

## THE GROUNDS FOR HOPE

WHAT kind of beings are humans? Are we creatures of the natural world? The question is filled with ambiguity because the natural world has so many mysteries. Can we divide the world into, on the one hand, its natural functions, and, on the other, its transcendent aspects, of which in time we become aware? And if this latter aspect of nature, its wonder, its beauty, its splendor, gains reality from our minds, does this subtract from its reality? Reflecting on questions such as this, the English philosopher, W. Macneile Dixon, writing in *The Human Situation*, declared that "There is then something in us which nature has not given, for she had it not to give." Here he meant by nature the visible world "out there," and not the region of subjective existence. There are those who suppose that the subjective has no "existence," but Dixon was not among them, since he held that

Selfhood is not a contingent entity, but the representative of a metaphysical and necessary principle of the universe, a part of its essential nature, a constituent of reality, nor without it could the Cosmos attain to recognition, to full consummation or true being. Experiencing souls were a necessity if a universe in any legitimate sense there was to be. Such is the soul's superlative standing in reality.

Was it the biologists who read selfhood out of the universe? They certainly had a part in it. Or was it their predecessor, Galileo, who maintained that only what could be touched, weighed, and calculated should be counted as "real," who was mainly responsible? This outlaws thought from reality, but if we could not, did not, *think*, would we be human beings? Thinking does indeed differentiate us from nature, allows us to say something about what is "natural" and what is not. But surely it is natural for *us* to think, so that it might be well to say that there is the nature which we see making up the world, but also a

nature—is it a *higher* nature?—which qualifies our mind or thinking principle as real.

A contemporary writer has given attention to this question, Wendell Berry, who in an article on "Preserving Wildness" in the March-April issue of *Resurgence* says it would be "a mistake to assume that there is no difference between the natural and the human." And he adds: "Our problem, exactly, is that the human and the natural are indivisible, and yet are different."

How are they different? They are different in the way that thinking makes them different. How do we think? Well, first, we think about meaning, which means deciding what is good and what is bad. Like the animals, we have our instincts which seem to say something about good and bad, yet there are areas of which animals are totally unaware and where instincts never penetrate, but where thought is able to go. We also think about arrangements—arrangements out in the world, which are made up by us after figuring out how our needs and conveniences might best be served. This is Berry's view of the difference between us and the animals and plants and rocks. The world as given is wild—wild and natural—but the world in which humans make arrangements is no longer wild, but has been domesticated. Regarding this contrast, Berry says:

The indivisibility of wildness and domesticity, even within the fabric of human life itself, is easy enough to demonstrate. Our bodily life, to begin at the nearest place, is half wild. Perhaps it is more than half wild, for it is dependent upon reflexes, instincts, and appetites that we do not cause or intend and that we cannot, or had better not, stop. We live, partly, because we are domestic creatures—that is, we participate in our human economy to the extent that we "make a living", we are able, with variable success, to discipline our appetites and instincts in order to produce this artifact, this human living. And yet it is equally true that we breathe and our hearts

beat and we survive as a species because we are wild.  
...

But to say that we are not divided and not dividable from nature is not to say that there is no difference between us and other creatures. Human nature partakes of nature, participates in it, is dependent on it, and yet is different from it. We feel the difference as discomfort or difficulty or danger. Nature is not easy to live with. It is hard to have rain on your cut hay, or floodwater over your cropland, or coyotes in your sheep; it is hard when nature does not respect your intentions and she never does exactly respect them. . . .

But humans differ most from other creatures in the extent to which they must be *made* what they are—that is, in the extent to which they are artifacts of their culture. It is true that what we might as well call culture does go into the making of some birds and animals, but this teaching is so much less than the teaching that makes a human as to be *almost* a different thing. To take a creature who is biologically human and to make him or her fully human is a task that requires many years (some of us sometimes fear that it requires more than a lifetime), and this long effort of human making is necessary, I think, because of our power.

There is a further consideration that Berry does not mention. This making of humans into beings "fully human" cannot really be done by some people to others. Exceptional people can sometimes help with the process, but the actual growth must be done by those who are doing the growing. The "self" has to take hold of the self with transforming measures and *recreate* itself. People can sometimes degrade one another fairly easily, but the growing is an independent process that must be pursued each one for himself.

That is one reason why education presents so many problems. We have only small knowledge of how to help people to grow. It is mainly the ability to *inspire*, and for us that idea is embarrassing. We know how to teach techniques, but opt out when it comes to inspiring. So we have a lot of techniques but little conception of their best use. Berry considers this:

In the hierarchy of power among earth's creatures, we are at the top, and we have been growing stronger for a long time. We are now, to

ourselves, incomprehensibly powerful, capable of doing more damage than floods, storms, volcanoes, and earthquakes. And so it is more important than ever that we should have cultures capable of prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance, and the other virtues. For our history reveals that, stripped of the restraints, disciplines, and ameliorations of culture, humans are not "natural," not "thinking animals" or "naked apes," but monsters—indiscriminate and insatiable killers and destroyers. We differ from other creatures, partly, in our susceptibility to monstrosity.

This is one aspect of human beings, plainly the lower, with which we are now confronted on every hand. Dixon, however, writes of the higher aspect, saying:

Whatever it be, this entity, this I, this being that cares for truth and beauty, the haughty, exclusive, conscious soul, its sense of personal identity survives all assaults. You may analyze it, with Hume, into a series of disconnected thoughts and feelings, but its unity reasserts itself in reviewing the series into which you have attempted to dissect it. In Hegel's words, "I have many ideas, a wealth of thoughts in me, and yet I remain, in spite of this variety, one." There is then something in us which nature has not given, for she had it not to give.

This "something" which makes us what we are, how can we speak of it? In some—a few—it becomes the maker of high destiny, in many more the slack imitators of the behavior of the mob, seeking to be safe in a plurality of numbers, while in still another few it moves to actions of deliberate evil, as though good were nothing but concentrated self-interest, to be achieved in pinnacles of separateness, indifferent to all else. As witness of this, Berry is constrained to say:

The awareness that we are slowly growing into now is that the earthly wildness that we are so complexly dependent upon is at our mercy. It has become, in a sense, our artifact because it can only survive by a human understanding and forbearance that we now must make. The only thing we have to preserve nature with is culture; the only thing we have to preserve wildness with is domesticity.

Here Berry writes with the sensibility of a craftsman, saying:

To me, this means simply that we are not safe in assuming that we can preserve wildness and wilderness by making wilderness preserves. Those of us who see that wildness and wilderness need to be preserved are going to have to understand the dependence of these things upon our domestic economy and our domestic behavior. If we do not have an economy capable of valuing in particular terms the durable good of localities and communities, then we are not going to be able to preserve anything. We are going to have to see that, if we want our forests to last, then we must make wood products that last, for our forests are more threatened by shoddy workmanship than by clear-cutting or by fire. Good workmanship—that is, careful, considerate, and loving work—requires us to think considerately of the *whole* process, natural and cultural, involved in the making of wooden artifacts, because the good worker does not share the industrial contempt for "raw material." The good worker loves the board before it becomes a table, loves the tree before it yields the board, loves the forest before it gives up the tree. . . .

In other words, conservation is going to prove increasingly futile and increasingly meaningless if its proscriptions are not answered positively by an economy that rewards and enforces good use. I would call this a loving economy, for it would strive to place a proper value on all the materials of the world, in all their metamorphoses from soil and water, air and light to the finished goods of our towns and households, and I think that the only effective motive for this would be a particularizing love for local things, rising out of local knowledge and local allegiance.

For Berry this means that the earth and its fruits are intrinsically every bit as important as the "higher" things of life. As he puts it:

Now that the practical processes of industrial civilization have become so threatening to humanity and nature, it is easy for us, or for some of us, to see that practicality needs to be made subject to spiritual values and spiritual measures. But we must not forget that it is also necessary for spirituality to be responsive to practical questions. For human beings the spiritual and the practical are, and should be, inseparable. Alone, practicality becomes dangerous; spirituality, alone, becomes feeble and pointless. Alone, either becomes dull. Each is the other's discipline, in a sense, and in good work the two are joined.

Put in other terms, you could say that this proposition means that every man, every woman, and every child should do his own share of drudgery, dispose of his own garbage, and neither want nor allow others to take care of these tasks. Does this mean that we would want Mozart to grow beans instead of writing music? Well, yes and no. The question brings to the fore the differences among human beings and the manifest need for specialists of some sort. We do need doctors and it would be folly to expect doctors to give their time to raising beans when they could use that time healing children of besetting ills. Yet much of the time the instincts of a mother's love may be far more valuable than the rules of academic medicine. Not always, perhaps, but much of the time. The libraries have good books on the simplicities of sound health care, books which point out the delusions fostered by some specialists, but not of course all.

So we have this problem created by the rules made by specialists who are dominated by rules that began with interesting discoveries and ended as supposed panaceas to which all must conform. This problem pervades our entire society—we'll fight the next war with the weapons of the last, is a sour example. Authentic individuality is the balance one is able to find between self-reliance and the knowledge of the specialists. We may all need the help of specialists on some occasions, but the best among us seem to be able to find the services of *wise* specialists, who are humans who recognize the value of self-reliance and are determined not to over-rule it or set it aside.

We have all run into people who are cocky about their own opinions and who take care of themselves without going to doctors. Then there are those with a childlike faith in the "other medicines," and stay away from the practitioners of conventional medicine. Finally, there are people who use their best judgment each time they have to make a decision, pointing out to their friends that while they may expose themselves to some kind of risk, it is at least a *calculated* risk,

and that all life involves calculated risks of some sort. Berry uses this approach for every sort of problem, not only personal ones. He says:

I would argue that, at least for us in the United States, the conclusion that "there are too many people" is premature, not because I know that there are *not* too many people, but because I do not think we are prepared to come to such a conclusion. I grant that questions about population size need to be asked, but they are not the *first* questions that need to be asked.

The "population problem," initially, should be examined as a problem, not of quantity but of pattern. Before we conclude that we have too many people, we must ask if we have people who are misused, people who are misplaced, or people who are abusing the places they have. The facts of the most immediate importance may be, not how many we are, but where we are and what we are doing. At any rate, the attempt to solve our problems by reducing our numbers may be a distraction from the overriding population statistics of our time: that one human with a nuclear bomb and the will to use it is 100 per cent too many. I would argue that it is not human fecundity that is overcrowding the world so much as technological multipliers of the power of individual humans. The worst disease of the world now is probably the ideology of technological heroism, according to which more and more people willingly cause large-scale effects that they do not foresee and that they cannot control. This is the ideology of the professional class of the industrial nations—a class whose allegiance to communities and places has been dissolved by their economic motives and by their educations. These are people who will go anywhere and jeopardize anything in order to assure the success of their careers.

In each human being there is a counselor, an adviser who we need to consult. Most of us need the prod of pain to listen to this inner monitor, whose presence at other times is ignored. Rare indeed is the individual who listens regularly to himself, who learns by listening to the lessons in self-knowledge. This is the Socratic dialogue with one's inner partner or colleague, the *daimon* or, as the old Christians called it, the guardian angel. Thoreau spoke of this spectator in a refined and guarded way. In the chapter on "Solitude," in *Walden*, he said:

With thinking we may be beside ourselves in a sane sense. By a conscious effort of the mind we can stand aloof from actions and their consequences; and all things, good and bad, go by us like a current. We are not wholly involved in Nature. I may be either the drift-wood in the stream, or Indra in the sky looking down on it. I may be affected by a theatrical exhibition; on the other hand, I may *not* be affected by an actual event which appears to concern me much more. I only know myself as a human entity; the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections; and am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another. However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it, and that is no more I than it is you. When the play, it may be the tragedy, of life is over, the spectator goes his way. It was a kind of fiction, a work of the imagination only, so far as he was concerned. This doubleness may easily make us poor neighbors and friends sometimes.

Thoreau, people said of him, was a prickly sort of human being, not easy to get along with. Even Emerson found this to be the case, yet Emerson loved him well. The reason, perhaps, was that Thoreau understood too well the ways of human nature and dealt with them directly. He wrote to a dear and close friend:

When, in the progress of a life, a man swerves, though only by an angle infinitely small, from his proper and allotted path (and this is never done quite unconsciously even at first; in fact, that was his broad and scarlet sin,—ah, he knew of it more than he can tell), then the drama of his life turns to tragedy, and makes haste to its fifth act. When once we thus fall behind ourselves, there is no accounting for the obstacles which rise up in our path, and no one is so wise to advise, and no one so powerful as to aid us while we abide on that ground. . . . For such the Decalogue, and other far more voluminous and terrible codes.

This seems the harsh and unforgiving side of life, yet a scheme of compensation appropriate for ominous times like our own. We have but to begin cultivating the other aspect of our lives to create another atmosphere of being and the ground for hope.

## *REVIEW*

### DEMOCRACY—A MORAL IDEAL

JOHN DEWEY celebrated his eightieth birthday in 1939. He made it the occasion for giving a talk, "Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us," and in a recent book, *Post-Analytic Philosophy* (Columbia University Press, 1985), Richard J. Bernstein contributed a paper on Dewey, based on that talk, which seems one of the best appreciations of Dewey that we have read.

His 1939 talk, Bernstein says, focuses on "democracy as a *moral ideal*, a personal way of life to be concretely embodied in everyday practice." Dewey said:

Democracy as compared with other ways of life is the sole way of living which believes wholeheartedly in the process of experience as end and as means; as that which is capable of generating the science which is the sole dependable authority for the direction of further experience and which releases emotions, needs, and desires so as to call into being the things that have not existed in the past. For every way of life that fails in its democracy limits the contacts, the exchanges, the communications, the interactions by which experience is steadied while it is enlarged and enriched. The task of this release and enrichment is one that has to be carried on day by day. Since it is one that can have no end till experience itself comes to an end, the task of democracy is forever that of creation of a freer and more humane experience in which all share and to which all contribute.

Nothing is said here, or elsewhere that we know of, about the weaknesses of democracy. It is for us undoubtedly the best form of government, since the misuse of authority, for whatever reason, is the worst evil we can suffer, and democracy affords the only protection against such practices. Yet it fails to take into account the sometimes extreme differences among human beings and the ease with which clever individuals find ways of deceiving the ruling majorities. Plato maintained that the best rule is maintained by giving authority to a wise man, but also said that when there are no wise men, democracy is the best form of government. This seems evident enough, but the problem or weakness remains: wise men are still needed to conduct public affairs, yet, in our country at least, we have great difficulty in selecting men of both ability and

integrity to conduct our affairs with practical wisdom. If our country were smaller, this problem would be reduced, but to make over the United States into a lot of little countries—as the bioregionalists might be said to hope for—is a project that may take centuries to accomplish.

Meanwhile, Dewey's advocacy of democracy has much to recommend it. Bernstein gives attention to Dewey's idea of the framework of decision in our time. He says:

Dewey's critics have frequently criticized him for his alleged anti-intellectualism—and his irreverent treatment of the history of philosophy certainly offended many of his professional colleagues. But the charge of anti-intellectualism is a gross slander. Dewey was steeped in the history of philosophy and typically he would approach almost every problem by reviewing and evaluating different philosophical approaches. But he was always seeking critically to appropriate what was still viable in the traditions that have shaped us. Viewed as a quest for certainty, or as the search for some final and definitive Truth, the history of philosophy had to be judged a failure, but understood as imaginative attempts to gain critical perspectives, to locate, specify, and clarify human problems, as attempts to provide orientation and guidance, philosophy takes on a much more vital and dramatic significance. What Dewey feared—and to a great extent he was prophetic—is that as philosophy becomes more academic and professional, and as philosophers become more nervous and defensive about protecting their turf, the entire discipline would become more marginal and irrelevant to the "problems of men."

On what he conceived to be the role of philosophy, Dewey wrote:

As far as any plea is implicit in what has been said, it is, then, a plea for casting off of that intellectual timidity which hampers the wings of imagination, a plea for speculative audacity, for more faith in ideas, sloughing off a cowardly reliance upon those partial ideas to which we are wont to give the name facts. I have given to philosophy a more humble function than that which is often assigned to it. But modesty as to its final place is not incompatible with boldness in the maintenance of that function, humble as it may be. A combination of such modesty and courage affords the only way I know in which the philosopher can look his fellow men in the face with frankness and humanity.

Dewey was convinced that unless we are able to restore community and communal life, democracy will prove a failure. If communal life can be made a

reality, Dewey said, "it will manifest a fullness, variety, and freedom of possession and enjoyment of meanings and goods unknown in the contiguous associations of the past." But Dewey was also very much aware of what commercialism has done to our lives. The "business mind," he said, "having its own conversation and language, its own interests, its own intimate groupings in which men of this mind, in collective capacity, determine the tone of society at large as well as the government of industrial society." This leads Bernstein to say:

Witnessing the way in which our educational institutions from elementary schools to institutions of higher learning, are deformed by the imperatives of a corporate society, it is difficult to see how they might become the beacons for democratic communal life that Dewey saw as their primary function. There is a genuine need to engage in the type of criticism of his own philosophy that Dewey took to be the mark of all philosophy.

Dewey, Bernstein points out, didn't think much of preachers:

He was scornful of what he called "moralism"—the belief that social change can be effected by calls for moral reform. In this respect, he was close in spirit to the tradition of practical philosophy that has its roots in Aristotle's *Ethics* where leading the good life and becoming virtuous requires that we constantly seek to develop the habits, dispositions, judgment (*phronesis*), and character that can only be cultivated in a proper communal life. But the Greek *polis*, for all its glory, could no longer serve as an adequate model for communal life in advanced industrial societies.

This, of course, is precisely the point of the bioregionalists, who advocate a deliberate return to communal society in terms of alliances around the ecological order of regions, which are largely determined by watersheds. In key with this idea was Dewey's allegiance to Thomas Jefferson:

Jefferson was always one of Dewey's heroes because his own formulation of democracy "is moral through and through: in its foundations, its methods, and its ends." Dewey did think that Jefferson was right in discerning a serious threat to the moral character of democracy in the coming industrialization of America. But it was not "industrialization" that Dewey took to be the main problem: but rather the resulting "dislocation and unsettlement of local communities."

In local communities, the differences among individuals would become virtually unimportant, since in small communities each one knows all the others, knows what others are capable of, recognizes their good qualities, is aware of their weaknesses and of how to take advantage and make use of their strengths. This comes very close to being crucial for the practice of democracy. While Dewey did not speak of this, so far as we know, he seems to have sensed it. Bernstein says:

All of Dewey's intellectual pathways lead to a defense of this strong sense of community. This is why he was so suspicious of the dichotomy of the individual and the social and why he thought that individualism versus collectivism was such a misleading contrast. It is also the reason why he was so critical of classical forms of liberalism and individualism. . . . For whether classical forms of liberalism take benign or malignant forms, they implicitly or explicitly assume that it makes sense to speak of human individuals existing apart or independently of their social relationships. Genuine individualism is not given as a starting point, it is only an *achievement*—an achievement that Dewey claimed could be realized in and through democratic communal life. Dewey stressed this strong sense of community for both philosophical and practical reasons. Our task now is "to recreate by deliberate and determined endeavor the kind of democracy which in its origin . . . was largely the product of a fortunate combination of men and circumstances."

Mr. Bernstein concludes with a tribute to John Dewey that we are happy to repeat:

For what is most enduring in Dewey is his sanity and his courage, his refusal to submit to despair. Dewey did emphasize the projective and future-oriented dimension of all thinking and he was aware of the ways in which history and tradition are always effectively shaping what we are in the process of becoming. But his central focus was the living present, with facing our present conflicts and problems with honesty and imagination, and with finding the concrete ways in which we can reconstruct experience where free communication, public debate, rational persuasion, and genuine sharing are integrated into our everyday practices. Creative—radical—democracy is still "the task before us."

## COMMENTARY

### THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

IN this week's lead article, on page 7, "the Socratic dialogue with one's inner partner" is referred to. This calls for a measure of explanation, since such questioning of oneself has become uncommon indeed. Nowadays, we do not normally question ourselves. We do think about the things we plan to do, not in terms of right or wrong but usually in terms of "win or lose" possibilities—whether or not the plan will work to our advantage. To worry about right and wrong seems old-fashioned, indeed irrelevant. There is perhaps some good sense in this, since the time has come for graduating from old-time "morality" and we are immediately bored by anyone who starts preaching at us.

Yet there are other ways of thinking about what used to be called morality. Are we in harmony with the world and natural processes? This, after all, can be regarded as an ethical question, perhaps closer to the meaning of the Socratic inquiry than the heavy handed moralizing of the nineteenth century, which we have largely succeeded in leaving behind. The real questions are functional in relation to the whole, not "righteous" in terms of the commands of some "spiritual" ruler.

Socrates was concerned with doing justice rather than being morally "right." In her paper, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," which appeared in *Social Research*, Autumn, 1971, Hannah Arendt wrote:

Socrates, however, who is commonly said to have believed in the teachability of virtue, seems indeed to have held that talking and thinking about piety, justice, courage and the rest were liable to make men more pious, more just more courageous, even though they were not given either definitions or "values" to direct their further conduct. What Socrates actually believed in such matters can best be illustrated by the similes he applied to himself. He called himself a gadfly and a midwife, and, according to Plato, was called by somebody else an "electric ray," a fish that paralyzes and numbs by contact, a

likeness whose appropriateness he recognized under the condition that it be understood that "the electric ray paralyzes others only through being paralyzed itself. It isn't that, knowing the answers myself I perplex other people. The truth is rather that I infect them also with the perplexity I feel myself." Which, of course, sums up neatly the only way thinking can be taught—except that Socrates, as he repeatedly said, did not teach anything for the simple reason he had nothing to teach. . . . It seems that he, unlike the professional philosophers, felt the urge to check with his fellowmen if his perplexities were shared by them—and this urge is quite different from the inclination to find solutions to riddles and then to demonstrate them to others.

Socrates raised questions. What, he asked in effect, are your first principles? And—Are they good enough? Such questions may cause shock. They can easily lead us to a place where there is nothing to stand on.

So, as we suggested, a man who asks such questions makes us very uncomfortable. He made the Athenians so uncomfortable that they put him to death. We don't do that, but we ignore such people, which may lead to the same effect. As Hannah Arendt says:

There are no dangerous thoughts; thinking itself is dangerous, but nihilism is not its product. Nihilism is but the other side of conventionalism, its creed consists of negations of the current, so-called positive values to which it remains bound. All critical examinations must go through a stage of at least hypothetically negating accepted opinions and "values" by finding out their implications and tacit assumptions, and in this sense nihilism may be seen as an ever-present danger of thinking. But this danger does not arise out of the Socratic conviction that an unexamined life is not worth living but, on the contrary, out of the desire to find results which would make further thinking unnecessary. Thinking is equally dangerous to all creeds and, by itself, does not bring forth any new creed.

This is surely sufficient explanation for the absence of Socratic inquiry in our time. Thinking is dangerous—dangerous to confidently held illusions, dangerous to prevailing authorities, dangerous to complacency in all its forms.

Yet we are not just one, but indeed two, as Thoreau insisted. We hold interchange with ourselves. We have obligations, duties, hierarchical relationships with the world around us. Our obligations to the world, growing out of the misuses we have imposed on the world, are becoming more and more apparent. These obligations are defining the structure of the new morality that we are now beginning to recognize. We call it a new "morality," but it will not be a true morality until we learn that we are born into the world with our obligations, which are more than the need to correct our mistakes. The human being defines himself by fulfilling his original obligations. This is the true nature of what people are now beginning to call the spiritual life.



## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves A NICE GOOD BOOK

WE'VE been reading in a recent book, *An Outbreak of Peace* (New Society Publishers, \$9.95), by Sarah Pirtle, trying to decide what to say about it. It is a very nice book about some high school students—boys and girls, told by a girl—in a New England town, and how they stirred up the people of the town to think about the importance of making peace. We began by feeling, should such a book be so "nice"? People who are serious about making peace are bound to make a lot of other people angry. But then we thought, no one who campaigns for peace realizes this at the beginning. Why, then, shouldn't the teen-agers in a novel—the book is a made-up story, but not entirely—be unaware of the antagonisms they would arouse by working for peace?

So we decided that *An Outbreak of Peace* would be a good book for young people to read, despite its determined "niceness." The story begins with Cassie, whose name recalls Cassandra, at thirteen, asking "Why is peace such a dirty word for some people?" It goes on with Cassie's adventures with her school friends, who belong to all races, telling how a group of them decide to hold an art exhibit in the town with drawings showing the importance of peace. The pictures in the book are all by young people with these inclinations.

The students would get together and argue about what to draw.

Ned was all excited. "You know what?" he said to Derek. "There's an article here that says we can safely dismantle nuclear weapons. This scientist says technologically it's no problem. You take the trigger out of the warhead, and it can't go off."

"What about radioactivity?" asked Derek. These sort of detailed problems were the kind that interested him. "And getting countries to trust each other enough to do it?"

"You could have inspection teams of scientists from all the different countries involved, and some neutral countries too," said Claude, joining the two of them.

The next day, Wednesday, Ned came in with a picture of a missile being carefully taken apart. More kids were there than had come for a while, including some of the younger members. Derek's brother Stevie got interested in what Ned had done, and he tried to draw something like it. He worked on that as enthusiastically as he had once worked on drawing rockets.

A group of them got all wrapped up in the specific details: where the radioactive waste would go, how the metal parts could be melted down to make tools, and how the whole thing would be watched over by inspection teams.

Louisa collected all of their drawings in a folder marked, "How We Could Dismantle the Bombs Some Day." Ned crossed out the word *could* and changed it to read, "How We Will Dismantle the Bombs Some Day." . . .

The whole art display was getting more interesting. We decided we wanted it to be like a fair with different booths set up around the display.

On the day of the exhibit Cassie and her mother and father wandered through the show.

We started with a bulletin board on the topic, "What about the Soviets?" There was a picture from Zack's notebook of American and Soviet teenagers playing music together. The label said, "Peace comes by building relationships with all people, even our enemies." . . .

There were pictures of responses to all the controversies that had come up in our group. Should boys be drafted? Should we stop testing and building nuclear weapons? . . . How do you help end unemployment, hunger, and lack of medical care? . . . Ned drew food coming from lots of different places, like from local farmers who couldn't sell all of squash they'd grown, and then going out to the senior center and to other places where it was needed.

"What if someone submitted something that you didn't agree with?" asked my mother. "Did you still include it?"

I pointed to a letter we'd gotten from a boy in eleventh grade who criticized the skit we'd done in the school cafeteria when the air force recruiters had come with their helicopter. We put it under the

heading, "America stands for the Right to Free Speech."

Two weeks after the art show, which had a considerable effect on the people of Larkspur, the people of the New England town, there was a town meeting to which a great many came. The young people had asked for the meeting and for a vote on what they were doing.

"Here we go," said Mr. Sweeney, rubbing his hands together. "Now let me outline again what this vote is about. This is a non-binding referendum. What we're voting on here is a recommendation. It's something that's never been tried in any other city or town in America, as far as we know. So we need to give it our most careful consideration. A 'yes' vote for an outbreak of peace in our town, our country, or our world within the next year. And we would celebrate this on July Fourth this summer. That's what 'yes' would mean, but there's lots of sides to this issue. We're going to start out with speakers 'for' and then speakers 'against' the vote. Who's here to speak in favor of an outbreak of peace?"

A black youth named Langston made the first speech "for."

"It is an honor to stand here on Martin Luther King's birthday to ask all of you in Larkspur to consider the ways of peace for which he stood all his life. There was a time when Treena and I could not have stood here together. There was a time when we might not have been friends because the color of my skin is black and the color of her skin is white."

Treena leaned forward toward the microphone. "Because my mother and father are farmers and Langston's mother teaches at the university, there was a time when our families might not have been friends."

Finally Cassie was persuaded to speak.

"It's just a simple idea," I began. "I started to think about what is the most important part of an outbreak of peace. . . . I know it's not going to work to try to get everybody in town to sign up. But I don't think that's the important thing, any more. Right now, when you care about the world, you can feel kind of alone. It seems like war and violence and cruelty are what people expect, and anyone who speaks about peace and justice is just called a dreamer. An outbreak of peace means we're reversing that. We're not accepting war as something

normal. It doesn't mean we have the answers about how to make that switch, but it means we're going to do everything we can to try. . . . Just imagine if everyone in Larkspur had to climb some incredibly steep mountain to survive, what would we do? We'd probably help each other out. People would take turns carrying the babies and giving people who needed it a lift. We'd pull each other up. We'd be encouraging. That's what I want us to do now. If we work together—those of us who can and want to—then miracles can happen. I want us to know, no matter what happens, that we tried our very hardest."

I stopped. All I remember was loud applause like drums or thunder.

I sat down between Terry and Maritza and rested with their arms on my shoulders. Up on stage, Mr. Sweeney said in his own words the compromise I suggested. More people talked. There were a couple of questions, and Mr. Goldstein answered them.

Then Mr. Sweeney put it to a vote.

I saw many hands waving like tall grass all around me. And then I heard him say the words, "The town of Larkspur has just declared an outbreak of peace."

This book seems a success because it is a good story. We think others will share this view.

## FRONTIERS

### Another Sort of American Dream

IN his editorial column in the Spring 1987 *North Country Anvil*, Jack Miller sets out on a difficult project—getting *Anvil* readers used to the idea of simple living. After some brief quotations from Thoreau, who was probably the best embodiment we have of this project, he says:

Since the time of Thoreau, a hundred and twenty-five years ago, we have become much more dependent on money—lots of it. The model American runs up a bill in the thousands just getting born; and the cost of being raised properly from birth to age 18 is, according to some family experts, close to \$200,000. Then, the tab for college can be \$25,000 or \$50,000 or more, and graduate school may run that much again.

Does Jack Miller actually move in circles of people who have that much money? We doubt it. But the figures doubtless apply to a lot of people. As he explains:

Although most Americans spend nowhere near this amount growing up, it is nonetheless enormously expensive to raise and support us in the manner to which we have become accustomed. And it doesn't just cost money. It costs natural resources that are irreplaceable. It costs the best hours of millions of people around the world (a mother with young children working long hours in a Singapore electronics plant, for example).

He turns to housing:

Consider, for example, the cost of just one basic component of this standard of living—a house. In our area, a fashionable new house can run you about \$60,000. If you borrow the full amount at 10 per cent interest for 30 years, and include the cost of insurance, taxes, utilities, and upkeep, you're going to have to earn about \$250,000 to pay for the privilege of living in this place. . . .

There are alternatives. There are ways to acquire housing—good housing—cheaply. But our society has made this very difficult to do.

Yet there are ways—ways, that is, to do it if you adopt the standards of Dorothy Day instead of the goals advocated by Madison Avenue. She said:

. . . . "once we begin not to worry about what kind of house we are living in, what kind of clothes we are wearing—once we give up the stupid recreation of this world—we have time, which is priceless, to remember that we are our brother's keeper and that we must not only care for his needs as far as we are able immediately, but we must try to build a better world."

Jack Miller says:

Let me give you an example—an extreme example—of the possibilities of an unrespectable house. Some friends live in a cabin-sized house built of solid, salvaged wood. There is no electricity, no running water, no telephone. The place is heated entirely with a wood-burning cookstove, and when we visited for several days during below zero cold in January of this year, the house was always cozy. This house, built by the man of the place for less than \$1,000 (and replaceable now with about that much cash) is comfortable, attractive and lovingly decorated. It is full of books and pictures and hand-made artifacts and cooking utensils. Here live a man, a woman, a school-aged boy, and a baby.

Clearly, most Americans would be not merely unwilling but wholly incapable of living in such a place. Yet consider the advantages: no mortgage payment, no rent, no utility bills. Because it is on a relative's land, there are no taxes. Wood for heating and cooking is easily gathered nearby. The family has access to a garden in which they grow most of their food. Because their living expenses are so low neither partner has to work fulltime. By doing seasonal and occasional work, they made last year about \$3,000, on which they were able to operate a pickup truck and a car and make several week-long trips of a few hundred miles each. The baby was born during the year, attended by a friend. Because of their income they would have qualified for several forms of welfare, but they needed none.

I offer the example of these friends not to suggest them as a model, but to stretch our notions of what is possible.

Community living expands such possibilities.

Jack Miller says:

For another example, let's consider an intentional community that is located elsewhere in our region. Here eight families have built homes within easy walking distance of a central farmhouse which has a root cellar, workshop, showers, laundry, and telephone. There are no electrical lines to the

homes, though some have photovoltaic or other systems that permit minimal electrical use. The land, some 400 acres, is held in common. Each family pays a onetime fee of \$2,000 to become members and about \$200 a year for its share of property taxes and maintenance of common facilities. A longtime member of the community estimates that most of the homes have been built during the last ten years for about \$5,000 worth of materials each. They vary in size from cabins with lofts to several-bedroom houses. The community member estimated that families can live comfortably on \$4,000 to \$6,000 a year and that a single person who wanted to drive a car could live well on about \$2,000.

Again, this isn't everyone's idea of The American Dream. Yet it shows another possibility. There are more. None of them requires a lot of money but all demand some boldness of imagination, some courage and some free time.

These things are happening, we should say, in Minnesota, a beautiful but rather cold country in the wintertime.

The conditions may seem depriving, but let us remember that practically all the people in the United States lived in such conditions a hundred years ago, and didn't feel deprived. Privation, therefore, is mostly something that exists only in our minds.

In a concluding paragraph Jack Miller says:

How much better it would be if people of all income levels adopted a new standard of restraint. This might be called the notion of Enough. Instead of working our heads off to buy the biggest and most expensive house within reach, we would devote ourselves to buying no more house than we needed.

We would of course have to have other kinds of jobs, other kinds of friends, but a great many people already long for changes of this sort. Let us be thankful to those who are showing how to make beginnings in this direction—showing that it is indeed possible, now for some, later for all.

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