

THE ESSENCE OF MAN

THERE comes a time in the life of every habitual reader of books when he or she starts to wonder about the value of the printed word. One begins serious reading with great anticipation—the hope of really finding out what one needs to know. But finally, questions arise. There are, apparently, two kinds of books. There are books with reliable information in them, matters of definable fact and precise measurements which can be found out and stated, once and for all. These are books useful for solving problems—the problems, that is, which *have* solutions, called by E. F. Schumacher convergent problems. He illustrates them in his *Guide for the Perplexed*:

Take a design problem—say, how to make a two-wheeled, man-powered means of transportation. Various solutions are offered which gradually and increasingly *converge* until finally, a design emerges which is "the answer"—a bicycle—an answer that turns out to be amazingly stable over time. Why is this answer so stable? Simply because it complies with the laws of the Universe—laws at the level of inanimate nature.

I propose to call problems of this nature *convergent* problems. The more intelligently you (whoever you are) study them, the more the answers converge. They may be divided into "convergent problems *solved*" and "convergent problems as yet *unsolved*." The words "as yet" are important, for there is no reason *in principle* why they should not be solved some day. Everything takes time, and there simply has not yet been time enough to get around to solving them. What is needed is more time, more money for research and development (R&D) and, maybe, more talent.

When in the course of past history—starting, say, in the time of Francis Bacon and Galileo, whose birthdays in the sixteenth century were only three years apart—people began to realize that humans have the capacity to solve convergent problems through the practice of science, a vast excitement and enthusiasm developed. We call this period of history "The Enlightenment," and in

the sense we have given it, it still goes on, although certain discouragements have set in. These discouragements may be best understood after consideration of the other sort of problem Schumacher talks about.

It also happens, however, that a number of highly able people may set out to study a problem and come up with answers which contradict one another. They do *not converge*. On the contrary, the more they are clarified and logically developed, the more they *diverge*, until some of them appear to be the exact *opposites* of the others. For example, life presents us with a very big problem—not the technical problem of two-wheeled transport, but the human problem of how to educate our children. We cannot escape it; we have to face it, and we ask a number of equally intelligent people to advise us. Some of them, on the basis of a clear intuition, tell us: "Education is the process by which existing culture is passed on from one generation to the next. Those who have (or are presumed to have) knowledge and experience *teach*, and those who as yet lack knowledge and experience *learn*. For this process to be effective, authority and discipline must be set up." Nothing could be simpler, truer, more logical and straightforward. Education calls for the establishment of *authority* for the teachers and *discipline* and *obedience* on the part of the pupils.

Now, another group of our advisers, having gone into the problem with the utmost care, says this: "Education is nothing more nor less than the provision of a *facility*. The educator is like a good gardener, whose function is to make available healthy, fertile soil in which a young plant can grow strong roots; through these it will extract the nutrients it requires. The young plant will develop in accordance with its own laws of being, which are far more subtle than any human can fathom, and will develop best when it has the greatest possible freedom to choose exactly the nutrients it needs." In other words, education as seen by this second group calls for the establishment, not of discipline and obedience, but of freedom—the greatest possible freedom.

His point is made. As we know, educational policy in the schools has gone, through the years,

from one extreme to the other, without what can be called impressive results from any system adopted. From time to time some wise educator will remark that no formula can settle this question—that the quality of the teacher is really at issue, since good teachers find a balance between discipline and freedom, and a lot depends upon whether the teacher is able to engross the attention of the students and fire them with the hunger to know.

Such comments, while accurate enough, seem of little use to administrators who are looking for a definable system that can be installed in a state's schools, properly described in a set of rules to be given to teachers. And a great many politicians see their task as turning all problems—whether convergent or divergent—into problems of administration, regardless of whether or not they are intrinsically solvable. Why do they do this? Because they were not elected on a platform which acknowledges the existence of divergent problems. This is a way of saying that the people who voted for the politicians are still in the Enlightenment frame of mind, believing or hoping that *all* problems are of the convergent sort and that smart politicians can devise solutions.

Schumacher's general comment is of particular interest. He says:

Convergent problems relate to the *dead* aspect of the Universe, where manipulation can proceed without let or hindrance and where man can make himself "master and possessor," because the subtle, higher forces—which we have labeled life, consciousness, and self-awareness—are not present to complicate matters. Wherever these higher forces intervene to a significant extent, the problem ceases to be convergent. We can say, therefore, that *convergence* may be expected with regard to any problem which does not involve life, consciousness, self-awareness, which means in the fields of physics, chemistry, astronomy, and also in abstract spheres like geometry and mathematics, or games like chess.

The moment we deal with problems involving the Higher Levels of Being, we must expect divergence, for there enters, to however modest a degree, the element of freedom and inner experience.

If we accept this analysis—and we have every reason to do so—then we may see that it throws considerable light on the human condition. Our lives combine an order of experience in which we have certainty, or see our way to obtaining it, with another order in which certainty seems almost impossible and where, if it should be obtained, it is not in the terms of the order in which certainty is common and definable. For lack of more precise language, we name this kind of certainty *wisdom*, and are able to say little more about it.

The things we are sure of—represented by past solutions to convergent problems—we name scientific knowledge, knowledge which deals with finite matters and covers the area in which the things we are certain about are predictable. As we know, this is one of the tests of scientific knowledge—its predictability. Wisdom, by contrast, is unpredictable. As a result, those who have come to rely on convergent solutions to all human problems are unable, most of the time, to recognize wisdom when it is offered, since it does not result from the kind of prediction they are familiar with. Wisdom may indeed depend upon familiarity with another kind of order—not an order revealed by the finite realities of past experience, not relating to "the *dead* aspect of the universe, where manipulation can proceed without let or hindrance," but concerned with factors not commonly understood.

Can we say anything at all about these factors? Very little, actually. But we are able to circle around the subject, using metaphors and imperfect analogies. That is why, on occasion, wisdom seems implicit in great poetry, ancient aphorisms, and the paradoxical utterances of those accounted to have been wise. A passage in Schumacher's book will illustrate his method of "circling":

"What is the best method of education?" presents, in short, a divergent problem par excellence. The answers tend to diverge, and the more logical and consistent they are, the greater is the divergence. There is "freedom" *versus* "discipline and obedience." There is no solution. And yet some educators are

better than others. How does this come about? One way to find out is to ask them. If we explained to them our philosophical difficulties, they might show signs of irritation with this intellectual approach. "Look here," they might say, "All this is far too clever for me. The point is: You must *love* the little horrors." Love, empathy, *participation mystique*, understanding, compassion—these are the faculties of a *higher order* than those required for the implementation of any policy of discipline or of freedom. To mobilize these higher faculties or forces, to have them available not simply as occasional impulses but permanently, requires a high level of awareness, and that is what makes a great educator.

What, then, can we say about "a great educator" or a wise human? We can at least say that he or she is an individual who has grown beyond the level of complete confidence in the method of convergent solutions. The wise individual takes into consideration elements of reality which are *not* part of the "dead," mechanistically predictable part of the universe. What are those elements part of? They are part of the growing, learning, unpredictable aspect of living intelligences. The wise man, we might say, understands something, or a great deal, of the psychodynamics of man's non-physical evolution, and bases his decisions on that knowledge. He knows that this knowledge cannot be a "sure thing," since the inherent freedom of growing intelligence is involved, but he also knows that nothing fine or good can happen unless the potentialities of that freedom are given openings or room for exercise and play.

The entire argument about the virtues and limitations of Democracy is based on the pluses and minuses of this question. The validating idea which approves and encourages the adoption of self-government is the idea of human potentiality, the claim that "the people" are able, given freedom and a measure of education, to govern themselves. If this proposition be accepted—as it was by the Founding Fathers of the United States—then the question becomes: What rate of growth in responsibility and capacity for both innovation and self-restraint can be expected of the people?

Skeptics predict that little can be expected of them; optimists look for much. It will be remembered that Gandhi, in contending for the freedom of India from British rule, was confronted by the skeptical view on the part of many of the British. "Yes," they said, "eventually you can be free, but you are not ready yet. You may have freedom, but only step by step." This was the voice of traditional wisdom, of experience. (Some self-interest may also have been involved.) But Gandhi replied (in effect): "What you say may seem plausible to you, but it overlooks the fact that growth in self-reliance and competence in self-government are possible only for people who are free to attempt it and to make, it may be, some serious mistakes, from which they will learn." Gandhi understood that the British had certain ideas about government which they had been practicing for a long time, and was himself by no means persuaded that these ideas were better, or even as good, as the order that had been the social basis of India's long past; and he also had in mind his ideal of the India of the future as a country of self-governing villages, self-reliant and non-violent.

Was Gandhi too optimistic? Judging from the present it might seem so, but large questions are involved in any such decision. Is it better to fail at a visionary or utopian project than to have the collective destiny constructed from compromises leading to long-drawn-out disaster without even the relief of having tried to do better?

Such questions may appear to be wholly academic when their anticipations are compared with the way history actually gets made, yet practical decisions need nonetheless to be based upon such reflections, if we are ever to take charge of our own lives at the social level. Today, the best thinkers are suggesting that self-government works well only when the social units are small, where emerging problems are within the grasp of ordinary human intelligence and solutions may be applied with the range of independence necessary for them to work. This seems an

appropriate mix of wisdom with the convergent solutions we know how to apply. At any rate, it is obvious that the nation-states of the present are wholly trapped by their own belief in convergent solutions, proudly manipulative through the accession of vast military power and deliberately neglectful of the factors of the human potential for growth and self-determination. Only lip-service is now paid to these ideals—which were at least present in some strength during the period of our origins.

What are we talking about here? We are trying to get at how we think, and to give some attention to the question of how we *ought* to think, in the hope that our thinking may be improved. In other words, we are hoping to add to philosophy—the quest for truth or the Good—a grasp of our psychology. Philosophy without psychology is powerless, an area of dreamy longing, while psychology without philosophy is a spiritless debate about technique. This has been evident in the West ever since the Dialogues of Plato. The question, "Can virtue be taught?" is as vitally current today as in Plato's time, and Plato's criticism of the Sophists as much needed as in the fourth century B.C.

All these questions and problems appear again for the reader of books, since books are a selective microcosm of human experience. They reflect every level of human thinking. Since the Enlightenment, for example, the practice of philosophy has been at a great disadvantage because of the tendency to say that philosophy must be made into a science, so that it may make some *progress*, and not repeat the same old questions and inadequate answers it has offered for some two thousand years. A great many thinkers adopted this view and tried to apply convergent techniques to the divergent realities of life. Because of the articulate brilliance of some of these writers, and the undoubted prestige that science as a solver of problems enjoyed until about the middle of this century, this effort was widely persuasive, but today the confidence in the

scientific approach has noticeably lessened. It is increasingly recognized that the assumptions with which science starts out prevent even the recognition of divergent problems. Among the writers especially good at showing this are Joseph Wood Krutch and Theodore Roszak, and we might add the name of a still living scientist, Erwin Chargaff, a distinguished chemist who is also a true philosopher. In his book, *Heraclitean Fire* (Rockefeller University Press, 1978), he says:

Gently and reverently, the scientist of the future, this pale dream of mine, will try to bring into the clear what is inside nature, and the way in which he does it will determine the quality of what he finds. He will attempt to avoid the gray strips of eroded nature that his measuring machines tend to leave behind and he will stay away, as much as he can, from METHOD, that bulldozer of reality. He will be slow, for he will be one of the few. He will be aware of the eternal predicament that between him and the world there is always the barrier of the human brain. But above all, he will be conscious of the perpetual darkness that must surround him as he probes nature.

Chargaff is one of the comparatively few writers who understand the limitations of the convergent approach to human problems and open the way to thinking about the modes of thought which seek the balance necessary to living with—not finally "solving"—the divergent problems of life. Only the writers who are thoroughly aware of this necessity are worth reading. Plato was the first to point out the absolute limitations of the written word—its incapacity to deal with the insights which arise from the *stance* of the thinker, which result from inner growth and elevation, and not from any skill at manipulation. Then, in his seventh letter, he makes it clear that in his opinion, that kind of "knowledge" can never be written down, and that only the ignorant and pretenders will attempt it.

But if this is the only true knowledge, shouldn't something be said about it? Naturally, something should be said, but what? Sampling the dialogues will help to answer this question. Plato's idea was to be as provocative to thinking as one can, without any supposition of certainty.

In fact, he said his writing was only a sort of "play" and has Socrates emphasize the fact that he made no claim to "teaching" or having "knowledge." Yet such knowledge, Plato maintained, was attainable. As he said in his letter: "Acquaintance with it must come rather after a long period of attendance on instruction in the subject itself and of close companionship, when, suddenly, like a blaze kindled by a leaping spark, it is generated in the soul and at once becomes self-sustaining."

We shall use our remaining space for an illustration of some writing about the nature of man. It makes no claim to "certainty." It is by Ortega, who was far from a systematic thinker with pretensions to finality. The persuasiveness of the passage is due almost entirely to the effectiveness of Ortega's use of metaphor. This, we suspect, is the closest it is possible to come to a fair account of the knowledge Plato spoke of, which "is generated in the soul and at once becomes self-sustaining." In the passage which follows, taken from *Man and Crisis*, Ortega begins by comparing history with the other sciences:

If history, which is the science of human lives, were or could be exact it would mean that men were flints, stones physiochemical bodies, and nothing else. But then one would have neither history nor physics; for stones, more fortunate if you like, than men, do not have to create science in order to be what they are, namely stones. On the other hand, man is a most strange entity, who, in order to be what he is needs first to find out what he is; needs, whether he will or no, to ask himself what are the things around him and what there in the midst of them, is he. For it is this which really differentiates man from a stone, and not that man has understanding while the stone lacks it. We can imagine a very intelligent stone; but as the inner being of the stone is given it already made, once and for all, and it is required to make no decision on the subject, it has no need, in order to go on being a stone, to pose and pose again the problem of self, asking itself "What must I do now?" or, which is the same thing, "What must I be?" Tossed into the air, without need to ask itself anything, and therefore without having to exercise its understanding, the stone which we are imagining will fall toward the

center of the earth. Its intelligence, even if existent, forms no part of its being, does not intervene in it, but would be an extrinsic and superfluous addition.

The essence of man, on the other hand, lies in the fact that he has no choice but to force himself to know, to build a science, good or bad, in order to resolve the problem of his own being. This—that he needs to know, that whether he likes it or not, he needs to work to the best of his intellectual means—is undoubtedly what constitutes the human condition.

We do all this together, sometimes in concert, but the achievement of the knowledge we need is always individual. This seems a common and increasingly adopted intuition of our time.

REVIEW

A PERSONAL APPROACH

OUR enthusiasm for the thinking and writing of Arthur Morgan is always renewed by picking up and reading in one of his books. What he says seems always to have fresh relevance, even though one has read it before. The book we came across recently in an out-of-the-way corner of the MANAS library is his *Search for Purpose*, first published by Antioch Press thirty years ago, in 1955. Before looking at it again we thought about the title, of the importance of this theme. What could be more important, today, for us all than the clarification of human purpose—that is, finding and developing a purpose in life which will make more sense and do less harm? In earlier epochs formulating a personal purpose and direction may have been of primary interest and value, but today the human race suffers from a common and largely self-made confusion. It becomes necessary to ask, What are we here for? Is there a general purpose in human life, and if we can happen to determine what it is, shouldn't things work better for us, for everybody and, indeed, for the planet, since the planet, too, has been announcing in unambiguous terms that it is in trouble, mostly as a result of human action?

What about other books with this theme? We think easily of two, John Dewey's *Quest for Certainty* and Scott Nearing's *Search for the Good Life*. Dewey was a thinker who believed that thinking should lead to positive action in behalf of the social community. He was tired of mere righteous rhetoric and of flights of speculative idealism which began in philosophic arm chairs and ended there. He wrote:

After a polite and pious deference has been paid to "ideals," men feel free to devote themselves to matters which are more immediate and pressing. . . . Men hoist the banner of the ideal, and then march in the direction that concrete conditions suggest and reward. . . . To many persons, the idea that ends professed by morals are impotent save as they are connected with the working machinery of economic

life seems like deflowering the purity of moral values and obligations.

In his Introduction to *Man's Search for the Good Life*, which first appeared in 1954, Nearing said:

Reduced to its simplest terms, the author's dilemma, the dilemma of his generation, the dilemma of western man, the dilemma of man in history, involves a clash between ideals, aspirations, hopes, projects and plans on the one hand, and on the other the web of circumstance. In a word, man as an individual and as part of the human community is presented with a contradiction, an either-or, or a dilemma, a choice. He cannot have both his penny and his cake. He can have one or the other. Within the limits of the natural and social environment, it is his decision which determines the course that is to be followed. *Man's Search for the Good Life* is an attempt to describe the contradiction, to explain the dilemma, to evaluate the various factors involved in the choice and to discuss the probable consequences which result from the decisions made by western man in recent years.

Both these books have proved valuable to thousands of readers. The reason, we think, for this is that not very many writers have made themselves competent to think clearly about the question of human purpose in general terms. Obviously, even the best of writers will differ on the subject. But these differences are not a shortcoming. In physics only the general truths count. In thinking about human action and decision, however, since each human has his own endowment, circumstances, longings, and hopes, the thinking needs to be open to a wide range of applications to be of use. It is for this reason that no good book is exactly like any other good book. Yet an inquiry into what makes them "good" is not without point. To define a good book at the universal level means to seek a Platonic or ideal definition in which the differences are somehow resolved. On the other hand, a book is not much good unless the reader is able to turn its meaning to his own distinctive uses. This requires what we might call—for lack of a better term—*creative writing*, which in this case means ample and effective illustration and a temper which helps the

reader to look for and find analogies and applications of his own. Morgan was not a flashy writer. His prose is lean and economical, yet the man had an active and practiced imagination—so much so that he made himself into a serviceable model for anyone ready to think about human purpose in the way Morgan thought about it.

Why so?

He uses himself as a "sample" in a way that practically all readers are able to understand. His second chapter, "My Personal Approach," tells about how he came to decide that the search for purpose was about the most important thing he could undertake. For him, it started early—astonishingly early—yet readers who have asked themselves similar questions will nevertheless feel at home with his recollections. Morgan grew up in the last years of the nineteenth century in a small, rural Minnesota town. His father was liberal and agnostic, a good and decent man yet not very effective in practical terms. His mother was a Christian fundamentalist, yet unselfish, generous, and efficient in the sense that she found ways (taking in boarders, for one) which kept the family going. His environment, in other words, was more or less like millions of the rest of us. The interesting thing about Morgan's life is not this typical environment but what he did with it, made out of it. He says:

In the course of my general curiosity, by the time I was eight I was turning over in my mind some of the theological phrases I heard at church. For instance, I was taught that God is all-powerful, that there is nothing he cannot do. Suppose, I would say to myself, that there has been a certain occurrence, say, that I have been born. Could God make it that it had never taken place? Whatever he did, would not the fact remain? If so, then there was something he could not do. Even while playing games with schoolmates or with neighbor children such childish speculations would be running through my mind.

The Minnesota town (St. Cloud) had a wonderful library which became for the boy "a whole congregation of friends."

Some of the authors were asking themselves just the questions I was asking myself. There and from similar sources during the next few years I found writings which moved me very deeply. In addition to books on science there were such standard works as Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, Tolstoi's *My Confession*, Wordsworth's *Prelude*, Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, and Sidney Lanier's poems, along with Bacon, Montaigne, Epictetus, Emerson and Thoreau. Also, I read many less known authors. It was not only the thoughts these men expressed which appealed to me, but the climate in which they lived.

Question: Could a young person of today go to the library and be able to generate that climate for himself or herself, without the assistance of an exceptional librarian? One must doubt it very much. (This doubt plays a part in the MANAS review policy, which is to pay little or no attention to the fact that many of the books to which we give attention are no longer easily available. They are still the best things to read and *deserve* this attention, if the "climate" Morgan speaks of is important—and of course it is, perhaps the most important thing in a young person's life.)

Morgan's book on the search for purpose is rich, not because he has grandiloquent passages on the purpose he chose, but because he tells about the obstacles he had to overcome in thinking about it, and the steps he took to make his thinking effective. As a boy, for example, he asked himself, "What shall I believe?" How much validity is there in the feeling, "This is true!" Looking back for about sixty years to the time of his teens, he said:

Perhaps the most difficult decision I ever made was that my own deep conditioning should be examined. When I did arrive at that conclusion I went far beyond the immediate issue. I arrived at the conclusion that free, critical inquiry cannot be free so long as there is an emotional drag holding one to particular beliefs. Desire or intent to justify a particular belief or attitude leads to unrepresentative selection and inaccurate weighing of evidence. It would be my aim not to try to make myself believe any doctrine or theory nor to try not to believe. I would want my beliefs and opinions to be my best judgment from the evidence, not adopted because of

comfort or courage I would get from believing. If I should be convinced that for me to know the truth, or to give up some current belief by finding it untrue, would take away my comfort and remove the present basis for my hope, nevertheless, I should seek to know the truth.

His search was attended by a modesty reassuring to the reader:

Since I was about sixteen I have been committed to complete freedom of inquiry, regardless of what effect that would have on my beliefs, outlook or hope. (My idea of complete freedom of inquiry has not involved taking serious risks without counting the cost, such as becoming addicted to opium to find out what that would be like.)

Why has such commitment had no more significant results in my own life? There are several reasons. First has been my own mediocre and limited personality in motive intelligence, energy, vitality, education and judgment. But aside from weakness of will, cowardice, and selfishness which interfered with my living up to my purposes, there was another reason for hesitation to commit myself unreservedly to a course which seemed to me right. This was a feeling that my wisdom and judgment, and my personal stability, were not adequate to justify or sustain extreme action.

There seems a sense in which Morgan's feeling of the purpose of life is implicit in every line of this book. It is still in print and available from Community Service, an organization Morgan founded in the 1940s, in paperback at \$2.75. Another book containing large extracts from the diary he kept in his twenties and a brief account of his life is *Finding His World*, edited by Lucy Morgan, his wife, is also available (\$2.00) and would make a valuable companion to the one on purpose. The address is P.O. Box 243, 114 E. Whiteman St., Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387. The Community Service book list would be a good thing to have.

COMMENTARY

WHAT DOES OUR SOCIETY NEED MOST?

THE answer to this question seems simple enough. Not only our society, but every society, needs effective minorities. A society needs innovators, individuals capable of figuring out what changes ought to come about, and who then focus on the means of such changes.

What we can say about such individuals? How might they be described? They need to be of the sort that is illustrated by Arthur Morgan, as for example in what he says at the bottom of the next column: "Perhaps the most difficult decision I ever made was that my own deep conditioning should be examined." He speaks of the "emotional drag holding one to particular beliefs," saying that when these beliefs have become irrelevant they may "lead to unrepresentative and inaccurate weighing of evidence." This is precisely what innovators and change-agents cannot afford. If you are out to make changes in *society*, the greatest necessity is to know exactly what you are doing and what is the likelihood of its having the effect you hope for. If you should be successful in initiating a change which eventually turns out to be a serious mistake, how can you bear the responsibility of bringing disaster on the people you wanted to help? So *many* people!

To go beyond this in saying what society needs most would be to write a program, and that is not what we need half so much as the individuals who have taught themselves how to recognize representative evidence and to weigh it accurately. Morgan, it seems fair to say, really had these qualities. For evidence we offer his book, *The Long Road*, written after he left the directorship of TVA. It is a seminal work embodying his vision of what America should become—available at \$2.00 in cloth from Community Service, Inc.

Innovators need to distinguish carefully between things which need to be gotten rid of and

things we should hold on to. Peter Viereck put this so well in a passage quoted recently from him in MANAS that we repeat it here:

The meaningful moral choice is not between conforming and nonconforming but between conforming to the ephemeral, stereotyped values of the moment and conforming to the ancient, lasting values shared by all creative cultures. . . . Liberty depends on a substratum of fixed archetypes, as opposed to the arbitrary shuffling about of laws and institutions.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves SCHOOL AND STATE

AMONG other radical contentions, Vinoba Bhave declared for separation of school and state. He wanted to free education from the biases of political contention. In his book, *Third Power*, translated into English by Marjorie Sykes and K. S. Acharlu, published by Sarva Seva Sangh in 1972, he recommended that teachers avoid politics, saying:

If a teacher gets involved in politics he is no longer his own master, he is a mere tool in the hand of another, and loses his independence. He does not act, he is acted upon. He can no longer exercise the functions of a teacher, nor keep his proper status.

Today, most teachers in this country would frown on this injunction. They may feel that being active in some way—against nuclear war, for local autonomy and ecological thinking—is a way of showing independence. On the other hand, it is hard to imagine a good teacher even wanting to be conventionally political. But let us see what Vinoba has in mind. He says:

Education in the old days was not in this predicament. The story of Sri Krishna tells how even while he was still a child he overcame Kansa and set the country free. However, his father realized that he had not yet had any schooling, he had no degree, and so sent him to a *guru* for his education. The *guru* thought to himself: "This boy is a hero and he has been sent to me to be taught. Well and good I will teach him." He set Sri Krishna to work with a poor Brahmin boy, and sent the pair of them into the jungle to cut firewood. The Brahmin boy, Sudama, was very poor Sri Krishna was the son of a powerful king, but they studied together. There was no "public" school for the rich only such as we have nowadays, where the ordinary public cannot go. Sri Krishna's *guru* made no such distinctions, he gave the same physical labor to both boys alike, he taught both alike, and when their education was completed he gave them both his blessing, saying: "You have done your work well; you have given good service, and he who serves acquires knowledge, therefore your studies are completed; I bid you both farewell."

Vinoba drew his moral:

I have told you this story to make you realize that the *guru*, in those days, was not subject to political authority. The *guru* was above politics. The Department of Education today should be just as much above politics as the Department of Justice, which is independent of the government and can decide a case against the government if it sees fit. The judges receive their salary from the government, but they are not subject to governmental pressure. The same principal should be accepted for education as has been accepted for the judiciary. If that happens, education will go ahead. No educational problem will ever be solved unless we can shake off the clutches of the politicians in which we are held today.

At the time India gained her independence Vinoba was living near Wardha, the center of Gandhian education. On Aug. 15, 1947, the people of Wardha invited him to address a meeting, for that was Independence Day. He accepted. This is what he said:

"Friends, we have got our independence. Should we now fly the old flag even for one day?" "Of course not," they replied—for if the old flag flies it means that the old government still goes on. I then suggested that just as the new regime has a new flag, it should have a new kind of education. The old education means that the old regime goes on and that there is no real change. Gandhiji with great farsightedness suggested a type of education which he called "Nai Talim." I do not mean to say that Nai Talim should be accepted merely because it is his. Gandhiji did not desire us to accept everything he said blindly or swallow it whole. However, if the government were in my hands—a thing which will not happen—I would give all the school children three months' holiday and tell them to go and play, to grow strong, to work in the fields or with the craftsmen, as they please, to enjoy their independence. Meanwhile I would call a conference of educationists and ask them to draw up a plan for education in free India, to be ready within three months. When it was ready, I would open the schools again. Instead of that, however, we have first, second, third, fourth, Five-Year-Plans, but the same old education as before, no change at all.

Now comes his critique:

The Government tells us that there is an educational "explosion," an enormous expansion of

education, which brings all kinds of new problems in its train. But my doubt is "Do good things ever explode? If education has 'exploded' it must surely mean that it is a bad and dangerous thing." And that is what it really is, today. If you don't expand education, people will remain ignorant, and if you do expand it they will become unemployable. The choice is between ignorance and uselessness—which will you choose? The last time Dr. Zakir Hussain [a former president of India] came to visit me I told him all this. His reply was: "Vinoba, you said that the educated are useless for work, but it is worse than that, they are useless and ignorant too." That was his amendment, and I accepted it. That is why I say we ought immediately to have changed the pattern of education. What is done is done, but we must change it now.

He goes on:

Education, then, is said to be a big problem. Why is it, I ask, that something which is meant to solve problems has itself become a problem? The reason of it is that education has got into the hands of the State. You have given to a Director of Education an authority which you never gave to Shankaracharya or to Tulsidas. Any book the Director cares to choose becomes a textbook throughout the State and every student has to study it. It is imposed on the whole of Bihar North, South, East, West, and if the children don't study it they will fail. Tulsidas possessed no such power to compel people to read his *Ramayana*, though plenty of people read it of their own free will. But you consider that a Director of Education is competent to decide on compulsory textbooks for all.

To sum up, the whole field of education should be freed from Government control. It is in your power to bring this about, for if you, yourselves, the teachers, assert your freedom, education will also gain its freedom.

Curiously, in a recent *American Scholar* (Summer, 1984) essay, E. D. Hirsch, of the University of Virginia, finds reason to object to the policies of educational administrators in the United States, not because they require the use of certain books in the schools, but because they don't recommend *any*. Many educators, he says, have adopted the theory that reading and writing can be taught without reference to the classics or other literary works that carry specific values or perhaps unpopular ideas. In the teaching of

English, for example, the state curriculum guides of California "mention no work, no period, no author." This is regarded as a "safe" policy, since it enables educators to avoid the "eternal controversy with parents over the English curriculum." Vinoba found that Indian administrators were exercising greater dictatorial authority than the authors of the classics of Indian literature, such as Tulsidas. Hirsch reports the spinelessness of American educators, who hesitate to name works worth reading because someone might object. He calls this "educational formalism" and deplores the "unfortunate segregation of the three traditional aspects of 'English': reading, writing, and literature."

As for freeing the whole field of education from Government control, a movement in America is deliberately and successfully engaged in this liberation, on a family basis. Its principal advocate is John Holt, who is helping parents wanting to free their children from the public schools by teaching them at home. Both his book, *Teach Your Own*, and his magazine, *Growing without Schooling*, may be obtained by writing to his office at 729 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass. 02116.

FRONTIERS

What To Do about Unemployment

COMMON problems have a social origin and require social solutions. They are therefore difficult. How do you get people to act together, often in unaccustomed ways, for the common good? People who think well along these lines are scarce and for this reason of some importance to read—we are thinking, for example, of writers like Edward Bellamy and Henry George. Arthur Morgan, who wrote an informing life of Edward Bellamy, is one of their number. So is William Coperthwaite, whose most recent contribution to *MANAS* was the two-part article on Bread Labor which appeared last September.

Lately we came across a discussion of "The Self-Reliant Community" by an Australian writer, Geoff Lacey, in the November 1983 *Permaculture*, a quarterly journal devoted to the Permaculture movement begun and carried on by Bill Mollison, a paper full of vital ideas concerning how to "produce an efficient, low maintenance, productive integration of plants, animals, structures and people with the ultimate result of on-site stability and food self-sufficiency in the smallest practical area." (Subscription is \$14 a year—37 Goldsmith St., Maryborough 3465, Victoria, Australia.) Lacey's article seemed a useful extension of the ideas proposed by Bill Coperthwaite in *MANAS*. We'll try to summarize them here. He begins with examination of the fundamental problem of our time—unemployment—saying:

To "solve unemployment" we try to "create more jobs." A job is a position in which one works as an employee for a monetary wage. Attempts to create jobs generally entail the investing of capital by the government or a private organization in some project that will "generate economic growth" and hence the money to pay wages to workers. Yet, in spite of continual efforts by governments to generate growth, unemployment goes on rising.

But why do we need jobs at all? Is a job an end in itself? Is it something demanded by human nature? Of course not. A few hundred years ago

relatively few people had jobs but most had a means of subsistence. A job is a means to an end, something that enables us to meet our needs, to exercise skills, and to participate in society.

I suggest that those who see unemployment as a basic social problem are mistaken. The real problem is that many people are being deprived of their rightful access to the means of meeting their needs. There may be other ways of meeting these needs besides getting a job. The real task is not to solve unemployment, but to find ways by which all people can meet their needs, exercise their creative skills, and help build up their community.

The question may be raised: are all our needs "real" or are some of them "artificial," created perhaps through advertising? . . . Two points, however, should be kept in mind. Firstly, in this paper I am considering needs that can be met through organized work (such as food, travel and study courses) and not other kinds of needs (such as affection and prestige). Secondly, many items that people now consider as needs may no longer be needed in an alternative to the present system of production.

The very idea of an alternate system of production may seem strange and unlikely to many people. They have accepted the existing industrial system as the natural "way things are," hardly giving thought to the comparisons Lacey introduces. But the numerous troubles we are having do give rise to the question of whether they are inevitable, and to the further inquiry: Can our system be changed or replaced? After a few hundred words on the character, limitations, and disadvantages of the industrial system, Lacey says:

Today our lives are so thoroughly moulded by the industrial system that it is easy to take it for granted. However, this system of production is relatively new in history. Key factors in its development were the European colonial expansion, the "industrial revolution" in the late eighteenth century, and now the growth of modern electronics. The industrial system has become more and more comprehensive decade by decade, reaching into new "virgin lands," making contact with new "native people," and penetrating new aspects of the lives of all.

At one time, the majority of people built their own houses. In fact many of the houses we see in

country towns in Australia were built by the hands of their first owner. Students in Melbourne colleges have sometimes told me they expect to be given a car when they are 18. A mere generation earlier, such privilege was rare indeed and almost all people of that age travelled by foot, bicycle, and public transport—modes that entail a much lower degree of dependency on the industrial system. . . .

The industrial system is something over which most people have little or no control, although it affects their lives so profoundly. In the work-place, for example, the average person has no say in what is produced, how the work is done, and to what use the product is put. One can generally do nothing, other than resign, if what is produced is useless or harmful. One is alienated from one's work. It has no meaning for the worker; it is not an expression of the person; it is merely the means of plugging into the industrial system, of obtaining money and hence access to the global market.

Today, moreover, the system no longer has the semblance of stability. It can no longer provide full employment. It has given rise to a global environmental crisis, and its most dynamic expression is the nuclear arms race.

This is the kind of criticism and analysis that one practically never finds in the high-toned, conventional discussion of economic problems. The idea of a basic change in the system to an arrangement that is at least compatible with human hope and decency is never introduced. The reason for this is fairly obvious—the minority in control doesn't want and refuses to think about basic change. Yet basic change is what is required. E. F. Schumacher, for one, made this completely evident. Lacey says:

In principle there is another economy, an alternative to that of the industrial system, another way in which people can meet their basic needs. I will call this alternative "community self-reliance." A self-reliant community is one that aims to provide for its own needs, under its own management, using as far as possible local resources.

Geoff Lacey discusses the attributes of the self-reliant community in the abstract, and then, what is far more valuable, describes steps taken in this direction by existing communities. These include having one's own or a community garden

to grow food, applications of solar space and water heating, mud brick dwellings, bicycle transport (as in Davis, California), and various innovations already under way in Maryborough. His point:

Such small steps are the starting-points for community self-reliance. They require imagination, clear thought, and persistence. For any community, there is no single obvious answer, but a range of free choices to be discovered and explored.

Eventually, this sort of thinking is going to take hold. The surprising thing is how well it is already being done, establishing the plateau of future possibility.