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PREACHERS AND PRAGMATISTS

FOR long generations and centuries moralists have been declaring that self-interest is a bad thing, although with little effect on human behavior. By "bad thing" they meant morally wrong, which in turn meant contrary to the dictates of religion or a violation of what in our hearts we know to be right and good. Then, starting, say, in the eighteenth century, for the twofold reason of disgust for the hypocrisies of religion and the rise of the scientific mode of thinking, observant men began to say that, regardless of what the moralists claim, self-interest is the source of the driving energy which makes the world go round. You can't get rid of it, and shouldn't expect to, because that would be contrary to nature and common experience. Some regulation may be necessary to prevent abuse, but in general the free play of self-interest would lead to the good of all.

Adam Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) with this idea in mind. Slogans based on his thinking still echo around the world, and his remaining followers have no trouble in pointing out that self-interest is a fact of human life, while people who have accumulated some wealth usually believe that it is theirs because they followed a law of nature (the path of virtue). We know what they also believe about regulation: they want the kind that will enable them to keep their money and to get more. Since wealth is power, the arrangements we have—through politics and regulatory law—are a reflection of this intention, somewhat qualified, it is true, by social considerations and the pressures which the working classes are able to exert through their own growing power. Political economy is the area of debate concerning the justice and feasibility in the methods of controlling self-interest.

Today other voices are being heard. A fresh generation of moralists (often so well disguised that they don't seem like moralists at all) is making a more compelling declaration: Self-interest *doesn't work.* These are moralists with empirical (historical) observation in the foreground of their work and argument. Sometimes they say simply that our short-term self-interest is attacking and destroying our long-term self-interest, while pointing out that it becomes hard to distinguish between long-term self-interest and common good. (The distinction may have importance in ethics, but is not essential for winning arguments.)

What else do these new moralists say? Well, they may not say it in these words (some of them do), but what they really claim, and are able to show, is that concentration on short-term self-interest has a blinding effect. We lose sight of the necessities of the self-interest of only a few years in the future. It would be much more "scientific," they say, to look at and anticipate the consequences of what we are doing now, than to ignore, because we are so busy making money (or trying to), the plain facts of economic cause and effect. These moralists, in short, are individuals who have caught up with the enormous complexity of the technological civilization and have become able to generalize with impressive simplicity about what we are doing, and to some degree about what ought to be done. What they say is often convincing, and sometimes so indisputable that they seem to be calling our attention to undiscerned laws of nature. And behind what they say there seems a ringing confirmation of what the older generation of moralists sometimes declared was *right.*

We have illustrations in two books that have come out this year. One is Geoffrey Kirk's selection of the writings and speeches of E.F. Schumacher on energy, a powerful book. It does

not replace the classic *Small Is Beautiful*, but strengthens and amplifies it. Mr. Kirk has drawn on twenty-five years of Schumacher's thinking. His book is titled *Schumacher on Energy* and is published by Jonathan Cape (London) at £7.95. The other book is Paul Hawken's *The Next Economy* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, $14.50), which has equal importance. Mr. Hawken is a businessman, and economics editor of *CoEvolution Quarterly*, with the ability, as thinker and writer, to turn neglected implications of human behavior into meanings which are inescapably clear. He seems to have just the right touch for influencing a very large audience of readers in the right direction.

First, *Schumacher on Energy*. This book reveals Schumacher in his role of public servant in Britain. A German-born (1911) Rhodes scholar, he emigrated to England in 1937 to avoid contributing to the Nazi "war machine." Both J. M. Keynes and Lord Beveridge recognized his exceptional insight as an economist and made use of his abilities. He became a British citizen after the war and was appointed Economic Advisor to the Allied Control Commission, being given the task of restoring the German coal industry. In 1950 he joined the British National Coal Board as Economic Advisor and later became the director of statistics and then head of planning. During the twenty years he served in these capacities he was twice sent abroad by Britain to advise governments overseas—Burma (in 1955) and India (in 1962). It was his experience at first hand of the economic needs of these countries in the East that led him to formulate the conception of Intermediate Technology and then to go before the world with the message of its crucial importance for the developing countries. *Small Is Beautiful* embodies that inspiration and an account of the activities to which it led.

The present volume, *Schumacher on Energy*, provides his thinking about coal as a source of energy for Britain. While the book is rich in all aspects of the subject, its major focus is on one point: Britain needed to keep its coal mines in efficient operation, no matter what the prospects for other sources of energy. He began saying this as the Coal Board Advisor in 1952. His papers gave the reasons. The issue became urgent in 1957 when imported oil, for a complex of reasons, became cheap and plentiful. The British government decided to close the mines. What good was coal when oil was cheaper and handier? So, during 1958 and 1959, eighty-five collieries were closed, ending employment for nearly 30,000 miners. This policy continued throughout the 1960s, against Schumacher's counsel and protest. During this period, as he later pointed out, "nearly half the British coal industry was abandoned as 'uneconomic'—and, once abandoned, it is virtually lost forever."

As Schumacher said in 1974:

> In the 1960s the coalminers were told that they were not wanted, and it was only due to the kindheartedness of society that all the pits were not closed at once. Under pressure from the government, the mass media and public opinion, we were forced to abandon about half the industry and were told that oil would for ever remain cheap and plentiful. No reasoned case against this extraordinary thesis ever made an impression, and so, as you know, we had to run down the coal industry even to the point of telling able-bodied miners aged 55 that we would actually pay them to come out of the pits. They were not wanted.

Why was it so important to keep the mines in productive operation, even though oil had become a cheaper fuel? Schumacher gave the answer in a talk to engineers in 1963:

> To close a pit is an irreversible decision. Once a pit is closed it is not possible to re-open it except by the expenditure of a vast amount of capital. To keep a pit on a care and maintenance basis is so expensive that, in fact, it is never done. So these irreversible decisions have to be taken and they have to make sense, not just now, but also twenty, thirty, forty years hence.

Even then he saw that the oil supplies of the future were basically uncertain, that nuclear

energy was more of a big question mark than a reliable resource. He pointed out in 1966:

> There has been a very intensive nuclear energy programme in the last five or seven years but it has been totally uneconomic, and the latest stations that have come on stream are still producing power at a cost which could be compared with a colliery that made a loss of £5 per ton of coal. The justification for this vast expenditure, in spite of total lack of viability, was that we did not want to make ourselves unduly dependent on imported oil, nuclear energy being a semi-indigenous fuel although we have to import the uranium. This thinking in 1955 was quite sound, but what has happened? These vastly uneconomic stations have been integrated into the British fuel economy in such a way that they did not reduce Britain's dependence on imported fuel supplies but worked to the detriment of the coal industry. Instead of using a colliery that had already been paid for, society has spent a vast amount of money on a totally uneconomic nuclear reactor, this simply substituting one fuel for another. The outcome has been, not that Britain's dependence on imported fuel has been reduced, but that many additional collieries have had to be shut.
>
> The insurance policy that Western Europe, and particularly Britain, can take out is to approach its one important indigenous fuel supplier, the local industry, in the spirit of a good householder. I suggest that this insurance policy would be very cheap indeed, the common people would not even notice its cost. But unfortunately, as a society, we are doing the opposite; we are telling the public and the coal miners, that coal is a dying industry, or at any rate a declining industry.

Why was there so little foresight? Short-term self-interest is the only explanation. Oil is cheaper, the conventional experts said, so who needs coal?

In *Small is Beautiful* (1973), Schumacher commented:

> Even today, soothsayers are still at work suggesting that there is no problem. During the 1960s, it was the oil companies who were the main dispensers of bland assurances, although the figures they provided totally disproved their case. Now, after nearly half the capacity and much more than half the workable reserves of the Western European coal industries have been destroyed, they have changed their tune. It used to be said that OPEC would never amount to anything, because Arabs could never agree with each other, let alone non-Arabs; today it is clear that OPEC is the greatest cartel monopoly the world has ever seen. . . . The oil-producing countries, meanwhile, are beginning to realize that money alone cannot build new sources of livelihood for their populations. To build them needs, in addition to money, immense efforts and a great deal of time. Oil is a "wasting asset," and the faster it is allowed to waste, the shorter is the time available for the development of a new basis of economic existence. The conclusions are obvious: it is in the real longer-term interest of both the oil-exporting and the oil-importing countries that the "life-span" of oil should be prolonged as much as possible. The former need time to develop alternate sources of livelihood and the latter need time to adjust their oil-dependent economies to a situation—which is absolutely certain to arise within the lifetime of most people living today—when oil will be scarce and very dear. The greatest danger to both is a continuation of rapid growth in oil production and consumption throughout the world.

Why did the British ignore Schumacher's advice to keep the coal mines going? After offering two or three explanations, Russell Kirk ends his Introduction by saying:

> Whatever the reasons, the results for Britain and the other developed countries were calamitous economically and politically. Because of the neglect of the coal industry the choice of substituting indigenous energy for imported oil when prices soared from 1974 up to the present day was not available. . . .Industrial activity in Britain has never regained the levels achieved before 1974. Schumacher's belief in the need to preserve alternative choices has been ignored and the British people are still having to live with the consequences.

Well, the British government—supported, we should add, by the British people—ignored the great good sense offered by Schumacher and some others, made a terrible, an inexcusable mistake, and all the people are paying for it now.

Something similar happened in the United States, which is well described by Paul Hawken in *The Next Economy*, and again the government seems primarily at fault. In a middle chapter Hawken says:

> U.S. government, like big business, has defined its role as the gatherer and keeper of information rather than the distributor of that information to society. One of the enormous vanities of being at the locus of incoming information is to think that one is consequently best qualified to act on it. There is no better example of this than Washington's response to the rise of oil prices. At that time there was federal regulation of oil and natural gas prices. Because of political pressure, President Nixon did not try to lift controls on oil. When Ford succeeded Nixon, he requested that Congress deregulate the prices of both natural gas and oil in order to encourage conservation. Ford also proposed a $3-per-barrel tariff on imported oil to further discourage its consumption. But the Democratic-controlled Congress had different ideas and instead lowered the maximum selling price of oil by 15 per cent. So while the rest of the world was paying over $15 a barrel, the United States was paying closer to $8 for its domestic oil.

Good old Congress, people said. "They're really saving us money!" However—

> The retention of price controls was supposed to protect consumers from high prices; instead, consumers were fooled. The price of a commodity in the marketplace is important information. By controlling prices (information), the government was in effect spreading disinformation throughout the economy. The American people, once the recessionary shock of OPEC's price hikes wore off in 1975, returned to buying big cars and burning vast amounts of motor fuel. Thus the government was rewarding consumptive behavior when consumers should have been conserving and learning to adapt to an era of expensive energy. Similarly, energy-intensive businesses were not provided with sufficient incentives to invest in more energy-efficient and productive machinery and technology. One result was the near-bankruptcy of Chrysler, burdened by the fact that its customers continued to demand large cars through the seventies and also that it was making its cars in antiquated and inefficient factories. When the price of oil climbed again after the Iranian revolution in 1979, big cars became a glut on the market and Chrysler initially could not compete with the Japanese in efficient production of small, high-mileage cars. Between 1978 and 1981 Chrysler's market share dropped from 12.3 per cent to 7.1 per cent, displacing forty thousand workers from their jobs . . It appears that U.S. candidates view politics as a game of obfuscation, as demonstrated by their uncertainty about how much information should be allowed to enter the political dialogue. Candidates for President in 1980 should have told the American people that the economy was so laden with past excesses and political conveniences that whoever gained power would preside over an economic mess for at least four years.

No doubt we can agree that for what happened in England concerning the coal mines and what happened in America to make us think big cars were still the right thing, the politicians should be blamed. But we should pause before adopting this conclusion. Politicians, the best of them to their sorrow, have learned that the repetition of unpleasant or unwelcome truths, however important, is not the way to get elected or to stay in office. In wartime things are different. Winston Churchill could tell the British that they were in for an ordeal of "blood, sweat, and tears," and they applauded him for it and remained cheerful themselves. But only Schumacher and a few others were far-sighted enough to see that a much less sacrificial policy of conservation, uncomfortable but necessary, was required by a Britain that would never again have the cheap oil to which the people had become accustomed. Nobody "important" was willing to try to generate the martial spirit in order to accomplish everyday conservation. Japan has been able to do it—whether for long-term good or otherwise remains to be seen—but Americans are doubtless too spoiled by past good times to respond to ordinary appeals. They preferred the "disinformation" released by Congressional decision, and now we have about ten million unemployed, for this and related reasons.

There is a sense in which both Schumacher and Hawken have in common one fundamental contention. They reject Garrett Hardin's argument that appeals to conscience in behalf of the common good are useless and even counterproductive. In a musing portion of "The Tragedy of the Commons" Hardin argues:

> The long-term disadvantage of an appeal to conscience should be enough to condemn it; but has serious short-term disadvantages as well. If we ask a

> man who is exploiting a commons to desist "in the name of conscience," what are we saying to him? What does he hear?—not only at the moment but also in the wee small hours of the night when, half asleep, he remembers not merely the words we used but also the nonverbal communication cues we gave him unawares? Sooner or later, consciously or subconsciously, he senses that he has received two communications, and that they are contradictory: (i) (intended communication) "If you don't do as we ask, we will openly condemn you for not acting like a responsible citizen; (ii) (the unintended communication) "If you *do* behave as we ask, we will secretly condemn you for a simpleton who can be shamed into standing aside while the rest of us exploit the commons.

There is certainly some truth in this analysis, but it applies with force only to those who rely on preaching, who simply say that self-interest is a bad thing. By contrast, those who point to the practical consequences of mass self-interest, using both existing evidence and foresight, engage another aspect of human nature. They are attempting to arouse understanding, not guilt feelings. Hardin would seem to be suggesting that this is impossible. Yet, *he* understands the result of accumulating self-interest; is he saying that other people are not equal to this feat of intelligence? Can there be no moral evolution? If there can, then understanding how and why self-interest does not work is a clear possibility. What is science, philosophically, but the capacity to see ahead? This is the Promethean genius—Prometheus means foresight—and we all have at least the germs of this ability. What gets in the way of its development? The answer is simple enough: preoccupation with immediate self-interest. That is why the British chose cheap oil and closed the mines. That is why Congress regulated the price of oil when it should have been allowed to find its own level—because Congressmen like to be popular with voters.

There seems a sense in which both Schumacher and Hawken have combined the spirit of science with moral insight—an outspoken combination with Schumacher, low-key but there in Hawken. Morality and long-term good may not be identical in principle, but they inevitably converge in practice. Preachers please take note. It is science and thinking (plus *x*) which transforms self-interest into devotion to the good of all.

REVIEW
WHAT'S WRONG, WHAT MAY BE RIGHT

WE have four useful books for review, two of them diagnostic, two making positive proposals for change. These books are confirming evidence of the fact that we are no longer floundering in ignorance. They show that there is ample to overflowing information on what is wrong with our lives, and plenty of intelligent and thought-out suggestions concerning what ought to be done.

For a beginning, then, we quote from *Awakening from the American Dream* (Universe, 1976, $4.95) by Rufus E. Miles, Jr., who sets out to show that there are psychological and social limits to growth as well as the material limits pointed out by the Club of Rome reports. He says in a concluding chapter:

> The limits to physical growth in the overdeveloped world, the limits to population increase in the underdeveloped world, and the limits to human capacity in both worlds to design and manage extremely complex systems of interdependence through the political process—these three factors, in combination, are now beginning to bring about a profound alteration in the momentum and direction of history. It could be the most profound of all, since never before has human kind pressed against such intractable limits. And never before have people been able to see that they are straining the resources of the earth and the capacities of their psyches and nervous systems to such a degree that they cannot long continue on their present course. Either they must consciously shift direction away from continued obsession with material growth or their social vehicle will simply break down.

Evidence for this is presented throughout the volume, should anyone still need its persuasion. A comment by the author goes more deeply into the problem in a discussion of human responsibility. Our Founding Fathers, Mr. Miles points out, probably never thought of adding a Bill of Responsibilities to the Bill of Rights. In the relatively decentralized society of their time, the fulfillment of responsibility was taken for granted. People were neighborly and naturally helped one another. Moreover, formal (political) definition of responsibility would probably wither its essential if undefined source. But today we are more a nation of strangers than neighbors:

> When communities are small enough so that each person recognizes by sight and knows the names of most of the persons he or she sees each day and feels that he or she knows or has some sort of meaningful access to the leaders of the community and role in it, the concept of responsibility can be and usually is inextricably integrated with daily living. The larger the social unit, the more difficult it becomes to achieve this mesh, and when the political unit becomes a huge city, where people live in mammoth high-rise apartment complexes, shop in supermarkets, know few of the people they see on the streets, have no way of distinguishing "neighbors" from strangers and therefore belong to no community, the voluntary exercise of social responsibility becomes more exceptional and heroic than normal.

This may be a more important "law" than the one about supply and demand.

Food, Poverty, and Power (Spokesman, Bertrand Russell House, Gamble Street, Nottingham, 1982, £3.5) comes to us from England. The underlying theme is the same as that found in Lappé and Collins' *Food First*, but drawing on a wide selection of European sources. The author is Anne Buchanan, who says:

> The present world economic system requires food to be grown first of all not to feed people but to make a profit; prices must be kept high even if it means dumping food needed to keep people alive. Yet if hunger is the result of man-created structures, and not of inexorable physical conditions, then mankind can change those structures and eliminate hunger and the poverty with which it goes hand in hand. . . .
>
> Today, and for at least twenty years now, about one tenth of humanity is said to go to bed hungry every night; in the non-Communist Third World one in every four people does not get the minimum needed to stay alive in the long term. In Marshall Sahlin's words: "This is the era of hunger unprecedented. Now, in the time of greatest technical power, starvation is an *institution*."

To add to the irony of the situation, we quote from the *Progressive* of last June:

> The U.S. Department of Agriculture has enough surplus food in storage to supply nine bushels of grain and ninety-five pounds of other edibles to every hungry man, woman, and child in America. . . . Storage costs alone amount to $600,000 a week. . . . While the food warehouses bulge, the nation's soup kitchens, food banks, and emergency food services are inundated by growing numbers of the hungry. More and more Americans are forced to forage for food wherever they can find it.

"The problem," spelled out with facts and figures in this book, "is not so much the number of people or the amount of arable land but rather whether the people have the opportunity to grow (and eat) the food they need." The problem is not land but *access* to the land, plus the initial help needed to get subsistence agriculture going. Perhaps the most moving quotation in this book is from Josué de Castro's *The Geography of Hunger:*

> I asked the men, "What are you carrying wrapped in that hammock, brothers?" And they answered, "We carry a dead body, brother." So I asked . . . "Was he killed or did he die a natural death?" "That is difficult to answer, brother. It seems more to have been a murder." "How was the man killed? With a knife or a bullet, brothers?" I asked. "It was neither a knife nor a bullet; it was a much more perfect crime. One that leaves no sign." "Then how did they kill this man?" I asked, and they calmly answered: "This man was killed by hunger, brother."

What sort of neighborhood has our world become, where this explanation of death has become so commonplace—an "institution," as Sahlin put it? Who is to blame? If no one is to blame—just the "brute facts" of modern life—then *everyone* is to blame. Yet who feels "responsible"? Where do you begin to work for change? Who knows how to "teach" responsibility? Meanwhile, as Rufus Miles has said, ordinary human decency has become almost a heroic act.

The two other books we have are in a sense inventories of possible change. One is titled *The Alternative Way of Life,* a report of the first international Conference on Communal Living (Communes and Kibbutzim), issued by the Kibbutz Movement Organizing Committee, P.O.B. 1777, Tel-Aviv, Israel. It was natural for the Kibbutz movement to host a gathering from communes in many other parts of the world. This movement, now a major factor in the economic if not the cultural life of Israel, began seventy years ago when a handful of young people resolved to live in community and established the first kibbutz at Degania, in the Jordan Valley. They had no blueprint, but developed their mode of association as needs and problems emerged. For example, education "became a question when the second child was born." Because the women wanted to work in the fields along with the men, communal childcare was devised. One member traveled around the world, studying childcare in other communities—among the Dukhobors in Western Canada for example—and they worked out what seemed the best way for Israeli people. A contributor says:

> It is worth bearing in mind that in the beginning seven people took this road, 72 years ago, in Degania. The sum-total of all people living today in the different kinds of communities is surely a very small minority of mankind. Numerical sizes are, however, unimportant. From the seven grew the movement which was the main bearer of the Jewish Renaissance movement and of the establishment of the State of Israel; it is likely that the small minority in all countries, aware of the meaning of its task, can be the guide for a better future in the world of the coming age.

This book is filled with the thinking of communitarians from kibbutz members and communitarians from other countries. Following are the observations of a Danish "delegate," Bernt Djurs.

> I've been living in a kibbutz for a week and I keep comparing it to what I've seen in other places. . . I am speaking in the position of having lived in a commune for some ten years, a small commune of less than 10 adults and four children, but this is characteristic of many communes in West Europe. They are very small. . . .
>
> Internally kibbutz is an incredibly socialist society. On the other hand externally they are much

> more capitalist than I ever dreamed of. Internally it is fantastic what they have accomplished. . . .
>
> We have to work much more to influence mainstream decision-making on the national level. . . Changing the rationality of technology is a social question and communes should perhaps join a greater movement. We are trying to form a popular movement, to enlighten people about new media in Denmark.

This seems a representative sample of the intelligence revealed in full measure by *The Alternative Way of Life*—a book of 140 pages.

An ideal text for the kind of thinking and planning the Dane communitarian proposes would be *Renewable Energy—The Power to Choose*, published this year by Norton for the Worldwatch Institute. The authors are Daniel Deudney and Christopher Flavin, and their work has the characteristic thoroughness and reliability of the publications of the Institute (headed by Lester R. Brown). They say at the beginning:

> The aim of this book is to draw on the decade's experience with renewable energy and critically assess its potential. Ten years of trial and error have weeded out the less promising technologies, so the emphasis here is on the major sources of renewable energy with the most potential. Passive solar design, active solar collectors, solar voltaic cells, wood fuel energy from other plants and wastes, hydropower, wind power, and geothermal units are covered at length, while such limited—or limiting—options as wave power and solar satellites are discussed briefly. Although obstacles still surround the use of these eight major sources, their collective potential is enormous.

In short, fundamental change is already on the way. This book examines the means at the nuts-and-bolts level, distinguishing and appraising. It is a thoroughly practical book of more than 400 pages, concluding:

> In the long run, humanity has no choice but to rely on renewable energy. No matter how abundant they may seem today, eventually coal and uranium will run out. The choice before us is practical. We simply cannot afford to make more than one energy transition within the next generation. We have not money enough or time.

COMMENTARY
IS IT REALLY "FREE"?

A READER in New York, sending in his renewal—after saying pleasant things for the editors to read about MANAS—adds this comment:

> My only suggestion is that you think through your gut hostility to a free-market system approach to economics with all its uncertainties—e.g., environmental short-sightedness: Is any other system of social organization compatible with individualism, decentralization, and humane responsiveness to people's desires?
>
> A free society is inconceivable to me apart from a free market. Perhaps you might include the works of Ludwig von Mises or F.A. Hayek among those commented upon for MANAS readers.

Well, in years past we have looked into the works of both von Mises and Hayek, finding them useful as intelligent critics of *Omnipotent Government*, to recall von Mises' best known book. However, our comment in MANAS for Sept. 28, 1949, might serve (in part) as reply to our reader. Von Mises had been retained by the oil industry to warn against the threat of co-ops in the production and sale of oil. After considering his argument, as given in a *Nation* article, we said:

> One would think that, as a critic of government monopoly, this scholarly advocate of free enterprise would be equally opposed to monopoly in any form, for it is not only government monopoly or interference which menaces the "unhampered market" economy to which he is so devoted. Any sort of monopoly threatens free trade, and that is precisely why the co-ops are of such great value and significance.

For light on the services of co-ops in this respect, one might read what they accomplished in breaking commercial monopolies in Sweden, in the now "old" book, *Sweden: The Middle Way*, by Marquis Childs.

It would be folly to deny the virtues of competition and the free market on a small scale. But evils almost as bad as political interference and control result when commercial enterprises become so powerful that they are able, by a variety of means, to erase competition and become *de facto* monopolies. One does not object to the free market when it amounts to an honest discipline confronted by all, but one need read only a book or two to see that today the "free market" idea is a fraudulent slogan, while admitting that State Capitalism (socialism) is no doubt worse (in terms of actual performance, not ideal theory).

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

JAPANESE CHILDREN, AND ADULTS

EARLIER this year, Review (June 8) took note of figures to the effect that while the average Japanese auto worker produces between 30 and 40 cars a year, the American worker produces between 20 and 25. There have been dozens of articles about the legendary efficiency of Japanese industry, and several books. American managers have been going to Japan to discover some of their secrets. One would think that "production" is all that we can learn from the Japanese! That is the trouble with learning about other countries from journalism: We are obliged to see them only through the lens of momentary self-interest!

Then, of course, after a year or so of astonished praise of how the Japanese are perfecting the production techniques of our major obsession—the automobile—there come the critics with sharpened scalpels who tell us what is wrong with what they are doing. Neither account can be just. First you read about workers who sing the company anthem every morning, and then, six months later, you read that such ceremonies are not spontaneous, but performed under pressure. And you are left with contradiction as a way of forming impressions of the Japanese. This method of learning about the world will doubtless continue until we develop another conception of the good life to take the place of our "always more" habits of assigning value. Yet it must be admitted that the Japanese are now really infected with the American sickness.

A long article by John Junkerman in the *Progressive* for last May, "The Japanese Model," presents something of a psychoanalysis of the "miracle" of Japanese production. The writer points out that the Japanese drive to lead the world of technology and economic achievement grows out of a "crisis mentality" which overtook the country during the years of post-war destitution. The leaders and the people feel vulnerable and, like the rest of us, long for security. Having limited space and resources, they could, they decided, work harder and more faithfully than anyone else. They think of themselves as an enormous middle class, persuaded that Japan's capitalism is "egalitarian." And this is the doctrine of national propaganda Junkerman says:

> The myth of egalitarianism has been sustained by another—that authority and wealth are distributed according to merit. Merit, in turn, is determined by the educational system, with its rigorous examinations that channel students into a wide range of institutions, from the elite (such as the University of Tokyo) down to technical schools and junior colleges. The burden, and it is a heavy one, is on the individual to prove himself or herself worthy.

Worthiness is an excellent goal, but does anyone ask about worthiness for what? Junkerman goes on:

> This neatly constructed social mechanism—a consensus-oriented growth economy supported by an ostensibly egalitarian meritocracy—is the heart of the Japanese system. . . .Because of the importance of the education system in determining future status, parents have taken to enrolling their children in special classes starting at age three or four. Competition for admission to quality kindergartens is intense and the pressure builds from that time on. A survey of Tokyo residents showed a remarkable 20 per cent of total family income spent on education and supplementary tutoring for children. In extreme cases, half of the family budget is devoted to schooling.

Doubtless there are some Japanese parents with other views of worthiness, but doubtless, also, they are comparatively few in number—as in other countries where the production sickness has made decisive inroads. (John Holt has been to Japan, finding enthusiastic audiences there. You could call such people a "saving remnant.") Meanwhile the doleful account by Junkerman continues:

> The pressures to perform do not leave the children's lives untouched. In one Tokyo ward, a survey showed that half of all fourth-grade pupils attend special schools until 7 P.M. Not surprisingly, a third of fourth-graders and more than 70 per cent of

ninth-graders complained of constant fatigue in their daily lives.

The psychic costs continue into people's working lives: The quality-control fever that has infected most Japanese enterprises has given birth to a new psychological disorder, "QC neurosis." At the Toyota auto company, workers tell of an employee who committed suicide when he could not come up with an efficiency suggestion to present to his group. Another Toyota worker compiled an award-winning record of sixty suggestions per month until he ran out of ideas and suffered a nervous breakdown, at last report, he was sending meaningless suggestions to his boss from his bed in a psychiatric ward.

The *Progressive* writer believes that eventually the people will revolt, and reports the dissatisfaction of many parents. The Japanese system, he says, "is riddled with internal tensions and contradictions." Yet the older generation of Japanese leaders, men of "austere integrity," is dying out, now being replaced by "a new breed of technocrats who lack charisma and authority." From them will come incessant calls "for a renewed dedication to the national cause of economic performance"—ever more strident as time goes on.

Another slant on Japanese production figures was provided by a spokesman for American machinists and aerospace workers, William P. Winpisinger, in the *Washington Spectator* for May 15. He begins by pointing out that much of Japan's economic growth had its start in military co-production agreements between Japanese companies and U.S. corporations, under which the Japanese adapted the technology to civilian production, while the Americans went on making devices for the military. Mr. Winpisinger recites some little known facts:

While the Japanese work longer hours—a 5½ and 6-day week—and have fewer holidays and shorter vacations than American and European workers, Japanese wage increases have outrun productivity changes, as they have with us. Over the last five years, average wages in Japan rose 42.6% compared with a productivity rise of 19%.

Three quarters of Japanese workers are considered "temporary" and have no job security, let alone a lifetime security. There are two very distinct classes of employees in Japanese industry: (1) "Regular" employees. who work for the largest firms, have job security, higher pay, cleaner jobs, shorter hours, subsidized housing, vacations and other perks. (2) Temporary or subcontract employees, who often work during their entire careers next to permanent employees but have no job security, do the dirty jobs for longer hours, less pay, and no fringe benefits.

It is almost a "feudal" cottage-industry system, with "subcontracting" firms operating within the factory walls of the largest enterprises. This explains why some of the Japanese labor productivity figures in the steel and auto industries seem so impressive. The temporary and subcontract employees are not counted.

Well, there is surely truth in all this, just as there is truth in what Miles Shishido said (quoted in June 8 Review) to explain Japanese production: " . . . the main reasons must be that company is family, and worker and management are not in an adversary relationship, but a cooperative one. On both sides, rights and freedoms have been moderated for the sake of harmony and mutuality and company success."

Meanwhile, in a letter to the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* for last May 1, a resident in Japan told about an acquaintance who "took a dealer maintenance course at a Japanese motorcycle factory" and found that "the regimentation and authoritarianism" was much worse "than his U.S. military service." This correspondent quotes from Satoshi Kamata's *Japan in the Passing Lane* (Kamata worked on the assembly line in a Japanese auto factory) who said that "Toyota workers recalled off-hand some twenty suicides in the past year—three in one week!"

What does one say to that? Not only that it may be a selected fact, although an impressive one, but that such reports call for literary recourse to the prophetic soul of Lafcadio Hearn and how he felt about the two sides of Japan. In these days of "bottom-line" reporting one needs to read the other side, if only to keep in balance. (And see also the appreciation of Japanese management by Paul Hawken in *The Next Economy*.)

FRONTIERS

Is Death a Friend?

DEATH seldom obtains discussion as a "frontier"—which it plainly is—probably because it is as plainly inevitable: what is the use of marshalling opinion about something you can do nothing about? However, in recent years there has been growing insistence that we can do something about death, perhaps put it off indefinitely; and that, according to a species of common sense, would be *very good!*

But would it? asks Leon Kass, M.D., who teaches "Human Biology" at the University of Chicago. Dr. Kass is a modern stoic philosopher who, after deliberation, decides that we should leave well enough alone. Back in 1971 (Nov. 19 issue) he contributed to *Science* a paper questioning the wisdom—indeed, the right—of the molecular biologists to remodel the human organism through genetic modifications. Why, he asks, should we put biologists in charge of our lives, if biology has no knowledge of or anything to say about the finest qualities of humans?

> We are witnessing the erosion, perhaps the final erosion, of the idea of man as something splendid or divine, and its replacement with a view that sees man, no less than nature, as simply more raw material for manipulation and homogenation. Hence our peculiar moral crisis. We are in turbulent seas without a landmark precisely because we adhere more and more to a view of nature and of man which both gives us more power and, at the same time, denies all possibility of standards to guide its use. Though well-equipped, we know not who we are or where we are going. We are left to the accidents of our hasty, biased, and ephemeral judgments.

We may know some of the rules for manipulating organic processes, but what do we—or science—know of "things in themselves"? Science has no explanation of the human love of justice, says little or nothing about the wonder of human thought and speech, and gives no consideration to the almost continuous engagement of human beings in moral discourse.

> Can such a view of "science" yield any knowledge about the nature of man, or indeed, about the nature of anything? Our questions appear to lead back to the most basic of questions: What does it mean to know? What is it that is knowable?

In key with the theme of this paper is "The Case for Mortality" by Dr. Cass, in the Spring *American Scholar*. Here he gives attention to the researches and intentions of the National Institute on Aging, which seeks "prolongation of healthy and vigorous life," and even, perhaps, an ultimate "victory over mortality." Dr. Kass repeats the familiar reasons for wanting to live longer, noting that if we should find a way to last, say, ten years more, in reasonably good health, we would hardly then be ready to embrace death with good will and readiness, but would doubtless say, why not twenty years instead of only ten!

> Though what we desire is an empirical question, I suspect we know the answer: the attachment to life—or the fear of death—knows no limits, certainly not for most human beings: It turns out that the simple answer is the best: we want to live and not to wither and not to die. For most of us, especially under modern secular conditions in which more and more people believe that this is the only life they have, the desire to prolong the life span (even modestly) must be seen as expressing a desire *never* to grow old and die. However naive their counsel, those who propose immortality deserve credit: They honestly and shamelessly expose this desire.

We said at the beginning that Dr. Cass is a stoic philosopher. Like the Roman stoics, he will not invoke the promise of eternal life—survival after death—in making a case for mortality. First he asks us to consider that having a lot of vigorous seventy, eighty, and ninety year-olds around would upset our careful calculations about "the economy." There would be fewer, almost no jobs for the younger generations coming along. Centralized "planning" would be necessary, and we have already had enough of that. Planners often make terrible mistakes, and when this happens on a national scale all we can do is live with the results. Moreover, when you get old, life often seems much less interesting and boredom might ensue. Dr. Cass asks:

> Could longer, healthier life be less satisfying? How could it be, if life is good and death is bad? Perhaps the simple view is in error. Perhaps mortality is not simply an evil, perhaps it is even a blessing—not only for the welfare of the community, but even for us as individuals. How could this be?

He wonders:

> Could life be serious or meaningful without the limit of mortality? Is not the limit on our time the ground of our taking life seriously and living it passionately? . . . . Perhaps if we lived indefinitely, we would have no need of engagements, seriousness, beauty, or virtue. For we would be altogether different beings, perhaps capable of other satisfactions and achievements—though God only knows what they would be.

At the end Dr. Cass gets around to his real point—one worth making. It is that the hunger for longer life—even bodily immortality—does not represent our true goal, but is symbolic of a deeper yearning.

> That so many cultures speak of a promise of immortality and eternity suggests, first of all, a certain truth about the human soul: the human soul yearns for, longs for, aspires to some condition, some state, some goal toward which our earthly activities are directed but which cannot be attained during earthly life. Our soul's reach exceeds our grasp; it seeks more than continuance; it reaches for something beyond us, something that for the most part eludes us. . . . Our distress with mortality is the derivative manifestation of the conflict between the transcendent longings of the soul and the all-too-finite powers and fleshly concerns of the body.

We think that if we could go on living in a body, something wonderful might happen, we might achieve wholeness of mind and soul. But this, Dr. Cass proposes, is illusory:

> Mere continuance will not buy happiness. Worse, its pursuit threatens human happiness by distracting us from the goal(s) toward which our souls naturally point. By diverting our aim, by misdirecting so much individual and social energy toward the goal of bodily immortality, we may seriously undermine our chances for living as well as we can and for satisfying to some extent, however incompletely, our deepest longings for what is best.

There is this final irony: "It is probably no accident that it is a generation whose intelligentsia proclaim the meaninglessness of life that embarks on its indefinite prolongation and that seeks to cure the emptiness of life by extending it."