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THOUGHTS ON GETTING THINGS DONE

IT is a convention of criticism that after you have described some gravely reprehensible action, behavior, or opinion, you draw back and ask, wonderingly: How it is possible that so wrong a thing could have been done, said, or allowed to be done? The assumption is that since practically everybody with a grain of common sense and ordinary decency would have thought and acted otherwise, all right-thinking people will agree on the changes that need to be made to put things right.

This is a form of rhetoric which helps in escape from expressing the defeatism that no one wants to read or write except for cynics who, since they have a fixed low opinion of "human nature," take delight in further evidence of the follies that shape our ends. There is, apparently, a deep compulsion felt by writers to assume an optimism they are not able to feel. On the other hand, who feels able to stamp out hope? So, in the last paragraph or chapter they urge us to gather our courage, gird up our loins, and return to pursue the needed course of action with renewed resolve. What else is there to do?

In a review of a book by Ronald Clark on nuclear weapons and what should be done about them, Thomas Powers recalls the early efforts of scientists to institute "controls" of these weapons. The physicists, in particular Niels Bohr, hoped that informing the world in detail of the horrors that had become possible would deter the nations from inaugurating a nuclear arms race. Commenting (in the May *Saturday Review*), Powers said:

> Genuine international control of the bomb would have required a profound alteration in the sovereignty of nations a single-minded and determined effort to surrender autonomy in the one field—that of arms—which has always been the most jealously preserved of all national prerogatives. . . . and when the United States finally did offer a detailed plan for international control, not even its authors believed for a minute the Russians would accept it. Nor were they at all sure the United States Senate would ratify the necessary treaty instruments if the Russians did accept it. It is even open to question whether those whose plan it was—Dean Acheson, say—*wanted* it to work. The ordinary people of the world—the citizens who carry the guns in war, or worry about those who do, who live in the cities threatened with incineration by nuclear weapons—may have learned something about the futility of arms from World War II, for a time at least, but their leaders did not. If anything, they came out of the war more deeply dependent on arms for security than ever.

Then, in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* for January of this year, E. P. Thompson, the British historian who founded the European movement for Nuclear Disarmament, addressed those who still have hope that the governments of the major powers will join together to eliminate the possibility of nuclear war:

> It is supposed that the very same political forces which have made these insane structures will suddenly unmake them; the weapons systems and their political and security support will de-weaponize themselves. This will not happen. And what this analysis should indicate is that it is precisely at the top of both opposed societies that agreement to de-escalate is most impossible. . . . It is here the advice of scientists and even of traditional military minds is jammed by a concatenation of competing interests and bureaucracies. It is here that maintenance of cold war becomes an actual *interest*, and an instrument of policy in the subjection and control of client states, the legitimation of other kinds of adventure, and the suppression of dissent. It is here that the futile exercise of "balance," of contests for "face," of "posture," of endlessly protracted negotiations about minutiae, and of worst case hypotheses, govern every encounter.

Mr. Thompson's indisputable logic, obviously, is what needs to be pointed out to those whom the *SR* reviewer called "the ordinary

people of the world." But if this were done effectively and successfully, what would happen? "Ordinary people" seldom have the habit of self-reliant and independent action. They are used to relying on authority, on waiting for the leaders in power to do what is best. Prof. Thompson, however, is convinced that only by arousing the populace at large to their unfamiliar responsibilities can disarmament—and thereby peace—be made into a possibility. Interestingly, he would have had agreement from a former American president, Dwight D. Eisenhower, who said toward the end of his career:

> Some day the demand for disarmament by hundreds of millions, will, I hope, become so universal and so insistent that no man, no men, can withstand it. We have to mobilize the hundreds of millions; we have to make them understand the choice which is theirs. We have to make the young people see to it, that they need not be the victims of the Third World War.

Who, one wonders, makes up this "we," to whom President Eisenhower referred? On whom does the responsibility fall to inform the ordinary people of the world that they cannot rely on their governments, their leaders, their publicists, their educators, to do the things that will assure a warless world—that, in fact, nearly all those people can be depended upon to do exactly the opposite?

Why can't we at least have help from the educators? Well, we can. That is, help can be expected from *some* educators—E. P. Thompson is an educator who teaches the young in a British institution—and there are others who think as he does. One of them in this country is John Holt, who does not hesitate to speak his mind. Holt is especially explicit, on the folly of supposing that *organized* education is interested in telling the truth about war. In a letter printed in MANAS for May 27, Holt said:

> Viet Nam has come and gone. Whatever lessons we might have learned from it, we have learned—mostly that this country, on the whole, is incapable of shame, remorse, repentance. Meanwhile, the idea of using the public schools to teach children that our government did wrong in Viet Nam is naive beyond imagining. . . .
>
> I'm reminded of something I saw the other day in the February *Bulletin* of the National Association of Independent Schools. It was an article about teaching the Holocaust in schools. Some teachers were for it. There was much support in Brookline, which has a strong, affluent, and liberal Jewish population. But in another affluent suburb, Arlington, the entire History department of one public school voted against teaching a unit on the Holocaust. Reason: it encourages students to question authority. Said one teacher: "When my government tells me to go to war, I go." Far from being ready to look at American war crimes, these people don't even want to look at German war crimes, because they don't want to admit into their students' minds for a second the idea that anything that authority tells you to do might be wrong.

These remarks add to and illustrate the meaning of what Prof. Thompson said about the people who cannot be expected to oppose nuclear armament. The bomb and its various fiendish offspring have been available for a number of years, now, so that the processes of making them, planning their use, and justifying them as weapons to be held in readiness, involve a great many people. As Thompson puts it:

> The cast has now become larger: it takes in public opinion, the media, the military, the politicians. In sum: the weapons systems—and their "laboratory" technicians, lobbyists and public relations operators—attract a large concentration of resources and scientific skills of the host society and are then transformed into huge inertial forces within that society, whether bureaucratic or private in expression. . . . And behind the politicians is the pressure of those hundreds of thousands of electors who "are making their livings" doing things which were promoted years before by their political predecessors. It is the past which imbues the arms race with its inner momentum.

There are two ways to consider the picture here suggested. One is to say that if you try to work with existing institutions, you run up against the fact that every institution becomes recognizable only through its severely limited functions. If you work for or with an institution, what you do has to fit in with the options the

institution provides. Otherwise the institution will oppose or get rid of you. Take for example Niels Bohr, a physicist who enjoyed universal respect when World War II broke out. He was Danish and reluctant to put his inventive genius and talents at the service of either side in the war. According to the *SR* reviewer, this bothered the Germans and the Allies so much that they both considered assassinating him. And of course, there was the case of J Robert Oppenheimer in the United States. When he opposed a program of further development in nuclear weapons, he was "tried" and found wanting in reliability for service to his country. Institutions, it seems clear, are likely to be of little help in serious peace-making.

The other way to look at E. P. Thompson's account of the supporting "cast" for nuclear weaponry is in terms of the infrastructure it represents. They are far from free to think for themselves. Even the "ordinary people" out there are not a lot of independent individuals. They have their alliances and liens, their connections and their vulnerabilities, their dependencies, habits, and hopes. Yet they still have more freedom than office-holders and corporate employees. They have more independence—or opportunity for independence—than people involved in large organizations. This is why present-day writers speak more and more of the vitality and promise of "grassroots" enterprise and initiative. Actually, freedom seems in large part to depend upon not being a part of the infrastructure of some big institution, whether industrial or political.

A recent account (in Environment for March) of the fortunes of the environmental movement in Japan makes this clear. After describing how polluting Japanese industries evade their responsibility when brought to court, the writer, Toshio Hase, says:

> Nor are the labor unions very sympathetic to the antipollution protectors. This is partly because Japanese unions are formed on the basis of employment, not occupation, so each company has its own union. Thus when their parent corporation is accused of pollution damage, the unions support their employers. This was particularly evident in the Minimata mercury poisoning case, where the workers were anxious to keep the plant open and hence were hostile to the protests from the sufferers and their supporters.

Of the press, this Japanese writer says: "When the problem under consideration is well known, a petition can have influence on a government, but it must be recalled that the newspapers are partly controlled by advertising revenue from established interests and are not noted for their environmental sympathies. Generally speaking, the smaller the legislature the more likely a petition is to be successful." This seems the rule:

> When a controversial development scheme is being proposed, the argument can become an issue in local elections; e.g., in a town where a nuclear power station was planned the candidate opposing the scheme won the local election. But in the national Diet, *every* party supports economic growth and material improvement. There are few votes in favor of a steady-state economy in Japan.
>
> The Japanese environmental movement is thus normally spatially fragmented and politically weak because the growth ethic is so well incorporated in the governing establishment and because the government itself has numerous corporations which promote major development. The courts also generally rule in favor of development. . . . Even the newspapers do not promote environmental arguments as much as they did before the 1973 OPEC embargo. Many Japanese people, possibly because they do not know any better, are beginning to accept existing levels of pollution.

Toshio Hase writes in conclusion:

> Pollution-caused ailments are widespread, with 62,000 people officially recognized as sufferers. Water bodies, land, and food are contaminated by a variety of toxic substances. Children have lost their former play areas and beautiful scenery is made ugly by ill-designed structures. . . . The burden falls most harshly on the poor, while the rich can usually buy themselves out of the worst of nuisances. . . .
>
> The quality of the nation's environment is deteriorating markedly, yet the members [of the movement] feel helpless, largely cut off from the mainstream of Japanese political culture. . . . industrial production is to be doubled in ten years and

> a great variety of new development schemes are proposed. . . .
>
> The government also tries to divide the movement by offering compensation to victims of nuisance and alienating those who continue to oppose. Leaders are arrested for minor criminal offenses and often face unusually long detention and costly, delayed court trials. Development interests and government officials are loath to meet with group leaders, special laws may be enacted to permit a particular development to proceed, and unsympathetic newspaper coverage tends to imply that the movement is really only about violence.

It is—be it noted—in *spite* of these obstacles that the growing strength of the environmental movement in Japan has become noticeable enough to deserve a long article in an American magazine. Japanese women, who are perhaps the least involved in political or economic organizational relationships, have been especially effective in working for reform. The Democratic Women's Union, which has 5,000 members, "is not affiliated with any political party and publishes a weekly newspaper which reports on environmental activities."

The blocks encountered by the environmentalists in Japan are of course the same in other parts of the world. Comparable difficulties exist in the United States, as readers of *Not Man Apart* (monthly organ of Friends of the Earth), *Rain,* and other journals are well aware. Reporters covering pollution in cities in the United States have been driven from their jobs and out of town by the wrath of paper-mill workers and local industrialists. What seems possible from all this is that the very "helplessness" of the least organized may become the source of greatest strength in the future. The capacity to abandon violence, to reject the means of exploiting the earth and its resources, to find or devise ways of living that are harmonious with natural processes—these are essentially individual, not organizational, potentialities. The infrastructure developed by such decisions and the resulting patterns of life are characterological, not bureaucratic. In short, to be, in Henry Beston's phrase, "on the side of life," is to make some fundamental discoveries about how people are able to recover power over their own lives. It begins, as Gandhi proposed, with refusing any sort of power over anyone else. If the spectrum of human behavior, at very nearly all levels and in all remembered centuries of the past, can be taken as a guide, the only free human beings have been those who would never compel or coerce, but sought for others the voluntarism they chose for themselves.

This takes us to a poem by Emerson—

> There are two laws discrete,
> Not reconciled,—
> Law for man, and law for thing;
> The last builds town and fleet,
> But it runs wild,
> And doth the man unking.

Was he right? He was certainly right in his conclusion, for the world is now filled with powerless people—the "ordinary people" who have lost authority not only over their governments but over their lives. They are indeed "unkinged."

But are there actually different laws for things and humans? And would they be—one law for the objective order, another for the subjective?

Emerson was not alone in making this proposal, although few have put it so succinctly. For example, in *Bodies in Revolt* (1971), Thomas Hanna said:

> Man *uses* that which he perceives to be *unlike* himself but he searches for a *common understanding and common harmony* with that which he perceives to be like himself. The former perception leads to manipulation and authentic technology; the latter perception leads to understanding and authentic science.

If we accept this statement, then we are obliged to admit that the quest for a "common understanding and common harmony" has barely begun. There are plenty of writers who seem to have adopted in part both Emerson's vision and Hanna's analysis, but who try to work out some shrewd compromise under the terms of which

we'll be able to push a little faster to understanding and harmony. They would like to find a way to *manipulate* a change of heart. They see well enough that all long-term alterations in the direction of common human action will have to be preceded by a reform in attitude, but feel that we haven't much time to wait. So, in the last chapter of their books they speak of the importance of reorganizing ourselves for political and educational purposes. And some of them have fairly elaborate plans.

Well, no doubt a little organization is necessary, to extend some forms of action. Yet a look at the great religions of the world may be clarifying. We might start with the proposition that the most effective religions have been the least organized, and add that the most organized religions are the least religious.

The Buddha, perhaps because he knew that organization was inevitable, did not oppose it, but he gave no instructions on how to proceed. In *Sarvodaya—The Other Development* (Vikas, 1980), Detlef Kantowsky draws attention to the perils of organizational apparatus in the Sarvodaya movement of India and Sri Lanka, and remarks:

> Buddha himself was fully aware of these facts when during his last days he told Ananda, his devoted attendant, that he had not given any thought to how the Bhikkus should organize themselves after his passing away. Had he not told them the full Truth? Had he ever tried to withhold anything in the closed fist of the teacher? Certainly not, so each of them could be his own support and refuge. Similarly, Gandhi had warned against an administered and organized form of "Gandhism." In his ideal state everyone should be his own ruler and should rule himself in such a way "that he is never a hindrance to his neighbor."

In the West, the Quakers are the least organized of all the Christian forms of religion, and they have been most valuable citizens wherever they live. On the matter of weapons, which are symbols of one sort of organization, the story is told of George Fox, the Founder of the Society of Friends, that when young William Penn, an aristocratic youth who had become a Quaker, asked him what he should do about his sword—part of the dress of the seventeenth-century gentleman—he said, "Wear thy sword as long as thee can, William."

REVIEW
TWENTIETH-CENTURY WISDOM

ONE needs little excuse to turn for relief to the books of Erich Kahler. He is a writer—a historian, and much more—who writes without presumption yet seems to know practically everything! This impression, of course, is misleading. He doesn't know everything, but is careful to identify so well what he does know that a species of literary omniscience seems just around the corner. In short, Erich Kahler writes with superb control, which may indeed be a working equivalent of knowing all, since it means that you know what you need to know.

In *Out of the Labyrinth*—his titles have a monumental quality, others being *Man the Measure*, *The Tower and the Abyss*, and *The Meaning of History*—which, issued by Braziller in 1967, is probably the last thing he published, he describes the contents in his preface: "The essays all deal, from different aspects, with the relation between what may be considered permanent in man and what changes with the expansion of political units, the technological transformation of our ways of life, the unification of our globe, and the enlargement of human consciousness."

What could be more important to attempt? The urgency of ordering our thinking in this way comes out clearly in the essay, "The Reality of Utopia," which begins with the failure of the dream of the Enlightenment. The optimists of the eighteenth century were convinced that since Man was now on the way to understanding the universe, he would soon be able to control it and make events come out in the way they were planned for the general good. "That," he says, "was how the future looked."

> But something very different sprang from the Industrial Revolution. A huge production of commodities, devices and conveniences arose, swamping the very presence and consciousness of man and hemming him in with a new and much worse tyranny. This was fulfilled by means of two irrepressible and inseparable procedures: technicalization and collectivization. Gradually, a technical machinery of life set itself between man and man, installing mechanical links that created between men a natural schism and alienation and a new and artificial relationship.

The prerogatives of individuals were lost in the crowd. Kahler's illustrations embody both delicacy and power:

> The movies, to a great extent, supplanted the theater. In the theater there arises between the players on the stage and the audience for whom they play, a distinct, momentary, living relationship, a direct mutual reaction from person to person that exercises a particular influence on every single performance. In the movies the actors play in front of a machine, their only medium of communication with a completely anonymous, world-wide, timeless, and placeless mass audience.

Other observers have made this discovery. Ivan Illich, for example, has explained why he will never again appear on television. The artificial, mechanized version of conversation with an "interviewer" destroys for him the relation he seeks with his hearers. How, he asks, can I speak intelligibly to, say, five million human beings at once? I become, he said, a caricature of myself, an amplified, technical echo. Kahler continues:

> Between the customer and the artisan of former days—tailor, cobbler, cabinetmaker—between man and his neighbor, there existed an intimate relationship based on personal confidence. Today, however, between customer and supplier we find the machines of mass production and of mechanical transport; and the inhabitants of a modern metropolis have more in common with the members of their particular trade or profession than with their individual neighbors, whom they scarcely even know. On the other hand, these same machines of mass production, distribution, and communication, have segregated the community into specialized and differentiated producer and consumer groups. And between these groups, between the remotest nations and communities throughout the world, they have established so closely woven and complex a pattern of interdependence that the individual completely loses sight of his place in this vast network.

The point toward which Kahler is moving—and which many now know at first hand—is that

today neither control nor leadership is possible from a human point of view. "Since no single man—be he ever so close to political developments—can understand or master the total situation, the true course of events (in spite of all Fuhrers and dictators) has become leaderless, a pure automatism. In fact, the Fuhrers and dictators are a direct result of that leaderlessness; they are the immediate makeshift for the lack of human leadership." The plight of the individual:

> Entangled in such gigantic mass relationships, the individual sinks to hopeless insignificance, impotence and ignorance. In the tumult of our daily life and business in a metropolis, where press and radio, with their ceaseless waves of urgent news, sweep away even the experiences of yesterday—in this overwhelming turmoil, no sort of connected memories, and hence no coherent knowledge, can be built up. Through the rapid communication and interaction of events, everything occurs much faster than before. In fact, much more occurs, and that more complicatedly; and all that occurs (more even than actually occurs) is perpetually recorded. Even that which does not really occur, but is announced falsely either on purpose or through careless haste, produces by reaction real occurrences. Research and technical discovery have become a gigantic, permanent procedure that constantly injects into daily events a stream of innovations and alterations that touch closely the very foundations of our living.
>
> But who knows about this? Who can be aware and keep abreast of all this? What single scholar is capable of keeping in touch with the sciences immediately bordering on his particular field, let alone of achieving a general picture of our whole present-day knowledge? What single man, even in our governments and parliaments, has a comprehensive view even of the momentary situation, let alone of what is looming up from the depth and breadth of daily events to form the future?

Kahler draws his conclusion:

> This trend implies a decline of morals, a moral degeneration. For morality is nothing else but the attitude toward the whole—positive or negative, furthering or hindering and disturbing. When knowledge of and orientation in the whole are no longer possible, then the individual must, in his consternation, be carried away by the nearest wave of impulse or opportunity. To whomever human history and events are no longer a living whole and a oneness, to him the brotherhood of man cannot have any meaning.

This is indeed much of the meaning of our part of the twentieth century. In a few words Kahler has articulated the bewilderments of mind and the agony of heart which afflict the best human beings of the time, and who are reacting in the only way possible: they are simplifying their lives and obtaining as a result a view of the world which can be understood, because it springs from a focus of moral insight and determination.

Kahler discusses many things; in the essay, "What Is Art?", he undertakes to define what others have claimed to be indefinable. Why is art indefinable? It has become so, one professor has said, because the word now confuses identity with quality. In effect, there can be no "bad" art, because if it is bad, it isn't art!

This seems a useful comment, and that professor, if he is right about present habits of language, has helped us to understand our confusion. No adjective serves a purpose unless it has degrees of application, and when it is restricted to the inflexible meaning of a noun, communication is over.

In his discussion, Kahler starts out by admitting that exact definition of art may be impossible—anything with the factor of human creativity in it defies final definition—but, he says, "we should not give up seeking a clarification of what art really is."

> If we carefully take account of the artistic achievements and experiences up to our time, we may even reach a less than personally or doctrinally subjective, but a merely epochally subjective conception; that is to say, a concept that, by assembling the principal features of art as developed up to the present stage, may claim an approximate general validity *as of today.* If we succeed in making use of all the artistic material, all individual and group efforts up to now, such a concept should be more inclusive than any previous concept.

Since this chapter has twenty-seven pages, we can't show how Kahler moves point by point to his conclusion, but several of his distinctions

deserve notice. First of all, a work of art presents a "visional whole." And it is also symbolic, with all that this implies. A work of science is literal, not symbolic.

> And it is the same symbolic quality, particularly its source, the conquest of new reality, that marks the difference between art and *craftwork.* Craftwork, good or bad, is routine work adapted to practical uses, and whatever innovation it carries is purely technical. To be sure, technology and techniques also change our reality, but these changes are just the external exploitation of the findings of science and the ventures of art. They lack all cognitive support.

This in no way disputes the possibility that the craftsman may rise to the rank of artist when his work takes on holistic and symbolic meaning. Art, Kahler says, reaches a "new reality in a suprarational, visional, metaphoric way . . . accordingly the reality it presents is a microcosmic whole reflecting a macrocosmic whole. . . ."

There is more, but stopping here seems desirable. He concludes:

> As a summary definition of art I propose the following: Art is a human activity which explores, and hereby creates new reality in a suprarational visional manner and presents it symbolically or metaphorically, as a microcosmic whole signifying a macrocosmic whole.

This seems a sentence illustrating at once both the value and the limits of definition.

COMMENTARY
ANNOUNCEMENTS

IN recent issues of MANAS there have been several quotations from E. P. Thompson, the English historian who is cited this week on page one. It may be of general interest that in a recent issue of the *WRL* (War Resisters League) *News* (339 Lafayette Street, New York, N.Y. 10012), in a column listing new literature available, there was this announcement:

> No. 1332—*Protest and Survive*
>
> This pamphlet, by E. P. Thompson, which was originally a whole issue of the *Nation* magazine, is intended to break the silence about the Soviet-U.S. nuclear arms race, and to galvanize opposition to the current madness. For the world to survive, the nuclear powers must disarm. To disarm, a protest movement must be mounted, here and in the Soviet bloc, against possibility of nuclear annihilation. (26 pp., $1.00.)

Equally relevant is the following:

> No. 515—*Handbook for Conscientious Objection*
>
> "For twenty years, from 1952 to 1972, the *Handbook for Conscientious Objectors* was the most reliable book on conscientious objection under the U.S. draft law. . . . GCCO has just published the 13th edition of this Handbook, completely revised and expanded, including additional chapters, a complete rewriting in simple style, illustrations, and a revised discussion of draft procedures which takes into account changes since the last *Handbook* was published in 1972. (218 pp., $3.00.)

East Coast and especially New England readers may be glad to learn that the first of the annual Schumacher Lectures in the U.S., sponsored by the E. F. Schumacher Society (Box 76, RD 3, Great Barrington, Mass. 01230), will be held on Oct. 24 at Mt. Holyoke College, South Hadley, Mass. The principal speakers will be Wendell Berry and Wes Jackson, and Hazel Henderson, a friend and associate of Mr. Schumacher, will tell of his vision and his work. Robert Swann, president of the Society, will be heard on "A New System of Land Tenure in America," and Robert Rodale, publisher of *Organic Gardening*, will take part in the discussions. As meetings and conferences go, this may be one of the best—both informing and inspiring.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
EXTRACTS

THIS week we draw on John Holt's *Growing Without Schooling* (a back issue, No. 19) for both substance and variety. In addition to reports from home-schoolers (parents who teach their children at home), the editor reviews books he likes and sells by mail. In a notice of a new edition of *Grimm's Fairy Tales* ($5.35 plus postage), Holt quotes another (Pantheon) version of Grimm because it has an introduction by Padriac Column. The Irish writer says of Grimm's collection:

> . . . In the place where the story-teller was, the coming of night was marked as it was not in towns or modern houses. It was so marked that it created a different rhythm. There had been a rhythm of the day, and now there was a rhythm of the night. A rhythm that was compulsive, fitted to the daily tasks, waned, and a rhythm that was acquiescent, fitted to wishes, took its place. . . .
>
> The prolongation of light meant the cessation of traditional stories in European cottages. And when the cottages took in American kerosene or paraffin there was prolongation. Then came lamps with full and steady light, lamps that gave real illumination. Told under this illumination the traditional stories ceased to be appropriate because the rhythm that gave them meaning was weakened.
>
> Other things happened to put traditional stories out of date. Young people went to schools and learned to read. . . . The newspaper reader took the place of the traditional storyteller, the man of memories.
>
> A real culture, as we know, is all of a piece and all its parts fit together. Household stories imply work done in a household and work done in a household implies household stories. In western Ireland today a loom or a spinning wheel is a sign that one can find a traditional storyteller in the cottage or in the neighborhood.

This recalls, somewhat more than obliquely, a passage by Edward Abbey in *Desert Solitaire* on some reflections out in a Utah desert where he sat by a fire in the night.

> Again the fire begins to fail. Letting it die, I take my walking stick and go for a stroll, down the road into the thickening darkness. I have a flashlight with me but will not use it unless I hear some sign of animal life worthy of investigation. The flashlight, or electrical torch as the English call it, is a useful instrument in certain situations but I can see the road well enough without it. Better, in fact.
>
> There's another disadvantage to the use of the flashlight: like many other mechanical gadgets it tends to separate a man from the world around him. If I switch it on my eyes adapt to it and I can see only the small pool of light which it makes in front of me; I am isolated. Leaving the flashlight in my pocket where it belongs, I remain a part of the environment I walk through and my vision though limited has no sharp or definite boundary.

Here, you could say, Abbey is warding off "tunnel vision." Returning to his trailer to write a letter, he switched on his generator.

> The engine sputters, gasps, catches fire, gains momentum, winds up in a roar, valves popping, rockets thumping, pistons hissing up and down inside their oiled jackets. Fine: power surges into the wiring, the light bulbs inside the trailer begin to glow, brighten, becoming incandescent. The lights are so bright I can't see a thing and have to shade my eyes as I stumble toward the open door of the trailer. Nor can I hear anything but the clatter of the generator. I am shut off from the natural world and sealed up, encapsulated, in a box of artificial light and tyrannical noise.
>
> Once inside the trailer my senses adjust to the new situation and soon enough, writing the letter, I lose awareness of the lights and the whine of the motor. But I have cut myself off completely from the greater world which surrounds the man-made shell. The desert and the night are pushed back I can no longer participate in them or observe; I have exchanged a great and unbounded world for a small, comparatively meager one. By choice, certainly; the exchange is temporarily convenient and can be reversed whenever I wish.

This suggests what might prove a good rule to follow: Take no irreversible steps!

People who are fond of "manuscript printing" and use it because it seems easier to write and read will be delighted by John Holt's confession:

When I was little I was taught cursive handwriting, found it easy and pleasant to do, and soon developed a small and fairly neat handwriting that, at least when I am being careful, has not changed much to this day.

Teaching fifth grade, and seeing many students with slow, tortured, scrawly, irregular "cursive" writing, I began to wonder why the schools insisted on teaching cursive. Still believing then that schools had good reasons for everything they did, I decided it must be because cursive was so much faster than manuscript printing. Since my own handwriting, particularly when I was using it a lot, was very small and quick, I could easily believe this. Secretly I thought that probably very few people could write as fast as I could.

One day Holt had his fifth-grade children engage in a writing race. How many times in half a minute could they write "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog"? They did it again and again, not competing with each other but with themselves.

The children enjoyed these contests, in which, since everybody improved, everybody won. . . .

When I began walking around the room looking at the papers which the children eagerly stuck in my face to show their improvement, I received a shock. Three of them could apparently write faster than I could, even though they used manuscript printing, one sloppily but two quite neatly. . . . I proposed we write some more quick brown foxes. They gladly agreed. Back at my desk, I made my pen *fly*. This time we would see! Alas, the results were the same I was still the fourth fastest writer in the class. . . .

So why do we teach and demand cursive in the schools? I have no idea. Pure habit, I guess. . . . Later I learned that school cursive, first called Palmer handwriting, had begun as an elaborate decorative script invented for engraving in copper, a very slow and painstaking form of writing that had nothing to do with speed. Someone, somewhere, decided that it would be nice if children learned to write like copperplate engraving, and the rest, as they say, is history.

A home-schooler writes to tell how a child followed up on the project of plant identification:

Our nine-year-old really took off on this idea of self-directed "study." He took "trees" as his first project. What a fascinating subject it turned out to be. When "school" was "out," he wasn't ready to quit. . . . With just a suggestion or two, he had a neighbor cut him a slice of one of the logs in his woodpile. He now has one side beautifully sanded (his first experience with an electric sander) and is preparing to varnish it so the rings will show. I got some library books and we tramped through our woods gathering leaves and identifying trees. . . .

And a mother in Illinois relates:

J. P. has a new motivation for learning to read—I'll bet you've never heard this one before. I use a lot of chemicals—paint thinner, stripper, stains, varnishes, paint, etc.—that J. P. is not allowed to mess with. When he gave me an argument a while ago, I told him that when he was old enough to read and understand the warning labels, he could help me when I use "owie" chemicals. Would you believe that that little twerp immediately began to take an interest in all the words he came across and made me tell him what they said? I think he just found out that he doesn't know how to read. Now when I read him stories, he'll pick out a word he hears and ask me which one it is. *Winnie the Pooh* didn't inspire him, but turpentine did.

Holt's paper, *Growing Without Schooling*, is available (at the moment) for $15 for six issues, $24 for twelve—729 Boylston St., Boston, Mass. 02116.

FRONTIERS

A Private World Government

A READER has supplied us with a copy of a short article by Robert Engler (author of *The Brotherhood of Oil*) which appeared in the pamphlet, *Oil . . . Energy and Arms,* issued by the Riverside Church Disarmament Program (490 Riverside Drive, New York, N.Y. 10027). Mr. Engler probably knows as much about the oil business as anyone alive, so that what he says is worth listening to. First, then, his outlook, as given in this pamphlet:

> I have been arguing for about the last twenty-five years that the oil industry made up the first world government—a private world government. . . . The United States has accepted a view of the world as essentially a series of storage tanks: Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and even Alaska and Appalachia. Now most of us do not think that way, but if we review the energy policy of the United States as well as a number of other industrial societies, we discover that that is exactly their pattern of thought. The energy system is part of a highly integrated private system. The search for oil in Alaska and the Gulf of Mexico is not necessarily to find and develop oil, but rather to find it and stake it out, and then turn up the valves wherever it is most expedient for private industry. We must remember that the private system treats this basic resource essentially as a commodity, and this illusion that a basic resource can be treated as a commodity has meant the justification of the profit motive. The energy industry has decided that not a drop of energy should be produced in the world which is in excess of an effective market demand. In other words, they are deciding how much energy is brought into the market and at what point.

Mr. Engler has this view of the oil business as a result of long observation. He isolates the controlling motive, often concealed by flurries on the surface of current events:

> The bankruptcy of the American position is that the President's [Carter's] objective is to bring the American price of oil up to the OPEC price, and it is interesting that with all the thundering against the "wicked Arabs," there is absolutely no pressure on the United States and its leaders about the high price. In fact, I have argued for some years that just as the nightmare used to be about competition in the energy industry, the haunting fear now is that these "wicked" OPEC people might threaten the Western economy by lowering the price of oil. That is the weapon of OPEC—not the threat of higher prices. We could deal with that. The whole synthetic fuel program, which depends heavily upon natural fuels, would be threatened if they lowered the price of oil. The argument for shale and all the other synthetics is that when the price reaches a certain level, *then* it will be time to introduce them. . . .
>
> OPEC itself should be understood as more than simply a villain in this picture. It arose in the '60s, not because of any outrage over treatment of the Palestinians, but because the big oil companies were arbitrarily raising and (mostly) lowering the price of oil in the fields. They did not even consult with the producing countries, even though the economies of many were totally dependent on the oil price. . . .

The "brotherhood of oil," Mr. Engler says, is the author of U.S. Government policy:

> To this day, most of the basic information about energy comes from the corporations. Presidents of the United States have made speeches claiming new energy policies, using corporate documents with only the covers changed. . . . A bright young lawyer in Washington recently used the Freedom of Information Act to trace the whole Carter energy policy. He literally traced much of it to private contractors in the Department of Energy who are also employed by the oil and the gas and the nuclear industry. . . . The young lawyer concluded that if we had a "Truth in Government Act," we would list the Department of Energy in the Stock Exchange—an accurate conclusion.

And now, Engler says, "we are prepared to accept rationing, strangulation theory, war, and peace based on an information base which is in the hands of not evil people, but people who view energy as a commodity."

> The issue is not that we *must* have oil. The issue really is that we want the oil on terms that inevitably invoke the wrath and frustration of most peoples of the world. We need to do more than search for alternatives. We must fight the political forces that now frustrate efforts to turn to alternatives; . . . and want to make sure that all alternative energy is introduced on the same terms as the present energy system, which means the same industrial or controlling system. We simply must stop treating resources as commodities: . . .

In comparatively few words, Mr. Engler has outlined the dimensions of the problem. The people who are using so much power in behalf of themselves and their stockholders—the latter, indeed, are many—are not, as he points out, "evil people," but people who think the way most Americans have been brought up to think. They now—they and all the rest—need to learn to think of the earth and all its inhabitants as a living organism. Unless the common mode of thinking changes, the operations of those in power will not change. This is the difference between politics and education.

At present, it seems fair to say, some powerful Americans don't care much about the rest of the people in the world. For example, we used to have a rule that enabled the government to control the export to other countries of poisonous pesticides and other chemicals banned from use in the United States, but the executive order to that effect was revoked last February. The story of what these products have done and are doing to human beings is told in *The Circle of Poison* (Institute for Food and Development Policy, 2588 Mission St., San Francisco, Calif. 94110, $3.95). In their first paragraph, the authors, David Weir and Mark Shapiro, say:

> This book documents a scandal of global proportions—the export of banned pesticides from the industrial countries to the third world. Massive advertising campaigns by multinational pesticide corporations—Dow, Shell, Chevron—have turned the third world into not only a booming growth market for pesticides, but also a dumping ground. Dozens of pesticides too dangerous for unrestricted use in the United States are shipped to underdeveloped countries. There, lack of regulation, illiteracy, and repressive working conditions can turn even a "safe" pesticide into a deadly weapon. According to the World Health Organization, someone in the underdeveloped countries is poisoned by pesticides *every minute.*

Obviously, the brotherhood of oil reaps a substantial part of the profits from such illness-and-death-dealing enterprise. Yet, as we said, they are not really evil men. They are just ambitious Americans who regard the resources of the world as their commodities and the peoples of the world as their market. What will it take to change their minds?

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R. M. LAW
Circulation Manager