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THE IRREPRESSIBLE QUESTION

IT'S getting harder and harder to be an earnest capitalist. The tripod of pilings—God, Country, and Free Enterprise—which gave support to Western civilization for so long is getting shakier and shakier. Only the true believers are able to rely on these supports with unabated confidence, and Fundamentalists, whatever their practical virtues, are notoriously lacking in imagination. They are entirely ruled by the past. Meanwhile, in place of God, people are beginning to feel reverential about a nameless, all-pervasive spirit which underlies and unites everything and requires no church. Instead of the nation-state, the whole earth is gradually becoming the homeland and cherished habitation deserving loyalty and care. And as for Capitalism or Free Enterprise—take your pick—belief in this progressive, eighteenth-century doctrine just doesn't come naturally any more. A great many people carry out its motions only because there isn't much else that they can do.

Sages and religious teachers, of course, long ago denounced the acquisitive drive as the highroad to disorder, ugliness, and pain, but who, during the past century or two, has listened to sages? Competition, people said, is the life of trade. True enough, the way they once traded. But then they said, competition is the life of civilization, of even culture, and education. And since "they" ran the press, industry, and the government and paid the salaries of the professors in the colleges and of the teachers in the schools, the competitive struggle for existence achieved the unquestioned status of Natural Law. Yet the fact is, as more and more people are slowly realizing, this coarse and affronting doctrine has nothing to do with the meaning of a distinctively human life, and acting on it brings systematic destruction of the qualities that sustain the relationships all decent people hold dear. The makers of our beliefs and customs were simply wrong.

Yet here we are, saddled with a vast system of competitive economic enterprise, geared to the motive of single-minded acquisition for its survival, maintained by a network of reflexes growing out of habits carefully nurtured for hundreds of years, and championed by anxious, threatened leaders whose world seems to be coming apart. The larger their stake in the existing system, the more desperately will people insist on trying to make it work, while demanding the loyalty of all those who have a natural trust in authority. How, they ask, can you dare to let go?

Well, it's happening. People are letting go. Little by little, the philosophers of the past are being vindicated. Today's critics are not just a few sages, but a growing number of intelligent and sometimes learned human beings. The rhythms of the market place, Karl Polanyi declared, are not the heartbeat of mankind, and he wrote several books to show that what he said was accurate and true. Others have pointed out that the most successful competitors, once they become rich and powerful, devote their undeniable talents to making things practically impossible for their competitors. In other words, the climax of the competitive system brings an end to competition. Life is more comfortable, less demanding, that way. They are right, of course. Commercial competition has become a kind of war, and normal human beings will naturally try to end it. Continuous conflict makes no sense. But the men who rose to power by this means still praise the challenge of competition and the virtues which are said to result from it. After all, what else can they say? What else do they *know?* People have defiantly believed what they want to believe in the face of massively contradictory facts long before

this. Nor is economic ideology the only source of delusions.

This, you could say, illustrates the difference between the way sages and ordinary people make up their minds. Sages learn to recognize how things work without having to go through all the fires of bitter experience. They endured some fires, no doubt, or they wouldn't be sages, but somehow they acquired the capacity to see more deeply than the rest of us, and beyond the half-truths of the hour or epoch. Today we have the good fortune to live at a time when certain truths are appearing in the round, forced into visibility by the light of the fires of collective experience. And the light, you could say, is getting more and more intense.

Intermediate between sages and ordinary folk are often scholars and literary people with some inclinations toward wisdom. A good writer might be a talented man who lends an ear to sages, verifies for himself some of what they say, and then gives it currency. For a long time now, good writers have been pointing out the follies of single-minded acquisition as the foundation of human life. One of these writers, Joseph Wood Krutch, wrote in *Human Nature and the Human Condition* in 1959:

> Production is now neither for use nor exclusively for the profit of the bosses. It is for the "prosperity" of labor and the average citizen. But the "needs of the economy" rather than his own genuine needs still come first. And neither socialism nor cornrnunism seems to know how to reverse that topsy-turvy order.
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> Referring to a depression in his own day, Thoreau once wrote to a friend: "If thousands are thrown out of employment, it suggests that they were not well employed." To most readers who come upon that casual remark for the first time it seems merely heartless: "If there is no useful work for these thousands of people to do, then just let them starve." But there is another way of looking at it. If you are thinking not only of their plight but how they came to be plunged into it, then Thoreau's remark goes straight to the heart of the matter. A major fraction of the people is engaged in making things which nobody needs. All the arts of publicity are proving insufficient to persuade a sufficient number that they even "want" them. Is there nothing better that the now unemployed could have been working at? Must they boondoggle on a gigantic scale? Must boondoggling be accepted as the foundation of our economy? Or are there tasks upon which all might be "well employed"? Is our definition of what constitutes the good life the real reason they are not?

A particular value of Mr. Krutch's prose is its temperate common sense. If you think about what he says, his implied conclusion seems indisputable. At issue is the meaning of "the good life." Ten years later, an editorial writer in *Business Management* (April, 1969) felt obliged to ask the same question. And when the house organs of the industrial and acquisitive system begin to wonder about the "meaning of life," changes in attitude are already well under way. The title of this editorial was: "Is the Rat Race Really Worth it?" A sub-title might have been, "These People Don't Know What Else To Do." Reporting on the mood of executives in business, the writer, Jules Archer, said:

> Chronic anxiety is endemic in the seats of power. Apart from the burden of heavy responsibility, both in terms of business decisions and an expansive standard of living, the executive knows that nothing is so slippery as the top of the hill. Added to this anxiety is the exhausting burden of a relentless work week, month in month out. It is hardly surprising that many executives who talk about eventually retiring to the good life never make it but die young in harness.
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> Studies show that the higher an executive climbs, the more dissatisfied his wife becomes, and the greater the emotional stress on his home life. Many wives, baffled by a steadily rising standard of living that only seems to alienate them from their husbands, become unsure of themselves and what they really want. The platitude of "getting ahead" as a life goal seems suddenly meaningless.

A lot of these men are simply in flight:

> Fear of failure spurs many men into a compulsive scaling of the ladder, apprehensive that if they stop moving upward they will start slipping down hill. At each higher rung they adopt new protecting coloration—habits, dress, style, opinions, car, corporate echelon. They attempt to demonstrate

> not merely executive competence but also the credentials of social acceptability. Discarded on the rungs below are friends, ideals and tastes now denigrated as liabilities.

The good life? Critics of the back-to-the-land movement often remark that a farmer's life is one of ceaseless drudgery, by no means an idyllic romance with Nature. They are mostly right, of course. It is very tough to be a small farmer and survive. But it's not degrading. It doesn't dehumanize people, even if it wears them down.

These abstractions inevitably mislead. Not all business is degrading, and not all small farmers fail or work till they drop. You can't settle these things for everybody with statistics since there are wonderful exceptions on both sides of every argument; but at the same time there are massive tendencies in urban existence which nonetheless emerge in statistics—realities the sages warned about without needing to wait for computer print-outs.

A. H. Maslow has written musingly on the effect on a person of the kind of work he does. Maslow said he couldn't imagine feeling much self-respect if he worked in a chewing gum factory or a phony advertising agency. There would be no dignity in it, no service to others, no occasion for feeling good about what you make. All he would get out of it is money, and could there be a more reductive situation for the worker, except perhaps real slavery? But the slave was at least reduced to his condition by outside forces; he didn't choose it, and he can, if he is exceptional, attain the serenity of an Epictetus. Well, perhaps we should say that a person who seems to have little or no choice among jobs is practically a slave. Meanwhile, there are some signs that recognition of the countless meaningless tasks imposed on people by the acquisitive society is leading to a deep rejection of the industrial system in its entirety.

The sort of thinking Joseph Wood Krutch pursued in *Human Nature and the Human Condition* seems now to be part of the half-conscious brooding of a great many people. After some discussion of the deterioration of modern life and the traps people feel that they are caught in, Krutch continues:

> It is all very well to ask what laws ought to be passed, what courses ought to be taught in schools, in order to correct some of the evils which have developed in man's present condition. But we need to consider more thoroughly what that condition is. We need to ask questions about it as this discourse is attempting and will continue to attempt to ask. The justification for them is, not that they always suggest immediate solutions, but that they probe into a situation which will need to be understood before practical solutions can be thought about.
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> Are we so much at the mercy of our system of production only because we have been too exclusively concerned with production? Is the trouble with the poor and the rich alike something besides either poverty or superabandance? Are certain of the present concrete problems unsolvable because the tendencies which produced them are producing others more rapidly than they can be solved? Is mankind too "realistic" for its own good?

Or, as the *Business Management* editorial put it:

> More executives and their families today are beginning to question the whole American ethic of success and its *raison d'être.* Who is the successful man—and why?

Or still more urgently, as Paul Goodman asked—have we all been "growing up absurd"?

The sages gave their reasons for answering this question in the affirmative, but now we are hearing similar replies from a much larger band of critics. Mr. Krutch was a fine example of the voice of the growing maturity of American thought. The *Business Management* writer took a sounding of the psychological health of the business community and made his candid report. Maslow gave a subjective judgment which reflects the unspoken attitudes of a great many people who are plugging along, living lives of "quiet desperation" and trying, not very successfully, to buy some relief from their self-disgust, boredom, and fear.

Currently the editor of *Harper's*, Lewis H. Lapham, brings the question farther out into the open with an article, "The Capitalist Paradox," in his March issue. An editor sees a lot of people—articulate people—and he reads a lot of sometimes revealing words. Mr. Lapham begins his discussion with some remarks about the obvious relief of former businessmen once they leave industry or commerce to undertake more "cultured" roles. They are apparently glad to get away from it all. Speaking of the union in America of the spirit of the Enlightenment—science, discovery, and invention—with aggressive commercial enterprise, he says:

> Hardly anybody likes to admit that the highest achievements of the Western mind spring from the same soils that nourish the lush flowerings of corruption and greed. On the one hand the capitalist system implies the exploitation of any available weakness, but on the other hand it encourages freedom of thought and experiment. The two genies emerge from the same bottle, simultaneously and without benefit of ideology. In November of last year, in the same week that the usual number of public officials were rounded up on the usual suspicions of fraud, seven Americans received the Nobel Prize.

One could, Mr. Lapham seems to think, hardly expect anything else. "I take for granted," he says, "Jefferson's dictum that money, not morality, constitutes the principle of commercial relations." He doesn't really know what to do about all this—supposing something ought to be done—but provides eloquent description of what the dominion of commercial methods is doing to our lives:

> Given the American capacity for transforming anything and everything into an article of merchandise, nobody can escape the seductions or the intimidations of money. That so many people refuse the offers and resist the threats testifies to their larger understanding of the character of human life. They make their choices not so much on moral grounds as on the basis of empirical observation, because the obsession with money, as witness the long and unhappy life of Howard Hughes, reduces a man to the gibbering sycophancy of a frightened ape.

Calling the basis of resistance "empirical" is a way of saying that during certain intervals of history some of the wisdom of the sages gets objective confirmation from everyday events. We now *know* that the acquisitive society fosters all these ugly tendencies in people and imposes crisis after crisis on them—you can see this all around:

> The dehumanizing effects of capitalism become more vicious as they become separated from the exuberance of the dreaming mind. The builders of the American railroads presumably had a vision of a continent drawn together by lines more palpable than those found on any of the known maps. The contemporary evidence suggests that their descendants no longer have the energy to conceive of anything but their own safety. Their crimes have a sallow and diminished aspect, as if it was all they could do to steal a few thousand dollars from the corners of a bureaucracy. . . . What impressed me about the Watergate scandal was the pettiness of it. In decorous conference rooms of the so-called Establishment these days, whether in the university the banks, or the departments of government, I have the uneasy feeling that it is the money which owns and uses the people rather than the people who use and own the money.

It is the money system, not the technology Jacques Ellul warned against, that has taken over, according to the *Harper's* editor. Of course, there may be practically no difference between the two—nor, again, any difference between the rule of money, or technology, and the "rationalizing" process described in Roderick Seidenberg's *Post-Historic Man.* We take orders from an outside boss:

> If the morality inherent in money governs the workings of a commercial nation, then the stability of that nation depends upon a balance between the confusions of money and the clarity of mind. The confusion makes itself most plainly visible among people who believe in the omnipotence of money and therefore lose the capacity to think.

Mr. Lapham's chief point seems to be that we must somehow learn to work out an uneasy balance between the goodies the demon system of money brings us and our now waning, if not disappearing, capacity to think. As he puts it:

> The moralists in the press who mumble about the quasi-religious foundations of a free society remind me of the spokesmen for the business interests who believe that their products appear in the stores as if by virgin birth. They forget that if people take seriously the guarantee of their inalienable rights they have no choice but to fight for the truths they hold to be self-evident. Like the totalitarian or religious systems of thought, they would have me believe that the slaughter doesn't exist, that people somehow conduct themselves according to the movements of stars or political abstraction. Their hypocrisy obscures the dynamic as well as the tragedy of the capitalist paradox. The best that can be done is to ameliorate the slaughter, but this is difficult to do if the scribes and pharisees insist that capitalism brings nothing but gladness to the hearts of the people obliged to obey its rules.

One of these days, perhaps, Mr. Lapham will favor us with an essay on the ways and means of "amelioration." One can easily agree with him that breaking the paradox of capitalism by "force or subversion" would be comparable to "the building of guillotines," and we have had more than enough of that.

Amelioration, in E. F. Schumacher's language, means reduction in size. When enterprise becomes small, the "slaughter" is immediately reduced. The testimony to the benefit of smallness is as extensive as the evidence of the harm done by the mindless bigness of the industrial operations which the money system rules. But the chief interest of Mr. Lapham's article lies in the doubts it confirms and the questions it raises. It marks a temper of inquiry, now becoming widespread, which goes behind the various ideological curtains to the root issue as set by Mr. Krutch: *What constitutes the good life?*

REVIEW
NO SPILLS, NO LEAKS

IF the rate of publication of books on solar energy and wind-power is any indication, a basic change has begun in the way people are thinking about the physical supports of their lives, a change practically certain to exercise a transforming influence on the face of America. How this thinking is working out in individual action is the subject of *Design for a Limited Planet* (Ballantine, 1976. $5.95) by Norma Skurka and Jon Naar (photographer), a book which shows and tells about thirty-five homes (all over the U.S.) constructed for the absorption of solar energy, to provide "a cleaner, more natural life." The pictures are both lively and informing, the descriptions thorough.

The foreword by Jacques-Yves Cousteau performs a service of particular value. While Cousteau is known mainly for his devotion to and knowledge of the oceans, he is also an effective thinker and writer. In this foreword he contrasts the incalculable threat of nuclear devices as a source of power with the small-scale, decentralized alternatives adopted by a growing number of individuals and communities. It would be difficult to find a clearer brief account of what is now happening, or a more insightful recognition of its significance. He says:

> The lethal debris from atomic power is a quiet violence we are perpetrating on our children and our grandchildren. It may be the greatest danger we know about today, because it contaminates, not only the bodies of living things, but the political systems that eventually arise to control its terrible potential.
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> But there are hopes, great hopes, and they are these: the creativity and the common sense of people like the men and women whose works are described here. If we must learn to speculate more about the degree of concern for life held by our governments and our industries, then we must concurrently begin to trust individual initiative and intelligence. The creative engines of the great social and business institutions reside in a few minds present at a few research and development meetings. In such isolation, there is the capacity for unrealistic decisions and mistakes which tend to be large mistakes. But thousands of free-thinking individuals, taking thousands of small random steps forward, risking their savings and investing their spare time, will make only small mistakes on the way to accumulating a large aggregate success. The automobile itself is a system developed part by part in widely-separated garages across decades by inspired individuals.
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> That is how humanity has developed the colossal technologies which, ironically, are so successful that they now threaten to engulf us. But that is also how we will save ourselves, if it is not too late in the next fifty years: by modifying our own homes and lifestyles, improving the quality of our lives, so that we are consuming only renewable energy, food and goods. And it is one way of regaining a very important measure of control over our lives"—independently producing most of the energy required by our dwellings.
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> What in the world makes more sense than solar power? It will last as long as life on earth. . . . It arrives free from the generating station. It does not spill or leak. It does nothing more to the airspace above our cities than to brighten them . . .
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> Some day, after my generation is forgotten, it will be noted that the tide was turned against mindless waste that solar wind and ocean power sources have become staples of life on earth.

The lesson of this passage is essential to all the world. This is the only way that *human* beings can bring about real changes. The changes begin in the minds of individuals. What is not thought of first, with a degree of independence, by individual humans cannot spread from person to person to affect the way people live and make decisions. Even what may seem the best of decisions, when made *for* people, will eventually turn out badly because they are not really understood and will be misapplied, often making them go into some kind of moral reverse. The intelligent members of the human race know this and sometimes explain it clearly. "I am done," William James wrote years ago, "with great things and big things, great institutions and big success, and I am for those tiny, invisible, molecular moral forces that work from individual to individual,

creeping through the crannies of the world like so many soft rootless, or like the capillary oozing of water, yet which, if you give them time, will rend the hardest monuments of man's pride."

That is what we are busy with now—rending "the hardest monuments of man's pride," reducing to manageable size the constructions of a century of ever-increasing size, power, and complexity. As Jim DeKorne, one of the solar home builders who figure in this book, has put it: "If you want to change the world, change your own life."

Design for a Limited Planet is of course a visual delight, with some pages in full color. Everyone remembers the past pleasure of looking through copies of *House Beautiful* and *Better Homes and Gardens,* seeing what the better architects and designers could do when given enough of rich peoples' money. The pleasure of looking through *Design for a Limited Planet* comes at another level. These houses were built mostly by the owners themselves, who combine inventive skills with moral or wholistic intelligence. A lot of the solar pioneers are represented, with quotation from them to go with the photographs of what they built. The first thing you notice about these houses is their diversity. There must be hundreds of ways to cooperate with the sun! The reasons for this variety—in addition to the personal taste of the builder—come out in the text.

At the back of the book is a lot of practical information people who dream of having a solar-heated home will need. First is a list of organizations and groups to contact for more facts. There are dozens of these sources around the country. There is a list of manufacturers of wind-related hardware—windmills, pumps, etc.—and a much longer list of the firms which supply the products and devices needed for collecting solar energy for space and water heating. It is of course possible to build your own gadgets, as becomes evident, but this requires mechanical skill and pertinacity. Meanwhile manufacturers are getting their costs down as sales increase. There is a glossary of terms, a list of periodicals—most of them papers regularly quoted in MANAS Frontier articles—and a fine bibliography of basic texts and other materials.

Obviously, no book of this sort can be complete. During a great wave of change new things happen practically every day. The lights go on in people's minds and they start out in some new direction. People handy with tools invent a new kind of solar collector or a wind machine, and such fresh developments will go on for generations.

The story of the human use of windpower, starting with the Babylonian emperor, Hammurabi, in 2,000 B.C., up to the present, is told in *Catch the Wind,* an attractive volume for youngsters between ten and fourteen by Landt and Lisl Dennis (photographer). The publisher is Four Winds Press and the price is $7.95. Hammurabi used windmills for irrigation. Europe, apparently, did not have them until the eleventh or twelfth century, when, according to existing records, a French convent installed both a water mill and a windmill. Some time thereafter the people of Holland began erecting windmills as the means of draining the marshes and keeping their low-lying lands dry enough to farm. Windmills were built behind the dykes to lift the water from the land and pour it into troughs that carried it out to sea. Great windmills became the basis of enormous land reclamation projects. Large lakes were drained to provide more land; in one case drying up an area took fifty-one windmills four years—from 1630 to 1634. Many of the illustrations in this section of the book are reproductions of the work of great Dutch artists. There is an etching by Rembrandt and a painting by van Ruisdael.

The section on Holland concludes with a pleasant account of the present revival of the use of windmills, most of which were torn down after the advent of steam power and then electricity. In the 1920s the construction of three electric pumping stations brought the destruction of fifteen windmills, and during succeeding years the

mills were demolished one after another. Today, however, the Windmill Societv is working to prevent any further destruction, and in 1952 a Dutch foundation began research to determine whether it would be possible for Holland to go back to windmills as a source of energy for the country. So far the anticipations of efficiency have not been encouraging, but an American engineer, William E. Heronemus, of the University of Massachusetts, is urging the Dutch to build a network of windmills along the margins of their land. "Holland," he declares, "could achieve a high degree of independence from fossil fuels like oil, coal, and gas—and their attendant woes—by practicing modern technology windpower in the same way as America must now do." Landt Dennis comments:

> Whatever role windpower is to play in Holland's future, as well as that of the rest of the world, one thing is certain: The Dutch are determined that the windmills which exist in Holland today will remain for centuries to come. Although they were obsolete for over a hundred years, Dutch windmills have had a comeback. Once more, their sails have begun to turn. . . .

Dutch settlers brought windmills to the United States but they did not come into wide use until the middle of the nineteenth century, when an inventor showed Western ranchers how to get water out of the ground with a lightly constructed machine. Later the windmills were used to generate electricity. Manufacturing windmills was in 1900 a ten-million-dollar business. The Western prairie, a traveler said, "is practically alive with them." Sales of windmills reached a peak in 1958—100,000 in that year—but fell off to about 5,000 in 1970. This picture began to change, however, with the emphasis given to windmills by the *Whole Earth Catalog*, which brought the sales of one company from 375 mills a year up to more than a thousand. The closing pages of the book give full attention to recent experimental developments in windpower, describing research programs and telling about various individuals who have installed windpower devices to supply their energy needs in the home. Most of these people are swamped with inquiries from interested persons who are getting ready to make some changes in their own lives.

COMMENTARY
THE STANCE OR THE PROPS?

ONE of the things we all need to do is admit—at least to ourselves—how much we follow our hunches or feelings of deep belief in matters of far-reaching decision. Last fall the editor of *Science* described a young man who was eagerly circulating a petition against nuclear power. Under questioning he also denounced coal as polluting. Asked where, then, we'll get our electricity, he responded airily, "Oh, they'll take care of that."

He had his hunches, with corresponding lists of good guys and bad guys, and this was enough for him. Proponents of nuclear power and other hardheaded solutions seem to make up their minds in pretty much the same way. Their opponents are just dreamers and sentimentalists.

It is easy to point these things out. If you collect enough "facts" for your arsenal, you can make almost anybody look silly. So people go about seeming to win arguments all the time. This has been going on for centuries, but none of us is any wiser as a result.

So we need to look more carefully at our hunches. We are, we know, going to go on living with them, and by them. And the fact is that some hunches are better than others. This may be hard to admit, since criticism of hunches is very close to being an attack on identity, and we just can't stand this from other people. Improvement of hunches, then, is something we have to do for ourselves. It seems a deep and well-supported hunch that there is no human progress at all without individual openness to this sort of self-criticism.

How does it work? It depends, one might say, not on skill in assembling facts but on the capacity (willingness) to rise (descend or move) to another level where a different (more complete?) array of facts becomes visible.

For example, only people who try to think at a certain level will feel the force of Jacques Cousteau's observation (see Review) that nuclear power will contaminate "not only the bodies of living things, but the political systems that eventually rise to control its terrible potential."

It accomplishes nothing to batter down other people's defenses—*make* them see. The idea is to help them to get their imaginations working. Then, if you should happen to be right, they'll see what you see, and you'll be a lot less guilty of intellectual contamination.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
SOURCES OF ALTERNATIVE CULTURE

IT is small wonder, considering the vast confusion of the modern world, that what we speak of broadly as "education" is in deep trouble. The confusion is so great that it can hardly be dissipated in the foreseeable future. Meanwhile, the children keep coming along, generation after generation. In our relations with the young, we need to shut out at last the worst effects of the confusion, while arming them, as best we can, to cope with it as they grow up. Actually, we can do little more.

What are the main forms of the confusion? Choosing at random from the waves of printed matter that keep flooding in, there is, for example, Dr. Herbert Hendin's account (in the *New York Times*, Aug. 26, 1976) of the disintegrations of family life, due to a variety of causes. Suicides among youth between fifteen and twenty-four have increased by 250 per cent during the past twenty years. One explanation of this, he thinks, is the transfer of envy and greed from the lust for possessions to the appetite for "experience."

> The egocentric consumer of people wants to get more and gives less. Attitudes toward being in a family have changed accordingly: A husband or wife is all right as long as he or she gives all and requires little in return, a child is all right if his or her success is great enough to justify the sacrifice one has made to raise it. The family becomes the center of concern for the ever-retreating prize of self-fulfillment.
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> No wonder so many young people today see their families as jails in which everyone is in solitary confinement and no one is happy. No wonder so many young women dread children as the seal on a marital trap. Given the unhappiness of so many parents and the apprehension of so many young people, it is not surprising that the family itself is cited as the cause of all our woes.

Dr. Hendin continues, exploring the effects of radical feminism on the unity of the family, noting the twisting of Freud's doctrines into justification for acting out "all sexual fantasies and aggressive impulses." People have come to expect "unlimited personal fulfillment" in terms of trivial or casual preferences. Sullen disappointment is inevitable. Dr. Hendin says:

> The evidence is overwhelming that the family is not disposable, that even the best alternatives do not equal a reasonably good family's power to raise responsive people. The rising numbers of young people who abuse alcohol and drugs, who drift in a numbed way unable to find any sort of life that pleases them, the increasing number of young suicides, and the anguish of parents who have done their best only to suffer from the misery of their children are human proof of what even the present degree of the family's decline has created.

Speaking briefly of "remedies," Dr. Hendin says we should help men and women make their families "work," warning that it will be futile to "institutionalize" alternatives. He is certainly right in this, but how *do you* "help"? Going about telling people to be "unselfish" and to love one another is hardly an answer.

Wanted are pervasive influences which have *displacing* power. Dr. Hendin is talking about a cultural atmosphere which affects nearly everybody, the good families as well as those which focus disintegrative tendencies. You can't shut out this atmosphere or isolate the young from its penetrating effects. All anyone can do is try to spread a counter-atmosphere generated by healthy and useful activity. The back-to-the-land movement is one way of doing this.

There are sources of cultural health in the world of ideas, but here, again, are pervasive fogs of depression spread by influential poets and writers. In one of his essays, Walter Kauffmann speaks of Eliot's insistence that the world is a "wasteland" and of Gertrude Stein's complaint that her capacities had been spoiled by "society." Thousands of writers "feel sorry for themselves," and this "self-pity and self-deception," Mr. Kauffmann says, "involve, among other things, a comprehensive distortion of history."

> It is not uncommon for modern writers to talk themselves and others into the fancy that our generation is unique in having lost the motherly protection of a firm religious faith, as if Socrates and Shakespeare had been reared with blinders and as if the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the nineteenth century were all contemporary inventions.

The antidote he proposes for this atmosphere of defeat is to begin to expose ourselves to the literature created by those who responded very differently to "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." Great riches are being ignored:

> In fact, a disillusionment that used to be the prerogative of the few has become common property; and what exhilarated Socrates and Shakespeare, who were in a sense sufficient to themselves, is found depressing by men who lack the power to find meaning in themselves. It has almost become a commonplace that the modern artist has lost contact with his audience and that the public no longer supports him as in previous ages. In this connection one simply ignores Rembrandt and Mozart, Villon and Holderlin, Cézanne and Van Gogh. . . .

The present-day cult of art has vulgarized its meaning:

> There have never been so many writers, artists, and philosophers. Any past age that could boast of more than one outstanding sculptor or philosopher the whole world over and of more than three good writers and painters wins our admiration as unusually productive; and many an age had none of great distinction. It is not the public that is at fault today but the excess of pretenders. But instead of recognizing their own lack of excellence, many resort to styles that will allow them to charge their lack of success to the obtuseness of the public.

How does a really great artist or writer deal with the always backward and tasteless "public":

> Shakespeare came to terms with the obtuseness of his public: he gives his pearls a light odor of the sty before he cast them. Far from cheapening his art, he turned the challenge of a boorish, lecherous, and vulgar audience to advantage and increased the richness and subtlety of tragedy so vastly that age cannot wither it, nor custom stale its infinite variety.
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> A stupid public need not always be a curse. It can be a challenge that turns the creator to search within. . . .
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> Some modern writers with intellectual pretensions deal with sex and use four-letter words to register a protest and to get their books denounced, either to insure their success or to excuse their failure. Their preoccupations are with success or failure and with sex as a means to one or the other.
>
> Shakespeare dealt with sex and used four-letter words as a concession to his audience and for humor's sake, not to antagonize and not from boldness and least of all because he had nothing else to offer, but incidentally as one more element in the complexity of his creations. Shakespeare's poetry is the poetry of abundance. There is laughter in it and despair but no resentment or self-pity. He was not even intent on fame and did not see to it that his works were painstakingly committed to print.

There are others filled with resources for health of mind. In the *Virginia Quarterly Review* (Winter, 1977) John Stevenson says:

> What connects Wordsworth with modern literature and what makes him a necessary stage in the poet's development is his insistence on the primacy of the imagination. For Wordsworth, as I read him, the imagination is the faculty that discovers the source of being, that recovers the mind's priority. And what makes the imagination so particular is that its action is a controlled effort at recreation; it is a conscious striving to reconcile the external appearance with the inner reality. It is a synthesis of sensory perception with intellectual conception. It is, as Wallace Stevens says, a way of knowing. It is also a way of seeing. In short, it is a particular way of seeing because it is the discovery of the self which leads to the discovery of man—the discovery of man's kinship with man.

The modern world seems a stale and unprofitable place—a place to fear and flee—chiefly because of the failure of the imagination. People think, say P. B. and J. S. Medawar at the end of a long article in the February *Harper's* on the biological "facts of life," that science will be able to solve their problems. They do this because "they have grown so used to thinking of science and technology as a secular substitute for the miraculous; but most of the problems that beset mankind call for political, moral, and administrative rather than scientific solutions." Moreover, "Mozart's piano sonatas and the paintings in the Uffizi Gallery amplify the human spirit and not human DNA."

The future, in other words, for both ourselves and our children, lies in the hands of the amateurs, not the professionals. We are the amateurs, and we are not helpless or victims without recourse.

FRONTIERS

Exploring Foundations

WE have always had "idealists" and dreamers, communitarians and utopians, but except for keeping going the rhythms of a distant drum among a handful of enthusiasts regarded as mavericks and cranks, the current of their ideas has had little effect on the patterns of the common life. (See Thoreau's "Life without Principle.") The farmers who settled America were first animated by the exhilaration of owning their own land, without peonage to any feudal baron, and in the course of a century or so this normal "possessiveness" grew into the driving energy of the acquisitive spirit.

With the spread of the population westward and the transformation of "Yankee ingenuity" from frontier know-how into the magic of technology, the habits of American life were fixed in the patterns of expanding industrialism, with economic and social activities constrained by the requirements of its goals. The instinctive balances of self-sufficient rural life' natural to pioneers, were submerged by all-encompassing economic purposes. This cultural conversion was especially noticeable in California where conditions were favorable to industrial methods. "Farming in this country," said one of the men who used these methods successfully, "*is a business, it is not a way of life."* The land was good, but it needed regular irrigation, and the cost of getting water to the land required high-value cash crops. Big farming became the formula for success. The early years of the twentieth century saw the changes in California agriculture described by Walter Goldschmidt in *As You Sow* (Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1947), a history of the emergence and domination of industrial farming. The farmers who made money by concentrating on cash crops regarded those who refused to specialize as "old dumb-bells" who "just can't farm any more."

Goldschmidt says:

> This tendency to specialize in one or two cash crops has very clear effects upon the social and physical landscape. Basically, it expresses the competition between the old traditional rural values and the urban value system. One of the first evidences of this meets the eye immediately—the virtual disappearance of the barnyard. Practically no farmers milk cows; almost as few have chickens a garden is considered a luxury, not because it is work to plant one, but because it is considered cheaper to buy the products at the market and turn the land into cash crops. Flower gardens around a home are also a luxury. . .
>
> There are other psychological effects. The farmer is planting with one eye on his furrows and the other cocked at the market. When the total investment is in cash crop, it becomes a basic matter to hit the right market. Farmers consider that during the harvest season they should be at the marketing center rather than in the fields. The entrepreneur's insight into market conditions is more important than his managerial ability in supervising the harvest.

California agriculture is the most dramatic example of this trend, but it was also nationwide, urged on by the country's educational institutions. Writing in a present-day mood in *Environment* for last October, Kevin Shea asks:

> What have our agricultural research, education, and policymaking institutions been doing for the past 100 years to solve some of the problems of rural Americans (and affecting urban Americans as well) which have been growing as rapidly as the agricultural revolutions? The answer is, of course: very little. Our agricultural research and educational establishment has been so busy grinding out scientific and technical gadgetry to *boost* farm production that it has largely ignored the problems its labors have created. On the other hand, the federal government has been so preoccupied with devising complicated legislation to hold down production that the people who have suffered from these two seemingly opposite activities have been all but ignored.

This is the inherited contradiction which confuses the reflexes of a large section of the population of the United States, now subject to the barrage of the forces of change. In contrast with the continuous preachment in the past of "more production," the new gospel now gaining voice, and not only from environmentalists, has

the decentralist theme of "small is beautiful." Most impressive today is the diversity of the groups and organizations now advocating change, along with the articulate intelligence and powerful logic of their recommendations. The thinking of the country is noticeably changing. While institutional change is always laggard and reluctant, new and more flexible institutions are being formed by determined people all over the country. That except for pioneer beginnings they are still in the "idea" stage is no cause for discouragement, since all useful action requires preparation.

Earth Journal, the quarterly publication of the Minnesota Geographical Society, now in its seventh year, is a good example of the new avenues carrying the meaning, desirability, and necessity of change to receptive people. In the Summer 1976 issue, an architect, Malcolm B. Wells, describes the attitude that is slowly displacing the individualistic, "get ahead" psychology. As head of an affluent family he might be able to have a solar-heated home, with wastes properly restored to the land and rainwater conserved and used to irrigate the humus:

> But the man who pays the greatest price for all my ecological mistakes is the guy I'd be leaving behind: the bluecollar worker, the black man, the Indian, or the Chicano He couldn't built that woodland hideway with its lush or ganic garden. He'd have to stay behind and breath the worst of the air, drink the worst of the water, and live in the meanest of houses because I, who could perhaps afford to escape refused to offer him a job or the friendship he needed to leave the city. And besides, there just isn't that much room left in paradise any more; not for 200 million of us there isn't. So we've got to solve this thing right here, wherever we are today, and we've got to realize that things like brotherhood and jobs are going to be as much a part of the solution as are waste-management and rebuilt cities.

From an article on "The Law of Return" by Tom Griffin in an earlier issue:

> We are through the cream and down to the skim milk. The farming situation is changing . . . in the same way all forms of production in America are changing. The time of the free ride is over. We have skimmed the cream off the abundant natural resources the original settlers found here . . . prices have gone up . . . and most likely will continue to rise. We are relying more and more on imports for both energy and fertilizer feedstocks, and the weakness of the dollar on international exchanges raises the frightening possibility that there are going to be big shake-ups in the way our trade—and even our farm production—is organized.

Tom Griffin writes about the rule that wastes replenish the earth. This is an elementary, ground-floor principle of constructive change. "Minnesota," this writer says, "produces over 200,000,000 *tons* of potential fertilizer from animal manures, compostable garbage, and sewage sludge but uses virtually none of it." Then he tells what some states and cities are doing to restore these precious nutrients to the soil. The Law of Return, he says, if followed, "will bind the city to the country in natural, not artificial bonds."