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THE GYROSCOPE OF LIFE

MATURITY is a word with two meanings when applied to human beings. Used physiologically, it signifies full organic development, but it also means exercising balance and discrimination in human affairs. Practically speaking, in the latter sense "maturity" is a synonym of wisdom, and in current usage is preferred to wisdom because of its less pretentious feeling-tone. To say that a person is mature is more acceptable than saying he is "wise." Yet wisdom is surely the ground of mature behavior. Probably, we say "mature" because we feel able to give examples of good decisions, while "wise" calls for an explanation that is likely to seem extravagant.

Maturity, then, is a substantial goal of human life. It may be the most important, since without it no other achievement is likely to have permanence. Mature persons sort out their objectives and establish priorities for the investment of their energies. They acquire immunity to merely impulsive action. They develop foresight and become able to distinguish between predictions based on mechanistic law and anticipations growing out of insight into character. They go through life with what seems an astonishing grasp of the vast ecology of human thought and feeling, making decisions which often puzzle their friends and associates, but which in the end come out well. While not directly implied by the term, an ethical quality appears in the behavior of the mature human. It is, perhaps, spontaneous, a strain of purpose belonging naturally to the fully developed human, yet it may also be recognized as a practical result of adopting a long-term view. Considering the character of Prometheus, who might be regarded as the Christ of the ancient Greeks, Eric Havelock (in *Prometheus,* University of Washington Press, 1968) contrasts the two brothers of Greek myth, Prometheus and Epimetheus, who typify forethought and afterthought:

> In the old Greek myth "Afterthought" was not only a fool; he became the agent of transmission of miseries to man. But "Forethought," on the contrary, is what it is because it represents the ability to visualize the end beyond the end beyond the end. It is always shaping and then reshaping the means to embrace an objective which becomes wider and wider. Short-range effort fastens on the thing nearest to one's nose; this thing becomes one's own utility of the immediate moment, something private to oneself. As the time range extends, so does the orbit of persons and interests. The mind enters into a calculation. What will this momentary utility mean to my further utility, the day after tomorrow? Then if necessary the first utility is remodeled to suit the second, but the second is meanwhile remodeled to suit a third, till the process is pushed to that point where "utility" takes on the meaning of a common denominator between "myself" and an expanding range of other men's interests. This common denominator automatically involves a harmonization of interests, because the task of predicting what "I" will need, at a further and further and further stage of foresight, can be carried out only by trying to imagine a hundred other relationships in which "I" will be involved and in predicting a thousand actions of others on which "my" needs in turn will depend. The perspective extends, if pushed far enough in time length, to the point where it takes in city and state and family of states, and the estate of the unknown.
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> The conclusion would seem to be that if a man cares to prethink far enough, his forethought becomes increasingly moral and philanthropic in its direction. Man cannot prethink evil, but only good.

This is Professor Havelock's way of showing that Prometheus was not a sentimental philanthropist, but that his sacrifice in behalf of mankind had an intellectual ground. Yet it must be remembered that when he brought the fire of mind to humankind, Prometheus acted out of spontaneous sympathy and compassion. He knew, he said, what he was doing, and he

acknowledged that from the viewpoint of Zeus it was a sin.

If we take Prometheus as the exemplar of true maturity—which is our intent here—we see that such heroic individuals are condemned to loneliness. Their outlook and decisions contradict the short-term view. In the perspective of history, we recognize them as noble-hearted, but when they appear as contemporaries they are seldom understood. The Prometheus character, Professor Havelock suggests, "can be a part of many men; but one which, if they lack Promethean nerve or if they are placed in circumstances where they cannot use intelligence, they conceal in order to be successful."

Of Eschylus' drama, *Prometheus Bound*, he says:

> Its actors, with varying degrees of irony or protest, all give witness that philanthropy is not requited, that the benefactor is evilly treated, that pity given wins no pity in return, almost as though this were a historical law. It is not suggested by the victim that his benevolence was mistaken. He nowhere expresses regret for his policies. Rather, the drama seems designed to reconcile the Promethean to carry this burden of non-requital, as if it were a functional element in his task. And this is true. Working in actual history, the Promethean intellect can never be repaid in kind for its services, for if it were, the services would be recognized in the category of the familiar; and its objectives, to be familiar, would have to be short range. They would therefore lose that touch of imaginative science which makes them Promethean.

There is a terrible irony in the story of Prometheus. He is both the teacher of the arts of civilization and the victim of their misuse. "Modern progress," in the eyes of Eschylus, "is not a romance but a tragedy." Havelock asks:

> Was he not a little wiser than his counterparts among the modern philosophers, the Positivists, the Marxists, or the Instrumentalists, who by their formulas have approved the extension of scientific knowledge and method, and linked it more or less directly to their own dream of prosperity or liberty or equality? Intellectual man, seated at his drawing board and in his laboratory fifty years ago, probing the behavior of matter, seeking to change and to control its temperature, was still a "huntsman of the mystery," but he scarcely foresaw the uses to which his new-won knowledge could be put. The physicists who originally explored the laws which govern the expansion and contraction of gases did not foresee even the industrial application of their researches, let alone the military. The nuclear physicists of forty years ago were just professors pursuing in relative obscurity a mathematical dream, in service to the purest, the most abstract type of science and, it seemed, the most useless. Did any of them in Cambridge or Copenhagen or Berlin or Moscow or Paris or New York, foresee Hiroshima, and the hysteria of nations, and the naked power-politics of the Bomb?

Zeus may have various characterizations. There are times when he seems to play the role of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, who holds things under control and will tolerate no advocates of heroism, no "Saviors" who will upset the balance of his calculated authority, his rule by a combination of threats and promises and calculated deceptions. Zeus represents the power that retains its control by the satisfaction and titillation of short-term interest, which Prometheus sees beyond. Prometheus even sees that Zeus will bring about his own downfall, but refuses to explain how this will come about; and further, surprisingly, he foresees that in the far-distant future Zeus will capitulate, bringing ultimate reconciliation between the Titan and the Olympian. But meanwhile, Prometheus remains the lonely, tortured god whose suffering is unrelieved.

Moving to the scene of history, Professor Havelock finds a notable decline of Promethean vision in the present. He says:

> In the field of human action, in the most vulnerable areas of public policy, there has occurred at the same time a remarkable foreshortening of practical prevision, a sclerosis of the faculty of anticipation of cause and consequence. Lest anyone doubt that a decline has taken place, or think that we are creating an unfair contrast between the normal range of common sense and the theoretic exactness of the sciences, let him compare the detachment, the accuracy and the long-range foresight, the tracing of

> present acts to future consequences, which were employed by those who established the independence of America, and framed her Constitution. Their historical errors were as nothing compared to their historical grasp of what the United States might become, and what path it should follow. They were, in the main, accurate in the arrangements they made for peace, order, and good government of the country, and in their prediction of its place in the world and its relation to its neighbors.

There is this reflection:

> The forethinker, considered as an intellectual phenomenon, is not as rare as we might suppose. His opposite number, the short-range manipulator, is more in evidence, but the two still contend for the ultimate allegiance of the mind of the West. If the sphere of the forethinker has contracted, it is permissible to ask why. The answer may lie partly in continual war and rumor of war, which robs men of the daily ease of thought, and of moral poise and of freedom of choice. But since short-range calculation is itself an irritant which provokes enmity and exacerbates friction and fear, this cannot be the whole answer. War is as much a result, as it is a cause, of the limitations placed on the forethinker.

The explanation, Professor Havelock thinks, is twofold. Humans, having tasted the delights of short-term satisfactions, have become greedy for more, while the traditional reasons for self-restraint have been thrown away along with other "superstitions" of the past. Meanwhile, modern man has been persuaded by science, or what passes for science, of a very low estimate of himself. He is "secretly depressed and defeated by his own insignificance. He retreats and relapses into a half-formulated cynicism, which confines his practical hopes and ambitions to an immediate minute." It becomes difficult, in such circumstances, for Prometheans to remain Prometheans. Except in their private affairs, and sometimes even there, whatever they attempt goes against the grain of the time. Melancholy becomes the companion of their maturity, save for the few able to see still further into the future—to a time when, perchance, there will exist mature communities in which to live.

Mature communities—an idea to conjure with! Are they possible? Did they ever exist? The answers may be partly a matter of goals. Utopias—for mature communities would amount to utopias—succeed, or have succeeded in the past, through rigorous limitation. Arthur Morgan, who gave much thought to the possibility of a utopian society, examined these questions in *Nowhere Was Somewhere* (Chapel Hill, 1946), and in the chapter, "Why Utopias Fail," he said:

> First of all, utopias fail by definition. As has been indicated, if a plan of society or of government comes quickly into successful operation, as did the Constitution of the United States, it ceases to be classified as a utopia. Harrington's *Oceana* almost lost its status as a utopia because it was so widely used in making actual constitutions.
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> Again, utopias are said to "fail" when they picture an order of society so excellent that its realization will require a very long period. The visions of the Isaiahs are of this character. There is a current saying, "If a man is one step ahead of the crowd he is a leader, if two steps ahead he is a disturber, if three steps he is a fanatic." The great utopias of the world are several or many steps ahead of the crowd. The qualities which make them failures at a particular time may be the very ones that give them enduring value.

One sees from this "mature" analysis how difficult it might be to make utopian goals popular! Morgan has a further comment:

> Another very common reason for the failure of utopias is dilution. The early Christian way of life could not be killed by mass crucifixions, by burnings, by feeding Christians to the lions in the arena. But what these terrors could not destroy was undermined by the dilution of spirit which came with multiplication of numbers and with prosperity. Many men and women will join an organization or a movement which promises a better social order. They may have a strong feeling of loyalty. However, as they become economically and socially secure it may develop that what they unconsciously craved was security for the existing pattern of their lives, not a chance to use all their powers to achieve a new pattern. They may begin to talk of personal freedom, meaning freedom to counteract, to dilute, and to destroy the genius of the undertaking they were so eager to join.

These may seem hard words, yet their sense is evident enough.

Let us accept the judgment of Professor Havelock, that the Founding Fathers of the United States were indeed mature individuals who knew how to plan for the future in creating a new constitutional government. With various conservative safeguards, they put into the hands of the people the right and the power to alter the laws of the land. Without that right, the "freedom" for which the War for Independence had been fought would be but an empty word. They knew well the hazards which accompany freedom, and did what they could to protect American freedom from the inroads of power it made possible. What was the chief hazard?

Jacob Burckhardt, the great nineteenth-century conservative historian, named this danger in relation to the French Revolution, which had left the French more vulnerable than were the Americans after theirs. As Gottfried Dietze says in his introduction to a recent (Liberty Classics) edition of Burckhardt's *Reflections on History:*

> He [Burckhardt] credited the French Revolution with having aided such concepts as equality before the law, religious and political equality, freedom of industry, and freedom to transfer real estate. But he contended that on balance it was the source of many evils. To him the French Revolution appeared to be basically as unfree as a forest fire: It would spread, destroying values.
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> This destructive force was inherent in what Burckhardt deemed the Revolution's major evil: its "authorization to perpetual revision." . . . Stable older law that had proved its merit was replaced by legislation in the veritable rage for lawmaking that followed the French Revolution. Often motivated by the honest desire to improve things, lawmaking too often reflected the degenerate desire to change for the sake of change. This perpetual change through the laws would result in an increasing regulation and regimentation of the society and the individuals composing it. . . . This meant that equality would be in a perpetual conquest of liberty, even though the revolutionary slogan "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" had put liberty before equality. Equality through the law would replace equality before the law.

The "perpetual change" now goes on in the United States at an accelerated pace. In his column in the *Washington Post* (printed in the Jan. 18 *Manchester Guardian Weekly*), George F. Will reported:

> In the 1970s, Congress enacted 3,359 laws, which is bad enough. But New York's legislature enacted 9,780. The 50 state legislatures enacted approximately 250,000. (Prof. Irving Younger of Cornell suggests, puckishly, an antidote—a court ruling that "no law is validly enacted unless legislators voting for it have read it.")

We, as other democratic peoples, are forever passing laws, no doubt inspired "by the honest desire to improve things," yet the over-all result is not only "increasing regulation and regimentation," but also a vast network of compensatory measures intended to correct the results of past immaturity and to cushion circumstances which call for ingenuity and self-reliance instead of coarse legislative remedies.

How do individuals grow to maturity? It is evident, first of all, that not very many do. Those who do are the ones who make their own way. They are persons who refuse to be institutionalized, who feel invaded by practically any form of mechanistic "help." Instead of complaining when they are hurt, they learn from their pain. They don't try to reform other people, having all they can do to re-form themselves.

Governments, on the other hand, feel obligated to cater to the wants of the immature, simply because so many of them vote. It is a gross, statistical way of helping people, but it becomes increasingly necessary by reason of the inadequacies engendered in those who are now habitually dependent upon the welfare state. What can be done about this? Very little, from a political point of view. The qualities of maturity cannot be imposed from without, nor is government an appropriate instrument for educating the populace in its virtues. Bad government is able to weaken human character, but its development is independent of any form of external authority.

It might be useful to consider the attainment of maturity as the central drama of human life. A primary element in maturity is self-rule, sometimes called independence. This independence is not a sometime thing. It runs through good times and bad. In good times the mature individual does not waste his substance. In bad times he does not cry for help. His life may turn like a wheel, getting on top after being at the bottom, then going down again. Part of him endures these changes, but he lives at the axis, which neither goes up nor goes down. He doesn't just endure, he is more than a static stoic. He is busy with some engrossing purpose that operates in his life as a gyroscope, keeping him on the level.

There seems hardly any use in talking about the possibility of a mature society so long as the existing society is so largely a cluster of institutions which have grown up to compensate for both the greed and the immaturities of the population. A mature society, if there is ever to be one, will have to begin on a very small scale, slowly coming into being as the efflorescence of a community of mature individuals. Maturity, for the individual, is the capacity to make something worth making out of almost any environment. Maturity, for society, would be a blend of the excellences achieved by the individuals involved, by no means the result of some calculated planning. To paraphrase Erich Fromm, the mature individual is one who has been able to stop wanting what is not good for him, and the mature society, then, would be the society developed under the same rule of natural restraint. Such a society may seem a long way off, but there have been enough past instances of its elements, produced in this way, to enable Ruth Benedict to write a remarkable paper on the subject, and A. H. Maslow to make her principle of synergy the foundation of his utopian thinking.

REVIEW
THE WEARING OUT OF A DREAM

WRITING in *Farewell to Revolution* in 1935, Everett Dean Martin said:

> There are many indications that revolution has accomplished less for liberty than is commonly supposed. Indeed such liberty as the nations of the Western world do possess would seem to be the result chiefly of the advance of learning since the Renaissance. I doubt if revolutions really solve any problems at all. . . . The history of revolutions points to the conclusion that we are not the victims of impersonal economic forces working inevitably through insurrection to social reconstruction, but that rather the generations which have to pass through the experience of revolution are the victims of their own failure to deal with reality, victims of their own lack of understanding of history and of insight into their own motives such as better knowledge of psychology provides.

The book we now have for review, *Fire in the Minds of Men* (Basic Books, 1980, $25.00) by James H. Billington, is a history, as the author says, not of revolutions but of revolutionaries, and it goes a long way toward confirming Martin's brief diagnosis. In a volume of nearly 700 pages, almost a third of them devoted to notes, the author conducts the reader through a maze of revolutionary feelings and outbursts. The idea of revolution, which obtains its coloring and modern meaning from what happened in France at the close of the eighteenth century, seems a kind of mass intoxication. Books like this one may help the modern world to outgrow the dream—which becomes a nightmare—that a single massive stroke of violence will be able to make all things just, beautiful, and good. The idea of revolution is plainly a fever which captures the young, and often the not so young, embodying all the ideal fulfillments sought for by victims of ages of injustice. Since we forget so easily, it may be well to repeat here a set of figures provided by Solzhenitsyn in *Gulag Achipelago,* and summarized by a writer for the *Saturday Review* (April 20, 1974):

> Solzhenitsyn notes that those executed between 1826 and 1906 in Russia amounted to 894. In the revolutionary days of 1905-1908, 2200 executions took place. In Lenin's time, very incomplete figures for the central provinces alone estimate that 16,000 were shot in eighteen months. Even in December 1932, before the Stalin terror proper, he notes the shooting of 265 people at one time in the Kresty Prison in Leningrad. And, in peacetime, at the height of the terror, a minimum of just under a million were executed in two years—that is, a rate about *fifty thousand* times as great as that of sixty years of czardom back to Nicholas I!

Mr. Billington, who heads the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C., is careful about his generalizations, but in his introduction he permits himself to say that "it was passionate intellectuals who created and developed the revolutionary faith." What was that faith? It was the belief "that a perfect secular order will emerge from the forcible overthrow of traditional authority." The general conclusion of his study, stated at the beginning, is this:

> The revolutionary faith was shaped not so much by the critical rationalism of the French Enlightenment (as is generally believed) as by the occultism and proto-romanticism of Germany. This faith was incubated in France during the revolutionary era within a small sub-culture of literary intellectuals who were immersed in journalism, fascinated by secret societies, and subsequently infatuated with "ideologies" as a secular surrogate for religious belief. . . .
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> The revolutionary faith was built more by ideological innovators than by political leaders. . . . Professionalism began later with a different kind of man: an intellectual who lacked political experience, but saw in revolution an object of faith and a source of vocation, a channel for sublimated emotion and sublime ambition. If traditional religion is to be described as "the opium of the people," the new revolutionary faith might well be called the amphetamine of the intellectuals.

Yet as the author says, this isn't fair, for it overlooks the self-sacrificing devotion to the common good that characterizes many revolutionaries. They have endured extreme

loneliness and often death on the scaffold, upheld by their dream. He adds:

> At a deep and often subconscious level, the revolutionary faith was shaped by the Christian faith it attempted to replace. Most revolutionaries viewed history prophetically as a kind of unfolding morality play. The present was hell, and revolution a collective purgatory leading to a future earthly paradise. The French Revolution was the Incarnation of hope, but was betrayed by Judases within the revolutionary camp and crucified by the Pilates in power. The future revolution would be a kind of Second Coming in which the Just would be vindicated. History itself would provide the final judgment; and a new community beyond all kingdoms would come on earth as it never could be in heaven.

The appearance of this book might be taken as evidence that present social and moral awareness is at last putting an end to the intoxications of revolutionary fervor. It is beginning to be understood that means requiring the iron of violence and the blood of the innocent as well as the guilty will always infect the post-revolutionary period. Spiritual dreams cannot be realized through the laws of matter. As Mr. Billington puts it, "Belief in a purely secular salvation leads the modern revolutionary to seek deliverance through human destruction rather than divine redemption."

Even the dream loses its transcendent qualities when brought down to earth and subjected to prevailing human longings. The author speaks of the "occult" inspiration of the secret societies in Germany and France as providing a major impetus to the revolution, and it becomes clear that passionate moral impatience led these half-taught European followers of the Hermetic and Rosicrucian tradition to materialize the spiritual vision of a world transformed by self-reform into the promised land of a politically managed utopia. There was lip service to spiritual growth, but the concrete revolutionary objectives became increasingly mundane. In the closing pages of his Introduction, Mr. Billington provides historical perspective:

> The schools of thought that played the most important roles in developing a revolutionary tradition all saw themselves providing the rationality that would end violence. Politicalized Illuminists promised inner moral renewal messianic Saint-Simonians, an organic order to end revolutionary unrest; Young Hegelians, the peaceful completion of Prussian reforms.
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> The fascinating fact is that most revolutionaries sought the simple, almost banal aims of modern secular man generally. What was unique was their intensity and commitment to realizing them. This faith and dedication made the revolutionary trail-blazers bigger than life—and deeply controversial. Their progress represented, for some, humanity emerging on wings from its cocoon; for others, a malignancy attacking civilization itself.
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> Most Communists and many Third World leaders still profess to believe in salvation-through-revolution; others fear that this belief still retains the power to immobilize intellectuals in the West who lack "the experience of living in a society where that myth has been politically elevated to the status of official doctrine." Others see this secular faith fading away as a "post-industrial society" moves "beyond ideology" into a "technetronic" era. Others may suggest that belief in revolution was only a political flash fire in the age of energy—now burning itself out on the periphery as the metropole enters the twilight of entropy.
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> The present author is inclined to believe that the end may be approaching of the political religion which saw in revolution the sunrise of a perfect society. I am further disposed to wonder if this secular creed, which arose in Judaeo-Christian culture, might not ultimately prove to be only a stage in the continuing metamorphosis of older forms of faith and to speculate that the belief in secular revolution, which has legitimized so much authoritarianism in the twentieth century, might dialectically prefigure some rediscovery of religious evolution to revalidate democracy in the twenty-first.

The capacity to look back dispassionately on past illusions seems a kind of guarantee that we shall never submit to those illusions again, although, as Mr. Billington notes, the critical awakening is as yet far from universal. In some parts of the world, people are still fighting the eighteenth-century revolution—as for example in Cuba a few years ago. Mao-Tse-tung was one of

those able to regard revolution as a "vast plan of universal regeneration" (in the words of Nicholas Bonneville, a revolutionary journalist in Paris in 1789), to be achieved under the dictation of a "tribune of the people." The value of Mr. Billington's guided tour of revolutionary France, then of Russia, lies in the understanding it gives of the men who turned words into revolutionary spells, themselves becoming the enthralled victims of their own glamor.

The journalists discovered "the secret of arousing the masses." Billington says:

> The legitimizing myths of the revolution became inextricably connected with key words drawn from the language of "sighs and tears" and used for incantation more than explanation. . . . Insofar as words played a unifying role in the early years of the revolution, it was through the slogans of orators like Mirabeau and Danton rather than through the structure of arguments. . . . Slogans and images changed with the passions that inspired them; they were fleeting points of reference for a fickle populace.

Literate reformers, the author says, opposed this verbal manipulation of the people, one of them warning that "despotism has passed from kings to committees," but the wrath of primitive energy had been stirred by the sufferings of the people and fierce fires were set by revolutionary incendiaries, so that the holocaust had to run its course. Present parallels to this terrible process will not escape many readers.

COMMENTARY
A NOT-QUITE-LOST ART

IN the April *Atlantic Monthly*, Dr. Lewis Thomas reflects on the state of the medical profession, years ago and now. It hasn't, he thinks, changed much. Reviewing the ideas of Dr. Abraham Jacobi, a leading pediatrician with whom Dr. Thomas's father interned late in the nineteenth century, he says:

> Apart from good nutrition and cleanliness, Jacobi had nothing much to propose in the way of prevention of disease. He did have a great deal to say about the urgency and complexity of treatment. The public expectation then, as now, was that the doctor would *do something.*

In Jacobi's time, while bleeding was going out of fashion, he still believed in it "as a cure for a few ailments but *not* as a universal form of therapy." It is a substantial tribute to the self-confidence of modern medicine that Dr. Thomas feels able to describe the fashionable "cures" applied during this century without fearing to undermine public faith in medical doctors. He even suggests that medical schools add a course titled "Medical Ignorance," since present-day students have to memorize so many facts that they have no idea how much is still *not* known. This *is* his last paragraph:

> The greatest and most expensive of all fads in the history of medicine is today's diagnostic laboratory. Automated, computerized, capable of emitting numerical data at machine-gun speed, ready at the tap of a finger to perform dozens of tests simultaneously, the laboratory has an irresistible charm, particularly for interns, residents, and medical students. The laboratory sheet is the centerpiece of ward rounds. It organizes straws of fact that young doctors, not yet comfortable with what they know, can clutch. Pint after pint of blood, off to the laboratory: if there ever was a therapeutic effect achieved by bleeding, we have it still with us.

How many *Atlantic* readers, one wonders, are also subscribers to *CoEvolution Quarterly?* Not many, probably, yet those who are may read with particular interest the account of the homeopathic mode of diagnosis, and the remedies used in this obscure branch of the healing arts, as given by Dana Ullman in the Spring issue of *CoEvolution.* The theory, history, and practice of homeopathy are described in fourteen pages. Briefly, homeopathy doesn't declare war and attack the disease, but helps the body get rid of it. "Homeopathy," a Harvard researcher observes, "has cured many sick people; how it does so is a question that must be considered by all theorists of healing and treatment." Paracelsus applied its principles in the fifteenth century. Information is available from Homeopathic Educational Services, P.O. Box 5015, Berkeley, Calif. 94705.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
TEACHERS AT BAY

THE weekly news magazine, *Time*—not a familiar source of material for comment here—had a story in its last December 15 issue which cannot be neglected. We learn that a high school English teacher, Cyril Lang, has been threatened with suspension from his job at the school in Rockville, Maryland, for using Aristotle's *Poetics* and Machiavelli's *Prince* in a class of sophomores studying Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Not only did the teacher continue to draw on these works after a warning from the School Superintendent, but he based examinations on them! This, for the Superintendent, became "insubordination and misconduct in office," calling for suspension.

Apparently seeking vindication for the teacher, *Time* asked the president-elect of the National Council of Teachers of English about the charge. "Tenth-graders," he said, "can handle Aristotle." One of the students who took the offending course said:

> I didn't think his class was too hard at all. Mr. Lang had us go over the readings line by line, and I think they added a lot to the course. Some kids hated the course in the beginning, but at the end they liked the work. He treated us like adults. He had standards."

Time adds some scholarly background:

> Indeed, whether or not Aristotle is mentioned by name most high school discussions of *Julius Caesar*, *Othello* and other tragedies build on the characteristics of tragedy originally set out in a few pages of the *Poetics*. Such fundamental questions as "Is Brutus or Caesar the hero of the play?" and "Why would an honorable man like Brutus join in the conspiracy against Caesar?" are good Aristotelian questions. Nor is Machiavelli unfathomable in an age well versed in political manipulation. Merely asking if Caesar, Cassius and Brutus appear honest, awe-inspiring or venal amounts to considering these characters in Machiavellian terms.

What did the school authorities think about such matters? Well they didn't; thinking is not an approved function for school superintendents, judging from *Time's* report.

> To school officials the issue was the system, not the subject matter. Says School Superintendent Andrews: "I don't know whether Lang is right or wrong about the books. But in a public school system, you have to have reasonable procedures to determine what is to be used, and the superintendent has to uphold them." Montgomery County has approved Aristotle's *Poetics* only for senior honor students. Asked Andrews: "What if a teacher decided to use *Playboy* or *Hustler?* I think the school system has an obligation to set standards and to set the curriculum."

Mr. Lang is prepared to go to court if the school board decides not to reinstate him. *Times* article concludes:

> "I made a premeditated intellectual decision to continue teaching the way I had," he says. "There's nothing wrong with the genetic makeup of these students. It's the educational system that's declining. We are bearing witness to the triumph of mediocrity."

Well, with the backing of *Time* and the National Council of Teachers, to say nothing of ordinary intelligence, Mr. Lang will probably get his job back, but the real problem remains. It seems inevitable that a great many teachers who have their own ideas on how to teach will lack the spunk to buck the system. The children are the losers.

Why is the "educational system" run that way?

There are various answers, but one would be that administrators try to run the schools as if they were businesses. The consolidation of the schools—making big ones out of several little ones—was partly a "business" recommendation, although it was claimed that more diversified studies would be available in larger schools. Today, after about fifty years of this policy, consolidation is at last being recognized as "an exercise in futility." Such, at any rate, is the comprehensive conclusion of a report issued in 1976 by the National Institute of Education, part of HEW. The report is titled *Economy, Efficiency,*

and Equality—the Myths of Rural School and District Consolidation, prepared by Jonathan P. Sher and Rachel B. Tompkins. These writers go over the whole story—why consolidation was undertaken, who argued for it, what they said, what they did, and finally how it worked, or rather failed to work, around the country. Copies of the report, full of tables and critical analysis, may still be available. Here are concluding paragraphs:

> People came to believe that the values of consolidation were supported by scientific truth. They got their new buildings and fancy equipment. They got highly-credentialed teachers, more specialists, and more professional administrators—some of which they probably would have eventually received anyway. Not surprisingly, their taxes continued to increase, as did per pupil costs.
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> But even with all their spending and all their new resources, rural people still did not generally receive that which they wanted most dearly—better life chances for their children. Those chances are more surely affected by the education and income of parents, the social and economic character of the community, the investment of time, energy, and love by many adults, and plain luck, than they ever are (or were) by the size, newness, or variety of the local school.
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> Consolidation was deemed a panacea. However, we now discover that panaceas are every bit as mythical in rural education as elsewhere in society. It's an important lesson.

Why does what happened in Rockville, Md., follow from consolidation? It follows because bigness, as Schumacher pointed out, requires more and more administrative decision and permits less and less individual judgment by teachers. Eventually, the administrators get delusions of grandeur, and then you have practical indifference to common sense in teaching, as in the case of Mr. Lang's superintendent.

There are elements of humor in Mr. Lang's adventure—which is doubtless why *Time* picked up the story—but it has antecedents of a much grimmer sort. One of them is described by Jonathan Kozol in *Death at an Early Age.* Back in 1964-65 he was teaching the fourth grade in a segregated Boston public school. One of the things he did was read poetry to the children. They liked the verse of Langston Hughes, a black poet, and best of all they liked his "Ballad of the Landlord." Kozol likes it too. As he says:

> It is a poem which really does allow both heroism and pathos to poor people, sees strength in awkwardness and attributes to a poor person standing on the stoop of his slum house every bit as much significance as William Wordsworth saw in daffodils, waterfalls and clouds. At the request of the children later on I mimeographed that poem and, although nobody in the classroom was asked to do this, several of the children took it home and memorized it on their own. I did not assign it for memory, because I do not think memorizing a poem has any special value. Some of the children just came in and asked if they could recite it. Before long, almost every child in the room had asked to have a turn.

To make a long story short, he was fired. The poem wasn't in the assigned curriculum. Kozol relates:

> The woman to whom I spoke said the reason was the use of the poem by Langston Hughes, which was punishable because it was not in the Course of Study. . . . No literature she said, which is not in the Course of Study can *ever* be read by a Boston teacher without permission from someone higher up. When I asked her about this in more detail, she said further that no poem anyway by any Negro author can be considered permissible if it involved suffering. . . . The only Negro poetry that could be read in the Boston schools she indicated, must fit a certain kind of standard or canon. The kind of poem she meant, she said by example, might be a poem that "accentuates the positive" or "describes nature" or "tells of something hopeful." Nothing was wanted of suffering, nothing that could be painful, nothing that might involve its reader in a moment of self-questioning or worry.

So Kozol was discharged and told he could never "teach in the Boston schools again." The children—not the other teachers—struck. The story of what happened is told in Kozol's book, which also includes the "Ballad of the Landlord."

FRONTIERS

Gardening for Beginners

THE sixth booklet in Ecology Action's Self-Teaching Mini-Series, titled *Beginning To Mini-Farm* ($2.75), is missionary in purpose. The other booklets, along with John Jeavons' book, *How To Grow More Vegetables*, instruct in how to become an organic gardener. This one tells you why. There are two reasons for doing it. The first, in order of appearance, is that in a comparatively few years—if we go on as we are now—there won't be enough land fit to grow food for the people on the planet. Hunger will be felt practically everywhere. Even the U.S., with its vast areas devoted to agriculture, will not be immune:

> The United States has become like a Third World country—mining its natural resources (especially the soil) in order to pay for imports. If this practice continues, the U.S. may no longer be able to export food by the year 2000 (or even sooner). Currently, agricultural exports pay for one-half of our imported energy, and the recent U.S. Government-sponsored "National Agricultural Lands Study" reported in 1979: "Ten years from now, Americans could be as concerned over the loss of the nation's prime farm lands as they are today over the shortages of oil and gasoline."

The other reason for becoming a gardener is that this eventually may be the only sure way of providing good food for one's family, and also a way of making a modest income. Finally, it is a good way to live.

A few generations ago, Americans who felt cramped by population growth could "go West" and start out afresh. With all that land of the North American continent, anyone could make his way by persistent hard work. No more.

> Iowa, which produces 10% of the U.S. farm output and 20% of the U.S. agricultural exports, has been losing at least two bushels of topsoil for each bushel of grain produced for the last ten years. In another agricultural state, California, one inch of topsoil is being lost every 25 years—while it takes nature 2,000 years to rebuild an inch of topsoil there.
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> Secretary of Agriculture Robert Bergland was asked on "Face the Nation" in November, 1978: "Can we continue our present energy and chemical intensive agricultural production without eventually wearing out our resources?" His answer was that we cannot. We are, he said, "on a collision course with disaster. . . . Our water supplies are being reduced; we have whole watersheds where the ground reserves are being depleted; and we have mined our soil. In fact, the erosion of America's farm land today is probably at a record rate, and this simply cannot go on."

Interestingly, the World Bank has lately expressed interest in big-intensive farming methods—used and developed by Ecology Action (and others)—because it is becoming evident that the yields can be as high as those of the Green Revolution, but without the large amounts of capital needed, and without the high input of energy, water, pesticides, and special seeds. The need for change in the way we grow food is at last becoming manifest, even to some Department of Agriculture officials. The facts are plain enough:

> If the entire world raised all of its food by United States' agricultural, marketing, and packaging techniques in the year 2000, approximately 1.5 to 2.5 times *all* the energy used in the *world* for *all* purposes today would be required just to provide people's nutrition. This would be an agriculture which requires 6 to 20+ calories of fuel energy to produce one calorie of food energy—in contrast with the Chinese manual big-intensive wet rice food production system which produces 50 calories of food energy for each calorie of energy used in its production.
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> About 80% of the world's water consumption occurs in food raising. The world is already beset by both water and *clean* water shortages and the situation is expected to get much more pressing. A few examples are:
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> —One part of the United States Midwestern Region rests on top of a great underground reservoir. Currently, this Ogallala Aquifer is being pumped out from western Nebraska to northern Texas at the rate of 48 inches annually, while rain is only replenishing it at the rate of one quarter inch per year.
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> —50,000 pounds of water (6,250 gallons) are required to "grow" one pound of meat eaten in the U.S.

—In the Third World, women often spend much of their day just obtaining water.

Moreover, 50% of the world's forests have been cut down in the last 25 years and have not been replanted. One Rockefeller Foundation-sponsored study indicated that if the present course of cutting continues without change, the remaining 50% could disappear in the next 40 years. These lost forests pose several problems. Nutriments brought up from the deep subsoils into the trees' leaves and then dropped to enrich the soils are no longer present. The soil micro-climate created by the trees' shade, leaf mulch, and roots is lost resulting in erosion by wind and rain. Water tables drop without the trees' transpiration, with subsequent loss of easy access to water. Important reserves of fuel and building materials disappear. Lastly, one-third of the world's people are experiencing a different kind of energy crisis—not enough firewood. (Half the world's people still depend on wood for two of their most basic needs: cooking their food and heating their homes.) After spending 4 to 6 hours searching for wood and brush, children return home where their families must often burn animal manures as well as the wood they have found to cook food and, perhaps, heat their home. These manures would be better utilized as fertilizer to nourish crops and as a source of organic matter for the soil. Organic matter nourishes microbiotic life in the soil, helps hold the soil structure together to prevent erosion, and retains soil moisture long enough so that crops can grow and the water table can remain stable.

Needless to say, food prices will continue to go up. Having a garden may eventually become a necessity, not a hobby. The steps required for making one are in this booklet and other Ecology Action literature. The publishers of this material are committed and serious. They write without excess verbiage. They offer a kind of warning to beginners, which seems important enough to reproduce here:

There are those who, having never had the opportunity to work with Nature and living in a world of instant results have difficulty comprehending the many years it is taking to develop the sustainable mini-farming system presented in this booklet. . . . The patience aspect of beginning to mini-farm for a living cannot be over-emphasized. Begin slowly. Begin to understand your soil and climate. As a living system, it is different from an instant cereal or a computer kit. Any farmer takes years to feel competent with his or her farm. . . .

Although mini-farming is smaller, the learning curve perhaps shorter, and the use of resources considerably less (per unit of food produced) than in traditional agriculture, the understanding that it takes two to five years to build up one's soil (usually the latter) and one to five years to build up one's skill (usually four or five) is of tantamount importance when beginning.

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