

## QUESTIONS LACKING CERTAIN ANSWERS

THERE are some books—a few—which ought never to be forgotten, since they represent the most penetrating insights we have into the character of our times. Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful* is one such book, Berry's *The Unsettling of America* is another. A third, now seldom even mentioned, belongs to a previous generation. It is Ortega's *The Revolt of the Masses*, first published in Spain in 1930, and issued in English by Norton in 1932. Why is this book so important? Because the author shows that we are now living in a culture dominated by the psychology of the mass man, the unworthy inheritor of the vision and genius of the great revolutionists of the eighteenth century. What is the trouble with the mass man? He is, as an abstraction, a member of no particular class, but represents the limitations of all those who, in the mass, think of themselves as good and righteous simply because, by principle, they are equal to all others, needing no improvement, their lives appropriate simply because they are. He lives in a world vastly improved by the special talents of inventive technologists which it is naturally his to enjoy. As Ortega says toward the end of an early chapter, summing up:

For, in fact, the common man, finding himself in a world so excellent, technically and socially, believes that it has been produced by nature, and never thinks of the personal efforts of highly-endowed individuals which the creation of this new world presupposed. Still less will he admit the notion that all these facilities still require the support of certain difficult human virtues, the least failure of which would cause the rapid disappearance of the whole magnificent edifice.

This leads us to note down in our psychological chart of the mass-man of today two fundamental traits: the free expansion of his vital desires, and, therefore, of his personality; and his radical ingratitude towards all that has made possible the ease of his existence. These traits together make up the well-known psychology of the spoiled child. And in fact it would entail no error to use this psychology as a "sight" through which to observe the soul of the masses of today. Heir to an ample and generous

past—generous both in ideals and in activities—the new commonalty has been spoiled by the world around it. To spoil means to put no limit on caprice, to give one the impression that everything is permitted to him and that he has no obligations. The young child exposed to this regime has no experience of its own limits. By reason of the removal of all external restraint, all clashing with other things, he comes actually to believe that he is the only one that exists, and gets used to not considering others, especially not considering them as superior to himself. . . .

No human being thanks another for the air he breathes for no one has produced the air for him, it belongs to the sum-total of what "is there," of which we say "it is natural," because it never fails. And these spoiled masses are unintelligent enough to believe that the material and social organization, placed at their disposition like the air, is of the same origin, since apparently it never fails them, and is almost as perfect as the natural scheme of things. . . .

Thus is explained and defined the absurd state of mind revealed by these masses; they are only concerned with their own well-being, and at the same time they remain alien to the cause of that well-being. As they do not see, behind the benefits of civilization, marvels of invention and construction which can only be maintained by great effort and foresight, they imagine that their role is limited to demanding these benefits peremptorily, as if they were natural rights. In the disturbances caused by scarcity of food, the mob goes in search of bread, and the means it employs is generally to wreck the bakeries. This may serve as a symbol of the attitude adopted, on a greater and more complicated scale, by the masses of today towards the civilization by which they are supported.

Ortega has been disposed of by demagogic critics who say he was a conservative with an aristocratic theory of society. He welcomed the charge, changing only the meaning of aristocracy. He declared himself to "uphold a radically aristocratic interpretation of history," going on to explain:

Radically, because I have never said that human society *ought* to be aristocratic, but a great deal more than that. What I have said, and still believe with

ever-increasing conviction, is that human society *is* always, whether it will or no, aristocratic by its very essence, to the extreme that it is a society in the measure that it is aristocratic, and ceases to be such when it ceases to be aristocratic.

To understand what Ortega is getting at, and to make it clear that in speaking of an "aristocracy" he does not mean a blooded class or a moneyed class, but an aristocracy of character, we need to know what he means by "mass man" and by what he calls "select minorities." He says:

Strictly speaking, the mass, as a psychological fact, can be defined without waiting for individuals to appear in mass formation. In the presence of one individual we can decide whether he is "mass" or not. The mass is all that which sets no value on itself—good or ill—based on specific grounds, but which feels itself "just like everybody," and nevertheless is not concerned about it; is, in fact, quite happy to feel itself as one with everybody else. . . .

When one speaks of "select minorities" it is usual for the evil-minded to twist the sense of this expression, pretending to be unaware that the select man is not the petulant person who thinks himself superior to the rest, but the man who demands more of himself than the rest, even though he may not fulfill in his person those higher exigencies. For there is no doubt that the most radical division that it is possible to make of humanity is that which splits it into two classes of creatures: those who make great demands on themselves, piling up difficulties and duties; and those who demand nothing special of themselves, but for whom to live is to be every moment what they already are, without imposing on themselves any effort toward perfection; mere buoys that float on the waves. . . .

*The characteristic of the hour is that the commonplace mind, knowing itself to be commonplace, has the assurance to proclaim the rights of the commonplace and to impose them wherever it will.* As they say in the United States: "to be different is to be indecent." The mass crushes beneath it everything that is different, everything that is excellent, individual, qualified and select. Anybody who is not like everybody, who does not think like everybody, runs the risk of being eliminated. And it is clear, of course, that this "everybody" is not "everybody." "Everybody" was normally the complex unity of the mass and the divergent, specialized minorities. Nowadays, "everybody" is the mass alone. Here we have the

formidable fact of our times, described without any concealment of the brutality of its features.

This is probably the most important and most undiscussed reality of our time, for obvious reasons. No one who wants to "win friends and influence people" could ever bring himself to say what Ortega says, whether or not he recognizes its truth. Yet it has been well understood from the days of the Sophists of Plato's time to the politicians of today and tomorrow. The difficulty in discussing it lies in what seems the tacit assumption of the writer that he or she belongs to the distinguished minority and is thereby qualified to consider and evaluate the "mass-man" qualities of the population at large. No one wants to be branded as elitist or anti-democratic, and how do you adopt Ortega's line of criticism without suffering this fate, as indeed he did. Yet there are plenty of thoughtful people who reveal, perhaps indirectly, that they agree with Ortega. And now and then some extraordinary individual gets across the same idea without the shadow of egotism in what he says. Gandhi is an example.

There is certainly no doubt that Gandhi held up as an ideal the distinguished, morally disciplined and self-sacrificing individual for whom non-violence became the law of life. Long before him Socrates did the same, declaring that it is better to suffer wrong than to do it. Both were advocating an aristocracy of character, and Plato insisted that there was no hope for a politics that would render true justice until either kings became philosophers, or philosophers kings. Socially, all these teachers were calling for an aristocracy of character, and Gandhi made it clear that the man of true non-violence sought no personal advantage or reward, thus giving an unthought-of meaning to the idea of a moral aristocracy.

Meanwhile, it is becoming plain that mass-opinion is based on little besides self-interest and personal advantage, even where one's own children are involved. In *Harper's* for last February, Dennis Littkey, a high school principal in New Hampshire, spoke of what happened in his school when a teacher seriously attempted to teach his class to think:

One of my teachers did a fantastic month and a half of classes on questioning—teaching the kids how

to analyze a subject and ask the right questions. The sessions were designed to teach critical thinking and they were highly successful. But we got a huge amount of flak—from parents. They didn't want their kids pestering them with questions. We thought our job was somehow forcing these kids to use their minds; the parents thought we should take care of the kids during the day and eventually reward them with a diploma.

Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, added a comment:

Insofar as a student is influenced at home, he is told to go to class, find out what the teachers want, and give it to them. Not because he'll become a good citizen or come to enjoy learning the rest of his life or learn how to think critically, but to get that piece of paper and trade it for a job.

These remarks were made in a symposium on what to do about education, with nine participants, in the February *Harper's*. The discussion was opened by Walter Karp who began by saying that "America's high schools characteristically breed conformity and mental passivity. . . . They attempt to break citizens," and he concluded:

We also have enormous schools. I went to one, and I'll never forget what it was like to be one of 5,000 students: gongs ringing, announcements blaring, guards at either end of a mobbed hallway. It was a prison. Citizens should not have to spend their youth becoming accustomed to prison life.

No one in the group, made up of teachers and educators, objected to this sort of criticism, but all endorsed it. Ortega would simply say: This is the mass mind in action. Now it is running things as I predicted.

Well, what will happen next, under the direction of the mass mind, which does seem to be in charge? We don't of course know, but strongly suspect that it will bring more trouble to a world already deep in a welter of increasingly dangerous situations.

One thing we might do is to look more closely at the result of the eighteenth-century revolution, which we regard, with good reason, with great respect. It will be well to look at this result in America—in the United States—where all serious thinking began with the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. One of our most distinguished

scholars, John Schaar, addressed himself to this question in a paper published in January, 1970, in No. 8 of the *New American Review*:

The United States can be seen as a great experiment in the working out of these ideas. Our founding took place at an advanced stage of the progress toward epistemological and moral individualism. . . . At the time of the founding, the doctrine and sentiment were already widespread that each individual comes into this world morally complete and self-sufficient, clothed with natural rights which are his by birth, and not in need of fellowship for moral growth and fulfillment. The human material of this new republic consisted of a gathering of men each of whom sought self-sufficiency and the satisfaction of his own desires. Wave after wave of immigrants replenished these urges, for to the immigrant, America largely meant freedom from inherited authorities and freedom to get rich. Community and society meant little more than the ground upon which each challenged or used others for his own gain. Others were accepted insofar as they were useful to one in his search for self-sufficiency. But once that goal was reached, the less one has to put up with the others the better. Millions upon millions of Americans strive for that goal, and, what is more important, base their political views upon it. The state is a convenience in a private search; and when that search seems to succeed, it is no wonder that men tend to deny the desirability of political bonds, of acting together with others for the life that is just for all. We have no mainstream political or moral teaching that tells men they must remain bound to each other even one step beyond the point where those bonds are a drag and a burden on one's personal desires.

Did, then, the men of the eighteenth century make a bad mistake? We are unable to think so. There is surely a sense in which all men are equal, but it seems obvious that the meaning that has been popularly given to the second term of the revolutionary credo—"Liberty, Equality, Fraternity"—has suffered from either distortions or omissions or both. How, then, are we all equal?

We must start with saying what is a human being, and we are obliged to admit that a human being is one capable of both good and evil, which cannot be said of either plants or animals. Our equality, in all having these essential qualities, seems evident enough. To whom is the assertion, "All men

are equal," addressed? It is addressed to law-makers and to citizens concerned with government. It is the principle which says, Don't deny or abridge in any way the right of the human being to make moral decisions. It doesn't say that some men are not better, wiser, and more skillful than others, but its weight is toward full freedom to all to *become* better, wiser, more skillful. Our law, however, cannot direct people to so become, because we know that such development cannot be coerced. There are various theories of human development, and one of the discoveries of the eighteenth century was that no one can be compelled to be "good." It may be possible to provide what is hoped will assist people to become at least good citizens—by establishing a public school system—but no one knows how to convince people to do this. From the report in the February *Harper's* for example, we have more or less failed to provide that sort of education.

The realists, then, when it comes to making all such laws, are likely to vote with the anarchists and echo the rule learned from experience: The best government is the least government.

What, then, will inspire people to become the minority men and women that Ortega talks about and himself represented? All that asking this question accomplishes is to take us back to Plato and his fundamental question: Can virtue be taught, even if it cannot be enforced? Well, if you read Plato you find that he doesn't really answer the question, while revealing his own conviction that if anyone could teach virtue it was by the method of Socrates. And Socrates, we are constrained to admit, was no great success, in view of what happened to him in the Athens to which he was devoted and so loyal!

Finally, we are obliged to admit that we haven't made any notable progress in dealing with the question since Plato's time. Yet history and biography both point to the fact that members of Ortega's minority keep showing up—why, no one knows—and trying once more to move the hearts of men.

What, finally, shall we say? Plato regarded it as important to devote considerable space in his dialogues to the idea that all humans are immortal

souls, even potential gods, yet gods who have become so daubed with the fascinations of material existence that they have largely forgotten their spiritual origin. Was he right? He couldn't prove it, and he believed that matters of this sort, which are crucial to human development, can never be proved, although they can be *suggested*, as he did, mainly in the myths he invented for that purpose. The fundamental truths, he held, cannot be nailed down; our moral independence is not to be destroyed in the name of final certainty, which we are able to discover only if we retain the right to choose.

Can anything more be said on this subject? One thing seems evident, and that is that the few who make heroic decisions—decisions of the sort that Jesus made in Dostoyevsky's *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*, that Socrates made in the face of the disapproval and condemnation of the Athenian mob, that Tom Paine made, which lost him the admiration of his fellow American countrymen when, after accomplishing so much for the emancipation of the colonists from British rule, he went on to write *The Age of Reason*, breaking with organized conventional religion by comparing Bible teachings with the findings of scientific knowledge, making the churchly institutions of England and America very nearly identify Paine with the devil himself, as one biographer has put it.

What is the origin of such remarkable individuals? Are humans on a course of evolution which inevitably develops such pioneers, a few admiring followers, and the massive opposition of conventional minds? What sort of duality is behind the presence of both qualities in most of us, and the uneven struggle which results? Why are the few triumphs always the fruit of the uncompromising spirit of independent individuals, and the failures unmistakably the harvest of the irrational pressures of the mass mind?

Any reasonable account of the human species must give us at least tentative answers to questions of this sort.

## *REVIEW*

### A CULTURAL PUZZLE

THE presence on the road of so many Japanese cars—the number seems to increase each year—is sufficient evidence for most Americans that the Japanese are now able to beat us at our own game—and while this may be perturbing to our manufacturers and to the people who have lost their factory jobs as a result, most other Americans are glad to buy Japanese-made cars and other manufactured articles because they cost less, last well, and are as good-looking as anything else available.

Where will this end? we are inclined to ask, and both businessmen and writers have been giving what answers they can. The best thing on the subject we have seen lately is James Fallows' "Letter from Tokyo" in the August *Atlantic*, in which he reports his impressions and findings after a month in Japan. He says at the beginning:

I spend half my time in awe of Japan's production system, and despairing that Westerners can ever keep up, and the other half chuckling about the parochialism and self-induced limitations of the place. The fundamental problem we've had in competing against the Japanese is obvious after only a few days here: the Japanese all work much harder than we do.

They not only work harder, but they *believe* in working harder. This seems a part of the fundamental psychology of the country, dating back no one knows for how long, and to which, surprisingly enough, no one dissents. A careful observer, Fallows says:

Rather, what has impressed me most about Japan is that the entire culture seems to discourage consumption and leisure and to enforce a dour, self-sacrificing, *hard* life. This is the second biggest market economy in the world, as measured by GNP (Japan has half as many people as the United States does), and I'm sure Japan will sometime soon surpass us in per capita manufacturing output, if it has not already done so. But the conditions of daily life here often make it seem more like the twentieth-richest country.

The people are crowded into small space ("With enough money, some people can live in spacious surroundings even in Manhattan, but Tokyo is so crowded that no amount of money can buy you much elbow room"), and housing, which may be dainty, is flimsily constructed. Fallows goes on:

I don't mean to whine; my point is that the Japanese accept all this as normal life, even as they tirelessly turn out high-quality, cheap goods for consumers everywhere else in the world. Many Americans have sourly joked that the Japanese, without an army, have accomplished exactly what they set out to do during the Second World War—develop a Co-Prosperity Sphere. But there is another way of looking at it. By working so hard and enjoying the results so little, they have voluntarily done to themselves what colonial powers have so long tried to force or trick other countries into doing. They work so hard that others may live well. Even considered strictly as consumers, the Japanese are not enjoying the full fruits of their labors. Radios, computers, VCRs, cameras, and other made-in-Japan products that I've priced all cost more in Tokyo than at discount outlets in New York. My Japanese friends assure me that this is the result of heavy excise taxes and perhaps exchange-rate fluctuations, not anything so vulgar as dumping.

Why is Japan so crowded? The answer is obvious enough.

Fitting 120 million people into an area the size of Montana would be difficult in any circumstances, but it is even worse because most big cities are crammed into the narrow coastal plain. In addition, a quirk of post-Occupation life makes the housing problem even more formidable than it might otherwise be. Believing land ownership to be a bedrock of democracy, Douglas MacArthur enacted sweeping land-reform plans that accentuated the already chaotic pattern of landholding. (This one of the MacArthur innovations stuck, like the anti-war plank of the constitution.) . . . Now something like 53 per cent of those in greater Tokyo own some parcel of land. Of course, the amount each of them owns is minuscule, and because land prices keep going up astronomically—they have doubled in Tokyo in the past two years—conventional wisdom is that you should never sell. In the priciest parts of Tokyo, a *tsubo* of land now goes for about \$1 million. A *tsubo*

is the size of two straw tatami mats, for a total of 3.3 square meters.

At the end of his article, Fallows draws a comparison:

Americans work to make money and to win respect, but to some extent our culture says that you work hard so eventually you won't have to work. . . . I'm sure the Japanese don't love to sweat any more than the rest of us, but the basic calculation seems different here. They work because that is their duty to a tight-knit, homogeneous society. They work . . . so as to keep working.

That is the puzzle that James Fallows leaves us with, and one cannot help wondering if the game is worth the candle, and what will happen when the Japanese begin to ask themselves this question.

More or less by accident, we came across a little light on this matter, although not much of an answer. In a casual moment, picking up our favorite volume by our favorite author, Lafcadio Hearn, *Gleanings in Buddha Fields*, published by Harper in 1898, we read a passage in his account of Osaka, a city more than two thousand five hundred years old, and in Hearn's time the commercial capital of Japan—"the best-ordered city, commercially in the empire, and one of the best-ordered in the world." It was where the Japanese came to learn trades and businesses, serving as apprentices without pay for from twelve to fourteen years. The apprentices were given only board and lodging, and necessary clothing, and they often worked fifteen hours a day. Hearn ends this account by describing what he saw and learned in a visit to a famous Osaka silk house which was doing a rushing business. There were many salesmen, all of whom sat on mats and called out to boys what to show inquiring customers.

I asked how many persons the firm employed, and my friend replied:—

"Probably about two hundred here; there are several branch houses. In this shop the work is very hard, but the working hours are shorter than in most of the silk-houses,—not more than twelve hours a day."

"What about salaries?" I inquired.

"No salaries."

"Is all the work of this firm done without pay?"

"Perhaps one or two of the very cleverest salesmen may get something,—not exactly a salary, but a little special remuneration every month; and the old superintendent—he has been forty years in the house—gets a salary. The rest get nothing but their food."

"Good food?"

"No, very cheap coarse food. After a man has served his time here,—fourteen or fifteen years,—he may be helped to open a small store of his own."

"Are the conditions the same in all the shops of Osaka?"

"Yes, everywhere the same. But now many of the *detchi* [apprentices] are graduates of commercial schools. Those sent to a commercial school begin their apprenticeship much later; and they are said not to make such good *detchi* as those taught from childhood."

"A Japanese clerk in a foreign store is much better off."

"We do not think so," answered my friend positively. "Some who speak English well, and have learned the foreign way of doing business, may get fifty or sixty dollars a month for seven or eight hours' of work a day. But they are not treated the same way as they are treated in a Japanese house. Clever men do not like to work under foreigners. Foreigners used to be very cruel to their Japanese clerks and servants. . . . In a house like this there is no unkindness. The owners and the superintendent never speak roughly. You see how hard all these men and boys are working without pay. No foreigner could get Japanese to work like that, even for big wages. I have worked in foreign houses and I know."

It is not exaggeration to say that most of the intelligent service rendered in Japanese trade and skilled industry is unsalaried. Perhaps one third of the business work of the country is done without wages; the relation between master and servant being one of perfect trust on both sides, and absolute obedience being assured by the simplest of moral conditions. This fact was the fact most deeply impressed on me during my stay in Osaka.

What is the relation between these age-old customs and standards, perhaps acquired over thousands of years, and the present devotion in Japan to work, work, work? Fallows found this

devotion puzzling indeed, yet the Japanese people revealed other qualities which won his heart.

Many people have been kind and generous. There is a delicacy and precision evident in all the details of daily life. Things work, because people care about doing their jobs. The food is great. Still, there's no escaping the fact that the cultural premises here are not just "different" from ours, as they might be in Brazil or Finland, but, as I will argue in a future article, repellent to some of our basic values.

Curiously, there is now in Japan a movement of advisers to the Prime Minister, led by a former bank director, Haruo Maekawa, counseling that the Japanese people must now relax a bit and enjoy themselves more, and accept more imports from others countries. Maekawa, to his credit, says Fallows, "has waged a personal publicity campaign in support of more imports and less self-sacrifice."

The strongest argument for change is that all of Japan's "friends" around the world are getting tired of losing their jobs and markets to Japan. This may be a testament to its industrial diligence but not to its prudence and foresight. In a big trade war everyone would suffer, but Japan would suffer most (because it needs some export earnings to pay for imported food and fuel).

Should the Japanese, then, become more like us, if only for "commercial" reasons? Or is this question trivial compared to issues of value that have not been raised save by writers like Hearn?

## *COMMENTARY* IN THE MAIL

WE have received a letter from Bill McLarney, adding to his article on the use of cyanide to benumb and capture ornamental tropical fish that hide in the coral reefs of the Philippine Islands, which we reviewed in our Sept. 17 issue. McLarney says:

Steve Robinson, of the International Marinelife Association, was recently here and informed me that the situation is radically different under the Aquino government. Mrs. Aquino has made the conservation of the coral reef ecosystem a high priority and, as a result, there is enforcement of the cyanide laws and the retraining program for aquarium fish collectors is proceeding toward its goals. This happy ending is looming strongly enough for me to do another part of the series I wrote about this subject.

Steve Robinson is on his way to our experimental farm in Costa Rica (ANAI) to undertake a feasibility study for us, hoping to set up a community-based ornamental fish business there. The demand for Caribbean species is increasing, and the region is going to get either cyanide (already in Haiti, regrettably) or nets. (Turns out Steve is a self-professed Gandhian and a reader of MANAS in this small world.)

And from the Land Institute (2440 E. Water Well Road, Salina, Kansas 67401) comes a reminder that the Institute offers up to ten internships in sustainable agriculture, beginning Feb. 16, 1987 to Dec. 18, with stipends for each student of \$95 a week for 43 weeks, plus full tuition scholarships. The interns study in the mornings and do physical work in the afternoons.

Topics in plant ecology and genetics related to sustainable agriculture research are emphasized during the 43-week term. . . . The rest of the curriculum is called "Considerations for a Sustainable Society." Assignments explore the ethics and values which can be the underpinning of a sustainable society and the social and political structures which will enable such a society to evolve.

The interns do maintenance work to keep the program going and take part in the research program. They write papers for the *Land Report*,

which comes out three times during the term, and for the *Land Report Research Supplement*. Wes and Dana Jackson direct the Land Institute, with a staff of highly trained helpers. They are looking for interns who plan to be teachers. The research is directed toward developing perennial plants that preserve and thrive in the prairie environment, to produce food grain in the future.

The vitality which once animated the schools and colleges of America has migrated to places like the Land Institute in Kansas, Ecology Action in Willits, Calif., the New Alchemy Institute on Cape Cod, and to the homes of the home schoolers. That vitality is what the young need to experience. Properly infected with it, they are sure to find their way.



# CHILDREN

## . . . and Ourselves

### ANECDOTE VERSUS STATISTICS

IN *Reading, How to*, Herbert Kohl declares his fundamental rule: Trust the children and help them to teach themselves. A letter from a Tennessee mother, Kathy McAlpine, in *Growing Without Schooling* No. 51, will illustrate the importance of this rule:

My son Nathaniel (8) and I began homeschooling last September [1985] after a trial run during the summer months. We started out in really high gear, so thrilled to be liberated from public school that we imagined we could do *everything*. I drew up a detailed curriculum plan, which I've since come to realize was absurdly over-ambitious. But there we were.

Then, suddenly, fate pulled the rug out from under me; I learned I needed major surgery. The operation was completely successful, but my recovery took a couple of months.

I'm a single parent, so there was no other adult to help out, except for a friend who cared for Nathaniel during my hospital stay. There went my carefully planned curriculum; Nathaniel was left to his own devices much of the time. Neither of us could stand the thought of his going back to school, though, and we decided we'd just tough it out and get by the best we could.

Well, guess what? We got by just fine. Nathaniel read for his 2-3 hours a day, watched public TV, practiced his violin, ran errands to the corner store (handling money, grocery lists, and even coupons with aplomb), and learned the multiplication tables from some cassette tapes I'd made for him. I couldn't drive for six weeks, and we missed our customary visits to the library and science museum. Although I often felt tired and frustrated (I wanted to be *all better immediately*), it was heartening to watch Nathaniel actually blossom under the extra responsibility. He took such pride in helping with the household tasks, showed such tenderness and sensitivity toward me, and developed an independence I hadn't known he had in him.

I'd hardly recommend having an operation as a terrific learning experience, but it really taught me something important. I learned—because I *had* to

learn—to trust my own child and my own instincts, to stop being so uptight about curricula and "basic skills" and other people's expectations. It was a real turning point for both of us.

And what changes we've been through since then! In the beginning, Nathaniel couldn't function without workbooks; we've now abandoned them as hopelessly boring. In first grade last year, his printing was barely legible; this year he's taught himself cursive, and his handwriting is beautiful. He has recently resumed writing poetry, which he'd abandoned in response to a teacher who emphasized "creative expression" with all the iron joylessness that term implies. An exciting project for both of us this year has been an in-depth study of ancient history. We use a couple of high school textbooks as chronological guides, then supplement with library books, *National Geographics*, maps, and everything else we can find. We plan to spend the whole summer reading about ancient Greece (Nathaniel, who's at the "super-hero" stage, finds Odysseus as enthralling as any of those Saturday morning cartoon characters).

Best of all, he is himself again, full of the old sparkle and spunk. It has taken almost a year for him to get over the effects of public school, but I feel like we're finally home free.

Apart from the fact that Nathaniel seems to be a model child—they are certainly not all like that!—this story, which is true, shows what can be learned from individual cases, very different, perhaps, from what statistics would reveal. Statistics have their value in showing the behavior and tendencies of both children and their parents within the great majority, but they tell us almost nothing about the people who have decided to go in the opposite direction. For such families you need accounts of individual cases, and this is what *Growing Without Schooling* supplies, by printing such letters from parents. Equally valuable are the responses of homeschooling parents to the criticisms of their friends who send their children to school. A parent in Virginia tells about bringing up four children by teaching them at home, remarking that, contrary to the prediction of others, these youngsters have developed remarkable self-reliance and independence. This parent concludes:

Comments about your children becoming dependent on you are ridiculous. They don't become dependent, they start out dependent on you and grow in independence. . . . Most parents who choose to give their children the option of homeschooling really like their children, they enjoy being with them and doing things with them. They consider them worthwhile people. That attitude builds the self-confidence to do things which builds competence. That leads to the real independence which we all want for our children. And with the true closeness and bond of friendship and trust, they can move out into the world knowing that only physical distance separates them from you. . . .

Those comments about dependence are related to the ones (which I also heard) about holding the baby. "If you always hold the baby, he'll never let you put him down. You'll spoil him"—from my mother-in-law about my 4-month-old son. My son was one of the most independent 2-year-olds I have ever seen. La Leche League's answer is, "If you baby the baby, you won't have to baby the man." Build a strong secure base and the independence will follow, and build a strong secure relationship and distance will not harm it.

A woman, Patti Smith, in Vermont writes to tell of a conference attended by fifty-five persons, including five from the Department of Education and one Superintendent, and the rest homeschoolers.

The superintendent came prepared with a 2-page outline on "why he objected to homeschooling" that he passed out to folks as they came into the auditorium. At the end of our meeting he stood to comment: he learned a lot about homeschooling, what it is, and who is homeschooling, that the negative opinions changed and that he wished parents at his PTA meetings were half as enthusiastic as the homeschooling parents are.

The following is taken from an interview with John Holt involving the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued in 1983. In the interview, which was broadcast by a Boston radio station, Holt was asked "how important are teachers and what makes a good teacher." He replied:

Very important question, which the commission almost certainly did not ask. The most important person in the learning process is the learner. The next most important is the teacher. . . . The teacher

does not fill up bottles—it's much more like gardening. You don't grow plants by going out with Scotch tape and sticking leaves on to the stems. The plant grows. But the gardener creates as far as she or he can the condition for growth—in the case of plants, soil fertilizer, acidity, shade, water, etc. It's simple with plants. With children, it's more complicated. What the teacher does—and the parents at home—is to create an environment which is in part physical—there are books, records and tapes, and tools—and in part emotional, spiritual, moral, intellectual, in which growth can occur. Now that's a very subtle, very difficult, very interesting task. Nobody in any school of education that I've ever heard of would describe it that way. It's an extremely important task. It's not what most teachers think they're supposed to be doing—which is, I say, filling the bottles—but it's an important task in itself. It is by no means trivial, and it is certainly not easy.

He was asked how one learns to teach, and he replied:

By teaching. Where do you learn to swim? In the water. Schools of education, I promise you, would like places where you'd spend four years studying courses on hydraulics and the theory of swimming and so forth, and then they'd say finally, "Okay, we've taught you how to swim, now here's a pool, or here's a lake."

You learn to teach by teaching. I never had any educational training, luckily. I say "luckily" because I went into the classroom knowing that I didn't know anything, and therefore realizing that if I wanted to learn something, I'd better keep my eyes and ears open and think about what I was seeing and hearing. The only way you learn about teaching is to do it and to see which of your inputs into this environment produce helpful results and which don't. . . .

*Learning Without Schooling* is a paper which reports the experiences of parents who have learned to teach by teaching. It comes out six times a year, with 32 or more pages, and a subscription costs \$20. The address is 729 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass. 02116.

## *FRONTIERS*

### **The Errors of Industrialism**

LONG thoughts ensue from a reading of Christopher Flavin's Worldwatch Paper No. 70, *Electricity for A Developing World: New Directions*. This is not a study that can be reviewed in a few brief paragraphs, but an analysis of a situation which calls for painful recognition of the fact that the experts on whom ordinary citizens have relied for so long as doing their job with knowledge and foresight, have made—and are making—some very serious mistakes. The common assumption has been that the "advanced" nations of the industrialized world will be able to teach the managers of the "Third World" countries how to achieve growth and prosperity by following the pattern created by the Industrial Revolution in the West. We now see, from the sort of investigations pursued by the Worldwatch Institute and other research organizations, that this plan does not work. First of all, the Third World does not have the same infrastructure and "know-how" which led to the rapid technological progress that brought the Western nations to their present pitch of economic development. Second, the shortage of petroleum, made plain by the sudden increase of the price of oil in the early 1970s, was hardly anticipated by anyone even in the West.

What actually happened, and is still happening, was not made clear until E. F. Schumacher published his *Small Is Beautiful* in 1973. Early in this volume he said:

I started by saying that one of the most fateful errors of our age is the belief that the problem of production has been solved. This solution, I suggested, is mainly due to our inability to recognize that the modern industrial system, with all its intellectual sophistication, consumes the very basis on which it has been erected. To use the language of the economist, it lives on irreplaceable capital which it cheerfully treats as income. I specified three categories of such capital: fossil fuels, the tolerance margins of nature, and the human substance. Even if some readers should refuse to accept all three parts of

my argument, I suggest that any one of them suffices to make my case.

What did Schumacher recommend?

To say the least—which is already very much—we must thoroughly understand the problem and begin to see the possibility of evolving a new lifestyle, with new methods of production and new patterns of consumption: a lifestyle designed for permanence. To give only three preliminary examples: in agriculture and horticulture, we can interest ourselves in the perfection of production methods which are biologically sound, build up soil fertility, and produce health, beauty and permanence. Productivity will then look after itself. In industry, we can interest ourselves in the evolution of small-scale technology, relatively nonviolent technology, "technology with a human face," so that people have a chance to enjoy themselves while they are working, instead of working solely for their pay packet and hoping, usually forlornly, for enjoyment solely during their leisure time. In industry, again—and, surely, industry is the pace-setter of modern life—we can interest ourselves in new forms of partnership between management and men, even forms of common ownership.

Consistent with Schumacher's analysis, Christopher Flavin's first paragraph about the production of electricity is concerned with problems rather than solutions. He says:

Electric power systems, long viewed as showpieces of development, are now central to some of the most serious problems Third World countries face. Many Third World utilities are so deeply in debt that international bail-outs may be necessary to stave off bankruptcy. Financial troubles in conjunction with various technical problems, have led to a serious decline in the reliability of many Third World power systems—which may impede industrial growth. The common presumption that developing countries will soon attain the reliable, economical electricity service taken for granted in industrial countries is now in doubt.

Financial aid to the developing countries for electrification is dominated by the urban habits of mind of the large lenders.

Between 90 and 95 per cent of the electric power investments in developing countries goes to providing power to large cities and industries. Planners explain this as a logical priority given the needs of our

modern sector and the wider benefits that are expected to result from industrialization. In some countries, such as the neo-industrial economies of the Far East, this traditional approach to development appears to be working. But in many other countries it is not. . . . Most Third World electric utilities are government-owned monopolies, often having strong political connections and the power to commit large sums of money. However, Third World utilities are increasingly troubled institutions. Not only is their financial condition deteriorating, many have management problems caused by the pace of recent growth. Budget crises have forced substantial salary cuts and the loss of top engineers and managers. The first step in any effort to put Third World utility systems on a sustainable footing has to be increased attention to the basics of good management, including programs to hire, train, and keep qualified personnel.

Third World utilities also need to place greater emphasis on energy efficiency. From generation and distribution to the way electricity is used, Third World power systems are among the world's least efficient, each year wasting billions of dollars worth of electricity. There is now convincing evidence that careful programs to invest in efficiency improvements can provide developing countries with electrical services at far lower cost than most new power sources being developed. . . . Smaller plants, whether relying on hydropower, biomass, wind power, solar technologies, or the traditional fossil fuels, can be built more quickly in response to consumption trends and without the need to tie up capital resources for five to ten years. Many of these energy sources are now more economical than large conventional power plants, and have the advantage of relying on domestic renewable resources rather than imported fuels.

This is only the beginning of Mr. Flavin's analysis, which continues for fifty-seven pages. Helpful in understanding these many problems would be a reading of the Rocky Mountain Institute's paper, *Purpose and Programs*, issued earlier this year (address: Drawer 248, Old Snowmass, Colo., 81654). Here Amory Lovins shows that the utilities at home in the United States are not in much better shape than those of the Third World. He points to the remedy: efficiency in the use of electricity rather than increasing the supply.