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WHERE RESPONSIBILITY LIES

THE twentieth century, with only fifteen more years to go, has been a period of so many rapid and far-reaching changes that hardly anyone has been able to keep up—to understand, that is, what is going on. Impressionist writers tell us many things, also the moralists, but responsible makers of opinion have become quite cautious. The prophets with good things to say are almost all extrapolators who ignore the onset of further changes—some of them predictable, such as the imminent exhaustion of vital resources if we continue to try to live as we do now. In addition, the focus of debate about the present and the future is itself changing. Past issues are being replaced by new ones. The radical young who once would have joined the socialists are now becoming environmentalists and bioregionalists. The most effective reformers of the present are men and women on the land who are testing their ideas on a small scale, modeling for a consciously adopted community life in harmony with the natural world. They hold that the future has become quite unpredictable, but that what they are doing cannot be wrong . . . and, what else is there to do?

The few who are able to remember life in America before World War I are likely, now and then, to be appalled by the measure of the changes in the circumstances of their lives since their childhood. From then until now has been a time of revolutionary scientific discoveries, immeasurable disasters, and psychological transformations. All the orthodoxies, all the optimistic beliefs, all the reliable sources of security are now in question. One who was, say, a youngster in 1912 felt able to look forward to a happy future in an unchanged world. He or she became an adult during the frantic 1920s, at the end of which the Depression descended, making life for most people an ordeal of continuous anxiety. Holding a job—even an unpleasant sort of job—seemed a supreme achievement. Eventually, as we know, the country was lifted out of the depression by the spurious prosperity of a war economy. The war, which to most seemed necessary and right, although won, turned sour in its total effect.

It had been the same after World War I. In a long article in the *Atlantic* for May, 1920, the British journalist, Sisley Huddleston, wrote of its general effect in continental Europe and England:

> For one who has always fought on the side of the oppressed, as I in my humble way have done, it is indeed depressing to feel that behind all these strikes and threats of strikes there is no generous impulse, there is no spiritual stirring. It is all cold materialism. One would like to feel that at least the people, the good little people, were free from this prevailing fault of profiteering and money-grubbing. It is not so. There is no dim aspiration toward better things. The people have merely taken pattern from the contractors, from the crowd of those who buy and sell at exhorbitant profits, and those who are frankly unscrupulous. The manufacturer sells at a swindling price because he has to deal with governments which took no heed of money, or which had officials who were corrupt. And the worker demands his share of the swag. Labor, like leather, is something on which a profit can be made. . . .
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> Turn where one will, one finds only that war has worsened mankind. Those who speak of the heroic virtues which are born on the battlefield, which spring, like the Phoenix, out of the ashes of war, are uttering the most stupid claptrap. The dominion of darkness has spread over Europe and a slimy progeny of cruelty, of bestiality, of insensibility, of egoism, of violence, of materiality, has crawled into the light of day—a noisome brood, of which it will be long before we can dispossess ourselves.

The second world war produced a similar heritage, and in its aftermath a general disregard of human life. In addition, it gave us the haunting nightmare of the atom bomb followed by the

proliferation of nuclear weapons and an arms race pronounced insanity by very nearly all the informed critics, including some military men. Meanwhile the United States entered upon a cycle of prosperity of a sort, with accelerated production and a multiplication of goods, many of them not needed by anybody, but sold by increasingly feverish promotion. Then came the warnings that our destructive civilization was going out of control. *Silent Spring* told us that the natural world was being mutilated by peacetime business-as-usual. *Limits to Growth* and similar volumes announced that the planet simply could not afford to be devoured by excessive mining of its resources. Sociologists spoke of the *anomie* of increasingly purposeless lives.

On the other side of the ledger, the influence of Gandhian thinking began to spread around the world. The ecologists, at first a few, and now virtually an army, began to be heard. The voices of these advocates claimed a growing audience. We are losing our soil at an unprecedented rate, agricultural specialists declared. Most farmers said they had to mine and waste the soil in order to keep from going broke. After a while trees on New England mountain sides began to die, with reports from Germany on decimation of the Black Forest from acid rain. Water became a problem in the arid states, and studies which promised little hope warned of what ought to be done, such as following the ignored advice that John Wesley Powell gave about a century ago. Today the whole world is in the grip of the disease called inflation, transforming the middle class into the poor. E. F. Schumacher prescribed for this ill more than ten years ago and told what was needed by the developing world, but his name is scarcely mentioned by conventional economists. Yet his ideas have been taken up by the few periodicals devoted to fostering the development of a new sort of community life, proposing conservation as a fundamental metaphysic for guidance in life on earth, and a science which begins with reverence for the earth and its needs.

These are good beginnings, but the question now being asked is: How can the indifferent or apathetic millions be reached and helped to see the necessity of a fundamental change in attitude? People speak hopefully of education, but public education, even "higher" education, is largely in the hands of institutions which, for many reasons, are the last to change. Institutions tend to be havens rather than sources of innovation. 'Do we any longer have a *culture* independent of institutions? Fortunately, good books still appear, and there are the magazines we spoke of, often reviewed in these pages. But to obtain encouragement from such books and articles, one must resort to the biological metaphor—the ratio of germ cells to somatic cells. If these strenuous and sometimes heroic efforts toward enlightenment can be identified as having, in the long run at least, the power of germ cells to shape the social and cultural organism, then a guarded optimism seems within reason.

But if we talk of the promise of education, it would be well to be realistic about where and how it might take place. A necessary perspective is provided by Wendell Berry in one of the concluding essays in *A Continnous Harmony* (1972). If there is to be good reading there must also be good writing. We don't want, can't use, a society of leaders and led. We need a society of awakened and alert individuals—the kind Thomas Jefferson hoped for. Berry is a writer devoted to the kind of change this will require.

He begins his "Defense of Literacy" by saying:

> In a country in which everybody goes to school, it may seem absurd to offer a defense of literacy, and yet I believe that such a defense is in order, and that the absurdity lies not in the defense, but in the necessity for it. The published illiteracies of the certified educated are on the increase. And the universities seem bent on ratifying this state of things by declaring the acceptability, in their graduates, of adequate—that is to say, mediocre—writing skills.

Who is he appealing to? Not, surely, those universities. He must be appealing to an audience

of readers as individuals, inviting them to begin improving their own literacy, thereby exercising a beneficent influence on everyone else, including the young. The necessity for this comes from the impossibility of doing much about the institutions of learning. The task is not as difficult as it seems. John Holt gave up on the schools years ago and has been successful in helping thousands of parents to teach their children at home. Not everybody can do this, but if *enough* people do it the schools will eventually improve.

Berry goes on, explaining what is wrong with the schools:

> The schools, then, are following the general subservience to the "practical," as that term has been defined for us according to the benefit of corporations. By "practicality" most users of the term now mean whatever will most predictably and most quickly make a profit. Teachers of English and literature have either submitted, or are expected to submit along with teachers of the more "practical" disciplines, to the doctrine that the purpose of education is the mass production of producers and consumers. This has forced our profession into a predicament that we will finally have to recognize as a perversion. As if awed by the ascendancy of the "practical" in our society, many of us secretly fear, and some of us are apparently ready to say, that if a student is not going to become a teacher of his language, he has no need to master it.

Literacy, in short, is a frill except for English teachers. Berry turns to the importance of being able to read good books in an age like ours:

> Ignorance of books and the lack of a critical consciousness of language were safe enough in primitive societies with coherent oral traditions. In our society, which exists in an atmosphere of prepared public language—language that is either written or being read—illiteracy is both a personal and a public danger. Think how constantly "the average American" is surrounded by premeditated language, in newspapers and magazines, on signs and billboards, on TV and radio. He is forever being asked to buy or believe somebody else's line of goods. The line of goods is being sold, moreover, by men who are trained to make him buy it or believe it, whether or not he needs it or understands it or knows its value or wants it. This sort of selling is an honored profession among us. Parents who grow hysterical at the thought that their son might not cut his hair are glad to have him taught, and later employed, to lie about the quality of an automobile or the ability of a candidate.
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> What is our defense against this sort of language—this language-as-weapon? There is only one. We must know a better language. We must speak, and teach our children to speak, a language precise and articulate and lively enough to tell the truth about the world as we know it. And to do this we must know something of the roots and resources of our language; we must know its literature. The only defense against the worst is a knowledge of the best. By their ignorance people enfranchise their exploiters.

The exploitive language which is fired at us from all sides—by mass bombardment in the hope of securing the largest possible "market"—is the only language known to many, both young and old. One cannot think in that language and of course people are not meant to think about what is said in it. You are simply supposed to *buy*. It is meant to bypass the thinking process, which would probably interfere with the sale.

> Such language is by definition, and often by calculation, not memorable; it is language meant to be replaced by what will immediately follow it, like that of shallow conversation between strangers. It cannot be pondered or effectively criticized. For those reasons an unmixed diet of it is destructive of the informed, resilient, critical intelligence that the best of our traditions have sought to create and to maintain—an intelligence that Jefferson held to be indispensable to the health and longevity of freedom. Such intelligence does not grow by bloating upon the ephemeral information and misinformation of the public media. It grows by returning again and again to the landmarks of its cultural birthright, the works that have proved worthy of devoted attention. . . .
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> I am saying, then, that literacy—the mastery of language and the knowledge of books—is not an ornament, but a necessity. It is impractical only by the standards of quick profit and easy power. Longer perspective will show that it alone can preserve in us the possibility of an accurate judgment of ourselves, and the possibilities of correction and renewal. Without it, we are adrift in the present, in the wreckage of yesterday, in the nightmare of tomorrow.

Here Berry provides an Emersonian view of language, using it as the means of evaluating the underlying character of those who speak it. Emerson wrote in *Nature:*

> A man's power to connect his thought with its proper symbol, and so to utter it, depends on the simplicity of his character, that is, upon his love of truth, and his desire to communicate it without loss. The corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language. When simplicity of character and the sovereignity of ideas is broken up by the prevalence of secondary desires, the desire of riches, of pleasure, of power, and of praise,—and duplicity and falsehood take place of simplicity and truth, the power over nature as an interpreter of the will, is in a degree lost; new Imagery ceases to be created, and old words are perverted to stand for things which are not; a paper currency is employed, when there is no bullion in the vaults. In due time the fraud is manifest, and words lose all power to stimulate the understanding or the affections.

Our everyday language, Berry points out, has become the paper currency of ephemeral information and misinformation—the language-as-weapon of the salesmanager, the language of professional liars who are culturally vindicated by the success of their large-scale deceptions. This is the practice of the "practical," to which even the schools have submitted. No institution, therefore, can lead us out of this world of commercial jargon. Only individuals, sickened by what has happened to very nearly all of us, are in a position to resist and to begin using for themselves "a language precise and articulate and lively enough to tell the truth about the world as we know it."

The diagnosis is one that should be taken seriously. All the recoveries we hope for depend upon this one—on awakening to the falsity and uselessness of the superficial consciousness revealed by the way we use words, by our morally impoverished vocabulary. As a reader of MANAS recently pointed out: "The greatest difficulty is to deal with people who were born in an ambience which gave them the wrong habits and concepts when young."

This analysis is now being repeated in many ways. In *Higher Creativity* (Tarcher, 1984), Willis Harman describes the psychological effect on cultural life of acceptance of mechanistic science:

> Values became relativistic and arbitrary; measures of technological advance and economic indicators gained a powerful influence in guiding public and private sector decisions. But these pseudovalues fail to take into account the deepest motivations and highest aspirations of human beings; similarly, they tend to neglect considerations of the well-being of all the earth's creatures, and of all the earth's present and future population. . . . When guided primarily by economic and technical pseudovalues, development tends to produce marginal people—people who aren't needed by their society. . . Because of the rise of absentee ownership of corporations, large private enterprise after World War II tended to become primarily responsive to signals of financial return, and the corporate world became increasingly dominated by the short-term financial bottom line as opposed to the long-term view possessed by individual owners. In the absence of a strong commitment to overarching social and ethical values, the corporate incentive structure tended to move toward irresponsibility in the face of societal issues, however humane and noble might be the private values of corporate executives.

Dr. Harman calls the resulting state of mind in the West—for the great majority copy the thinking of the "successful" people—a kind of "cultural hypnosis" which immunizes the population from actual thinking. What can be done, not to make people think "correctly," but simply to open their minds? Three examples of men who knew what to do occur: Socrates, Thomas Paine, and Henry David Thoreau. The influence of these three has aroused countless people to thinking, becoming for some a guide to everyday living. But not one of them accomplished a great deal during his life. Socrates was executed by a dissatisfied and angered democracy; Paine was ignored by his adopted nation until long after his death; and Thoreau was not much read during his lifetime, although today his provocations are bearing notable fruit.

What did they do? They pointed to the moral power of great ideas, and in their personal lives refused to compromise in order to win more followers. Little by little they are being recognized as the architects of a possible future. They built into their lives a pattern of decision based upon the principles they found to be true. Slowly, among the best people of our time, this attitude is found to lead to actions that are in harmony with nature, that are learned from nature, and work toward both autonomy and interdependence in ways that do the least harm.

The manifest breakdown of the exploitive and acquisitive way of life is a powerful stimulus to independent thinking. There is at the same time a kind of awakening which may have its origin in a transcendental evolutionary impulse that we can hardly explain yet is made evident in books like Harman's *Higher Creativity.* Actually, there are numerous signs suggesting a growing realization that civilization—the cultural environment in which life is worth living—is not given to us by the productive apparatus of economic enterprise, but is the energetic creation of the members of society, generated and maintained by responsive and imaginative thinking. Institutions have value only so long as they reflect the intentions of such individuals. Like individuals, institutions have a life cycle. After a period of service they decline and die.

Is it possible to have self-regenerating institutions? One of the Founding Fathers hoped so, as the primary need of the new-born United States. But today there is little evidence of the realization of this possibility. The responsibility for change, then, is returned to the people. As Berry puts it in *A Continuous Harmony:*

> That teaching is a long-term service, that a teacher's best work may be published in the children or the grandchildren of his students, cannot be considered, for the modern educator, like his "practical" brethren in business and industry, will honor nothing that he cannot see. That is not to say that books do not have their progeny in the community, or that a legitimate product of a teacher's life may not be a book. It is to say that if *good* books are to be written, they will be written out of the same resources of talent and discipline and character and delight as always, and not by institutional coercion.

This is an epoch in which good books have an enormously important service to perform. They help us to understand the complexity of history during the twentieth century, show where our history is taking us, and point to the requirement of new beginnings. Perhaps, in the dim future, we shall have a society with strong community culture and books will not be so much of a necessity. But we certainly need them now, in order to find our way, in order, as we listen to the inner voices beginning to be heard, to make a wise selection among the counsels which come in this way.

REVIEW

PREDATION OR SYMBIOSIS?

IN *The Bone Peddlers,* a recent book critical of anthropologists who insist that their researches prove humans are animals and nothing more, the author, William Fix, says in his concluding paragraph: "The reality is that there is a deep tide running in the direction of things of the spirit. Unless and until anthropologists and related scientists are able to develop a more holistic approach studying the whole man and taking into consideration the full depth of human nature, they will soon lose their wider constituency."

We might say that this trend is already well established, having been started by the influential essays of Joseph Wood Krutch, beginning with *The Modern Temper* (1929), in which he set forth the scientific claims to authority in defining the nature of man, and then spent his life contesting the idea that humans have no power to determine their destiny. Other figures in the campaign to give the mind priority in deciding who and what we are include A. H. Maslow and Carl Rogers among psychologists. The tide of this view has gradually become almost a flood of arguments rejecting mechanistic determinism as applied to human beings.

The urbane Krutch wrote disarming essays to break up the stereotypes of the Darwinian tradition, one of these being that the survivor is always the most vigorous competitor. In 1951, as columnist for the *American Scholar,* he dealt with this subject in an informal personal manner, but was nonetheless effective, since many of his readers felt the same way. He said:

> Competition—so far as it affects my private life—I have always found so unpleasant a thing that I never enjoyed even competitive games. Great wealth, even the luxury of the very well-to-do, makes me uncomfortable when I am invited to share it. Disinterestedness, the desire to do something for its own sake, has always seemed to me one of the most admirable of human traits. And yet no scheme for the establishment of a noncompetitive society, in which no one could get rich and all men should do what ought to be done for the sheer love of doing it, has ever seemed to me to take proper account of the fact that evil is a protean artist terribly clever at discovering new roles to play when it has been deprived of an old one.

Krutch's persuasiveness is largely due to his essential fairness—he will not have it that competition *is* the foundation of life, but he willingly admits that a society which ignores the competitive tendency is not likely to work. He goes on in this essay:

> In America today, there are a certain number of public servants who forego the opportunity of making large sums in order to perform important tasks for small pay. My cynicism stops short of believing that in all such cases secret ambition or love of display is the real motive. But how many such men are there, and is such virtue common enough to do all the world's work for it? . . . are there enough such men to staff . . . the executive offices of the steel mills and the automobile factories? I am not unfamiliar with the contention that in a noncompetitive society their number would multiply in a healthy atmosphere. That is an attractive hypothesis and it does credit to those who hold it. But does anyone know whether it is true or not? The state, so the Communists used to tell me, would wither away, but it does not seem to be withering very fast.
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> In the end, I suppose, it all comes down to the question whether or not man really is the product of his social institutions; whether, if you want to put it this way, the capitalist system as it exists in practice created greedy men or whether men created that system because they were greedy. And I am afraid it is because the second assumption seems to me to be as true as the first that I have my doubts about the success of any scheme which depends upon the virtue to be created when the scheme is put into effect. Man is perhaps perfectible, but original sin is at least as self-evident as perfectibility.

In his later years Krutch became an amateur naturalist, and like others of his and a later time took on the Darwnian theory:

> If few today doubt that Darvvin's theory of "natural selection through the struggle for survival" explains much, there are many who insist that it does not explain everything. Some of the most primitive organisms have survived for many millions of years—

far longer than other more advanced organisms and possibly longer than man himself will prevail. If only "the fittest survive," then the sea squirt is fitter than any mammal—including, perhaps, man. And "natural selection" cannot account for the intensification of man's consciousness or the value which he puts upon such ideals as justice, fair play and benevolence. It cannot account for them inasmuch as creatures in which these traits are not conspicuous are at least as successful in the "struggle for survival" as he is. If nature herself has exhibited a tendency, if she seems to "want" anything, it is not merely to survive. She has tended to realize more and more completely the potentialities of protoplasm, and these include much that has no demonstrable "survival value." Evolution itself has spread before us the story of a striving toward "the higher," not merely toward that which enables an organism to survive.

Today there is growing recognition that life on our planet is as much a confraternity as it is a "war of all against all." The keynote of this idea was sounded by the anarchist philosopher, Peter Kropotkin, with the publication of *Mutual Aid* (1902, written to show that the basis of a cooperative society of humans already existed among animals and that a proper interpretation of evolution would support the ethics of cooperation). The nineteenth-century enthusiasm for domination of the world by the imperialist nations on the ground that they represent evolutionary "fitness" has lost its appeal through the agony of the wars of the twentieth century. A recent book representative of this great change in thinking is Stephan Lackner's *Peaceable Nature* (Harper & Row, 1984, $13.95). This study is largely a compilation of biological evidence that natural processes are basically symbiotic, revealing interdependence, with mutual aggression and killing more the exception than the rule. Dr. Lackner says:

Certainly, cruelty and violence are effective in the animal kingdom and have contributed to the great adventure of evolution. This we can admit, but without enthusiasm. A peacefully oriented biology would give humanity some new grounds for optimism. It would help to show that creatures everywhere regard life as a desirable good and not as a prelude to catastrophe. Most young mammals, while at play seem personifications of *joie de vivre.* The blossom turns toward the sun, and the butterfly enjoys its nectar.

This book is an examination of both life and death in nature, in order to show that cooperation, not aggression, is the key principle of existence. This is no "academic" exercise but an urgent human and personal expression. The author says:

The problems of aggression have haunted me since I was an American soldier in World War II, fighting against Germany, my former homeland. I came to regard the large-scale destruction around me as counterproductive. The Stockholm Peace Institute has established that in World War I, 20 per cent of the victims were civilians, in World War II more than half were civilians; and in the Vietnam War go per cent of those killed were non-military persons. A linear projection of this curve would engulf us all. . . .

The so-called "law of the jungle" which yields every right to the mighty, seems to be a fantasy of the age of colonialism to justify war, slavery, and oppression. In recent decades, observations of dedicated naturalists have given us a much more peaceful picture of jungle life. Even the gorilla, once feared as the embodiment of dimwitted aggressiveness has proved to be a shy, sensitive creature. Our aboriginal fear of jungle and rainforest should by now be reversed—it is our own greed for wood and building sites that menaces the primitive forests and their inhabitants.

The toll taken by carnivorous predators has been largely exaggerated, with naturalists now indicating that "less than 10 per cent of the grazing animals die of violence."

If we go to nature for instruction in the endowment of living things and for guidance in our own behavior, we soon discover that we have been taking nineteenth-century prejudices for our rules. "Only roughly one-twentieth of all animals are killed and eaten by carnivores," Dr. Lackner says. "The overwhelming majority dies a peaceful, 'natural' death." He continues:

Cooperation in nature is at least as frequent and decisive as competition. We must only learn to see the superimposed units of life. A forest protects and supports its members: The mantle with its green branches extending down to the bottom is an organ comparable to our skin; it keeps out destructive

> storms and protects the interior against abrupt temperature changes and desiccation. Reed—a mass of many stalks, which is defined as singular by common usage—is really a unit: No single stem could defend itself against wind and rain. People have used this same principle consciously for breeding improved grains. A wheat field consists of individually helpless plants; each plant, trusting its cooperating sisters, can convert most of its energy into nourishing kernels instead of wasting it on a uselessly thick and strong stalk—thus drastically reducing its defense budget. Each such landscape unit is helpfulness made visible. A meadow wants to spread and preserve its health as a whole, it heals its wounds by overgrowing bald spots, it is an organism. Rethinking and restructuring the world in this holistic fashion, we arrive at more hopeful aims and purposes than were ever derived from the Darwinian idea that life is a struggle and nothing else.

We have, Dr. Lackner says, the freedom to choose between the acquired drive of combativeness and the more natural impulse to cooperation.

COMMENTARY
WHAT IS AND WHAT MIGHT BE

THIS week we feel obliged to consider a touchy subject. What is it, then, that makes the differences among human beings—their high and low intellectual capacities, the remarkable ranges of moral sensibility—from, say, an Eichmann to a Schweitzer, a terrorist to a Gandhi? The differences are real and neither heredity nor environment will explain them. If you come up with a genetic explanation—our genes make these differences—socially minded critics will call you a fascist and if you say it is all environment, you may be branded a communist, because, in that theory, the state is supposed to provide the environment that produces superior people. If you say that people are a combination of both heredity and environment—which seems reasonable enough—there are thoughtful scientists or historians who will reply that these factors, while obviously playing a part, are not sufficient to account for the extremes of possibility—a genius on the one hand, the low-grade dullard on the other.

It is undoubtedly best to admit that we simply don't know the formula for producing human excellence, if only as a protection against the programs advocated by individuals who claim that they have solved the mystery, and might include sterilization of the unfit, or the enforced exposure of the young to compulsory indoctrination. The admission of ignorance—almost an insistence on it—seems now the only remedy for such possibilities, as the messes we are in grow worse and worse.

We say this as introduction to noting what Berry says about literacy (on page 7)—that "mastery of language and the knowledge of books—is not an ornament but a necessity." He means that the survival of the world may be dependent on having people literate enough to know what we must do. Along with this idea we should place the remark by the Paideia Group that those who low-rate human possibility neglect the fact that we don't really know what that possibility may be, since the so-called "low achievers" have "never had their minds challenged by requirements" of a genuine education. As a matter of fact, high possibilities almost never come to pass except for people who really believe in them.

The differences are indeed real, but so are the possibilities of becoming. The differences have to be admitted—they are there—but the possibilities must be affirmed, because they are, so to speak, "on the way"—or would be, if we gave them the right encouragement.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
CAN THERE BE PAIDEIA IN AMERICA?

PAIDEIA was the word used by the ancient Greeks to describe the educational effect of Hellenic culture on Greek youth. It included communication of ideals of human character. In his work devoted to this subject (in three volumes), *Paideia,* the distinguished classical scholar, Werner Jaeger, who in later life taught at Harvard, has said:

> It is a mark of the close connection between the productive artistic and intellectual life and the community that the greatest Greeks always felt they were its servants. This attitude is well known in the East also; it seems to be the most natural in a state where life is organized by quasi-religious rules. Yet the great men of Greece came forward not to utter the word of God, but to teach the people what they themselves knew, and to give shape to their ideals. Even when they spoke in the form of religious inspiration, they translated their inspiration into personal knowledge and personal form. But personal as it might be in shape and purpose, they themselves felt it fully and compellingly social. The Greek trinity of poet, statesman, and sage embodied the nation's highest ideal of leadership. In that atmosphere of spiritual liberty, bound by deep knowledge (as if by a divine law) to the service of the community, the Greek creative genius conceived and attained that lofty educational ideal which sets it far above the more superficial artistic and intellectual brilliance of our individualistic civilization. That is what lifts classical Greek literature out of the category of pure aesthetics, in which many have vainly tried to understand it, and gives it the immeasurable influence on human nature which it has exercised for thousands of years.

It seems well not to forget entirely the meaning given to Paideia by Jaeger, when considering the undertaking of a group of American educators who have banded together to design the reform of education in this country under the banner of *The Paideia Proposal.* They call themselves the Paideia Group, which is made up of twenty-two persons, nearly all educationists, headed by Mortimer J. Adler, long an associate of Robert M. Hutchins at the University of Chicago. Others in the Group include persons of the stature of Jacques Barzun, Douglass Cater, Leon Botstein, and Charles and Geraldine Van Doren. The Group has issued three comparatively small volumes in explanation of what they propose. The first, *The Paideia Proposal,* "An Educational Manifesto," came out in 1982 (published by Macmillan), addressing all readers concerned with the quality and character of public (and private) education in the United States. They take for granted a general dissatisfaction with present education methods and results, giving little space to criticism. They propose a way to improve it *for all,* outlining how they think this can be done. They dedicate this first volume to Horace Mann, John Dewey, and Robert Hutchins, who, they say, "would have been our leaders were they alive today." They believe, first of all, in "one track" education—the same, that is, for all. "We are politically a classless society. Our citizenry as a whole *is* our ruling class. We should, therefore, be an educationally classless society." All will study the same material, pursue the same goal, in twelve years of schooling, whether or not they plan to go on to college or university. The authors say:

> In 1817, long before democracy came to full bloom in this country, Thomas Jefferson made a proposal that was radical for his day. He advocated three years of common schooling at the public expense for all the children of Virginia. But he then divided the children into those destined for labor and those destined for learning. Only the latter were to go on further to the local colleges of the time. The rest were to toil on the farms as hired hands or in the shop as apprentices.
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> In the twentieth century, we demand twelve years of common schooling at public expense for every child in the country. It is no longer a radical demand. But our present tracking system of public schooling still divides children into those destined only for labor and those destined for more schooling.
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> We believe, on the contrary, that all children are destined for learning, as most are destined for labor by their need to earn a livelihood. To live well in the fullest human sense involves learning as well as earning.

The Paideia Group plans the same course of instruction for all, while recognizing that natural human differences will result in different rates of progress or attainment among the pupils, who for

this reason will be grouped according to attainment rather than age. Proposed are three methods of growth—"(1) by the acquisition of organized knowledge; (2) by the development of intellectual skills; and (3) by the enlargement of understanding, insight, aesthetic appreciation." The fundamental branches of learning are considered to be "language, literature, and fine arts; mathematics and natural sciences; history, geography, and social studies." The "factual" or "knowledge" aspect of learning is accomplished by didactic means, transmitted as information. The skills of learning are best acquired with the aid of "coaching" by the teacher. This method is insufficiently used today, although it is "the backbone of basic schooling." Finally, and most important, is the exploration of meaning, which involves "the Socratic mode of teaching": "It is teaching by asking questions, by leading discussions, by helping students to raise their minds up from a state of understanding or appreciating less to a state of understanding or appreciating more.

> Those who think the proposed course of study cannot be successfully followed by all children fail to realize that the children of whom they are thinking have never had their minds challenged by requirements such as these. It is natural for children to rise to meet higher expectations; but only if those expectations are set before them, and made both reasonable and attractive. They will respond when their minds are challenged by teachers able to give the different types of instruction . . . and who are themselves vitally interested in what they are teaching.

Good teachers are essential to the success of such a program. Can teachers function didactically, as coaches, and as Socratic questioners? The Paideia Group thinks a teacher should be able to combine these abilities in working with children. This calls for a considerable improvement in teacher education. Teachers can do far better than the present system permits them to do. They should be generalists, not specialists, and the Paideia program aims at a generalist education for the young. It is opposed to specialization during the first twelve years that the plan involves. Following is an excellent passage on learning:

> All genuine learning is active, not passive. It involves the use of the mind, not just the memory. It is a process of discovery, in which the student is the main agent, not the teacher.
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> How does a teacher aid discovery and elicit the activity of the student's mind? By inviting and entertaining questions, by encouraging and sustaining inquiry, by supervising helpfully a wide variety of exercises and drills, by leading discussions, by giving examinations that arouse constructive responses, not just the making of check marks on printed forms.
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> Learning by discovery can occur without help, but only geniuses can educate themselves without the help of teachers. For most students, learning by discovery must be aided. That is where teachers come in as aids in the process of learning by discovery, not as knowers who attempt to put the knowledge they have in their minds into the minds of their pupils.
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> That never can be done, certainly not with good permanent results. Teachers may think they are stuffing minds, but all they are ever affecting is the memory. Nothing can ever be forced into anyone's mind except by brainwashing, which is the very opposite of genuine teaching.
>
> Teachers who do not understand these truths misunderstand the true character of learning. Worse, they do violence to the minds in their care. By assuming that they are the primary cause of learning on the part of their pupils, by filling passive receptacles, they act merely as indoctrinators—overseers of memorization—but they are not teachers.

This should be sufficient to show the basic value of the Paideia Program. The three books should be of particular use to persons who are thinking about education in the broad sense, as community planners, or simply as parents. It is generally conceded that public education is now a mess. The Paideia books are not critical except in passing or making a corrective point, being mainly concerned with the simple declaration of an ideal. What we have said and quoted here is based on the first of the three books. The other two, which came out in 1983 and 1984, are titled *Paideia Problems and Possibilities* and *The Paideia Program—An Educational Syllabus.* In each case Mortimer Adler is the principal author. The three are priced respectively $2.95, $3.95, and $4.95. They are all valuable as studies of theory and practice in education.

FRONTIERS

Less Soil, Higher Costs, Less Food

SOME five years ago a senior official of the U.S. Department of Agriculture said that due to relentless pressure on the land "soil erosion today can be described as epidemic in proportion." This becomes the text of Worldwatch Paper No. 60, *Soil Erosion: Quiet Crisis in the World Economy,* by Lester Brown and Edward C. Wolf. The authors proceed to explain:

> Soil erosion is a natural process, one that is as old as the earth itself. But today soil erosion has increased to the point where it far exceeds the natural formation of new soil. As the demand for food climbs, the world is beginning to mine its soils, converting a renewable resource into a nonrenewable. Even in an agriculturally sophisticated country like the United States, the loss of soil through soil erosion exceeds tolerable levels on some 44 per cent of the croplands. Indeed, the U.S. crop surpluses of the early eighties, which are sometimes cited as the sign of a healthy agriculture, are partly the product of mining soils.
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> The incessant growth in demand for agricultural products contributes to soil erosion in many ways. Throughout the Third World farmers are pushed onto steeply sloping, erosive land that is rapidly losing its topsoil. Elsewhere, such as the American Midwest, many farmers have abandoned ecologically stable, long-term rotations, including hay and grass, as well as row crops, in favor of the continuous row cropping of corn or other crops. In other areas farming has extended into semiarid regions where land is vulnerable to wind erosion when plowed.
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> The loss of topsoil affects the ability to grow food in two ways. It reduces the inherent productivity of land, both through the loss of nutrients and degradation of the physical structure. It also increases the costs of food production. When farmers lose topsoil they may increase land productivity by substituting energy in the form of fertilizer, or through irrigation to offset the soil's declining water absorptive capacity. Farmers may experience either a loss in land productivity or a rise in costs. But if productivity drops too low or costs rise too high, farmers are forced to abandon their land. Grave though the loss of topsoil may be, it is a quiet crisis, one that is not widely perceived. . . . nowhere has the depletion of the topsoil gained the attention paid to the depletion of oil reserves. Fifteen years ago, the public was largely unaware of the rate of oil depletion, but that changed with the oil price hikes of 1973 and 1979.

The petroleum shortage of 1973 (or the price manipulations based on claims of a shortage) generated immediate response. There was no time-lag because of the impact of experience which affected nearly all of us, causing at least inconvenience, but for some a cost increase that led to economic failure. The quest for renewable fuels then began and the wave of interest in solar energy and wind machines soon took hold and now continues. But there are no substitutes, in the long run, for fertile soil. How, one wonders, can the modern world be made aware of this indisputable reality?

The practical world is ruled by the market mechanism, which was adopted over recent centuries by men who had no reason to think about conservation, whose energies were given to commercial progress, technological advance, and personal acquisition and enrichment. The habits and interests of "successful" people were shaped by these motives, and freedom came to mean a career with little or no responsibility. Our industries grew up in this atmosphere and in time education fell into line.

Now there are major indications, soil depletion being among the most evident and most important, that we must learn to care for the earth with the same regard and attention that we give to our own bodies and our families. Somewhat suddenly, we are required to make an ecologically moral attitude the basis of our lives. This is a change of heroic proportions—not just making a great decision but altering our patterns of association, the way we define goals, the basis of social relationships. There are considerable difficulties for even those who would like to make a change in farming methods—for other farming methods are known, available, and practiced by some. But the rule of the market stands in the way. There is no factor for conservation built into

market mechanisms. No values affect market equations. As Brown and Wolf say:

> Narrow profit margins, such as those confronting U.S. farmers during the early eighties, might well mean that if farmers were to invest in appropriate conservation measures their profit margins would disappear entirely, forcing them to operate at a deficit. They would then face the prospect of bankruptcy in the near future. Alternatively, they could continue to follow existing agricultural practices and avoid near-term bankruptcy, but face the prospect of declining productivity over the long term and the eventual abandonment of land, if not by this generation then by the next. In the absence of a governmental cost-sharing program similar to those used so effectively in the past, a farmer's only choice is whether to go out of business sooner or later.

As the Worldwatch paper shows, this trend is worldwide:

> Newspaper headlines that describe widening food deficits and chronic hunger in many Third World countries also describe a world finding it difficult to live within its means. Eager to maximize food output today, we are borrowing from tomorrow. The loss of over 25 billion tons of topsoil from our cropland each year is the price we pay for shortsighted agricultural policies designed to boost food output at the expense of soils, and of failed or nonexistent population policies.

The universality of the market system, which is now nearly all-pervasive, brings habits which stand in the way of awakening responsibility. For example, in the first issue of *Agriculture and Human Values* (Winter 1984) published in the University of Florida in Gainesville (32611), Katherine Clancy, writing on "Human Nutrition, Agriculture and Human Values," says:

> The morality of advertising foods both to children and to adults has been an issue for years. Advertisers so far have not been willing to share responsibility for the consumption (or over-consumption) of their products, preferring to place the burden solely on consumers. Foods with high profit margins, i.e, highly processed foods like soda, candy, snack foods, and convenience foods, continue to be the most highly advertised even though all recent dietary recommendations promulgated by the government and private organizations have stressed the need for all or part of the population to decrease the intake of foods high in refined substances like sugar, fat, sodium, etc. Continuing controversy among scientists has been cited as a reason for not producing foods which meet the standards proposed in the Dietary Goals and Guidelines, by the American Heart Association, and by other public health agencies, although some firms have reformulated products to meet requests for lower sodium sugar, caffeine and cholesterol and fat products. Imitation milk products command a large portion of this market.

It seems that the watchdog solution for such excesses will never work well. What is needed is a cultural revolution in taste, moral awareness, and personal responsibility that will affect our whole lives. This is the way to work for the future.