

QUESTIONS ON THE ECOREGION

[Last year—in MANAS for Sept. 8, 1976—we presented in *Frontiers* a short article by Maurice Girodias: "Ecoregions: A Proposal." We have printed nothing on the subject since, except for occasional asides in other material, noting the increasing interest in this idea. Late last spring a reader in Mexico sent in his reflections on the proposal, in the form of questions. Being convinced for a variety of reasons that the Ecoregion is an idea "whose time has come," we now print our reader's comments, adding some discussion of the questions raised.]

THERE seems little doubt that a world organized into "ecoregions" as envisaged by Mr. Girodias would be preferable for the most part to the tumultuous structure of today, if only because ecoregions are not so large in physical size as the nation-state. Yet there exist severe impediments to ecoregional organization *per se*. Nor am I here considering the practical problems of dismantling the present organization of the world, awesome though these will doubtless prove to be.

It is implicit in Mr. Girodias' descriptive material that an ecoregion is *geographically* defined, and that it replaces (although it is not clear to what extent) the present structure of national states. If this is so, then the inhabitants of an ecoregion—or at least, the great preponderance of them—must form a homogeneous group. Were this not to be the case, we should inevitably have to confront the problem of overlapping ecoregions, in which two or more of them would attempt to exercise sovereignty over the same acre of land. It may well be that the notion of sovereignty itself shall have to be abandoned; but nothing in the proposal so far reviewed has even implied that this is the case.

Now, Mr. Girodias suggests that such homogeneity is ethnocentric, or at the very least, that it is based on some sort of cultural commonality. After all, it is presumed that there will exist freedom of movement such that people who were unable to get on with their neighbors would be in a position to move to a more congenial ecoregion. Provision for

such physical readjustments might well become a salient logistic problem in the early stages of shifting to the new organization.

Unfortunately, the modalities by which human beings habitually categorize themselves are, in all too many instances, neither ethnic nor cultural in character (or not primarily so). Not only are there the professional societies that represent the last flowering, perhaps, of the medieval guilds: there is also a community of intellect itself, that recognizes no boundaries, so that men with no common cultural nor ethnic heritage find themselves more kin than separate. Religion offers another type of modality: one may cite not only the monastic orders, existing throughout the world as the blood throughout the body, but also the theocratic States like Pakistan (or Israel?), some of whose religious fellows prefer to live in a different country. Powerful cohesive forces are offered by such behavioral anomalies as homosexuality: there is a certain grim humor in the reflection that a homosexual ecoregion would have to be sustained by immigration, incessant if not massive.

I live presently in Mexico; in a region with whose traditions and cultural artefacts I can find nothing in common: should I move, or may I remain to enjoy the climate, maintaining many of my ties with my fellows by correspondence? In one sense, my problem is presented by migrants everywhere, and complicated by the cultural disorientation experienced both by migrants and by their hosts.

We have touched on one problem of the ecoregion: that presented by the exigencies of individual personal assignment. Another arises from the (supposed) territorial determination of the ecoregions. It is not hard to see that the various ecoregions would differ from each other in size, population, wealth, climate, and economic strength. Given the recalcitrant nature of man, would they not also differ in cultural bias? Would not the residents of some betray jealousy and belligerence toward the

inhabitants of others, in a manner not unreminiscent of human political behavior over the last hundred years? In truth, it is hard to see how a system of ecoregions would differ fundamentally from our present (and obviously inefficient) system of nation-states, unless there is to transpire a tremendous, far-reaching, and well-nigh universal shift in human attitudes, tantamount in fact to a basic change in human nature.

In private correspondence, Mr. Girodias has written, all too truthfully, "Human society cannot survive the combination of demographic expansion and nuclear proliferation more than 20 to 50 years at best—unless a world order is instituted." He believes, and correctly, that that cannot occur on the basis afforded by national states; and here we reach an *impasse*. He suggests that the ecoregion he proposes is different in kind (not just in size or shape) from the nation-state.

I wish I could agree. History has shown all too dearly that the human animal only learns through experience of hardship. I fear that the world shall have to undergo the horrifying experience of major nuclear conflict, wholesale starvation, or both, before practical efforts are undertaken to reconstruct society; and even then, I am far from sure that the reconstruction will tend toward the good of the great majority.

GEORGE MARTYN FINCH

This sober recital of what may be major obstacles to ecoregional reform of present-day society has two aspects: there are both particulars and fundamentals to deal with. Both require attention. The fundamental question grows out of the claim that establishing ecoregions will require a "well-nigh universal shift in human attitudes, tantamount in fact to a basic change in human nature." So we must ask: Is such a change actually possible?

Well, what constitutes a "basic change in human nature"? What would be acceptable evidence that it may take place?

If we look to American history, we might decide that the change in the attitude of the colonists toward

the mother country, England, during the closing years of the eighteenth century was pretty basic. The question gains focus by regarding the influence of Thomas Paine as the most evident agency of that change. Paine converted the colonists to the idea that political independence was their highest political good, worth desperate struggle and extreme risk. By the end of 1775, very few of them yet thought in this way. Far-seeing souls like Franklin recognized the need for independence, but such, as Bernard Bailyn says (in *Fundamental Testaments of the American Revolution*), "was *not* the common opinion of the [Continental] Congress, and it certainly was not the general view of the population at large." Summing up the evidence (which he gives), Bailyn declares: "All the most powerful unspoken assumptions of the time indeed, common sense—ran counter to the notion of independence."

Paine's *Common Sense*, published in January of the revolutionary year, *changed* those assumptions. There were numerous contributing factors, but Paine's work—as George Washington observed later—was the obvious and significant cause of the change. Prof. Bailyn gives an account of how *Common Sense* had this effect:

The great intellectual force of *Common Sense* lay not in its close argumentation on specific points but in its reversal of the presumptions that underlay the arguments, a reversal that forced thoughtful readers to consider, not so much a point here and a conclusion there, but a wholly new way of looking at the entire range of problems involved. For beneath all of the explicit arguments and conclusions against independence, there were underlying, unspoken, even unconceptualized presuppositions, attitudes, and habits of thought that made it extremely difficult for the colonists to break with England and find in the prospect of an independent future the security and freedom they sought. The special intellectual quality of *Common Sense*, which goes a long way toward explaining its impact on contemporary readers, derives from its reversal of these underlying presumptions and its shifting of the established perspectives to the point where the whole received paradigm within which the Anglo-American controversy had until then proceeded came into question.

Let us concede, then, that this change was basic enough to qualify as an example of the possibility we should like to admit. Of course, there were circumstances which fueled the spread of Paine's fiery declaration. John Adams later pointed out that the revolution had been accomplished in the hearts and minds of the people before the first shot was fired at Lexington. What did he mean? Developed was a whole complex of feelings and attitudes, to be got at by reflecting that these hardy and self-reliant people had in fact already *become* independent through life unaided on the frontier. They had deep feelings about what they wanted and knew from experience what they could do. Paine brought these feelings to the surface of consciousness, where they could become operative in making a great decision.

Was there a moral factor in all this? The moral element in everyday life is often beset by ambiguity. There *was* a great moral factor, however, if love of freedom can be termed moral. It was certainly there for Paine, who cried out:

O ye that love mankind! Ye that dare to oppose not only tyranny but the tyrant, stand forth! Every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the globe. Asia and Africa have long expelled her. Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. O! receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind.

This is no place to reply to the tired criticism that Paine's freedom wasn't good enough. Of course not. Not any more. But you don't measure past moral or practical achievement by either absolute or even present standards or goals, but by attempting to recreate in the mind the extent of what *could* happen in that past—and you do this by practically (but not altogether) losing yourself in it, feeling as the people then felt, conjuring up their longings, their hopes, their vision—and then comparing the actual achievement with the dream. In these terms, the Revolution was a major advance.

Today another sort of change in basic attitudes seems required. It has, we could say, more of a moral quality in the radius of its human aspiration. But there are practical supports for this moral feeling, just as there were corresponding supports in

1776. Moral ideas—really inspiring moral ideas—have always been in the world; when we say that the "time has come" for such an idea, we mean that there is collaboration and growing support for it in the logic of circumstances. The circumstances of our time help people, as Maslow has put it, to "perceive what the facts wish, what they call for, what they demand or beg for."

If we knew more about what this teamwork between circumstances and moral decision means—whether or not there is an actual metaphysical basis for such conjunctions—writing history wouldn't be such a blindly empirical and discouraging profession. Being ignorant about this, we often use myth to help us, sometimes disguising its guidance behind a front of "objective research."

No one can prove analyses or conditions of this sort, but a second-best sort of proof would be to show that if we deny the possibility of the sort of change our correspondent questions, then the alternative—continuing as we are today—will almost certainly produce total disaster. In other words, even a failed regionalism, or a partial or compromised regionalism, would absorb at least *some* of the destructive impact of the inevitable economic and social collapse of our present system.

How can we say this? We can say it because it is simple common sense to claim that smaller social units will suffer smaller disasters—ones which it may be possible to survive. The spread of economic paralysis is slowed by whatever degree of decentralization and autonomy has been achieved. Using other words, we could say that a measure of appropriate technology might make bearable an equal measure of appropriate disaster—the kind of disaster which tries and chastens without utterly destroying those whom it overtakes.

All this, of course, is a response to the pessimistic terms of our correspondent's last paragraph. Even if his depressing anticipations be accepted, we should nonetheless work for our transformation into a regional society. What else is there to do?

That, for the moment, may be sufficient attention to the "fundamental" side of the question. The particulars, too, deserve thought.

Mr. Finch doubts that the present "cohesive forces" uniting people in homogeneous groups will lend themselves to ecoregional requirements. History, one could say, confirms this doubt. The settlers who went West in the nineteenth century had their own interests and objectives. Little by little, and quite rapidly in some instances, they wiped out the culture of those earlier, successful ecoregionalists, the Indians of the plains, the Southwest, and the Northwest. But even for the Indians there were "overlapping ecoregions," with intertribal conflict the rule as much as it was the exception. The same has been true of Africa's tribal past, an inheritance that the new African nations are having a hard time changing. So, there will indeed be problems.

On the other side, however, are the combining forces of maturing vision and oppressive experience. The vision was born a long time ago, and only now are people—some people, here and there—growing up to its recognition. The harmonies of past ecoregions were achieved mainly by people who seldom asked *why* they were enjoying such good lives. Today we are beginning to wonder about this. Ecologists such as Eugene and Howard Odum, economists like E. F. Schumacher and Leopold Kohr, and sociologists like Peter van Dresser are able to relate past practice to present vision. Meanwhile, effective criticism is getting around. There were few if any books like Engler's *The Brotherhood of Oil* in the nineteenth century. At least a beginning has been made in seeing what we have done wrong.

The modalities of human association may change gradually, but they do change, and changes are speeded up by pressures from circumstance, and by economic confusion and social unrest. In a time of change, it becomes extremely important to have a vision that will attract restless energies which could easily go in a nihilist direction.

Well, what else is needed?

You need to identify a *scale* of enterprise that can be begun by a comparatively few people. To get large masses of people going in some direction, it usually seems necessary to frighten them or compel them, or seduce or bribe them. Reduce the size of the enterprise and another level of motive becomes possible. That is the reason why the study of individual achievement (biography) and of small communities and cultural groups has now to be added to the study of history. We may have reason to formulate our problems on a mass scale—reliance on statistics contributes to this tendency—but doing the same thing with *solutions* may be self-defeating. Vision, moreover, begins with individuals, and the implementation of vision begins with small groups.

So, when it comes to support for the ecoregion idea, we need to *unsmooth* the statistical curves recording past experience. We need to ungeneralize our conclusions about what is and is not possible, socially or humanly speaking, down to the point where glorious exceptions can be seen, recognized, and made into paradigms for the sort of undertakings we want to initiate. The idea is not to start out trying to change "mass behavior," but to open ways to action that is not constrained by the low-grade purposes and goals which, statistically speaking, characterize mass behavior. The ecoregion, conceived as a socio-economic and cultural goal, can be regarded as a kind of halfway house between the mass and the intentional community. As an *idea* it at once unsmooths the curve.

Some paragraphs from Peter van Dresser's *Landscape for Humans*, concerned with the unique features of northern New Mexico, will illustrate what emerges from thinking in ecoregional terms. The author draws attention to the "land logic" of "a semi-arid mountainous terrain within which human settlement naturally gravitates to watershed valleys where small-scale irrigation subsistence agriculture is feasible, yet where access to surrounding forests and high pastures is convenient." These natural advantages and opportunities were originally found and adopted by the Spanish settlers, but have since been forgotten and virtually ignored:

The long drawn-out decline of this village culture is evident in the many abandoned houses,

churches and schools, in unmaintained *acequias* and fields, in ruined grist mills, and deserted hamlets. Village *fiestas* and *bailes* are still attended, but the mechanized carnival, the juke box, and easy access by television or car to commercial entertainment robs them of the color and vitality of an earlier period, the essential question arises: Is this decline inevitable in the march towards "modernity," and hence to be deplored solely for sentimental and "romantic" reasons? Or is it an indication of a failure of our general society (to its own detriment) to recognize, adapt to, and build upon permanent values in this regional life-style? . . .

Thinking "big," on a mass scale, has little or no awareness of these values, while continued large-scale action can erase even their potentialities:

Massive money (whether public or private) invested in enormous dams and scenic railways, in recreation complexes and retirement cities, can monopolize the best sites and waters for non-productive use—can, like any other monocultural industry—destroy a sound and diversified regional economy, and can, by importing all the problems of a high-energy, high-consumption megalopolitan economy, disrupt the natural balance of the landscape. . . .

Seen in this perspective, the question is not whether northern New Mexico is well enough endowed with "natural resources" to justify economic development in the traditional sense. The question, rather, is whether we can modify our institutions and values to allow the people of this regional community to make effective use of the basic life-supporting factors which nature offers.

The time has come, Mr. van Dresser proposes, to put aside a way of life exclusively based on "the large-scale, centralized, and mechanized functions" of our city-dominated economy. Only because this way of life is "modern" have we assumed that it is "good"!

If we can overcome this prejudice and look at this great region both with an unbiased eye for the cares and labors of centuries embodied in it, and with insights derived from the current renaissance in the ecologic and environmental sciences, we may paradoxically discover here a truer shape for the future than our current conventional wisdom conceives. For does the opportunity for fruitful human survival in this part of the world lie in a senseless mechanical multiplication of population in

two or three stereotyped consumer-cities located at transport hubs, with a vast expanse of prefabricated amusement and retirement suburbs and satellites tied to them? Or might it more hopefully lie in a constellation of organically formed communities, sited throughout the fertile valleys of this favored uplands province, and drawing their sustenance from skilled and scientific use of the biotic resources around them? Should we be thinking, to be specific, not in conventional city planning terms of a Santa Fe-Los Alamos-Espanola metropolis of endlessly proliferating freeways, traffic exchanges, supermarket plazas, and motel convention centers, but of an uplands province of dispersed and decentralized smaller towns and new-era villages?

A final word as to "sovereignty." The term has for us mainly a pejorative meaning. It means *power*, the capacity to obtain conformity to the sovereign will. But the word sovereign, like many of the charged terms of social discourse, has another significance. It can mean spontaneous *noblesse oblige*. When social units are smaller, this aspect of sovereignty may begin to have some play.

REVIEW

WHAT IS A GOOD BOOK?

PICKING out books for review and then trying to tell why they are worth reading is likely to have one definite effect on those who work at this task. All along—at the beginning, the middle, the end, and afterward—the reviewer is haunted by a persisting question: "What makes a good book?" When you find what seems a right or partial answer there is a natural impulse to set it down somewhere for reference and frequent inspection. The latest answer we have found—one at a pretty rarefied level—is based on Hannah Arendt's extraordinary essay, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," published in *Social Research* for the Autumn of 1971.

She says:

The whole history of philosophy, which tells us so much about the objects of thought and so little about the process of thinking itself, is shot through with intramural warfare between man's common sense, this highest sixth sense that fits our five senses into a common world and enables us to orient ourselves in it, and man's faculty of thinking by virtue of which he willfully removes himself from it.

She means that, in order to think, we must generalize or symbolize, and doing this removes our attention from the matter-of-fact world of particulars where common sense must reign supreme. So we rush back into the everyday world of the senses—not merely because we want to, but because we *have* to—one must eat, have shelter, etc.—taking with us the results of our thinking, ready or not, eager to put them to work.

If, to someone who does this quite naturally, without "thinking" about it, you explain that you don't feel *ready*—that you haven't yet found out all you need to know to make things in the world work well—he will probably be firm with you. "You have to be practical," he will say. If an academic, he may tell you that you suffer from the Platonic ill of fascination by the timeless world of ideal conceptions, where everything is by

definition beautiful and good but where nothing ever happens.

Socrates, as Hannah Arendt shows, overcame this difficulty in advance by claiming that he had *nothing* to teach anyone. No "thing," that is. He would not instruct people in how to dig deeper wells or construct more powerful navies. He imparted nothing "practical." He was interested in the thinking process itself, not in its countable benefits. His own thinking, in other words, was "resultless," as Hannah Arendt says. Socrates went about asking people why they thought what they thought, requiring them to justify their replies. And then he embarrassed them by showing that they really hadn't made themselves ready to reach any workable conclusions about what is good or bad, wise or foolish. In short, he made himself very unpopular by seeking to undermine common confidence in the way Athenians reached their decisions.

Can the Socratic sort of thinking ever become popular? Only when things start falling apart. Only when the practical world turns against us and what we do every day starts blowing up in our faces. Then we catch an echo from the Socratic questioning that still goes on in the world. What are we doing wrong? we ask ourselves. Usually there are a few Socratics who offer explanations, and then a great cultural ferment develops. One man can make up his mind anew without starting a revolution, but a whole culture turns itself around only from continuous and worsening pain, which sometimes—but not always—leads to new discovery.

A good book, then, is a book which helps us to grasp the issues of that "intramural warfare" Hannah Arendt speaks of—which illuminates the debate between Socrates and his Athenian opponents. There is really no way of pushing this debate aside, since every time one acts one in some sense takes sides in the argument. Each act of judgment is an illustration of what Socrates was talking about. So long as we are confident that we know what we are doing, we have no use for

Socrates and try to get rid of him and his sympathizers by any available means. But if we feel coming on the infection from which he declared himself to be an extreme sufferer—*perplexity* concerning what is right, good, and true—then we begin to investigate the timeless world of concepts, general meanings, and the laws, if any, of transcendental being—hoping to find a remedy for the mess our lives are in.

This gets us into fresh trouble, of course, even though, sometimes, it may help to clear away some of the dark fog attending the perplexing circumstances. The trouble comes from inadequate answers reached too easily. But not all the answers prove completely inadequate; some of them work better than the old ideas, and they begin to shape the practical thinking of a new epoch of history.

A good book, then, is a book which has openings for the entry of Socrates—which means, that it provokes some thinking about thinking. Obviously, the "subject" of the book doesn't matter much; any rational discourse should give room to some thinking about thinking—the activity which makes the book. Thought which never questions its own validity opens the way to all the crimes of imperialism. So any question about a thought's validity is a good thing, a Socratic thing. Such questions can be asked anywhere, in connection with anything that people think about.

We have from a friend a good book about music—Beethoven's music—by J. W. N. Sullivan. What is music? It is one of the arts, and the arts are a wonderful halfway house between the timeless world of eternal forms (ideas) and the world of the senses. Practical application of ideas to the needs of the world diminishes the ideas by making them seem local, consumed after they have been put to work. If they are capable of serving other needs in other ways, we tend to ignore this possibility. Application shuts out—although it need not—greater potentiality. By not

attempting too much, the arts partially evade this fate.

When you listen to Beethoven, you don't expect anything except a kind of contact with a world of beauty musicians know better than you do. You will emerge from the concert with no more money in the bank, yet enriched. How enriched? Well, people say that great art brings you to some sort of climax of feeling. Mr. Sullivan will not let it go at that. In *Beethoven—His Spiritual Development* (Vintage, 1960), he says that among perfect works of art may be a symphony, a line of melody, or a Serbian mat, and asks what happens if we say that great art excites our æsthetic emotion to the maximum.

The objection to this theory is that it entirely fails to take into account the most important of our reactions to a work of art. It is not true that works of art excite in us one specific emotion, and works of art are not adequately classified as perfect and imperfect. The difference in our responses to a late quartet by Beethoven and an early quartet by Haydn, for instance, is not described by saying that a specific emotion is more or less excited. The one is not a more perfect form of the other. It may be replied that both compositions possess the quality of *beauty*, and that our only relevant reaction, from the point of view of æsthetic theory, is our reaction to this quality, a reaction which is susceptible of degrees, but which is always of the same kind. Such a reply derives all its plausibility merely from the poverty of language. Language, as an historical accident, is poor in names for subjective states, and consequently in names for the imputed properties of objects that produce those states. Even such words as love and hate, dealing with emotions to which mankind has always paid great attention, are merely portmanteau words. Within their meanings are not only differences of degree, but differences of kind. To conclude, because the word "beauty" exists almost in isolation, that it refers to some definite quality of objects, or that it is descriptive of some one subjective state, is to mistake a deficiency in language for a key to truth.

Socrates inhabits almost every sentence. What, he will insist that you tell him, is *Beauty*? Beauty in itself? You will almost certainly be dissatisfied with what you reply. You'll feel the necessity to go on and on, as people do. Socrates

went about melting such words down to see what had gone into their meaning. He freed easy generalizations from their deficiency in language by dissection, and then attempted a reconstruction or reanimation of meaning that seemed better, although still incomplete. *We* are incomplete, so our most important definitions—about the things we are most concerned with—should be left in corresponding condition: Incomplete. Completion, for us, is by definition self-delusion.

In his first chapter, "Art and Reality," Mr. Sullivan sets out to emancipate art and art criticism from the confinements of the scientific outlook. He believes that art brings within our view some of the resonances of the real world, the timeless world:

Beethoven does not communicate to us his perceptions or his experiences. He communicates to us the attitude based on them. We may share with him that unearthly state where the struggle ends and pain dissolves away, although we know but little of his struggle and have not experienced his pain. He lived in a universe richer than ours, in some ways better than ours and in some ways more terrible. And yet we recognize his universe and find his attitudes towards it prophetic of our own. It is indeed our own universe, but as experienced by a consciousness which is aware of aspects of which we have but dim and transitory glimpses.

There may be those who will demand that we put Beethoven's message into *words*, in order to understand and "measure" him, but Sullivan would simply point out that such an attempt would almost certainly "mistake a deficiency in language for a key to truth." And those among his hearers who agree would go back to listen to Beethoven again, hoping to use their inner ear.

There is, however, this final and perhaps only defense of language: it has enabled us to arm ourselves against its own deficiencies. Or rather, a "resultless" sort of thinking has armed us in this way. No good book can fail in this.

COMMENTARY

QUESTIONS INSTEAD OF ANSWERS

THIS week's Children article ends by speaking of how we pull our lives out of shape.

What might people do about this? A letter in a student paper in Champaign, Ill., is one illustration of what can be done. The writer, Paul Schroeder, evaluates the proposal for a new jail in that city. He wanted to reach the public in one of the daily papers, but only a student paper would print his letter. Happily, the proposal failed, and the county officials, he says, "are starting to talk about things like a smaller jail, speeding up the court processes, alternative community projects for misdemeanor offenders, . . . *Exactly* what I had in mind."

What did he say in his letter? He didn't assemble facts and arguments, but began by asking himself questions:

How can we become aware that [a new jail] is not a step forward, is not a cause for civic pride? How might we begin living so that the construction of new jails is not always the "obvious" conclusion? . . .

I started looking at the people who are promoting this new jail, at the Sheriff and his deputies, at the referendum organizers, the lawyers and judges and county board members and architects and builders. I saw the wide array of motivations, mostly decent, mostly narrow, mostly shallow. . . . I thought about the arbitrary and discriminatory practice of the law, which is designed to allow the "peaceful people" to go about "business as usual." And I thought about a cultural environment dominated by alien forms of communications media, especially television, which keep people ensnared in the webs of illusion, fear and greed. .

Eight "professional" studies over the last eight years—I even wrote one of them myself—were not enough to get us onto a new road. But what new roads will be mapped by experts? The present state of coercive solidification in all institutions, including the jails, the hospitals and the schools, results from the insulation of those in power from the scrutiny of the people. We live in a dominion of experts who use their intelligence more to solidify their own positions than to untangle our problems. We must untangle

our own problems; otherwise there is the silent growth of a mentality of submission to authority in all its forms.

A key idea in this letter—one explored in several directions—is: "The jail is the embodiment of everything we don't understand about our lives together—built as if we did understand."

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves LOOKING AT LIFE

THE Spring *Dædalus* is entirely devoted to the family, with thirteen essays by distinguished scholars. Unhappily, this remains a "subject" which rarely comes to life. Is it unfair to expect more of scholars than deft and learned discussions of how the family and family life appear to specialist and generalizing minds? The editor remarks that the family is now "a matter of lively curiosity and controversy," and that such studies "have never been more illuminating than they are at this moment." Well, we have been reading in this issue, and been driven to wonder who, actually, is illuminated, and what, consequently, might result. Do these essays attempt anything more than dialogue among scholars?

The first paper by Alice S. Rossi has the following for its second paragraph:

Age and sex are fundamental building blocks of any family system. In part, the contrasting views of any family sketched above simply reflect a shift in our emphasis from age to sex. When functional theory dominated family sociology, the key was age: the treatment of generational continuity and parent-child relationships received central attention, while the treatment of sex was based on the belief inherited from the nineteenth century that accepted as innate attributes and constant features of all family systems a particular division of labor between men and women. More recently, the emphasis in family analysis has been on sex, with a heavy reliance on an egalitarian ideology that denies any innate sex differences and assumes that a "unisexual" socialization will produce men and women that are free of the traditional culturally induced sex differences. This egalitarian ethos urges several programmatic changes in family organization: reduction of material investment in children to permit greater psychic investment in work outside the family, an increased investment by men in their fathering roles, and the supplementation of parental care by institutional care. Frequently associated with this emphasis on equal commitment to work and family for both men and women is a corollary emphasis on the autonomy and the "rights" of children.

This writer gathers impressive evidence to show that babies *need* close physical and emotional attention from their mothers. She points out that in the contemporary American household, isolated from other households, "women are deprived of the social support system of other women, which in the past helped to lighten the burdens associated with rearing very young children, and children are deprived of easy access to peers and adults other than their parents during the important early years of growth and development." She does not, however, expect the ideologists of sex equality to agree. Of her paper she says in conclusion:

It may be more acceptable to those who question the desirability of a work-dominated life and to those who see both strength and meaning in family support, community-building, and institutional innovation in which women have been for so long engaged. There will be those who see in this analysis a conservative justification for the status quo, for traditional family and work roles for men and women, but that is a risk one takes to reach those who will see a more radical vision in the analysis: a society more attuned to the natural environment, in touch with, and respectful of, the rhythm of our own body processes, that asks how we can have a balanced life with commitment both to achievement in work and intimate involvement with other human beings. In my judgment, by far the wiser course to such a future is to plan and build from the most fundamental root of society in human parenting, and not from the shaky superstructure created by men in that fraction of time in which industrial societies have existed.

There is a great deal more life in the last paragraph than in the second. This is natural enough, since the writer's convictions at least show in the end, while the first-quoted material is an account of changes in opinion.

Why does scholarly writing seem so *technical*? Why should manifestly intelligent people feel obliged to conceal their natural good sense from the people who quite likely need it the most? Is it because "the most fundamental root of society" is actually unknown, causing the focus of scientific investigations to be on the changing forms of social life? We study cities and their ills,

our ex-communities and their increasing sterility, our industries and their inroads on the economic and social welfare of the common life, and because these things are all forms, not *people*, we use a technical language that shuts out the understanding of ordinary folk. Much of the time, in these studies, the people observed seem to be treated as if they were members of a colony of termites. What good can come of this stultifying objectivity? One is reminded of Ortega's stricture:

The moment that a name is converted into a technical term, a change comes over it, and over our use of it. Far from telling what the thing is, bringing it to us and making it visible, we must now seek the thing that the term expresses by other means, observing it closely, and only then do we understand the term. A terminology is the exact opposite of a language.

Not that this issue of *Dædalus* is valueless. There is an underlying theme which runs through many of the papers. The closing contribution, for example, by Philippe Aries, has this conclusion:

Although people today often claim that the family is undergoing a crisis, this is not, properly speaking, an accurate description of what is happening. Rather, we are witnessing the inability of the family to fulfill all the many functions with which it is invested, no doubt temporarily, during the past half-century. Moreover, if my analysis is correct, this overexpansion of the family role is a result of the decline of the city and of the urban forms of social intercourse that it provided. The twentieth-century post-industrial world has been unable, so far, either to sustain the forms of social intercourse of the nineteenth century or to offer something in their place. The family has had to take over in an impossible situation; the real roots of the present domestic crisis lies not in our families, but in our cities.

One form of development seems desirable to us, so we pursue it, and then find that its requirements have pulled other quite important elements of our lives out of shape, so that they no longer function well—both cities and families, for example. Vital functions are continually being pulled out of shape even the remedies we devise have this effect. Does this mean anything more

than that we had poor or superficial reasons for doing what we did in the first place?

FRONTIERS

Ugly Duckling Housing

IN *The City Is the Frontier* Charles Abrams listed the built-in defects and observable consequences of urban renewal programs in the United States. They tear down slums but make virtually no provision for the people who have lived there. They rely on the profit motive for rebuilding, despite the fact there is often no profit possible in what really needs to be done. They try to wipe out the visible ugliness and disorder of the slums while giving no attention to the several forces which create slums and will go on doing so. Thus urban renewal, as commonly pursued, increases housing problems by ignoring the needs (and capacities) of people.

How can we start doing what really needs to be done? The familiar answer is to say: By taking power away from those who misuse it and giving it to people who will do the right thing. This is the endlessly tried but rarely true formula, of which Walter Lippmann wrote forty years ago: "Thus, by a kind of tragic irony, the search for security and a rational society, if it seeks salvation through political authority, ends in the most irrational government imaginable." The practical record of urban renewal confirms what Lippmann wrote.

What, then, can we do? The cities are there, and the inhabitants can't be transported to some rural Shangri-la. And only the government—never the poor, hardly ever the well-intentioned—has the power to do what is *right!* Yet, obviously, the government doesn't know how.

We have a book which seems to contain as much of an answer as may be possible to this question. It is *Housing by People* (Pantheon, \$10.00) by John F. C. Turner. This man knows what he is talking about because he has worked for years in the thick of public housing and because he has thought the problem through at both practical and theoretical levels. He is, as Colin Ward says in a splendid preface, "something

much rarer than a housing expert: he is a philosopher of housing, seeking answers to questions which are so fundamental that they seldom get asked."

"Putting together a house to live in is simple enough; people have been doing it remarkably well for thousands of years." Books like *Architecture without Architects* (Bernard Rudofsky) and *Native Genius in Anonymous Architecture* (Sibyl Moholy-Nagy) give overflowing evidence of this. Why is construction of a dwelling no longer simple? Because of the enormously complex circumstances of our lives and the psychological barriers embedded in ideology and bureaucratic structures, preventing individual exercise of the natural human capacity to make a house.

How did Mr. Turner learn what to do about this? By studying what the people in less advanced and less organized countries do. Colin Ward says:

John Turner absorbed in Peru the lessons offered by the illegal squatter settlements: that far from being the threatening symptoms of social malaise, they were a triumph of self-help which, overcoming the culture of poverty, evolved over time into fully serviced suburbs, giving their occupants a foothold in the urban economy. More perhaps than anyone else, he has changed the way we perceive such settlements.

It became evident to him that what could be done in Peru could be made possible elsewhere, even in places like New York. The fundamental problems are not different; they are only a bit easier for people to solve for themselves in less "developed" countries. John Turner's outlook is given in his introduction to the American edition:

A careful reading of this book will show that what I am advocating is a radical change of relations between people and government in which government ceases to persist in doing what it does badly or uneconomically—building and managing houses—and concentrates on what it has the authority to do: to ensure equitable access to resources which local communities and people cannot provide for themselves. To fight instead for the restoration or extension of public expenditure on conventional housing programmes is as reactionary as the failure to

press for land reform and the liberation of housing finance from corporate banking.

How do such things work? A look at the *Saturday Review* (July 23) feature, "The New Urban Pioneers—Homesteading in the Slums," shows one of the ways they work. It is easy to remain ignorant of such "triumphs of self-help" since they seem to suggest the need to go *backward* through the mazes of technology, in order to find the way to a decent life. Such methods aren't supposed to work, and a literary engineer, Samuel Florman (who has gained some notoriety by carelessly making fun of people like Lewis Mumford, Theodore Roszak, Amory Lovins, and E. F. Schumacher), declared in *Harper's* for August that the urban homesteading program "failed because most poor families simply were not capable of fixing up the houses."

This seems a curious neglect of the facts and figures (to which engineers are reputed to pay attention) reported by Mr. Turner in his book:

At the time of writing [1976], after two years of operation, U-HAB [Urban Homestead Assistance Board program in New York City] has assisted groups taking over more than 60 buildings, 50 of which are fully organized and providing improved housing for more than 2,000 people in over 600 apartments. Initial costs, to quote the 1975 annual report, range between \$8,000 and \$13,000 per unit, with monthly carrying charges of \$80 to \$180. This is less than half the cost of comparable commercial rehabilitation and about one quarter the cost and rental price of new units.

Three sets of people made this happen: First, the people intending to live in the renovated flats; second, the funders, mostly governmental; and third, independent specialists (architects, etc.), usually non-profit people. By no means an ideal combination, one could say, but when you're working your way back through a controlling system that does everything wrong, you must use whatever loose energies and available talents that are around and can be turned in the right direction. Mr. Turner says:

While this combination may be essential at present, the deeper reason for the measurable savings,

as well as the equally evident but non-quantifiable human benefits, lies in the meaning of the activity itself. The main motive for personally committing oneself to the always exacting and often exhausting job of organizing and managing, let alone self-building, may be the bodily need for socially acceptable shelter, but "higher" needs for creative expression and personal identity are, in most cases, also present and for many equally important. No self-helper to whom I have ever spoken, and no observer whose evaluations I have read, has failed to emphasize the pride of achievement, the self-confidence and self-respect, or the delight in creativity, however hard the task may have been.

Curiously, what Turner and some others recognized with delight in Peru, conventional authorities view with alarm. When a leading newspaper editor inspected the "rapidly self-improving squatter settlements" of Arequipa, he saw only "a vast shanty town, instead of a huge construction site." He didn't see or understand the people there who were busily recreating their own community for and by themselves, with pride and joy.

It will take time for people to see the real point of such changes. Meanwhile, the story of the Ugly Duckling might be used as an urban reconstruction myth for our time.