

NewOptions

May 28, 1990

Issue No. Sixty-seven

We Have Got to Start Controlling Our Technology

In our lifetimes, our tools and machines — our techniques and technologies — have changed dramatically. But not because of anything you or I decided.

True, we were asked if we wanted George Bush or Michael Dukakis to be president. (A major decision!) But were you ever asked if you wanted “white collar” work to consist of sitting in front of a computer all day?

Were you ever asked if you wanted trolley cars and passenger trains to virtually disappear?

Were you ever asked if you wanted plants and animals to be “genetically engineered” by humans?

Or, on a more philosophical note — were you ever asked if you wanted your society to spend the last 30 years slavishly serving the values of speed and efficiency, even at the expense of humanity and community?

If these questions seem ludicrous to you, it's probably because you have bought in to the notion that technological change, as distinct from political change, is something that “just happens,” like the weather.

Probably most Americans believe this, even today; even after the anti-nuclear power and “appropriate technology” movements opened many people's eyes. But now at least there is a questioning. And there is more. Outside the Democratic and Republican parties, among certain key thinkers and activists, there is a growing conviction that we've got to start controlling our technology.

Common sense

This month we spoke with four of the most prominent of these innovative thinkers. They are not only quite different from each other (a good sign), but each of them wants us to control technology for a different reason.

Langdon Winner wants us to control technology because our lives are increasingly inseparable from it. “Our whole way of life is increasingly technologically mediated,” says

Winner, who teaches political science at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y., and is author of what many regard as the most balanced and sophisticated critique of high-tech-without-limits, *The Whale and the Reactor* (1986). “You can't separate society from technology any more, or politics from technology, or culture from technology. The life around us is very largely influenced by choices in the design and shape of technology. So it's crucially important that ordinary people become concerned with [these] matters.”

Chellis Glendinning wants us to control technology because we're getting sick from it! She came to our office last week on a promotional tour for her new book, *When Technology Wounds: The Human Consequences of Progress* — a book that chronicles the suffering of people whose lives have been injured by technology (and not incidentally points out that the vast majority of us are in danger: 35 million oral contraceptive users, 21 million employees working near asbestos, 14 million big city residents exposed to electromagnetic radiation from microwave sources . . .).

“Really, with the book I was just trying to say, Look, there are all these people getting sick from technology,” Glendinning said. “[But] many of the people who interview me don't want to talk about that. They want to talk about *technology*. I think it's too threatening for them to talk about technology *survivors*, to talk about the fact that — yes! — people are being just completely decimated by technology.”

Rustum Roy wants us to control technology because we are, after all, paying for it. “About 50% of the [nation's] research and development budget is public [funds now],” says the India-born Roy, who runs the “Science, Technology and Society” (STS) program at Penn State University and is co-founder and president of the National Association for STS (see NEW OPTIONS #47). “Certainly since society pays the bills it should have a major say in

which technologies are generated, when they're permitted to enter into circulation [and how to] regulate and control them.”

Undemocratic & irrational

David Noble wants us to control technology because it's already *being* controlled — undemocratically and irrationally.

“Technology has always been under social control,” says Noble, who teaches history at Drexel University in Philadelphia and whose meticulously researched book, *Forces of Production: A Social History of Industrial Automation* (1984), proves that point better than any other text I know. “To say it's not [socially controlled now] is ideological nonsense. The question is, Whose control?”

“In this society, [the controllers of technology] are the state and [those who derive their] power from ownership of capital or association with those who own capital. That's it. [The rest of us] have no control whatsoever over technology — except in the streets, in strikes, sabotage . . . — but I don't think that's what you're talking about . . .

“The control [these people have] doesn't mean that what they do is rational. I'm convinced that the underlying compulsions behind [technology] are much more significant than the articulated justifications. . . .

“If you ask someone [in management] why they're bringing in this robot, they'll say it's [for] economic [reasons]. But more often than not it's because their own status is going to be enhanced, or they're infatuated with the technology. . . .”

Find a forum

It's easy to say *why* technology should be controlled, harder to say *how*. To their credit, all four innovative thinkers have spent at least as much time on the how as on the why. And all seem to agree on one key thing: public discussion and debate on this issue has simply got to precede lawmaking and institution-

building.

Noble would have us find a public forum where we could raise the issue of social control of technology. "Now we're at a point where we could perhaps [question] the belief in high-tech as the way to go, the belief in automat[ion], and so forth," he told NEW OPTIONS. "But I've been unsuccessful, speaking personally, in finding any forum where these issues can be seriously discussed.

"I tried to raise some of these issues in my own writing . . . and as a result have been in court for four years against MIT. I was a professor there for 10 years, [and] they fired me. . . . Then the Smithsonian fired me. I was a curator there, on industrial automation. I had an exhibit called 'Automation Madness: Boys and Their Toys' and rather than run the exhibit they just fired me. . . .

"What [I learned was that] in the established fora, if you're serious about raising some of these questions, you will find very quickly the pulpits of the institutions closed to you."

Build on what we have

Most of our thinkers are less gloomy than Noble. Roy thinks the university and the church may soon be on the side of a "socially responsible" technology.

"Maybe we're seeing the end of the era of research and high-tech and all that at the universities," Roy told us. "I spoke with Don Kennedy [the president of Stanford] the other day. He said that what he looks for by the year 2000 is, first, to cut back on research and pay more attention to undergraduates; and, second, to downsize the institutions. Small is beautiful. . . .

"I also think the churches have an interesting role. I was just at a meeting in Washington. All over, the churches are now seeing the *connectedness* of ecology and equity and socially responsible technology. . . ."

Union of survivors?

Glendinning would have us *create* the kind of public forum on technology that Noble longs for. In her scenario it would be a "Union of Technology Survivors."

"The technology survivors are the visionaries and prophets that need to come forth to speak," she told us. "That way other people can protect themselves from the endangerment that's happening right at this moment.

"There are all these different groups, you know — the National Association of Radiation Survivors, the Asbestos Victims of America, the Dalkon Shield Information Network, DES Action. In my book I talk about bringing them all together into a *union* of technology survivors.

"They could educate the public about

health-threatening technologies. They could lobby, they could campaign. . . ."

Advice to Congress

For our four thinkers, consciousness-raising is necessary but not sufficient. There will also have to be new laws, new programs. In Roy's deft phrase, there will have to be a "coupling to power."

Roy sees the problem as *largely* one of consciousness. "Each one of us is a Fifth Column," Roy told NEW OPTIONS. "We all want the damn technology. We all want the comfort, we all want the so-and-so. . . ." Once our consciousness has begun to change, says Roy, the first thing we should do is pressure our Congresspeople to pay attention to the good advice they're getting — even now — from the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) of the U.S. Congress.

"I wrote the first bill for the Congressional Office of Science and Technology, the precursor to OTA," Roy told us. "I think OTA is a very sensible institution. Their analyses are done well, they're reasonably timely — much better than [those of] the National Academy of Sciences. . . ." But their analyses are rarely read, much less followed. One OTA report, published in 1981, gave Congress a deft overview of "resource-efficient residential architecture," "food-producing solar greenhouses" and "resource recovery from municipal solid waste." Probably more people worked on the report than read it.

Referendums

Getting our Congresspeople to listen to "enlightened experts" would be a giant step forward — in the Washington of 1990. But it's a very small step toward the world that our four thinkers ultimately hope to create.

"Let's take RU-486, [the new French abortion pill]," says Noble. "How should decisions about the use of this technology be made?"

"Right now the decisions are being made by private firms that are loathe to run the risk of adverse publicity and boycotts; and they're being made by the state [the FDA]. And the chances are good that they're being made by men.

"Why not have a referendum, state by state? Or even on a regional level?"

Noble's idea is not as heretical as you (or he!) may think. For example, in her book *Ariadne's Thread* (reviewed in #66), biologist Mary Clark urges that "technological innovation" be shaped by "public, grassroots, democratic decision making." Of course, Clark doesn't teach at MIT either.

"Codetermination"

Holding referendums on technology is at best a blunt instrument, useful only in certain

very dramatic cases. More promising may be the rather more mundane idea that everyone should have an opportunity to participate in shaping the technology that affects their lives.

That's Langdon Winner's view. "A number of social movements are playing an increasingly prominent role [in] technological choice-making," Winner told us. "The anti-nuclear power movement of course, the toxic wastes movement, the Council for a Responsible Genetics, the movement of disabled people in the U.S. . . .

"But all these movements are pretty much on the fringes. In other words, the real power-holders still exercise the important choices about what kinds of technologies we're going to have. I think it's important to try to move beyond citizen participation as a fringe activity, toward the idea of democratic citizen participation as something central.

"In the Scandinavian social democracies there are what are called 'codetermination laws' which give ordinary workers the right to a voice in matters that affect the quality of working life — including the introduction of new technologies. . . .

"Ordinary citizens are given a direct role in making technology policies *at local levels*. [For example], the UTOPIA Project in Sweden involved workers, managers and university computer scientists in a cooperative effort to design a new system of computer-generated graphics for a Stockholm newspaper. . . .

"[In Sweden], just because one owns a newspaper does not mean that one has total control over what happens on the floor! One's rights as a property owner are only one fact among [many]. . . .

"Over the last 10-15 years these codetermination laws have been passed at a *national* level, giving citizens the right to influence matters that in the U.S. would seem simply

Continued on page eight, column two . . .

NewOptions

NEW OPTIONS (ISSN 0890-1619) is published every month except August by New Options Inc., 2005 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., lower level, Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 822-0929.

Please address ALL correspondence to Post Office Box 19324, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Subscriptions \$25 a year in the U.S., \$32 Canada, \$39 elsewhere. Back issues \$2 each. Microfilm from Univ. Microfilms (Ann Arbor).

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Is the Self-Esteem Task Force for real?

When the California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem was set up three years ago, most commentators' reactions to it were predictable. Leftists accused it of being New Age mouthwash; rightists accused it of being a waste of taxpayers' money. Garry Trudeau had a field day lampooning it in *Doonesbury*.

This January the Task Force published its final report, and it was clear from people's reactions that it had won a measure of credibility. There was a nice editorial in the *Boston Globe*. There were some fair-minded articles in big-city newspapers. The country didn't exactly stand up and take notice, but one could be forgiven for thinking that it should have.

Reasons to believe

One reason the Task Force won some credibility was because of its own processes. It held public hearings across California. It commissioned an intelligent book by seven UC professors summarizing the research on self-esteem and social behavior (*The Social Importance of Self-Esteem*, 1989). Perhaps most impressive, it will not evolve into a bureaucracy — it's coming to an end June 30.

Some of the credit also has to go to the Task Force's makeup — 27 people chosen from over 400 applicants (more than had applied to be on any other commission in California history). The group not only included 15 Republicans and 12 Democrats; it ranged from the fundamentalist Christian school principal to the gay therapist, from the L.A. police sergeant to the Asian Planned Parenthood director.

But most of the credit has to be given to John Vasconcellos, chair of the powerful Ways and Means Committee of the California Assembly and initiator of the legislation for the Task Force. Vasconcellos worked tirelessly for years to get the legislation approved. He spoke out all over the state and, recently, he's been speaking out all over the country on behalf of the notion that self-esteem is the key to many of our social problems.

Vasconcellos is not your ordinary politician. He practices self-disclosure with a vengeance. "I was a dutiful, well-behaved, frightened kid," he told reporters during a recent visit to Philadelphia. "We were so heavily Catholic — the whole 'I'm a sinner, I'm evil, I'm not worthy' breast-beating thing. It was crippling. When I was in my 30s, I came apart at the seams."

He sought therapy from California's humanistic psychologists. One thing they did

was encourage him to vent his frustration and rage, and long-time California Assembly watchers recall that, many years ago, floor monitors had to be regularly assigned to calm him down. His coming-apart was tolerated partly because he explained it all so carefully to the voters, and partly because the therapies worked: he radiates a personal comfort now, and he has become one of the few members of the Assembly whom all factions can turn to when the going gets rough.

So when Vasconcellos tells you about the use-value of self-esteem, you know you're not hearing somebody's abstract intellectual theory. Couple his integrity with the Task Force report and the many successful school programs built around self-esteem (NEW OPTIONS #27) and you have the makings of what Vasconcellos and others have begun to call a self-esteem *movement* . . . a movement they feel will be every bit as good for us as the women's and environmental movements.

Blueprint

The first thing that strikes you about the Task Force's final report is how *thorough* it is. It is all there: a carefully worked-out definition of self-esteem, some "key principles for nurturing self-esteem," descriptions of programs that are successfully promoting self-esteem — above all, dozens of recommendations for how the government can help.

The guiding idea is that *lack* of self-esteem is a primary cause of six key social problems (child abuse, academic failure, drug abuse, crime, chronic welfare dependency, and alienating workplace environments) — and that programs that tackle self-esteem directly would not only produce a kinder, gentler nation, but would save the government millions of dollars in the long run.

We spoke with Vasconcellos last week from his office in Sacramento. Of all the dozens of recommendations, we asked him, which two were the most important? "First, that every *prospective parent* ought to be prepared to become a presence that nurtures the self in the child. And second, that every *teacher* ought to be prepared to be the same."

We asked him to be even more specific, and he referred us to some of the recommendations in the report: "develop a statewide media campaign"; "make courses on child rearing available to all"; "course work in self-esteem should be required as a part of ongoing in-service training for all educators."

When we asked him what the chances

were of getting any of this adopted, his tone changed from missionary to grave: "Well, the chances are complex. Anything that costs money is out, because we're going to be \$3.6 billion in the red next year.

"Still, I think we've got a good chance of incorporating some of the dimensions of the report into [some of the ongoing] practices in this state. I'm going to introduce a series of resolutions [in the Assembly] that's going to ask every school to incorporate the [relevant] recommendations, and every mental health program and every prison and department of corrections. I would expect I'd get pretty strong support for that."

We spoke with Robert Ball, executive director of the Task Force and "self-esteem counsellor," and he expanded on Vasconcellos's answer: "Forty-seven of the 58 counties in California have *county* Task Forces, and we're hoping that most of them will continue. Now that we've got the final report out most of the county task forces are going through it and picking out the recommendations they feel are relevant to their areas. . . .

"Plus two states, Maryland and Virginia, have enacted task forces [of their own], and at least 10 others are in the process of working in that direction."

Dramatic claims

In his talks and writings, Vasconcellos makes four dramatic claims for self-esteem. We recently asked him about each of them:

- **It's the key to solving our social problems.** "What I've been saying," Vasconcellos told us, "is self-esteem amounts to a 'social vaccine.' It provides us with the strength not to be vulnerable to dropping out or getting pregnant too soon or getting violent or addicted. . . . I called Jonas Salk and *he* said that was an appropriate metaphor!"

- **It's the key to our economic development.** "It's a new strategic vision for the development of human capital," he says. "Healthy self-esteeming persons are more likely to become productive, creative [and] responsible employees."

- **It's the key to community.** "It is my sense that only a self-esteeming person can truly relate across lines of race and gender comfortably, and not want everyone to be 'just like me' so they can feel okay."

- **It can reframe the political dialogue.** "The ideal of the right is that of the individual becoming able to take care of him- or herself. The ideal of the left is that we ought to be active in . . . leading people to better lives. [The self-esteem movement merges both ideals.]"

Not so fast, bub

To Vasconcellos, the perspective above seems like only common sense. But to many

others it's misguided at best.

For one thing, the book of research summaries that the Task Force commissioned, *The Social Importance of Self-Esteem*, did not find the clear causal effects between self-esteem and social problems that the Task Force assumed it would. In the book's introduction, prominent sociologist Neil J. Smelser states, "The news most consistently reported . . . is that the associations between self-esteem and its expected consequences are mixed, insignificant, or absent."

Garry Trudeau seized on this in a February 20, 1990 *Doonesbury*. He had Boopsie, channeling Hunk-Ra, state, "Hear this! The intellectual foundation for this report, the academic research, DOES NOT SUPPORT ITS FINDINGS! . . . Our leaders knew this and ignored it!"

We called David Shannahoff-Khalsa, the research scientist and Task Force member from Del Mar, Calif., who'd been communicating with Trudeau and whose ideas are reflected in the strip (and who's even pictured in the Jan. 12, 1988 strip), and asked him to say more.

"I did not sign [the Task Force report] because to me it was fraudulent," he said. "It covered up the key findings [of the academic researchers]."

"Vasconcellos knew personally that the chapters [of the academic book] did not substantiate his thesis. I heard him say, after he had just finished reviewing them, that if the Legislature found out what was written there they'd cut the funding to the Task Force."

Shannahoff-Khalsa also related what one of the co-authors of the academic study, Harry Specht, had to say: "Essentially the evidence does not support the Task Force's finding that low self-esteem is a primary cause of social problems. . . . Vasconcellos is a True Believer in this stuff. Here is a unit of government passing off this garbage as given wisdom."

We asked Vasconcellos to respond to these criticisms, and he did — with passion!

"The book's been used against us," said Vasconcellos, "but only by those people who think the book is all there is."

"The book wasn't the end of [the Task Force's] search! They did, like, nine public hearings from the north of the state down to San Diego; they had experts in from all over the country; they did lots of reading and research of their own. And they concluded from all that that there was enough evidence to make the claim of a causal relationship and a 'social vaccine.'"

Need to "measure up"?

Another kind of criticism came from people who think people's self-esteem *should* and

must be bound up with real achievements, real accomplishments.

Syndicated black columnist William Raspberry (interviewed in #45) recently distinguished between "self-esteem, which can thrive on the sugary diet of self-affirmation — 'I am a good person,'" and "self-respect, [which] is both an acknowledgement of personal responsibility and an assertion of one's ability to meet that responsibility." Raspberry goes so far as to suggest that self-esteem can get in the way of self-respect, since it denies people the chance to prove themselves by "measuring up."

Garry Trudeau's feelings are roughly similar. "Trudeau told me about a study that looked at students' proficiency at math in the developed nations," Shannahoff-Khalsa told NEW OPTIONS. "There were two findings that he brought to my attention. One being that the Koreans did better than [students from] every other country, while [students from] the U.S. were at the bottom. When the same students were asked how well they *thought* they did, the U.S. [students] ranked themselves at the top and the Koreans ranked themselves at the bottom."

"So our students feel very good about themselves — but they don't function very well. They are not proficient, they are deluded. . . ."

What does Vasconcellos think of those criticisms? "You know, David proved to be the most uncompromising, dogmatic person on the Task Force. . . ."

No, no: What does Vasconcellos think of those criticisms? "It's a common belief that we're not worth much," he told us, "and so you go out and you work hard and become saved. It's kind of the Calvinist model."

"That's not my bias. That's what I lived with for a long time and . . . didn't 'live with' at all, OK, 'cause you can't live with it."

"I think the human being is *inherently* worthy and inclined towards good. And if we know that and proceed from that knowledge, we'll learn and express and relate and produce. But you don't 'get' self-esteem by going out and doing something good for somebody. The good proceeds from the self-esteem."

"[To say self-esteem proceeds from achievement], that's real dangerous, it's getting into competition, and those who don't 'win' [can't be esteemed]."

Yuppie diversion?

Several left-liberal thinkers have raised a different objection to the report.

"The larger issue is that [self-esteem] problems are rooted in the economy," says Utah psychologist Roger Schultz.

"More than half the jobs created last year pay \$7,000 or less," says San Jose State Uni-

versity professor Roy Christman, "and so it follows that people at the bottom of the totem pole aren't going to feel good about themselves. . . ."

"That's a self-fulfilling prophecy," Vasconcellos told us.

"That doesn't mean people should be allowed to languish [at the bottom of the totem pole]. My record is one of a lot of activity to reach out to people who are the dispossessed and uncomfortable! But [we need to] do it in a way that gives them more than material [goods]. [We need to] give them material [things] but also encouragement to become able to protect themselves and take charge of their lives."

"Self-esteem is really a matter of empowerment. I don't think that's been [emphasized enough]."

Superficial?

After spending nearly an hour criticizing the Task Force and its report, Shannahoff-Khalsa proposed a different approach to the problem the Task Force was trying to address.

"Without probing the depths one can never reach the heights," he told us.

"The real problems people face stem from their subconscious."

"People walk around repeating, I don't like myself, I don't like myself. But this feeling is *deeply embedded*. And the superficial efforts that are part of most of these self-esteem trainings, [they] never reach deeply into people. They're not going to do the job."

"People are suffering from anxiety and depression and inability to deal with stress in their lives and things like that. We are really dealing here with people who have become severely dysfunctional in their lives, [and we need to face that fact]."

How long, oh, how long

After we finished this article, we felt deeply moved by the sincerity and intelligence and commitment of all those we had talked to. But we were also somewhat sad.

For the arguments about self-esteem we'd been privy to were arguments that deserved to be at the very forefront of the American political debate. But in fact, they are not even a significant part of it.

How long, oh, how long America, will it be before you admit that people's feelings about themselves are as real — and as politically potent — as the amount of money they have?

Vasconcellos: State Capitol, Box 942849, Sacramento CA 94249. "Toward a State of Esteem" (Task Force report): Calif. State Dept of Education, Bureau of Publications, Sales Unit, PO Box 271, Sacramento CA 95802, \$5.

The Ear . . .

The left had its day

I found your cover story on Earth Day 1990 vs. the Wall Street Action very stimulating (NEW OPTIONS #65). Some of the quotations from the Wall Street Action people reminded me of the radical left statements I heard in Santa Barbara in the early 70s — statements that eventually drove me out of the leftist fold.

While it is true that the actions of wealthy and powerful individuals and corporations have plundered our planet, we get nowhere fast when we say "It isn't *us*, it's *them*." In fact, that is nothing more than the well-documented psychological defense mechanism called "projection."

Great leaders of reform movements, like King and Gandhi, emphasize the importance of individual responsibility. Blaming corporate greed and short-sightedness while drinking from a styrofoam cup is spiritually and strategically absurd.

Gandhi and King also taught about speaking to the good in one's opponent. It seems to me that one assumption behind the Wall Street Action approach is that the people making up the guilty corporations are unredeemably evil people. Some may be, but I think it is more useful to think of them as ignorant, addicted, or driven by personal needs for power and control.

So they don't need our blame. They need education and compassionate confrontation.

— **Molly Young Brown**

Petaluma CA, Shasta Bioregion

Congratulations for exposing the big behind-the-scenes intrigue of the environmental movement. The big Earth Day splash may have had some commercialism — but the violence of the Wall Street Action people only results in discrediting things.

I think Earth Day 1970 was moved by the *outrage* of people realizing the American Dream wasn't working. By contrast, the dark side of Earth Day 1990's crowd psychology was *fear* — the problems are bigger, more global, and more insidious.

That explains the violence on Wall Street. It reflected the underlying terror many people feel today when they seriously try to understand the problems and come up with a case of the well-informed futility blues.

You can criticize the Earth Day entertainers for glossing things over and being glitzy. But when people are scared and worried,

they need to laugh a little and find things to celebrate so they can feel renewed.

— **James Swan**

Mill Valley CA, Shasta Bioregion

Call it a draw

Your cover story "Battle(s) for the Soul of Environmentalism" pointed out the differences of opinion(s), not to mention some bitter feelings, between Earth Day 1990 and the Earth Day Wall Street Action. Like you, I conclude we need both approaches.

The two "sides" are simply looking at the same mountain from two different vantage points.

In my own evolution as an environmentalist, I started off with petitions and letters to the editor, all quite tame and probably making not a dent. As I learned more, my commitment increased, leading to such activities as blockading the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant and going to jail for a few days.

As my commitment increased further, it led to a job change — which may have had the greatest ripple effect, influencing other to do the same.

— **Lauren Ayers**

Fair Oaks CA, Shasta Bioregion

Some women's thing

In her article "The Man/Woman Thing Clouds Earth Day" (#65), NEW OPTIONS Advisor Elizabeth Dodson Gray laments our human arrogance. She also states that this human arrogance is male-generated.

C'mon, Ms. Gray. From what I can see out there in society, women handle power and wealth about the same way men do.

— **Dennis W. Brezina**

Harwood MD, Chesapeake Bioregion

In her "Advisors' Corner" column, Elizabeth Dodson Gray implies that men are responsible for the communication gap between the sexes. She also suggests that because we are responsible for "solidarity connection" problems, we cannot experience the joys of fully contacting nature.

I would like to make a few observations, which are intended not to diminish the capacities of either gender, but to stake out a common ground that women and men can stand on as equal partners in the 90s:

- Men deeply love and feel the Earth, its rhythmical natural processes, its flowers, its babies, and fall's red plums, as do women.

- Men and women are equally wounded by the current system of values and beliefs.

- Men have some problems with communication related to their training, and women have some problems with communication re-

lated to their training. Both sexes are taught to blame and shame the other.

- Women are as ethical and moral as men.

Men are as ethical and moral as women.

- Men and women pass on the legacy of the current system to each succeeding generation.

A key to right relationship in the 90s is for men and women to see each other as equally powerful and equally determined to make the changes in the world which must be made.

— **George Taylor**

Mill Valley CA, Shasta Bioregion

I've just read Elizabeth Dodson Gray's column and would like to propose an alternative view of male human beings.

It seems to me that male children are just as severely conditioned as female children. I am sure if a boy child were ever given a chance to grow up without this conditioning (which presently permeates our culture), we would see that he is just as lovely and good as a girl child would be without hers.

The male is no more at fault for succumbing to his overwhelming experience than is the female. And bitterness, blame and sarcasm is not the way to undo it.

— **Marjorie W. Smith**

Seattle WA, Cascade Bioregion

Arts & craft of politics

Your letter/review of my book *Common-Wealth: A Return to Citizen Politics* was gratifying and thoughtful (#65). I liked the personal touch — I too remember our conversation in that restaurant with past scenes of Minneapolis on the wall.

And you're certainly right: my disassociation from the U.S. Green movement had to do with the aura of self-righteousness and, ironically, the "correct line-ism" that I felt American "Greens" were borrowing from the political left, even as they sought to distance themselves from the ideological wars that defined conventional politics.

This is the real irony of activist environmentalism today: Just as the nation is open in an unprecedented way to ecological insight, environmental activists remain usually caught by the polarities (good versus evil, forces of lightness versus the forces of darkness) that lend an inflamed and Manichean quality to America's mainstream politics, from the abortion debate to discussions of the national debt or the drug crisis. It is the legacy of the 1960s and, in different fashion, of the Cold War era.

As long as greens see themselves as a minority truth squad out to convert the world, they will fail to develop the political arts of listening, engagement and judgment required to transform the larger political culture.

Your review of *CommonWealth* included a remarkably clear, crisp and useful summary of my critique of the left for its overemphasis on redistributive justice instead of democratic power. Where I felt you missed the point was in exploring *CommonWealth's* rationale for focusing on the community organizing network associated with the Industrial Areas Foundation.

This focus was not intended to privilege community organizing — or even the revitalization of community — as a unique locus of a revitalized public life. A healthy public life is far broader, containing a variety of “communities” and associational forms. (This is where I disagree with Robert Bellah [co-author of *Habits of the Heart*, #23] and others whom I believe hold a too nostalgia-tinged and 19th century view of public life, grounded in stable, homogeneous communities.)

Rather, I dealt with these particular organizing groups at length in order to suggest other themes — especially the idea developed in IAF that politics in its best sense is a craft that is deeply and transformatively educative, in the sense of the Latin root, *educare*, meaning to draw out.

Politics as a craft is relational and dynamic. It teaches the literacy of citizen empowerment as its highest end. It sees public issues as *occasions* for deepened insight, judgment and the development of people's capacities.

— Harry Boyte

Minneapolis MN, Heartland Bioregion

Talk about caring

You have chosen to read Michel Foucault as the philosopher of the “caring individual” (“The 1980s Were Better Than We Thought,” #64), but it's not even clear that he believes in a personal, individual identity!

— Suzanne Sheber

Boca Raton FL, “Everglades Bioregion”

Your article on the “caring individual” neglects one of the most significant examples of caring in modern society. And the argument you make is weakened by the neglect.

For a segment approaching 10% of the population, the 1980s were characterized by a plague that — seemingly out of nowhere — swept through their lives, cutting down friends and lovers and threatening to lurk secretly in their own bloodstreams.

And while gay men watched their brothers die mysteriously, society didn't seem to care. Doctors didn't want to treat the disease. Ministers blamed it on the victims. The President couldn't even bring himself to say the word AIDS.

In the face of this indifference and hostility, gay men and lesbians joined together to as-

sist the sick and dying.

Gay community groups across the country organized buddy programs, psychological support groups, bereavement workshops, safe sex trainings, to ease the pain and stop the virus. Women and men came forward to visit and help people with AIDS — people who were often strangers to them, who had a disease other Americans were so frightened of they wanted all the sufferers locked away in quarantine.

The volunteers fed and cleaned up after the people with AIDS. They helped them bathe; they emptied their bedpans. And they did this not for a few days when it was in vogue and the focus of a super rock concert, but for months and even years.

In spite of enormous opposition from mainstream society, lesbians and gay men cared for one another. And they virtually stemmed the spread of the virus in their own communities, and alleviated untold suffering.

Such caring was not born out of guilt or fear of divine wrath, but out of compassion. It is *the* example of the caring, conscious, compassionate individual your article calls for.

— Edwin Clark (Toby) Johnson, Ph.D.

Author, *Plague: A Novel About Healing Austin TX, “Edwards Aquifer Bioregion”*

Caring side of punk

Your 80s article missed the point when you wrote that “By the late 1970s rock music was in crisis.” Granted, *American* music was at a standstill, but English rock was paving the way for some of the most interesting music of the 80s. The Clash was the best example of a band that combined the raw sounds of punk (and later, reggae) with an urgent political commentary.

American bands such as Hüsker Dü, Mission of Burma and Bad Brains, while keeping punk rock's intensity, developed “caring” themes of their own, with little or no support from the older generation of music listeners. On *Zen Arcade* (1984) Bob Mould writes about “broken home, broken heart/now you know just how it feels to have to cry yourself to sleep at night,” while at the same time lamenting the “newest industry” in “a world where science went too far.” But these bands were ignored by the music industry, not to mention publications like *NEW OPTIONS*.

It's Tracy Chapman and Suzanne Vega — your heroines! — whose music is at a standstill. Their music is a mere repetition of the folk guitar so reminiscent of the 60s. Lester Bangs understood the 80s better than you when he wrote of the greatness of Iggy Pop and had “James Taylor marked for death.”

— Matt Gallaway

Ithaca NY, Allegheny Bioregion

Advisors' corner

Selma to Beijing to Berlin to you

By Vincent Harding

At various points, watching world events in the portentous year 1989, I caught a glimpse of other times and places in our own nation.

My initial engagement with the past occurred as I watched with the world the events in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. There, before the soldiers came, I was struck by the powerful and committed simplicity of the students' call for democracy.

But the images that almost took my breath away were the great banners in the square announcing “We Shall Overcome.”

Nor will I soon forget the voice and face of one of the fasting students, firmly declaring, “We are willing to starve for democracy.” For in addition to its own integrity it immediately brought to mind the image of C.T. Vivian rising from the sidewalk in Selma, Ala., in 1965, facing the sheriff who knocked him down, and with blood streaming from his face declaring, “We are willing to be beaten for democracy.”

Then, at the top of the Berlin Wall, there was another encounter with a profoundly remembered history.

At one point they were singing a song whose words simply repeated, “The wall is coming down.” But the tune they sang was music created in the struggles of slavery, music made popular by Fannie Lou Hamer, the great singing soldier of the modern African-American freedom movement. The tune was “Go Tell It On the Mountain.”

Reflecting on these empowering images, and others like them, I realized that the term “civil rights movement” is too narrow a description for the great, Black-led eruption that shook the antidemocratic, white-supremacist foundations of this nation not long ago.

When I look back now from the vantage point of Beijing and Prague, from Berlin and Soweto, what I realize is that the post-World War II African-American freedom movement was our own seminal contribution to the massive pro-democracy struggles that have set the globe spinning in these times.

It belongs to every one of us in this country — just as the students in Tiananmen Square and the marchers, organizers and martyrs in Eastern Europe and South Africa realize it belongs to them.

NEW OPTIONS Advisor Vincent Harding's third book, *Hope and History*, will be published this summer by Orbis.

Schaeffer: beyond self-determination

Dear Robert Schaeffer,

I remember having lunch with you many years ago, when you were still senior editor of *Nuclear Times Magazine*, and you mentioned in passing that you were working on a book about the partitioning of states (North Korea/South Korea, Israel/Palestine, etc.) and, more generally, the whole trend toward separatism and autonomy and "self-determination" in the modern world. I looked up and glibly said something about how I assumed you favored that trend. You became very thoughtful and said you were coming to the opposite conclusion. I pursed my lips and wouldn't let you have the last word.

In the years since then, I have also begun to have doubts about the various "independence" and separatist movements that have arisen around the world, as well as the splintering of movements in this country into a hundred different narrow identities (environmental, ecological, "deep ecology," "social ecology," Green, etc.). I often wondered if you would finish your book, and if you'd take a strong stand on these issues. Well, you have, and you sure do.

Your book is called *Warpaths: The Politics of Partition* (Hill and Wang, \$23). Its thesis is that self-determination may have been a positive thing in Lenin's and Woodrow Wilson's day, but that today it's too often a code-word for ethnic, racial and ideological separatism which makes community harder, not easier, to attain, both within and among nations. Instead of devolution and self-determination you propose inclusiveness and democracy. Instead of a "hip" vision you propose that of Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Schizophrenic states"

Although you are still not comfortably settled in a mainstream institution — currently you're senior editor of *Greenpeace Magazine* — your book is as carefully wrought as could be (not for nothing did you get a Ph.D. in "historical sociology"). Part I covers the background to partition (i.e. independence movements and European resistance to them until World War II); Part II covers the process of partition after World War II; and Part III spells out the grisly legacy of partition. Only the last chapter draws the broad conclusions that will — or at least *should* — make your book a hot topic of movement debate.

Along the way you reveal some fascinating things. For example, nearly everyone in the prewar era spoke of "freedom" and "self-de-

termination," but nearly everyone was cynical and self-serving in doing so. The independence movements spoke of these grand concepts abroad, to attract the support (and money) of idealists, but at home sang a much more parochial tune. Moreover, by "self-determination" they rarely meant permitting minorities in their *own* country to have equal political rights — a fact that was typically downplayed until self-determination was granted by the occupying or colonial power.

For their part, Wilson's and Lenin's beautiful rhetoric about self-determination concealed some less beautiful facts — for example, the victory of indigenous movements meant that countries dominated by Europe would henceforth be in the spheres of influence of the U.S. or the USSR. Partition permitted occupying powers to get out of the divided nations quickly and "nobly," without having to try to prevent the bloodbaths that were, in most cases, sure to follow.

As you see it, the consequences of partition were disastrous, even evil. There were immense social upheavals, as when over 17 million Moslems and Hindus migrated across the new India/Pakistan border, and over one million were killed. There was a propensity to civil war as self-righteous "independence" leaders sought to guarantee their rule.

There was a propensity to interstate war as the new rulers sought to deflect attention away from domestic troubles. There was a resurgence of racism and virulent ethnic nationalism as politicians and activists — following the ideology of self-determination to its logical conclusion — sought to create ever more homogeneous states.

Some of your most moving passages come when you describe the "psychological walls" that grew up between different ethnic or racial or ideological groups in many partitioned or newly independent states . . . leading to the phenomenon that you call, not entirely facetiously, "schizophrenic states."

Rediscovering democracy

The reader may buy your argument, but be left with one seemingly unanswerable question. If partition, devolution, separatism — in a phrase, the ideology of self-determination — is a disaster, then where is the alternative that promises to be at least equally fair, at least equally "for the people"?

There is an alternative, you say in your last chapter. It is called "democracy." Its most relevant champions are Lincoln and King.

Lincoln argued that democracy means majority rule *and* minority rights, and that self-determination is basically a secessionist principle that owes more to Confederate than Unionist ideals.

King argued that, by working for civil rights, we were trying to create a common community *for* minority and majority alike. "This approach," you write, "contrasts sharply with insistence on self-determination and the creation of separate communities."

Even more provocatively, you write, "To achieve community [King] sought to deconstruct the ethnic social identity given to the black minority by social, political and economic institutions in the U.S. and to reconstruct this identity so that blacks could join the national community on an egalitarian basis. King sought nothing less than the transformation of the 'Negro' minority into a majority made up of other disenfranchised minorities — the young, the old, the poor, women, white and black."

King's vision moved people — for a while. But it was overthrown, you write, by a trendy "Third World nationalism" that began pursuing a "separatist-secessionist politics based on self-determination and its indigenous . . . expression, 'black power.'"

I was deeply moved by your book. It raises all the right questions for activists of the 90s, and has more guts than any five books on the best seller lists. Since I didn't give you the last word at the lunch we had, let me give you the last one here: "Unless social movements and government officials find a way to promote democracy in heterogeneous nation-states, [and] deconstruct social identities defined by animosity, . . . the divisions created by partition will sharpen and the walls dividing people will continue to rise."

Crouch: militance or inclusiveness?

Another new book makes some similar arguments, and brilliantly extends those arguments into realms Schaeffer won't or can't go: Stanley Crouch's *Notes of a Hanging Judge* (Oxford Univ. Press, \$23).

Crouch was a longtime jazz critic and staff writer at the *Village Voice*, and the book is a pointedly arranged collection of some of his best articles. In a moving introduction, he describes his evolution from civil rights worker to militant black nationalist to self-described "traitor" to the nationalist cause: "Having been born in 1945, I consider myself part of an undeclared lost generation that ran into the xenophobic darkness, retreating from the complex vision of universal humanism that

underlay the [early] Civil Rights Movement.”

The book is a sustained critique of that retreat, and Crouch finds traces of it not only in obvious targets like Louis Farrakhan, but in such celebrated political-cultural manifestos as Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing*. Crouch says that Morrison’s novel is too simplistic, that it produces white guilt (a useless emotion) but not a true sense of the tragic (which might move us to community): “For all the memory within this book, . . . no one ever recalls how the Africans were captured. That would have complicated matters.”

Similarly, Crouch argues that Lee’s film lacks “true dramatic complexity,” has no “feeling for the intricacies of the human spirit” that could engender a deeper sympathy between its characters and its audience. It is human complexity that binds us, Crouch is saying, not politically correct sentiment.

You’ll be fascinated by Crouch’s no-holds-barred critiques. But what rivetted me still more were the things he stood *for*. I imagined — you will forgive me — that at its best NEW OPTIONS also stands for such things.

For example, his heroes include Bob Moses of SNCC, whose “charisma had to do with the ability to make people believe in themselves.” And the African filmmaker Ousmane Sembene, “an artist absolutely unsentimental in his depictions of historical and contemporary life in his country,” a man committed to telling, in his own words, “the cruel sweet truth” about people and movements he believes in. And former New York City deputy mayor Haskell Ward, who understands that “it is the mobilization of [black political and economic power] that is the issue, not [blacks’] helplessness, not [their] victimization.”

Who we are

Ultimately Crouch does not want white Americans to feel sorry for blacks (or women, or gays). He wants us to do as we did with blacks in the mid-60s, “participate in the realization of their ideals”; identify with black people not as an unfortunate “other” but as an integral part of who *we* are.

And that’s just part of Crouch’s larger vision. In the long final essay in this book, “Body and Soul,” we glimpse the whole. It’s an account of his trip to the Umbria Jazz festival, in Italy, and as we re-live the journey with him we move effortlessly across such subjects as African music, the Cathedral of St. Francis of Assisi, Louis Armstrong, Milan Kundera, Hannibal’s army, Zora Neale Hurston, Michelangelo, and Muhammad Ali. After you read this essay you will know, in your bones, that we separate ourselves from each other at our peril, and at our deep loss.

Continued from page two:

extraordinary. . . .

“I look at the Scandinavian experiment as a first step . . . and as something that should perhaps be tried in some manner in the U.S. It breaks down all kinds of boundaries having to do with property, expertise, institutional power and the like, that I think have led us from one disastrous technological choice to another.”

Set the research agenda

For Noble, it is not enough for citizens to have a say in deploying existing technologies. He also wants us to have a say in developing new technologies.

“If you look at how the research agenda of institutions is being set, and by whom,” he says, “you will see that the bulk of the population is left out.

“For example, what’s called ‘industrial liaison’ programs — where industries and universities collaborate — are [occasionally branded as] unfair because other companies don’t have access. And I say yes, of course it’s unfair. But that’s just the tip of the iceberg! The society is composed of more than just companies!

“Environmentalists, labor, feminist groups, you list them, don’t have any access to these laboratories; don’t have any influence over the setting of the research agenda.

“[There needs to be] some mechanism for democratic oversight of the scientific agenda.

“[Some of us] are now calling for much tighter Congressional oversight, which is just a half-measure, but would be a step in the right direction.”

Winner points, again, to Sweden: “There’s a whole research and development center in Stockholm called the Center for Working Life which investigates possibilities for the demo-

cratic shaping of new workplace technologies. It’s government supported!”

Decentralize!

For Glendinning, even the program above isn’t enough. It doesn’t challenge the technological society deeply enough.

“We have to question [technology] on a deeper level than just policy and regulations,” she told us, leaning excitedly across our big table. “The problem at its root is our whole mechanistic way of approaching the world.

“It seems like part of the answer has to be to give certain things back to people: community, closeness to nature, and some kind of spirituality. Because if you’re living in a technological world, how can you know anything except more technology? . . . I don’t really think we can *have* a safe, non-toxic technology until we have a different *kind of society*. . . .

“To get to democratic control of technology I just can’t get away from the idea of decentralizing our society — so that people have more control of what’s around them. . . .”

Prospects

As much as any article we’ve run in NEW OPTIONS, this one reads like only common sense. And yet, when you look at even the most “progressive” forces in our society, no part of this perspective is present.

The 1988 Democratic platform speaks glibly of “using our best minds to create the most advanced technology in the world.” Jesse Jackson’s 1988 issue briefs had much to say about bigger salaries, nothing to say about social control of technology.

Like most of the rest of us, the progressives are obsessed with bigger and “more.” Before we can have social control of technology, a new movement is needed whose watchwords will include participation, enoughness and the human scale.

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Issue No. Sixty-seven