

WHY SELF-DIRECTION?

ROSS L. MOONEY

LOOKING over the shelves of new books arriving in the library, I was attracted to one with a bright orange cover having the title, *Guidance*. It was a big book and I wondered how I had come to miss the announcement of such a massive work in a field of my interest. I opened the cover, flipped through the pages, and found it packed with information about guidance, true enough, but it was the guidance of missiles and rockets.

Behind the volume were massive resources of our technological society, seeking to create machines that can guide themselves by information they are able to receive from their environment while they move toward the target to fulfill their purpose. Man is here creating machines to be as fully self-directive as possible in imitation of the self-directive capacities of the mind of man.

This development in machines is moving, full throttle, while we who are concerned with the self-direction of human beings are having to fight hard merely to keep in mind that men are self-directing, too, and that the development of men requires development of their self-directing capacities.

Why, when facing machines, is our society so freely given to developing self-direction and, when facing men, so little given to the same, when we know, at last, that the missiles and the rockets are to serve the ends of self-directing men if they are to serve the cause of human life at all!

Our history yields a clue. Since the founding of our nation, we have been a people facing outward into the environment, making changes there. First, we faced the wilderness of a vast continent, remaking it for our habitation. No sooner were we well along with this than we entered the era of heavy industry, remaking our environment again through what we found to do with machines and the power of coal and oil and iron. No sooner were we well along with this than we entered the era of science and technology, remaking our environment again through the use of nature's universal structures, producing the products and conditions with which we now surround ourselves. Barely well begun with this

and we now enter an era which has us reaching outward toward the stars, traveling by rocketry, communicating by satellite and using the atom's power.

Persistently, and in successive waves, we have turned outward to ever increasing domains of our environment to compose the circumstances of our life anew, giving our lives to the consequences of each outward thrust until we are now met with need to integrate the peoples of the earth into one society of men, arriving here with the physical power to destroy all human life before we have the human power as well prepared to hold the peace and generate the love and wisdom necessary to the continued and growing life of man.

The Inward Thrust

Our assumption, unexpressed but dominant in the shaping of our acts, has been that "the good life" comes from what we are able to do with our outward environment. Confirmed in this belief by the successive comforts with which our lives have been provided by the successive yielding of the wilderness, the earth, and heavens, we are committed quite unconsciously to the formula that more of this will net the better yet. In this succession lies "success." The psyche has gained its momentum, too, with all the rest, and the commitment to the outer thrust is near compulsive in its claim.

Hence it is that our society has been able to give itself freely to the making of machines into which we have built, as best we could, the self-directing features of the minds of men. Hence the volume on *Guidance*, meaning the guidance of machines in their course round the earth and into outer space, while guidance in the system of a man, himself, remains so little fed. Hence the struggle in which we find ourselves engaged, when, as educators, we undertake to turn attention to the inward, self-directed, workings of the minds of men. The struggle is hard because we are working well against the grain.

Were our society to become conscious of its having an outward psychic thrust, it could also become conscious of the possibility of an inward thrust. As educators, we have the outward thrust to reveal, and then the introduction to the inward thrust, as well. Our people, then, could come to entertain what we must know so well, namely, that there is an inner self in man and that self-direction comes for him when he includes his "self" as base for choice as well as outer circumstance. Man needs to confront himself to know, with confidence, what is his choice; and changes there, inside himself, are quite as much required as changes in the outer world to net what's good for man.

This we must make plain, for our people now are caught at the end of the pendulum of outward thrust where the power gained in atom's blast and satellite now threatens end to life itself. More of this is not the same as it has been in the past. The "good life" is no longer good if it means the end. A changed environment is not enough; we need changes made in man. Our people sense this awesome fact, but the turn into the inner path is hard to make.

We who are educators are called upon not to follow blindly in the outer thrust but to lead attention, on the inward turn, to the make-up of a man as man, to the

self we are by virtue of our humanness, and to the mind we have within ourselves as instrument for choice, knowing now the choice is ours, whether we are to have continued life or death. We are the species who, alone among the rest, can kill itself by choice.

Do we so choose? And, if not, do we prize the-man-we-are enough to seek the saving of his life? Do we lead our young to know themselves and love their life such that, knowing this and loving life, they can find their course, seeing how it is that other men are made up in the same design to share a common fate?

To know one's self is not alone to know one's difference from others of his kind but to know, as well, the bond that binds in commonness the members of the human race. To be self-directing is not alone to be self-reliant in the shaping up of choice, but to choose, as well, to cherish self as instrument of humanness.

So this issue of this magazine is prepared around the self-directing theme to help us see what is cut out as our work. Difficult as it might be, the saving grace is that those who serve the cause of life find, coursing back into their veins, the stuff of life itself.

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A twelve-year-old writes—

I should be responsible because if I were not nobody could depend on me to do anything. I couldn't depend on myself either. I should learn to be responsible because people will think more of me and I will think more of myself.

Being responsible might come in handy some day. I might influence other people too. It might help save somebody's life. It might help me do my homework, or other assignments. It would also help me to remember to do things, and I wouldn't be worrying all the time about getting something done.

It is important to obey because you could get severe punishment. It is also important to obey because it teaches you discipline. Also it sometimes lets you do things of your own accord.

You should also obey because in some cases it could take your job away from you. You should obey because it is in the Ten Commandments. You should obey when your parents tell you to do something. You should obey because it is something you need to do. You should obey because it will help when you grow into a man.

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