhaps should be glad of that.

The only real solution is to begin more; and more to live lives within a range where the effects of what we and other people do can be recognized

and understood. Only in such circumstances does it make sense to talk about "morality." Morality without knowledge means continuous borrowing of ideas about good and evil, and submission to the inadequacies of propagandists, some of whom may be doing the best they know.

The complexity of our lives puts us in the position of moral illiteracy. This was Schumacher's main point.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

"A CONCEPTION OF THE LEARNER"

IN the General Semantics magazine *Etc.* for the Spring of 1979, Henry J. Perkinson, who teaches the history of education at New York University, performed an exceptional service by reviewing educational theory in the twentieth century, translating its technical language into the common tongue. Most of the trouble we have in understanding what academics say is a matter of terms. Some of this trouble is inevitable and necessary—new ideas have to be named in order to give them content and identity. Piaget, for example, is difficult to understand. To absorb what he says you have to get inside his mind, follow his thought processes, and then make him simple through understanding his terms. Another can do this for you if all you want is to get straight some general ideas.

This sort of help is provided by Prof. Perkinson. His article, "Learning from our Mistakes," sets out to show that the "Transmission" theory of education is wrong, that the "Self-education" theory is right. Arch offenders who launched the transmission theory were Comenius and John Locke. Comenius (1592-1670) said that the minds of children "have to be imprinted with the symbols of knowledge," and Locke (1632-1704) declared the *tabula rasa* doctrine—that the child's mind is a blank sheet waiting for the teacher to write on.

On the other side, John Dewey pointed to the fact that children grow by encountering problems and learning to solve them. People who just "transmit" prevent learning by giving the supposed solutions. Growth results from working out the solutions, not being "told" what they are looking them up in an answer book. Prof. Perkinson says:

In accordance with the theory that we learn from our mistakes, Dewey assigned the teacher the task of introducing students to problems—which I interpret as the task of making them aware of their errors and mistakes. But as a transitional figure who still accepted the transmission theory of education, Dewey also thought that teachers could transmit to students the solutions to those problems, or at least, transmit the method for solving problems.

Next he turns to Piaget:

Piaget has established conclusively what many people have always suspected; namely, that a child does not understand the world the way an adult does. Yet, the child is not in a state of continual confusion. The world does make sense to the child—or better: the child does make sense *of* the world. At each stage of its cognitive development, the child has what Piaget calls cognitive structures through which it understands the world. . . . I will call these cognitive structures "theories."

There are several of these stages of structure, and helping the child to develop them for himself is the teacher's job—not making him learn the formulas containing the results of other people's structures. The teacher becomes able to help by understanding where the child is and what sort of "problems" he needs to be engaged with in order to consolidate what he is learning and prepare for the next stage. Both insight and experience are required to teach well.

In explaining how we learn from our mistakes, Piaget has elaborated a conception of the learner that is diametrically opposed to the conception contained in the transmission theory of education. According to that theory, you will remember, the learner is a passive receptor of knowledge who must often be controlled or motivated to pay attention. But with Piaget, we realize that human beings are active, not passive learners.

In addition to construing the learner as active, Piaget has identified a second characteristic of learners that all the 20th-century educational theorists share: the learner is a creator of knowledge. Human beings are not blank sheets of paper awaiting the imprinting of knowledge, nor are they like buckets waiting to be filled up with knowledge. They are not receivers of knowledge; they are creators of knowledge.

Finally, in addition to construing the learner as an active creator of knowledge, Piaget has explained that the spring of learning is not the desire for rewards and fear of punishment—as the transmission theory would have it—but simply the learner's quest for order. Human beings do not have to be motivated to learn, nor do they have to be controlled. Human beings learn because they seek order; they try to make sense of things.

One great trouble with ordinary education is plain enough. The transmission theory *interferes* with children's efforts to make sense of things by the only means they have as yet developed. So the problems arising in the classroom are largely the result of resistance to and resentment of the

transmission theory. They want to do it themselves, but they are not allowed to. So they grow rebellious and indifferent.

This is the part of the Generation Gap that people can do something about. We might start with the idea that children can, must, and always do create their own knowledge, and that we need to let them and help them to do it, more or less at their own pace.

Why haven't we done this years, centuries, ago? One reason is probably that teachers from before and after Comenius have been imitating the accredited version of how Jehovah did things. He made everybody, then stamped their destiny on them (according to the Calvinists). If you believe that, how else would you go about improving the little blank models as they come out? A creed of belief is, moreover, a transmission practice. Those preachers really *told* the people what to believe, with hellfire and damnation in the wings for negative reinforcement. So we, with perhaps better manners, *tell* the children; we have this habit of transmission, and having had it for centuries, it is not easy to overcome just from reading a book by Dewey or Piaget.

Piaget is a liberator of the mind, nonetheless, because he posed a better "conception of the learner." What good are all the theories of education without an understanding of how people learn? We need to grasp and adopt the doctrine that children don't take or accept their knowledge from us; they create it for themselves.

This is the *Genesis* given us in the Renaissance by Pico della Mirandola in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. Human beings, he declared, create themselves. It is their *nature* to create themselves. And now, about five hundred years later, we are beginning to see the reality of what Pico declared, in the work of a benign French empiricist.

After Maria Montessori and Carl Rogers are honored by Perkinson as champions of the learn-for-yourself theory, he turns to A. S. Neill and Summerhill. It is time that there was a better appreciation of Neill. Neill understood, clearly, and long before most of us, that children *educate*

themselves. He also had *confidence* in them. It is fear that children won't make it that drives us to turn to the "transmission" theory instead of helping them to do it themselves. We think of them as silly putty instead of people with imagination and a zest for independent discovery. (The children without imagination and a hunger to know have mostly been discouraged by the oppressions of ruthless transmission.)

What is a child, anyway? Without the Jehovah theory, we hardly know. But we at least have the pragmatic Piaget, and some day we may develop a religio-metaphysical theory, following Pico, that will meet Piaget halfway. Meanwhile, there is this by Perkinson on A. S. Neill:

We are now at a point to tackle the most common criticism made of Summerhill—Summerhill, the critics say, did not prepare the young to live in the larger society; Summerhill was an island.

It is important to note that this criticism is based upon a transmission theory of social education. That is, it assumes that social education is a process of imposing accepted habits or patterns of conduct. But Neill had an entirely different theory of social education. Neill's theory of social education was not one of transmission. It was the 20th-century theory that we learn from our mistakes. And what students learned at Summerhill was social and moral sensitivity.

This social and moral sensitivity is largely a matter of being self-critical. Summerhill students came to accept their human fallibility. They came to recognize that they sometimes acted in ways (not usually by design) that hurt others. . . . So moral and social education at Summerhill did not consist (as socialization does) of the transmission of a pre-determined set of behavior or habits. It was the development of a moral and social sensitivity which allowed the Summerhill graduates to live in any community or any society or any social group. The graduate can do this because he or she is self-critical. And the reports that have come in about Summerhill graduates confirm this—they have no trouble living in the real world—they continually learn from their mistakes.

Obviously, reform in education consists in reform in the idea of what human beings are and how they learn. Nothing else works.

FRONTIERS

What Has Become of the Men?

IN the December 1979 *Peace & Freedom*, monthly magazine of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Ruth Cadwallader begins an article on what has been happening in Cambodia:

The death of Kampuchea must surely be the greatest genocidal disaster in this generation. And its demise has been hastened by U.S. policy toward Vietnam and abetted by U.S. media coverage. . . . The Kampuchean people are pawns in the deadly game of power politics. In March [1979] it was clear that a food shortage of catastrophic proportions was imminent, and last spring only 5-10 per cent of the rice land was planted. In August the CIA reported that as many as 3.5 million people would starve to death as a result of the poor harvest and that typhus and malaria were decimating the population. . . . Although the State Department is propagating the myth that the Vietnamese are preventing aid from reaching Kampuchea, OXFAM officials deny this and say that the Vietnamese are giving total cooperation.

Diplomats, says Ruth Cadwallader, "chose not to implement the massive food program needed to prevent the virtual extinction of the Kampuchean people," claiming that relief supplies might fall into the hands of the Vietnamese. After some recital of facts the writer continues:

It is well to look carefully into the past in order to judge the present and the future. It cannot be ignored that the Kissinger-Nixon blanket bombing of Cambodia, 1969-73, completely destroyed the infrastructure of a quiet rice-exporting country. This, according to William Shawcross in *Sideshow*, paved the way—along with the manipulation by the CIA—for the Khmer Rouge; the Pol Pot regime was born "out of the inferno that American policy did much to create."

According to John Pilger, the Australian journalist who was in Cambodia last year (quoted in *MANAS* for last Dec. 19), both the International Committee of the Red Cross and UNICEF have been fully aware of the desperate need for food, but by last September had mounted no substantial relief program. The pressure

against action for relief, Pilger said, came "mostly from Washington."

The media, especially the U.S. press and the wire services have pushed the hard line, which has met with a curiously quiet acceptance by the public. How can we so readily forget the healthy skepticism that sifted through the lies and corruption to conclude that Vietnam's liberation war and U.S. involvement in it was an abomination?

Pilger called the situation a "nasty, messy business." It is certainly that. But it represents something far worse. War is now obsolete, and an intelligent people should have recognized this in the Forties, if not in the 1920s. Today the evidence has become overwhelming. Most convincing of all is the decline in moral character of the human beings still able to believe in war and to use it cold-bloodedly as an instrument of policy. Today, the contrast between politicians and conscientious soldiers has become dramatic.

One recalls the use made of his power by General Douglas MacArthur as Supreme Commander in occupied Japan after World War II. Rejecting Henry Morgenthau's punitive plans, after the Japanese troops had been demobilized "he issued a Civil Liberties Directive lifting all restrictions on political, civil and religious freedom." From William Manchester's *American Caesar*, a life of MacArthur, we learn that among his first acts were the abolition of the secret police and its torture chambers, the release of all political prisoners, and an easing of newspaper censorship. Manchester writes that early in October, 1945—

MacArthur handed Baron Kijuro Shidehara, the prime minister, a list of reforms he wanted "as rapidly as they can be assimilated." These were: woman suffrage, "encouragement of the unionization of labor," liberalization of schools to teach "a system under which government becomes the servant rather than the master of the people," an end to "secret inquisition and abuse" by officials, an end to monopolies, a wider distribution of income, and public ownership of production and trade.

MacArthur didn't think much of the new Japanese constitution prepared for his inspection so he wrote one himself, giving the people

"freedoms and privileges they had never known." That constitution has endured, "observed in every particular," for a third of a century. When MacArthur died at the age of eighty-four, in 1964, his last public act before falling into a peaceful coma was "a deathbed plea to President Lyndon Johnson, begging him to stay out of Vietnam."

Great soldiers—and Douglas MacArthur was one—fight wars, but they do not make them. Now that war is indeed obsolete, it seems well to recognize that the qualities of these men will be indispensable to any peace worth having.

We have had other such men in the past. After the fall of Richmond, General Robert E. Lee and General Ulysses S. Grant met in a little village. Bruce Catton relates (in *Never Call Retreat*):

Before he went to this meeting Lee quietly spoke a few words that were both a judgment on the past and an omen for the future. To him, as he prepared to meet Grant, came a trusted lieutenant who urged him not to surrender but simply to tell his army to disperse, each man taking to the hills with his rifle in his hand: let the Yankees handle guerilla warfare for a while and see what they could make of that. Lee replied that he would have none of it. It would create a state of things in the South from which it would take years to recover. . . . This was the last anybody heard about taking to the hills. The officer who suggested this course wrote that Lee "showed me the situation from a plane to which I had not risen, and when he finished speaking I had not a word to say."

The South, as Catton put it, was not to become "another Ireland." Grant had similar stature. He gave these terms to Lee:

The beaten army would not go off to a prison camp, any more than had been the case after Vicksburg. The men would lay down their weapons and then they would go home; and since most of them were small farmers, and the war was about over, Grant directed that each one who claimed to own a horse or a mule be allowed to take one home with him from the stock of captured Confederate army animals. The men would need these beasts to get in a crop and work their farms, said Grant. . . . And he wrote into the terms of surrender one of the great sentences in American history. Officers and men

were to sign paroles, and then they were to go home, "not to be disturbed; by the United States authority so long as they observe their paroles and the laws in force where they reside."

Grant looked at the beaten army and he saw his own fellow Americans, who had made their fight and lost and now wanted to go back and rebuild.

Where are men like that today? Not, we suspect, in the army. Perhaps there are one or two in Washington, but there they have no voice. It might be best for them to go home, too. Character has become an anachronism almost anywhere else.