**POLICYMAKING,
COMMUNICATION,
AND
SOCIAL LEARNING**

Sir Geoffrey Vickers

*Edited by Guy B. Adams, John
Forester, and Bayard L. Catron*

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Essays of Sir Geoffrey Vickers

Edited by

**GUY B. ADAMS
JOHN FORESTER
BAYARD L. CATRON**

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Foreword

My friends, the editors, initiated the idea of this book and it is they who have done virtually all the work of selecting and editing its contents from a collection of my papers. My first and most welcome task is to thank them for the trouble they have taken, the courtesy they have shown in keeping me in touch with their enterprise, and the assurance they have given me that they have found something useful in my writing and believe that even the earliest pieces they have chosen still have a relevance wide enough to warrant another publication.

I have learned how hard it is for a would-be communicator to guess what effect, if any, his communication will have on any receiver, for this depends on the usually tacit assumptions that both parties bring to the marvelous and obscure process of sharing each other's understanding of some situation and even of changing their own and each other's underlying assumptions in the process. This involves dialogue; where that is impossible, the one-way communicator can do no more than make explicit, so far as he or she can, the concerns that have goaded him or her to utterance and the assumptions and perceptions that have aroused them. It may therefore be useful if I outline the experiences that have led me to seek so obsessively a better understanding of the changing concept of "order" in human life.

I grew to manhood before the First World War in an England that took stability for granted and regarded order—national and international—both as a self-regulating process of betterment called *progress* and also as a field for human design directed to the same end. These two not wholly consistent ideas applied in the political-social, the financial-economic, and the scientific-technological fields; all these fields are regarded as benign partners, the first still the most prized.

Of the thirty years following 1914 ten were spent in intensive warfare and twenty in the vain search for both national and international stability. By 1944 all my early assumptions were shaken, if not destroyed. Stability could not be taken for granted, could not even necessarily be assured by even the greatest conscious effort. Still, neither automatic regulation nor human design could be trusted to achieve "betterment" by any of the diverse criteria that had emerged.

Worse was to come, but before it came an event occurred in the intellectual world that had a profound effect on me. In the decade following the war, a set of concepts about systems and their control that had been maturing in technological contexts during the previous decade was set loose in the general intellectual community by such writers as Norbert Wiener, Ludwig von Bertalanffy, and Ross Ashby. The effect on me was not so much revelation as liberation. The ideas did not seem surprising or even new, but they provided a new language in which to talk about the perplexing experience of my lifetime and a new point of view from which to regard it. The result was immensely illuminating. The relation between stability and *betterment*, the nature of the dialectic process of history, the extent of human initiative in influencing the course of a process of which it was itself part, the inescapable increase in constraint as well as enablement in every increase in organization, all this and much more, previously sensed chiefly as paradox, became understandable and discussable. I did not assume that this would make human affairs more controllable; but even if it did not, we should, I thought, be much the better for understanding the limits and conditions of human control.

It would, I hoped, greatly increase our understanding of the part played by different cultures in affecting the ways in which the members of each appreciated their own situation and that of others, however numerous and overlapping the groups which these cultures and subcultures defined—be they national, racial, occupational, social or of any other kind. For cultures, even the smallest subcultures, are pre-eminently systems, which give rise to the type of question illustrated in the previous paragraph and which can be understood only in systemic terms.

Inevitably and rightly there arose an intense concern to formulate a *general* systems theory. Inevitably, but in my view disastrously, this focussed attention on systems of which the elements and interactions could be fully described, if not actually designed. Consequently those human systems which could not be described or designed were either ignored or over-simplified. This tendency was intensified by the startling development of the digital computer. I recall all these developments because those who did not experience the intellectual excitement of those early days may not realize how greatly systems theory has improved our understanding even of those aspects of human systems where we are least able to quantify or even to specify the essential elements or their interactions, still less to exercise any effective control or to model with any precision. We know, for example, far more about the generation of urban traffic than about the generation of urban crime. But systems thinking is as necessary and as

illuminating in the second area as in the first, if only for its aid in distinguishing a symptom from a more basic disorder.

Norbert Wiener's symbolic helmsman takes his course as given, as does the technological problem solver take his problem as given.¹ But the greatest importance of control theory in the human field, in my view, is that it points beyond problem solving to the far deeper question of problem setting. It also extends beyond that to the human concerns and appreciations which construct problematic situations and define standards of what should be regarded as success in dealing with them. Without these there would be neither problems nor solutions.

Human order is not to be described in biological or ecological terms alone, though it is obedient to the laws of both these disciplines. T. H. Huxley, Darwin's champion, insisted that biological evolution had set in motion in man a new and different form of evolution that was both social and ethical. A human society was as different from a state of nature as a garden was from the Amazon jungle. A new selector had evolved whose task was to create "in opposition to the State of Nature the State of Art of an organized polity capable of maintaining and constantly improving itself."² But he postulated no gardener other than the human plants themselves. He died in 1900 and did not live to see what the multiplying gardeners would do to each other and to their common garden in the century which was to follow *the century of hope*. He was nonetheless prescient, for he regarded the struggle toward greater humanity as a losing battle, though a noble one. "Evolution," he wrote, "encourages no millennial expectations."³

These essays are essays in understanding and the basic model which underlies them is not the technological problem solver with his growing battery of simulators, not even the helmsman with his all-powerful rudder and his given, attainable course. It is the gardener aspiring to impose on the state of nature the state of art of an organized polity capable of constantly maintaining and improving itself and painfully learning with the aid of systems theory the relation between maintenance and improvement and the conditions, costs, limitations and ambiguities inherent in both concepts.

Culture is more than a biological, and much more than an engineering concept.

SIR GEOFFREY VICKERS

Notes

1. Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings* (New York: Avon Books, 1967).
2. T. H. Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics, and Other Essays* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), p. 45; see also chapters 9 and 10.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

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Preface

The three of us were fortunate to know Sir Geoffrey Vickers during the last decade of his life. We met him during the early 1970s when we were doctoral students—two of us at the University of California at Berkeley, and the third at George Washington University. We carried on an active correspondence with him throughout the 1970s, and he visited us on some of his occasional trips to this country.

We proposed this project to Sir Geoffrey around 1980 because we believed that the ideas in these essays had merit, and that the few published elsewhere deserved wider attention than they had received. Sir Geoffrey participated in the selection and organization of the essays, and wrote the foreword before his death in March 1982, at age 87.

Of all Sir Geoffrey's intellectual contributions, several related ideas stand out as having particular personal significance to us—his work on social roles, the place of authority, and personal responsibility, as well as his best known contribution, the concept of the *appreciative system*.

Through his incisive argumentation, and his patience and persistence, we now understand the importance of social roles in a fuller and richer way than before. He helped us see that managing our multiple and conflicting roles is in fact one of our principal tasks as human beings: The way we manage them is among the truest tests of our integrity, and indeed bears testimony to our humanity. We might choose to treat our roles as artificial and play them superficially, keeping our *selves* disguised or remote. But as Sir Geoffrey understood even as a young man, this adversely affects the quality of our lives and the lives of those we touch. Here is an excerpt from a letter he wrote in the mid-1920s for his two year old son, Burnell, to be kept until he was old enough to understand it:

Every contact which you make with a human being . . . is an experiment, and a dangerous and therefore important experiment. It is dangerous because it can never be repeated. However serious, however trivial it may be, though you will afterwards make many others, perhaps more unusual, more intimate or more complete—that chance will never come again.

Human contacts are dangerous, too, because they matter so much, and no one knows how much they matter. Even the most trivial meeting makes a difference, slight but lasting, to one or both. Intimate contacts make heaven and hell, they can heal and tear, kill and raise from the dead.

These contacts are the fields in which we succeed or fail. I believe that they matter far more than anything else in life. What we are is written on the people we have met and known, touched, loved, hated and passed by. It is the lives of others that testify for or against us, not our own.

Sir Geoffrey resolutely pursued the far-reaching implications of the exercise of authority in social, political, and organizational life. He argued persuasively the unpopular and unpalatable case that cultural stability requires greater exercise of authority in social institutions, not less. The apparent inevitability of superior/subordinate relationships in our social and organizational lives seems at odds with the notion of mutuality in personal relationships, which seems absolutely essential to friendship. Sir Geoffrey's concept of the *responsible person*, in contrast to that of the *autonomous individual*, helped us to forge a new understanding of the relationship between the individual and society. The central human importance of his concept of the *appreciative system* is revealed in the following, taken from the first essay in this volume:

The sanest like the maddest of us cling like spiders to a self-spun web, obscurely moored in vacancy and fiercely shaken by the winds of change. Yet this frail web, through which many see only the void, is the one enduring artifact, the one authentic signature of humankind, and its weaving is our prime responsibility.

These concepts are interrelated—not only as ideas in the abstract, but as they were articulated and refined by one man. This is the feature that is most important to emphasize here: These ideas were not only products of his work, but manifestations of his life. It is fitting that he developed these rich notions of authority, role-playing, and the responsible person. He was unafraid of the exercise of authority, by all appearances, even though he recognized that it inevitably would be abused. We imagine that he played the various roles of his earlier careers—as a soldier, a solicitor, a member of the National Coal Board and so on—in the authoritative, responsible, graceful fashion that characterized his personal presence, and his writing and speaking.

It was therefore not Sir Geoffrey's ideas alone which prompted us to undertake this project, but also our admiration for the ways in which his ideas were manifested in his life, the integrity and the wisdom of the

man, his warm and gentle manner coupled with tough-minded acuity and boundless curiosity. He was unusually sensitive and open to the breadth and diversity of human experience. He invested an intensity of thought and feeling in all he did that bore witness to his personal integrity. And his wisdom was apparent in his ability to present powerful, thoughtful reflections on the human enterprise without diminishing or losing sight of concrete experience.

Sir Geoffrey was a significant mentor for us, and for many others a generation or two younger than he. He was also a formidable intellectual sparring partner, a lively conversationalist on an incredibly wide range of topics, an indefatigable correspondent. And he was a delightful companion and friend who brought his considerable energy and acuity to bear on all the events of life, great or small. In all the situations in which we saw him, he seemed to be fully engaged, as a whole person. This was exemplified in the way he introduced himself to our young children. Then in his eighties he knelt down to talk to them in a very direct and personal way. In a few brief moments, he established a bond with them—simply by presenting *himself* to them.

Sir Geoffrey's energy, wit, and curiosity enlivened his British demeanor; they continually threatened to undermine his reserved and dignified manner, and counterbalanced his shy and private side. His zestful curiosity was engaged by a remarkable range of human experiences and natural phenomena. His delight in seeing his first cardinal while visiting one of our homes was infectious. His interest in the concrete question of what blight might have weakened the honey locust in the yard was as intense, for the few moments that it caught his attention, as his interest in the broader managerial, social and cultural issues that occupied his attention during much of the last quarter of his life.

This was a man who cared—he cared about the concrete events and circumstances of the *lived-in* world of daily life, as well as the larger questions of the human enterprise. And he cared with a depth and exuberance and authenticity which was apparent, no doubt, to virtually everyone who spent any time in his presence.

This rare and complex blend of attributes seemed to work in him and through him with the greatest harmony and clarity. It is fitting also, therefore, that his most durable intellectual legacy should be the concept of the *appreciative system*. His own appreciative system was one of the keenest, most refined, and most thoroughly integrated of any human being we have had the pleasure to know.

We wish to thank Mrs. Jeanne Vickers of Geneva, Switzerland, Sir Geoffrey's daughter-in-law and copyright holder of his papers, for her

unflagging cooperation and encouragement throughout the project. Mrs. Sheila Seymour of Goring, England, who was Sir Geoffrey's secretary in his last years, has been most helpful in a variety of ways. We thank Irving Louis Horowitz, President, and Scott B. Bramson, Publisher of Transaction Books, for their professional collaboration in moving this project into publication. Our thanks also extend to Bonnie Schmitz and Jim Johnson of The Evergreen State College for their very able production of the manuscript.

Our own participation in this project has been a rare and thoroughgoing delight.

GUY B. ADAMS
JOHN FORESTER
BAYARD L. CATRON

Introduction

Sir Geoffrey Vickers (1894–1982) was born into Edwardian England, an era brimming with optimism and faith in progress. The era into which we, the editors, were born in America some 50 years later had seen two world wars and a world-wide depression of unprecedented magnitude. The intervening two generations had experienced an explosion of technological capability unparalleled in human history. That explosion greatly expanded the potential for both good and ill in human relations, and set the stage for even greater promise and threat to human culture.

The 40 years since the end of World War II have seen similarly dramatic changes—some literally changing the map of the world, as new nations have come into being and others have disappeared. The Nuclear Age and the Space Age have given us collectively a more vivid sense of the threat and promise of our age.

It was against this backdrop of change in his own lifetime that Sir Geoffrey began his career as an author, after ending earlier careers as soldier, lawyer, administrator and public servant. He wrote eight books and nearly a hundred published articles, most after he “retired” in 1955. A brief biographical sketch might help to put Sir Geoffrey’s work in context.¹

Sir Geoffrey grew up in Nottingham, and was educated first by a governess and then at local schools. At age 14, he was sent off to public school at Oundle, where he studied humanities and the classics. As he reflected on it later, he recognized that what was supposed to be a *pure* education was in fact “a subtle blend of vocational and cultural training, well suited to the ruling class of that particular place and time.”²

In 1913, Vickers entered Merton College, Oxford, to read *Greats*—Greek and Latin. But his education was interrupted in 1914 by the onset of the war against Germany. Vickers enlisted immediately, and without second thoughts: “War was still almost universally accepted as the normal instrument of last resource in international politics and by no means necessarily as self defeating or signalling a bankruptcy of policy.”³

By the spring of 1915, Vickers was fighting in France, as an officer in the seventh Battalion of the Sherwood Foresters. On his twenty-first birthday, 15 October 1915, he showed exceptional courage in defending a barrier against enemy attack, for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross. He was seriously wounded, and took almost a year to recover. Then he returned to France to command a company in his old regiment; he saw more fighting and later received the Croix de Guerre.

After his discharge, Sir Geoffrey married Helen Tregoning Newton and returned to Oxford, where he finished his degree in classics in 1921. He was never to regret having been educated at a time when humanities had a preeminent place. His first two children, a boy and a girl, were born in the early 1920s.

In 1923, Vickers qualified as a lawyer, and in 1926 joined the prestigious London firm of Slaughter and May. He was already reputed to be an *almost dangerously brilliant* lawyer, and the practice of law was quite comfortable for him. During the 1930s, he had several assignments which took him abroad. He traveled to India on corporate business, and went many times to Berlin during the early years of Nazi control, working on an extension of the German debt.

The Munich agreement stunned Vickers into political awareness and activism. Within a month after Chamberlain acceded to Hitler's demands in 1938, Vickers and others started a movement in London called "The Association for Service and Reconstruction." His political writings for the association gained him membership in "The Moot," a circle of distinguished intellectuals including J. H. Oldham, Karl Mannheim, Reinhold Niebuhr, T. S. Eliot, Michael Polanyi, and Adolph Lowe.

Vickers' political position evolved from classical liberalism into a form of social democracy. The threat of Nazism and then World War II called into question his tacit assumption of cultural stability; this was to become a theme in his writings much later in his life. He developed a deeper appreciation of the exercise of state power in assuring unity of national purpose and in achieving more equitable distribution of social goods. By the time Britain entered the war, Vickers had come to view the ideology of liberty with the self-interest of the privileged.

When Britain entered World War II, Vickers, then age 46, reenlisted as an infantry lieutenant and underwent training in the use of explosives. He fully expected to be parachuted into battle, but was given a very different role. He was made, in his words, a *bogus colonel* and was sent on an intelligence mission to South America. He was unhappy in this assignment, not least because of the separation from his second wife, Ellen, and their baby. After several months, he returned home

and was assigned to the Ministry of Economic Warfare, of which he later became director. He also became a member of the Joint Intelligence Committee of the Chief of Staff. In 1945, he was knighted for his service.

Vickers became legal advisor to the newly created National Coal Board in 1947. The following year he was named a Board Member and put in charge of manpower, training, health, education, and welfare. From that experience, he developed a fuller appreciation of both the promise and the limits of socialism. He became more directly and concretely concerned with a set of questions—of efficiency and social equity, and of alternative ways of organizing human affairs—which would occupy him in his later writing.

Vickers voted labor for the first time in 1950, albeit with some reservations. His experience on the Coal Board gave him a deep sense of the workplace as a human community: “. . . a pit is more than a hole in the ground. It is a community of men engaged in common enterprise; difficult, challenging, complex, interesting, and important. The more that concept is realized, the more attractive the pit will be.”

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Sir Geoffrey was greatly influenced by systems ideas—not because they were new or even surprising, but because they gave him a powerful way of understanding “what could be changed and what had to be accepted.” He found systems concepts like *standard* and *control* helpful in characterizing his experience. Unlike most systems thinkers, who were technologically oriented, Vickers found the most exciting applications to be in human society. Much of his subsequent writing was an attempt to articulate his belief that the fundamental notions belonged to art rather than to science. Vickers was intrigued by, if not entirely sold on, general systems theory and the notion of unified science, which seemed to hold promise of improving communications between the academic disciplines, thus paving the way for exciting progress in applying them to human purposes.

When Sir Geoffrey “retired” in 1955, he kept a number of positions which he then held. His experience as Chairman of the Mental Health Research Council and as a member of the Medical Research Council added important breadth to his already broad interdisciplinary background, and he contributed to various academic debates in medicine, psychiatry and psychology. His exposure to psychology was indispensable in the development of his central concept of the *appreciative system*.

He also began a career as a “para-academic,” lecturing in an unusual variety of professional programs at various universities; this became a

pattern which continued off and on for the rest of his life. He spent several terms at the University of Toronto, where he led colloquia in the School of Social Work and lectured to the faculty of Applied Science and Engineering. He lectured at the School of Public Health at Harvard and later fostered the concept of community medicine. In the 1970s, he spent periods of time at the city planning programs at Berkeley and MIT, and gave lectures at other schools, including the public administration department at George Washington University. He also developed relationships with British academics, particularly the systems groups at Lancaster and the Open University.

The changes during his lifetime that most absorbed Sir Geoffrey's attention when he turned to writing were cultural in nature. They were not principally technical, managerial, social or governmental in any narrow sense, although he wrote on those subjects as well. He wrote with a sense of urgency emanating from his perception that Western culture was becoming dangerously destabilized, due in large part to the internal dynamics of the culture itself. And he came to see his enterprise and central concern as ethical in character. As he wrote to one of us in 1979: "To restore ethics to the centre of the human stage and to explain the ethical imperatives is probably the main focus of all my interests."

For Sir Geoffrey, the challenge—and the open question—was whether social learning would prove to be adequate and timely in resetting what he called the *appreciative system*—the set of self and mutual expectations by which we sustain human relationships—in ways which would allow us to adopt new norms and adapt more rapidly to our changing circumstances. The essays collected in this volume, written during the 1960s and 1970s, reflect these concerns.

Part I presents the character of thought and judgment—appreciative processes—necessary to policymaking and planning. Part II shows how these appreciative abilities are put into practice in human communication—and how such practical communication, changing speakers and listeners alike, is located in and vulnerable to the context of broader political and cultural influences. Part III addresses the practical implications of these concepts for social learning, and more particularly for professional education.

In Part I, "Policymaking and Appreciation," Sir Geoffrey Vickers presents the problems and elements of a psychology of policymaking. In the first essay, "The Psychology of Policymaking and Social Change," Vickers sets out his fundamental concept of the appreciative system which enables us to make judgments of value and fact for policymaking, and for human action more generally. Distinguishing

inadequate models of goal-seeking action from communication-based and cybernetic models of self-regulating or norm-maintaining action, the essay presents—and then applies to issues of local government, management, law, and social policy—the dynamics of our appreciative system—our evolving capacity to make practical judgments of *what is* and *what should be*.

In “Evolving Priorities,” the essential role of government is presented as one of maintaining a complex and ever-changing set of activities deemed acceptable with respect to existing norms—acceptable but always subject to improvement. Local government, the extended example drawn here, should be seen as an element in a system rather than simply as a purposive agent. Not only are diverse actions of any authority subject to a host of external pressures, but the very rules by which it acts are continually the object of change, renegotiation, and legislation. Public administrators, then, are not simply executors of policy; they are also monitors, advisors, systems analysts, innovators and conservators. Their actions, whether intentionally so or not, have the effect of establishing—and changing—priorities.

How, are public officials, planners, and others concerned with social and political affairs to make sense of the complexity of the problems with which they are faced? The next three essays explore the ever-present process of appreciation, those continual judgments of fact and value, the analysis of which will likely be Vickers’ enduring contribution to the literature of the applied professions. In “Norms and Meanings,” Vickers argues that the ubiquitous conflicts of interpretation, so familiar to us, may be clarified once our understanding of social and political actions has evolved from a mechanical, energy-based view of causation to a more sophisticated cybernetic, information-based view of systems theory and communications. Arguing that information is meaningful only with respect to the norms of the receiver of the information, Vickers contends that the *facts* upon which policy might be based are given meaning by the social norms of the time—and that these evolving norms crucially deserve study.

“Reflective Consciousness” provides a further assessment of those processes of judgment lying at the foundation of policymaking. Vickers shows that a preoccupation with the conscious purposes of actors leads us as analysts to misunderstand what they are doing. Calling for “an ecological view of man and his milieu,” this essay points to the importance of recognizing the systemic relations that provide the context and the fabric of social action. A local government authority, for example, must not only achieve functional goals. Its various activities must be balanced and ordered in “the on-going task of

maintaining relations through time, i.e., regulating a system.” Here we have a significant practical view of public action, and one that calls attention to processes of judgment and conscious evaluation that are deliberately reflective. As Vickers shows, these are processes that cannot be accounted for in psychological models of consciousness understood as awareness, attention, or a result of repression. Reflective consciousness calls to attention not simply goals and objectives, but the basic social norms by which diverse actors make sense of their situations, their roles, and their possible futures; those norms give meaning to the experiences then classified as facts and values, matters of *is* and *ought*.

“The Tacit Norm” follows with examples and applications of the work of reflective consciousness. Suggesting that the work of design is less the abstract realization of form than the considered elimination of *misfit*, Vickers shows that norms by which *fit* and *misfit* are to be judged are characteristically parts of social action more generally. Meaning and action are comprehensible as norm-defined, but these norms are neither given once and for all, nor do they exist in a vacuum. Indeed, these norms are shaped by and in turn shape all human communication. Thus we may examine the character of experience from the political to the aesthetic (as Vickers reveals), and we are led to ask how human communication alters our understanding and interpretation of the recurrent problems of public policymaking and governance. Part II, “Communication and Ethics,” addresses these questions and focuses on the process of human communication. As we communicate, Vickers suggests, we change not only one another’s views of the situations we share, but we change one another and ourselves as well. In communication, we see the process of *appreciation* in action.

“Communication and Ethical Judgment” is a lucid, incisive analysis of the ethical implications of the mid-twentieth-century revolution in information theory and cybernetics. Beginning with the now widely accepted claim that facts regarded without values would be quite value-less, without point or utility, Vickers elaborates the hidden ethical revolution within the cybernetic advances. Appreciative systems bring standards to bear upon experience, and so meaning is created anew. Governments are easily recognized as regulators of complex systems, and public officials, administrators, and planners alike need carefully to attend not only to measures of performance and feedback signals but to the fundamentally political and ethical norms and standards by which those signals are given meaning. The advances in systems theory have not yet taken us nearly far enough to fulfill these tasks:

They have not yet provided us with working models to help our thinking about the way we set and reset our own and each other's appreciative systems. And until they do this, the most important aspect of human life is still likely to be ignored and even denied.

Here, Vickers suggests, lies the revolution within the revolution; addressing these issues takes us beyond the paradigm of cybernetics. Vickers' own work is an important contribution to the practical understanding of these problems.

The next essay, "Communication and Appreciation," takes up this challenge by exploring the processes by which appreciative systems change. Communication is "the process by which human beings change each other by exchanging words." In communication, we make not only noises and utterances—but we act. In communication, we change one another's appreciative systems: through discussion, consultation, advice, promises, questions, or validation, we may alter or confirm, strengthen or weaken one another's abilities to know and to value, to believe factual propositions with more or less certainty and to make judgments of value with more or less justification. What counts as a house, for example, depends not only on facts about materials and structure, but also on political and cultural standards. Which houses might be deemed eligible for subsidies or service depends upon expectations that are communicated as a matter of public policy. Through communication, we alter one another's sense of fact and value, and of what is to be hoped for as well.

The centrality of communication in social life is not limited to matters of policymaking. In "Changing Patterns of Communication" Vickers addresses the field of communications itself. Discussing questions of technology, distribution, education, interpretation, constraint and trust, the essay presents five levels of increasingly complex communication: those of threat, bargaining, request, persuasion, and dialogue. In communications of all these types, reflecting lesser or greater trust, we affect one another's lived worlds. Vickers formulates an ethical imperative in conclusion: "It seems . . . a trans-cultural human duty to sustain the level of communication, to resist its debasement and to cooperate in raising it."

The challenge of sustaining effective and cooperative human communication is a matter of politics and culture. The remaining two essays in Part II address these issues. "The Ecology of Culture" explores an ecological model of society premised on four assumptions: the malleability of the human environment, the ethical character of social action, the plurality of cultures and populations, and the interdependence and complexity of the modern world. Unlike the paradigms

of Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, or Karl Marx, an ecological model of culture is found in the work of the biologist T. H. Huxley. Vickers suggests that such a model centers not upon a social Darwinism but upon ethical judgment and action. If the metaphor of society is that of the garden rather than the jungle, who is the gardener, and what is the source of the standards and criteria governing social change? Here Vickers proposes a notion of regulation fundamental to all social processes:

The art of government, including self-government, is to sustain this set of standards at levels not intolerably unattainable or mutually inconsistent yet real enough and high enough to regulate a society capable of maintaining and constantly improving itself.

This task of governance becomes ever more difficult and ever more pressing. Following Huxley, Vickers confronts us here with the choice: to choose as our guiding metaphor for social relations and government the cultivation of the garden or the struggle for survival in the jungle.

In "The Ecology of Ethics" Vickers notes that ecologists apply the term *ecological ethic* largely to "the standards of regulation which should govern the relations of men with their habitat." He wants instead to apply the ecological metaphor to our relations with each other, to the internal and the mutual relations of human societies. In human society, a cultural selector has been added to the selection of biological evolution. While there has never been a Hobbesian man to engage in individual struggle of each against all, there have been—and are—Hobbesian societies: "More than any other social species, the tribes of men have been addicted to endemic mutual war." Today, internal feuds as well as geopolitical strife threaten the political coherence of societies around the world. And *special interests* exercise increasing influence on events as the concept of a society's *general interest* loses its ethical cogency. Vickers discusses the ethical requirements for maintaining society in light of these threats to social coherence. Vickers provides no easy solutions here, yet he complements the preceding essays of Part II with an essay suggesting the larger historical context in which the processes of human communication and appreciative systems must be placed.

The essays in Part III "Social Learning and the Professions" consider the implications of the arguments of Parts I and II as applied to professional practice and education. "The Changing Nature of the Professions" sets out the characteristics of professional practice: the skills of understanding, designing, advising, operating, responsibly serving the client, and judging the shifting relations to clients, to the

public, and to the broader profession. Vickers casts the professional-client relationship as a partnership, a matter not only of expertise but also of ethics. The work of the professional reflects the play of appreciation through and through—in design for, in consultation with, and in the education of, the client. Wary of preoccupation with technique, Vickers articulates the legitimate and ethical role of professionals as one of advising and designing, in dialogue with others rather than preempting their actions in the face of uncertainty.

“Practice and Research in Managing Human Systems” explores the character of scientific knowledge which might serve the professions in practice. Vickers addresses four issues widely discussed in professional schools and training programs: the problems of interdisciplinary research; the relation of *pure* and *applied* science; the tensions between social science and management science, and the promise of general systems theory. In each professional field these are addressed differently, but here we have a cogent statement of these overarching considerations.

“Educational Criteria for Times of Change” addresses the problems posed for us by the demands of multiple membership, one of the predominant features of our growing social complexity and interdependence. Conditions of rapid change and uncertainty place a special burden on education designed to cultivate the appreciative processes of human judgment, including expressive, deductive, creative, and heuristic skills. As our appreciative systems regulate our expectations of the natural world, the social world, and the inner personal world, so education should be designed to nurture appreciative competence in each of these three realms. Vickers concludes the essay with a detailed discussion of the multiple roles of educators taking on these tasks.

Finally, in the concluding essay of the volume, “Education for Systems Thinking,” Vickers focuses in particular on professional education in human governance (which he defines broadly to include policy studies, management, planning and administration). He contrasts it on the one hand with *academic* studies like political science and economics, and on the other with the *problem-solving* orientation of much systems analysis. While not ignoring the importance of problem-solving, he insists that the primary aim of systems thinking is understanding. He argues further that the professional study of governance should retain the traditional aspiration of education generally—to deepen understanding rather than merely teaching technique.

In an era when communication in society has come to mean image-making, and education has too often been training for adaptation to roles which will not serve us well, individually or collectively, in the

emerging world, Vickers offers insights which are as fresh and timely now as when they were written. Although they were written for disparate purposes and audiences, they have a coherence which we believe is helpful in sustaining attention, from different angles of view, on some of the most perplexing and crucial problems of our time.

Notes

1. Two excellent, more lengthy biographical essays are available, one by S. B. Sutton, the introductory chapter in Vickers' *Human Systems Are Different* (London: Harper and Row, 1983), and the other by Margaret Blunden in *The Vickers Papers* (London: Harper and Row, 1984).
2. Sir Geoffrey Vickers, "The End of the Gentleman." Unpublished paper, 1940.
3. Sir Geoffrey Vickers, unpublished biographical notes, p. 23.

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