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THE PARAMOUNT LAWS

A CONCLUSION that seems evident from the findings of the ecologists is that the laws of nature have two levels of meaning—big meanings and little meanings. Or you could say that there are big laws and little laws, and that it seems possible to apply the little laws in defiance of the big ones, at least for a time. That, apparently, is what has been happening in terms of the misapplications of technology. The matter is of course arguable. But one could say that the argument for this analysis is becoming stronger and stronger all the time. In areas where there has been intensive development of technological know-how in relation to vital resources of the environment, we already seem confronted by irresolvable dilemmas.

Consider industrialized agriculture in relation to the need for an ever-increasing supply of foodstuffs, and at the same time regard its socio-cultural effects, along with certain ecological penalties now being warned against by specialists in that field. The case for scientifically guided agriculture—which usually means large-scale agriculture, although there could also be science applied to the family-size farm—is well and persuasively stated by men like Norman Borlaug, who is a plant breeder of international reputation. Then, in the March "Society" issue of the *Saturday Review*, an article on computerized farming in California tells how the Superior Farming Company (owned by a Texas oil company) raises twenty-six different crops (mostly fruit) on some 15,000 acres—with land and equipment worth upwards of $40 million. One big competitive advantage of this agribusiness is an irrigation system copied from installations in Israel which brings individually piped water to *every fruit tree* and regulates the flow to a trickle supplying exactly what the tree needs and no more. Great savings are involved, since water is expensive in the San Joaquin Valley. Today a third of the company's holdings are dripper-irrigated, which means more than two million individual drippers. Completed, the system will cost more than $2.2 million. The president of the company, Fred Andrew, believes that there is no other sensible way to farm:

> "I was a small farmer," Andrew philosophized as we drove, "and there's no way you can do it today. You need technology and you need efficiency, and there's no way the individual farmer can do that. We can get specialists in our organization who can go out and learn things and apply them to our farms that the small farmer just can't afford to do. We aren't alone in this concept of farming and we re losing thousands of farms every year in California alone. Sometimes it takes capital to do something that you know is right, and you can't afford to do it if you're down there on a small farm. But if you've got capital behind you, you can go ahead and develop those things that will bring you the efficiencies that you need."

Take tomatoes. Superior Farming grows tomatoes under plastic-topped green houses—10.8 acres of them—where all the conditions are perfectly controlled, with the result of a crop eight times as large as ordinary field production. It also appears that Andrew is right about the fate of small farms: "A recent study done at Iowa State University estimates that around 700,000 farms, mostly smaller ones, will disappear over the next seven years and of those that remain, a third will account for nearly all farm income by 1980; average net incomes of better than $55,000 per farm are seen as possible."

Here we have practically the same reasons for expansion and rationalization as those given by the landed proprietors of England, centuries ago, for the enclosure of the commons—arguments difficult to oppose save on social and cultural grounds. Mr. Andrew cannot be accused of monocropping, nor does it seem particularly sensible to charge him with "swallowing up" the small farmers, since he was a small farmer,

himself, who couldn't make a go of it. At issue, rather, is the rhythm of an entire civilization, and the closely woven destiny of a society which has itself undergone a long cycle of hothouse industrial growth, resulting in population figures which seem to demand an unending continuation of the exploitation of the land. Even if such large agricultural combines were to be developed as community or cooperative enterprises, some of the problems of bigness would still remain, and it is necessary to recall the finding of Walter Goldschmidt, in *As You Sow,* that the "individualism" of California farmers, and Americans generally, has in the past led to the practical failure of community efforts in this direction. In addition, the high cost of land and irrigation techniques required high-value cash crops, so that the would-be cooperators "were immediately caught in the established pattern of farming."

There is little to be gained, then, simply from criticism of the existing patterns of agriculture or other forms of enterprise, since these are natural and inevitable reflections of the attitudes of people concerning what is desirable and necessary to do in the fulfillment of the dominant ends of the American people. Only by the adoption of other ends will other ways of living and of "making" a living have a chance to gain expression.

What effect, then, will the ultimate monopoly of all agriculture by enormous, computerized farms have on people generally? For answer we quote some passages from Wendell Berry's *A Continuous Harmony:*

> A person dependent upon somebody else for everything from potatoes to opinions may declare that he is a free man, and his government may issue a certificate granting him his freedom, but he will not be free. He is that variety of specialist known as a consumer, which means that he is the abject dependent of producers. How can he be free who does nothing for himself? What is the First Amendment to him whose mouth is stuck to the tit of the "affluent society"? Men are free precisely to the extent that they are equal to their own needs. The most able are the most free.

Increased production—the iron law of growth economics—is the objective of many men who hope to be free, since wealth is accumulated by increased production. Wealth is held to be security, and evidence of a more abundant life. The satisfaction of wants is fulfillment, and since the sum total of human wants is insatiable, endless growth is the path to fulfillment. This process, as values are defined in our society, is "progress"—a straight, ascending line into the future, marked off by stages of acquisitive development. The most elaborate consumers are the most progressive citizens, since they have the freedom to satisfy any desire. Waste is a symbol of luxurious fulfillment, and unimportant because it can be put out of sight.

Wendell Berry also speaks of waste:

> According to the scheme of our present thinking, every human activity produces waste. This implies a profound contempt for correct discipline; it proposes, in the giddy faith of prodigals, that there can be production without fertility, abundance without thrift. We take and do not give back, and this causes waste. It is a hideous concept, and it is making the world hideous. It is consumption, a wasting disease. And this disease of our material economy becomes also the disease of our spiritual economy, and we have made a shoddy merchandise of our souls. We want the truth to be easy and spectacular, and so we waste our verities; we are hastening from the essential to the novel; we will have no prophet who is not an acrobat. We want to have love without a return of devotion or loyalty; to us, Aphrodite is a peeping statistician, the seismographer of orgasms. We want a faith that demands no return of good work. And art—we want it to be instantaneous and effortless, we want it to involve no apprenticeship to a tradition or a discipline or a master, no devotion to an ideal of workmanship. We want our art to support the illusion that high achievement is within easy reach, for we want to believe that, though we are demeaned by our work and driven half crazy by our pleasures, we are all mute inglorious Miltons.

Returning to the subject of agriculture, he says:

> According to the industrial vision of it, the life of the farm does not rise and fall in the turning cycle

> of the year; it goes on in a straight line from one harvest to another. This, in the long run, may well be more productive of waste than of anything else. It wastes the soil. It wastes the animal manures and other organic residues that industrialized agriculture frequently fails to return to the soil. And what may be our largest agricultural waste may not be recognized as such but is thought to be an urban product and an urban problem: the tons of garbage and sewage that are burned or buried or flushed into the rivers. This, like all waste, is the abuse of a resource. It was ecological stupidity of exactly this kind that destroyed Rome. The chemist Justus von Liebig wrote that "the sewers of the immense metropolis engulfed in the course of centuries the prosperity of Roman peasants. The Roman Compagna would no longer yield the means of feeding her population; these same sewers devoured the wealth of Sicily, Sardinia and the fertile lands of the coast of Africa."

All nature is a delicate balance of organic cycles, and man, with his productive drives, moves in on those cycles, turning them to his own purposes until, at last, they are exhausted, drained of energy, or unnaturally accelerated by excesses against which they have no defense, since little laws have been turned against big ones. The natural processes of transmutation and purification no longer work; the cycle of regeneration fails; the reproductive process is over-stimulated in some areas and starved into sterility in others.

Meanwhile, the natural cycles of man's being are ignored, their intersection with the cycles of nature turned into a saturnalia of consumption. One might say that man's misuse of the rhythms and cycles of nature is a result of his neglect of the cycles in his own life, which play no part in his thought about meaning and fulfillment. Berry has some comment on this, too:

> The linear vision looks fixedly straight ahead. It never looks back, for its premise is that there is no return. The doctrine of possession is complemented by no doctrine of relinquishment. Our shallow concept of use does not imply good use or preservation; thus quantity depresses quality, and we arrive at the concepts of waste and disposability. Similarly, life is lived without regard or respect for death. Death thus becomes accidental, the chance interruption of a process that might otherwise go on forever—therefore, always a surprise and always feared. Dr. Leon R. Kass, of the National Academy of Sciences, recently said that "medicine seems to be sharpening its tools to do battle with death as though death were just one more disease." The cyclic vision, at once more realistic and more generous, recognizes in the creation the essential principle of return: what is here will leave to come again; if there is to be having there must also be giving up. And it sees death as an integral and indispensable part of life. In one of the medicine rites of the Winnebago, according to Paul Radin, an old woman is made to voice this principle: "Our father has ordained that my body shall fall to pieces. I am the earth. Our father ordained that there should be death lest otherwise there be too many people and not enough food for them." Because death is inescapable, a biological and ecological necessity, its acceptance becomes a spiritual obligation the only means of making life whole: "Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it."

There are various levels of reconciliation with death. The physical return of the body to the reservoir of living processes in nature is one of them. An old Montagnais Indian of the Canadian wilds, who tells his story in Yves Theriault's recent book, *Ashini* (Harvest House, Montreal, 1972), expresses this well:

> Finally, to succumb on some lonely mountainside.
>
> To die, watching the trees.
>
> And to die, absorbed in the sky.
>
> And to bequeath my body of fresh meat to the fur-bearing animals, who would draw from it a reprieve, so that a man younger than myself, my successor in the solitude, would trap them at a propitious time, and himself gain a reprieve.
>
> The slow, cyclic mechanism of nature. Will you change even one of its impulses?
>
> Will you modify its course?

But men limited to linear vision think of death only as interruption, as irremediable evil. They seldom prepare for it except by making a "will." Life as a cycle is not known to them. Even the stages of life, except for the independently thoughtful, are ignored. In the East, the last stage of life before death is a time of reflection. It is a

time of loosening and letting go of the ties of earthly existence. During the earlier stages, the individual occupies himself with activities relating to embodiment, to work in the world, to the duties of the householder. The scheme of life stages, which Erik Erikson unavoidably encountered while researching the background of traditional Indian life for his book, *Gandhi's Truth*, allows, as Erikson says, "for a succession of pointedly different life styles." These are differing sub-cycles within the cycle of an incarnation. The beginning of the life is set in circumstances which are determined by previous lifetimes; being born in them, each individual has specific things to learn from that particular round of experiences. Erikson comments:

> We in the West are proudly overcoming all ideas of predestination. But we would still insist that child training can do no more than underscore what is given . . . we continue to project ideas of doom and predetermination either on hereditary or constitutional givers, on early experience and irreversible trauma, or on cultural and economic deprivation—that is, on a past as dim as it is fateful. And let us face it: "deep down" nobody in his right mind *can* visualize his own existence without assuming that he has always lived and will live hereafter; and the religious world-views of old only endowed this psychological given with images and ideas which could be shared, transmitted, and ritualized.

Erikson discusses these ideas at some length, suggesting that while skeptically trained Westerners are likely to turn away from such notions, "a pragmatic world-view which shuns all concepts of the cycle of generations can cause widespread disorientation," and he adds:

> For what an ingenious scheme this is: all caste, subcaste, and not-yet-caste having been predetermined, one comes into life with a curse that can be lived down if one lives up to minutely prescribed ways; and by living and dying well, one becomes deserving of ever better lives until, having exhausted the available life cycles, one is ready for release from the whole big cycle.

There is this further comment by Erikson:

> All world-images are apt to become corrupt when left to ecclesiastic bureaucracies. But this does not make the formation of world-images expendable. And I can only repeat that we deny the remnants of old-world images at our own risk, because we do not overcome them by declaring them—with all the righteousness of scepticism—something of a secret sin. They are not less powerful for being denied. In India, I found . . . that anyone who trusts a stranger not to smile will soon confide to him the magic reaffirmations he receives from sources other than those the West calls rational—from astrology to mysticism. But it is true for us, too, that the imagery of our traditional inner resources must be transcended, rather than denied, by what we are learning to learn.

What would this "transcendence" mean? It is difficult to say, but a brief remark of Jacquetta Hawkes, comparing the culture of the pueblo Indians with that of white Americans, and Westerners generally, might be suggestive. She proposed that the individualism of modern man was an attempt to reach to a higher level of life than the communal, tradition-controlled pattern, but that when men, relishing their individualistic freedom, neglect the laws of interdependence and harmony, there is a falling back and a failure on both levels. So, from this point of view, there is need to return, consciously and by individual choice, to those relationships with the rest of life which were once demanded by the insistent customs of the traditional society. In short, we ignore the ancient principles of collaboration with the universe at our physical as well as moral peril. The law of life for the kingdoms of nature is the cycle of living; for man it may be the cycle of both living and learning, and not merely learning to implement a more extravagant and wasteful sort of living which the powers of intellect make possible. To transcend, then, would be to do by choice and finally by inclination what the law of the tribe or of ancestral revelation once prescribed. There is a fragment of Confucian wisdom to this effect:

> The master said,
> "At fifteen I had my mind bent on learning.
> "At thirty, I stood firm.

"At forty, I had no doubts.

"At fifty, I knew the decrees of heaven.

"At sixty, my ear was an obedient organ for the reception of truth.

"At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired without transgressing what was right."

There is a profound conception of interaction between man and nature in the Hopi religious tradition. Laura Thompson says in *The Hopi Way:*

> In the Hopi system of mutual dependency, which gives basic form to the universe, each individual, human or nonhuman, has its proper place in relation to all other phenomena, with a definite role in the cosmic scheme. But, whereas the non-human orders fulfill their obligations more or less automatically under the law, man has definite responsibilities which have to be learned and carried out according to a fixed set of rules.
>
> It is interesting to note in this connection that the Hopi use the same word (*na'wakna*) for "to will" and "to pray." Praying is willing. The Hopi believe not only that man can control nature to a limited extent by observing these rules, but that if he does not do so, the universe may cease to function. That is, the movements of the sun, the coming of rain, the growth of the crops, the reproduction of animals and human beings depend (to a certain extent at least) on man's correct, complete and active carrying out of the rules. . . .
>
> . . . the Hopi way of looking at the universe is quite different from our own . . . it shows that the conception of change in linear, cause-and-effect terms, common among us, is absent in the thinking of these people, who see life in terms of interrelated, multi-manifested wholes in the process of metamorphosis, each according to its own mode, rhythm and tempo. Moreover, the Hopi concept of the balanced, correlative interdependence of the manifold aspects of reality excludes an arbitrary overall dual division, such as that which structures our own thinking and forms the basis for our traditional concept of the competing forces of good and evil. Duality in the Hopi world-view exists only insofar as it represents two correlates in a reciprocally balanced universal scheme, and each correlate is conceived as an inseparable part of the whole, neither one being essentially subordinate to the other.

What is the role of the old among the Hopis? Responsibility is never thrown off but increases with age. The oldest men are the chief instructors of the people, transmitting the traditional teachings and the obligations attached to the Hopi way of life. One is led to think, in connection with this, of the meaninglessness of "retirement" in the affluent society, where the old seem to need bright young men to think up ways to keep them from growing bored with their own uselessness. Many men know that retirement amounts to a death sentence and they refuse to stop working if they can. But these conventions, which belong to the linear, acquisitive, progressive view—what have they to do, really, with the subtler laws of nature governing the interrelated life cycles of man and the world? Here, too, there is ostentatious or "conspicuous" waste, as Thorstein Veblen would say. The final stage of life is not "playtime," but the time of deliberate inner growth, of understanding, of reconciliation with universal life-processes, and of teaching those who are still in the other stages.

Man in the service of the universe, and the universe in the service of man—what is so unbelievable about this? If this is the "big" law of nature, and we become able to acknowledge it, the application of the little laws in harmony with greater principles might not, in time, prove so difficult to accept, and the reform of our relations with nature not seem impossible at all.

REVIEW
A POET'S ESSAYS

OCTAVIO PAZ writes with a cold brilliance. One can read his new book and feel greatly stimulated, yet also a certain emptiness: something crucial seems left out; there is always the same dispassion, and it sometimes seems as though Twain's "Mysterious Stranger" is doing the writing. So, while the insights in the essays which make up *Alternating Current* (Viking Press, 1973, $7.95) go a long way, they never seem to go far enough. Yet there is much to be grateful for. For example, this:

> If we are to believe the logicians, all that remains of metaphysics is no more than the nonscientific residuum of thought—a few errors of language. Perhaps tomorrow's metaphysics, should man feel a need to think metaphysically, will begin as a critique of science, just as in classical antiquity it began as a critique of the gods. This metaphysics would ask itself the same questions as classical philosophy, but the starting point of the interrogation would not be the traditional one *before* all science but one *after* the sciences. It is difficult to imagine man returning to metaphysics. Having been so deeply disappointed by science and technology, he will seek a poetics.

Well, that, too, but the metaphysical criticism of science began a long time ago, notably with Edwin A. Burtt's *Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science*, first published in 1924, which was followed by at least a dozen similar volumes. Paz is particularly good on what happens to thought and culture which are without metaphysics:

> Philosophical schools . . . gave the ancients something that our modern philosophies have failed to give us: *wisdom.* None of our philosophies has produced a Hadrian or a Marcus Aurelius. Or even a Seneca. Our Marxist philosophers prefer "self-criticism" to hemlock. Modern philosophy has admittedly given us a politics, and our revered philosophers go by the names of Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, and Mao Tse-Tung. The descent from these first two names to the last two is a dizzying one. In less than fifty years, Marxism, which Marx defined as a critical system of thought, has turned into a scholastic philosophy of executioners (Stalinism) and the elementary catechism of seven hundred million human beings (Maoism). The source of modern "wisdom" is not philosophy but art. And it is not "wisdom" but madness, a poetics. In the last century it went by the name of Romanticism and in the first half of our century by the name of Surrealism. Neither philosophy nor religion nor politics has been able to withstand the attack of science and technology. But art has borne up under the onslaught. Dadaists—above all Duchamp and Picabia—exploited technology to make a mockery of it: they turned it into something *useless.* Modern art is a passion, a critique, and a cult. It is also a game and a form of wisdom—the wisdom of madness.

It is at this point that the reader begins to hunger for another sort of criticism—the kind that Maslow published a few years ago in the *Music Educators Journal:*

> If your situation is like mine, you know that we are in a complete and total confusion of values in the arts. In music, just you try to prove something about the virtues of John Cage as against Beethoven—or Elvis Presley. In painting and architecture similar confusion is present. We have no shared values any more. I don't bother to read music criticism. It is useless to me. So is art criticism, which I have also given up reading. Book reviews I find useless frequently. There is complete chaos and anarchy of standards. For instance, the *Saturday Review* recently carried a favorable review of one of Jean Genet's crummy books. Written by a professor of theology, it was total confusion. It was the approach that Evil now has become Good because there is some kind of paradox while playing with words: If evil becomes totally evil, then it somehow becomes good, and there were rhapsodies to the beauties of sodomy and drug addiction which, for a poor psychologist who spends much of his time trying to rescue people from the anguish of these kinds of things, were incomprehensible. How can a grown man recommend this book as a chapter in ethics and a guide to the young?

Yet while Paz is not inclined to offer comment of this sort—he seems too remote from the agonies Maslow'is talking about to say such things—he does trace the effects of our philosophical impoverishment in other ways. Without the metaphysical structure which supports the hierarchy of values, the will to power

fills the vacuum. This driving energy becomes the source of other "values." Paz comments:

> I am not at all certain that the essence of life is the will to power. In any event, it does not seem to me to be the source or the origin of value, its underlying cause; nor do I believe that it is its foundation. The essence of the will to power can be summed up in the word *more*. It is an appetite: not more being, but being more. Not *being*, but a passionate *wish to be*. This passionate wish to be is the wound through which the will to power is drained of its blood. Just as movement cannot be the cause or the principle of movement (*who* moves it, *what* supports it?), the will to power is not being but an urge to be and therefore incapable of becoming its own foundation or the foundation of values.

Paz goes on to say that the inversion of values wrought by technology has "demoralized" all values, both those of Marxism and those of Nietzsche. Life becomes "a technique for living." Technicians replace revolutionaries, socialism's appeal being no longer a *social* doctrine but demand for a higher standard of living for all, with power as the key. Socialism is now only an ideology, and where politically successful becomes a new form of alienation. Then Paz grows eloquent:

> The American: a titan enamored of progress, a fanatical giant who worships "getting things done" but never asks himself what he is doing nor why he is doing it. His activity is not creative play but mindless sport: he drops bombs in Vietnam and sends messages home on Mother's Day, he believes in sentimental love and his sadism goes by the name of mental hygiene; he razes cities and visits his psychiatrist. He is still tied by his umbilical cord even though he is the explorer of outer space. Progress, solidarity, good intentions, and despicable acts. He does not suffer from hubris; he is simply lawless, perpetually repentant and perpetually self-satisfied. . . .

There is a flashing incisiveness in the brief perceptions of Paz, distributed almost at random throughout these essays. Here are three short passages:

> Can we escape barbarism? There are two sorts of barbarians: the barbarian who knows he is one (a Vandal, an Aztec) and therefore seeks to borrow a civilized life-style; and the civilized man who knows that the "end of a world" is at hand and does his utmost to escape by plunging into the dark waters of savagery. The savage does not know that he is a savage; barbarism is a feeling of shame at being a savage or a nostalgia for a state of savagery. In both cases, its underlying cause is inauthenticity.

> The idea that language does not stem from physical necessity may seem strange, but it is not absurd. If we think about it, Rousseau was right. Whether it comes from God or from nature, language is not intended to satisfy biological needs, since animals survive as individuals and as species without articulate language. There is a gap between animal language and human language because the latter is intended to satisfy nonanimal necessities, the passions, and entities no less powerful and no less illusory than the passions: the tribe, the family, labor, the State, religion, myth, the awareness of death, rites, etc. . . .

> On embarking on his experiment, Michaux wrote: "I propose to explore the mediocre human condition`" The second part of this sentence—a sentence which applies, I might add to Michaux's entire *œuvre* and to that of any great artist—turned out to be strikingly false. The exploration showed that man is not a mediocre creature. A part of oneself—a part walled in, obscured from the very beginning of the beginning—is open to the infinite. The so-called human condition is a point of intersection with other forces. Perhaps our condition is not merely human.

Paz has a long section on the use of hallucinatory drugs. In what amounts to a study of cultural anthropology, he explores their use through history and among different peoples. He notes that while alcohol at first increases the gregariousness of its users, drugs lead to isolation from others. Baudelaire, he shows, recognized this difference more than a century ago. Baudelaire called wine a stimulant but hashish a "suicide weapon." He had reference to its psychological, not its physical effects. Paz remarks that Baudelaire might have added that "it is not the merits or defects of alcohol and drugs that are most important, but their relation to communication." At the end of this discussion he says:

> Now that we have examined the general context in which this change has occurred, we can better understand the meaning of the more and more widespread use of hallucinogenic substances. Like alcoholism it is a revolt that is self-defeating; drugs can give us blissful or terrifying visions, but they cannot give us either silence or wisdom. Unlike alcoholism drugs are not an exaggeration of a traditional value (communication) but of something foreign to our tradition. Alcoholism is a caricature of the Platonic symposium and of communion; drugs are its negation.

It may be remembered that Buber said something very like this in his discussion of Aldous Huxley's *Doorways to Perception.* Another part of Paz's essay throws light on the severe legal penalties for drug use and the public anxiety on the subject:

> Alcoholism is an infraction of social rules; everyone tolerates this breaking of the rules because it is a violation that confirms them. Prostitution is a similar case: neither the drunk nor the whore and her client questions the rules they break. Their acts are a disturbance of law and order, a departure from the rules of society, not a criticism of them. The recourse of hallucinogens implies a negation of social values, and it is an attempt—though doubtless an illusory one—to escape from this world and drop out from society. You are now in a position to understand the real reason for the condemnation of hallucinogens and why their use is punished: the authorities do not behave as though they were trying to stamp out a harmful practice or a vice, but as though they were attempting to stamp out dissidence. Since this is a form of dissidence that is becoming more widespread, the prohibition takes on the proportions of a campaign against a spiritual contagion, against an *opinion.* What the authorities are displaying is *ideological* zeal: they are punishing a heresy, not a crime. They are thus taking the same attitude as that taken in other centuries toward leprosy and insanity, which were not regarded as diseases but as incarnations of evil. . . . Those who hound the users of hallucinatory drugs are no less credulous than those who worship these drugs. There is little use in reminding both sides that all the experiments and studies on the subject agree on at least one point: no known substance can make a genius of someone who is not one.

This is the sort of generalization which gives the writing of Octavio Paz its character and appeal.

COMMENTARY
LAND REFORM—PLUS

WHILE the march of technology to total domination of agriculture is especially noticeable in California (see lead article), and a significant lessening of this tendency will have to await basic changes in human attitudes, this is by no means true of all other parts of the country; and in other lands, where industrialization is still "backward," it remains possible for small farmers to make their living on the land. In fact, a majority of the people in the world are still agriculturalists of one sort or another.

In an article in *Peace News* for July 28, 1972, Robert Swann, of the International Independence Institute, tells how this organization is helping in the redistribution of land and supplying credit on a small scale, at reasonable rates, to small farmers. Working through existing organizations, the Independence Institute has already brought much needed credit to ninety Mexican farmers, and has made possible a credit program for the farmers on an Indonesian island. It also enabled a group of Georgia farmers, mostly black, to acquire cooperatively close to six thousand acres of good farm land, and is working on a flexible form of land trust for application in Maine. The Institute has prepared a manual, *The Community Land Trust Guide,* to assist those who want to work for land reform.

Swann makes it clear that access to land, while essential, is seldom sufficient aid to the small farmer, who also needs credit for the purchase of seed, equipment, fertilizer, and livestock. At present, Swann says, credit costs the small farmer of South America or India between forty to fifty per cent interest! He also lacks information about the intermediate technology appropriate to small-scale operations.

Inspiration for the International Independence Institute, Swann says, came from the Gramdan movement of India. The idea is to work out equivalents of the Gandhian program for other parts of the world, and to add to land allotment these other features of assistance equally necessary to growth. This decentralist approach, independent of government, would give some community control of ecological resources and serve as a responsible channel for receiving gifts of land from interested donors, making the land available to those who want to work on it. For descriptive literature of these projects, write to Robert Swann, International Independence Institute, West Road, Box 183, Ashby, Mass. 01431.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE SALVAGE PROFESSIONALS

WE heard recently, from a friend, about a "Prayer Breakfast" that took place some months ago, attended by both the President and Billy Graham. It seems that these get-togethers are now increasingly popular, and this one reached the dimensions of an affair of state. An observer said that the prayerful thanks given to the Almighty were typically expressions of gratitude for having been born "an American," while solicitations for divine aid usually included an appeal for further economic progress and blessings on the Free Enterprise System. On this occasion Senator Hatfield and one or two others asked in effect if the prayers which struck this note were really being addressed to the right Deity—a wondering passed over in silence by both the President and Mr. Graham.

For some reason or other, this anecdote seemed an appropriate introduction to some notes on *P.S. Your Not Listening* (Richard Baron, 1972, $5.95), by Eleanor Craig. The title is taken from the end of a note sent to her (his teacher) by a nine-year-old black boy who weighed a hundred pounds—and who had, on the second day of school, locked her in a broom closet and left her there.

This is a book about children who are so disturbed—and disturbing—that ordinary school classes cannot take them, and unless special provision is made they will have to be taught at home or institutionalized. The children's behavior is simply "impossible" and you wonder how any teacher can have the courage and the persistence to work with them, but this is what Mrs. Craig did. She worked and worked for normal human response, and finally, little by little, she began to get it.

What had gone wrong with them? The psychiatric aide in the school had ways of explaining that were extremely helpful to the teacher, but an ordinary person, watching Mrs. Craig's class, might say that the children seemed always to shift into the wrong gear when they had to do something—either that or the clutch would slip. They had all their parts, but they didn't coordinate. Usually it was the home situation that had mixed them up. Some of these children were very bright, but their intelligence operated destructively or in the wrong direction.

Teachers like Mrs. Craig are people who have an instinct, a *calling*, for helping children who are either so anxious that they *can't* work in school, or so rebellious that they *won't*. Mrs. Craig kept searching for their humanity.

At first there were only two boys—the nine-year-old black boy who mocked at everything and a smaller lad who just sat and tapped with his foot.

> Kevin, who had so much he needed to express, now relied on his shoes to do it for him. Every time I approached him his feet would begin to tap—heel, toe, heel, toe, louder and louder. I said he must stop so that we could read. Tap! Tap! Tap! He looked at me blankly, then shrugged innocently. He was being very good but could not be expected to control those disobedient shoes.
>
> The shoes became more and more expressive, interrupting whenever Kevin wanted to interrupt. On Thursday, when it was his turn for "work period," he headed for the fountain outside the room.
>
> "Just a minute!" I called. "You may have your drink when we have had a look at this book."
>
> He eased out of each shoe and carried them into the hall, carefully lining them up directly under the water fountain, then in stocking feet returned to his desk. Kevin was obedient—only his shoes were defiant.

After a couple of weeks of school Mrs. Craig asked Kevin's parents to come to see her in the evening at the school.

> Mr. Hughes, who looked much younger than his matronly wife, wore a stylishly tailored teal-blue suit and pale blue tie. His wavy brown hair was slicked back, his face so boyish and unlined it looked unlived in.
>
> "We also felt," Ceil [the psychiatric aide] continued, "that you might have some questions you might like to ask."
>
> "Do I? Oh, boy, do I!" Mr. Hughes plunged in. "The kid hasn't come home with homework once! Is he doing anything in this place or not? What's going on here? Is he learning anything? What the hell kind of a school is this?"

Ceil jarred my stunned silence. "Mrs. Craig can answer questions about the learning program better than I."

"Yes. Well, ah, part of the reason Kevin is here, Mr. Hughes, is that he does have a learning problem. But there is more than that. I am sure you remember some of the things the psychologist discussed with you after he had seen your son and tested him. When he is able to work, Kevin will receive individual attention here and progress at his own rate. We have to work together to help him reach that point of readiness."

Ceil elaborated on Kevin's feelings of inadequacy, and the importance of cooperation between home and school in helping him to overcome his problems.

Mr. Hughes shook his index finger at Ceil, then at me. "I get it! I get what you two are telling me! You're saying the kid hasn't got it, huh? From what you're telling me, my son just doesn't have what it takes to make it in the real world. Right? In other words—*he might as well be a teacher!"* And, grabbing his wife by the arm, he left the room.

The "Your not listening" note came to Mrs. Craig after an announcement had been made of the school Halloween party, for which each child was to bring his own costume. So—

After the other boys left, I said, "I found your note, Doug. Won t you tell me, please, what is it I haven't been listening to?"

His depression turned to rage. He ripped all the charts and pictures from the wall, threw chalk, erasers, books in all directions. Then he ran into the closet, his back to me, and began to yell.

"Trying to get me in trouble, huh? You want me to steal some dumb costume? Think my grandmother's got money to spend on some junky thing to make *you* happy?" His voice faltered. He was crying.

"You're the only one who could do it, Doug. Make a costume better than any store has. Use anything you want in the closets. I'll help you."

Within an hour he had transformed a paper bag into a lion's head with a mane of yellow yarn and plastic straws for whiskers. He also picked up everything he had thrown around, even tacked the charts back on the walls. On the way home we stopped at Macdonald's for hamburgers and french fries. His housing development was more depressing than I had realized. "Douglas," I said as we drove in, "see how much better everything was when you finally told me what was on your mind, instead of bottling it all up inside."

"Look," he opened the car door, "just sympathize, don't criticize." And he was gone.

Another time, Doug emptied a box of fish food on the floor, and then shouted that the guppy would *die,* and wouldn't ever have a lot of little babies. But a little later he burst into tears and swept up all the fish food.

There are some happy endings in the book, and some sad ones. One day, when Kevin was away with his mother in California, the police station called. Kevin's father had been extradited by another state. He was the prime suspect in a series of robberies. Mrs. Craig never saw Kevin again.

What you learn from this book is the curious ways in which children's minds work or have been made to work by the distortions and mutilations imposed upon their lives. The logic of what they do has to be understood, where it is possible to do so. For the rest, time and an environment with some love, friendliness, firmness and dependable symmetries in it seem to be about all that will help. "The person we're looking for," said the man who hired Mrs. Craig for this job, "must have certain characteristics which don't necessarily accompany a degree in psychology or education. We need somebody with insight and acceptance." Well, he found her.

Maybe Senator Hatfield was wondering what sort of deity would have concern for people who were not "born" Americans, or are the wrong color Americans, or people the Free Enterprise system didn't try to find a use for, and what sort of religion would increase our supply of "insight and acceptance." Meanwhile, there is ever greater need for devoted teachers who have been able to develop these qualities on their own. What, indeed, do you say about a civilization in which the best human beings always seem to turn up in a salvage profession? Is it because that's the only place they can work and that's the only place they can work and feel able to hold up their heads?

FRONTIERS

The Hazards of Success

IN an interesting article on the erstwhile "Underground Press" in the *Nation* for Feb. 19, Daniel Ben-Horin discusses several of the current examples of what he thinks is better called "alternative journalism," including the paper he works for—the *New Times*, published in Phoenix, Ariz. These papers, or most of them, start out with a Woodstockian, "Movement" appeal and a communal idea of editorial management, but seem to grow like their "straight" competitors in more ways than one if they survive and begin to enjoy financial success. Examples are New York's *Village Voice*, which was the first, started in 1955, the *Los Angeles Free Press*, and the *Berkeley Barb*, begun in 1964 and 1965. These papers are not really alike but Ben-Horin shows that a certain pattern is likely to emerge with commercial stability. The owners run things their own way and reject a selective attitude toward advertising.

But all such generalizations ignore the exceptions. Some papers have grown without losing their collectivist approach to editorial decision. And the cooperative spirit has an effect in other areas. Ben-Horin says:

> Collectively run papers, by contrast, tend to see their advertising columns as extensions of their collective identities. They unabashedly label themselves advocacy journals—common beliefs, after all, are what link disparate types in a collective—and are disinclined to allow their ads to work against their goals. Sexism, for example, is a commonly accepted reason for refusing advertising space.

Curiously, the conservative Arizona environment turned out to be favorable to the development of the *New Times*, since an alternative paper was a fresh idea in the area and there was no competition. Started in May, 1970, the *New Times* now has 35,000 circulation (it's weekly) and is able to pay a full-time staff. But with growth came the problem of publishing a paper that interests progressive businessmen as well as campus radicals and readers who delight in "the rock-satire-comics mix." The staff must now offer "the serious, in-depth local reporting most post-collegians demand before they will subscribe to or support a paper." Again, there is the advertising issue: "Even more disturbing to the staff is the possibility that the paper they publish in an effort to change society is mainly perpetuating that society's defects by giving amoral corporations a chance to push their wares and urge their ethic in an attractive-to-youth publication."

Standing back and looking at what they are doing, a *New Times* staff member said:

> Something that is a bigger contradiction than advertising vs. radical politics is the contradiction between counter-culture life style and newspaper-living life style. We are a culture that eschews the 9-to-5, take your work home from the office, pressure ulcer syndrome. Yet putting out a newspaper creates a situation that is more intense than any suburban commuter's job in New York. One is almost forced to function in a collective manner because there is no financial independence. You have to think paper twelve hours a day, seven days a week. You have to be organized, efficient, *businesslike*. And you have to do it with the same people all the time. You become insulated, inside yourself and a small group.
>
> And what are the rewards? Where is the satisfaction? No one sees the system changing. . . . To stay alive you have to create an *institution*, a tough thing to do if you're into Woodstock. Reading the good-by soliloquies (in two folding papers), I felt that they finally realized that they had created an institution, with all the inherent evils. . . .
>
> Historically, I think, we're in the middle. Change isn't going to come without some form of permanence. But it's the nature of permanence of institutions that we have to change.

Meanwhile, the breath of fresh air brought by the experience of writing for the underground press is spreading around. People who write for *Rolling Stone* are also selling *Esquire* and *Playboy*. *"Harper's,"* Ben-Horin remarks, "ran a story on CIA involvement with drug traffic in Southeast Asia two years after *Ramparts."* But he also says:

> Not all of those involved with the underground press movement think that the increase in traffic between new and established journalism, and the growing attempt of new papers to establish a broad base and achieve durability, are healthy developments. Some ask if getting articles in *Playboy* is what writers interested in bringing about radical change in this country should be about. It's a tough question. Writers, even those with radical politics, have writers' egos. And radical politics itself has undoubtedly become diffused in the last several years. Few speak of "The Movement" any more. In any area where there are a large number of alternatively minded people, there is a correspondingly large amount of confusion.

The size of the city seems to be an important factor. In smaller urban areas, alternative press ideals have a better survival rate, since the feeling of "community" is easier to preserve. But in places like New York and Boston and Los Angeles, Ben-Horin says, "the impulse seems to be to reach for the brass ring—to parlay alternative politics and culture into mass circulation, heavy advertising (with just about all advertisers not only welcomed but solicited), competitive wages and inbreeding with other forms of media and social action."

One sort of survival pattern worth looking at is found in the San Francisco *Bay Guardian*, which is neither radical nor "hippie" in spirit, with an editor and publisher who "looks like everyone's favorite high school teacher." The success of this paper is based upon solid investigative reporting, "and Movement types admit he's made the right enemies since he began publishing in 1966." Ben-Horin devotes considerable space to the *Bay Guardian*, and in one place tells about its unostentatious youth program:

> For the past two summers it has run an intern program which attracts volunteer researchers from across the country, almost all of whom have had social action experience, good grades, and proved writing ability. That a paper with only a trace of youthful aura, but skilled in applying old journalistic virtues in the public's benefit, can interest such people in investigating city finances, urban tax reform, neighborhood politics, "Inventory Foundation in the Bay Area," and many other non-Woodstocky topics says something about the pool of talent waiting to be tapped.

Well, as the staffer of *New Times* said, "Historically, we're in the middle!"