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THE SOLID MEANING OF LIFE

VARIOUS important secrets are probably safely locked within the pages of Oscar Ameringer's book, *If You Don't Weaken* (Holt, 1940)—secrets which, if "explained," would break up into tired platitudes. Ameringer was an American socialist who emigrated here as a boy (before he became a socialist) because he had made himself so unpopular in his hometown in Germany that there was nothing else to do. For his school work in that strongly Catholic community he turned in a paper on Luther's Reformation, based on a work by the Hugenot historian, d'Aubiguy, which revealed the terms of the salvation contracts peddled by Tetzel:

> . . . As soon as the coin in the coffer rings,
> The soul of the sinner out of Purgatory springs. . .

A night of solitary in the school dungeon (without bread and water) could not reform him, and a forced pilgrimage to a local shrine (Mother Anna's) failed to move his stubborn heart, so he was shipped off to America armed with his sorrowful mother's rosary, a pack of cigarettes, and one mark in cash. Since he could draw pictures and play the cornet, he managed pretty well in America. His decision to save the world with socialist revolution came later.

He didn't of course save the world; not enough people, it turned out, are interested in salvation; but it must be admitted that he saved himself. The evidence is in his book. He was a man who lived by principle, but modestly, and with rare good nature. It seems almost easy, the way he did it. The ingredients of his success seem to have been, first a determination to do what is right, second, his talents (which included writing and speaking ability), and finally and most important, a magnificent sense of humor. This was his secret of how to live a good life—the combination of these elements. All three are beyond (or practically beyond) definition, which keeps the secret well. How, after all, do you explain a sense of humor? In Ameringer's case, while he went about preaching Marxian socialism, it made him humane. A sense of humor keeps the application of principle in scale. It prevents righteousness from getting out of hand. The people least trapped by the tunnel vision of exclusive virtue are those with a sense of humor.

Ameringer was against both injustice and violence. Yet he understood why there was so much violence in American history. In an account of the early attempts of the Oklahoma coal miners to organize he tells how Army regulars were used to break strikes and evict the miners' families from their shacks. He understood the people he was working with and for:

> Later there was another strike. This time there were no evictions. The company imported Negro strike breakers from the sugar-cane, tobacco and cotton fields of sunny Dixie, and protected them with white thugs and gunmen. It lodged these beauties in a string of box cars along a siding, surrounded by a board fence crowned by barbed wire. The drunken, degraded rabble of thugs and gunmen found amusement at night by discharging revolvers and rifles in the direction of the sleeping mining camp. Bullets penetrated the walls of the flimsy shacks. No one had been hurt yet, but something had to be done.
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> A small body of volunteers agreed to do whatever had to be done. In the dead of night they crawled toward the protecting board fence, each with a bundle of dynamite sticks stolen from the company's powder house under his arm. Their leader was Sam, peace to his ashes: he was laid to final rest in Illinois only a few years ago. Sam was a preacher and a miner. He preached salvation until he was too drunk to preach; then he worked at digging coal until he had sobered up sufficiently to save souls again.
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> The volunteers pried a board loose from the board fence and were ready to enter when a whisper from parson Sam bid them pause.
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> "Brothers," he said, "let us not enter this battle without asking the blessing of the Lord."

> They all knelt down, each with his bundle of dynamite sticks properly primed with fuse and cap, and preacher Sam told the good Lord above why it was his duty to help the miners, rather than the dirty coal operators who were robbing them in their company stores and shantytowns. According to my young informant, and later verified by parson Sam, a few minutes later it rained box cars, strike breakers, and thugs from heaven. The miners' prayer was answered.
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> Raw, sordid, beastly? Yes, as raw, sordid, beastly, and brutal as life in American mining camps before the United Mine Workers put an end to it—in part.

As often as not the labor leaders and socialist politicians sold out their supporters when it seemed a good thing (for themselves) to do. Ameringer eventually got used to this and told his audiences "that to fight such entrenched interests as reign over Oklahoma—and New Jersey—more is needed by the representatives of the people than a proletarian front." After total betrayal by an Oklahoma governor the socialists had put in office, Ameringer concluded: "Politics is the art by which politicians obtain campaign contributions from the rich and votes from the poor on the pretext of protecting each from the other." A curious sort of socialist, Ameringer, who counseled the miners he was trying to help to leave politics alone.

Like a few other reformers, Ameringer could not be bribed to forsake his life of principle:

> By the way, and apropos of nothing in particular, just when my faith in democracy and my personal fortune hit rock bottom, came a wire from Moses Annenberg, then one of *die Hauptmacher* of the Hearst organization, asking me to come to New York. Well, I went to New York, because just then I was so low in mind and cash that if his Satanic majesty had invited me to his summer resort, I would have thumbed my way in that direction.
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> The proposition Messrs Moses Annenberg and Arthur Brisbane laid before my still watery eyes was to become a Hearst scribe at an initial salary of one thousand a month (yes, $1,000), to be raised to twenty-five thousand per annum if I made good. When I declined the flattering offer on the grounds that I could not desert my Oklahoma *Leader* baby while it was about to give up its ghost, the twain offered to buy our plant at a price that would get me outright. The big idea behind buying my baby was the publication of a Hearst Sunday paper. However, hard-pressed and sorely tempted as I was, I felt the good people of Oklahoma had suffered enough from absentee ownership ministered by their native sons without having William Randolph Hearst inflicted on them. On parting, Arthur Brisbane ruefully shook his head, as if to say: "This kind of impractical person would sell America short," while the less philosophical Moe called me a damned fool.
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> Well, I wasn't. Arthur is dead. Moe became a multimillionaire, which is worse yet. On the other hand, I'm still alive and kicking, and happily so poor that no self-respecting income tax ferret would dream of snooping into my financial affairs. Besides, as the Good Book says, "What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?"

Since this is not a socialist tract, but an inquiry into the roots of human behavior, we'll quote little more of Ameringer's splendid prose, especially since he would doubtless be saying something different, today. He was no doctrinaire thinker; what really comes out in this book, which arrays the fabric and touches the nerves of American life during the first half of this century, is the jovial, unpretentious integrity of a man who did what he thought was right from day to day, all his life, while never letting a theory of social justice narrow his mind or get in the way of his spontaneous sympathy for inadequate people who are doing the best they know. He was a Gene Debs kind of socialist, and we need another quotation to illustrate what that means. During Ameringer's organizing days before World War I in Oklahoma, Debs was often the star attraction of their public meetings. Debs, he says, was a great orator, and—

> He was more than that: he was a great soul. People loved him because he loved people. Children used to flock to him as they must have flocked to the Carpenter. I remember gray-bearded farmers, who as American Railway Union strikers had followed him to defeat, rushing up to their Gene, crying, "Gene, Gene, don't you remember me any more?" And Gene remembered them always, threw his long arms around them, pressed them to his heart until their

> eyes moistened in love and gratitude to the leader who had lost them their strike, their job and their home.
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> Gene Debs was the dreamer, poet, and prophet of the weary and heavy-laden. He was of the stuff of which the prophets of Israel, the fathers of the Christian Church, the Ethan Allens, Nathan Hales, Abe Lincolns, and John Browns were made. He was a riler-up of the people by the grace of God. It didn't matter what Gene said or how he said it. He won men by the force of his magnificent personality and the power of faith within him. The people heard him gladly because he believed in them, was for them, would give his life for them, and they knew it.

Dan Hogan, Ameringer's father-in-law, who was also trying to make socialists out of Oklahoma farmers and miners, told this story:

> "We had paid Gene the customary hundred dollars honorarium and expenses for addressing one of our weekly encampments. I know it was one hundred because I often handed him the roll of bills myself. I accompanied Gene to the depot, where a woman was waiting for him on the platform. She was the widow of one of his former American Railway Union strikers, and to Gene she poured out her troubles. Whatever they were I never learned, for Gene gently led her out of my hearing, and when he returned after bidding the troubled soul good-by all he said was, 'Dan, will you lend me five bucks to pay my fare to Girard?' "

Ameringer comments:

> Some ten years later the champion of "The New Freedom" and savior of democracy in Washington [Woodrow Wilson] presented Gene with a retreat in Atlanta's Federal hoosegow behind iron bars, as punishment for having opposed America's entrance into the World War. Just as if saints could be punished, be it by imprisonment, gallows, faggot or cross! Just as if ideas could be killed by locking their possessors behind bars, hanging, shooting, starving or deporting them!

You don't read *If You Don't Weaken* for a portion of the history of the socialist movement in America, which in some sense it is, but to revel in the rollicking humanity of the author. His principles weren't at the tip of his articulate tongue—"I don't go in for morals," he says in one place--but they saturated his life as inevitably as water finds its own level. Win, lose, or draw, Oscar Ameringer was a principled man. He wrote this book about his life to tell about the fun he had living it, but a gleam of the Grail shines through its pages. Socialism was for Ameringer what the Single Tax was for Henry George, what the utopian dream of *Looking Backward* was for Edward Bellamy, and what a slaveless, self-ruled America was for Tom Paine.

Like all good books, *If You Don't Weaken* is contrapuntal. It has two melodic lines. One is the author's tract for the times, embodied in his muscular appeals for social justice, his delighting satire, his Debs-like career, and his capacity to write about the cruel effects of the Great Depression with pen dipped in compassion. But it is a study, most of all, of the timeless, placeless qualities of spontaneously decent human beings who are drawn by some mysterious tropism to work for the good of all. This is indeed the secret of the ages, the sharing soother of pain, the heartener of the oppressed, and the comforter of the failing when failure is all that an age of complacent darkness will allow.

It may be that people like Ameringer are not meant to be the realizers of their dreams—the dreams, that is, set down in their tracts. Ameringer ran for office on the socialist ticket just once. When the people of Oklahoma City failed to elect him mayor by a few hundred votes, he said:

> That was a narrow escape both for Oklahoma socialism and for me, personally. Had I been elected, I would have been just in time to take office on the eve of the collapse of the Oklahoma City boom, and that event would have been blamed on me instead of the other fellow.
>
> As for my fellow socialists, my defeat was a disguised blessing. I am not a politician, and still less an executive. They were fortunate in not having to sponsor me as their Mayor. I might have shaken their faith. . . .

Dreamers like Ameringer can never do the work of solid citizens who, when the time is ripe, turn dreams into history of a sort. For the real

dreamer, realization is always anti-climactic. Dreamers are people who are always ahead of themselves. Historians have pointed out that Paine would have made a terrible administrator. He had no head for it, and he wasn't, they say, stable enough. Edmund Burke was probably the better man for such duties, but there are moments in history when nothing good can happen without the incomparable services of a Paine.

It seems likely that Socrates, while he fought in Athens' wars, could not have served politically the city he loved so well. He had a way of going into trances, sometimes, when people wanted to talk to him. He certainly had no political tact. There he was on trial for his life, and he lectured his judges, telling them they ought to give him a pension for plying Athenian youth with questions that embarrassed their parents. Can you imagine him running any kind of country?

Then there was Paul Goodman, who wrote so much and so intelligently about what is wrong with education (and everything else) in the United States, but could never be inveigled into starting a school. People who did start schools got a bit bored with him; he would kibitz, but he wouldn't accept organizational responsibility.

In business they call this division of labor and it's perfectly respectable and necessary. Advertising managers don't make good plant superintendents, and salesmen are poor purchasing agents. And so on. This is common sense. But when it comes to envisioning a better future for all, we expect those who attempt it to prove themselves good bookkeepers, prudent managers, and cautious planners. We demand that they add to their creative daring the qualities of the super-wise—those exceedingly rare individuals who can really be all things to all men.

The question may be asked: Could we actually *use* such extraordinary individuals as models? Aren't they too far ahead of us on the path of human development? A man who knows how to do *everything* well has no more to learn from our world, and such beings seem to mingle with mankind only about once in every ten thousand years. The Hindus call such beings Avatars, and one of them, Krishna, explained to his chosen disciple:

> There is nothing, O son of Pritha, in the three regions of the universe which it is necessary for me to perform nor anything possible to obtain which I have not obtained, and yet I am constantly in action. If I were not indefatigable in action, all men would presently follow my example, O son of Pritha. If I did not perform actions these creatures would perish. . . . O son of Bharata, as the ignorant perform the duties of life from the hope of reward, so the wise man, from the wish to bring the world to duty and benefit mankind, should perform his actions without motives of interest. He should not create confusion in the understandings of the ignorant, who are inclined to outward works, but by being himself engaged in action should cause them to act also.

This is a complicated idea, but the gist of it seems captured by William James in an essay in *On Some of Life's Ideals.* Speaking of the sort of struggle to which Oscar Ameringer gave his life, James wrote:

> Society has, with all this, got to pass toward some newer and better equilibrium, and the distribution of wealth has doubtless slowly got to change: such changes have always happened, and will happen to the end of time. But if, after all that I have said, any of you expect that they will make any *genuine vital difference* on a large scale, to the lives of our descendants, you will have missed the significance of my entire lecture. The solid meaning of life is always the same eternal thing,—the marriage, namely, of some unhabitual ideal, however special, with some fidelity, courage, and endurance; with some man's or woman's pains.—And, whatever or wherever life may be, there will always be the chance for that marriage to take place.

James is not talking about this or that goal or social achievement, but the way people feel and act in relation to *any* goal or achievement—and goals or achievements change. This quality of persistent striving in Ameringer's book is what takes it out of the tract-for-the-times class. As you read, the feeling grows that all that he contended with is still there, although the external issues may be different. It is as James said: "The

changing conditions of history touch only the surface of the show." James focused on what he called "the eternal meaning," the meaning jocularly referred to by Ameringer when he spoke of his modest funds and quoted the Bible on not losing your soul.

The only progress worth thinking seriously about is progress in how we feel and think about our lives. The other things—the goals that the tracts talk about—are only relative markers in an endless sequence of change. We have to work for these goals—since they are necessary—but if they are allowed to become absolutes, then something terrible happens: transcendence is ruled out as the inner or secret principle of health in all human life, and then the vision which once upheld all human striving becomes the authority of prison rule.

Northrop Frye once remarked that science never enters and affects the decisions of everyday life except in the form of myth. So it is with a book like Ameringer's autobiography. Not his goals, but the way in which he sought them; not his achievements, but the feelings he helped to generate in others; not his theories of good and evil, but the spontaneously chosen canons which gave them form and set their limits—these are the things which are native to no time and place and therefore belong to that wondrous collection of levers we call "myth."

What then is myth? It is the form taken by the tracts which embody our self-knowledge—what we need to live by in any time. As long as we are held captive in a world of matter and circumstance, we'll need to have myths to live by. Self-knowledge, unless given objectified story form, remains too abstract for communication. Self-knowledge is what is always true for human beings in *every* circumstance. The good life, then, is always a mythic life, however artfully disguised.

REVIEW
ON "NATURAL SYSTEMS"

LOTS of people are attempting to predict the future, these days. Fortunately, there are others, perhaps more numerous, who are working hard to change the present, with a fair degree of confidence that if we do what we can now the future will take care of itself. Yet having a vision of the future is not unimportant. The vision, one could say, is needed for deciding on what we do right now. If you set out to predict, all you can hope to accomplish is a picture of what *must* happen because the causes are already in force and on the way to their visible effects. But if the idea is to create a better future, you need a vision of what should be, and then to define the first steps toward realization. Prediction leaves you passive, while vision leads to acts.

We have for review a little book about the present and the future which puts its vision at the end—in two pages of Epilogue. For reasons that will perhaps become evident, we are looking at it first in our review. The author, Sim Van der Ryn, founder of Farallones Institute, California State Architect, and head of the California Office of Appropriate Technology, sets the stage for his dream by pointing to the folly and disaster of present-day sewage systems, which spread waste and pollution around the world. Commenting on the delusion that natural reclamation systems can be replaced by chemical warfare on germs, and the belief that the energy flow of natural systems "is not essential to our well-being," he remarks that we are "just beginning to realize that a society which is tied to fossil fuels cannot last for long." The vision:

> The challenge of appropriate technology is to design a high quality environment for people that makes use of the innate harmony and productivity of natural systems. Doing this means freeing ourselves from destructive technological fixes and finding ways to create a high quality of life without destroying the life-sustaining balance of nature.
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> Images and possibilities come to mind.
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> Flying low over the flat expanse of California's great central valley, my eyes follow the thin white line of the California Aqueduct. Clear waters from a thousand tumbling Sierra streams unravel their way southward in a concrete ditch, pausing at the edge of the Tehachapi where giant pumps push the flow over the mountains into a vast artificial lake: Lake Parris, a giant flush tank for millions of Los Los Angeles toilets.
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> Flying back we skim over the Santa Clara Valley—a wide flat ribbon running south from San Francisco Bay between two lines of rounded coastal hills. Thirty years ago the most productive orchard lands on the continent, this once lush valley now grows an unbroken mat of roofs and streets—a "icky-tacky crop of asphalt and air pollution made possible by sewer lines and freeways running down the center of the valley.
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> The sewage plant stands on a ruined marsh next to the dump, its aerating booms slowly pivoting around the center of circular concrete ponds. I wonder when the marsh, a "sewage plant" of unseen complexity and intricate beauty, will once again take up its delicate dance of life and decay while the concrete monument slowly moulders to its more basic molecular form.

What is the title of this book? *The Toilet Papers* (Capra Press, Santa Barbara, $3.95). It tells how to build waterless composting toilets for the disposal of human wastes. It is a celebration of the privy as the first step toward solving the linked problems of waste and pollution. Wendell Berry says in his Foreword:

> The importance of this little book is that it begins in the awareness of effects. It proposes to solve the sewage problem by doing away with its cause. This solution springs from an elementary insight: it is possible to quit putting our so-called bodily wastes where they don't belong (in the water) and to start putting them where they do belong (on the land). When waste is used, a liability becomes an asset, and the very concept of waste disappears.

This is the larger sense of the book, which begins at the beginning in order to teach people how to think about creating a society where there is no waste, where everything gets used . . . and used and used. The charming pictures of privies ought not to distract the reader from the fact that

the book is asserting, over and over again, the Law of Return declared by Sir Albert Howard some forty or fifty years ago: "we must give back what we take out; we must restore what we have seized; if we have stopped the Wheel of Life for a moment, we must set it spinning again." The privy, or better say, composting toilets—one of which now widely in use Mr. Van der Ryn designed—is a symbol of obedience to this Law. When, from general conformity to it, human beings have gained a natural harmony for their lives, the vision given at the end of this book will come true:

> In not too many years, our vast cities and settlement patterns will be very different from now. To survive the waning days of the oil age, cities will have to reassemble themselves into coherent biological systems.
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> Cities with millions of people living on coastal desert plains using water pumped in from six hundred miles away hang on a very slender thread. As the city devoted to the care and feeding of the automobile fades, streets will be torn up and gardens planted. The soil, now compressed and lifeless dirt, will be restored to life with our composted wastes and greywater. Like the hill towns of Italy which for centuries perched themselves on the rocky unproductive hills reserving the rich bottom lands for food, the pattern can be reversed so that the ruined agricultural valleys can bloom again, and the hills will be terraced with gardens and houses. In the cities, wind-powered solar heated aquacultural greenhouses will grow fish and shrimp on wastewaters and return purified water for use in the home. The soft edges of wetlands and marshes, cushions against flood and superb biological filters of impurities, can be restored.
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> The shapeless and disintegrating urban mass bound together with cars, clocks, cheap fuels, TV and institutionalized waste can be recreated into many communities, each with its own history, its own limits, and its own future.

Seldom has a practical vision been put so engagingly. Its virtue is that it rises from the grain of life in California, and has its inspiration in a first practical step which brings both the feel and lesson of change home to individuals in an irreversible way.

It seems a good idea to add here some notes on a recent report to the Office of Appropriate Technology by Jerry Yudelson and Lynn Nelson. When change is in the offing, a great many people start asking weighty questions on how people will regard it, and how they may be affected. The report addresses itself to such inquiries, although direct answers are hardly possible. The transformation of a mechanistic system governed by economic abstractions and technological imperatives into a social and ecological organism responsive to natural and intuitive mandates can hardly be described except in terms of altered attitudes and motives and *their* consequences. The actual processes of change will be full of surprises—often good surprises, because Yankee ingenuity and frontier self-reliance are emerging once again.

Yet the report by Yudelson and Nelson, titled *Right Livelihood, Work, and Appropriate Technology,* has distinctive value as a compilation of ideas and themes from which the bywords of the years ahead will doubtless be drawn. The bibliography of the report, listing 150 titles of key books and papers, is sufficient evidence of this. On the factors bringing transition the authors say: "Just as we may be pulled into a new economic order by embracing right livelihood, so we are being pushed into a major economic transition by a variety of interrelated and seemingly intractable economic and social problems." The circumstances which both require and oppose change are given in the form of "dilemmas" by Willis Harman:

> (*a*) We need continued economic growth but we can't live with the consequence.
>
> (*b*) We need guidance of technological innovation but shun centralized control.
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> (*c*) Ever-closer coupling between individuals and organizations seems to lead inexorably in the direction of reduced liberties and system fragility.
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> (*d*) Possession of a societally-supported work role is essential to the individual's sense of self-esteem, yet the economy seems increasingly unable to provide enough satisfactory work opportunities.

> (*e*) The industrial nations will find it costly to move toward a more equitable distribution of the earth's resources; not to do so may be even more costly.

All these dilemmas and the steps begun toward their resolution have careful attention in this report. In summary, the authors say:

> The basic problem of the coming economic transition is to manage the "crisis" of dislocation and disruption as we seek to embrace and experience new values and develop new patterns of cooperative and decentralized work and social life. One thing we must do is to get away from the crisis mentality (which usually justifies dictatorial action) and begin to realize that these problems are endemic to our way of life and that we will need to "muddle through" to a new economic order, with a large number of apparently small or Insignificant changes.

"*Apparently* insignificant" applies to composting toilets.

COMMENTARY
FORMULA FOR FRUSTRATION

"DOUBLE-BIND" is a popular expression used to identify situations in which nothing works. You are "damned if you do and damned if you don't." The quotation from Willis Harman in this week's Review lists five cases of "double-bind" which, taken together, show that practically all our accustomed ways of doing things—getting what we want, solving problems—are doomed to failure.

We could hardly have a more insistent red light telling us to stop what we are doing and to figure out what is wrong and what we ought to be doing.

But there is a double-bind here, too. We don't know how to think about the meaning of "ought." We don't see any connection between moral obligation and desirable results. "Ought" has only a technical meaning for us. We *ought,* we say, to do what works, simply because that's the way things are. Works to what end? To the end we *want.* Wanting the end is all the assurance we need that it must be good. There has been no serious examination or criticism of ends for generations.

That is the way we think—or fail to think—and it is the everyday version of the scientific approach to deciding what to do. Science is a discipline of means, not an examination of ends. Weighing ends would require us to be philosophical or metaphysical, and we can't have anything like that. It wouldn't be "scientific."

This common way of thinking may be the master-pattern of the double-bind. It is an absolute barrier to intelligent change, as Paul Goodman has pointed out:

> . . . how can we get from "is" to "ought"? Modern logicians tend to deny the possibility and to hold that ethical sentences are ultimately, not propositions but commands or expressions of feeling. There is a pathos in this positivism, for these philosophers are dedicated to natural science, yet their logic makes it unthinkable to develop a naturalistic ethics. Then the search for truth and the searchers for truth are at the moral mercy of any kind of venality, fanaticism, bullying, or caprice.

Yet if you look around, you can find a few people who are busy at things which lead to no double-bind—Sim Van der Ryn is among them (see Review). They have one thing in common—their logic, program, and action always have an ethical ground. For them, the oppressive side of 'ought" is dissolved by the delight that working harmoniously—or morally—produces for them. Where does this sort of thinking begin? Van der Ryn said recently:

> I have always believed that to the extent we have the power to affect our lives, change begins within each individual heart and mind, transforming one's space first and moving out from there.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
A MELANCHOLY REPORT

READING in Colin Ward's *The Child in the City*—published in England this year by the Architectural Press and in the United States by Pantheon places a moral weight on the reader. The report on how it feels—not just looks—to be a child growing up in a modern city is so extensive, so uniform in saddening implication, that one begins to recognize how much must change before we can be comfortable about the lives of today's and tomorrow's children. Present circumstances are against the grain of a natural childhood. Because the conditions which have this effect are so common, they have become virtually acceptable, even though, when all the factors are examined and added up, they are plainly intolerable. Colin Ward collects and arrays the factors while adding them up.

This makes him some kind of expert—a kind different from what we are used to. Usually experts acquire precise knowledge about some limited area and tell us, when we ask them, what we need to know. But Mr. Ward's expertise is concerned with seeing certain things whole, in this case the effect on children, many sorts of children, of living in a modern city. Why should a man with an architectural background write a big book about children's lives?

Architects used to be thought of as people who design houses and public buildings. But as the industrial revolution came to maturity (maturity may be the wrong word), revealing its actual effects on people's lives, and as the techniques of industrialism took over control of larger and larger chunks of the socio-economic structure, it became evident that architects were also environment-makers. Some of them felt the moral responsibility involved. The tendencies of industrialism were putting an end to relationships and kinds of experience that had framed normal child development for thousands of years. These relationships were so universal and so naturally health-and-happiness-producing that nobody noticed them. Only as they disappear is anything felt to be wrong, and then, alas, we seem to require this unique sort of expert to tell us what has happened. At first we hardly believe what he says. But after a time the holistic (whole-respecting) expert is able to persuade us of the fracturing realities which bring so much unhappiness and pain to children—and of course to adults, too.

What is really wrong? The industrial society and its awful cities represent a failure of the imagination. We suppose that technology is of itself able to supply the conditions of a good life, but we do not really live in physical places, although we have to have them. We *live* in our minds and feelings, and the surrounding material structures are no more than external shells of the way we feel about them. We make up various myths about our lives, and if there is enough correspondence between the myths and our circumstances—not much is needed—we are able to enjoy good inner health and develop our myths. Maurice Samuel speaks of "the miraculous capacity of children for wringing happiness out of the most disheartening circumstances." Obviously, the circumstances aren't as important as the "miraculous capacity." But if we provide circumstances which *wither* that capacity, there will be "death at an early age." Obviously, the psychic quality of the circumstances is the important thing. We want our children to be healthy, of course, but physical health is a poor thing if the children are unable to live out their dreams. Isn't this pretty much what we are saying, for ourselves, about "technological civilization"? The enclosing necessities of technological system leave small room for the creative powers of the imagination, and little by little we are learning how this has happened and what it means. No ordinary "fix" will help us, and no simple legislative measure, however dutifully passed and assiduously administered, will help our children. Where the "miraculous capacity" has been discouraged or shut out, good intentions get reversed, no matter how generously funded, because we—all of us—live in our feelings and achieve through acts of the imagination.

In one place Colin Ward speaks of a comparison between photographs of Main Street—Main Street anywhere—taken in 1900 and ones taken in 1975.

Reading the meaning of the difference is complicated. Photography "is the most poignantly nostalgic of all the arts."

> What do we read into the faces of the children in the same old pictures? When we romanticise the past the social historians are at our elbow to remind us, as Peter Laslett does, that "Englishmen in 1901 had to face the disconcerting fact that destitution was still an outstanding feature of fully industrialized society, with a working class perpetually liable to social and material degradation. More than half of all the children of working men were in this dreadful condition, which meant 40 per cent of all children in the country. These were the scrawny, dirty, hungry, ragged, verminous boys and girls who were to grow up into the working class of twentieth-century England." The difference between the child in the British or American city in the last century and today is that the modern child survives while his predecessor very frequently did not. But once we go beyond the statistical steps to survival owed to sanitation, water supply and preventive medicine, and attempt to look qualitatively at the lives the modern city offers to its children, doubts and worries emerge. We begin to think that there is a difference between the slums of hope and the slums of despair, and being poor and being part of the culture of poverty. The rich crop of autobiographical reminiscence from the inner East End of London, for example, throws up observations and judgments which could not possibly be made by contemporary children. Dolly Scannell, who was a girl in the nineteen-twenties, writes: "Limehouse was my favorite place, near the lovely river and ships, tall houses down narrow causeways, a churchyard all grey and dreamlike with a pond in the grounds full of beautifully coloured goldfish. I could have lived at Limehouse forever."

Such splendid memories—and Colin Ward gives a lot more of them from other recollectors—are contrasted with the present-day environment of the English city of Sheffield. At a conference on "Educational Disadvantage," the city's chief educational officer, Michael Harrison, said (as quoted in the *Guardian*): "Sheffield, regarded as the national model of a cohesive working-class city, with the most progressive modern education, now has more unhappy children in its schools than it did five years ago." Colin Ward comments:

> Mr. Harrison's claim is understood to be based on a survey of 25 per cent of the Sheffield school population, an exceptionally large sample. Results so far are disclosing that family breakdown, among other things, is "spectacularly up" in 1970, when an initial survey was made. Mr. Harrison said that family breakdown could be one of the main reasons for the unhappiness the survey found. Among the other possibilities were an increase in one-parent families domestic stress and stress arising from inflation and worry about employment prospects. Mr. Harrison's speech was desperately pessimistic about local government's ability to discover, plan for or solve such problems. He could not claim, he said, that Sheffield administrators were familiar with "the realities of life" in different parts of the city. Until there was "some sort of rapproachement between the school and the community," it would be difficult to approach the problem of disadvantage. The report went on to quote Mr. Harrison's confession that no one knew whether it was anticultural attitudes, the high rates of pay now available in low-skilled jobs, or other forces which caused the undoubted apathy among many parents about educational opportunity which leads their children to under-achieve. There was also, he said, a need to think more about the way in which authorities were upsetting people by rehousing policies unmotivated by sociological knowledge. "I have never yet seen a plan which talks in intelligent terms about people," he said. "It always talks of the space people will occupy and the quality of life—but without defining what that is. . . . "

Obviously, the diverse consequences of uncontrolled industrialization have all run together and created an environment which saps the vitality and wears away at the hope of human beings. Remedies on a trouble-shooting basis can't be made to work and an over-all view doesn't seem possible because we have no understanding of the intangibles of community life—how they are generated and woven together in a favorable atmosphere. We think we have been engaged in the "real" business of life, when the fact is that we have been ignoring it for generations.

This seems the main lesson of Colin Ward's study of children in cities. The Pantheon edition is $12.95.

FRONTIERS

It's Happening All Over

YEARS ago Arthur Morgan pointed out that the homestead laws of the United States worked against the formation of communities in the settlement of the West. The pioneers, spotted on their quarter-sections, lived far apart, with little daily contact with one another. One consequence of this policy is noted by Gil Friend in an article on "Biological (Organic) Agriculture in Europe," in the Spring *CoEvolution Quarterly:*

> Europe is a community gardener's dream. They are everywhere. Some are miniature cities, with dozens of brightly painted tool sheds among the vegetables and flowers. Some look just like the community gardens we know. And some are inventively crammed into whatever space there is—a public square, a railroad right-of-way, a factory front yard. One industrial plant even grazed sheep on its lawn.
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> The cultural difference between European and American food systems which struck me most dramatically, though, was the organization of rural communities. Fly over American rural countryside, and you will see individual houses surrounded by tracts of land, with an occasional town. Do the same over much of France, for example, and the landscape is quite different: clusters of buildings in small towns surrounded by a mass of fields, then another town and more fields, and so on. Farmers commonly live in town and commute perhaps a mile or two to their fields each day, or to the several fields they rent around town. In other cases, the houses from a number of holdings are clustered together at a common corner or edge, so the family lives both on its own land and in a small community. This may be a natural outcome of small farm size. A house even in the middle of a 50-acre parcel is obviously closer to the neighbors than one in the middle of a 300 or 600 or 1,000 acre tract. Whatever the reason, one immediately notices the contrast with the isolation of the American farmstead. In Europe people are often both farmers and villagers, not sacrificing the social matrix for the biological.

European peasants—peasants everywhere—are preservers of tradition, and the Americans, eager to free themselves of bonds with the Old World, may have abandoned too many of the traditions of the past, especially those which unite agriculture and community. In 1946 (*Human Events,* Aug. 21) Henry Beston wrote of European peasant civilization as a Green Commonwealth which through the centuries cared for the land and restored life again and again after countless wars, invasions, plagues, pillages, and changes in sovereignty. Today, Gil Friend says, the European farmers tend to keep their farms small and to use intermediate technology. So far as agriculture is concerned, Europe seems healthier both culturally and economically than the United States. American organic farmers are learning from European tradition:

> Cultural factors have probably contributed a great deal to the success of biological agriculture in Europe. Europe has simply not come as far along the road of modernization, specialization, and rationalization as agri-business has managed to drag the U.S. The frontier mentality is absent; the land has been farmed a long, long time, often hundreds of years by the same family. Perhaps continuity breeds respect.

Meanwhile, in the U.S., scores of effective individuals are working to transform the urban face of America. While New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles may never look like French communities, or even Paris, from the air, spots of greenery are persistently multiplying. Two years ago *Elements* reported on hundreds of community and urban garden projects around the country. One group in St. Louis, active in urban food production, declared that "skill-intensive methods which rely on human labor rather than chemicals, machinery, and capital outlay are the future of food production in the U.S. and in the Third World."

Today brief news-items from all over tell about the development of community gardens. In Seattle, a gardening group got hold of a third of an acre of practically dead land, terraced it, and began nurturing the soil, and now Chinese cabbage, bitter melon, Japanese eggplant, and Chinese parsley are thriving crops. But to restore this land to full fertility will take about seven

years. The enthusiasm generated by such projects led to establishment of a dozen other gardening sites around the city, and King County (which includes Seattle) has sponsored an intern program to teach young would-be farmers the agricultural arts. The story of this achievement is told by Darlyn Rundberg (in *Tilth,* Winter, 1977), who helped to establish Seattle's first commun;ity garden.

Writing on similar developments in the Mid-Atlantic states (in *People & Energy* for January), David Holzman says:

> Urban gardens are sprouting up all over the region. In New York City 30 acres are under cultivation (1400 plots), and in Philadelphia 130 community gardens exist, 95% in low-income neighborhoods. . . . In the Philadelphia program eight demonstration gardens will be planted.

Also in New York:

> The Green Guerillas, a group of community activists, landscape architects, horticulturists, businessmen and others are creating gardens on the Lower East Side, Bedford Stuyvesant, and the Bronx. The GG's are assembling a clearing house on toxic substances in urban gardens and they provide guidelines for site selection to avoid lead in your lettuce.

This report tells about gardening projects in various other places and concludes by recommending *The City People's Book of Raising Food* ($4.95 from Rodale, Emmaus, Pa. 18049) by Helga and Bill Olkowski.

Darlyn Rundberg's third-of-an-acre garden project in Seattle was cultivated by senior citizens. Last year, in Berkeley (Calif.), Helga and Bill Olkowski conduoted classes in gardening for that city's senior citizens at the Integral Urban House, headquarters of the Farallones Institute. One activity of the course was the establishment of a small demonstration garden. Thousands take part in the educational programs of the Farallones Institute, which have these aims:

> To provide participants with an understanding of wholistic living systems which will render more meaning to the interface of appropriate technology and personal lifestyles and careers; to provide an atmosphere which encourages participants to explore the ecological, socio-economic and community development aspects of appropriate technology; to provide participants with first hand experience in design and construction of appropriate technology systems, emphasizing that broader community concerns must not neglect the desperate need for practical skills.

The address of Farallones Institute is Integral Urban House, 1516 Fifth Street, Berkeley, Calif. 94710.