

LEVELS OF DISCOURSE

THE passage of centuries sometimes seems to have made an enormous difference in the course of our lives, and then, at other times, it appears that the fundamental qualities of human existence have changed hardly at all. This, we could say, is a way of recognizing that there are different levels in our lives—external levels and internal levels—and that these, too, may sometimes seem widely differentiated, and, also, again, about the same. The changes, whether actually superficial or "real," account for the way in which we define our problems and issues. And these definitions, of a certainty, do change. This is to say that our circumstances also change, and the changes may be very great.

For philosophers—for those who try to understand the meaning of our lives—the great question is: What control do we have over the course of our existence, and what matters most in the confrontations with experience? Obviously, there is little agreement among humans as to the answers to these questions, whatever the philosophers say. Yet there are great blocks of common opinion concerning the answers. As Hannah Arendt put it years ago (in an essay in the *New Yorker* for Feb. 25, 1967):

The Socratic proposition "It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong" is not an opinion but claims to be truth, and though one may doubt whether it ever had a direct political consequence, its impact on practical conduct as an ethical precept is undeniable; only religious commandments, which are absolutely binding for the community of believers, can claim greater recognition. Does this fact not stand in clear contradiction to the generally accepted impotence of philosophical truth? . . .

To the philosopher—or rather, to man insofar as he is a thinking being—this ethical proposition about doing and suffering wrong is no less compelling than mathematical truth. But to man insofar as he is citizen, an acting being concerned with the public welfare rather than his own well-being—including for instance, his "immortal soul" whose "health" should have precedence over the needs of a perishable body—the Socratic statement is not true at all.

She goes on:

And since we know from the Platonic dialogues how unpersuasive Socrates' statement remained for friend and foe alike whenever he tried to prove it, we must ask ourselves how it could ever have obtained its high degree of validation. Obviously, this has been due to a rather unusual kind of persuasion; Socrates decided to stake his life on this truth—to set an example, not when he appeared before the Athenian tribunal but when he refused to escape the death sentence.

And this teaching by example is, indeed, the only form of "persuasion" that philosophical truth is capable of without perversion or distortion. . . .

For Socrates, we might say, to perform acts contrary to what he believed—contrary to his nature—was simply impossible. Needless to say, his decision to die instead of compromising has exercised wide influence, on individuals, not on governments. But when you read in the *Phaedo* Plato's reconstruction of his last hours, talking with his friends, he didn't sound as though he thought he was making a big sacrifice. He was just doing what was natural for him, and he consoled his friends as well as he could; they needed it, he didn't. If he stood for an ideal development of a human being, firm in his resolve, his friends had a long way to go to be like him. His decision-making was at a different level from theirs, although he tried to explain what he did in terms they would understand.

While he was in prison, awaiting the day when he was to die, his friend Crito visited him to urge him to escape to some neighboring city, where there were plenty of youths in need of instruction. Socrates replied by saying:

Look at it this way. Suppose that while we were preparing to run away from here—or however one should describe it—the laws and constitution of Athens were to come and confront us and ask this question, Now Socrates, what are you proposing to do? Can you deny that by this act which you are contemplating you intend, so far as you have the

power, to destroy us, the laws, and the whole state as well? Do you imagine that a city can continue to exist and not be turned upside down, if the legal judgments which are pronounced in it have no force but are nullified and destroyed by private persons?

How shall we answer this question, Crito, and others of the same kind?

Socrates went on, elaborating all that Athens had done for him, and the obligations of a just man to obey the law. The laws and the constitution would point out, he said, that—

there are very few people in Athens who have entered into this agreement with them as explicitly as I have. They would say, Socrates, we have substantial evidence that you are satisfied with us and with the state. You would not have been so exceptionally reluctant to cross the borders of your country if you had not been exceptionally attached to it. You have never left the city to attend a festival or for any other purpose, except on some military expedition. . . . You have been content with us and our city. You have definitely chosen us, and undertaken to observe us in all your activities as a citizen, and as crowning proof that you are satisfied with our city, you have begotten children in it. Furthermore, even at the time of your trial you could have proposed the penalty of banishment, if you had chosen to do so—that is you could have done then with the sanction of the state what you are now trying to do without it. But whereas at that time you made a noble show of indifference if you had to die, and in fact preferred death, as you said, to banishment, now you show no respect for your earlier professions, and no regard for us, the laws, whom you are trying to destroy. You are behaving like the lowest type of menial, trying to run away in spite of the contracts and undertakings by which you agreed to live as a member of our state.

Whatever the reason Socrates really went out of his way to achieve the penalty of death, these were the reasons he gave to Crito—reasons his friend could understand, and to which he finally submitted. But while Crito was silenced by Socratic argument and respect for his teacher, he probably didn't change his mind. That is, confronted himself by the same decision, he doubtless would have escaped to avoid death. At the same time, Socrates made a deep impression on him, we may think, as he does on us all.

There is, then, a level of discourse, Socratic or Platonic, in which decisions are argued and reached wholly in terms of principle; yet both Socrates and Plato, in arguing in this way, by no means supposed that the majority of men would be persuaded by their arguments. Their mission, it now seems, was to keep alive in the memory of man at least the recognition that a few, at least, would live according to the standards and values they declared. As Plato put it at the end of the ninth book of the *Republic*, the city in which these standards prevail as the rule may be nowhere on earth, but exist only in ideal, yet the philosopher will live by its laws—"The politics of this city only will be his and of none other."

This is a level of being and action which changes little or not at all. Plato's dialogues were set down some twenty-four hundred years ago, but virtually all the questions raised and issues discussed are well within our understanding. They have to do with human nature and obligation and with ideals which we are capable of understanding and applying.

Some two hundred years before Plato's time in Greece, a Chinese sage, Lao tse, was born in the province of Chou. We have only legendary accounts of him, such as that after his mother conceived him he remained in the womb for sixty-two years and was white-haired, able to speak immediately, as soon as he was born. He was therefore called "Old Boy," the meaning of Lao tse. Little is known of his youth. His later years were spent as Keeper of the Archives at the Court of Chou. He married, had a son, and at a venerable old age disappeared through a pass leading to the West. The Keeper of the Pass asked him to set down his wisdom, so he wrote his now famous book, the *Tao Te Ching*, containing 5,000 characters, and departed. There are thirty-six English translations of this book, and those who read it soon understand why.

This is but one of a number of legendary accounts of Lao tse, although the one most frequently repeated, and as Holmes Welch remarks in his study of his book, *The Parting of the Way* (Beacon Hill, 1957), "We shall never be able to write a life of the author of the *Tao Te Ching*."

Welch then asks:

Is this a great loss? I think not. The important thing about the book is not its author, but its ideas. One of its ideas is the value of anonymity. . . . The book really had to be anonymous. That may be why it mentions no dates, no places, no persons, no events.

The *Tao Te Ching* is filled with ambiguity, paradox, and vague suggestion, yet modern readers find it fascinating. Some renderers of the text see in it many parallels with Plato, others list passages in the New Testament which seem virtually the same—in both idiom and image—as counsels in Lao tse's text. Lin Yutang thought the Chinese sage was Emersonian and other scholars discerned a metaphysics in it. There are apparently grounds for all these readings. Welch says:

Lao Tzu tells us, for instance, that our response to hatred should be *te* ["virtue is an inadequate rendering of *te*]. By this he means that when we are attacked, in most cases we should be passive and in all cases we should regard the attacker with love, moderation, and humility. This makes an impossible demand on social reflexes that have been conditioned for survival and success. And so Lao Tzu tells us that our social reflexes must be erased. But to erase them because it is logically correct is no easier than to respond passively to attack because it is logically correct. There is only one answer: to dissolve reflexes and responses alike in a stronger experience, or rather in our memory of it. To do nothing when our cheek stings from the blow, we must remember the time when we knew nothing—a Nothing so overwhelming that the stinging blow is faint, and anger seems irrelevant.

Still, although Taoism becomes easier to practice as we approach its mysteries, it does not insist that we approach them. That is why the *Tao Te Ching* was written in levels, to yield a little or a great deal, depending on the needs of the reader. To the reader unprepared for inner experience it offers practical advice, which, to the extent that he is able to take it, will help him. For the reader with mystical inclinations it points a way which he can follow as far as he may wish. But to all men it offers a degree of comfort—a cold comfort, it is true, not like the comfort of a prayer to a merciful God who may, if he chooses, suspend the order of the universe for the sake of a single penitent. Tao can never be suspended. Dark, infinite, and unchanging it is something a man can depend on to the end of his

days. Rationally, intuitively, he can know it, accept it, and bring himself into harmony with it, and mystically he can penetrate to something darker behind it. At each step his comfort will grow, until at last he feels that "mysterious power" which all of us need to feel, confronted by the hostile immensity of the universe. There is little that we cannot face then. It is a wonderful, almost a miraculous thing that for Lao Tzu this hostile immensity becomes the Mother, symbol of all that is warm and protective.

Thus, in writing levels into the *Tao Te Ching* Lao Tzu did not seek to discourage people from reaching its highest level, but to entice them towards the highest level of which they were capable. Society is not to be envisioned as a hierarchy of castes—layman, ruler, and Sage. The layman can be a Sage and the Sage a ruler. But since the Sage is the "perfected man" he exemplifies *te* in all its senses. Therefore we have license to make his attributes the ideals of the ruler and the layman. We may not say of a passage, "Here Lao Tzu is talking about the Sage and so this is inapplicable to the man in the street." Lao Tzu hoped that everyone would become Sage-like. Then society might come back to what it was in the beginning. That is why the ruler must keep his people ignorant and desireless. For if they are ignorant of money and power and feel no desire for them, there will be fewer impediments to their following the Way. They will be able to practice inaction with increasing inwardness. In the end they may return to the Absolute Tao.

Lao tse wrote, Welch says, "in a time of troubles" very much like our own. The Chinese call it the "Period of the Fighting States," with ruthless, cruel wars between the feudal princes. That is why, finally, it is said, Lao tse departed in disgust for the West. At the end of his Foreword, Welch says:

Lao Tzu wrote the earliest anarchist book in East or West. He had something to say to all who are troubled today by the growth of the State. His book is also the earliest we have that explicitly recommends the policy of returning good for evil. Since it does so on logical rather than religious grounds, it has something to say to all who would like to see that policy more widely accepted. Finally, here is the book, among all the world's scriptures, which addresses itself most specifically and radically to the problem of how to prevent war. Few people are likely to accept its proposals, but many may want to know what they are.

During the past fifty years, a great many Americans have reached the point where they may be able to take Lao tse seriously. Earlier in this century, he seemed to advocate becoming lost in some sort of anti-progressive Dark Age. Today he stands for the kind of awakening that is everywhere beginning to take place. Welch says:

In America today competitive life is becoming unbearable—at least it is for some of us, and may be for more of us than are aware of it. Like Sisyphus no one can get his stone to the crest of the hill. Each year's production must be higher than last. If we are a foreman now, we must become a superintendent. If we are Chairman of the Board we must retire and start a new business. Or if we do not win promotion, still we must strike for higher wages. Our standard of living must always go up. It can never get to the top. If only it could get to the top! If only we did not have to buy a Buick next year because we bought a Pontiac last! If only we did not have to build what President Eisenhower called "a stronger and better America—of greater security and constantly increasing prosperity for us all"! To such subconscious protests Lao Tzu answers: You need not.

Lao Tzu turns upside down the pyramid of values and offers us the material for a comedy. Failure becomes success. The common laborer, the swillman, and the tramp turn out to be more successful than the Chairman of the Board. But the Chairman benefits by the inversion of values.

Welch ends his book with these two paragraphs:

It is reasonable to suppose that *some* clever people will survive the next war. From a Taoist point of view, therefore, the only hope can be that all other surviving human beings will be so confirmed in their stupidity that cleverness cannot lead them astray. Dolts, bumpkins, and savages, they will dully and persistently refuse to rebuild what they have seen to be a self-destructive way of life. They may even—though it is a dubious hope—teach clever people to be as stupid as themselves. Then the Kingdom may come.

The "Kingdom," according to Lao tse, is described in his book:

Men will "live in small settlements, refusing to use machinery even though it requires ten times, or a hundred times, less labor. They will value their lives and not go far away. There will still be boats and cars, but no one will ride in them. There will still be

small arms, but no one will drill with them. They will have no use for any form of writing save knotted cords, will find sweet savor in their food, beauty in their clothes, peace in their homes, and pleasure in their rustic tasks. The next settlement may be so near at hand that one can hear the cocks crowing in it, the dogs barking, but the people will grow old and die without ever having been there."

One small caution should be applied in reading Lao tse. When he speaks of keeping people ignorant, he means not spurring them to acquisition and ambitious undertakings—indifferent to the motives that have been made into the mainspring of modern life. He rejects "teaching" in the same way that Carl Rogers rejected it, long ago, having discovered that each one must actually teach himself. There are times when, put into modern or poetic prose, Lao tse sounds almost sardonic, but after reading the section in Welch's book on the extreme difficulties in translating archaic Chinese writing, one learns to take liberties with the fixed meanings of many of the terms in our vocabulary, and to read what we think were Lao tse's intentions. We may feel uncertain about this, but not after absorbing his leading ideas. We do not take "parables" literally, but endeavor to read their meaning. So, also, with Lao tse.

By these means, we may come to understand the world's greatest instructors, and to recognize the various levels at which they spoke, in full understanding that all individuals, as well as large sections of the population, must go at their own pace, and that there is a level of wisdom that applies at each level of learning, on each plateau of achievement. By gaining this understanding, we may be able to help others as well as ourselves.

REVIEW

SEEING INDIA BY CAR

THE book we have for review this week—*The Walls of India* by George Woodcock, with delicately dreamy watercolor paintings of temples and palaces by Toni Onley, both Canadians of note—is a handsome volume published (\$29.95) by Lester & Orpen Dennys (78 Sullivan St.) in Toronto. Unhappily, the depth and charm of this book reminds us of the provincialism of most serious journals published in the United States, which seldom devote space to works originating in Canada. Years ago, by reason of the friendship of one of the MANAS staff with the painter, Lauren Harris, we gave attention to a stunning retrospective presentation of his work, published by the Canadian Macmillan, filled with reproductions of his paintings, faithful to the originals in all respects, and were later informed by the publisher that no other magazine in the United States reviewed the book. The excellence of the production was beyond debate, and the worthiness of the artist was attested by Northrop Frye, who wrote a thoughtful introduction, with the text by Harris. Our printer, the Cunningham Press, a specialist in fine color reproduction doing work for museums and art gallery catalogs, praised the Harris book as a landmark of achievement in the graphic arts, but there was no mention of its appearance in any journal in this country. There are and have been fine publishers, exceptionally good writers, and notable artists in Canada, but only the writers, in time, gain recognition in the United States.

The present volume, *The Walls of India*, is a model of typographic excellence, fine color reproduction, and general good taste, deserving wide attention. There are twenty-four paintings. While watercolor is a light and delicate medium, these paintings, done "on the spot" in India, seem to capture the ageless spirit of Indian architecture—Islamic, Hindu, and Tibetan.

George Woodcock and his wife Inge have now visited India five times, the first in 1961. He was then drawn there by his admiration for Gandhi, which helped to shape his anarcho-pacifist attitude. As a result of that visit he wrote *Faces of India*. *The Walls of India* grew out of his last visit, in 1982-83. After twenty-one years he found India changed, grown more uniform, more like the rest of the world, yet still filled with interest. Other books grew out of the other visits. After his fourth visit, in 1969-70, he wrote *Mohandas Gandhi*, now saying that it—

was less a biography than a disguised dialogue with the master who had played such a crucial role in my own mental development and whose influence had led me in the beginning to his country.

I recognized that India had rejected Gandhi. Yet this very rejection had released his teaching to the world, where his defiance of militarism and of state glorification helped to shape the protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s, which in turn developed their own versions of his methods of *satyagraha*, nonviolent noncooperation.

The Walls of India begins with what happened four years ago to a Sikh friend in New Delhi, Patwant Singh, an Indian writer and editor of an architectural journal, who had been of great help to the Woodcocks during their first visit, introducing them to people they needed to meet. Toward the end of middle age, Patwant suffered a heart attack, from which he recovered, although it left him wondering about "the power of *karma* and the relation between present and future lives." He visited the villages near his country farm, finding them "poorer than he had thought, the land arid or desalinated from bad irrigation," and the threat of bad health was omnipresent.

Returning from one of these pilgrimages into the foreign land that was his own country, Patwant had an experience that resembles any number of incidents from the legends of the Buddha's life. From his station wagon, Patwant saw a group of peasants by the roadside, obviously in distress. In their midst a young woman lay in agonized labor; she would die, it was evident, if she did not get help quickly. Patwant told the peasants to lift her into his car and had his driver go straight to the military hospital in Delhi; the

woman's life and her child's life were saved. The incident seemed like a sign. Patwant decided immediately to create a small hospital so that such a situation might never more arise among the peasants of Ghamroj.

Now there was no stopping the man. He wangled a piece of land from the government and persuaded his architect friends to design an open campus of small pavilions that could be made with local materials. He got top doctors and nurses to cooperate, raised the money to run it. Woodcock and his wife, and a friend who was along, got involved. They have started the Canada India Village Aid, to produce other such medical centers and hospitals in India. The royalties from the sale of *The Walls of India* will be given by the author and illustrator to this group (CIVA).

The book is a delightful travel book, yet the underlying mood plays a part in its quality. The first real stop of the travelers was Rajasthan—more remote from Western influence than other regions of India. It is a northern province bordering on Pakistan where live twenty-five million people scattered over 340 square kilometers of desert, hill ranges, and small mountains. Its name means the abode of kings. The inhabitants claim descent from the Aryan chieftains who descended from central Asia more than three thousand years ago to take possession of the Indus valley. They were the heroes who figure as Kshatriyas in the *Mahabharata*. They became generals for the Moguls after the conquest and later the best Indian regiments under the British. The journeying of the visitors, other than by plane, was in two cars rented from a bearded and turbaned Sikh who became the driver of one car and secured another driver. They went from place to place in this arid, rugged country, stopping now and then so Onley could paint the scenes that attracted him.

It should be said that Woodcock condenses a great deal of history in a few words, telling about the various achievements of the Mogul monarchs. One of these, Jai Singh, who built the city of

Jaipur, capital of Rajasthan, erected a great observatory.

Jai Singh was, among his many other accomplishments, a notable amateur astronomer. He corresponded with European astronomers and is said to have corrected the errors in some of their calculations. He had Euclid's *Elements* and Napier's *Logarithms* translated into Sanskrit for the use of Indian scholars. And he was so enthusiastic about the pursuit of astronomy that he constructed not one, but five of his extraordinary observatories; the first, built in 1724, was in Delhi, the others in Benares, in Ujjain, and in Mathura, all of them centers of Brahmin or Islamic scholarship. . . . They are projections in gigantic masonry of scientific calculations about the nature of the heavens, and though they obviously make great use of Hindu mathematics (a noble and largely unrecognized tradition), they remind one less of modern European astronomical equipment than of the great stone instruments for observing the movements of the sun and the planets that were constructed by the megalith builders in distant prehistoric times. For each instrument is in fact a massive structure, the biggest among them a sundial whose gnomon is a masonry triangle ninety-eight feet high, creating a shadow that moves thirteen feet an hour.

Enroute to their last stop in Rajasthan, the Rajput town of Bikaner, they passed through a desert that seemed endless. Woodcock writes:

The desert continues, sand and stone and sand, broken by small sights that in the monotony take on the shining self-sufficiency of surrealist images. The picked-over skeleton of a bullock by the roadside, white kites prising off the last morsels. A gazelle buck staring at the car from fifteen feet off, then doing a leaping turn to bound away over the desert. A herd of camels—perhaps a hundred—guarded by two small boys as they crop the wretched scrub. A frieze-like procession of women, red clay pots balanced on their heads, walking over the sand to a village whose round storage huts looks like Basuto kraals and whose little cubical houses with smoothed mud walls could have been lifted from anywhere in the Sahara. The women's shawls and wide skirts are bright red, orange, yellow—colors of survival in the desert; they wear heavy silver anklets above their bare feet and tiers of ivory bracelets on their upper arms. Around the village, bits of roughly tilled ground, too ragged to be called fields, are being watered laboriously by men in immense red turbans from

wells where oxen draw up great leather buckets; they seem to grow nothing but millet, the crop of a rainless land. No rain has fallen here, a shepherd told me in the last village, for four years.

Visiting Jodhpur, the princedom where hundreds of years ago "the baggy-bottomed and tight-legged riding trousers were first devised for polo-playing princes," Woodcock and his wife and Onley conversed at length with the former prince, an Oxford graduate who had placed what remained of his inheritance in a trust fund to save what he could. He told them of his interest in improving the plight of the villagers who had once been his subjects.

Talking of villages led us to talking of Mohandas Gandhi, and I was surprised to hear this former prince denounce the hypocrisy with which the leaders of the Congress Party paid nominal homage to Gandhi's fame, but in fact pursued policies that in every way contradicted his teaching. Jodhpur [princes are known by the name of their realm] seemed to admire Gandhi as a kind of hero, even though he did not fight with the swords and arrows the Rajputs themselves had once used, and at the same time, he seemed to find nothing remotely heroic about the contemporary Indian Congress politician with his cant and corruption. But he also recognized that Gandhi's most important message for independent India was that it would never flourish unless it began to regenerate its villages. The power of the Rajput princes themselves had depended on the villages where their warriors were bred, warriors who were attached to them by clan loyalties resembling those which the epics suggested existed among the Aryans of prehistoric times—the ancient and original Kshatriyas. It would be stretching things far to call Jodhpur a Gandhian maharajah, yet he was obviously near enough to the real traditions of India to understand Gandhi and his teachings rather better than most contemporary Indian political leaders.

Woodcock says at the end of his book: "Now, after so many visits, I can only say that, since the pretentious efforts to cure India's ills by turning it into a western-style nation-state have inevitably failed, the last hope lies in the efforts of those groups and individuals working outside politics at the social grassroots in Gandhi's tradition."

COMMENTARY A TASK BEFORE US?

FROM time to time we feel obliged to take notice of the fact that in these pages, from week to week, we devote a great deal of space to recalling the thought, lives, and actions of unusual if not extraordinary people. There are various reasons for this, but what seems the wholly justifying reason is one given by Arthur Morgan years ago, and published in *Observations*, a book issued by the Antioch Press in Yellow Springs, Ohio, in 1968. From this rich collection of selections from his writings, we take the following:

A person without history of knowledge of the past must see the world as commonplace because, except at extreme times, he is going to live among commonplace people who have come to that conclusion. . . . The only way to get the sum and substance of human experience is to reach out beyond the years we have into the years of the past, into the significant experiences of the human race.

The implication, here, is that people in general, or most of them, frequently long to live more than ordinary or commonplace lives. Morgan, as an educator, was interested in speaking to that longing, and in encouraging it. He made for himself an extraordinary life, out of very plain raw material of experience, and his writings are a record of this achievement, although modestly set down. He was a man who, like Socrates, lived by principles, who developed the abilities life gave him for a beginning, and used them throughout his life in a quietly heroic manner.

This week's lead speaks of other such men—Socrates and Lao tse, who laid the foundation of philosophy for untold numbers who have lived since their time. The stories of such great men—and women—reach into and awaken human aspiration, instructing us in the reality of the moral and intellectual polarities in all human beings. This in itself is a profound education in the reality and the mystery of human nature—in what some few individuals found themselves able to do.

Why, we must then ask ourselves, are such individuals so few? Are they, we naturally ask, the products of "evolution"? Does evolution actually include mind and soul as well as the organic endowments of human beings? Is fitting such questions with a context of meaning about the world and ourselves that would make such evolution reasonable the large task which lies before us?

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves LEARNING FROM JAPAN

IN the *American Scholar* for the Winter of 1985-86 Thomas P. Rohlen considers high school and university education in Japan. Somewhat apologetically, he begins by remarking the likelihood that economic growth in Asia will be "twice as rapid as it will be in Europe and North America in the next decade," indicating that "the dominant historical trend of the next quarter century will probably be the rise of industrial Asia." Economic growth, he notes, is far from being the most inspiring context for considering education, yet the achievements of Japan have made her educational program "a 'challenge,' even a 'model,' for America."

Actually, within the past 30 years, Japan has literally transformed her educational system into one of recognized world leadership. Today, in the areas of science and math, "Japanese students outperform all others."

A considerably larger percentage of Japanese (90 per cent) than Americans (75 per cent) or Europeans (below 50 per cent) finish the twelfth grade, and a greater proportion of males complete university B.A. degrees in Japan than in other countries. Japanese children attend school about fifty more days each year than American students, which means that, by high-school graduation, they have been in school somewhere between three and four more years than their American counterparts. Added to this is the fact that requirements in all basic subjects are heavier in Japan and that elementary-level education in art and music is universal and quite advanced. No one now denies that this is a most impressive portrait of national achievement. Japan has succeeded in holding very high standards for virtually its entire population, standards typical of elites in Western countries. It would not be an exaggeration to say that in many respects the upper half of Japan's graduating high-school students possess a level of knowledge and the analytic skills equivalent to the American graduating from college.

How can these achievements, in contrast to the laggard performance of our own educational system, be explained? The *Scholar* writer gives a number of reasons. First of all, Japan has no traditionally

privileged class. It is not divided into an elite and the "masses." Japan, moreover, is a country with few natural resources. The Japanese must live by their wits, by discipline and hard work. Of great importance is the almost universal belief in Japan that "diligence in school is the path to greatness." The social problems that interfere with education are slight compared to many other countries. There are very few immigrants and few minorities. Divorce and unemployment rates are low. Drug use is not a big problem and juvenile delinquency nowhere near as serious as in America. Educational standards are high, being set for all by the national Ministry of Education. The people agree on the crucial importance of education. Mr. Rohlen adds:

Very important, too, is the motivation that stems from the nation's very competitive university entrance exams. Pick up any of Japan's national newsmagazines in early spring, and you are certain to find the lead story to be about these examinations. . . . Imagine *Time* and *Newsweek* each publishing thirty or so pages of statistics documenting the secondary school origins of new entrants to hundreds of universities, along with details of the tests, competition ratios, and notable study techniques. All this attention (and anxiety) attests to the centrality of entrance examinations to Japanese society. Schooling is geared to it, jobs are based on it, and families are preoccupied with it. The obsession with entrance exams is like a dark engine powering the entire school system. High national standards and entrance exams combine with a great popular thirst for the benefits of education.

The transformation we spoke of at the beginning has dramatic illustration:

In 1950, only 43 per cent of all fifteen-year-olds were going on to high school, whereas by 1975 the figure had risen to 93 per cent. In 1950, only 7 per cent of college-age Japanese enrolled in higher education; today more than 40 per cent are going on to universities or junior colleges. The university population has swollen from about half a million in 1950 to nearly two million. Universities are clearly overcrowded, and the quality of education has suffered greatly. Only at the levels of higher and graduate education does our system stand out as comparatively strong.

For getting into the universities, nothing counts except exam grades. Students who fail may try

again, with no limit to the number of times. Each year, Rohlen says, someone succeeds on his sixth or seventh attempt. The exams are tough. The factual knowledge required (in the history sections) would tax American graduate students, he says.

What are the exams like?

Composed almost entirely of multiple-choice and short-answer questions, the exams are designed to test (1) the comprehension of mathematical (high-school math goes beyond trigonometry) and scientific principles (physics, chemistry, biology, and earth sciences are required), and (2) the mastery of enormous bodies of factual material. Economics, geography, history (European, Japanese, Chinese, and United States), and English (six years) are required subjects. Every question has but one correct answer. Interpretive skills are not tested, but skills in math and science problem solving are important, and the degree of detailed knowledge required can be astounding.

Cram schools which help to prepare students for entrance examinations have become a substantial growth industry. "Private entrepreneurship," Rohlen says, "parental anxiety, and exam pressures combine to create an unprecedented phenomenon that critics feel threatens to make Japanese childhood nothing but a tightly scheduled existence shuttling from home to school to *juku* [cram school], with no time for friends or play." All the pressure is on the parents and the students, virtually none on the teachers, who are highly respected, well paid, and the responsible authorities.

Observers of Japanese early elementary school note that teachers make proper group behavior their highest priority, that they view their job as establishing proper habits for the entire subsequent school program. For this reason, they are ready to patiently drill their wards in the essentials of listening, queuing up, sitting still, being helpful, not disturbing others, and so forth. In elementary school, all students share in cleaning up their classrooms and school grounds on a daily basis. They learn not only to read music but to play two simple instruments, one wind and one keyboard. Playground time is supervised, as is lunchtime, by the teachers themselves. An awareness of proper order permeates the atmosphere.

One additional note: A few more women than men now enter Japanese institutions of higher

learning. This is explained by a recent multiplication of junior colleges, which are 90 per cent female. Yet women enrollments in universities increased from 16 per cent in 1965 to 21 per cent in 1975, although the percentage of women in the top universities remains small.

What shall we make of all this? We know what the Japanese are making of it. They are making us look silly in industrial expansion, trade, and financial dominance. We assume that this is entirely a bad thing, but is it? Is there a legitimate point of view for saying that it is time someone made us look silly—that for us there should be health in the experience? 'Does anyone in Japan, one wonders, say anything about the "rat race" and what can be done to get out of it?

Is it fair to suggest that the conventional "virtues" of the Japanese, which make them so successful in organizing and producing competent engineers and industrialists, are likely to become traps which indoctrinate them with the idea that the rat race is a proper way of life, and that the wearing out of this idea will take more than the influence of a dozen Thoreaus and a dozen Lafcadio Hearn for good measure?

Mr. Rohlen is quite aware that it would be folly for Americans to try to copy the Japanese methods in our schools and universities. It wouldn't work, to begin with, and those of us who long for at least the beginning of a life of synthesis instead of analytical brilliance will probably say that it *shouldn't* work—for us or anyone else. But he does think that we can learn from the Japanese achievement in education.

But what? He has some suggestions. Ours would be that they have copied the wrong things that we have been doing for too long, and that for them the revolt will be too long in coming. Our own revolt, so far, is not impressive enough to serve as an example. Yet it has begun. That is the only encouraging thing we can think of to say.

FRONTIERS

Chemical Disasters

WE have from a news service originating in Malaysia two feature stories on environmental problems in that region. The source is Sahabat Alam Malaysia (with headquarters at 37 Lorong Birch, Penang, Malaysia), a non-profit, nongovernmental group. SAM is devoted to collaboration on environmental issues and seeks contact with similar groups in other regions. This work is carried on by the Asia-Pacific People's Environmental Network (APPEN) and has been going on for two years, offering subscription to the numerous releases issued at \$80 a year. The editors of the release on the developing crisis of the Malaysian environment find that the Malaysian government has consistently neglected the needs of the people by fostering industrialization. Excessive use of pesticides has unexpectedly brought the development of new pests, and the Minister of Agriculture has said that "Often, the more effective the chemical pesticides, the more dangerous it is to human health and the safety of the people." Yet the use of pesticides continues uncontrolled. One can easily see why concerned Malaysians are forming non-governmental groups to oppose these developments. Through them the common people are finding a voice.

The other release (issued in the name of APPEN) begins with the declaration: "Each year, rats destroy an average of 50 per cent of food crops grown and harvested in Third World countries." Curiously, there are as many rats as there are humans in the world, but unlike the humans, the rats are in general well fed. The rats are more plentiful in Third World countries. In India and parts of Africa, they outnumber humans ten to one. In East Asia, last year's excellent harvest was seriously reduced by rats, which fouled twice what they ate. Usually, half the damage to food grains occurs in the field before harvest, while the other half is ruined in the granary. Rats spoil much more than they

consume, and harm numerous other food plants besides grains. The report continues:

Bangladesh loses some 1.2 million tons of grain to rats every year. To make good its food deficit Bangladesh has to import an equivalent amount to feed the people. Rodents continue to destroy up to 70 percent of the rice fields in Thailand, while the damage to Malaysia's rice crop is estimated at 87,000 tons a year. Rodents also destroy oil-palm fruit and coconuts, cocoa, maize, peanuts, and sugar.

Stringent methods of control, using poisons, lethal gas, and acid baths have not noticeably reduced the rat population, while killing some of the rats' natural enemies. A Chinese investigator said that rat poison was exterminating cats, weasels, foxes, eagles, owls, and snakes—all of which reduce the rat population. Environmentalists recommend Integrated Pest Management which involves fostering the natural enemies of rats, installing traps, with pesticides as a last resort. For ordinary farmers, however, the cat remains the most potent weapon against rats. The rats seem to train their young on how to overcome human efforts against them, scientists say. This pest will not be easily reduced, much less eradicated.

A report by Holly Winger in the Fall 1985 *Land Report* reviews the findings of Angus Wright, historian of Environmental Studies at California State University in Sacramento, who has compiled the results of his observation trips in 1983-84 to study pesticide poisoning among the field workers in Mexico. In Sinaloa, an agriculturally rich state, he saw careless over-application of pesticides on more than 100,000 acres of tomatoes, bell peppers, cucumbers, melons, and squash, mostly intended for export to the United States. There are repeated applications of parathion. The toxic spray falls on the unprotected skin of field workers as well as on food and water supplies. He recognized no safety precautions. One chemical commonly used is paraquat, which causes perforated lung tissue within two to three years. The chemicals are used in back-pack tanks for spraying.

Workers' responses to questions showed they have no idea what the chemicals are, and though they see others become sick and even die, they wear no protective clothing such as masks, gloves, aprons, or boots. One worker told Wright: "You have to be careful." But he was handling the chemicals with his bare hands. In the field, the men do the mixing and spraying, often spilling the liquid on their feet and getting spray on hands, faces, and clothing.

Not surprisingly, Angus Wright has found evidence of high rates of poisoning in workers exposed to these chemicals. He has also found evidence of efforts to cover up the true cause of reported illnesses and deaths traceable to chemical exposure. Nationally, government statistics show a thousand cases per month listed as "other illnesses." . . .

Far from exploring alternatives to this sickening pattern of pesticide abuse and worker illness, the Mexican government is instead promoting the use of agricultural chemicals . . . Fertimex, a state-owned chemical production corporation produces 128 different trade names and formulations of pesticides, including DDT and parathion, for use in other regions of Mexico and Central America.

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Community Service, Inc. was founded in 1940 in Yellow Springs, Ohio, by Arthur E. Morgan, to help people improve the quality of small community life. Its activities are various, one of them being publication of a bi-monthly newsletter on community-related subjects. Another is the publication and maintenance in print of a number of useful books, many of them by Arthur Morgan. We suggest that readers interested in Morgan's writings write to Community Service, 114 E. Whiteman St., P.O. Box 234, Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387, and ask for a list of the books available. Morgan's classic study, *The Small Community*, has recently been reprinted and is available paperbound for \$10. A particularly valuable but little known work by Morgan, *Industries for Small Communities*, is only \$2. Also available are inexpensive editions of Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* and *Paths in Utopia* by Martin Buber. A useful pamphlet by Morgan and his son Griscom, *The Future of Cities and the Future of Man*, a study of the harmful effects of

high population density of large cities, through history is a dollar.

Six other books by Morgan are listed: *Observations*, a collection of extracts from his writings published by Antioch Press, with more than 300 pages—\$8.50 in cloth. *The Long Road*, perhaps Morgan's most valuable book, which came out in 1936, is available in cloth (\$2.50) and paperback (\$1.50). Then Morgan's *Search for Purpose* (cloth, \$3.50) is still available, also his *Dams and Other Disasters* (critical of the Army Engineers) and *The Making of TVA*, of which he was the first chairman. A treasure concerning Morgan's youth and young manhood is *Finding His World*, edited by his wife, Lucy Morgan, may be bought in cloth for \$2. *A Compendium of Antioch Notes*, the things he wrote for the brief bulletin issued while he was president of Antioch College, is available at \$5. President Roosevelt appointed Morgan head of TVA by reason of the quality of his thinking revealed in *Antioch Notes*.