

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY

[This is an article by E. F. Schumacher on the rationale of intermediate technology, an approach to the economic needs of the underdeveloped countries. It appeared in the first *Bulletin* of the Intermediate Technology Development Group Ltd., an advisory committee formed in England to work for better understanding of the problems of economic aid. Its membership is open to all those concerned with such problems. The address of ITDG is 9 King Street, Covent Garden, London WC2.]

A GREAT effort is going on called Foreign Aid for Development. Yet the impartial observer cannot help noticing that most of the so-called "developing" countries are plagued by large-scale and increasing unemployment. If the proverbial visitor from another planet would come and have a look, he might say: "I do see development but little improvement. I do see changes but no signs of growing economic health. I hear a great deal of talk about approaching the take-off point, but I see it receding. I notice more and more countries requiring ever-increasing food imports (and it is indeed one of the great marvels of the world that the United States are capable of producing very large food surpluses). I see increasing balance of payments problems—not increasing stabilization on the economic front." And he might also say that he sees increasing political instability.

Turning his attention to the aid-giving world, he will undoubtedly say: "I see increasing disillusionment." A few years ago one could say that only a kind of lunatic fringe in the aid-giving countries was openly critical of aid and even against it, but today this is no longer so. Disillusion is spreading fast. So we had better have a new look at the whole problem.

Some say the trouble is that there is too little aid. They admit that there are many disrupting tendencies but suggest that with more massive aid one ought to be able to over-compensate them. Effective aid, however, would have to be so

massive that there could not be enough for everyone. So there are suggestions to concentrate on a few countries only and to forget the rest: to concentrate on the countries where the promise of success seems most credible. But the moment one looks at such proposals, one realises that this is a running away from the problem. I think, therefore, that one is entitled to ask whether there may not be something fundamentally wrong with the philosophy of development. Because for the rich to help the poor is never easy. We know this from our private lives. The rich normally have very little understanding of what it is really like to be poor. They have little contact with real poverty. Complacently they say to the poor: "Make a plan to show what help you need. Carry out the plan and all will be well."

It is this thinking that needs perhaps to be questioned a little. Perhaps the logic of this thinking is too mechanical, too much lacking in insight. Our own civilization is a machine civilization, but it was not created by a machine civilization—it has grown out of something else, a pre-machine civilization. In every branch of modern thought the word "evolution" stands written with capital letters as a central concept; we accept that everything has evolved bit by bit. But in economic development we appear to think differently. We talk about the great leap, the great jump and, of course, we have every reason to hope that such a jump might be possible, because the pressures are very great. The only question is, does it work?

The theory of evolution is certainly, to a very large extent, a reflection of all our experience of *human* development, particularly economic and technical development. Let us imagine a modern industrial establishment, say, a great refinery. As we walk around in its vastness, with all its fantastic complexity, we might well ask ourselves

how is it possible that the human mind has conceived such a thing. What an immensity of knowledge, thought, ingenuity, experience is here incarnated in equipment! The answer is that it did not simply spring ready-made out of the human mind—it came by a process of evolution. It started quite simple, then this was added and that was added, and so it became more and more complex. But even what we actually see in this refinery is only, as I would say, the tip of the iceberg.

What you do not see on your visit is far greater than what you see: the immensity, again, of the arrangements and the ingenuity to allow the crude oil to flow into the refinery and to ensure that a multitude of refined products, properly separated, properly labelled, is sent to specific consumers through a most elaborate distribution system. All this you cannot see. Nor do you see all the intellectual achievements of planning, of organisation, of financing, of marketing. Least of all do you immediately become conscious of the great educational background which is the pre-condition of all, extending from primary schools to universities and specialised technical establishments, to cope with all these problems, only a few of which are immediately visible in the refinery itself. That is what I mean when I say that the visitor sees only the tip of an iceberg. There is ten times as much somewhere else which he cannot see, and without the "ten" the "one" that he does see is worthless. And if the "ten" is not supplied by the country where the refinery has been erected, either the refinery simply does not work or it is in fact a foreign body which depends for what I call the "ten" on some other country somewhere else. The whole modern tendency is to see only the visible and to forget all the invisible things that are really the pre-conditions.

Now, could it possibly be that the failure of aid, the failure or relative failure of development, has something to do with our materialistic philosophy which makes us liable to overlook the invisible pre-conditions? We forget that the

visible means nothing unless the invisible requirements are met and they may be ten times as great. If we do not forget it, we call for a plan and imagine that the whole iceberg can be created by blueprint, by a comprehensive plan; in other words, not by evolution but by creation.

Our scientists tell us from morning to night that everything has evolved by little mutations sieved out by natural selection. We are told that every complexity has risen incidentally through this process of evolution. But our development planners seem to think that they can create a most complex thing at one throw by a process called planning. Planning with a capital "P," letting Athene spring, not even out of the head of Zeus but out of nothingness, fully armed, resplendent, and viable.

Occasionally something like this can be done. One can get a project done here or there, but is that really development? To change the metaphor, you can always create little modern islands in a pre-industrial society. But these islands will have to be defended, like a fortress, and provisioned, as it were, by helicopter from far away, or they will be flooded by the surrounding sea.

Whatever happens, whether they succeed or not, they produce what is called the "dual economy"; that is to say, a social and human split where, on the one hand, you have a very modern sector normally concentrated in one or two towns and, behind it, a vast hinterland of impoverishment which sinks into ever deeper misery. There is no integration, no cohesion, and it stands as a question whether perhaps the modern sector may not have a baneful influence on the hinterland, producing a kind of poisoning. I believe that I have seen how it does tend to poison the hinterland; how the erection of modern factories in the modern sector, producing ordinary consumer goods, agricultural implements, building materials—the kind of goods which, in its primitive way, the hinterland could produce itself—creates havoc in the hinterland. For every

job created in the modern factory, ten or even a hundred jobs in the small towns and villages disappear. Thus the great hinterland, probably containing 85 or 90 per cent of the population, is poisoned and, in a desperate way, it takes its revenge. By what? By mass migration into the centre, in the forlorn hope to find work in the modern factory. But these jobs are so few that the majority of the migrants become an unemployed town proletariat, making a mess of the towns themselves. Hence we have this very disturbing development to which this recent press statement from the World Health Organisation refers: "The W.H.O. experts present a shattering picture of the ramshackle speed at which cities are now proliferating, particularly in Africa with its estimated 44 million urbanised population." I do not know why the reference is particularly to Africa because the phenomenon is worldwide. The experts also say that on present trends it must be expected that, with the world population doubling between now and the year 2000, the proportion of urbanised world population will also double—in other words, the city population will increase fourfold. They state that "today the very shanty towns of more than 100,000 inhabitants at the fringes of our modern cities concentrate 12 per cent of the world population, more than one third of the world's city population." And people who have studied this, like Kingsley Davies in his book on India's urban future, put forward estimates about the population of, say, Calcutta, in the year 2000: a minimum of 33 million inhabitants, more likely 66 million.

This is the terrible disease of the dual economy; this is what I call "the process of mutual poisoning," when thoughtless industrial development in the cities destroys the economic structure of the hinterland, and the hinterland takes its revenge by mass migration into the cities, poisoning them, making them utterly unmanageable, as you can observe all over the world. And if they are still manageable, they are only manageable because the great populations in

the shanty towns just become forgotten people, breeding vice and every kind of degradation.

Is there an alternative? I am not suggesting that everything that has been done in the past was wrong or everything must now be totally changed. Life is not like this. Of course, every country is committed to an irrevocably modern sector, and if the country needs an airline, I would not recommend that it should buy anything but the best. Is there a need for a certain change of emphasis, a certain reconsideration of the basic philosophy of aid? The ruling philosophy of aid over the last twenty years has been "what is best for us must be best for them." And we have carried this to the most extraordinary lengths, which I think I can epitomise by reading out a list of the countries where the Americans have found it necessary or wise to establish, of all things, nuclear reactors—in Formosa, Colombia, Congo, Indonesia, Iran, South Korea, Philippines, Portugal, Thailand, Turkey, Venezuela, and, for good measure, Vietnam, all of them countries whose overwhelming problem is agriculture, the occupation of the overwhelming majority of their poverty-stricken peoples.

Why tackle development at all? The only reason why one is interested in development is the existence of poverty of such a degree for many people that it goes beyond poverty and constitutes misery. It is not because a country is under-industrialised that it ought to develop; if it is rich, whether with industry or without industry, it needs no "development," certainly no development aid. The starting point is poverty, and if we want to deal with poverty, our first task is to recognise and understand the boundaries and limitations which poverty imposes.

I would put it to you that the causes of poverty are certain deficiencies in education, organisation and discipline. These are the causes of poverty. There are too many people who think that the causes of poverty must be visible factors—a lack of natural wealth or a lack of capital or a lack of infrastructure. Admittedly, in

some extreme cases, like that of the Eskimos in Polar regions, the environment may be so hostile that an adequate level of education, organisation and discipline cannot be established. These are the exceptions. As a rule, the material factors are not primary, and there are prosperous societies without any basis of natural wealth at all. A very interesting case, known to all of us, is Hongkong. And what about Switzerland or even England? Economics does not start with goods; it starts with people and their education, organisation and discipline. Without these three, all resources remain latent, untapped, potential like the marvellous, unlimited resources of Brazil about which so many people have said that "Brazil is the country of the future and will always remain so." There has been plenty of opportunity to observe the truth of this thesis after the second world war. Every country, no matter how devastated, which had a high level of education, organisation and discipline, produced an "economic miracle." In fact, these were miracles only for people whose attention is focussed on the tip of the iceberg. The tip had been damaged but the basis, which is education and discipline, was still there.

Here lies the central problem of development. If the causes of poverty are deficiencies in these three respects, then the alleviation of poverty depends on the removal of these deficiencies. Here is the reason why one cannot "jump" in development, because education does not jump; education is a gradual process. Organisation does not jump; it must evolve to fit changing circumstances, and the same goes for discipline. All three cannot be ordered or simply planned; they must evolve step by step, and the foremost task of policy must be to speed this evolution. And all three must become the property of the whole people, not merely of a small minority.

Education can be effectively tackled only if it is closely allied with work, and any economic activity, to be really helpful, must be designed to produce educational effects,—so that the higher level of education attained can fertilise more

economic activity,—and must lead to a higher level of organisation and discipline.

So we come back to aid. Aid is given to introduce certain new economic activities, but these activities will be viable only if they can be sustained by the already existing educational level of fairly broad groups of people, and they will be valuable only if they raise, spread, and promote an advance in education, organisation and discipline. There can be a process of stretching—never a process of jumping. If a new economic activity is introduced which is entirely out of reach of "the people," then it will have a negative demonstration effect. It will convince the broad masses of the people that they can do nothing, that they are out of it, that they are helpless. Not unless Uncle Sam or John Bull or somebody else gives them something, like a *deus ex machina*, can they do anything at all. And they will stop doing, as they have stopped in very many places, that which they can perfectly do themselves. That is what I mean by a negative demonstration effect.

Equally with organisation and discipline. If the new activity depends on a *special* organisation and a *special* discipline which is not at all inherent in the society where the activity is introduced, then the activity will be neither viable nor valuable. It will remain as a foreign body that cannot be integrated.

So the task for development planners is first of all to understand that the problem of development is not primarily an economic problem. Economics is secondary. I should be the last, as a professional economist, to say that economists do not have their usefulness, but only as long as they know precisely what is the crux of the matter. The invisible factors are more basic than the visible ones. If any project does not fit educationally, then it will be an economic failure. And even if it appears to be successful owing to certain highly artificial arrangements that can always be made, it will not promote healthy development but simply intensify the dual economy.

Poverty sets boundaries not only in economics but also in education, as in everything else, and the dearer the university places, the fewer they are. If the number of places is very small, the temptation to utilise education solely for one's personal advantage is very great and, from the point of view of the society as a whole, this kind of higher education may become a pure loss. When, therefore, we encounter attempts to democratise education in a poor country, I don't think it is fair to say that this amounts to a sacrifice of quality for quantity. No, it is an attempt to find the right quality of education—a quality that is relevant to the real problems of a poor society, a kind of education that respects the boundaries of poverty. Today, all populations are participants in the world-wide revolution of expectations and everybody must somehow be given a chance to participate. This means that there must be education for everybody.

As I look around, it seems to me that of all the developing countries only two have quite clearly understood these truths. They are very different. One is China, and the other is Israel. And they know what to do about education. Fundamentally, they say to their students: "If society enables you to get an education, something so valuable and so much better than what most of your fellow-countrymen can get, then you have to give something in return." And so in one way or another there is some kind of a conscription of the educated. It is temporary conscription, but with some element of compulsion. In China between 1958 and 1964, productive labour became a regular activity in all educational institutions; part-farm, part-study colleges and secondary schools; part-factory, part-study institutions in the towns. They say that it is only in this manner, when you marry education and work, that you achieve the necessary change in motivations and avoid producing an alienated educated class who will think of anything except looking after the people at large. Another approach is of great interest in this connection, that is, the conscription of the educated through

what is called "the peaceful use of military forces." And the very well-developed youth service has, I am informed, already founded or helped to develop something like 200 new agricultural communities and given them the necessary impetus for growth. I believe that all these things deserve the closest attention both from the donor countries and from the receiving countries.

And what do the educated have to do? They teach the simple things, literacy, hygiene, and some improvements in either collective or co-operative farming. People might ask, what has literacy and hygiene to do with development? It is interesting to recall that when Gandhi was once asked what to do to fight the misery of rural India he said "Promote literacy and hygiene." He did not give the answer of an economist but, even economically speaking, his was unquestionably the correct answer. Because it is only with literacy and hygiene that the three basic pre-conditions of development—education, organisation and discipline—can be realised. They can be realised only on a basis of self-respect.

I think the principles that we should never forget when dealing with development are these—

*If you want to go places, start from where you are.*

*If you are poor, start with something cheap.*

*If you are uneducated, start with something relatively simple.*

*If you live in a poor environment, and poverty makes markets small, start with something small.*

*If you are unemployed, start using your labour power; because any productive use of it is better than letting it lie idle.*

In other words, we must learn to recognise the boundaries of poverty. A project that does not fit, educationally and organisationally, into the environment, will be an economic failure or a cause of disruption.

Therefore, if we really want to help the helpless help themselves in education, health, agriculture, industry and so on, then in all these fields we need, I suggest, an approach which I have termed the method of "intermediate technology." This does not include, as I have said before, certain highly-developed sectors which are irrevocably committed to the most modern methods and can afford them. All the others need an "intermediate technology," something more effective and more viable than the indigenous, traditional technology and at the same time far cheaper and simpler than the modern. This intermediate technology must be cheap enough to create enough work places for all—in populous countries like India: millions of work places—and must be simple enough to educate the people. As I said before, education *en masse* can only be done through work—an education not just for a few people, who then will become alienated, but for the whole people.

I would also say that *we* should give the very best we have got. And what is the best we have got? It is not our ironmongery and hardware. The best we have got and can give as aid are matters of the mind; it is the knowledge that the West has gained through its scientific development. That knowledge has found one particular application in our present-day technology; it could find quite a different application in a quite different technology. Our technology has been designed to suit our condition, being rich in capital and poor in labour. But the same knowledge must now be applied to suit other conditions, the conditions of societies which are rich in labour and poor in capital. If that were done, a very different technology would result: a technology that recognised and respected the boundaries of poverty and really helped the poor.

I would recommend to anyone in industrial life to look at his equipment and ask himself how much of it is really the tool element and how much of it is labour-saving devices. I tell you, generally

the proportion is one to ten. One element is the tool. Well, if you want to do something with any precision and perfection, then you need a highly developed tool; but you do not need all the labour-saving accretions which constitute probably 90 per cent of the whole cost of the machine. The approach of Intermediate Technology becomes clear-sighted on these matters and says: "They do not need to save labour because they have got the labour—one of their biggest problems is unemployment. So, for goodness sake, no costly labour-saving devices but, for goodness sake, no inferior tools either. Let us reduce the capital intensity but maintain the quality of the tool and create more jobs; let us make our technology appropriate to the country that is to use it."

I would like to mention three roads to get to this intermediate technology, all of which are already being used. The first road is somehow to scale down our technology so that it becomes appropriate to poor countries, keeping the tool element and dropping all expensive labour-saving accretions. That is the first road—starting from where we are and making our machinery appropriate for the poor. Another road is to start from the traditional methods of production and to upgrade them—probably the sounder road, but it depends on which product we are talking about. The third road is to recognise the problem as new and to commission new design studies. Normally, the design studies commissioned in the West aim at a reduction of the labour requirement. The studies I have in mind would have different terms of reference, such as: "This is the raw material—this is the final product. Design a process for a capital-poor country where labour is relatively cheap and plentiful."

An organisation has now been set up in London to put these ideas into practice. It is called the "Intermediate Technology Development Group." It is a private, voluntary organisation and depends of course on attracting financial support. But it is unlikely to require large funds, the kind of

money on which other types of aid depend. The approach of Intermediate Technology is "organic" and "nonviolent," and we all know that everything truly "organic" and "non-violent" is relatively very cheap indeed.

Requests for help are coming in from all over the world. Here is a typical case: "Some 20 years ago there existed a bit of equipment which one could purchase for £20 to do a particular job. Now it costs £2,000 and is fully automated and we cannot afford to buy it. Can you help us?" These are the requirements of the poor people for whom nobody really cares. The powerful people, who are no longer poor, are more interested in nuclear reactors, huge dams, steel works and so on.

I think the time is right for new thinking on aid and development, and this new thinking will be different from the old because it will take poverty seriously. It will make a real effort of the imagination. It will not go along mechanically saying: "This is good for the rich; it must also be good for the poor." It will make a conscious effort to develop a real feel and understanding for the realities of a poor society. It will care for people—from a severely practical point of view. Why care for people? Because people are all that matters, and they are also the only ultimate source of any wealth whatsoever. If they are left out, if they are pushed out of the way by self-appointed experts and high-handed planners, then nothing can ever yield real fruit.

E. F. SCHUMACHER

London

## *REVIEW*

### SINNERS INTO SAGES

How much the increasing moral awareness of the present in the United States owes to the "saints" of New England and to the celebrated New England "conscience" is doubtless beyond calculation. It would be a great mistake, however, to let these forms of intensely moral—and often heavily moralistic—inquiry be submerged by the flooding angers of modern polemics. Such a break with the past could only be called mutilation. A few years ago, after giving a course of lectures at an Eastern college, Dwight Macdonald remarked another historical discontinuity—he had found that the young, on occasion even the radical young, had never heard of Eugene V. Debs. It may be a worse impoverishment of the generation that must deal with the dilemmas of the Age of Technology to be ignorant of such men as Bronson Alcott and Irving Babbitt, and of the nourishments these and other New Englanders sought and enjoyed for a century or more.

Two books by Austin Warren, *New England Saints* (1956, \$3.75), and *The New England Conscience* (1966, \$6.00), both published by the University of Michigan Press, provide initial means of repairing this lack. Yet there is a question which the reader ought to raise for himself at the beginning: What species of impatience will he tolerate in himself as he endeavors to absorb the contents of these books? What sort of drama is he inspecting in the transformation of ideas of moral necessity and obligation from the incredibly self-righteous Pilgrims and Puritans to the liberating but nonetheless exacting views of Emerson and Thoreau? Is there some climax and confirmation one hastens to reach? Or, to ask another question: Is there a classic historical process being fulfilled in this passage from Righteous Man Praying to Independent Man Thinking?

Much depends, of course, upon theories of history and conceptions of Mind. One may think, for example, that progress in ideas is accomplished by the attempts of men to convert legend, allegory, and both sacred and profane image into the stuff of reasoned conclusions. Something like this was done by Plato and his Academy; then, against the background of Hellenistic decadence and sophistication, a similar cycle of assimilation and rationalization was undertaken by the Neoplatonists, only to be rudely interrupted by the descent of the Dark Ages. It could be argued that the entire period of scholastic philosophy was another attempt at resolution by reason, brought to a climax by Thomas Aquinas. The Cambridge Platonists of seventeenth-century England achieved a synthesis which glowed briefly and then was lost in the triumph of Cartesian mechanism and the new scientific spirit. Lessing and Herder began something resembling a Neoplatonic revival that had development from men like Schlegel, Fichte, and Schelling, with Coleridge and Grlyle in England giving it further scope. The relation of these sources to the American Transcendentalist thinkers is well known, although the latter had access, also, to the deeper wells of Eastern wisdom.

This going back to the past proves sterile, however, unless it combines with a forward impulse which looks to the present and the future. A man needs to create his own mandate for what he ought to do, and in *wanting* to do it for inner reasons he attains the highest human estate. Even the narrow theology of Jonathan Edwards permitted him this insight into human development. In his last work, posthumously published, Edwards declared that the "saved" individual would be one no longer whipped into conformity by the moral ought; he would *love* duty through his heart's inclination, and not merely "approve" it. The Confucian principle is there, despite its harsh surroundings. Nearly two hundred years later, Walter Lippmann, a pupil of Irving Babbitt, was to quote its original expression



in his *Preface to Morals*, as "the clue to the function of high religion in human affairs":

The Master said  
 "At fifteen I had my mind bent on learning.  
 "At thirty, I stood firm.  
 "At forty, I had no doubts.  
 "At fifty, I knew the decrees of Heaven.  
 "At sixty, my ear was an obedient organ for the reception of truth.  
 "At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired without transgressing what was right."

It is easier to say what would be the wrong way to read Mr. Warren's books than to point to the right one. Plainly, it would be a great mistake to follow all these anguished self-questionings indifferently on the assumption that modern conditions have made them irrelevant to our problems and needs. There are irrelevances, to be sure, but they do not include that tense dialogue between the anxious conscience and the hungry heart. This is the vibrating skein of individuality in human life, and *nothing* can make it irrelevant to reflection.

For his choice of "saints," in the earlier published book, Mr. Warren begins with a brief coverage of Puritan poets' Anne Bradstreet and the Rev. Michael Wigglesworth taking most of the space. Then, after attention to the early "orthodox parsons," he passes to Bronson Alcott. For this essay, one who has enjoyed Odell Shepard's *Pedlar's Progress* will be especially grateful. Alcott must have moved through New England society as an amiable, slightly dazed Father Odin, sharing his riches with all who would hear. Emerson's last note on Alcott in his *Journals* was one of unyielding praise:

As pure intellect, I have never seen his equal . . .  
 The moral benefits of such a mind cannot be told.  
 The world fades: men, reputations, politics, shrivel:  
 the interests, powers futures of the soul beam a new  
 dayspring. Faith becomes sight.

Quotations from Plotinus in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* may have opened a door for him, but Alcott's Neoplatonism was entirely his own. The first issue of the *Dial* printed the initial

installment of his "Orphic Sayings," in which transcendental philosophy is merged with the visions of Plotinus and Proclus. Yet as Mr. Warren says: "Alcott taught doctrines akin to theirs not from erudition but from perception." Emerson wrote in his *Journals*:

It were too much to say that the Platonic world I might have learned to treat as a cloudland, had I not known Alcott, who is a native of that country, yet I will say that he makes it as solid as Massachusetts to me. . . .

The chapter on Emerson is called "Preacher to Himself." It shows him as a man who forged a life in response to his inner calling. Above all, Emerson is a moral psychologist. A century before Sartre, Emerson was saying: "If I strike, I am struck; if I chase, I am pursued." He felt his mission to be not to denounce the evil "but to remove ignorant fear from the 'powerless-feeling' men of good will—to give them faith and courage and power." Emerson's scholar is "man thinking," one who earns self-respect from work well done. If he is careless in his thinking, he will be ashamed to go by a workshop—"the steam engine will reprimand, the steam-pipe will hiss at him; he cannot look a blacksmith in the eye. . . ." Emerson had the respect of his Concord neighbors, not because he demonstrated his competence as a farmer, but because they recognized in him "a contemplative worker who had faith in his 'inner working,' who worked as hard and honestly as they."

In all, Mr. Warren sketches the lives and work of eight "saints" in this book. The one remaining which interests us here is Irving Babbitt, a man of immeasurable educational influence who is seldom spoken of these days. He is probably best known for his book, *Rousseau and Romanticism*. Babbitt taught at Harvard at the turn of the century. His field was the Romance Languages, but this is misleading. He was, in truth, a Buddhist philosopher, as Mr. Warren shows, and he mastered Sanskrit and the Pali tongues, publishing a translation of the *Dhammapada* in 1928. In another book,

*Democracy and Leadership*, he speaks of a sentence from the *Dhammapada* as condensing the wisdom of the ages: "To refrain from all evil, to achieve the good, to purify one's own heart: This is the teaching of the Awakened." Then he cites the Buddhist commentary, which says: "When you *repeat the words*, they seem to mean nothing; but when you try to put them into practice, you find they mean everything."

*The New England Conscience* submits less easily to sampling. The introductory essay, "Conscience and Its Pathology," is a philosophical essay useful as framework for understanding the drives and distempers of a righteousness which is transformed, finally, into the freewheeling moral intelligence of a Thoreau. Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards, William Lloyd Garrison, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, Henry Adams, and Edward Arlington Robinson are among those considered. What one notes, in the "evolution" of conscience in New England, is the depersonalization of the moral "ought" into the energy of the search for truth.

**COMMENTARY**  
**WORSE THAN "PLAIN SELFISHNESS"**

IN the introductory chapter of *The New England Conscience*, Austin Warren has a paragraph which helps to disclose what is behind the technological malpractice against which E. F. Schumacher contends. Mr. Warren writes:

Much of the falsity of the Protestant ethic lies in just what—whether in its popular or its philosophic form—it has prided itself on: its concern with self and subjectivity. Concern with *my* motives, *my* intentions, *my* conscience is always in danger of becoming more concerned with me than with God and my neighbor, with that whole vast other world. Egoism—refined subjectivity—is morally more dangerous, partly because more subtle, than plain frank egotism or selfishness.

One result of such preoccupations is the unquestioned assumption that "*my* motives, *my* intentions, *my* conscience" have only to be adopted by other people in order to achieve *my* virtue and excellence. Transferred to the secular realm, this assumption works as Mr. Schumacher shows the egoism of high technology to be working—"Let them imitate us," we say, "if they want to achieve what we have achieved."

This bland conceit, practiced in the name of *aid*, if persisted in, turns into hypocrisy, and its pretentious "goodness" becomes what Mr. Schumacher calls "the process of mutual poisoning"—

. . . thoughtless industrial development in the cities destroys the economic structure of the hinterland, and the hinterland takes revenge by mass migration to the cities, poisoning them, making them utterly unmanageable, as you can observe all over the world. And if they are still manageable, they are manageable only because the great populations in the shanty towns just become forgotten people, breeding vice and every kind of degradation.

What is the remedy? It can be nothing but a deliberate turning to "that whole vast other world" in a sudden and permanent holiday from the habitual self-congratulation which is now not only

tiresome but incredibly destructive in its practical effects.

There is probably no self-reform so devastating to the personality as having to give up the psychology of being the "chosen people." And when a whole civilization has been beguiled by, if not founded upon, this idea, what do you put in its place?

It is not, of course, a uniquely American delusion. The Chinese are afflicted with their version of it, based on a history reaching back for thousands of years, which has, as C. P. Fitzgerald shows in his essay, *The Chinese View of Their Place in the World* (Chatham House), considerable rational ground.

## CHILDREN

### . . . and Ourselves

#### THE GAMES TEACHERS PLAY

CASTING about for a simple explanation of the unusability of a great deal of the material which comes in to this Department, we decided that most of the time it is a *Reader's-Digesty* neglect of cultural contradictions all children will have to cope with, some day. There ought to be a clear distinction between the problems that a teacher can hope to solve, and those for which no solution—no *easy* solution, that is—is available.

In a book on human relations in the classroom, for example, the reproach is made that perhaps "the worst failure of our schools has been that they've taught the children everything *except how to live.*" This seems to say that the adult community, as represented by schoolteachers, knows how to live and how to impart this knowledge to children—a quite unbelievable claim. There must be a way for the teacher to convey some honest Socratic ignorance to children, in order to keep from exhibiting a fundamental phoneyess, but one seldom sees a serious treatment of this obligation. It is of course profoundly involved in delicate questions of sovereignty and the righteousness of public institutions charged with developing "good citizens." One hesitates to think that the schools can deal with these questions effectively unless both parents and teachers are themselves ready to examine them without fear or embarrassment.

In the source quoted above, there is the following description of a class in "human relations":

Personal strength and weakness, fear and envy, love and hate, honesty and pride are the subjects. Having learned all about Pi R squared and Timbuktu, the children are at long last learning something about themselves and the eddies and the shoals of life itself. We see all around us people who have never learned to live with themselves, let alone live with others. . . .

How does a human relations class work?

It begins with a story the teacher reads from a prepared lesson plan. It is selected to illustrate the day's theme—Emotional Problems at Home, That

Inferiority Feeling, How Emotions Affect Us Physically.

After the story the children analyze the emotional forces involved, isolate and discuss the conflicts and problems of the people, evaluate their personalities. Then, as the cream of the lesson, they talk about themselves. Have they ever felt these emotions? What have they done about it? Have they ever faced a similar problem? How did they solve it? In free and open discussion the children have no hesitation in admitting the emotions they feel, however unpleasant. That is one of the great values of the classes. Each child gets a healthy sense of relief at discovering that he is not the only one who ever told a lie, or was afraid, or felt greedy.

Two conclusions are suggested by this confident exposition. One is that good things might happen in this way. The other is that the values involved depend almost entirely upon the sensibility and wisdom of the teacher. There are benefits from catharsis, known to the Western world since the time of Aristotle, but there are also the bland self-deceptions of pseudo-catharsis, known ever since some human beings have felt qualified to take charge of other people's consciences. Helping people to find their way through the unavoidable quicksands of emotional experience is doubtless the highest and most difficult role of the teacher, and we are not suggesting that it should be evaded, but only that it cannot be made easy by some curricular *tour de force.*

An obvious difficulty arises from limiting discussion to "stock" illustrations of moral and emotional problems. Here, for example, is a non-stock illustration. A child in an elementary grade (in California) was studying about the days of the Spanish Missions and he came home with a shmarmy, sentimental view of the relations between the Indians and the padres. The child's parent, upset by such falsification of history, selected a few of the less horrifying passages on this subject in Carey McWilliams' *Southern California Country*—such as the fact that Fra Junipero Serra, whose statue stands in the old Los Angeles Plaza, was so cruel to the Indians that even the tough Spanish governor felt obliged to reprove him—and read them to the child. The youngster said excitedly, "Let me take that book

to school." Later the boy reported, "I showed it to the teacher and she said, 'Yes, it's all true, but I can't use it!'"

It then became the parent's task to help the child to live with the tension produced by finding out that what the teacher taught was not always gospel truth, and to explain why some teachers felt they couldn't help doing things like that when they knew better. It seemed important for the child to realize that teachers can be good people who care about children without being perfect or all-wise. The child must now learn to honor the good in human beings, despite such shortcomings, and to keep his mind open and his psychological independence growing at the same time. It was important for the child not to let this discovery of compromise grow into an immature, slashing contempt for teachers who show the effects of submission to conventional pressures and restraint.

Good teachers, of course, find ways of meeting such problems, but they do it without much help from the curriculum and with practically none from the community as a corporate body. And they do it, if they are wise, without turning the child into an angry rebel before he has the maturity to grasp the complex character of social injustice and the intricate relations between public authority and social reform.

Sometimes conscientious teachers feel so oppressed by the frustrations of cultural lag that they get together, organize, and declare themselves to be the leaders of reform. There seems ample moral justification for this view. If teachers can't teach what they know to be true, how can they have-self-respect? Since they want to continue to teach, they wonder what must be done to create the kind of society in which they *can* teach what is true. This is a simple explanation of the moral dynamics of the Progressive movement in the days of the *Social Frontier* under the editorship of George S. Counts at Columbia's Teachers College. Those were the days when teachers were really fighting the good fight! Those were the days of which Harold Rugg tells in his distinguished book, *That Men May Understand*—in which he describes how he took to the streets—went out into the social community to explain to individual members of boards of education

all over the country why they were wrong in banning his social science pamphlets from the public schools.

A great deal of the idealism in education, today, is directly traceable to the impetus generated at Teachers College and other Progressive centers, such as the University of Ohio. Opinions about what must be done may have changed, but the moral emotion continues, animating other resolves.

What became manifest, in time, is that classroom wisdom and classroom freedom are not values that can be programmed and institutionalized with any lasting success. When you "organize" some aspect of education, you create forces of good and evil, you classify teachers and others as either "forward-looking" people who have tangible objectives, or "reactionaries" who stand in the way, etc. In the process, the *wisdom* tends to get lost. The objectives get redefined in increasingly political terms—that is, instead of wisdom and truth, you go after power-in-order-to-do-good.

The fact is that we don't yet know how to change our cities and towns into human communities that place the highest priority on having the truth taught in the schools. This is partly because the undeniable truth about bad things is almost immediately turned into a questionable truth about how to make bad things good. Being eager for the good, we hate to admit this over-simplification. But not admitting it leads to passionate controversy and a moral confusion which makes self-righteousness seem preferable to clarity.

The tasks of education and the tasks of reform and revolution are obviously related, but they are not the *same*. Keeping the tasks separate without ignoring the relation between them calls for an exquisite maturity, an intensive honesty, and extraordinary patience. Recognizing this ought to produce all the Socratic ignorance anyone needs.