Localism, Good Work, and Technological Society

Fall Course, 2025 – Center for Catholic Social Thought

Thursdays, Oct 2-Dec 11, 2025 5:30-7p

Assumption Church, St. Paul

Colin Miller and KC Flynn

Course Description

Today each of us is forced to confront fundamental questions about how to live on a daily basis: technology is reaching into ever more remote corners of our lives, and at the same time there is increasing interest among Christians in reconnecting with the land as the source of our material life, finding good work, and living locally. How should we think about these issues as Catholics? What challenges or dangers does technology pose? How do we raise our children, find good work, live in touch with nature, eat well, cultivate real friendships, and live as disciples in the midst of it? This course draws on Scripture, Catholic social teaching, as well as authors such as Wendell Berry, Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin, Ivan Illich and others, to explore these questions.

Cotaught by Colin Miller (Ph.D., Duke University) and KC Flynn (Baylor University)
For more information and to register please visit catholicsocialthought.org

Weeks, Texts and Lectures

Oct 2 Miller, "Thinking Christianly about Technology"; Lecture: "Christianity on One Page"

Oct 9 No class, no readings, but attend William Cavanaugh Lecture, 6:30pm, at Assumption.

Oct 16 Miller, "Technology and the Fragmentation of Society"

Oct 23 Wirzba, "Why Agrarianism Matters – Even to Urbanites", *Agrarian Reader*. Watch *Food Inc.*

Oct 30 Berry, "Agricultural Crisis as a Crisis of Character," and "Agricultural Crisis as a Crisis of Culture"

Nov 6 Miller, "Cult, Culture and Cultivation," "A Philosophy of Labor," and "Chickens, Gardens and Dumpsters", in *We Are Only Saved Together*;

Nov 13 Miller, "The Agrarian Heart of the Catholic Worker Movement"

Nov 20 Illich, selections from *Tools for Conviviality* (Handout)

Nov 27 Thanksgiving – no class. Reading: "Summary of MacIntyre, *After Virtue*", first half.

Dec 4 "Summary of *After Virtue,*" second half. Discussion: *After Virtue,* localism and Christian community.

Dec 11 Berry, "Two Economies". Concluding discussion and reflections.

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Thinking Christianly About Technology, or, Why Your Grandkids Don't Care About Church

by Colin Miller[link:/articles/authors/colin-miller/]

June 21, 2024

I have the privilege of having a job in which I get to take Communion to the homebound on a regular basis. Many of these folks are elderly and many are deeply committed Catholics. One of the things I hear repeatedly is a lament that their grandchildren, though often raised in Catholic families and often with twelve, if not sixteen, years of Catholic schooling, do not have much or any interest in continuing to practice the faith. It is usual for them to speculate about some of the reasons for this, which are obviously various and mutually enforcing: the world is increasingly "secular," even Catholic schools; there are new moralities, especially where sex is concerned; the

internet exposes kids to a range of views they never used to encounter; many parishes are lukewarm at best, and some have adopted a policy of accommodation with the modern world, and in turn, have failed to provide adequate Catholic formation. And so forth.

Certainly all these and more are part of the picture, and important. Yet here I want to suggest that there is another biggie, arguably one of the biggest, which I never hear added to this list: not the content of technology, but the *use* of it. Or, perhaps more accurately, as I will suggest, its use of us. What do I have in mind?

When I talk about "technology," I mean to simply refer in general to our use of *tools*. The ones that dominate our world most obviously these days are of course smartphones and computers of all kinds, with their attendant applications like Facebook and text messages. But I am also talking about automobiles, airplanes, screens of all kinds, and also all the high-tech devices that make modern medicine, science, commerce, transportation, as well as warfare, possible.

I want to suggest that there are some largely unnoticed negative consequences in our intensive use of such technology, and not just that it distracts us, makes us anti-social, and that it is part of the motor that is destroying the environment. That is all true. But below I want to underline the way that the ubiquity of such tools makes Christianity unattractive and increasingly difficult to practice by cultivating moral and intellectual habits directly opposed to the Gospel. Technology makes us different people—people who are less inclined to be Catholic.

To see this we are going to have to think about what it is to think *Christianly* about technology, and when we do this we will see that it should be no surprise that our elders' grandkids—who might be our kids—have little or no interest in the Church.

It is necessary before going further, however, for me to say that I am no technophobe—I will not be suggesting that because there are dangers with technology we have to simply return to a time before electricity. To be critical of some of the effects of technology on us is not to reject it wholesale, were that even possible.

What I will be suggesting, rather, is that we have to develop an *asceticism,* a life-giving discipline, around our use of tools, in order to preserve and recover what their intensive use endangers. Just as the Church gives us disciplines around food, drink, and sex in order to preserve our freedom towards these very good gifts of God, so freedom around technology—also a good gift from God—today requires perhaps even greater discipline.

Thinking Christianly About Technology

Modern technology is so significant for the formation of children, and all of us, because it forms our habits. And as any good OCIA program or Catechism will tell you, Christianity is all about the cultivation of habits—the moral and religious habits that make up the virtues and the vices that constitute who we are—our character. Moral habits of this kind are cultivated the same way that other habits are: by repetition and practice (and always with the help of grace).

Do you want to become more generous and self-sacrificial in order to be more Christ-like? The only way to do it is to find a thousand little actions, in day-to-day living, that are generous and self-sacrificial. Give to the poor. Forgive your offensive coworker. Do kind things you do not want to do for your family members. Smile at strangers when you are grumpy. Likewise, if you do not do this,

and you take those thousand opportunities rather to practice greed and selfishness, those are sure-fire practices that will cultivate not good moral habits, but bad ones. Virtues are holy habits, vices are sinful ones. Christianity is all about becoming a saint, becoming is saint is about cultivating virtues, and virtues are won by all the little ways we habituate ourselves every day. This, I think, is just Christianity 101, or it should be.

The blind spot, for us, is all the little ways that *tools* habituate us every day. When we drive a car, for instance, we become habituated to speed. We get used, in other words, to the fact that we can go sixty miles an hour, and this quickly morphs into the habit of thinking that we should be able to get anywhere within a mile of where we are in about one minute. And we know that the habit has really taken hold, because, like all habits, it affects not just the way that we think, but how we feel and act. So, when I am expecting to get somewhere at the rate of a mile a minute, and then I hit a traffic jam, I am immediately impatient, irritated, and maybe even a little indignant (as if my car gave me a *right* to go fast). This is how I know my car has gotten deep down into my soul.

It is important to note that this has very little to do with what we *think* or what our *attitudes* are. No: if we ride in a car we just cannot *help* but be this way. Whatever our better intentions are, our *first* intention in getting into a car is to go fast. And so, "*I want to go fast*!" becomes part of who we are. The placement of our *body* creates the disposition, and our mind, more often than not, has no choice but to follow the placement of our bodies.

I can tell myself over and over again not to get used to going fast when I drive, but there is nothing I can do about it. I can likewise try to "psych myself out" and remain calm when I am sitting in a traffic jam, but such mental gymnastics are usually of little avail. The very fact that we have to use them shows that the position of our body is more determinative than what we are trying to do with our souls. Or rather, as Catholics know well, what we do with our bodies is the way that we shape our souls. Our addiction to speed shows that there is a significant part of technology that is always using *us* while we are using it.

We also carry the habits we form in the car with us into other areas of life. They shape our total character, not just what we do behind the wheel. So when I come home from a commute, freshly practiced at wanting more speed, it is not a coincidence that I snap at my two year old when he does not get into his booster seat for dinner as *quickly* as I would have liked.

But of course the car is just one example. Consider another obvious one, the smart phone. There are lots of habits these form in us, and all the more intensely and quickly because they become, literally, attached to our bodies and so almost like a second brain in a way that even a car does not.

Perhaps the most obvious habit it forms is the desire to be distracted by something new. When I have been texting with friends in a series of regular exchanges for an hour or so, and then the conversation dies down, I notice I have a strong and constant urge for something new to pop up on my phone. I feel like I need a "hit" to keep me going. This is both a craving for *novelty,* for the next new thing, and a craving for *distraction*. The phone trains me to get *bored* very easily, and it discourages my ability to focus or think deeply about anything—all I want is the latest trivial update, and that keeps my thinking in the shallow end.

A final, often noted, habit that comes with smartphones is the preference for screen-time over face-to-face interactions. Everyone has heard the jokes about a group of twenty high school students sitting silently around a room together all at their phones communicating with each other through

media. As many have noted, this preference for the virtual over the real stunts authentic community formation in profound ways.

When we are online, we can meticulously manage the way that we present ourselves, in a way that we cannot in person. Increasingly, then, we avoid in-person contact when possible, out of fear of not being able to control our encounter in the same way. This means that normal abilities for in-the-flesh relationships go underdeveloped and this has, and is having, catastrophic social consequences.

Technology is Not Morally Neutral

While all of this will be relevant for why our pews are getting empty, my main purpose so far has just been to convince you that our tools habituate us—they form our character and our dispositions, what we like and what we do not. We do not use them without them using us. This is true of all tools, but intensive tool use like we have in the modern world, as opposed to an ax or riding a horse, habituates us as never before. If you want proof of this from a secular angle, there is no better place to look than Nicolas Carr's book *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains.*

[link:https://wwnorton.com/books/9780393357820]

What all this means is that our use of technology *is not morally or religiously neutral.* The kinds of devices we go about using all day long have a profound effect on the kind of people we are. And of course, that determines everything: what we like to do, who we like to hang out with, even the kinds of things we are likely to believe.

In other words, if Christianity is all about habits, then technology has everything to do with Christianity.

But this is not all. We miss the major impact that our tools have had on the practice of Christianity in our day if we do not see exactly how the habits and dispositions of technology users can *directly oppose* the habits and dispositions required for Christian flourishing. Let us take a look at some of these contrasts.

We have mentioned that technology cultivates the desire for speed. This obviously carries with it an increasing inability to tolerate going slow.

Yet the ability to go slow, and spend time—you might even say "waste" time—simply "being with" God and neighbor is essential to Christianity. It is the heart of prayer, and it is the heart of fellowship. But no one is going to practice their faith with much enthusiasm or consistency if they always feel like it is taking too long.

We have mentioned that desire for the next beep or buzz, and this (especially coupled with our habits of consumption) has easily become an ongoing quest for *novelty*. We spend our lives in pursuit of the "next new thing," and we are so easily bored when it does not come: not only the next beep, but the next phone, the next gadget, the next scientific breakthrough, the next Amazon package.

Yet learning to be a Christian demands saying the same *old* prayers over and over, staring at the *same* icon for hours, or even over years, in silent prayer, and learning to love the most ordinary and unexciting people in our lives, day in and day out, over a lifetime, long after they have ceased to be

new and exciting. Indeed, it is usually in these unflashy and, to the modern mind, very *boring* things, that our tradition tells us we really learn to find God.

Relatedly, our tools and the noise of our lives constantly *distract* us. We get used to soothing our lack of inner peace with a thousand external stimuli. And this is primarily a lack of *attention*, the virtue that is the opposite of our constant quest for more stimulation.

Yet attention is essential to what theologians have always called *contemplation*, which our tradition places among the highest activities of Christians. It is not just "thinking," but attending to reality (whether divine or created) in all its beauty. It is essential to worship, and it requires us to focus our minds and our hearts and our senses. We would even be right to say we cannot be truly *happy* without it.

Our tools also make us value the *future* over the past. The demand for novelties is the demand for "new things." But new things only come in the future. The more our devices train us to distraction and novelty, the more we develop an unconscious but definite sense that *then* will be better than now. This only reinforces our common perception that, in light of modern advances in science and technology, the future *cannot but* be better than the past. All this becomes not so much a rationally thought-out position, as a sort of visceral inclination for anything but what we have now. Once again, our machines push this view on us largely without us knowing it. They secretly determine what we love. And we might not know why, but we love the future and we scorn the past.

Yet Christianity not only does not scorn the past, it *lives* from the past. It *is* a living tradition of loving attention to the slowly won insights of long dead men and women. Trust in this tradition—and thus a certain *identification with* the past—is a large part of what *faith* is. And so having faith will be increasingly difficult if we are always living in the future. If you cannot love the past you will not be a Christian for very long.

Finally, we have already highlighted some of the ways that our machines degrade community. But we should add that communication technology has so greatly increased our range of potential electronic "friends," that *local* community becomes unnecessary. It is replaced by a "network" (which we sometimes mistakenly call community) of all those people we keep in the orbit of our cars, planes, texts, emails, "posts," and phone calls. Each person is the center of his own network, and network is not community.

But Christianity *demands* local community. It *is* local community. The body of Christ is a *social* body and not just a collection of individuals that occasionally gather for pious exercises. The first Christians had "all things in common" and they "always kept together," says the Acts of the Apostles (2:44). And, on another level, but perhaps more pointedly, never was there a religion that took root deep in anyone's heart that was not supported by a warm and confident band of fellow believers *in the flesh*. It is hard enough being a Catholic today; it is *impossible* without stoking the flames of faith by constant encouragement from our friends. Catholics without community will not be Catholics for long.

It's Not "Just" a Tool

This list should impress us. It shows how some of the most vital aspects of Catholicism—community, tradition, faith, prayer, contemplation—are directly undermined by the dominant habits of technology use. Technology then, in a strange way, and usually without anyone intending

it, ends up taking aim at the very fabric of Catholicism. It shapes our character when we use it, whether we want it to or not, so that those who use it intensively are likely to be disinclined to be Catholics. This is especially true for young people today, many of whom have never had the privilege of knowing any other world.

As I said, then, tool use is not neutral, or indifferent; it is deeply moral and religious action. We often hear, "It's *just* a tool, . . . I *just* use it to get around, . . . I *just* use it to keep up with people." Those are lies we are encouraged to make our own, and harmful ones too; they are part of the ideology of a technological society.

This does not mean that every push of a button or trip to the store involves us in mortal sin. But it does give another powerful reason why more and more people and especially young people are checking out of the Church. They are simply not interested in it; they are interested in the things their material culture makes them love.

And this explains, too, why we are losing even the majority of those who go to Catholic schools. People learn from schools more than just the *content* of the curriculum; they learn the form of life that is embodied in what happens at school every day, hour by hour. So when even the most doctrinally orthodox and rigorous curriculum is conveyed largely by way of modern gadgets, the student is pulled, in a way, in two directions at once: she learns one thing in religion class and another by the computer she takes notes with for the same class.

Pile all this hidden character formation on top of two dozen other ways it is difficult to be a Catholic today, and add to it the normal temptations and desires of youth, and it should be no surprise when Confirmation becomes Catholic graduation.

Technological Asceticism

But this is no counsel of despair. For there *are* Catholics today, after all. There are even young people who stay or even *become* Catholics, and often with great zeal. And increasingly, when I meet these young people, they are sustaining and nurturing their faith with precisely those essential aspects of the Gospel we mentioned above: intentional face to face community, blocks of time set aside for quiet and prayer, and study of the riches of the Tradition. It is no surprise, then, that these same young people are also actively disciplining their use of technology. They limit their "screen time," choose low-tech schools—I have even met one that does not have a phone!

And we can do the same thing. We can choose this sort of technological asceticism for the sake of the Gospel.

For thinking Christianly about technology means seeing it as part of, and not separate from, the whole set of practices and disciplines that we take on as part of a life devoted to Christ and his Church. We know that strip clubs, violent movies, junk food, drugs and alcohol, and bad company have detrimental effects on our faith, and we go about limiting or excluding them altogether for ourselves and our children.

We can, we must, do the same with technology. We can look at screens as little as possible. We can leave our phones at home or at least turn them off for some of the day. We can close our social media accounts and call people or visit them in person. We can walk or bike or ride the bus as often

as possible. We can listen to the birds instead of a podcast or music when we go for our jog. We can cook our meals together with our friends rather than running through McDonald's or popping something in the microwave.

This is technological asceticism. All these sorts of disciplines bear the twin movements away from technology and toward what you might call *real relationships*. And the biggest thing that I have discovered as I have tried to do this in my own life is what a difference this makes in the way I *experience the world.*

For lack of a better way of describing it, I would say it is a rediscovery of the *bodily-ness* of being human. It is the rediscovery of a three-dimensional world, a world of five senses, of time; a world of persons where after a while what is happening on social media seems trivial; a world of voice, of glance, of touch, of eyes and faces, of the smell of dirt in my yard; a world where I can delight in *this* person that I am with *here* and *now* in *this* unique moment, *this* space that can only come into existence between my flesh and your flesh. I discover that the world, in other words, for which I came equipped out of the womb, is an endlessly more exciting and satisfying one, than the one we have made.

And this real world, this world of flesh and bodies and living souls, is after all the world that the Lord of heaven and earth took to himself by taking on the same flesh, body and soul. It is no wonder that if we lose this world we lose knowledge of him. We would better get to work trying to find it.

Featured Image: "Universum TV Multispiel 2006" first generation pong console. Released 1978, uses the AY-3-8500 General Instrument chip, photo taken by Shadowgate; Source: Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0[link:https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/deed.en].

Posted in Tech and Media[link:/articles/category/technology/]

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Read more by Colin Miller[link:/articles//authors/colin-miller]

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE ON ONE PAGE

Useless Worship – Thanksgiving (Eucharist) - Happiness

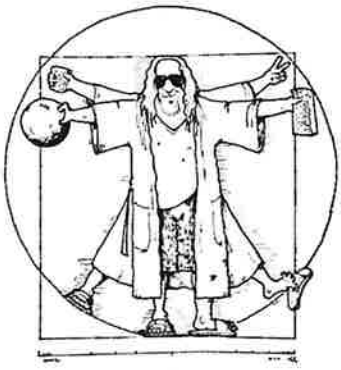
Virtues – Good Habits of Desire

Justice – Give to each what is due
Wisdom – make good decisions
Courage – move through fear
Temperance – the right amount

Faith – believe Church about LORD and salvation
Hope - - long for renewed world
Charity – love the LORD and neighbor as self (sacrifice)

Humility – orders self around the LORD

Church
Sacraments
Liturgy
Fasting
Works of Mercy



NORMAL CHRISTIAN DUDE

World
Temptation
Sinful nature
Devil

Vices – Bad Habits of Desire

Unjust – do not give what is due
Foolish – bad decisions
Coward – submit to fear
Gluttony– taking too much

Unbelief –skepticism about LORD and Salvation
Despair – no hope in LORD's future
Lack of charity – demands sacrifice of others

Pride – orders world around self – loves power

Ungratefulness- Dissatisfaction - Misery

Thinking Christianly About Technology Part II:
Technology and the Fragmentation of Society

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In a previous essay, I suggested that intensive use of technology, and especially digital technology, makes it more difficult to be a Christian. There's a widespread myth out there that the only "moral" or "spiritual" questions about technology are how *we use it.* On the contrary, I argued, it is not possible anymore to use technology without *it using us*: tool use always habituates us into being particular kinds of people. And in our day, I suggested, technology use shapes our character in a way that is contrary to the formation demanded by the Gospel.

Here I want to continue to build a picture of the significance of technology for Christians, and how we might respond to it faithfully. For while it is true that technology reorganizes each of us morally and spiritually, it has also reorganized and continues to reorganize society from top to bottom, again in ways harmful to the Church.

Below I want to highlight specifically the role technology has in the ongoing breakdown of any kind of strong community life in Western cultures, by undermining what Catholic social teaching calls local solidarity and subsidiarity at almost every point. To do this we'll take a look (first) at characteristics of healthy communities and (then) the role that technology has played in an unprecedented restructuring of society, bringing us to the increasingly rootless, fragmented, and lonely forms of life we inhabit today. This story will require a little background work before we come (in the last section) to the special significance of technology itself. So if you're wondering, as we go along, what all this has to do with a smartphone – hold on, we're getting there.

Before diving in, it's worth acknowledging that, from a conventional American political perspective, much of the following may seem by turns strikingly liberal or strikingly conservative. Yet this is just one more indication that these labels have worn out their usefulness. For the account I give arises directly from the Church's social tradition, and is broadly consonant with thinkers as diverse as Dorothy Day, Wendy Brown, Wendell Berry, and Mahatma Gandhi. It is neither the conservative argument that government and institutions are curtailing our economic freedom nor the liberal argument that reform is necessary to fix a broken system, but the longstanding contention of Catholic social teaching that local economies are the only alternative to social atomization.

Healthy Communities

Coming to an adequate grasp of our current situation requires that we first give a minimal account of key characteristics of healthy communities. The first thing we have to recognize here is that the social bonds of any given community must exist *within* that community. If they do not — if the basis of its togetherness comes from somewhere else — then that "somewhere else" is their true community.

For example, in a workplace, often groups of friends develop. Yet such groups are not independent communities, but are held together by a commitment to a common employer, rather than directly to each other. The company is the real community. So, when someone takes a different job, it is likely that person will leave the friend group. If they don't, it's because the group has found something besides the company to unite them — say, love of music or local beer.

Whatever it is, for the group to hold together, there must be something of personal interest, resulting in intentional and active participation. In traditional Catholic language, this is called the common good. It's the centripetal force — the social bond — of any community. Like a sports team or a brigade of soldiers, common goods mean that everyone in the community has an interest in everyone else, because they all have an active, personal interest in the same objective(s). Common goods are the glue of healthy communities. They are the basis of what the Church calls "solidarity" – social unity – among people.

For human beings, the core of the common good has always been shared and local *work* of some kind or another, usually centered around the production of the necessities of life. A strong community, in other words, is one that provides for many of its own goods and services: food, medicine, transportation, tools, entertainment, education, clothing, housing, etc. In this way, healthy communities have real practical things to *do* together, so that the things that make life go around are goods produced *internally* – the community provides them for itself.

For instance, I regularly hear stories from an older generation about farm life in rural Minnesota 75 years ago. Though each family owned their own property, making a living off the land was consciously a community effort. No one could get along without the regular participation of one's neighbors and extended family. This ranged from planting or harvesting or slaughtering to sharing tools (no one owned everything they needed) to building projects to financial help in hard times to apprenticing each other's children.

Though certainly such communities were not without their dysfunction – as no human endeavors are – these corporate projects provided social unity. Local work and

social solidarity could not be separated. Until relatively recently, such local economies have been characteristic of almost all communities.

Catholic social teaching has (perhaps inelegantly) called this localism "subsidiarity." This is the principle that the vital functions of communities should first be sustained at small and adjacent levels before they are taken over by more remote collectivities. Problems should be solved by those closest to them; the means of production as much as possible should be possessed and utilized by those who will consume the products; we shouldn't neglect our geographical neighbors in our concern for those across the globe; as much of a rural community's food should be grown from its own land as possible, and imports should only supplement unavoidable deficiencies; a homeless person should be taken in by her parish or neighborhood before she is referred to the municipal shelter.

Such localism means that the pursuit of the common good itself is always both *local* and characterized by what is sometimes called *personalism*. It is both of those things because to come to know a community's true common good, one must be intimately and so locally involved with its people. This is because every place and its people are almost infinitely complex. To *personally* get to know it is the only way to know it at all. You cannot engage the common good from a distance, or by pushing buttons, or by a few abstract categories. You must live in it. This means that true solutions to social problems will have to come from within, and not without — from the people themselves. They will have to engage each other in the flesh, in the complexity of *local* life. Such personalism is deep in the heart of the Catholic social tradition.

Strong communities, then, are engaged in an innumerable variety of what you might call local "projects," aimed at providing for their common life and enhancing their common good: agriculture, homeschool co-ops, family businesses, parish schools, community gardens, time-banks, credit unions, and a thousand other examples of people working together in the flesh towards a tangible common good. Such projects are the glue that keeps people bound together.

Work, under these circumstances, is itself always personal. I have a friend who, after working for many years as a banker, has recently taken up as the butcher of a small farming town, and does most of the butchering in the area. He commented to me about the difference it makes when what you do all day is for your friends, close acquaintances, and neighbors. There is an added sense of responsibility, along with a knowledge that the "customers" that you have are the same people you'll have over for dinner. Doing a good job is therefore part of your "social life."

In a community where everyone is working for each other in this way, a unique *place* is created to which you concretely and tangibly *belong*, by the practical things that

you do for each other. It's a place precisely by not being any other place, and that in part because of the irreplaceable relationships that *local work* involve. Such places provide a tangible sense of rootedness; their people have settled identities which are developed in conversation with communities and tradition, rather than having to come up with them and impose them on themselves.

Life in these local circumstances tends to form a united whole. "Education" is no longer a process of obtaining "book smarts" that have little to do with our neighbors, or that have to be "applied" to real life, but is the apprenticeship sufficient to be familiar with the tradition, history and skills required to engage in and carry on to the next generation the projects that constitute the community.

Likewise, "moral development" is not just something that happens in Sunday school, the Boy Scouts, or in an ethics class, much less by memorizing a set of rules, and less still by coming up with our own code of conduct. Rather, "becoming a good person" is just another aspect of growing up, coming to take one's part in the community, and so acquiring the character necessary to the jobs one will have to do to contribute to the common good.

In such a place "entertainment" is not a distraction from the drudgery of labor that has nothing to do with the rest of life, but is of a piece with the fascination, humor, and pleasure that is part of the projects and social bonds of the communities themselves: the telling of stories, musical and artistic expression, meals, drinks, conversation, reading and writing, dancing.

In such communities, in other words, to live is to work, and to work is to live. We are constantly surrounded by people and things we are familiar with. Aunt Betty made that dress , and it reminds me of her love; I made this desk, I'm proud of it, and it makes me think of my father, who taught me how. We grew this food; it was a tough summer, but eating it is immensely satisfying.

We are describing a world, in other words, in which we have the right kinds of dependence and independence. We are *dependent* upon friends, family, and neighbors in a way that creates social bonds, makes us secure, and provides a sort of built-in insurance. Yet we are *independent* in terms of having a healthy amount of agency and authority over our own lives. We can provide for ourselves and our community. It is not a world without many problems, sins, or evil. But it is a world that people understand, in which they willy-nilly belong and contribute, have friends, and most often maintain their sanity.

It can be tempting to smile at all this as a quaint throwback to *Leave It To Beaver*. Yet, as we'll see, it's likely only our *own* largely unprecedented way of life that motivates this reaction. It's important to remember that this "old-fashioned" way of life was, until

very recently, simply what most people in history meant by *human* life. It's also what people *still* mean by human life all over the world, largely in non-Western and countless subsistence cultures.

Outsourcing Social Bonds

So, what happened to strong communities? There are many factors, but a big one is that we increasingly developed an economy where production takes place *outside* of or *external* to local communities. For the last 200 years, increasingly food, medicine, childcare, transportation, tools, entertainment, education, clothing, eldercare, housing, and the like, have come to be provided outside families, neighborhoods, cities, and parishes.

As we'll see, this is intimately related to the development of technology. But the point for now is that when production becomes non-local, this amounts to outsourcing the community's social bonds. Today little is provided "in house" any more, and so there is little need for cooperation, dependence, friendship, or the common good. We've lost the glue that holds us together, and we've lost our sense of shared identity. We might happen to live next to each other, but we don't *have* to know one another anymore, so, very often, we don't.

The flip side of this is that as we have ceased to be members of local communities, we've simultaneously *become* members of the external, institutionalized providers of goods and services that have displaced the once-local economies. We no longer get our goods and services from sources internal to our communities, and so we have to get them elsewhere. In other words, we no longer need families, parishes, neighborhoods, cooperatives and Jerry the town butcher; we need banks, Target, health care, social workers, Amazon, and auto service centers. Such goods and services have (sometimes intentionally and sometimes unintentionally) displaced local common goods by radically monopolizing the sources of daily living. By their very definition they don't facilitate us working together, but are designed exactly as a *replacement for* shared projects. Because of this, our membership in them keeps us fragmented from one another.

But these new "memberships" are very different from our old ones. What it means to be a "member" of Amazon or Target is not what it means to be a member of a local community. To get our food at Target involves an entirely different form of life than to get our food from our fields or even from the farmer's market. The former involves very little of the flesh-and-blood relationships, personalism, common goods, friendships, or any of that right kind of dependence or independence characteristic of local community. Now the relations are flipped: we become independent of our neighbors, and dependent on external providers.

Of central importance here is that when you or I become "members" of (say) Target, that does not put us in any direct relationship to one another. Rather, each individual *as an individual* enters into a relationship with the *whole Target system*. In a local community, by contrast, perhaps you and I and ten other people used to be united by the fact that we all eat vegetables, because we all helped make our local crop of them. But now, because most vegetables come from stores like Target, the social bond made by our vegetable eating binds each of us *only* to Target and not at all to each other. We are kept isolated like spokes on a bicycle wheel: we all touch the hub but never each other. When this happens in every area of life, it creates a society of atomized individuals.

Of course, this does not just happen with stores like Target. *Most* of our social bonds today are becoming of this kind. And many of these so-called "communities" are in fact *more* impersonal, have fewer common goods, and so are more isolating than Big Box Stores. A world of Amazon, electronic money management, insurance companies and social media means that "community" is increasingly being re-defined by membership in invisible bureaucracies and legal entities that apply everywhere but exist nowhere in particular.

The basic rationale of this non-local economy is to do our work – provide for our necessities – more efficiently than we can for ourselves. Accordingly, our ability to engage our world independently has atrophied. In time, we have increasingly come to look on our institutionalized providers as – in a way what they have really become – the only solution to any problem, even our only way getting something done. We become a people who can only act *through systems.*

Our mindset and actions reflect this. For example, if we want to be involved in our local scene – say, to revitalize a neighborhood or engage a homeless encampment – the first thing we think to do is look to the professionals. We instantly think of involving more social workers, lobbyists, doctors, mental health workers, or housing experts. What else would we do but get people "connected," as we say, to the right services?

Yet, even with the best of intentions, these services often unwittingly *weaken* the very communities we were trying to strengthen, by leading them further from their own personalist pursuit of the common good and toward a growing dependence on the outside services. A homeless encampment or an impoverished neighborhood is not allowed to define and explore their own problems; those problems are defined ahead of time and then remedied in the impersonal terms of agencies whose very expertise is defined in terms of offering analyses and solutions that work in *every situation*. Yet this means that the personalism and proximity required to grasp a common good is excluded from the outset.

And so, inevitably, our institutionalized services tend to pluck people out of their local communities – even if they leave them geographically in the same place – and graft their lives onto *themselves* as systems that manage large parts of those lives for them. Once again, then, we lose our common good, our glue. And so it is that communities grow weak as systems grow strong.

I've been laying out the deep structural change at the heart of modern social history. It's hard to overstate the significance of this unprecedented shift, so let me state it again as concisely as I can. Human social bonds are mostly a function of the production of the goods, services, and culture necessary for a society to flourish. To relocate such production almost entirely outside a community is to strip that community of its social bonds. This we have largely done, destroying most of our local communities. We have then sustained the lives of their former members by technological goods and services, making us dependent members of new sorts of pseudo-communities.

Historically, this is one of the most revolutionary changes in the structure of any human society. We've never lived like this before. Yet it feels natural to us, since we're so used to it – like fish who don't notice the water. So by now we all have our sense of normal almost entirely determined by perhaps the greatest oxymoron history has produced: non-local community.

A Society of Radical Monopolies

But we can go deeper. I mentioned above that today's corporations and institutions "radically monopolize" the production of the things we need for daily living. Let me explain and expand on the phrase a little bit.

We all know what a monopoly is: the dominance of the market for a product by exclusion of all competitors. A *radical* monopoly goes even further: it's the dominance of an *aspect of life* by the exclusion of the ability to provide it from the local community. For example, if Apple were the only brand of computer in town, that would be a monopoly. When you need a smartphone to have a social life, that is a radical monopoly. If Aldi were the only place for groceries, that would be a monopoly. When you can only get your food from grocery stores, that is a radical monopoly. And this is what has happened in virtually every aspect of our lives.

A few more examples:

Care for our bodies: from time immemorial local cultures have made use of their own traditional arts of suffering and treating illness, much of which they engaged in quite skillfully even before modern medicine. Today, the health care industry has almost completely displaced such traditional wisdom and left us almost completely dependent on its own models, diagnoses, and cures.

Transportation: our bodies are naturally mobile. For all of history people have gotten around on foot, horse, or bicycle. But for the last 100 years our infrastructure has been so constructed that it is difficult to move without paved roads, cars, oil, and the jungle of institutions that stand behind them.

Insurance: historically, people have been secured against the vicissitudes of fate and financial catastrophe, as they still are today in many non-Western cultures, by duties of neighborliness, norms of solidarity, strict family obligations, and traditions of hospitality. Today, by contrast, even the closest of friends and family relations take care of each other only when recourse to the insurance company fails.

Education: throughout history most real learning has happened willingly, as part of a community, or by spontaneous interest, and in all these cases at very little cost. By contrast, today it is widely assumed that critical thinking and a stable moral temperament are available only to those who are supervised through the compulsory consumption of a standardized curriculum.

And let me again underline the two significant examples with which we started. Food: human beings have always procured most of their food locally, and with significant amounts of neighborly cooperation. Today this can be done only with great effort, and only by those well-off enough to afford the additional expense, time, and travel necessary.

And, finally, communication: it is increasingly difficult to be part of any community of friends at all, much less function in society, without the capabilities of a smart phone. Our "social" life now depends on it.

And now consider the cumulative practical difference the introduction of these radical monopolies has made in the shape of our daily lives. Perhaps one way to put it is that, for us, without commercial and institutional support, it is increasingly difficult for us to be sick, secure, to learn, eat, talk, or move.

Yet perhaps the most significant consequence of the radical monopolies is the way they permanently isolate us from one another. For they *are* the institutional embodiment of externalized means of production, and therefore of externalized social bonds. So the situation we've gotten ourselves into is one in which we are permanently isolated from one another by the very institutions we've created to make our bodily (and often psychological) lives possible. Because our productive lives are external to local communities, we have only the thinnest common goods holding us together. Yet the catch-22 is that, because we are now dependent on the radical monopolies for our daily life, they make it extremely hard for us to re-form any alternative, internal, local social bonds. Thus we can't live without them, but we can't live *together* with them.

Taylorism

All of this is directly relevant for the Church in a variety of ways. One of the most important is that, as I have said elsewhere at greater length, we can only be Christians as a *community* of Christians, and so forces assaulting solidarity will always also be assaulting the Church. I'll have more to say about this in a subsequent article, but at this point I want to draw our attention to the way that these forces are in large part the forces *of technology*. In this section, then, I'll outline how the basic dynamic of technological development, what is sometimes called "Taylorism," has been the engine that has driven these structural changes in society.

"Taylorism" takes its name from Fredrick Taylor, famous for pioneering the "scientific" management of workflow in factories in order to assure maximum output. His idea was to quantify and regulate each motion with the strictest precision, knowing what each worker was doing at each moment, and incentivizing compliance. Universal surveillance mechanisms insured against deviance, and constant data collection was always laying the groundwork for the next efficiency innovation.

Most of Taylor's ideas sound very familiar today, and that's why they're still so relevant. Each smallest move in Taylor's factory was quantified, analyzed, evaluated, and then manipulated to maximize profitability. The factory thus became one always-evolving machine, and the workers are just one part of it. Personal creativity and intelligence are minimized, and only allowed as they serve the ever-tightening canons of efficiency, usually defined by the bottom line.

Though we have in some ways moved beyond the factory age today, we have certainly not moved beyond Taylorism. On the contrary, we have totalized it. Our computer-based industrial economy is Taylorism beyond Taylor's wildest dreams. Precision, calculation and surveillance are now possible at a level increasingly coextensive with society itself. Taylorism – making processes and tools as efficient as possible – simply is the inner logic of the development of technology. It's what we're trying to do whenever we come up with the newest phone, app, or surgical instrument.

One important result of this is our ongoing attempt to turn everything around us into a statistic. When you are trying to maximize material and economic efficiency, the result will be to quantify everything, to make it calculatable, measurable – to make a world of countable "things" as much as possible – so you can manipulate and manage it. And it's not just material production anymore. Today as much of life as possible, including the human being – our psychology, moods, desires, travel habits, interests, education, tastes, consumer histories, religious traditions – are quantified (especially with the help of the internet) in order to be subsumed into the never-ending mission of finding yet another faster, cheaper, easier technique.

We could give ten thousand examples of this, for they are largely coextensive with society itself. With very few exceptions, no matter what industry you work in today, most of your time is spent on this kind of "efficiency" work. It's the common dynamic that connects the earliest industrial workshops' division of labor to the factory age, and later to military, medical, aerospace and electronic developments, to the earliest computers, the internet and the digital revolution, right up to AI.

The smartphone is the obvious cultural centerpiece of Taylorism in our midst. It is (so far) the crowning glory of two centuries of Taylorism, and we Taylorize our world with it more every second. We've all become factory foremen at work and at home, and it's not too much of an exaggeration to see our entire society precisely *as* a high-tech version of one of Taylor's factories. It never stops – there are plenty of apps that even help you Taylorize your sleep.

This ceaseless advance of technological development is what has resulted in the radical monopolies. They are the logical result of this slow application of Taylorism to every part of society. For Taylorism works by the logic of specialization, just like in a factory: the division of tasks and the "outsourcing" of those functions to wherever they can be done most efficiently. And this is what the radical monopolies are – different parts of our lives handled by outsourced specialists. They are outsourced not least so that they can be done in massive quantities, to aid efficiency. And so they are always done *elsewhere* – outside the home, neighborhood, or local community. But, again, when we have to do things this way, we also have to be isolated from one another.

* * *

The basic contention of this essay has been that the structural dynamics of our society inevitably lead to social fragmentation and the breakdown of strong communities. In this way, technological development has stood in direct conflict with the Catholic social principles of personalism, subsidiarity, solidarity, and the common good. This has had a predictably negative effect on the Church, imperiling the countless tasks we can only achieve as a body, and leaving Christians as lonely and isolated as the rest of the world. We'll take a closer look at this in a future article, including things Christians can do now to begin to live intentionally in the midst of this reality. This will include, unsurprisingly, the renewal of local living as a part of recovering the possibility of real community, and Christian community in particular. But before we come to that, we have to look in more detail at what is perhaps the most radical monopoly today, and the most obvious social characteristic of our age: the digital revolution. Stay tuned.

The Essential Agrarian Reader

The Future of Culture, Community, and the Land

EDITED BY
NORMAN WIRZBA

Introduction

Why Agrarianism Matters—Even to Urbanites

Norman Wirzba

It would seem, given the massive and unprecedented migration of farmers to urban centers, that a book on agrarianism is out of step with the times. After all, once independent farms are being consolidated into a few corporate conglomerates run by efficiency-minded, bottom-line agribusiness professionals. Driving through the American heartland shows that farming communities have become ghost towns, and consulting the Census Bureau demonstrates that farmers themselves have become a statistically irrelevant group. Picturesque farmyards, with their red barns and free-ranging chickens and geese, though having considerable storybook and advertising/marketing value, are in fact little more than quaint relics of a bygone era. Indeed, many would argue that former farmers are much better off working in cities, freed of the supposed drudgery and mind-numbing work of the farm and presumably able to depend on a steady wage, regular vacation days, and a secure pension. Overall, the mass movement from country to city represents a net gain.

Or does it? There are good reasons to suggest that a culture loses its indispensable moorings, and thus potentially distorts its overall aims, when it foregoes the sympathy and knowledge that grows out of cultivating (*cultura*) the land (*ager*). Past cultures needed to be attentive to the requirements of regional geographies because for thousands of years human life and development were themselves firmly and practically oriented through multiple relationships with natural landscapes and the organisms they sup-

port. Most people, as a matter of practical necessity, understood themselves and their aspirations in terms of the limits and possibilities of the land. And so, whether we appreciate it or not, current widespread insularity from and ignorance about our many interdependencies with the earth represents an unparalleled development in human history. Our novel situation requires us to consider if we can enact a vibrant and authentic culture without at the same time advocating a healthy *agri-culture*.

The purveyors of the industrial, and now information and global, economies routinely claim the inevitability and necessity of their programs and plans, and then argue that agrarian ways are anachronistic, even dangerous, since they stand in the way of a bright future. History shows, however, that the prophets and salespeople of technological progress rarely reveal the whole story. They do not tell us what the complete and long-term costs (to communities and ecosystems) of their visions are, when and where their visions fail, nor will they disclose the actual or potential profits they hope to realize. They hide the gap that often exists between promise and fulfillment.

Consider the following: (1) New technologies, first the television but now computers and the Internet, have been widely heralded as the indispensable tools to a more educated and intelligent democracy. It is plain to see, however, that democratic participation, civic responsibility, and general intelligence (including clear, honest communication) have not risen. Indeed, the evidence would suggest that corporate influence, which controls much of our technological media, has taken the place of democratic participation. (2) Nuclear power was promoted as the energy source that would make electricity safe, reliable, and "too cheap to meter." We now live with multi-billion dollar costs that must go toward securing or repairing existing facilities and cleaning up hazardous waste, hoping that this waste does not get into the wrong hands or into our groundwater and food systems. (3) The information economy would at last free us from the grime and labor of the industrial revolution, all the while lessening our dependence on diminishing natural resources. While it is true that many people no longer work manual labor jobs, it is not at all clear that labor has become less intensive, or that the pressure on natural habitats has eased. Indeed, frenetic consumption patterns mean that we are working more, even as our perception of the quality of life (for ourselves and for natural habitats) has gone down. (4) More recently we have been promised that biotechnology engineers will design organisms that will provide the world with a safe, steady, and secure source of food and pharmaceuticals. However, we are already beginning to see that genetically altered species (sometimes referred to as biological pollutants) pose grave risks to the stability of the ecosystems in which they were meant to flourish and on which they depend. (5) Finally, we are told that multinational corporations and global, centralized networks of business, communications, transportation, and production will raise the standard of life worldwide. Without minimizing the benefits that have accrued to some, it would be naive to overlook the select few growing extremely wealthy because of globalization, the corporate interests taking the place of national sovereignty and regional self-determination, the indigenous cultures and ways disappearing at an alarming rate, and the march of (mostly) Western power and money creating international tension and unrest.

Clearly it would be foolish to eschew all technological developments as uniformly bad, just as it would be ungrateful to overlook the many good things that have resulted in the last several decades. But in our haste to embrace technological improvements we must be careful not to overlook or degrade those elements of life—such as communal support, traditional wisdom, clean water, and nutritious food—that are fundamental. The long-term costs of some of our desires, when we take the time to measure them, may simply be too high to bear. While we (perpetually) search for a better tomorrow and a more luxurious place (somewhere else), we overlook the status of our homes and neighborhoods today. Here we can see that the social, economic, cultural, and environmental indicators are not very promising. In fact, many of us are tired of hearing the litanies of cultural and environmental problems: communal disintegration, social boredom and anxiety, nickel-and-dime employment, voter disenchantment, a growing gap between rich and poor, international terrorism and unrest, corporate welfare, biological/genetic pollution (super pests and pathogens), species loss, global warming, resource depletion, soil erosion, water and air degradation . . . and so on. This, rather than some hypothetical future, is our reality.

We should ask if these problems follow from the cultural mainstream as a direct consequence of the manners and goals prescribed by it. If they do, then we must also realize that it is unlikely that an enduring solution will arise from within the mainstream's midst. In other words, the cultural paradigm that causes or abets the crisis is unlikely to find a solution, primarily because the prevailing paradigm cannot see itself and its manners as the source of the problem. For that we must turn to people working at the margins of our culture, to those operating with a set of assumptions different from the prevailing order, to see what they think makes for a vibrant culture and natural environment.

Agrarianism is this compelling and coherent alternative to the modern industrial/technological/economic paradigm. It is not a throwback to a never-realized pastoral arcadia, nor is it a caricatured, Luddite-inspired refusal to face the future. It is, rather, a deliberate and intentional way of living and thinking that takes seriously the failures and successes of the past as they have been realized in our engagement with the earth and with each other. Authentic agrarianism, which should not be confused with farming per se (since severe economic pressure and the dash for quick profits have often led farmers to compromise agrarian ideals), represents the sustained attempt to live faithfully and responsibly in a world of limits and possibilities. As such it takes seriously what we know (and still need to learn) about the earth—the scientific ecological principles that govern all life forms—and what we know about each other—the social scientific and humanistic disciplines that enrich human self-understanding.

Agrarianism tests success and failure not by projected income statements or by economic growth, but by the health and vitality of a region's entire human and nonhuman neighborhood. Agrarianism, we might say, represents the most complex and far-reaching accounting system ever known, for according to it success must include a vibrant watershed and soil base; species diversity; human and animal contentment; communal creativity, responsibility, and joy; usable waste; social solidarity and sympathy; attention and delight; and the respectful maintenance of all the sources of life. Given the complexity and magnitude of this task, it is clear that authentic agrarianism has only been attempted thus far. Its full realization still awaits us. One of the primary aims of this book is to help us imagine and implement a genuinely agrarian vision.

The foregoing should make clear that agrarianism is not simply the concern or prerogative of a few remaining farmers, but is rather a comprehensive worldview that holds together in a synoptic vision the health of land *and* culture. What makes agrarianism the ideal candidate for cultural renewal is that it, unlike some environmental approaches that sequester wilderness and portray the human presence as invariably destructive or evil, grows out of the sustained, practical, intimate engagement between the power and creativity of both nature and humans. In agrarian practices we see a deliberate way of life in which the integrity and wholesomeness of peoples and neighborhoods, and the natural sources they depend upon, are maintained and celebrated. Agrarianism builds on the acknowledgment that we are biological and social beings that depend on healthy habitats and communities. However much we might think of ourselves as post-agricultural beings or disembodied minds, the fact of the matter is that we are inextricably tied to the land through our bodies—we have to eat, drink, and breathe—and so our culture must always be sympathetic to the responsibilities of agriculture. If we despise the latter, we are surely only a step away from despising the former too.

Urban Agrarian Culture

For too long, dominant worldviews have presupposed that we can design cultures without concern for the land's integrity and have naively taken it for granted that soils, waterways, and forests are simply resources to feed cultural ambition. Civilizations have presumed that greatness could be built at the expense of ecological degradation. The result, as can be seen in the cases of Sumer, the Mediterranean basin, and Mesoamerica, has invariably been either cultural ruin or severe cultural strain. What we need is a worldview that integrates and sees as continuous the limits and possibilities of land and culture together. What we need, as the economist Herman Daly has been saying for years, is a human economy attentive and responsive to the macro-economy of the land, the ecological patterns

and possibilities that constitute our biological, physical, and chemical world. We must learn to put aside the misguided and destructive ambition that claims to achieve human health and happiness, while the natural habitats we live from and through languish and suffer.

The cultural neglect of natural habitats has had its corollary in the animosity between the country and the city, each side claiming for itself moral purity or human excellence. Farming folk have routinely described their way of life as conducive to peace, balance, and simple virtue, and the ways of the city as promoting strife, ambition, and greed. City folk, on the other hand, have considered cities as the entry into sophistication, creativity, and enlightenment, and farms as places of ignorance, provincialism, and limitation. Clearly this sort of antagonism, which is often based on caricatures, needs to be faced and overcome if we are to develop a synthetic vision promoting the health of land and culture together. We need to understand that the relationships between country and city have been varied and complex and, cross-border bickering notwithstanding, necessary. Can we together envision a culture that incorporates what is best from what we know about urban and rural life, and in so doing take steps that will ensure a vibrant and just future? Should we be contemplating an "urban agrarianism"?

A phrase like "urban agrarianism" indicates that our concern cannot simply be about the preservation of farmland, but must include the care of all living spaces—residential neighborhoods, schools and playgrounds, parks, and landfills, as well as glaciers, forests, wetlands, and oceans—the protection of all the places that maintain life. Farming has been central to the agrarian vision because farming practices, most obviously in food production, are our most direct and practical access to the processes of life and death. In them we learn about the limiting conditions of life, discover life's fragility and impermanence, but also life's giftedness and grace. As we eat and drink and breathe we visibly demonstrate, even if we do not always honor, our attachments to and dependence on the land. If we take care of the land and preserve the integrity of the soil base and watershed, we will at the same time insure the life contexts that are indispensable for cultural flourishing. If nothing else, we will at least demonstrate that we believe the future of our grandchildren is worth protecting.

Cultural practices, however, are not limited to eating and the production of food. We also strive to learn, to create, and to celebrate. If we are to do these well and responsibly, we must do them in ways that do not compromise the life-giving potential of communities and the land. And so while an agrarian vision must always have the integrity of energy/food flows as its foremost concern, its scope must also extend to the many places where we live and to the many tasks we perform. The reach of agrarian responsibilities is all-inclusive because all our activities, whether they occur in a steel and concrete office building, a commuter train, or a backyard garden, are informed and made possible by natural cycles of life and death. Every member and every moment on life's way are joined together in a bewildering ecological maze of cause and effect. The urbanite no less than the farmer is implicated in this web and so must appreciate the requirements and the costs for living things. To fail to do this is to risk ecological and cultural ruin.

The two forms of ruin go together. Plato recognized long ago that when a culture amasses luxury goods, or defines success primarily in terms of lavish consumption, the conditions for jealousy, enmity, and (violent) exploitation are set. What he did not fully appreciate is that the exploitation characteristic of a materialistic consumer culture is premised on the exploitation and exhaustion of nature's supporting habitats. All consumption, whether it is luxurious or not, takes place at the expense or sacrifice of habitats and other organisms. Given a finite resource base (its finitude becoming more apparent day by day as we note rates of deforestation, water scarcity, desertification, and suburban sprawl), it is simply prudent to limit our consumption to the scale of appropriate need rather than inappropriate wants, recognizing that propriety has as much to do with natural as it has to do with social limits.

Living in an urban context makes the adoption of agrarian responsibilities more difficult because as urbanites we do not, for the most part, feel or see our attachments to the land. We live increasingly in built environments that reflect human desires and ingenuity rather than natural limits and possibilities. We live at a blistering pace that is oblivious to the rhythms of natural cycles. And perhaps most important, we tend to act in complete ignorance of the effects our choices have on natural habitats. We do not appreciate or understand how actions as simple as placing

garbage at the curb, purchasing a new computer, or adjusting the household thermostat can compromise or promote the natural contexts upon which we all depend. We tend not to connect increased electrical consumption with the leveling of whole mountains for their coal, or the discarding of used electronics with dangerously high accumulations of heavy metals and toxins in our groundwater. The effects are out of sight and thus out of mind. To think, however, that our actions are without effect is surely one of the great deceptions of our culture.

Agrarianism is about learning to take up the responsibilities that protect, preserve, and celebrate life. The first requirement of such responsibility is that we give up the delusion that we live in a purely human world of our own making, give up the arrogant and naive belief that human ambition should be the sole measure of cultural success or failure. As embodied beings we necessarily and beneficially draw our life from the many living beings that surround us and the natural processes that maintain them. If we are to care for these habitats we must, through education and direct experience, become attentive to our place in the wider natural world.

Agrarianism argues that attention and responsible action can occur most readily as we directly/practically see and feel our connections with each other and the land. For this reason, agrarians stress the importance of living as much as we can within local economies, economies that keep the loop between production and consumption as small as possible. Close communal contact and sustained commitment to a local, natural context increase the likelihood that our sight, feeling, and action are honest, nonevasive, and informed. If we can see how our living practices directly affect air and water quality, soil retention and health, species contentment and diversity, communal cohesion, and other markers of environmental health, and then learn to appreciate how nature's services enrich our personal and social lives, we will be much more inclined to change our practices in ways that benefit rather than bring harm to others. The assumption is that we are less likely to misuse or abuse the memberships we see benefiting us directly.

It is dangerous to romanticize local community life, especially when we remember that local communities have often been susceptible to various forms of provincialism. Farming communities, for instance, have not always been respectful of the contributions of women. Nor have they been very welcoming of foreigners or people with new ideas. The result has often been a form of communal claustrophobia. For good reason, then, when the opportunity for urban freedom, adventure, and anonymity arose, many young farmers took it. Wage employment, besides granting release from the steady demands of farm life, provided a relatively secure financial future, and it confined work to discrete hours of the day and week.

We now know, if we did not know before, that such unencumbered freedom carries with it the potential for considerable irresponsibility and destructiveness. We cannot live well—as friends, spouses, or citizens—if we do not respect and strengthen the bonds of relationship (human and nonhuman) that make life meaningful. Moreover, we should acknowledge that contemporary trends like globalization, corporate downsizing/restructuring, and movable capital have made all of us much less secure in our economic being. One of the hallmarks of postmodern life is its precariousness: we can no longer take our socioeconomic position for granted; we feel uncertain about the stability of the things and relationships we care most about; and we feel generally unsafe in the face of terrorism, vandalism, rape, and theft. It is no accident that literature on the themes of "home" and "community" is growing by leaps and bounds, as more and more people are seeking to ground their existence in something that is durable, safe, and life promoting.

Given these circumstances, it may well be that a broad-based discussion on the nature of responsible freedom should be our highest cultural priority. Can we envision and implement lives that encourage creativity, exploration, and self-expression and at the same time promote both the health of the natural habitats we live from and the vibrancy of communal structures that infuse personal life with meaning and joy? How will we maintain and celebrate the bonds of relationship that nurture life, without coming to regard these bonds as oppressive? These are complex, difficult questions that do not yield a simple solution applicable to all places at all times. Answering them, however, will require that we begin with a comprehensive and honest look at *where we are* as well as *who we are*, a thorough accounting of the costs of our desires and actions. It will also demand the creation of venues for sustained, engaged public discussion of

these issues, especially when we recognize that democratic participation in public matters has been declining steadily .

Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is the very precarious nature of global/postmodern life that compels us to take our commitments lightly and to value our relationships less than we should. Movable capital demands a movable, and above all flexible, workforce. To get ahead in this world we must be ready to forsake any and all strategies/commitments to meet the new opportunities awaiting us. In this fluid context many of the bonds that tie us to community and place come to be treated like any consumable good—they can always be discarded if a new and potentially better "bond" comes along.

Clearly this trend must be resisted if we are to become attentive and affectionate caregivers of the places and communities we call home. It will not be overcome, however, as long as we remain wedded to the ambitions of our prevailing paradigm, ambitions that we know to be conducive to ill health, anxiety, stress, and fatigue. We need to see that the purveyors of this paradigm do not have our well-being at heart, but instead have everything to gain (financially) by keeping us unhappy, dissatisfied, and disengaged consumers. As we resist the ways of corporate and global ambition, we may yet come to see the grace and joy that accompany genuine efforts to make of our living places an enduring and convivial home. We will discover that our lives are everywhere maintained and benefited by the countless contributions of traditions, communities, habitats, and other organisms, and that we in turn have the potential to similarly benefit others.

To be an agrarian is to believe that we do not need the hypothetical (often false, and perpetually deferred) promises of a bright economic future to be happy and well. What we need—fertile land, drinkable water, solar energy, communal support and wisdom—we already have, or could have, if we turned our attention and energy to the protection and celebration of the sources of life.

We Are What/How We Eat

We can better understand the urgency and relevance of agrarian concerns and priorities if we consider the example of food security. It would seem, especially given the abundance and relative cheapness of food, that we do not have a food problem. The appearance, however, is deceiving. A growing number of farmers, ecologists, economists, and policy analysts are beginning to see that the complete costs associated with current food abundance are extremely high and that current pricing hides these costs from consumers. Food, for the most part, is now an industrial product. As such its character and quality, as well as the conditions under which it is produced, are determined by the demands of industrial and market efficiency. While this might make good economic sense, the effect of treating food as an industrial rather than as a natural and cultural product has been the abuse of land, animals, and human communities.

Consider first the fact that farmer independence is a thing of the past. The food system, which includes food being grown, harvested, processed, packaged, distributed, shipped, and marketed, has increasingly come under the control and ownership of a small number of giant corporations like Cargill, Archer-Daniels-Midland Co., Monsanto, and ConAgra. These companies subscribe to "vertical integration," which means they play a determining role in all the processes of food production and distribution, providing the consumer with products they control from "farm gate to dinner plate." They determine what is planted or fed, how much, by whom, and at what price. In this scenario, farmers are reduced to serfs. They must sign a contract with the company at the beginning of the season and stick to the demands of the corporation. In many cases farmers assume all the risk and liability. They must also go to the same company (or one of its partners) for the many expensive farm inputs—seed, fertilizer, insecticides/pesticides—that are essential for profitability. Farmers who refuse to sign these contracts often find that simply no market exists for their product, since the same company or its subsidiary controls purchasing and distribution. The goal is to make farmers completely beholden to corporate interests and profitability. The most extreme example of corporate control can be seen in the invention of the "terminator gene," a genetically modified plant that produces sterile seed. The effect of this biotechnological advance is that farmers cannot save their own seed for next year's planting (thereby saving considerable sums of money, as well as securing farm self-sufficiency), but must purchase their seed at the store each year.

Is this transformation of the food system a good idea for farmers, communities, consumers, or the land? Clearly it has not been good for farmers. While corporate profits in the food sector have soared over the last several years, small farmers have seen a steady decline in income. Desperate for any margin of profitability, many farmers embrace whatever mechanical, biotechnological, agrochemical product they can, with the net effect that corporate profitability again increases at the farmers' expense. The farmers who survive must either get really big or get out, hoping they will have enough cash flow to get them through another bad year in which the costs of production exceed product income. For good reason, observers of the contemporary agricultural scene suggest that rural communities look more and more like mining communities. Everything of value is sucked out by the corporate office.

Rural communities have suffered greatly as a result of this transformed food system. With the demise of local seed companies, local purchasers, and processors and distributors, money that would have circulated several times within a community (and thus benefited many businesses and families) goes elsewhere. With this cash exodus, small towns and cities that were once the heart of American cultural life find it impossible to maintain basic services in education, health care, construction, and general social welfare. There is no place to go but the big city. On the other hand, megafarm managers are increasingly hiring minimum-wage, migrant workers, resulting in rural ghettoes replete with social problems similar to their urban counterparts.

Rural communities also bear the brunt of noxious corporate farming practices. While taxpayers absorb the costs of tax incentives and price subsidies to induce big producers to set up shop in their states or counties, local communities must deal with disgusting odors, contaminated ground and surface water, accumulated toxic waste, and stressed infrastructure mechanisms like roadways and waterways. These costs are rarely picked up by the producers responsible for them.

As consumers we should be asking whether or not the free exchange of products, the stewardship of public goods like soil and water, or more fundamental yet, informed public discussion about food issues can result from a context where integrated corporate monopolies set pricing and production. Consumers are mostly ignorant about how food is produced and provided, so they are in no position to understand, let alone confront, agricultural abuses like the depletion or contamination of public water supplies or the heavy use of antibiotics and hormones in meat and dairy operations. Doctors are increasingly aware that public health costs will increase dramatically as we confront super pests and viruses that evolve in confined farm factories. The costs of cleaning up water contaminated by agricultural runoff will also need to be picked up by consumers. Moreover, industrial farming stresses monocultures, which means the growing of one crop variety on a vast acreage (unbroken fields of wheat, corn, or rice), or the breeding of livestock from a very limited gene pool (90 percent of all commercially produced turkeys, for instance, come from just three breeding flocks). Monocultures of this kind are highly susceptible to disease and pest infestation. The threat of species collapse can be held at bay only with ever more toxic and expensive pesticides.

We cannot solve this problem of contaminated or compromised habitats simply by moving it to another region or country. Recently some economists have suggested that we should shift food production almost entirely to developing nations where food can be grown more cheaply (and where the hazards and costs of industrial production can be absorbed by others). Farmland in developed countries can thus be freed to the bucolic pleasures of the wealthy. This view, besides being unjust, is ecologically naive. It is foolish not to have a diversified food production network, a network spread out over many regions, if for no other reasons than decreased likelihood of massive crop failure and increased ability to capitalize on the strengths certain regions possess for the growth of particular crops. The old adage that one should never put all of one's eggs in one basket is especially true here. A stable food system, much like a stable and resilient habitat, depends on a diversity of crops grown over diverse landscapes. Food diversity attuned to regional ecological possibilities, rather than the massive monocultures of today, is our best defense against foreign attack, whether it comes from pests or terrorists. History has shown repeatedly that as regions grow and consume their own food and rely as little as possible on food imports, their food supply becomes more secure.

The most dangerous and pervasive threat to our food system, however, may well be the exhaustion or destruction of our land base. Agricultural experts are now discovering that returns on chemically intensive farming are actually decreasing. Many factors contribute to this decrease, foremost among them the degradation of the soil base itself. Besides massive erosion rates (in some regions one bushel of crop is matched by two to five bushels of soil lost to erosion), the heavy application of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides has reduced fertile soils teeming with billions of microorganisms to zombie status. We kill these life-promoting microorganisms and deplete the soil's organic content, thereby reducing it to lifeless dirt incapable of fending off pests or supporting plant life without synthetically produced (and fossil fuel derived) chemical additives. We are losing quality topsoil at a rate far faster than it can be replenished.

Industrial farming is heavily dependent on cheap fossil fuel, not only for farm power, but also for fertilizer/pesticide production, irrigation, and food transport (the average grocery store item travels thirteen hundred to fifteen hundred miles before it reaches the shelf) and preparation. In some instances it takes ten calories of fossil fuel energy to produce one calorie of food energy. Is this not grossly inefficient and destructive of our habitats and health? Clearly, this agricultural malpractice can be sustained only because of a greater malfunctioning in our energy sector that greatly subsidizes the fossil fuel industry, going so far as to protect it by means of war. The tragedy of this scenario is that farmers and consumers would not need to pay many of the exorbitant costs associated with industrial production if we could learn to work more attentively with natural processes that can provide many food services like pest control, water retention, soil fertility, and solar heating and energy for free.

Given this partial list of problems, we now need to ask if a food system can be secure if it depends on making its farmers, communities, consumers, and land base insecure. Our highly centralized food system, besides being antidemocratic, hugely wasteful, and destructive, is also vulnerable to external threats of terrorism, volatile global markets, and pests (because monocultures have the weakest immunity in nature). How would an agrarian worldview address this situation of insecurity?

For starters, agrarians would not propose that we all become subsistence farmers growing all of our own food. But all people, because they eat and drink, should be aware of food responsibilities and take a more active role in promoting food safety and security. Food security is grounded in regional food production. Food responsibility begins with becoming educated about the food industry, learning about those products and processes that promote health and vitality for the entire food neighborhood (should we expect wholesome eating if plants and livestock are sickly or under stress?). Given recent revelations of unsavory corporate food production practices, having as much information about the food system as possible is a bare minimum. The best way to accomplish this education is to form relationships with food providers, as can be done when we purchase from farmers directly, at farmers' markets or through community supported agriculture (CSA) projects. The key is to become involved participants in food production wherever we can. Best yet, we can make the effort to grow some of our own food, and thus directly see what we are eating and under what conditions it was produced.

Food is the most direct link we have between culture and nature, city and farm folk. It can serve as the point of interest that unites urbanites with farming concerns. We need to see that the "plight of the farmer" does not affect simply farmers, but all of us. The preservation of soils and watersheds, humane treatment of animal livestock, worker safety and contentment, common ownership of the genetic food base (rather than its patented protection by biotech food firms)—these are objectives that we should all have in common. We need to support farmers who are dedicated to preserving healthy farmland, and to encourage our governments to stop their financial support of megafarms and the corporate interests they support. We need also to reward those growers who dare to be independent by giving them our commitment to purchase from them, even if that means paying higher prices for food. Above all we need to get past the idea that cheaper food is better food, especially when we remember that the cheapness of food is made possible by the externalization of many ecological and cultural (especially health) costs, costs that we will end up paying in some other way.

This is not an argument for expensive food. In fact, there are a number of ways that food can become much more affordable. The most obvi-

ous would be to grow some of our own. Urban agriculture, what some refer to as the "quiet revolution" in food production, is making it clear that food can be grown in a great variety of urban settings—in backyards, on rooftops, in window boxes and basements, on vacant lots, greenbelts, or playgrounds, and in public housing projects. Community garden plots can become gathering places for the growth of nutritious food and revitalized communities, as residents form relationships that support and help each other. Another way to reduce food costs would be to extricate food production from the expenses associated with industrial production methods that consume great quantities of fossil fuels and depend on extensive processing, marketing, and distribution networks. There is no reason why consumers and institutions (schools and hospitals, for instance) cannot buy more from local producers, and thus cut down on many costs. Their food will be fresher and more nutritious. Consumers, in turn, can benefit producers by giving to them their recyclable waste and their steady business. Local businesses that facilitate these transactions will become a communal priority, thus keeping more of our food dollars circulating in the communities where we live.

As we begin to understand that food is not simply fuel, but is in fact a natural, social, cultural, and spiritual product, we will also make the effort to foster the practical conditions necessary to protect and preserve ecological and social health. Our safety does not reside in the proxies we give to food corporations that premise their success on compromised habitats and communities, mistreated livestock, and market dominance. It rests rather in the responsible support and celebration of regional networks that join together producer and consumer, country and city, nature and culture.

Reading *The Essential Agrarian Reader*

The essays in this book have been grouped into three parts, each having a different emphasis. Part 1 describes and develops the key principles of an agrarian worldview. Wendell Berry's "The Agrarian Standard" demonstrates that the agrarian view is fundamentally at odds with the received industrial paradigm. Industrialism is the way of the machine, the way of technological invention that premises economic success on the exploitation of habitats and communities. Agrarianism, by contrast, is a way of life attuned to requirements of land and local communities. Historically speaking, those who have tried to be faithful to the land have had a very difficult time. Brian Donahue describes why this has been the case and then offers an agrarian framework that might guide and correct current land and community development. Building on Berry's assertion that we have been "unsettling America" from the start, Donahue offers creative suggestions for how we might begin to settle into our land at last.

Maurice Telleen takes on the issue of whether or not agrarianism, as an "ism," qualifies as a movement. After giving several reasons for why it might be best not to consider it that way, he shows how agrarianism aims to be a comprehensive value system that orders life in its various dimensions. Because such a value system can readily be compared to a "quasi-religion," Telleen then develops the Ten Agrarian Commandments, which might very well "save this country's bacon" (commandments of any sort have everything to do with the structuring of our economic lives). Herman Daly offers a careful assessment of why the prevailing economic paradigm is not genuinely sustainable. Indeed, given the inability of many economists to integrate in their calculations basic necessities like fertile soil, fresh/clean water, stable/resilient habitats, and ecological wisdom and sympathy, this essay offers a preliminary and indispensable challenge to economists to expand their range of consideration to include what Daly calls "ecological throughput." A full-blown agrarian economics, an economic system that is attuned to the wide sweep of natural and cultural concerns as we have so far described them, must build on the principles of sustainability as here described. Successful economic development depends on the acknowledgment of ecological inputs and limits and the promotion of policies that focus less on growth (which in some cases turns out to be uneconomic) and more on quality of life.

In the essay "Placing the Soul" I explain why it has been difficult for us as a culture to develop the habits that would promote responsible dwelling within the land. I argue that dominant philosophical and religious traditions, by stressing the preeminence of spiritual souls, have falsified our true nature as embodied beings that necessarily live through our

connections with habitats and the lives of others. I conclude that a more authentic spiritual life is possible once we acknowledge and accept responsibility for the places and communities in terms of which we live.

Part 2 examines the current state of agriculture and its effects on broad cultural concerns, showing that problems in agriculture are reflective of cultural malfunction. The essay by Fred Kirschenmann describes the transformation of agriculture over the last several decades from relatively small, independent producers to the megafarms of today. He links this development to economic factors that have dramatically altered social and natural landscapes. He then considers public policy options that can help us avert the destructive ecological and social consequences following from the current paradigm. Vandana Shiva's essay shows that industrial farming is having a similarly destructive effect in India. As food corporations expand their global reach (Shiva uses the metaphor of war to express this development), local producers invariably suffer. Shiva shows that the promises of increased food productivity do not hold and that our best hope for global food security is to protect ecological and cultural diversity and equip local producers.

Wes Jackson describes how modern industrial farming rests on mistaken scientific assumptions. He argues that we need a natural systems agriculture, which patterns agricultural production on natural processes that have developed throughout evolutionary time. Authentic agrarian practices reflect an empathetic mind that is attentive to the limits and possibilities of geophysical places. Gene Logsdon's essay shows how this empathy might be practically realized through pasture farming. The predominant method of meat and dairy production is to confine huge numbers of livestock in a small area and then feed them corn, hormones, and antibiotics. Logsdon shows how this practice, besides being inhumane, is ecologically destructive and wasteful and can be replaced with range feeding that is much less expensive for farmers and healthier for animals.

The essay by David Orr looks more carefully at why an agrarian message has not been well received by the cultural mainstream. He shows how the assumptions that drive industrial agriculture also permeate society and thus prevent us from facing honestly the truth of who we are. We are, Orr says, a culture in denial of our material and biological contexts; thus, we cannot possibly develop a healthy culture. Our best future depends on the development and implementation of an agrarian worldview that holds together the wholeness of habitats and communities.

The essays in part 3 illustrate some of the practical effects that would follow from an agrarian agenda. The essay by Benjamin Northrup and Benjamin Lipscomb shows that agrarian concerns and priorities bear a remarkable affinity with the concerns and priorities of the "New Urbanism," a movement in architecture and urban planning that promotes vibrant and viable neighborhoods. They show how agrarians and New Urbanists can learn from each other in the effort to make our living places a genuine home. Susan Witt then documents several particular strategies—notably the Community Land Trust and the implementation of local currencies—that have been tried and found to be successful in the preservation of farmland and the promotion of community projects. She highlights the specific challenges facing local business and farming development and argues for solutions that grow out of communal problem solving.

If we take the agrarian worldview seriously, believe it to be necessary for ecological and cultural health, it is imperative that we learn to put words and ideas into action. Hank Graddy documents the work the Sierra Club (among other environmental groups) has done to stop, or at least mitigate, the destructive impacts of industrial agriculture, most notably concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs). He shows how local communities can work together to legally and legislatively protect their food and water supplies and promote the humane treatment of agricultural livestock. Eric Freyfogle shows how an agrarian framework can help us reformulate basic notions about private property and land ownership. He begins by noting that the entailments and responsibilities of land ownership have changed through time and that we can work together to form ownership rights that are more attentive to ecological realities and communal necessities.

The final essay, "Going to Work," asks us to think more carefully and more broadly about the nature of work. In an age when career specialization and advancement have taken the place of vocational responsibility, Wendell Berry prompts us to reconsider the practical conditions neces-

sary for us to make of our work an art that serves the health and well-being of the neighborhoods in which we live. More specifically, Berry draws the contrast between a sympathetic/affectionate mind and a mind that aspires only to (increasingly economic) reason, arguing that it will be through the former (though not entirely without the latter) mind that we may come to enact the virtues of humility, reverence, proper scale, and good workmanship.

Several of the essays in this volume made their first appearance (sometimes in rather different form) as speeches delivered at "The Future of Agrarianism: *The Unsettling of America* Twenty-Five Years Later," a 2002 conference hosted by Georgetown College. In addition, a few essays were written by authors who could not attend the conference but who, nonetheless, wanted to pay tribute to Wendell Berry, the author of *The Unsettling of America*. Besides marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of his book, the conference sought to extend the agrarian argument first set down there, to demonstrate that the ideas originally expressed had not outgrown their usefulness, but are now more compelling and necessary than ever.

It would be difficult to overestimate the significance of Wendell Berry's work for articulating and defending the agrarian cause. Through his writing, instruction, and personal example, Berry has been an inspiration and indispensable guide for many of us. This collection of essays is a vibrant testimony to the continuing relevance and usefulness of agrarian insights and practices. It is offered, in part, as an expression of gratitude for Wendell Berry's important contribution and as a stimulant for cultural reform. Our present cultural course is not inevitable. The great task before us is to envision and implement a better future. These essays present an agrarian alternative that may yet lead us, as Berry says, into "the grace of the world," the place where we will find our true freedom and joy.

1

The Agrarian Standard

Wendell Berry

The Unsettling of America was published twenty-five years ago; it is still in print and is still being read. As its author, I am tempted to be glad of this, and yet, if I believe what I said in that book, and I still do, then I should be anything but glad. The book would have had a far happier fate if it could have been disproved or made obsolete years ago.

It remains true because the conditions it describes and opposes, the abuses of farmland and farming people, have persisted and become worse over the last twenty-five years. In 2002 we have less than half the number of farmers in the United States that we had in 1977. Our farm communities are far worse off now than they were then. Our soil erosion rates continue to be unsustainably high. We continue to pollute our soils and streams with agricultural poisons. We continue to lose farmland to urban development of the most wasteful sort. The large agribusiness corporations that were mainly national in 1977 are now global, and are replacing the world's agricultural diversity, which was useful primarily to farmers and local consumers, with bioengineered and patented monocultures that are merely profitable to corporations. The purpose of this new global economy, as Vandana Shiva has rightly said, is to replace "food democracy" with a worldwide "food dictatorship."[1]

To be an agrarian writer in such a time is an odd experience. One keeps writing essays and speeches that one would prefer not to write, that one wishes would prove unnecessary, that one hopes nobody will have

any need for in twenty-five years. My life as an agrarian writer has certainly involved me in such confusions, but I have never doubted for a minute the importance of the hope I have tried to serve: the hope that we might become a healthy people in a healthy land.

We agrarians are involved in a hard, long, momentous contest, in which we are so far, and by a considerable margin, the losers. What we have undertaken to defend is the complex accomplishment of knowledge, cultural memory, skill, self-mastery, good sense, and fundamental decency—the high and indispensable art—for which we probably can find no better name than "good farming." I mean farming as defined by agrarianism as opposed to farming as defined by industrialism: farming as the proper use and care of an immeasurable gift.

I believe that this contest between industrialism and agrarianism now defines the most fundamental human difference, for it divides not just two nearly opposite concepts of agriculture and land use, but also two nearly opposite ways of understanding ourselves, our fellow creatures, and our world.

The way of industrialism is the way of the machine. To the industrial mind, a machine is not merely an instrument for doing work or amusing ourselves or making war; it is an explanation of the world and of life. The machine's entirely comprehensible articulation of parts defines the acceptable meanings of our experience, and it prescribes the kinds of meanings the industrial scientists and scholars expect to discover. These meanings have to do with nomenclature, classification, and rather short lineages of causation. Because industrialism cannot understand living things except as machines, and can grant them no value that is not utilitarian, it conceives of farming and forestry as forms of mining; it cannot use the land without abusing it.

Industrialism prescribes an economy that is placeless and displacing. It does not distinguish one place from another. It applies its methods and technologies indiscriminately in the American East and the American West, in the United States and in India. It thus continues the economy of colonialism. The shift of colonial power from European monarchy to global corporation is perhaps the dominant theme of modern history. All along—from the European colonization of Africa, Asia, and the New World, to the domestic colonialism of American industries, to the colonization of the entire rural world by global corporations—it has been the same story of the gathering of an exploitive economic power into the hands of a few people who are alien to the places and the people they exploit. Such an economy is bound to destroy locally adapted agrarian economies everywhere it goes, simply because it is too ignorant not to do so. And it has succeeded precisely to the extent that it has been able to inculcate the same ignorance in workers and consumers. A part of the function of industrial education is to preserve and protect this ignorance.

To the corporate and political and academic servants of global industrialism, the small family farm and the small farming community are not known, not imaginable, and therefore unthinkable, except as damaging stereotypes. The people of "the cutting edge" in science, business, education, and politics have no patience with the local love, local loyalty, and local knowledge that make people truly native to their places and therefore good caretakers of their places. This is why one of the primary principles of industrialism has always been to get the worker away from home. From the beginning it has been destructive of home employment and home economies. The office or the factory or the institution is the place for work. The economic function of the household has been increasingly the consumption of purchased goods. Under industrialism, the farm too has become increasingly consumptive, and farms fail as the costs of consumption overpower the income from production.

The idea of people working at home, as family members, as neighbors, as natives and citizens of their places, is as repugnant to the industrial mind as the idea of self-employment. The industrial mind is an organizational mind, and I think this mind is deeply disturbed and threatened by the existence of people who have no boss. This may be why people with such minds, as they approach the top of the political hierarchy, so readily sell themselves to "special interests." They cannot bear to be unbossed. They cannot stand the lonely work of making up their own minds.

The industrial contempt for anything small, rural, or natural translates into contempt for uncentralized economic systems, any sort of local

From Berry, The Unsettling of America

CHAPTER TWO

The Ecological Crisis as a Crisis of Character

In July of 1975 it was revealed by William Rood in the *Los Angeles Times* that some of our largest and most respected conservation organizations owned stock in the very corporations and industries that have been notorious for their destructiveness and for their indifference to the concerns of conservationists. The Sierra Club, for example, had owned stocks and bonds in Exxon, General Motors, Tenneco, steel companies "having the worst pollution records in the industry," Public Service Company of Colorado, "strip-mining firms with 53 leases covering nearly 180,000 acres and pulp-mill operators cited by environmentalists for their poor water pollution controls."

These investments proved deeply embarrassing once they were made public, but the Club's officers responded as quickly as possible by making appropriate changes in its investment policy. And so if it were only a question of policy, these investments could easily be forgotten, dismissed as aberrations of the sort that inevitably turn up now and again in the workings of organizations. The difficulty is that, although the investments were absurd, they were *not* aberrant; they were perfectly representative of the modern character. These conservation groups were behaving with a very ordinary consistency; they

were only doing as organizations what many of their members were, and are, doing as individuals. They were making convenience of enterprises that they knew to be morally, and even practically, indefensible.

We are dealing, then, with an absurdity that is not a quirk or an accident, but is fundamental to our character as a people. The split between what we think and what we do is profound. It is not just possible, it is altogether to be expected, that our society would produce conservationists who invest in strip-mining companies, just as it must inevitably produce asthmatic executives whose industries pollute the air and vice-presidents of pesticide corporations whose children are dying of cancer. And these people will tell you that this is the way the "real world" works. They will pride themselves on their sacrifices for "our standard of living." They will call themselves "practical men" and "hardheaded realists." And they will have their justifications in abundance from intellectuals, college professors, clergymen, politicians. The viciousness of a mentality that can look complacently upon disease as "part of the cost" would be obvious to any child. But this is the "realism" of millions of modern adults.

There is no use pretending that the contradiction between what we think or say and what we do is a limited phenomenon. There is no group of the extra-intelligent or extra-concerned or extra-virtuous that is exempt. I cannot think of any American whom I know or have heard of, who is not contributing in some way to destruction. The reason is simple: to live undestructively in an economy that is overwhelmingly destructive would require of any one of us, or of any small group of us, a great deal more work than we have yet been able to do. How could we divorce ourselves completely and yet responsibly from the technologies and powers that are destroying our planet? The answer is not yet thinkable, and it will not be thinkable for some time—even though there are now groups and families and persons everywhere in the country who have begun the labor of thinking it.

And so we are by no means divided, or readily divisible, into environmental saints and sinners. But there *are* legitimate distinctions that need to be made. These are distinctions of degree and of consciousness. Some people are less destructive than others, and some are more conscious of their destructiveness than others. For some, their involvement in pollution, soil depletion, strip-

mining, deforestation, industrial and commercial waste is simply a "practical" compromise, a necessary "reality," the price of modern comfort and convenience. For others, this list of involvements is an agenda for thought and work that will produce remedies.

People who thus set their lives against destruction have necessarily confronted in themselves the absurdity that they have recognized in their society. They have first observed the tendency of modern organizations to perform in opposition to their stated purposes. They have seen governments that exploit and oppress the people they are sworn to serve and protect, medical procedures that produce ill health, schools that preserve ignorance, methods of transportation that, as Ivan Illich says, have "created more distances than they . . . bridge." And they have seen that these public absurdities are, and can be, no more than the aggregate result of private absurdities; the corruption of community has its source in the corruption of character. This realization has become the typical moral crisis of our time. Once our personal connection to what is wrong becomes clear, then we have to choose: we can go on as before, recognizing our dishonesty and living with it the best we can, or we can begin the effort to change the way we think and live.

The disease of the modern character is specialization. Looked at from the standpoint of the social *system*, the aim of specialization may seem desirable enough. The aim is to see that the responsibilities of government, law, medicine, engineering, agriculture, education, etc., are given into the hands of the most skilled, best prepared people. The difficulties do not appear until we look at specialization from the opposite standpoint—that of individual persons. We then begin to see the grotesquery—indeed, the impossibility—of an idea of community wholeness that divorces itself from any idea of personal wholeness.

The first, and best known, hazard of the specialist system is that it produces specialists—people who are elaborately and expensively trained *to do one thing*. We get into absurdity very quickly here. There are, for instance, educators who have nothing to teach, communicators who have nothing to say, medical doctors skilled at expensive cures for diseases that they have no skill, and no interest, in preventing. More common, and more damaging, are the inventors, manufacturers, and salesmen of devices who have no concern for the possible effects of those devices. Specialization is thus seen to be a way of

institutionalizing, justifying, and paying highly for a calamitous disintegration and scattering-out of the various functions of character: workmanship, care, conscience, responsibility.

Even worse, a system of specialization requires the abdication to specialists of various competences and responsibilities that were once personal and universal. Thus, the average—one is tempted to say, the ideal—American citizen now consigns the problem of food production to agriculturists and "agribusinessmen," the problems of health to doctors and sanitation experts, the problems of education to school teachers and educators, the problems of conservation to conservationists, and so on. This supposedly fortunate citizen is therefore left with only two concerns: making money and entertaining himself. He earns money, typically, as a specialist, working an eight-hour day at a job for the quality or consequences of which somebody else—or, perhaps more typically, nobody else—will be responsible. And not surprisingly, since he can do so little else for himself, he is even unable to entertain himself, for there exists an enormous industry of exorbitantly expensive specialists whose purpose is to entertain him.

The beneficiary of this regime of specialists ought to be the happiest of mortals—or so we are expected to believe. *All* of his vital concerns are in the hands of certified experts. He is a certified expert himself and as such he earns more money in a year than all his great-grandparents put together. Between stints at his job he has nothing to do but mow his lawn with a sit-down lawn mower, or watch other certified experts on television. At suppertime he may eat a tray of ready-prepared food, which he and his wife (also a certified expert) procure at the cost only of money, transportation, and the pushing of a button. For a few minutes between supper and sleep he may catch a glimpse of his children, who since breakfast have been in the care of education experts, basketball or marching-band experts, or perhaps legal experts.

The fact is, however, that this is probably the most unhappy average citizen in the history of the world. He has not the power to provide himself with anything but money, and his money is inflating like a balloon and drifting away, subject to historical circumstances and the power of other people. From morning to night he does not touch anything that he has produced himself, in which he can take pride. For all his leisure and recreation, he feels bad, he looks bad,

he is overweight, his health is poor. His air, water, and food are all known to contain poisons. There is a fair chance that he will die of suffocation. He suspects that his love life is not as fulfilling as other people's. He wishes that he had been born sooner, or later. He does not know why his children are the way they are. He does not understand what they say. He does not care much and does not know why he does not care. He does not know what his wife wants or what he wants. Certain advertisements and pictures in magazines make him suspect that he is basically unattractive. He feels that all his possessions are under threat of pillage. He does not know what he would do if he lost his job, if the economy failed, if the utility companies failed, if the police went on strike, if the truckers went on strike, if his wife left him, if his children ran away, if he should be found to be incurably ill. And for these anxieties, of course, he consults certified experts, who in turn consult certified experts about *their* anxieties.

It is rarely considered that this average citizen is anxious because he *ought* to be—because he still has some gumption that he has not yet given up in deference to the experts. He ought to be anxious, because he is helpless. That he is dependent upon so many specialists, the beneficiary of so much expert help, can only mean that he is a captive, a potential victim. If he lives by the competence of so many other people, then he lives also by their indulgence; his own will and his own reasons to live are made subordinate to the mere tolerance of everybody else. He has *one* chance to live what he conceives to be his life: his own small specialty within a delicate, tense, everywhere-strained system of specialties.

From a public point of view, the specialist system is a failure because, though everything is done by an expert, very little is done well. Our typical industrial or professional product is both ingenious and shoddy. The specialist system fails from a personal point of view because a person who can do only one thing can do virtually nothing for himself. In living in the world by his own will and skill, the stupidest peasant or tribesman is more competent than the most intelligent worker or technician or intellectual in a society of specialists.

What happens under the rule of specialization is that, though society becomes more and more intricate, it has less and less structure. It becomes more and more organized, but less and less orderly. The community disintegrates because it loses the necessary understandings, forms, and enactments

of the relations among materials and processes, principles and actions, ideals and realities, past and present, present and future, men and women, body and spirit, city and country, civilization and wilderness, growth and decay, life and death—just as the individual character loses the sense of a responsible involvement in these relations. No longer does human life rise from the earth like a pyramid, broadly and considerately founded upon its sources. Now it scatters itself out in a reckless horizontal sprawl, like a disorderly city whose suburbs and pavements destroy the fields.

The concept of country, homeland, dwelling place becomes simplified as "the environment"—that is, what surrounds us. Once we see our place, our part of the world, as *surrounding* us, we have already made a profound division between it and ourselves. We have given up the understanding—dropped it out of our language and so out of our thought—that we and our country create one another, depend on one another, are literally part of one another; that our land passes in and out of our bodies just as our bodies pass in and out of our land; that as we and our land are part of one another, so all who are living as neighbors here, human and plant and animal, are part of one another, and so cannot possibly flourish alone; that, therefore, our culture must be our response to our place, our culture and our place are images of each other and inseparable from each other, and so neither can be better than the other.

Because by definition they lack any such sense of mutuality or wholeness, our specializations subsist on conflict with one another. The rule is never to cooperate, but rather to follow one's own interest as far as possible. Checks and balances are all applied externally, by opposition, never by self-restraint. Labor, management, the military, the government, etc., never forbear until their excesses arouse enough opposition to *force* them to do so. The good of the whole of Creation, the world and all its creatures together, is never a consideration because it is never thought of; our culture now simply lacks the means for thinking of it.

It is for this reason that none of our basic problems is ever solved. Indeed, it is for this reason that our basic problems are getting worse. The specialists are profiting too well from the symptoms, evidently, to be concerned about cures—just as the myth of imminent cure (by some "breakthrough" of science or technology) is so lucrative and all-justifying as to foreclose any possibility

of an interest in prevention. The problems thus become the stock in trade of specialists. The so-called professions survive by endlessly "processing" and talking about problems that they have neither the will nor the competence to solve. The doctor who is interested in disease but not in health is clearly in the same category with the conservationist who invests in the destruction of what he otherwise intends to preserve. They both have the comfort of "job security," but at the cost of ultimate futility.

One of the most troubling characteristics of the specialist mentality is its use of money as a kind of proxy, its willingness to transmute the powers and functions of life into money. "Time is money" is one of its axioms and the source of many evils—among them the waste of both time and money. Akin to the idea that time is money is the concept, less spoken but as commonly assumed, that we may be adequately represented by money. The giving of money has thus become our characteristic virtue.

But to give is not to do. The money is given *in lieu* of action, thought, care, time. And it is no remedy for the fragmentation of character and consciousness that is the consequence of specialization. At the simplest, most practical level, it would be difficult for most of us to give enough in donations to good causes to compensate for, much less remedy, the damage done by the money that is taken from us and used destructively by various agencies of the government and by the corporations that hold us in captive dependence on their products. More important, even if we *could* give enough to overbalance the official and corporate misuse of our money, we would still not solve the problem: the willingness to be represented by money involves a submission to the modern divisions of character and community. The remedy safeguards the disease.

This has become, to some extent at least, an argument against institutional solutions. Such solutions necessarily fail to solve the problems to which they are addressed because, by definition, they cannot consider the real causes. The only real, practical, hope-giving way to remedy the fragmentation that is the disease of the modern spirit is a small and humble way—a way that a government or agency or organization or institution will never think of, though a *person* may think of it: one must begin in one's own life the private solutions that can only *in turn* become public solutions.

If, for instance, one is aware of the abuses and extortions to which one

is subjected as a modern consumer, then one may join an organization of consumers to lobby for consumer-protection legislation. But in joining a consumer organization, one defines oneself as a consumer *merely*, and a mere consumer is by definition a dependent, at the mercy of the manufacturer and the salesman. If the organization secures the desired legislation, then the consumer becomes the dependent not only of the manufacturer and salesman, but of the agency that enforces the law, and is at its mercy as well. The law enacted may be a good one, and the enforcers all honest and effective; even so, the consumer will understand that one result of his effort has been to increase the number of people of whom he must beware.

The consumer may proceed to organization and even to legislation by considering only his "rights." And most of the recent talk about consumer protection has had to do with the consumer's rights. Very little indeed has been said about the consumer's responsibilities. It may be that whereas one's rights may be advocated and even "served" by an organization, one's responsibilities cannot. It may be that when one hands one's responsibilities to an organization, one becomes by that divestiture irresponsible. It may be that responsibility is intransigently a personal matter—that a responsibility can be fulfilled or failed, but cannot be got rid of.

If a consumer begins to think and act in consideration of his responsibilities, then he vastly increases his capacities as a person. And he begins to be effective in a different way—a way that is smaller perhaps, and certainly less dramatic, but sounder, and able sooner or later to assume the force of example.

A responsible consumer would be a critical consumer, would refuse to purchase the less good. And he would be a moderate consumer; he would know his needs and would not purchase what he did not need; he would sort among his needs and study to reduce them. These things, of course, have been often said, though in our time they have not been said very loudly and have not been much heeded. In our time the rule among consumers has been to spend money recklessly. People whose governing habit is the relinquishment of power, competence, and responsibility, and whose characteristic suffering is the anxiety of futility, make excellent spenders. They are the ideal consumers. By inducing in them little panics of boredom, powerlessness, sexual failure, mortality, para-

noia, they can be made to buy (or vote for) virtually anything that is "attractively packaged." The advertising industry is founded upon this principle.

What has not been often said, because it did not need to be said until fairly recent times, is that the responsible consumer must also be in some way a producer. Out of his own resources and skills, he must be equal to some of his own needs. The household that prepares its own meals in its own kitchen with some intelligent regard for nutritional value, and thus depends on the grocer only for selected raw materials, exercises an influence on the food industry that reaches from the store all the way back to the seedsman. The household that produces some or all of its own food will have a proportionately greater influence. The household that can provide some of its own pleasures will not be helplessly dependent on the entertainment industry, will influence it by not being helplessly dependent on it, and will not support it thoughtlessly out of boredom.

The responsible consumer thus escapes the limits of his own dissatisfaction. He can choose, and exert the influence of his choosing, because he has given himself choices. He is not confined to the negativity of his complaint. He influences the market by his freedom. This is no specialized act, but an act that is substantial and complex, both practically and morally. By making himself responsibly free, a person changes both his life and his surroundings.

It is possible, then, to perceive a critical difference between responsible consumers and consumers who are merely organized. The responsible consumer slips out of the consumer category altogether. He is a responsible consumer incidentally, almost inadvertently; he is a responsible consumer because he lives a responsible life.

The same distinction is to be perceived between organized conservationists and responsible conservationists. (A responsible consumer *is*, of course, a responsible conservationist.) The conservationists who are merely organized function as specialists who have lost sight of basic connections. Conservation organizations hold stock in exploitive industries because they have no clear perception of, and therefore fail to be responsible for, the connections between what they say and what they do, what they desire and how they live.

The Sierra Club, for instance, defines itself by a slogan which it prints on the flaps of its envelopes. Its aim, according to the slogan, is "... to explore, enjoy,

and protect the nation's scenic resources . . ." To some extent, the Club's current concerns and attitudes belie this slogan. But there is also a sense in which the slogan defines the limits of organized conservation—some that have been self-imposed, others that are implicit in the nature of organization.

The key word in the slogan is "scenic." As used here, the word is a fossil. It is left over from a time when our comforts and luxuries were accepted simply as the rewards of progress to an ingenious, forward-looking people, when no threat was perceived in urbanization and industrialization, and when conservation was therefore an activity oriented toward vacations. It was "good to get out of the city" for a few weeks or weekends a year, and there was understandable concern that there should remain pleasant places to go. Some of the more adventurous vacationers were even aware of places of unique beauty that would be defaced if they were not set aside and protected. These people were effective in their way and within their limits, and they started the era of wilderness conservation. The results will give us abundant reasons for gratitude as long as we have sense enough to preserve them. But wilderness conservation did little to prepare us either to understand or to oppose the general mayhem of the all-outdoors that the industrial revolution has finally imposed upon us.

Wilderness conservation, we can now see, is specialized conservation. Its specialization is memorialized, in the Sierra Club's slogan, in the word "scenic." A scene is a place "as seen by a viewer." It is a "view." The appreciator of a place perceived as scenic is merely its observer, by implication both different and distant or detached from it. The connoisseur of the scenic has thus placed strict limitations both upon the sort of place he is interested in and upon his relation to it.

But even if the slogan were made to read ". . . to explore, enjoy, and protect the nation's resources . . . ," the most critical concern would still be left out. For while conservationists are exploring, enjoying, and protecting the nation's resources, they are also *using* them. They are drawing their lives from the nation's resources, scenic and unscenic. If the resolve to explore, enjoy, and protect does not create a moral energy that will define and enforce responsible use, then organized conservation will prove ultimately futile. And this, again, will be a failure of character.

Although responsible use may be defined, advocated, and to some extent

required by organizations, it cannot be implemented or enacted by them. It cannot be effectively enforced by them. The use of the world is finally a personal matter, and the world can be preserved in health only by the forbearance and care of a multitude of persons. That is, the possibility of the world's health will have to be defined in the characters of persons as clearly and as urgently as the possibility of personal "success" is now so defined. Organizations may promote this sort of forbearance and care, but they cannot provide it.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Agricultural Crisis as a Crisis of Culture

In my boyhood, Henry County, Kentucky, was not just a rural county, as it still is—it was a *farming* county. The farms were generally small. They were farmed by families who lived not only upon them, but within and *from* them. These families grew gardens. They produced their own meat, milk, and eggs. The farms were highly diversified. The main money crop was tobacco. But the farmers also grew corn, wheat, barley, oats, hay, and sorghum. Cattle, hogs, and sheep were all characteristically raised on the same farms. There were small dairies, the milking more often than not done by hand. Those were the farm products that might have been considered major. But there were also minor products, and one of the most important characteristics of that old economy was the existence of markets for minor products. In those days a farm family could easily market its surplus cream, eggs, old hens, and frying chickens. The power for field work was still furnished mainly by horses and mules. There was still a prevalent pride in workmanship, and thrift was still a forceful social ideal. The pride of most people was still in their homes, and their homes looked like it.

This was by no means a perfect society. Its people had often been violent and

wasteful in their use of the land and of each other. Its present ills had already taken root in it. But I have spoken of its agricultural economy of a generation ago to suggest that there were also good qualities indigenous to it that might have been cultivated and built upon.

That they were not cultivated and built upon—that they were repudiated as the stuff of a hopelessly outmoded, unscientific way of life—is a tragic error on the part of the people themselves; and it is a work of monstrous ignorance and irresponsibility on the part of the experts and politicians, who have prescribed, encouraged, and applauded the disintegration of such farming communities all over the country.

In the decades since World War II the farms of Henry County have become increasingly mechanized. Though they are still comparatively diversified, they are less diversified than they used to be. The holdings are larger, the owners are fewer. The land is falling more and more into the hands of speculators and professional people from the cities, who—in spite of all the scientific agricultural miracles—still have much more money than farmers. Because of big technology and big economics, there is more abandoned land in the county than ever before. Many of the better farms are visibly deteriorating, for want of manpower and time and money to maintain them properly. The number of part-time farmers and ex-farmers increases every year. Our harvests depend more and more on the labor of old people and young children. The farm people live less and less from their own produce, more and more from what they buy. The best of them are more worried about money and more overworked than ever before. Among the people as a whole, the focus of interest has largely shifted from the household to the automobile; the ideals of workmanship and thrift have been replaced by the goals of leisure, comfort, and entertainment. For Henry County plays its full part in what Maurice Telleen calls "the world's first broad-based hedonism." The young people expect to leave as soon as they finish high school, and so they are without permanent interest; they are generally not interested in anything that cannot be reached by automobile on a good road. Few of the farmers' children will be able to afford to stay on the farm—perhaps even fewer will wish to do so, for it will cost too much, require too much work and worry, and it is hardly a fashionable ambition.

And nowhere now is there a market for minor produce: a bucket of cream,

a hen, a few dozen eggs. One cannot sell milk from a few cows anymore; the law-required equipment is too expensive. Those markets were done away with in the name of sanitation — but, of course, to the enrichment of the large producers. We have always had to have "a good reason" for doing away with small operators, and in modern times the good reason has often been sanitation, for which there is apparently no small or cheap technology. Future historians will no doubt remark upon the inevitable association, with us, between sanitation and filthy lucre. And it is one of the miracles of science and hygiene that the germs that used to be in our food have been replaced by poisons.

In all this, few people whose testimony would have mattered have seen the connection between the "modernization" of agricultural techniques and the disintegration of the culture and the communities of farming — and the consequent disintegration of the structures of urban life. What we have called agricultural progress has, in fact, involved the forcible displacement of millions of people.

I remember, during the fifties, the outrage with which our political leaders spoke of the forced removal of the populations of villages in communist countries. I also remember that at the same time, in Washington, the word on farming was "Get big or get out" — a policy which is still in effect and which has taken an enormous toll. The only difference is that of method: the force used by the communists was military; with us, it has been economic — a "free market" in which the freest were the richest. The attitudes are equally cruel, and I believe that the results will prove equally damaging, not just to the concerns and values of the human spirit, but to the practicalities of survival.

And so those who could not get big have got out — not just in my community, but in farm communities all over the country. But as a social or economic goal, bigness is totalitarian; it establishes an inevitable tendency toward the *one* that will be the biggest of all. Many who got big to stay in are now being driven out by those who got bigger. The aim of bigness implies not one aim that is not socially and culturally destructive.

And this community-killing agriculture, with its monomania of bigness, is not primarily the work of farmers, though it has burgeoned on their weaknesses. It is the work of the institutions of agriculture: the university experts, the bureaucrats, and the "agribusinessmen," who have promoted so-called

efficiency at the expense of community (and of real efficiency), and quantity at the expense of quality.

In 1973, 1,000 Kentucky dairies went out of business. They were the victims of policies by which we imported dairy products to compete with our own and exported so much grain as to cause a drastic rise in the price of feed. And, typically, an agriculture expert at the University of Kentucky, Dr. John Nicolai, was optimistic about this failure of 1,000 dairymen, whose cause he is supposedly being paid—partly with *their* tax money—to serve. They were inefficient producers, he said, and they needed to be eliminated.

He did not say—indeed, there was no indication that he had ever considered—what might be the limits of his criterion or his logic. Did he propose to applaud this process year after year until "biggest" and "most efficient" become synonymous with "only"? Did these dairymen have any value not subsumed under the heading of "efficiency"? And who benefited by their failure? Assuming that the benefit reached beyond the more "efficient" (that is, the bigger) producers to lower the cost of milk to consumers, do we then have a formula by which to determine how many consumer dollars are equal to the livelihood of one dairyman? Or is *any* degree of "efficiency" worth any cost? I do not think that this expert knows the answers. I do not think that he is under any pressure—scholarly, professional, moral, or otherwise—to ask the questions. This sort of regardlessness is invariably justified by pointing to the enormous productivity of American agriculture. But any abundance, in any amount, is illusory if it does not safeguard its producers, and in American agriculture it is now virtually the accepted rule that abundance will destroy its producers.

And along with the rest of society, the established agriculture has shifted its emphasis, and its interest, from quality to quantity, having failed to see that in the long run the two ideas are inseparable. To pursue quantity alone is to destroy those disciplines in the producer that are the only assurance of quantity. What is the effect on quantity of persuading a producer to produce an inferior product? What, in other words, is the relation of pride or craftsmanship to abundance? That is another question the "agribusinessmen" and their academic collaborators do not ask. They do not ask it because they are afraid of the answer: The preserver of abundance is excellence.

My point is that food is a cultural product; it cannot be produced by tech-

nology alone. Those agriculturists who think of the problems of food production solely in terms of technological innovation are oversimplifying both the practicalities of production and the network of meanings and values necessary to define, nurture, and preserve the practical motivations. That the discipline of agriculture should have been so divorced from other disciplines has its immediate cause in the compartmental structure of the universities, in which complementary, mutually sustaining and enriching disciplines are divided, according to "professions," into fragmented, one-eyed specialties. It is suggested, both by the organization of the universities and by the kind of thinking they foster, that farming shall be the responsibility only of the college of agriculture, that law shall be in the sole charge of the professors of law, that morality shall be taken care of by the philosophy department, reading by the English department, and so on. The same, of course, is true of government, which has become another way of institutionalizing the same fragmentation.

However, if we conceive of a culture as one body, which it is, we see that all of its disciplines are everybody's business, and that the proper university product is therefore not the whittled-down, isolated mentality of expertise, but a mind competent in all its concerns. To such a mind it would be clear that there are agricultural disciplines that have nothing to do with crop production, just as there are agricultural obligations that belong to people who are not farmers.

A culture is not a collection of relics or ornaments, but a practical necessity, and its corruption invokes calamity. A healthy culture is a communal order of memory, insight, value, work, conviviality, reverence, aspiration. It reveals the human necessities and the human limits. It clarifies our inescapable bonds to the earth and to each other. It assures that the necessary restraints are observed, that the necessary work is done, and that it is done well. A healthy *farm* culture can be based only upon familiarity and can grow only among a people soundly established upon the land; it nourishes and safe-guards a human intelligence of the earth that no amount of technology can satisfactorily replace. The growth of such a culture was once a strong possibility in the farm communities of this country. We now have only the sad remnants of those communities. If we allow another generation to pass without doing what is necessary to enhance and embolden the possibility now perishing with them, we will lose it altogether. And then we will not only invoke calamity — we will deserve it.

Several years ago I argued with a friend of mine that we might make money

by marketing some inferior lambs. My friend thought for a minute and then he said, "I'm in the business of producing *good* lambs, and I'm not going to sell any other kind." He also said that he kept the weeds out of his crops for the same reason that he washed his face. The human race has survived by that attitude. It can survive *only* by that attitude—though the farmers who have it have not been much acknowledged or much rewarded.

Such an attitude does not come from technique or technology. It does not come from education; in more than two decades in universities I have rarely seen it. It does not come even from principle. It comes from a passion that is culturally prepared—a passion for excellence and order that is handed down to young people by older people whom they respect and love. When we destroy the possibility of that succession, we will have gone far toward destroying ourselves.

It is by the measure of culture, rather than economics or technology, that we can begin to reckon the nature and the cost of the country-to-city migration that has left our farmland in the hands of only five percent of the people. From a cultural point of view, the movement from the farm to the city involves a radical simplification of mind and of character.

A competent farmer is his own boss. He has learned the disciplines necessary to go ahead on his own, as required by economic obligation, loyalty to his place, pride in his work. His workdays require the use of long experience and practiced judgment, for the failures of which he knows that he will suffer. His days do not begin and end by rule, but in response to necessity, interest, and obligation. They are not measured by the clock, but by the task and his endurance; they last as long as necessary or as long as he can work. He has mastered intricate formal patterns in ordering his work within the overlapping cycles—human and natural, controllable and uncontrollable—of the life of a farm.

Such a man, upon moving to the city and taking a job in industry, becomes a specialized subordinate, dependent upon the authority and judgment of other people. His disciplines are no longer implicit in his own experience, assumptions, and values, but are imposed on him from the outside. For a complex responsibility he has substituted a simple dutifulness. The strict competences of independence, the formal mastery, the complexities of attitude and

know-how necessary to life on the farm, which have been in the making in the race of farmers since before history, all are replaced by the knowledge of some fragmentary task that may be learned by rote in a little while.

Such a simplification of mind is easy. Given the pressure of economics and social fashion that has been behind it and the decline of values that has accompanied it, it may be said to have been gravity-powered. The reverse movement—a reverse movement *is* necessary, and some have undertaken it—is uphill, and it is difficult. It cannot be fully accomplished in a generation. It will probably require several generations—enough to establish complex local cultures with strong communal memories and traditions of care.

There seems to be a rule that we can simplify our minds and our culture only at the cost of an oppressive social and mechanical complexity. We can simplify our society—that is, make ourselves free—only by undertaking tasks of great mental and cultural complexity. Farming, the *best* farming, is a task that calls for this sort of complexity, both in the character of the farmer and in his culture. To simplify either one is to destroy it.

That is because the best farming requires a farmer—a husbandman, a nurturer—not a technician or businessman. A technician or a businessman, given the necessary abilities and ambitions, can be made in a little while, by training. A good farmer, on the other hand, is a cultural product; he is made by a sort of training, certainly, in what his time imposes or demands, but he is also made by generations of experience. This essential experience can only be accumulated, tested, preserved, handed down in settled households, friendships, and communities that are deliberately and carefully native to their own ground, in which the past has prepared the present and the present safeguards the future.

The concentration of the farmland into larger and larger holdings and fewer and fewer hands—with the consequent increase of overhead, debt, and dependence on machines—is thus a matter of complex significance, and its agricultural significance cannot be disentangled from its cultural significance. It *forces* a profound revolution in the farmer's mind: once his investment in land and machines is large enough, he must forsake the values of husbandry and assume those of finance and technology. Thenceforth his thinking is not determined by agricultural responsibility, but by financial accountability and

the capacities of his machines. Where his money comes from becomes less important to him than where it is going. He is caught up in the drift of energy and interest away from the land. Production begins to override maintenance. The economy of money has infiltrated and subverted the economies of nature, energy, and the human spirit. The man himself has become a consumptive machine.

For some time now ecologists have been documenting the principle that "you can't do one thing"—which means that in a natural system whatever affects one thing ultimately affects everything. Everything in the Creation is related to everything else and dependent on everything else. The Creation is one. It is a uni-verse, a whole, the parts of which are all "turned into one."

A good agricultural system, which is to say a durable one, is similarly unified. In the 1940s, the great British agricultural scientist, Sir Albert Howard, published *An Agricultural Testament* and *The Soil and Health*, in which he argued against the influence in agriculture of "the laboratory hermit" who had substituted "that dreary principle [official organization] for the soul-shaking principle of that essential freedom needed by the seeker after truth." And Howard goes on to speak of the disruptiveness of official organization: "The natural universe, which is one, has been halved, quartered, fractioned. . . . Real organization always involves real responsibility: the official organization of research tries to retain power and avoid responsibility by sheltering behind groups of experts." Howard himself began as a laboratory hermit: "I could not take my own advice before offering it to other people." But he saw the significance of the "wide chasm between science in the laboratory and practice in the field." He devoted his life to bridging that chasm. His is the story of a fragmentary intelligence seeking both its own wholeness and that of the world. The aim that he finally realized in his books was to prepare the way "for treating the whole problem of health in soil, plant, animal, and man as one great subject." He unspecialized his vision, in other words, so as to see the necessary unity of the concerns of agriculture, as well as the convergence of these concerns with concerns of other kinds: biological, historical, medical, moral, and so on. He sought to establish agriculture upon the same unifying cycle that preserves health, fertility, and renewal in nature: the Wheel of Life (as he called it, borrowing the term from religion), by which "Death supersedes life and life rises again from what is dead and decayed."

It remains only to say what has often been said before—that the best human cultures also have this unity. Their concerns and enterprises are not fragmented, scattered out, at variance or in contention with one another. The people and their work and their country are members of each other and of the culture. If a culture is to hope for any considerable longevity, then the relationships within it must, in recognition of their interdependence, be predominantly cooperative rather than competitive. A people cannot live long at each other's expense or at the expense of their cultural birthright—just as an agriculture cannot live long at the expense of its soil or its work force, and just as in a natural system the competitions among species must be limited if all are to survive.

In any of these systems, cultural or agricultural or natural, when a species or group exceeds the principle of usufruct (literally, the "use of the fruit"), it puts itself in danger. Then, to use an economic metaphor, it is living off the principal rather than the interest. It has broken out of the system of nurture and has become exploitive; it is destroying what gave it life and what it depends upon to live. In all of these systems a fundamental principle must be the protection of the source: the seed, the food species, the soil, the breeding stock, the old and the wise, the keepers of memories, the records.

And just as competition must be strictly curbed within these systems, it must be strictly curbed *among* them. An agriculture cannot survive long at the expense of the natural systems that support it and that provide it with models. A culture cannot survive long at the expense either of its agricultural or of its natural sources. To live at the expense of the source of life is obviously suicidal. Though we have no choice but to live at the expense of other life, it is necessary to recognize the limits and dangers involved: past a certain point in a unified system, "other life" is our own.

The definitive relationships in the universe are thus not competitive but interdependent. And from a human point of view they are analogical. We can build one system only within another. We can have agriculture only within nature, and culture only within agriculture. At certain critical points these systems have to conform with one another or destroy one another.

Under the discipline of unity, knowledge and morality come together. No longer can we have that paltry "objective" knowledge so prized by the academic specialists. To know anything at all becomes a moral predicament.

Aware that there is no such thing as a specialized—or even an entirely limitable or controllable—effect, one becomes responsible for judgments as well as facts. Aware that as an agricultural scientist he had "one great subject," Sir Albert Howard could no longer ask, What can I do with what I know? without at the same time asking, How can I be responsible for what I know?

And it is within unity that we see the hideousness and destructiveness of the fragmentary—the kind of mind, for example, that can introduce a production machine to increase "efficiency" without troubling about its effect on workers, on the product, and on consumers; that can accept and even applaud the "obsolescence" of the small farm and not hesitate over the possible political and cultural effects; that can recommend continuous tillage of huge monocultures, with massive use of chemicals and no animal manure or humus, and worry not at all about the deterioration or loss of soil. For cultural patterns of responsible cooperation we have substituted this moral ignorance, which is the etiquette of agricultural "progress."

part of our lives is untouched. This is a dangerous book, which is just why I hope you read it."

Meg Hunter-Kilmer
Author of *Pray for Us*

"Writing with a wisdom honed by the Gospel's demand to be in community with the poor, Miller reminds his readers that Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin are forgotten at our peril. With a storyteller's gift, Miller introduces us to the world of the Catholic Worker."

Stanley Hauerwas
Author of *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*

We Are Only Saved TOGETHER

Living the Revolutionary Vision of DOROTHY DAY and the Catholic Worker Movement

COLIN MILLER

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conditions of isolation, consumerism, distraction, and the rest, and to put in their place cultures such as the daily rhythm we slowly began to develop in Durham. If we want a true cultural revolution, it starts, as Dorothy says, with "a revolution of the heart": a revolution of cooking together instead of fast food, of conversation rather than television, of smaller houses closer together, of new friends rather than new things, of faces rather than screens, of feet rather than tires.

And so Thérèse, as Dorothy and Peter saw, invites us to fight the demons in our own little ways, in our own proverbial monasteries and lions' dens today. And here we will once again have to avoid the temptation to make this a *spiritualization* of the Gospel—as if the little way is about going around doing the *same things* with a different intention or spiritual perspective. Rather, if Peter is right that the separation of the material from the spiritual is the greatest error of modern times, and if we take the ways our society makes it hard to be the Church seriously, we should rather speak of the little way as the *materialization* of the Gospel. It's making a world, as Peter said, "where it is easier to be good."[2]

The bad news is that, as we've seen, we've got our work cut out for us. The good news is that every little step we take in this regard *is* the practice of the Gospel, *is* warfare, and *does* fight the demons. That's what the little way means. Every action is complete in itself, and even if it doesn't produce any visible result, it accomplishes its objective. In our prayers, in our meals together, in fellowship with the poor, in deciding for conversation and a walk rather than a drive or more screen time, in standing at the sink together doing the dishes, we are not just *preparing* to build a new society—we are actually living in it.

8

CULT, CULTURE, AND CULTIVATION

Bubba, whom I mentioned in an earlier chapter, was six-foot-six and two hundred forty pounds, almost always in a good mood, always ready to chat, and always ready to panhandle you. "I bet you didn't know I'm a professor of English," he'd say in his deep, *deep* voice.

"Really?"

"Yep, Old English [malt liquor]! Ah ha ha ha ha!"

He was one of the mainstays of the Guys, and in later years he would come to live at the hospitality house and become a real friend. But when I first met him, he lived in a tent in the woods, right across the street from the church.

I don't remember how the topic ever came up, but early on he said he would rather live there than at any of his other options: "People come in here, they say, 'Why don't you get a job?' Oh, what you want me to do, go work at the gas station, standing up behind a counter forty, fifty, sixty hours a week? Getting paid just enough to get me some bug-infested room all the way across town? Hell, no! I got bugs right here! Ha ha! You think I need to buy food? Hell, no. I got you to buy it for me! ! Ha ha ha.

"Out here I got everything I need," he'd continue. "The birds, the air, even Danny! I'm not going through all that shenanigans to be able to come out here in my *free* time and do what I can just do out here *all* the time."

Bubba had understood, in effect, that the conventional way of fitting into society was always going to give him a raw deal with demeaning and unfulfilling work, low pay, and meager living options. But he also saw that, even if he did somehow manage to climb the social ladder, at the end of his long days, when he wanted to relax and have fun, he would just come back up to the Hill and hang out with his friends.

Bubba wasn't buying it.

Cultivation

In this chapter and the next, we're going to be broadly exploring what Peter called his "philosophy of labor." That might sound like stuff for scholars, but it's really quite practical, as we'll see soon enough. Both of these chapters will help us understand Bubba's situation better and will put us in a good position to then see (in chapter 10) how our Durham community grew and stabilized itself by finding good work outside of conventional channels, even while we kept our "normal" jobs.

The present chapter prepares the ground for this approach to labor by looking at what Peter called "cultivation"—a reconnection with working the land that is part of our divine vocation. In the next chapter, building on this connection to the land, we'll look in more detail at the Church's teaching about what makes work good and why.

All this is relevant because, as both Peter and Bubba saw, so much of the work on offer today is, frankly, below the dignity of human beings. In Peter's day, that often meant mindless factory

work, spending all day every day performing the same meaningless mechanical action over and over again—becoming the extension, basically, of a machine. In Bubba's day, that meant (and often means) much the same thing: standing behind a cash register, or a computer, all day every day, performing the same meaningless actions over and over again as the extension of a machine, and getting out of it a life that was in many ways worse than what he had with no job at all.

Peter thought the Church could do better, and so he called for *cult, culture, and cultivation.* "Cult," today, is sometimes used to describe crazy sectarian groups, but the original meaning of the word, the way Peter used it, simply refers to an organized system of *worship*. By "cult" Peter meant the Mass. By "culture," as we have seen, he meant a life built around the Mass. And "cultivation" is then the further extension of the *culture* of the *cult* to all of life, and especially to our *work*. It's the last part of a full Christianization of life.

Peter didn't think that we all had to move out to farms. There was plenty of good work to be found in cities, as we'll see. But he did think that each of us, as part of our faith, has a lot to gain from an increased consciousness of our dependence on the soil as the very source of our bodily life. Working the earth, he thought, was a divine *vocation*, common to all human beings. And he thought that each of us could do things in our daily lives, even in the cities, to put this vocation into practice. This, he thought, in the spirit of the little way, was another way that our spiritual and material lives are inseparably linked.

One caveat is in order before we jump in. In this chapter, I'm going to be talking about big differences between agrarian and industrial modes of life. But I want to avoid giving the impression that preindustrial life was wonderful or easy, or that if we could just go back to it, everything would be better. There were

good things about it, as we'll see, but there were lots of problems, sin, and evil back then too.

I am no agrarian romantic, and Peter wasn't either. His point was not at all that modern life was terrible and that we should abandon it all and retreat into walled-off communes. We couldn't do that even if we thought we should. And, as we've seen, Peter's whole program is about *engaging* the modern world, not rejecting it.

The point, rather, is about *understanding* our world and finding ways to live more faithfully in it. In order to understand the unique character of modern work, we have to recognize, not with wistful nostalgia but simply as matters of history, the unprecedented nature of our industrial lives and some of the challenges and opportunities this presents Catholics today. The outline we give of these dynamics below is necessarily simplified, but no less true and relevant.

The Industrial Turn

The full significance of cultivation in the Christian life can only really be grasped if we first appreciate the seismic historical and cultural shift brought on over the last two centuries by the Industrial Revolution. As farmer and writer Wendell Berry notes, "Today, we like to talk about all kinds of revolutions: the fossil-fuel revolution, the automotive revolution, the assembly-line revolution, the antibiotic revolution, the sexual revolution, the computer revolution, the green revolution, the genomic revolution, and so on. But these revolutions . . . are all mere episodes of the one truly revolutionary revolution perhaps in the history of the human race, the Industrial Revolution."[1] What is it about *this* revolution that makes it the "one truly revolutionary revolution perhaps in the history of the human race"? To answer this

question, let's consider a little bit about what went before it, in comparison with what we have now.

Before about two hundred years ago in most places in the world, and more recently in America, most of the population was occupied in subsistence-based agriculture and its related arts and crafts. By "subsistence" I just mean that whatever they grew or made was largely made for personal consumption, rather than primarily for selling on the market. You grew what you ate, and ate what you grew. If you made a shirt, it was usually for you or a family member to wear. By "agriculture" I mean that most people were farmers. If you weren't one, but worked as a cobbler or in carpentry, you were still dependent, usually in a visible way, on the land for your materials and also for your food. You were still close, literally and metaphorically, to the earth.

There were, of course, cities, which held all kinds of professions not directly on the land. But 80 or 90 percent of the population was living off the land. That statistic is today more than directly inverted in the United States, with less than 2 percent of people living off the land, and far less than that doing it for subsistence.

This, in a nutshell, is the one truly revolutionary revolution: from almost everyone living on the land, to almost no one. What I want to do now is enter imaginatively into some of the massive changes that accompanied this shift, particularly as they impacted faith, community, and work. We should keep Bubba in mind through all of this.

Community, Cultivation, and the Earth

The first difference between modern and agricultural societies is the way that *community* on the land is built into life itself. One

of the things that I hear from many Minnesota old-timers who grew up farming is that they could never have done it—indeed could never have *survived*—without their neighbors. Family farms were not isolated from one another, but were in constant practical need of one another. Planting, harvest, barn-building, slaughtering, field-clearing, seed-sharing, and countless other tasks were *shared* tasks. Each turn of the season brought about another round of trips to neighboring farms and neighbors' trips to yours.

The requirements of the land, therefore, brought built-in friends, for you could not get by without them. The idea that work and friends could be two different things was unthinkable. Business and pleasure were *always* mixed. Who got along with whom was related to matters of life and death; the strength of the community was the strength of the agriculture, and vice versa. Community was created by shared work, and that work was necessary because it brought the necessities of life out of the earth.

Morality, Cultivation, and the Earth

The second difference between modern and agricultural societies has to do with the moral dimension of work on the land. The very fact that the earth demands things of our bodies can *make us different people.* For instance, farmers have to get up in the morning and milk the cows, every day, whether they want to or not. In Minnesota, they have to change the water in the chicken coop in the winter every day, or it will freeze. These tasks and countless others have to be done consistently, on time, and *well* if the farm is going to succeed.

Complex knowledge is also required. Farmers have to know their animals and their habitat well enough to discern when

something is wrong, and that only comes with time and attention. They have to know what part of their fields can be planted with which seed, which animals should graze on it when, when it should be tilled in the spring, and how each field is best protected in the winter. This kind of knowledge is intimate knowledge of a very particular place, which by definition cannot be learned from books because it is the knowledge of a *place* that is not every place. It only comes from experience—from seeing, feeling, touching, and realizing that we are, in a way, a *part* of the land from which we live.

The point is that the demands of a farm and the subtle knowledge this work entails require that each person develop certain *virtues*. Being a certain kind of person is necessary for being a farmer at all. It requires patience, care, attentiveness, courage, trust, resignation, persistence, wisdom, intelligence, and a sense of humor. It requires, you might say, that you *fit* your body, and so your character, to the requirements of the land. You might have heard the joke that people and their pets start to look alike. Something similar is true about people and the land. Farmers shape it, and it shapes them. Being *embedded* in the earth changes us.

Gardens, Cultivation, and Vocations

Perhaps it shouldn't surprise us, then, when the Bible says that human beings were originally made to live in a garden (see Genesis 1–2). And our job there was precisely to *cultivate* it. We were made out of the earth originally, and by tending it, we were meant to be continually made out of it.

It's important to note that Genesis says nothing about work being a result of or curse due to sin. The *toil* and *difficulty* of

work were increased because of sin (see Genesis 3), but to work the garden was given to us as a *vocation*. In the most literal and bodily terms, that is what human beings are physically made for. The Fathers of the Church sometimes remarked on this calling, noting that, of all the animals of the earth, humans were the only ones without claws or teeth or heavy skins to protect ourselves. We had hands and feet made only for picking fruit and tilling the ground. It's what we were brought out of the ground to do in the first place.

When we were in the garden there was, you might say, an organic unity that existed among humanity, God, and the earth. Humans were made for the earth and the earth for humans, just as they were made for God. In Genesis 1–2, our right relationship to *God* consists of obedience to his command to take care of the earth and subdue it (see Genesis 1:28–30), to tend and keep the garden (see Genesis 2:15), and not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (see Genesis 2:17). And we have a right relationship to the *earth*, likewise, by adapting our bodies to their natural fit with creation and by taking up our vocation as its *stewards*. In other words, our relationship with God is inseparable from our relationship with the earth.

It makes sense, then, that the name "human" (in the Bible's Hebrew and in English) is taken from the word for "earth, soil, or ground," so that the name of the first human, "Adam," literally means the "Soil-Man"—or the one who was taken from and made to tend the soil (see Genesis 5:2). Our very name tells us what we are primordially called to do.

Unity of Life through the Land

We can see in Genesis, then, in an embryonic but entirely accurate way, how all of life is included in the God-human-soil

relationship. By being connected to the earth, all the different areas of human existence find an organic unity. This is the unity of not only cult and culture but also cultivation. The early American small farmer, the medieval peasant, or today's urban gardener puts her life into her earth. She puts her stamp on it, as Pope St. Leo XIII wrote in *Rerum Novarum*, and her earth puts its stamp on her. She draws her life from it—she eats, drinks, enjoys, creates. Her life and her work are the same; she's an artist, an engineer, and a provider all at once.[2]

From that same earth she raises up a family, which is bound to that same spot in the same ways. She will have to sustain them by feeding them from the same earth. But she will also have to sustain them by teaching them how to sustain themselves by tending and caring for the land. And in so cultivating the land, they develop not just the land but themselves and their community by their intelligence, skill, friendship, prudence, and character. The land yields not just produce but education, tradition, work, art, and culture. The different parts of life arise, one step upon another, all connected integrally with the common task of cultivating the earth.

Each part is necessary and connected with each other part. The physical: for the necessities of life. The moral: for the dispositions needed to do it. Environmental stewardship: to safeguard and protect that land for the next year. Community: because you can't do it alone. Economy: because the resources of life are generated from the earth and from nowhere else. Culture: because traditions have to be passed on and creatively improved upon. Work: because this is the way God gave us to cooperate with him to co-create our lives.

And then finally comes perhaps the most important part: the Church. For most of Western history the Church has been a sort of unofficial preserver of agricultural traditions and practices. It is where all of life is consciously taken up, understood

as one whole, especially in relation to God. We see this in the sacramental cycle that moves from Baptism at birth, through First Communion and Confirmation, to marriage (and usually children) or religious life, all the way to anointing and burial at the time of death. Not only have we traditionally had prayers and processions for planting and harvest, for the "churching" of women after childbirth, for birthdays, and so on, but the liturgical seasons themselves often correspond to the agricultural ones: Advent in winter, Lent with sowing and toil, Easter with new life budding forth.

Life experience, scriptural testimony, and the Church's lived tradition all served for most of our history to make blatantly obvious—so obvious that it didn't even really need to be stated—that the agricultural life was a divine vocation. Indeed, in some ways, a life of cultivation was *the* divine vocation.

The Tower of Babel

It should not be surprising, then, that when Adam and Eve eat of the forbidden fruit and transgress that original harmony and get kicked out of the garden, everything goes from bad to worse. Indeed, it's not just the story of the eating of the fruit (see Genesis 3); the whole of the first eleven chapters of the Bible (see Genesis 1–11) form a single Fall narrative that passes through the original sin (see Genesis 3) and the first murder (see Genesis 4), to such general depravity that God sends the flood to kill everybody (see Genesis 6–9), and finally to the Tower of Babel (see Genesis 11).

That tower is clearly meant to symbolize the high point (pun intended) of the way fallen humanity can oppose God's plan for us. In the story, the people of the earth, who still all speak one language, build for *themselves* a city with a "tower with its top in

the heavens" to keep themselves, tellingly, from being "scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Gn 11:4). The Lord then comes down and confuses their language so that they don't succeed in their plan (see Genesis 11:7–9).

The result of their attempt, then, to create an *alternative* human form of life is the opposite of the harmonious union of the Garden of Eden. The Tower of Babel is a story of the peoples of the earth trying to unite *themselves*—but independently of God, and independently of the way they were made to be united.

In place of the divinely given fit between the body and the earth, they use their human ingenuity to try to engineer a way of life in which they don't have to be dependent on the soil any longer. In place of the unity that came about because God had made the earth, other people, and the human body all mutually for one another, they built a tower to rally around and function as their social bond. And, finally and perhaps most strikingly, in place of the garden that was the original human setting, they now live, for the first time, in a *city.* They have broken away from the land and created the first concrete jungle of bricks and mortar (see Genesis 11:2).

The point, of course, is not that scripture is condemning cities in themselves. It's that cities can so many times not only represent, but actually be, the rebellious human attempt to divorce ourselves from (or at least forget about) our irreducible finiteness and dependence on the land.

So for the first time humanity is *scattered* across the face of the earth (see Genesis 11:8). Up to that point, they all had one God-given language (see Genesis 11:1), corresponding to their universally recognized vocation to the land. They spoke "human," as it were—or we might call it "soil-ese." But when they tried to find another source of unity, an alternative corporate human task, God scattered them by giving them different languages. Such fragmentation is simply the natural consequence of

their seeking some alternative unity to the one they were given in the garden.[3]

Fragmentation and Life outside the Garden

This bit of biblical history is not a bad prefiguration (I won't call it a prophecy) of what happens when we no longer live anywhere close to our human agricultural vocation as "soil people."

We all enjoy one of the primary fruits of the Industrial Revolution: it makes it physically much easier for most of us to get the necessities of life. All of our mechanical technology has significantly removed the limits, toil, and dependency that come from drawing our life from the soil. But the result of this convenience is that most of us have only the most remote connections with the land.

No one would deny, of course, that our food, shelter, and clothing all come to us *ultimately* from the earth, for there is still no other way to get them. But for most of us this is a theoretical truth, rather than a practical, experiential one. We live at the end of long assembly lines, as it were, that separate our bodies from the sources of their life. When I ask my children, for instance, where their food comes from, their first answer is, "The grocery store." And when we think our food comes from the grocery store, that is a pretty good indication that we have lost something significant about what it is to be human.

Here's the main point in this: by minimizing our connections to the soil, we have also eliminated much of the moral formation, creativity, intelligence, local traditions, natural care for the earth, community life, centrality of the Church—and the unity of all these things—that was built on our links to that soil.

God made us so that our dependence on the land was directly linked to our personal and communal development. The two seem to be inseparable facts of creation. In God's wisdom, the physical limits imposed on humanity by our dependence upon the earth also *developed* our humanity and bound it together.

So, when society begins to move away from an organic connection to the earth, slowly and initially without anyone noticing, the character and unity of life begin to unravel. Now, in our day, for the first time in human history, we can think of life as divided into separate categories such as work, home, community, religion, economy, and morality. These things, for most of society, don't necessarily have anything to do with one another anymore. They are separate compartments of life, each with their own, independent logic.

To be more concrete, before industrialism, labor, home, sex, finances, food, and friends were necessarily bound up together. It was just a fact that sex was related to your ability to produce food, because sex makes children who help you till the earth; finances *were* home-life, because your household made the goods and products that were the basis of the economy; friends made all of this possible, so if you were eating (and hence living), you probably had them. Today, however, these things are no longer necessarily linked. They might *happen* to cross paths, if you go to dinner with friends, or decide to share a bank account with your wife. But they no longer mutually define one another.

Likewise, under these conditions, the retreat of the Church from heart and society was inevitable. Like the other new compartments of modern life, Church now just becomes one *possible* part of it, rather than the beating heart of an indivisible whole. Like children, like what kind of work you do, like whom you have sex with, like who your friends are, like what you eat for supper, the Church under industrialism now becomes one option among many. You can take it or leave it, depending on

how it suits your taste, and it accordingly becomes increasingly difficult to see its relevance to "real life." It is no wonder that secularization, as Pope Leo XIII said, was simply part of industrialism itself.[4]

Back to Bubba

Even with just this little bit of background—and there are plenty of things we have not even touched on—we can hopefully appreciate why the Industrial Revolution was so revolutionary. With the possible exception of the advent of Christianity, it is hard to imagine a more total set of changes in society happening within so relatively few years. Like the early Christian revolution, it really has turned the whole "world upside down" (Acts 17:6).

And we can also glimpse a little more clearly how insightful Bubba was. For when people criticized him for not getting a job, they were implicitly asking him to live more fully in the fragmented nature of industrial life. As it was, even though he wasn't a farmer, by simply staying outside of the conventional social world he had managed to avoid much of that fragmentation. He did his work with his friends, often sharing the panhandling proceeds; he lived where he worked, with those same friends; they ate together, laughed together, and entertained one another.

But the critics wanted him to break up his life the way that they broke up theirs. They wanted him to have work *and* friends *and* a home *and* food, and so on—all separate from one another. But Bubba intuited that was a raw deal, and he said no.

In the next two chapters we'll see what we can do about this fragmentation in our own lives too. Building on what we've explored here, we'll look in more depth at our vocation to good work, how we pursued this in Durham, and the little revolution that took place in Bubba's life when, a few years later, he traded his tent for a farmhouse.

9
A PHILOSOPHY OF LABOR

People today seem to be increasingly dissatisfied with their jobs. Not only is it the case that in society at large the turnover rate is higher than it has ever been and the service industry is perpetually short-staffed, but there's also a certain amount of conscious popular reflection about what we spend our days doing. Some evidence is the fact that a recent book about work, *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work*, recently reached the *New York Times* best-seller list.

The good news is that even in the ordinary circles of Catholics my family runs in, folks are taking measures to enrich their work experience. Rob, a thirty-eight-year-old father of four, looking to get out of the model-home contractor business, recently took some evening classes in the trade of timber-framing. Brian, a thirty-five-year-old father of four, an engineer for Best Buy, and an ex-military nuclear submarine designer, has started a side-business that connects the produce of Catholic farmers in outstate Minnesota with Catholic customers in the Twin Cities. Several active members of a local parish—including my friends Megan and Nate—all with jobs within the mainstream economy, have started a weekend pop-up market that sells roasted coffee, ceramics, paintings, and other items they've made themselves at home.

None of these people, that I know of, has read up on Peter Maurin's philosophy of work, or anyone else's. They also run in different circles and go to different parishes, and so it appears they've come to their resolutions independently. What they all do have in common is a sense, a gut feeling, that their usual nine-to-five is somehow not cutting it for them. They all have started integrating work that is more tangible, physical, or tactile into their lives. And they are doing it because, as someone recently put it to me, "It just feels good." They've intuited that work is important and that they want something more out of it than a paycheck. And they have all gone about addressing that desire in creative and beautiful ways—little ways.

In this chapter, we're going to take a closer look at some of the more specific things the Catholic tradition has to say about work. This will help us see what's behind that common gut feeling—why this kind of work feels good. We'll parse out "good" work from "less good" work and see that most of the time what we commonly mean by work is actually labor stripped of what makes it good. But this will also involve us seeing what makes work such an invaluable divine gift, as well as what we can do to transform our own experience of it.

As we explore these ideas, it's important to keep the examples of Rob, Brian, and the rest in mind. I mention them in part because they show what it can look like practically to grapple with work as a divine vocation. It's not out of reach or irresponsible; families with kids can do it, and more and more Catholics are starting to feel this tug every day.[1]

So, after we set out Peter's philosophy of labor here (which, as we'll see, is really just the Church's philosophy of labor as articulated by a number of popes), the next chapter will be almost entirely devoted to the manner in which this new way of looking at things materialized for us in Durham and literally transformed

our community. So if Rob and Brian pique your curiosity, there are more examples on the way.

A Different Kind of Poverty

In the last chapter, we saw what a relatively new thing modern industrial life is. For us in Durham, this was an important realization, and we wanted to go deeper. So, in addition to the social encyclicals, we also started exploring Peter Maurin's list of great books—writers he had learned from and recommended to others. These included, among others, Catholic agrarian thinkers such as G. K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, and Vincent McNabb. We also read more contemporary authors such as Wendell Berry and Ivan Illich. These folks helped us clarify and make practical the basic insights we had gleaned so far regarding industrial life.

One of the first things that became apparent was that the poverty we were encountering every day was a particularly *modern* poverty. There have always been poor people. Most people throughout history have been poor, and sometimes very poor. But, as we saw in the last chapter, until recently the poor have also had at their disposal the means of producing a living for themselves and the knowledge required to do it. This gave the poor a significant measure of independence, for they could take care of themselves. It also gave them dignity, for they were still creative, resourceful, and very much their own bosses. It was feasible to have very little income, and yet be quite well off.

Poverty today is very different. In our economy you can't get by without a regular flow of *money,* and that's because just about all the necessities of life today, besides air and water, are commodities. That is, as opposed to making things for the household and the local community to consume, we make things almost exclusively to be bought or sold on the market. So to get

money—the lifeblood of our world—the Guys on the Hill were utterly *dependent* upon begging, state or institutional handouts, or wage labor.

This is poverty of a brand-new kind. To single it out, Dorothy called it *destitution*, because it's poverty without any recourse. Perhaps worst of all, because it's poverty without independence, it's also largely poverty without any dignity. And yet we have more of it today than ever before, and in growing numbers.

This, it's worth noting, is the problem with the common argument that industrialism has raised the standard of living across the world even for the poorest. It's true that even the poorest now *consume more commodities* than ever before, but at the cost of being utterly dependent upon those commodities, their creators, and a cash income.

The Standard Question

All of this led to the issue of work for us, because the most obvious thing about poor or homeless people these days is that "they don't have enough money." And so the obvious standard question—the question we heard over and over again from folks interested in or curious about the hospitality house—was, "So do you try to help them get jobs?"

The answer was that we hadn't really thought about it very much. We weren't opposed to the Guys looking for jobs, but it also wasn't something we actively pushed on anyone. But the frequency with which people wanted to know about it showed us that there are some deeply rooted feelings about work in our culture. The unstated assumption often appeared to be that if we weren't helping them find jobs, we were somehow being irresponsible. And underneath *that* assumption seemed to be the feeling—often vague and unformed—that anyone who is

actively working for a living is in some sense morally better than someone who is not.

We wanted to dig around and underneath these assumptions a little bit, with the suspicion that understanding them better would help us see our relationship with the Guys more clearly. And this is where we got into what Peter had learned from the popes.

Good Work

We tend to define work as any activity at all that you get paid for. This is what people mean when they ask if we help them get jobs. In fact, the presumption can be that the longer the hours, the more menial the tasks, and the lower the wages, the *more* this really shows someone's character. Because part of the mark of a good person is that he or she is "willing to work."

Yet this, we quickly learned, is a modern, and not a Catholic, definition of work.

In the first place, no Catholic *really* thinks that just any activity that comes with a wage is honorable. Prostitution, child labor, and abortions fit that description, but we would want to say not only that each of those employments produces bad results but also that they are bad for those who do them. Those are examples of bad work.

The question is, then, What makes work good? What makes it part of our divine vocation?

We can begin by taking a look at a statement by Pope Leo XIII about the intimate connection that should exist between the worker and what he produces : *Rerum Novarum*. He writes that when man "turns the activity of his mind and the strength of his body toward procuring the fruits of nature, by such an act he makes his own that portion of nature's field which he

cultivates—*that portion on which he leaves, as it were, the impress of his personality*."[2] To place the impress or stamp of our personality on something—that is the first characteristic of good work. There are a couple of different aspects of this that are worth noting.

First, in impressing himself on nature, the worker takes the lower parts of creation—wood, metal, dirt, or whatever—and he, so to speak, makes it a part of *human* life. It is not just lying out there as part of the irrational creation anymore; it now takes a rational place in the order of your life. When Rob puts his timber frames together, he has raised up the irrational order into the rational order.

Second, this work makes its object *personal*—it puts not just any stamp, but *your* stamp on it. That field that you sow, that table that you build, that motorcycle that you put together has something of *you* in it. So, by working and stamping things with your "you-ness," you are, as St. John Paul II said, enacting your divine vocation to be a creator, a little bit in the same way that God is Creator.[3] That's one of the reasons why Megan's pottery is so beautiful—there's a good bit of *her* in it.

But there's even more. For in stamping our image on things, because *we* are made in *God's* image, we are also stamping *his* image on things. Good work, then, raises up the material creation not only into the human realm, but into the divine realm. Only humans, of all that God made, have his image and likeness (see Genesis 1:26–27); the rest of the world does not, even though God declared it was *good*. Yet *we* can put God's image and likeness on the rest of creation, when we put our own stamp on it.

And this image-bearing potential, Leo says, is where *property* comes from. For by stamping his personality on the world, the worker "makes his own that portion of nature's field which he cultivates." "Property" is just a common word that means "one's own." It is *your own*, then, because it has your own *image and likeness* on it. This view of property stands in contrast to that of some influential Enlightenment philosophers, who thought that one can use or abuse property as one pleases because it is a rational, objective matter of rights.

The meal that you prepared and set out, or the garden that you dug, planted, and weeded—and the way each looks so good in its symmetry, colors, and how the light catches it—is "yours" in the best sense of the term. What you made is like you, and the pride we take in this kind of property is a good kind of pride because we made these things, we see ourselves in them, and we also see the divine image *through* what we have made. If we know Rob or Megan, and then we see their work, we can affirm that *this* house or *this* cup really is *theirs* in a way that is not true for houses or cups that are mass-produced.

Leo adds one more important point in *Rerum Novarum*. He says that "the results of labor should belong to those who have bestowed their labor" and this for "the preservation of life, and for life's well-being."[4] In other words, another measure of *good* work is that what it produces is consumed by those who produce it. There should exist, we might say, a personal connection between the laborer and the fruits of his labor. Good work is growing food to eat it, making chairs to sit on them, chopping wood for your fireplace, fixing your car to drive it.

Leo gives us several criteria, then, for evaluating the work that we do. Work should (1) put our stamp on the world and (2) create property, and (3) the property, as well as the fruits of the property, should contribute to the life and well-being of the worker. Or, to sum it up, the worker should own the means of production and make his living off of them.

This helps explain why work of this kind—like Rob's timber framing or Megan's pottery—feels so good. We have an intrinsic interest in it, because *we* are going to use what comes out of

it; and while we work, we are looking forward to being proud of something that shows what we are and what we can do. It's engaging work; it holds our attention; we delight in it.

And all of this, finally, as St. John Paul II emphasized so well, is meant to make us holy. That's the ultimate reason for work—why it's a divine calling. This is not one *additional* criterion, but the goal of the other criteria. All work should be ordered toward making us and society better people and better Catholics. It should serve the common good. Leo's criteria are so important precisely because they serve as guides for what kind of work accomplishes these goals.

Not-So-Good Work

But clearly not all work meets Leo's criteria. I mentioned above Bubba's aversion to working at the gas station, and we noted in general that much of the work available both to him and in Peter's time was below human dignity. We're now in a position to see why.

A job at the gas station isn't demoralizing just because it's boring and hard on your legs. It is also demoralizing because it doesn't meet any of the criteria of good work Leo articulated. And the same is true for just about every other job our unemployed friends around St. Joseph's could imagine getting, whether it "produces" anything or not: waiting tables, loading boxes at UPS, canning tuna, or refining oil.

Let's go through Pope Leo's criteria in relation to these kinds of jobs. First, such work doesn't put one's stamp on anything; at most it puts a machine's stamp on something. This means that the work is not personal in any way, but predetermined by set categories to be as efficient as possible.

Nor does it produce any property of one's own. One receives a wage precisely to make property for someone else. It is the very point of your job that you don't end up with anything directly connected with what you've been doing all day. A wage is only connected with it *indirectly*. If you make cans of tuna, you don't take any of them home; you get money that you can use to go to the store to *buy* tuna.

Nor do you produce anything with which you directly provide for your needs. These jobs break the natural cycle of giving your body to the natural materials of the earth and those materials, in turn, nourishing your body.

That is, we are alienated or separated from the fruits of our labor. They are taken away from us, and we have only money to show for it at the end of the day. Unlike the farmer or craftsman, we are not surrounded by things that our own hands have made. Our body is separated from what we have and what we consume, for what we have and what we consume did not come from our own bodies.

I still remember going to my grandparents' house as a child and being told where just about everything in their house came from and who had made it and when. They were surrounded by the fruits of their and their community's labor. It was a deeply *personal* material existence, and that was because their *labor* was personal. They took joy in work, because they were making their life. Their work was their life and their life was their work; and people were proud of it.

Most modern work, especially those jobs the poor are likely to get, is very different. Our lives now *begin* where our work *ends*. In order to live we have to sell our labor. Our work, our divine vocation, is no longer our life, and it has become a commodity in the service of making other commodities. We sell our life vocation—our work—because in an industrial world it's the

only way we have to continue to get what we need to continue to exist.

We don't work, in other words, because it's part of living well. We don't think of it as part of how a human flourishes as a human. We work in order *to simply exist*—to make money to sustain our bodily needs. And so our work is separated from what we call "life." The time we spend doing labor is a *sacrifice* of life for the sake of what we call "real life." Real life begins for us when we go home, or to the bar, or to the soccer field. That's what we're really here for. What we've been doing all day is something else.

Degrading Work

It should not be surprising that, under these conditions, work can become not only not-so-good because of the toll it takes on our bodies, but degrading because it lacks those things that make it good for our souls. This destitution is what Peter was especially concerned about. Helping people get jobs, therefore, might not really be *helping* them at all.

Because of the extreme pressure of competition in a consumer society, tasks are divided in order to make work more efficient. We have all heard of this division of labor, and it has always existed in all societies. But our division is so extreme that it often simplifies tasks so much that there is little room for our own creativity and input. This is especially the case the more mechanized and computerized the work is. The *human* element is increasingly eliminated, and the more this happens, the more we are doing the work of animals. In farmwork, animals need humans to drive them, because they are not themselves creative and intelligent. The more the lead in labor is taken by routines,

programs, and minute bureaucratic regulations, the more we do jobs that, as we say, a monkey could do.

This is degrading because it doesn't develop our virtues and make us holy as work is supposed to. It is a general truth of the spiritual life that if we're not moving forward, we don't just stay stationary—we slide backwards. And if we're not moving forward toward holiness in our work—for eight hours or more a day—we don't develop those virtues of creativity, care, patience, courage, attentiveness, and all the others we noted in the last chapter. In fact, we can even slide into their opposite vices. So it's no wonder that Pope Leo associated industrial labor with "the prevailing moral degeneracy"[5] in *Rerum Novarum*. If we do the work of monkeys, we become more like them.

I think what Bubba might have really been offended at was the suggestion that he should do the work of an animal. Rob, Brian, and the others, too, have found things more worthy of their own divine calling.

The Common Good?

But there is one more important criterion for good work that Leo mentions in *Rerum Novarum*: it should serve the common good.[6] We don't need to go into any detailed definition of the common good to see one major way that most of our jobs fall short of it.

The industrial economy is premised, as we mentioned in a different connection above, on always producing the next new thing. This means—and this point is so important that it's worth underlining here—that we live in the midst of a sort of perpetual cultural revolution.

New things are what sell. So, for a time at least, when you have the next new invention—the best phone so far, or the best

nail gun, or the best machine gun—everybody is going to buy *your* product. But if you don't innovate, you're left behind and will soon be out of business because everybody is going to buy the new, more advanced, "better" thing your competitors are selling. Making money in our economy *demands* that the old get left behind as quickly as possible and that something new take its place.

This means that the consumer economy is always shifting. It will always be preying on traditional communities and old-fashioned ways of doing things. If you feel like the world is changing every minute and you can never set your feet on anything solid, this drive for innovation and novelty is one big reason why. As Leo himself implied in *Rerum Novarum*, there is nothing at all *conservative* about the industrial economy.[7] If the Industrial Revolution is the one really revolutionary revolution, that's in part because it has *never stopped* turning society upside down. It wasn't just a historical moment in the nineteenth century; it is still going on.

Most of the work available today, then, dependent as it is on this sort of creative destruction, fails the criterion of the common good. It does so not so much by producing things that are evil, though it does that as well. It does so by creating a society that is so transitory that the very notion of the common good becomes difficult to imagine.

Stability, continuity across time, shared traditions, and a common history of a unified way of ordering life—these are *prerequisites* for the pursuit of the common good. In a society like ours, these things are largely absent, and so we just have one different form of life following another. How can we build something *common* if each new generation cannot imagine what life was like when their parents were children? Unfortunately, most modern work only contributes to this perpetual revolution.

The Little Way versus the Perpetual Revolution

All of this can sound like an overwhelming bummer. And, in a way, it is. Most modern work is work stripped of the things that make it good. It doesn't fall into the category of overtly sinful behavior, like the work of the prostitute or the abortionist, but it also is far from what work should be. That's not good news. But it's also not the end of the story.

Part of the gift of the Catholic Worker's sharp critique of society is to help us see our world for what it is—for what the Church has told us it is. Dorothy and Peter refuse to let us put our heads in the sand and pretend the status quo is anywhere near the Gospel's ideals. It is not. The Church wants us to look reality squarely in the face. And this is good because we want to live as much *in* reality as we can.

At the same time, when it comes to not-so-good work, the Church takes a pragmatic and pastoral approach. As much as Pope Leo critiques modern work, he also clearly understands that, in the world as it is, many people will have to continue to take the not-so-good jobs that are available, and that you can't blame them for making that decision.[8] Dorothy and Peter always echoed this, while continuing to issue the summons to work as a divine vocation. They had no judgment for the jobs we have in the meantime—and perhaps indefinitely.

This pragmatic approach was ultimately the solution we came to regarding the Guys. If somebody wanted help with an application or a ride to an interview—no problem. But we also didn't actively press the matter.

For us, however, this was no longer just a question of the Guys' work. The more we thought about it—the more *I* thought about it—the more it became apparent that the issue involved

me as well. At the time I was teaching as an adjunct professor at a few area universities. While that work was good in some respects, I increasingly saw that it still basically failed all Leo's criteria, and that the university put my own work to the service of creating a society in which, as a Christian, I felt ever more out of place.

I wanted good work. *I* wanted to get my hands dirty with tasks that would engage my whole body in a way I could touch, feel, smell, and maybe eventually taste.

And so once again I found Thérèse's little way so important.

It'd be easy to feel as if extending the Gospel to all of our lives—much less just finding some good work—is going to be close to impossible, given all the ways the world is stacked against us. It can just seem like a very bad time to be a Christian. But Thérèse makes exactly the opposite point through her little way. As it was for the early Christians, *of course* the world is against us, but it is precisely our task to engage it, love it, and bring it healing—one person, one little-way action at a time—*while* it does its best to oppose us. That's just how Christianity works.

Like Rob and Brian, we don't have to wait till we have a Christian society before we can get on with actually being Christians or finding work that "just feels good." We have everything we need right now. The Lord has put us here exactly for this reason: to be little-way Christians in the face of the perpetual revolution. What will come of our efforts is not up to us. We don't have to plan the course to a Christian society beforehand. We just have to start. And the good news is that every little step toward a life of good work is itself good work.

The little way is a reminder that it is a very *good* time to be a Christian.

10

GARDENS, CHICKENS, AND DUMPSTERS

After a couple of years at the Maurin House, some of our core members branched off and rented houses a few blocks away. They provided additional hospitality to the homeless, and each hosted a weekly dinner. The Maurin House remained the main house, not least because it was where the chapel was, which we continued to see as the center of our life together. We named these houses the Thérèse House (for the saint of the little way) and the Elizabeth House (for St. Elizabeth of Hungary), and they allowed us to continue to experiment with putting into practice the ideas we were discussing about work.

Our friend Luke had just moved back in to town from Georgia and was taking on a leading role in the Elizabeth House. That property had a little side yard—surely less than a tenth of an acre, but big enough for a decent-sized garden. This was to be our first try at what we came to call "shortening the supply chain," by which we meant our little-way attempts to reduce the distance between ourselves and the earth.

And so a garden seemed an obvious place to start. We were certainly not going to get rid of the supply chains, but there were lots of little-way things we could do to shorten them, which we

came to see was the same thing as putting good work back into our lives, one step at a time. Every link we could take out of that chain was one thing that we were doing to put our stamp on the world.

Only a few of us (not me) had the faintest notion of what to plant, how and when to plant it, and how to keep it alive. Gardening sounds simple enough, but its complexity soon revealed to me how utterly practical this reconnection with the soil was going to be, and that I had absolutely no idea what I was doing.

Thankfully, Luke knew a little, and a neighboring Protestant community had some members who had grown up on a farm. So we dug up that side yard and put in some tomatoes, sweet peppers, jalapenos, summer squash, cucumbers, lettuce, and of course sweet potatoes since we were in North Carolina.

Gardening is pretty common, even if less so today than in the past. But I was a beginner. What impressed me so much was the visceral, physical experience of these first halting steps. It was as if I had discovered my body, and specifically, my *senses*, for the first time. The smell of the dirt, the sound of the bugs, the feel of the shovel when it hit a rock, and the soreness of my muscles the day after digging—nothing that I had done as a teenager in suburbia or as a bookworm in a university had engaged the whole of me in the same way. I started to see that this kind of work really does "just feel good."

Like meeting Christ in the poor, our garden opened for me a path to God that that I never knew existed, but that had been there all the time. I was discovering that there was more to my humanity than I had imagined. It was exhilarating. I started to understand firsthand how it could be that peasants, farmers, artisans, and craftsmen throughout history could not only endure but thrive in such work. It was work that could be grueling and frustrating, but it was also deeply pleasurable, almost sensual. There was real satisfaction in it.

But Luke wasn't done. He also had designs on a small flock of chickens. Someone in the area had a big, old coop for sale for $100. And so one Saturday afternoon we rented a U-Haul, picked it up, and got it set up beside the garden. A couple of weeks later we picked up the birds from a friend who was getting rid of hers, put them in the trunk of the car (have you ever tried to get eight scared chickens to stay in a trunk long enough to shut the lid?), and moved them in.

Chickens are goofy animals that are cheap to buy and easy to care for. Even I learned to do so with relative ease. But I was unprepared for the way they brought out the natural, self-sustaining unity in our tiny little human-garden-chicken setup. We fed the chickens feed from the store, but we also gave them table scraps. They, of course, gave us eggs—delicious, wonderful eggs that, to my surprise, were much more flavorful than the ones I was used to from the store.

But they also gave us poop. We took their hay-poop mixture and added it to the compost heap we had started when we dug up the yard. We also composted table scraps the chickens didn't want, like banana peels and their own egg shells. Soon I was eating veggies made with compost, which was made from chicken poop and eggshells, which were made from scraps from my table. And some of those scraps, as time went on, went directly to the chickens, which made poop for compost and eggs for eating and so on. I thought all this was so cool!

Of course, these are the most basic ecological connections, which many readers may justifiably laugh at. *Of course* that's what happens. And, of course, somewhere in my head I knew, theoretically, that that's how the world could work. But all my experience was of a different reality—the one that most of us live with every day: eggs come from the store; their packages, shells, and any scraps go in the trash and get carted off somewhere else.

My household had never consumed anything that I produced; it had only ever consumed things made by somebody else. The circle of life was somewhere "out there." Bringing it close to home (literally) and putting *myself* in the middle of it—putting my stamp on it by means of my work—was another remarkable experience I was not expecting. For the first time in my life, I was *participating* in creation the way that it was meant to be. We had shortened just a few simple supply chains, and I felt, even with just these steps, more human—more like a "Soil-Man"—than before.

We, of course, didn't grow and produce anywhere near enough to sustain ourselves. But we wondered if there were others around who did, and if we could get more of our food from them. And so naturally we turned our eyes to the local farmer's market that met every Saturday morning. Here were many people who, for a variety of different reasons, lived much more profoundly within the rhythm of God's creation than we could ever dream of. Most of them were not industrial farmers and were committed to local living and shortening the supply chains themselves. It only made sense that we could shorten the supply chains by supporting these folks as much as we could.

We also started being intentional about cooking our own meals. Making food from scratch, or at least buying some of the ingredients and putting them together ourselves, got us just a little closer to the earth by removing the processing of prepared foods by factories and industrial kitchens.

Finding good food and cooking it together became a regular activity. It's also a great way to build community. Instead of spending a couple of hours watching a movie on a Saturday afternoon and then going out to eat, we'd walk to the farmer's market together and then prepare a meal. It's something to do together, it's good work, and it shortens a few supply chains.

Then one day we were leaving prayer and we noticed something interesting. St. Joseph's lies adjacent to a Whole Foods grocery store, with the back of the store facing the church. One of the employees was loading a whole trash can full of perfectly good watermelon halves into one of the dumpsters. Luke ran over.

"Hey, are you just throwing those away?"

"Yeah, they're about to expire tomorrow," the gal said. "But there's nothing wrong with them."

"Can we take them?" Luke asked.

"I can't give them to you," she said, "but if you were to take them when I wasn't out here, there'd be nothing I could do about that."

And so began our habit of checking the dumpster every day. The employee gave us some insider info about when the "expiring" food came out and when it would get picked up so we could time it as best we could.

On the one hand, this was kind of cool because, well, we were poor graduate students and it was free food that helped supplement our dinners. On the other hand, we realized, this was another way of shortening the supply lines. Our industrial food system produces an incredible amount of waste. Much of it is not reintegrated into God's waste-and-renewal cycle like the one we had discovered in our side yard. A lot of it is thrown away in its noncompostable packaging to sit in a landfill somewhere.

So not only could we get some free food (always welcome), but we could take the food out of the industrial cycle and repurpose it to the use of our own bodies, chickens, and gardens. This also meant that we didn't have to buy that food from the store, which would be perpetuating the habits that produced all this waste in the first place.

All this was, of course, just a drop in the ocean. But once again it wasn't the scale of the thing we were concerned about.

We weren't doing this primarily to "make a difference." We wanted to do what we could to be faithful to the place and time where God had placed us. The rescue of that food, which God had made, after all, was a good action in itself. It was our own symbolic way of hoeing a row or milking a cow. It was a nod to the truth about human beings that we found in Genesis, but also felt in our bones. It made a difference to *us*.

And dumpster diving, it turned out, could be entertaining, even hilarious (if somewhat gross) good work. Often we had to have someone on the lookout for the manager while another one of us literally got into the dumpster (hence dumpster *diving*) to pull out the good stuff, often from among not-so-good stuff. It was a sort of stinky sting operation. At one point, this involved a secret signal (like a birdcall, I believe) in case the manager was coming. It also sometimes meant that one or more of us made the church smell like something other than incense and varnished pews at evening prayer. And then there was real work still left to be done: we had to haul the produce up to the house, pick over any rotten parts, and so on. All this bound us together more closely. Luke had found us another little bit of good work.

Bubba on the Farm

It is perhaps unsurprising that after living with our gardens and chickens for a couple of years, the more adventurous among us started seriously talking about what it would be like to add a small farm to our community. The original Catholic Worker house, founded by Day and Maurin in New York City, had done it, so why couldn't we?

Eventually we connected with a woman at a local church who ran a small farm about an hour away from Durham. She mostly sold her produce to local residents who signed up to

receive a box each week in a scheme commonly known as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). She was struggling to do all the work herself, and she also had a large farmhouse that was not being used. She offered to have some of us move to the house, help her out with the work, and have some share in the produce as well as the use of some land.

Two core families decided to go for it. By this time there had been a couple of marriages in the community, as well as a few children born. Life on the land especially appealed to them. There were places for children to run; real, good work for them to do; real things to learn; and plenty of space to grow into.

And, as it turned out, three of the Guys wanted to go as well—and one of them was Bubba.

Bubba's life in Durham was not atypical for the Guys. He was friendly and fun to be around, as I've mentioned, but he also had his own ways of dealing with the stresses of life.

Up at St. Joe's his usual mode when nothing else was going on was to sit on an old paint bucket off by himself under a large tree, put his headphones on, put his head between his hands and his elbows on his knees, drink a lot of Old English, and remain like that—for hours. I always took it as a totally understandable, if somewhat sad, mode of distraction in the midst of the concrete, noise, and heat of a big city that more or less tried to act like he and all the other Guys didn't exist. I'm sure it was also his way of dealing with his own demons, whatever they might be.

Yet it was clear, after they had been on the farm for a while, that there Bubba had found an entirely new rhythm. None of the Guys were required to work—they were simply given hospitality at the farm just like they were in Durham. But Bubba had clearly found that he *wanted* to work. Every day, he—and often the other Guys as well—went off to the fields and helped plant, weed, harvest, move bags of rocks, spread compost, dig, chop, or fell trees.

Bubba's own job was to take care of the farm's large flock of chickens. He'd tend the water and food day and night, collect the eggs, and clean the coop, and he was especially good at showing the birds off when different groups would come out for farm tours.

"Look at that one," he'd say, pointing to the rooster. "You'd strut around like that too if it was just you and all them ladies. That's the man of the house right there."

And I can't help mentioning the good-natured banter and joshing between the Guys while they worked. There's nothing better to pass the time on a hot North Carolina morning than listening to three old friends jaw at one another. It was funnier comedy than any movie you've seen—as long as you don't mind sentences composed primarily of four-letter words.

Another one of Bubba's jobs was to harvest veggies each evening for dinner. He also had to teach us how to cook some of them: kids from the Midwest don't know what to do with okra, and to this day I still think it's slimy and slightly gross. But Bubba fried it up some old Southern way so that the North Carolinians loved it, and the Northerners found it at least (almost) edible.

Not right away, then, but over time, you could see the change all this brought about in Bubba. He lost some weight, he drank much less, and, in general, he seemed to have more of a purpose in life. "He just came alive," one of the community members told me.

That was my impression, too, when we would go down to visit. And Bubba had already been pretty alive! Getting close to the land had clearly tapped into something in him—it was as if he was made for it.

Keeping the Connections: A Catholic Whole

These were some of our little-way attempts to shorten the supply lines and so tap in just a little more to our divine vocation. But it can be easy, reading what I have just written, to lose the deep connection between this lifestyle and the main themes of this book. What does all of this have to do with building thick Catholic communities, common prayer, life with the poor, the Gospel as social fabric, and so on? Had we just drifted into liberal, hippie "food justice"?

I want to end this chapter by pulling all of these threads together, so that we keep a properly *Catholic* understanding of the connection with the land. For Pope Leo and Peter Maurin would want to argue that shortening the supply lines, which is the same as finding good work, is not just one particular possible way of being Catholic among other options. The land is not just one "issue" that our community happened to be particularly passionate about, any more than we had a "special calling" or "particular ministry" to the poor or to build community. Rather, these are *ordinary* things we are all called to do just because we are ordinary Catholics. And they all go together.

Keeping the Connections: Community

First, then, the kind of work we've described in this chapter is part of those social bonds that any healthy Catholic community needs. As much as we may like one another, real community cannot just be a matter of hanging out. It is always a product of having shared *tasks*, as we have seen throughout the book in various ways. And for Christian community, that means shared Gospel tasks. So, to the shared work of prayer, breakfast, and

hospitality, we now added the care of gardens, chickens, and dumpsters.

For one thing, this strengthened our social bonds simply by our having to regularly coordinate and plan together. Who was going to water and weed, feed the chickens, turn the compost, and when? And what about when someone is sick? Or out of town?

Then there was the work itself. Not only did we now have a little bit of good work; we had good *community* work. And community work is especially important because it forms relationships between people who might not otherwise have much in common. Sitting and staring at each other over a cup of coffee, Monty and I would quickly run out of things to talk about. But now we had the garden, the coop, or the dumpster in common. Our *being with* each other was now based on a mutual *being for*. It didn't matter if we abstractly liked each other, because we both were committed to the garden project (think back to the projects we talked about in chapter 3), and so we were committed to each other. I sometimes think there is so much social anxiety today in part because we have so few of these very practical relationships.

Keeping the Connections: The Poor

But this kind of communal good work is also directly connected to hospitality to the poor. Pope Leo's teaching, as we've seen, is that today's new kind of poverty is caused by industrialism, a system that has left much of the population, he says in *Rerum Novarum*, under a yoke "not much better than slavery itself."[1] As we saw, Leo argued that modern poverty is historically novel because the poor today no longer have recourse to any productive property that formerly gave them a measure of independence. The implication of this is that the homelessness that we were living with in the hospitality house day by day was,

according to Leo, directly linked to our separation from the land and to our lack of good work.

It's unsurprising then that Leo suggested that the remedy for this situation was a reconnection with the land. If as a society we could start moving toward investing in property that we could live from, we could all start to develop more independence, and the general welfare would increase.[2] Accordingly, to Peter's way of thinking, the more we could all inch toward the land right now, the less modern poverty there would be. Hospitality houses and good work are not only nourishment for our souls; they are also twin Christian solutions to the same social problem. We do them out of devotion—to find God in the poor and in the land—but their effects also redound to the good of society.

So, in spite of its dreamy or idealistic associations, getting back to the land in little ways is actually the Catholic Worker's most *practical* component. It's dealing directly with a major social problem. We can contrast this with what are often thought of as the hard-nosed, "realistic" solutions to poverty: government programs or new theories of social organization or better economic regulations and so on. There's no doubt that such strategies are probably often necessary in the short term to alleviate some of the suffering of the poor. But insofar as they never question the *industrial* nature of our society, they are not actually addressing the cause of our malaise. Leo is encouraging us to go to the root of things.

Keeping the Connections: Personal Commitments

But by far our biggest motivator to shorten the supply chain was simply the friendships and commitments we had made. It was personal.

I loved *my* community—this particular one, with *these* friends, Tyler, Crystal, Justin, Mallory—and *our* peculiar

rhythms. I loved it, and it had become a big part of who I was. We've seen many ways that being closer to the land is good for community and many ways that our dominant culture is bad for community. I saw this analysis play out in very concrete terms.

For I started to see that to opt for Tyler and Crystal, Justin and Mallory, was also to opt for our garden, our chickens, and our dumpsters. The habits of attentive care for our little plot of earth, and the little ways we could express our commitments to shortening the supply chains, were the same habits that resisted fragmentation. On the other hand, the more we gave in to the convenience of big stores, smartphones, text messages, social media, fast food, and supermarkets, the less we would need one another and the easier it would be for each of us to walk away and do our own thing. Loving my community meant setting myself against this, and setting myself against this meant shortening the supply lines.

It was similarly personal with the poor. I saw Christ in *these* Guys—Crete, Danny, Mac—and had real relationships with them. How could I knowingly support the forces that made life so hard for them? How could I not support local farmers whose work established little oases like the one where Bubba was thriving? How could I shop at the mega-mart down the road that every day competed to put Bubba's farm out of business?

Finally, it's worth remembering that all of this had started with the liturgy. I had started praying at St. Joe's because I knew that prayer was absolutely essential to our relationship with God; it's how we commune with him. But, as we saw in Genesis, this relationship is always a part of a broader relationship and vocation to the earth. Our relationship with God comes in part *through* our relationship with the earth.

And there is perhaps no community more Catholic, and more committed to liturgy *and* land as part of being Catholic, than the Benedictines. Their motto, *Ora et labora*—which means

"Prayer and work"—often appeared in large letters across the pages of the *Catholic Worker*.

By *ora,* the Benedictines mean the Church's liturgy, which is their primary work. But they have also usually been farmers, and so for them *labora* in the field is also a form of prayer—a simple continuation of the *labora* they do in the chapel. And to this day they embody this connection by literally praying while they work. And so they have the prayer in the chapel that is work, and the work in the field that is prayer.

Their point, of course, is that all of their life becomes one liturgy, one continuous work of God. Cult and cultivation, just like in Genesis, are inseparable from one another. Shortening the supply chain, then, if the monks have anything to say about it, is just a little participation in the liturgy itself. It doesn't get more Catholic than that.

This combination of prayer and work, cult and cultivation, again, made it personal. We talked before about how it ought not to surprise us if we feel distant from God but we have not sought him in one of the major places he promises he'll show up: the face of the poor. The same is true with our vocation to the earth: sometimes the best thing I can do for my prayer life is to get my hands dirty. It's what they were made for.

The Agrarian Heart of the Catholic Worker Movement

Colin Miller

The Catholic Worker Movement, founded by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin in New York City in 1933, is best known for its houses of hospitality and its often heroic practice of the works of mercy. The movement consists of (1) houses of hospitality for sheltering, feeding, and clothing the poor (and in general sharing life with them); (2)"clarification of thought" on the social issues of the day, aided by group discussion and newspapers/pamphleteering; and (3) farming communes or a back-to-the-land movement to cut at the problems of industrial society at their root.

This program is meant to provide a uniquely Catholic alternative way of life to the American industrial-techno-capitalist status quo, while allowing for the participation of all sorts of people of goodwill, Catholic or not. As such, the movement has always attracted a wide range of enthusiasts, from secular left-wing activists looking for a space to put their convictions into action, to orthodox Catholics (like Maurin and Day) trying to live out the Sermon on the Mount and realize the life of the first Christians. This diversity can sometimes lead to a rift between those Catholic Workers looking primarily for a political counter-culture and those who identify more strongly as Catholics.

Yet what many on both sides of the movement, as well as many looking in from outside, have often not sufficiently appreciated is that it is an *agrarian* vision that animates *all* of Maurin's program, including its evaluation of modern life, and its proposals for the future. The land is the heart of the Catholic Worker, in the sense that it is the source from which its trenchant critiques flow, and the ultimate destination towards which it is always propelling us. Maurin does not just tell us what is wrong, but why it is wrong, and where we should be going; and he knows all this because he knows the difference agriculture makes. The Worker is thus fundamentally a back-to-the land movement built on the conviction that the industrial capitalist order is fundamentally opposed to human flourishing as well as to the practice of the Faith.

But it's not just that industrial society is opposed in a general way to "Christian civilization," whatever that might mean. More urgently, it often subtly makes living the Gospel extremely difficult for each one of us every day. In a thousand practical ways it frustrates the pursuit of sanctity, fragments community life, and marginalizes the Church. Faced with this reality, Maurin's genius was to devise a plan of attack that did not require that Christians *first* re-take the world from the top-down by winning the culture wars, or by going back to the middle-ages, but, on the model of the early Christians, by simply starting to live the Gospel here and now – to, as he said, "build a

new society within the shell of the old."[1] The Catholic Worker's core contribution to American agrarianism is a unique fusion of farming and deep Catholic commitment in a plan of practical action that, finally, does not just tell us where we should be going, but how to get there as well. The purpose of this essay is to lay out the essential and distinctive features of this unique vision.

I have been referring to *Maurin's* program. This is in no way to detract from the inestimable significance of Dorothy Day, or any other important personalities, in the history and development of the Catholic Worker. It is, rather, simply to acknowledge what Day herself often underlined: that it was Maurin who was the real founder of the Catholic Worker. And Day was right, at least in terms of theological vision and intellectual grounding. It was Maurin who gave Day her theological education and "a Catholic view of history,"[2] it was he who had read deeply in social and cultural theory, and whose three-point program would become the backbone of the movement. None of this vision, to be sure, would have ever gotten off the ground practically speaking, and no one would have ever heard of Maurin, if it weren't for Day's organizational and journalistic gifts; she quickly and understandably became the face of the movement, and is rightly considered its co-founder. But Dorothy's pre-Catholic radicalism would have never been Catholicized in the first place – we would have never had Dorothy Day either – if it weren't for Peter Maurin.

This is doubly true when it comes to the Worker's agrarian heart. Few have seen the social *and* spiritual problems of his day (or ours) as clearly as Maurin did, but this is only because he rightly traced them to their root in the recent breakup of the land-and-craft economy that had been the only other economy the world had ever known. Maurin's peasant upbringing in France, subsequently sharpened by voracious reading in both secular and Catholic cultural criticism, provided him this unique perspective. For this reason, this essay will be mostly Maurin-centric. But this provides us with a unique vantage. For if an agrarian vision and critique is at the center of the movement, and if no one since has surpassed Maurin's articulation of it, then what follows has some claim to be the core of the core of the Catholic Worker – its heart. And of course the only reason any of this is interesting is because it is still so profoundly relevant and inspiring for us today.

And the farms themselves are, indeed, a present, living reality, if not nearly as widespread as Maurin would have hoped. The Catholic Worker website lists 25 current

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[1] Peter Maurin, "The C.P. and the C.M.", accessed June 7, 2024, available at catholicworker.org/easy-essays-html/#the-cp-and-cm.

[2] Robert Ellsberg, ed., *All the Way to Heaven: The Selected Letters of Dorothy Day* (New York: Image Books, 2010), 66.

farms across the US and three overseas.[3] Like the movement in general, these show a wide diversity both in outlook and in terms of physical plant, from a single family on a half-acre producing almost all of their own food, to larger plots run by singles. Many are long-time establishments, run by veterans of the movement, but new and youthful energy is not far to seek, nor a variety of different projects and means of support.

So, for example, the recently founded John Paul II Catholic Worker farm in Kansas City, MO is run by a twenty-something married couple, recently both converts to Catholicism from the radical left. The latter includes with it the "Peter Maurin Academy for Regenerative Studies," a vibrant operation focusing on online courses and discussions about Catholic Worker philosophy and tradition. Elsewhere, the Lake City Catholic Worker, in southwest MN, run by a middle-aged married couple, includes a large house for guests built entirely from sustainable and recycled materials, perennial agriculture, and the "John the Baptist Beverage Company," which supports the farm by selling kombucha. And the agrarian spirit often finds itself a place even in the movement's urban houses of hospitality, such as my own, with backyards put as far as possible to productive use ("urban homestead" is probably claiming too much), sometimes with a flock of chickens, large gardens, permaculture, compost, or woodsheds.

As Dorothy Day wrote, in getting people back to the land "Peter saw the solution to all the ills of the world: unemployment, delinquency, destitute old age, man's rootlessness, lack of room for growing families, and hunger."[4] What follows will be just a brief account of why he thought this was the case. We'll look, first, at three important sources for the Worker's critique of industrialism: Karl Marx, Artur Penty, and Emmanuel Mounier. Next, we'll highlight the ways the Movement adopted the agrarian impulse in the Church's teaching, especially in its propagation of *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*. Finally, we'll look in more detail at Maurin's own vision for the Catholic "green revolution."

The Critique of Industrialism

Maurin contended with socialists, communists, Marxists, capitalists, and individualists, as he variously names the positions that he wishes to distinguish from his own. He did this in an idiosyncratic genre he called the "Easy Essay." These were short, poem-like statements of basic positions in socio-cultural and political philosophy designed to distill complex matters for the man in the street. In these he sometimes

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[3] "Catholic Worker Farms," accessed May 23, 2024, https://catholicworker.org/catholic-worker-farms/?paged=1.

[4] Dorothy Day, "Communitarian Farms," chapter 4 in *Loaves and Fishes* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1963), 44.

offered his own creative criticism of the world that industrial capitalism had created, but more often he simply takes over a variety of critiques of industrialism already widely available at the time. With these he was largely sympathetic and his writing often assumes you're familiar and sympathetic with them too. Often he'll reference a number of positions by one name each, for the sake of locating the Catholic Worker's own anti-industrial program within those accounts.

Karl Marx is certainly an important one of these positions. But Marx is doubly important in that he is perhaps the most widespread single backdrop for the context of the social thought and practice into which Maurin and the Catholic Worker spoke. Everyone knew Marx, at least by caricature, and many in great detail. If you were critical of the present order, then Marx was a source that could help you, even if you didn't endorse his more general philosophy or his prospective program. If you wanted to preserve the status quo, you had to frame your case against him. If you were just one of the rabble, you at least had some notion of what he stood for and against. Maurin himself was certainly well acquainted with Marx.[5]

What is not always recognized, however, is that Marx had a considerable appreciation for agrarianism. His radical critique of the injustices and deformations of capitalism are at the same time largely critiques of industrialism. He is from this perspective not unlike his contemporary Pope Leo XIII (to whom we shall come), lodging a massive complaint about what he saw happening to the world around him. To be sure, industrialization is at the heart of Marx's hopes for the dawning of communism that would bend the machine to its own ends. But he has more than a little nostalgia for and sometimes explicit endorsement of the feudal system he at other times castigates. At times he expressly (and rightly) recognizes the unity of capitalism and industrialism, so that it is notoriously unclear how he thinks they could be uncoupled in the future.[6] This means that in practice Marx is as little a friend to industrialism as he is to capitalism and he is as withering against the one as the other. Some of his account of industrialism is particularly relevant to what would become the Catholic Workers' emphases, especially on the topic of labor.

Marx saw better than perhaps anyone else the dignity of labor and the, we might say, anthropological changes it undergoes in the transition to an industrial economy of

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[5] He had read at least *Capital* and the *Communist Manifesto.* See Peter Maurin, *The Forgotten Radical: Easy Essays from the Catholic Worker,* ed. Lincoln Rice (New York: Fordham University Press), pp.48-52. This volume is now the most complete collection of Maurin's essays and other materials. Unless otherwise indicated, citations of Maurin's work below are taken from it.

[6] Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto,* in Robert C. Tucket, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 1978), 341.

commodity production. Under industrialism, he points out, workers no longer produce things that they have personal relations and attachments to, and that they use and consume in their own everyday lives. They now produce commodities, which are entirely abstract and interchangeable because they are defined solely by exchange value. Put differently, the thoroughly abstract substance called "money" is the ontology of commodities, and homologizes the once-important differences between hand-crafts, and so between workers as well.[7] More simply, when work is done in a factory, all work becomes practically the same – able to be done by anyone. The very nature of labor therefore changes. Work is not constituted, as in agrarian societies, by a personal relation to the objects one produces, lives from, surrounds oneself with, and consumes; one no longer lives in a world that she crafted. Workers are interchangeable, and commodities can be produced by anyone who is plugged into the same station at the factory.

Labor then, Marx rightly sees, for the first time in history becomes an abstract concept.[8] What was once a personal, loving, if grueling, *particular task*, almost always constituted by (and constituting) a particular place, time, material, custom, level of society, and place in the gender line, becomes generalized, and so a concept like "labor power" becomes thinkable. This is what the industrial laborer has to offer on the market, it is all he has, and it is a commodity like any other. He sells his labor power, and the object of his labor power (what he has made) is then taken away from him to be sold – it no longer redounds to him to sustain his body or beautify his life.[9] He is thus alienated from his labor and also from the personal nature of life that in previous times always reflected his own creative ordering. As a result of specialization gone crazy (which is the same dynamic as the homogenizing power that creates abstract work), the unique personal skill of the worker becomes worthless.[10]

It is hard to overestimate the historical significance of this, as well as the implications of each individual. For, Marx shows, in a more general way, the industrial worker is also alienated from his *whole life.* As opposed to the peasant, the farmer, or the artisan, whose creative work *is* his life and vocation, under industrialism

> the exercise of labor power, labor, is the worker's own life-activity, the manifestation of his own life. And this *life-activity* he sells to another person in order to secure the necessary *means of subsistence.* Thus his activity is for him only a means to enable him to exist. He works in order to live. He does not even

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[7] Ibid, 178.

[8] *Capital,* in ibid, 201-2.

[9] *Wage Labor and Capital,* 169.

[10] Ibid, 187-88.

> reckon labor as part of his life, it is rather a sacrifice of his life. It is a commodity which he has made over to another.[11]

Industrialism is a degradation of humanity previously unknown, for it is the transformation of what humans spend most of their time doing, working, into an impersonal, meaningless act that he finds compensated for with nothing but wages, which are not even themselves a partaking of the proceeds of his work, but are part of an already existing commodity with which the capitalist buys labor power as a commodity.

A slavery of a new kind results. On the one hand, because selling his labor power is now his only means to even exist, the worker cannot abandon the capitalist without renouncing his existence; he is therefore a slave to him. On the other hand, humans have become things (Marx calls it "reification" – "thing-ification") – just another part of the factory machinery, as well as mere commodities themselves – and where a human being is a thing, it too becomes property, and so humans become slaves in this way as well.[12] Leo XIII may have simply been echoing Marx then, when he said industrialism was in many cases "little better than slavery itself."[13]

Moreover, Marx points out, the homogenization of work – the creation of labor as an abstract category – is also an assault on gender differences. As Ivan Illich would later put it, picking up on this theme from Marx, gender in traditional, agrarian societies was constituted by a certain overlapping, asymmetric, complementarity: some tasks, tools, places and times were assigned to men, and others to women. This meant that most of the world was a "gendered" reality, with gender differences attaching to things, language, and even knowledge itself. But once factory work – and its modern analogues – make any work accessible to any human being, the gendered world is replaced by neutered *roles* that can be played by anyone.

Inasmuch as such gender-and-work grounded a whole way of life, industrial capitalism's abstraction of labor destroyed a way of life millennia old. But it is also, Marx noted, simply intolerant of tradition in general, in favor of the constantly novel. The demand for ever new products is the motor that drives production, and so no sooner can any tradition re-establish itself than it becomes the prey of ever new ways of doing things. For industrialism is not merely a new way of producing goods, but of producing constantly new forms of life. In this way at the hands of the machine "venerable tradition is swept away", and "all that is solid melts into thin air, and all that

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[11] Ibid, 170-1, italics original.

[12] *Capital*, 239.

[13] *Rerum Novarum* §3.

is holy is profaned."[14] The international result has been a cultural war of industrial change, and commodities are the artillery.[15]

The implications for the life of local communities (which, prior to industrialism, were really the only forms of community – industrialism created mass society) are implied in all of this: no society could sustain the breakup of their traditions, religious practices, and modes of production, which always formed one vital whole, without collapsing and becoming something completely different. In so remaking human community, industrialism changed, in a way, what it is to be human. And Marx points out that this is at least in part because of the fragmentation that occurs as citizens come increasingly to relate to each other solely in the act of exchange of abstract commodities. Direct relations between people in real flesh-and-blood gives way to a society held together by the market, where relationships are relations between products.[16] As such, the bonds of society (if they can be called bonds) become naked self-interest,[17] and even family relations are re-thought in terms of money.[18] Human action itself comes to be seen as the action of our products, the iron economic laws which rule us rather than us ruling them.[19] Marx would not have been surprised at the atomization we experience today.

In all these ways industrialism set the background of oppression that the Catholic Worker sought to address. But the movement also took an important philosophical point from Marx that Maurin often underlined: the inseparability of our spiritual lives from their material basis. Marx had of course come close to saying that religion, morality, the flow of history, philosophy, and even conscious thought itself were *nothing but* the disguised results of the purely material social relations of the means of production. This is obviously a position no Catholic could hold. Yet in it Maurin saw an important truth, related to the sacramental nature of all reality: human beings are morally, spiritually, psychologically, and somatically shaped to a great extent by our contingent historical and material surroundings, including the kind of activity we find ourselves engaged in every day. Human beings are, Maurin might say, always in large part products of their social context.[20] Being a Christian is not therefore just about individual acts of piety and interior exercises, but, especially under industrialism,

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[14] Ibid, 338.
[15] Ibid, 339.
[16] *Capital*, 217.
[17] *Communist Manifesto*, 334.
[18] Ibid, 334.
[19] Ibid, 219.
[20] Maurin, "CM," 351.

consists in the project of remaking our material surroundings, including our community, as a necessary part of remaking our souls. We can't do one without the other, and this is why Maurin called the attempt to separate the material from the spiritual, as so many Catholics at the time were in the habit of doing, the biggest error of modern times. It was this recognition that increasingly led him towards the land.

I have labored at this length on Marx because his contribution to the discontent with industrialism that inspired agrarian movements like the Catholic Worker is often not sufficiently appreciated. Of course his own positive materialist philosophy as well as his political vision has rightly been criticized by the Church as incompatible with central Christian tenants, and of course his work ended up being socially and institutionally embodied in regimes of unspeakable horror. Yet the horror and suffering caused by the regime he was criticizing has on a global scale not been incomparable. There is no doubt that in Catholic circles his work (and probably his person) have been unnecessarily villainized, and there is no reason we cannot learn from his significant insights.

Arthur Penty (1875-1937) was an English architect and consort of the better-known English distributivists such as Chesterton and Belloc. I include him here as a significant and representative influence on Maurin's thought for the opposite reason I included Marx: Marx influenced the movement if in no other way than simply by being "in the cultural air." Chesterton and Belloc were also relatively well known, at least among Catholics. Penty, on the other hand, is an intellect of the first rate known to very few, but whose influence on the movement through Maurin was deep, especially in the area of agrarian distributivism.

Penty wrote prolifically, but we know two of his works were especially important for Maurin. *A Guildsman's Interpretation of History* (1920) is a long, ingenious subversive re-writing of Marx's *Capital* from a Catholic "medievalist" and distributivist perspective at times (intentionally?) reminiscent of Augustine's own re-writing of Roman history in *The City of God.* Against Marx's contention that capitalism is a relatively late phenomenon, roughly subsequent to feudalism and penultimate only to history's socialist/communist goal, Penty casts the whole of the pre-Christian classical world as capitalist, and its attendant development of a money economy as responsible for its incessant wars and social discord. It was only the coming of Christianity and its communitarian economic practices, showcased in the opening chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, that redirected humanity back towards its primordial unity: "it sought, as it were, by a strong appeal to what was centripetal in his nature, to counteract the

natural centrifugal tendencies in man."[21] Indeed for Penty, Christianity always was simply meant to *be* this totalizing economic and social impulse.[22] While the radicality of the Apostolic age eventually waned, the communitarian impulse lived on in many usually-unrecognized forms such as monasticism, medieval village life, feudalism, and eventually in the creation of the guilds. Only with the coming of industrialism in the wake of the Reformation was such a communal economy, and especially the guilds, slowly uprooted and the path paved for a neo-pagan return to the old capitalism that ruled before the coming of Christ.

The guilds, Penty assumes you know, were a sort of non-socialist way of socially controlling the economy. Each particular craft, art, or profession in each particular locale formed a body (a guild) that set prices, quality standards, limited production, oversaw training, procured the raw materials, and regulated the local market (in the sense of a literal *place* of commerce). Apprenticeship in a craft involved a standardized process overseen by the masters, and those who did not abide by the guild standards were excluded from the market, and so simply could not make a living. Guilds were regulated and animated (at various removes, of course) by the various (and sometimes variant) moral and economic teachings of the Church, which made one's work of one piece with moral and religious life, and thus bound the small, local community together in the pursuit of a tangible set of tangled common goods. In this way property was privately owned, but socially controlled. Guilds were thus one important part of the distributivist practice of a wide and equitable distribution of the ownership of the means of production and a political map marked by decentralized nodes of genuinely local authority of government, jurisdiction, and administration.

Following Penty, guilds were paramount in the land-based economic vision of the Catholic Worker. A certain division of labor, trade, and mutual supply will be an essential part of any economy of even the most independent homesteaders, and if such trade is not to be a mere turning back the clock to an earlier stage in the development of liberalism, it will have to be the local community that regulates the means of production according to its sense of the common good. This was what Maurin called a *functional* economy, wherein a common vision of a local form of life set the terms for production rather than the market determining a form of life. Such functional economies, in Maurin's vision, following Penty, would inevitably be craft- and trade-based, with production centering first in households and agriculture, and then regionally and in urban life in support of this agrarian economy.

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[21] Penty, *A Guildsman's Interpretation of History* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1920), 36.

[22] Ibid, 34-46.

In *Post-Industrialism* (1922) Penty argued at length why such a land- and craft-based economy was the only alternative to the industrial status quo, and why a mere reform of industrialism would not suffice. Penty's architectural training had made him keenly aware of the way that our material environments shape and determine the moral and spiritual possibilities of our lives. Moreover, material objects and indeed the development of new technologies have a certain logic of their own that tends to become the logic of their human users (as Ellul would later argue), rather than being "mere" instruments under their control.

Thus for Penty, the central problem of modern times was not capitalism per se, but "the relation of men to machines."[23] This is what Marx and the socialists had overlooked when they opposed capitalism with a merely economic centralization.[24] Marx was right that the logic of the machine under capitalism would only lead to social disintegration, but wrong to think it could be redirected into industrial socialism.[25] So Penty suggests that the logic of the development of the machine *just is* the logic of capitalism: finance follows the evolution of technology.[26] This, in turn, predictably calls forth socialism (at least as an ideal) as a way of trying to get a handle on the social disintegration brought on by the free market and the machine.

Penty describes this disintegration with a clarity that is still impressive and relevant today. The logic of industry, that bigger and more is always better, must, he thinks, lead to a chronic over-production that can only find its satisfaction in ever new foreign markets. This, in turn, could only lead to a militarism necessary to ensure those markets. As such, Penty sees that one major motor that drives industry, as we subsequently experienced during the course of the 20th century, is the development of weapons used to ensure its own continuance. War and industry thus serve each other, as was obvious to Penty in the wake of the First World War: both form one single "cult of mechanism."[27] Or, as Maurin later put it: when "people began to produce for profits they became wealth-producing maniacs. When people became wealth-producing maniacs they produced too much wealth. When people found out that they had produced too much wealth they went on an orgy of wealth-destruction and destroyed ten million lives besides."[28]

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[23] *Post Industrialism* (London: George Allen & Unwin ltd, 1922), 41.

[24] Ibid, 34.

[25] Ibid, 32.

[26] Ibid, 36.

[27] Ibid, 36-8.

[28] Maurin, "Mechanized Labor," accessed June 10, 2024, https://catholicworker.org/easy-essays-html/#mechanized-labor.

Thus for Penty industry signaled the coming of a permanent and perpetual revolution; not one, as many claimed, that would foster a new civilization, but one that constantly overturns it: "what follows in the wake of the machine is chaos and confusion."[29] Art, in the broad sense of creative human work – philosophy, architecture, music, handicrafts, carpentry, husbandry, food preparation – is degraded, since the assembly line cannot reproduce human craftsmanship, but only a dull mechanical shadow of it. Such creative work – true culture – "cannot exist apart from life;" art must be a part of everyday work, so that work, culture, and moral formation are coextensive.[30]

For Penty, replacement of the daily work of art by the machine, as Marx had claimed, changes the nature of work.[31] It also destroys the unity of life, for we no longer find the pleasures of life *in* our work, and so we have to reach for "mechanical amusements."[32] Moreover, trying to compensate for the factory's moral and intellectual torpor we invented something called "education, "which Penty thus reveals as another industrial product. In other words:

> The links which bound culture and life are broken, and they cannot be repaired so long as man remains a slave of the machine. And so all art and culture disappear from life, for it cannot be kept alive by the [educated] few. All must share it or none. If any art is to revive, it must be an art that is the common possession of the whole people, and such an art cannot be grafted onto a machine society. On the contrary, the arts (if we may so call them) that a machine population can share, are the arts of the cinemas and the gramophone, and the only culture is the culture of mechanism, whether it be motor-cars or aeroplanes…they are the arts of plutocracy.[33]

Far more than any materialist philosophy, then, for Penty the machine is the real cause of the modern rejection of Christianity.[34] It has degraded morals and, he helps us see, separated religion from a whole way of life it used to unite and animate. "Religion" is no longer, as Maurin would put it, the "cult" that is inseparable from "culture" and "cultivation" – as inseparable in practice as the three terms are linguistically. Rather, under industrialism, "religion" becomes what it is today: a private realm of arbitrary individual beliefs or sentiments, which, being confined to itself, leaves most of life

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[29] Penty, *Post-Industrialism,* 39-40.
[30] Ibid, 46.
[31] Ibid, 47
[32] Ibid, 46.
[33] Ibid, 47.
[34] Ibid, 48.

without meaning or inherent order. As such, the machine has created an inhuman world, robbing everyone of a baseline sense of wellbeing, so that man becomes "a bed of live nerves ever stretched to high tension."[35] Marx was wrong, thinks Penty, that the means of production have always dominated and determined human nature, but he was right that they do so today.[36]

The final major contributor to the Catholic Worker's critique of industrialism we shall examine is Emmanuel Mounier (1905-1950), the leader of the French personalist movement and founder of the journal *Esprit.* A Catholic himself, Mounier was perhaps the greatest single contemporary influence on Maurin outside of official Catholic social teaching. Along with the latter, Mounier's "personalism" contributed much of the positive vision animating the Worker's program, to complement the more negative critiques like those of Marx and Penty (which, to be sure, always stand on a positive, though often implicit, vision of their own). Maurin recommended especially Mounier's *Personalist Manifesto* and his (still untranslated) article on the "Personalist Revolution." And though Maurin in practice adopted many different labels for his thought, including especially his advocacy of Mounier's "communitarianism," Maurin once said that the two most important ones were "Catholic" and "personalist."

The *Personalist Manifesto* is clearly intended to articulate a social and political alternative to both Marx's *Communist Manifesto* and the regnant industrial capitalism. He penned further articles in this same vein on the "Communitarian Revolution" and the "Personalist and Communitarian Revolution." The leading idea in all this is that modern society in both its capitalist and socialist guises produces a mass of passive automatons devoid of that personal initiative, creativity, self-organization and self-direction that characterize human flourishing.

The reign of the machine is a prime culprit here, especially insofar as it institutionalized the separation of spirit from matter, so that a Cartesian "dead" matter replaced the "living" matter of the guilds, where work was mixed with prayer and "people never thought of [matter] except in its living relation to man."[37] The factory or the cubical has thus stripped the human person of his inherently creative teleological impulse and made of him yet another appendage of the means of production.

This mechanization of the person is driven by the ascendency of the bourgeois virtues of comfort, power, security, ease, and the elimination of suffering at all cost. "For [the bourgeois] there is only prosperity, health, common sense, balance, sweetness

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[35] Ibid, 49.

[36] Ibid, 49-50.

[37] Emmanuel Mounier, *A Personalist Manifesto* (New York: Longmans, 1938), 21.

of life, comfort."[38] Such a character, for Mounier, is in fact a direct descendent of the true Christian ideal of sanctity, though now become progressively corrupted by chivalry, Protestantism, and capitalism. Thus, though culture was at one time rooted directly in the Gospel, achieving today's bourgeois ideals requires the suppression of all spirituality.[39] Over time we have "come to the tyranny of the merely mechanical: by reducing man to an abstract individuality without vocation, without responsibility, without resistance, bourgeois individualism became the responsible harbinger of the reign of gold, that is, of the anonymous society that is impersonal in its exercise of power."[40] From this society we have all inherited first bourgeois humanity, then bourgeois morality, and now, worst of all, bourgeois Christianity.

As opposed to this anxious, surfeited, risk-averse machine society, for Mounier the development of true personhood requires a process of detachment and internal dispossession, facilitating objective contact with nature and communion with others.[41] There is not a little salutary Romanticism here, which the Catholic Worker often echoes, including a fundamental "affirmation of mystery"[42] in life and work. Unlike the technocratic bourgeois who never transcends the merely material, the personalist and communitarian's work is precisely that which facilitates the infusion of the divine into the mundane: "It is above themselves and outside themselves that artists and thinkers and savants must go to recognize the spiritual reality – pictorial, musical, etc. – that they put into their works. There is only one possible means of communication between this reality and man, and that is personal mediation. Every work, every culture that aims at less than this reality must ever remain a minor work or a minor culture."[43]

Thus, for Mounier, in spite of what some commentators have said, today's mass industrial conformism is the farthest thing from the triumph of Nietzsche's strong individual superman: "If we want to study community decay today, it is not a Nietzschean world that we confront, but rather a faceless society...Each person gradually abandons himself to the anonymity of the world of the masses. The modern world is this collective collapse, this massive depersonalization."[44] Community in Mounier's day, as our own, had become mere collective homogeneity, a false community of mechanical "connectedness" aided by the speed of transportation, and

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[38] Ibid, 18.
[39] Ibid, 16-17.
[40] Ibid, 26.
[41] Ibid, 75-81.
[42] Ibid, 81.
[43] Ibid, 158.
[44] Mounier, "Révolution Communautaire," *Esprit* 3, no. 28, January 1935, pp. 549, author's translation. The phrase I have rendered "world of the masses" is *monde de l'on*, more literally "the world of the one."

the "togetherness" of "Managed Information Agencies" (or what we would call "information technology").[45] The very idea of "communion" is corrupted, for there are no longer any others who are different than myself to commune with:

> Commune with each other? There are no more, no more *others.* There is no more neighbor, only duplicates. Dull couples, where each rubs shoulders with the partner in a vulgar and distracted consent to standardized habits…grouped by circumstances or functions, not by events or choices. A bland amalgamation of the readers of the daily tabloids, and all these precipitates mixed in a big city, suspended, unstable: a drop of chance has agglomerated them, a drop of chance will dissipate them. This is the desolation of the man without interior dimensions, incapable of real encounters…The world of the masses is below the threshold marked by the first traces of community.[46]

What is most needed today, for Mounier, in direct opposition to industrial society's lethargic conformism, is personalist leaders who will take the initiative in creating new forms of communitarian society. This is a theme that Maurin often echoed: "The communitarian movement stands for personalist leadership…A Leader is a fellow who refuses to be crazy the way everybody else is crazy and tries to be crazy in his own crazy way."[47] Rather than waiting for governments or institutions to tell them what to do, to manage their lives for them, people must organize themselves. Again Maurin: "If the best kind of government is self-government, then the best kind of organization is self-organization. When the organizers try to organize the unorganized, then the organizers don't organize themselves. And when the organizers don't organize themselves, nobody organizes himself, and when nobody organizes himself, nothing is organized."[48]

We'll return to this personalist theme, and the deep connections Maurin saw between it and agrarianism, in our final section.

The Agrarian Foreground of Rerum Novarum *and* Quadragesimo Anno

Surely the strongest encouragement for the Catholic Worker's land movement, however, came from that agrarian Catholic vision that was given fresh legs in the social encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931). The general import of these documents is well known, so here I will merely underline what is often missed, or

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[45] Ibid, 551.

[46] Ibid, 551, AT. "Daily tabloids" renders "Paris Soir," a popular Paris newspaper.

[47] Maurin, "The C.P and the C.M.", accessed May 24, 2024, catholicworker.org/easy-essays-html/#looking-for-leadership and "Self-Organization," accessed May 24, 2024, available at http://www.easyessays.org/self-organization/.

[48] "Self-Organization."

at least downplayed, in these encyclicals, but that Maurin rightly saw as their center: a return to a society based on farming and crafts.

Perhaps the most obvious theme in *Rerum Novarum* is advocacy for widely distributed "private" property. This, it is often pointed out, is an alternative to both capitalism and communism, both in terms of property ownership and juridical structure.[49] For years this "third way" has been known as "distributivism" and has more recently happily been rebranded by the much more intuitive "localism."[50] What is not always appreciated about this localism is that property ownership and juridical decentralization are only desirable as part of a general return of a large part of society to the land from the factories and to the country from the cities. For the *purpose* of property, Leo XIII makes abundantly clear, is to return to that state of relative economic independence and self-sufficiency that was from time immemorial enjoyed by the vast majority of people in history: the peasants. Without denying peasants' manifold hardships, Leo recognized that it was the movement away from the land that degraded labor, stifled creativity, made the worker entirely dependent upon either the capitalist or the state, and so reduced him to a "condition little better than slavery itself"(§3). The conclusion, Maurin saw very clearly, was to go back to the land.

Property, therefore, for Leo, means, broadly speaking, the "permanent instruments of production" to which man is entitled as a rational being (§6): land, animals, dwellings, tools, furnishings and all those things that are necessary for the maintenance of the substance of his own body and that of his progeny "from the earth and its fruits" (§7). One's children, for instance, should be able to keep themselves "decently from want and misery amid the uncertainties of this mortal life. In no other way can a father effect this except by the ownership of productive property, which he can transmit to his children by inheritance" (§13). Such property thus becomes "properly" one's own because one puts, as it were, the impress of his personality on it (§8).

It was obvious to Maurin that in light of the social and economic turmoil of the Great Depression, it was the land and only the land that could provide this security on a society-wide basis. Catholic Worker farms, therefore, were designed to immediately put into practice the Pope's teaching in an immediately practical way, by allowing the destitute to go directly back to the land. To aid this process, Maurin underlined Leo's

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[49] For the best exhibition of what decentralized government, looks like see Andrew Williard Jones, *Before Church and State: A Study of Social Order in the Sacramental Kingdom of St. Louis IX* (Steubenville: Emmaus Academic, 2017).

[50] See Dale Ahlquist and Michael Warren Davis, eds., *Localism: Coming Home to Catholic Social Teaching* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2024).

exhortation to employers to pay their workers not only a family wage but an additional amount that can be put away. For the laborer to earn enough to build up savings was thus not only a matter of just remuneration in the abstract, but part of a strategy allowing industrial workers to move towards "obtaining a share in the land" (§47, cf. §5).

Rerum Novarum had thus quietly affirmed small farms and a craft-based society as *the* Catholic social vision. It had only mentioned the guilds briefly (§49), as the economic infrastructure necessary to make this sustainable. Elaborating the place of the guilds was a central task, therefore, taken up by Pius XII in *Quadragesimo Anno* in 1931. Pius first repeats and affirms the program of *Rerum Novarum*, and then proceeds to elaborate upon it. He notes that since Leo's time things had gotten even worse, since "through the evil of what we have termed 'individualism' [i.e., capitalism]...following upon the overthrow and near extinction of that rich social life which was once highly developed through associations of various kinds, there remain virtually only individuals and the state"(§78). Such statist-individualism was made possible only by the destruction of workman's associations.

By "associations", he makes abundantly clear at various points, he means economic organization on the model of the guilds (see §29-33). He also calls them (confusingly for English speaking Americans) "industries or professions" (§83), and makes it clear that the agrarian vision of Leo required this kind of non-socialist social control of the means of production. Otherwise the result of a return to the land would simply be a turning of the clock back to a slightly earlier time in the development of industrial capitalism. A renewed land-based population would then simply fall prey to the machine all over again. To avoid this regression, guild-like associations would once again have to be developed in which communities could protect themselves.

On the other hand, by reaffirming Leo's emphasis on productive property and the land (§61), Pius implied that modern "unions", while required as stop-gaps by the exigencies of the time (as also affirmed by Leo), could only do so much, and at worst were only an underwriting of the industrial status quo. Maurin constantly affirmed this, and was correspondingly cool on the question of unions.[51] Without the guilds, there could be no permanent land movement; without a return to the land, the guilds were just welfare capitalism. A comprehensive Catholic alternative takes both. Pius does not say this in so many words, but it's the logic of his position, and (more importantly for our purposes) exactly the one that Peter Maurin propagated.

Distinctives of the Catholic Worker Land Movement

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[51] "Commercializers of Labor", 33.

Much of the above was adopted in one way or another by the Catholic Worker. Its unique interaction with Marx, Penty, Mounier, and the Encyclicals has already indicated a lot about the characteristic shape and temperament of the movement. Anyone who is familiar with its history will recognize in these thinkers and their works a substantial amount of the Worker's patrimony. It remains to spell out its own distinctive traits in a bit more detail by reference to Maurin himself and the farms he inspired.

In 1949 the Worker collected and published many of Maurin's Easy Essays in a single volume, called *Catholic Radicalism: Phrased Essays for the Green Revolution* (New York: Catholic Worker Books). The title says a lot. First, it captures the vision that the Church *itself,* especially when properly placed on its agrarian moorings, is a truly radical alternative to other social and political options. Maurin would often emphasize that this land-radicalism was the only radicalism truly deserving of the name, since to be radical is to be *rooted.* He accordingly dismissed Catholics who styled themselves as conservative, seeing so little in the present order worth conserving. Thus, in place of the communist Red Revolution stood the Catholic "Green Revolution." This referred not, of course, to the industrialization of agriculture, but the very opposite: the return to a society that was green in the sense of being based on small land-holdings. And there was another sense in which Maurin's revolution was green as well: he saw a compelling model for it among the medieval *Irish*: "The only way to prevent a Red Revolution is to promote a Green Revolution…to make them look up to Green Ireland of the seventh century."[52]

At the most general level, the Catholic Worker land movement was a response, as Maurin saw, to "the separation of the spiritual from the material [that] is at the base of the modern chaos."[53] By failing to recognize that Christianity could only be practiced as an embodied, historical, communal reality, Christians have created a spiritualized religion of mere individualistic piety, having only an indirect relation to the rest of life. This at the same time cuts most of life loose to follow its own course, sometimes as the purported realm of the merely "natural." In this "great modern error of separating the spiritual from the material" the Church is complicit in making "the secular," as a realm of society separate from the Church.[54] For Maurin, the separation of the Church and society from the land was the greatest single instance of this. "Modern society" is thus "a materialist society because modern Christians have failed to translate the spiritual

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[52] "America and Russia," 127.

[53] "A Modern Plague," 39.

[54] "Another Open Letter to Fr. Lord M. Ag.," 56.

into the material."[55] The machine has accordingly displaced the land-and-craft society, generating successively capitalism, Marxism for the failures of capitalism, and fascism for the failures of Marxism.[56] But, Maurin saw, if "we had a Land and Crafts Society we would not have Capitalism. If we did not have Capitalism we would not have Marxism. And if we did not have Marxism, we would not have fascism. So to foster a Land and Crafts Society is to oppose Capitalism, Marxism, and Fascism."[57]

In place of this, the Worker's call "Back to Christ – Back to the Land!" was a summons to return to a "functional society" from an "acquisitive society."[58] "The new order brought about by right decisions will be functional not acquisitive, personalist not socialist, communitarian not collectivist, organismic not mechanistic."[59] Maurin in particular rightly doubted that there could be a humane industrial capitalism: there could exist no half-way house that might be a compromise between the status quo and the agrarian vision. He quoted Lenin approvingly that "[t]he World cannot be half agricultural and half industrial,"[60] for the latter will always prey on the former, as a Chinese friend of Maurin related: "What would Western industrialism do to us? Our people would become robots. Our cultural traditions would be destroyed."[61]

Maurin's ideal of the functional society was one in which the guilds (or their modern equivalent) would once again have to play a central role. A functional society meant a society where the economy was a function of a common vision of the good life, rather than allowing an unfettered economy to set the terms in which people live. Markets, in other words, serve life, rather than visa-versa. And this, Maurin had learned from Penty, was what the guilds had ensured: guilds and capitalism were incompatible, and it was capitalism itself that had recognized this and intentionally broken up the guilds. In a long Easy Essay Maurin traced the basic stops of this economic fall narrative, drawn from Penty, from the guild system of the high Middle Ages to the rise of the middle men, the bankers, manufacturers, economists (Adam Smith), to world war, and world economic depression.[62] If the land movement was to work in the long run, there would have to be such non-socialist social control of the economy. In the meantime, Maurin wanted to create little pockets of functional communities where that future could be lived right now. This is what his land movement was purposed to do.

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[55] "The Hope of the People," 183.
[56] "Revolutions," 352-3.
[57] "Land and Crafts," 318.
[58] "A Radical Change," 106-7
[59] "The Age of Order," 410.
[60] "Industrialization," 170.
[61] "From a Chinese," 174.
[62] "The Light of History," 147-52.

The Catholic Worker variously called their land communities "Communitarian Farms", "Agronomic Universities," "Parish Subsistence Camps", "Farming Communes", or "Farming Colonies", depending on which aspect of it they wished to highlight. It got a start, practically speaking, when the New York community found and purchased one acre on Staten Island, which included an eight bedroom house and large garden that provided enough vegetables for the inhabitants and many for the New York hospitality house. A short time later they moved the operation to a larger piece of land in Easton, PA, which they called Maryfarm. Within a few years, Dorothy reports that Catholic Worker farms had been born in Minnesota, Michigan, Ohio, Massachusetts, Vermont, another one in Pennsylvania, and in Newburgh, NY.[63]

While certainly emphasizing the properly agricultural component, the farms were also meant to be new centers of distinctively Christian community on the model of the early Church and the medieval communes. They were to exemplify and be training grounds in what Maurin called *communitarianism* – the Church as a lived *social* reality, an alternative society, where Christians could once again have "all things in common" (Acts 2:44). As such, they were to be more than places to grow vegetables and raise animals, but included some communal property, voluntary poverty, shared work, study and discussion, life with the poor, and the daily practice of the works of mercy.[64] "To Dictatorial Pagan Communism," said Maurin, "I am opposing Utopian Christian Communism."[65] For, as "St Ambrose says, 'The Church presents the most perfect form of admirable communism and social life.'"[66]

The Gospel, for Maurin, just *is* the solution to the world's problems, including its "economic" problems because Christianity is a social form that has to be enacted. Its practices such as common prayer, voluntary poverty, fasting, almsgiving, turning the other cheek, or sheltering the homeless, are not mere "religious" pieties for private individuals, but "the basis of a Christian Society."[67] The Sermon on the Mount was for Maurin a social manifesto meant for everyone, the original Catholic social teaching revealing the way to be truly human. "Christianity has not been tried because people thought it was impractical. And men have tried everything except Christianity,"[68] but

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[63] Day, "Communitarian Farms," in Dorothy Day, *Loaves and Fishes* (New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 55.
[64] "Reconstructing the Social Order," 52, passim.
[65] "To Our Readers," 62.
[66] "The Communism of the Catholic Worker," 156.
[67] "Christ the King," 104.
[68] "Christianity Untried," accessed 6/3/24, https://catholicworker.org/easy-essays-html/#christianity-untried.

the "Sermon on the Mount will be called practical when people make up their mind to practice it."[69]

The Catholic Worker, said Maurin, "is taking monasticism out of the monasteries. The Counsels of the Gospel are for everybody, not only for the monks."[70] "Catholic communes are not a new thing...The Communist ideal is the Common Good ideal – the ideal of Blessed Thomas More, the ideal of St. Thomas Aquinas, the ideal of the Irish Scholars, the ideal of the first Christians...We don't need new doctrine, we need an old technique."[71] "Catholic people...must return to the Catholic extremism of the early Christians."[72] Or, as Day put it: "one must give up one's life to save it. Voluntary poverty is essential. To live poor, to start poor, to make beginnings even with the meager means at hand, this is to get the 'green revolution' under way."[73]

Practically speaking, however, life on the farms could take any number of different forms. Like everything in the Catholic Worker, nothing was to be dictated from the top down, but adapted gradually and organically as the circumstances required. But Maurin did have some suggestions. Each family, he thought, should have its own house, and he was not a fan of community kitchens. That each family should have some space to itself was necessary to keep the authority structure within the family clear to the children. Still, each family should have one or more single people living with them, which enriches the nuclear family and prevents loneliness in both directions.

> In terms of property ownership, this meant that Maurin advocated the combination of the two kinds, private ownership and communal ownership. I always make a case for communal ownership which is the ideal. Here in America people homesteaded but they became victims of their isolation and their children left the farms and went to the cities. They forgot the village idea which was in Europe but went off by themselves. It was really the spirit of individualism which came from the Reformation and Catholics unfortunately followed it, forgetting the community, the liturgical idea.[74]

The community and liturgical idea was Maurin's way of emphasizing the Green Revolution's Catholic identity. Indeed, he sometimes named them "*Parish* Subsistence Camps" to underline that his program had nothing to do with the rugged romanticism

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[69] "Logical and Practical," 384.
[70] "Franciscans and Jesuits," 210.
[71] "Fighting Communism," 115.
[72] "Catholic Extremism," 386.
[73] Day, ibid, 48.
[74] "Four Interviews with Peter Maurin," 495

of the libertarian frontiersman, but was simply aimed at helping the Church to be the Church. Accordingly, Maurin often drew up suggested *horariums* (the daily schedules followed in monasteries) and posted them for viewing during common meals. There was to be an equal balance, he thought, between prayer, work, study/discussion, and sufficient time for leisure and family life.

Still, at the end of the day, each community would have to make its own path. "Trouble is," Maurin said, "people want blueprints. I don't want to give blueprints. Let them struggle with it."[75] Some would have to be devoted to farming, some to crafts, some to childcare, and others to any of the numberless tasks such a life requires, but that would have to be figured out along the way. "The practical ways of getting [to a functional society] are left to the initiative of individuals who have learned what to do with liberty and who always keep in mind the importance of pure means."[76] "One thousand families [on a commune] wouldn't be too many, if they had the right idea. St. Dunstan College on Prince Edward Island is doing the right thing; fostering a movement to bring craftsmen back to the villages."[77] Indeed part of the point was that the farm was a training in personalism, that each person had to take the initiative, be creative, *act*, in contrast to the passivity encouraged by hyper-institutionalization. Rather than waiting for an agency to do it, Maurin wanted people to learn to organize themselves.

The Catholic Worker thus puts substantial flesh on the sometimes-abstract personalism that we saw in Emmanuel Mounier. And Mounier is indebted to Maurin's program as it was actually (often heroically, and sometimes harrowingly) lived in the hospitality houses and the farms, for providing perhaps the finest example of what the *Personalist Manifesto* looks like in practice. Like Mounier, for the Catholic Worker, the personalism that opposes industrialism's regime of the impersonal constitutes an entire political philosophy. At the most obvious level this means that for the Worker no society without a healthy relationship to the land will be personalist and thus humane, just and healthy: agriculture is always an essential part of personalist politics, precisely because personalism is one aspect of life on the land.

We've already seen one way this is the case, as farmers and artisans are able to surround themselves with their own creative work. Maurin also emphasized the further point that on the land people can learn to work and think for themselves. A machine society takes much of the decision making out of life, and thus the virtue of prudence – knowing what to do in particular situations – is degraded for lack of development.

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[75] Ibid, 492-503.

[76] "Peter Maurin's Radio Interview, 1937," 507.

[77] "Four Interviews," 494.

People are not only passive today, they wouldn't know what to do if they did want to act. A land-and-craft economy is thus a personalist economy because it rehabilitates our capacity for true freedom.

Maurin thus found an alternative political program embedded in the nature of agrarianism itself. And up to a certain point Maurin no doubt simply shares this program with the distributivist tradition, which has long recognized that a commitment to an agrarian society also means a preference for certain forms of limited and decentralized governmentality. Accordingly, Maurin cited favorably the Jeffersonian ideal of a nation of small farmers and as little government as possible; he also valorized the distributist and (as we have seen) guild-based economies of the middle ages.[78] Yet Maurin gives this philosophy his own distinctive twist, and adopts neither the libertarian individualism sometimes associated with Jefferson, nor the medieval integralism (or monarchism) which is increasingly popular today among conservative Catholics. Nor, however, was he a liberal, rightly seeing the principled separation of Church and state as one more form of separation of the material from the spiritual.[79]

Rather, Maurin's political twist involved the Catholic Worker in a sort of non-coercive or even pacifist integralism. The gist of this position is that Christianity is indeed meant for the whole world (as the integralist holds). It *should* be the religion of all society, and must work itself down into the farthest reaches of everyday life. But – and here's Maurin's twist – it must do this without ever abandoning the non-violent supernatural ethic of the Sermon on the Mount. Taking over from Jacques Maritain the notion of "pure means", the "weapons" necessary for the Green Revolution, Maurin thought, were the simple but radical practices of the Gospel: voluntary poverty, hospitality, the liturgy, common life, care for the poor, preaching, sanctity, and all of this as part of a personalist ethic embedded in the land. These were the ways that the first Christians took over the world and that resulted in the best of the middle ages, and Maurin saw no reason they couldn't do it again in a grassroots sort of way.

The Catholic Worker's political platform therefore is an *agrarian* platform, but it is not one that is much concerned to be involved in what we usually think of as the political realm. Its interest is rather to start right now to "build a new society within the shell of the old," *by living it*, rather than angling to reconstitute society from the top down. The latter, for Maurin, is a violation of the principles of personalism. Rather than forcing others to do the good, Maurin emphasized that real change happens by being who you want the other person to be, and that all real change was necessarily voluntary

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[78] "Jeffersonian Democracy," 274.

[79] "Church and State," 37-8.

and organic. From this basis in personal initiative, in hospitality houses and on the farms, a new order really could begin to emerge. Thus, as Maurin put it: "We don't want to take over the control of political and economic life. We want to reconstruct the social order through Catholic Action exercised in Catholic Institutions."[80]

Finally, Maurin's principled pacifism is itself deeply connected with his agrarianism. At the level of formal military participation, even just-war Christians, he thought, would "see and know the injustice of practically all wars in our modern pagan world," and hoped that such Christians in our country would "form a mighty league of conscientious non-combatants."[81] Yet resisting militarism today requires more than simply refusing to take up arms, for the militarism of modern society is inscribed in the heart of industrialism itself, which must always be anxious to defend and expand both its markets and its supply: "The search for markets and raw materials is at the base of modern imperialism. And modern imperialism is at the base of modern wars."[82] For instance, Maurin helps us see that a society that requires oil in order to eat, move, or talk, as does our industrial agriculture, automobiles, and telephones, will have to be a deeply violent society, as our way of life is only assured by having bigger guns. Thus the Green Revolution seeks the (re)establishment of a more peaceable people by the only means practically possible, an increased local self-sufficiency.

> Maurin sometimes called the type of agrarian order he imagined "pluralist":
> The Pluralist state is one where Humanists try to be human, Jews try to be Jews, Protestants try to be Christians, and Catholics try to be Catholics…The Cooperative Movement, the Guildist Movement, the Agrarian Movement, the Communitarian Movement, find themselves at home in the pluralist state. The pluralist state does not try to solve the social problem by passing laws or creating bureaus, but by removing from the Statue Book all the laws that hinder the activities of the social movements based on personal responsibility.[83]

Yet such agrarian pluralism obviously has little to do with what is sometimes called pluralism today in the liberal West. It should be seen, rather, as an affirmation of, and aspiration to, true difference, made possible by being rooted in the soil of a particular place that is not any other place. Today, pluralism names something like a policy of allowing entirely predictable prosaic expressions of private self-determination within a reality of the strictest technocratic conformity. Such pluralism is industrial pluralism because it is simply the Taylorist conformism of the factory come to totalize all of

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[80] "For Catholic Action," 51, 90, passim.

[81] "Disarmament of the Heart," 277. See also, "Soldiers and Scholars," 279.

[82] "Adam Smith," 358.

[83] "The Pluralist State," and "Allied Techniques," 224-6.

society. Maurin's agrarian pluralism, by contrast, allows real difference because it does not divinize it. As agrarians have long rightly seen the reinstitution of productive property as necessary for democracy in the its proper sense, so too genuine varieties of human culture can only grow and be appreciated when they are literally rooted in the local soil.

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Modern society drives relentlessly towards what Marx called the "thing-ification" (reification) of everything – from labor to products to people themselves. Today this is so more than ever, with people's every trackable move, desire, and (sometimes it seems) thought, calculated, squeezed and sold. Our cars keep track of us while we move, our phones what we say and think, Alexa our habits at home, our banks a rolling list of what we have and desire to have. We pay for these latest industrial toys, but by using them we make ourselves into their products, and we are sold to the highest bidder. All aspects of life are increasingly a matter of producing *ourselves* as commodities. We are still cogs in an assembly line, a mere extension of the machine, only now the workday never ends. No longer do we grudgingly submit our bodies; we willingly submit our souls. We are progressively folding ourselves into one great factory where every bit of us, including what we think are our "own" desires, are fitted for maximum efficiency. Most of us spend most of our waking hours in jobs that at least indirectly support this way of life. We are approaching the total capitalization of human society and of the human being. We are all becoming more like a machine, and it is a war machine.

Catholics must resist this regime with all our might. Our daily pursuit of sanctity demands it. Yet a renewed land-and-craft economy remains the only alternative. This is because, as Maurin helps us see, the only livable world is a personal world, and only a real relation to the land at every level can make life personal. So we have a choice. Either we will begin to foster that real relation in our own lives, or we will slowly become the violent atomized cyborgs personal experience and recent history is more and more revealing us to be. This is especially true for those of us who will continue to live in cities.

Agrarianism thus appears not as one "social issue" among others, a soap box for liberals, or a retreat for traditionalists. It appears, rather – even for urbanites – as a necessary part of the practice of the Faith itself. What we need, in other words, is an agrarian Church. None have helped us imagine what this can look like better than the Catholic Worker.

Tools for Conviviality

Selected Readings

Ivan Illich

1973

Colin's introduction: Ivan Illich was a Catholic priest, born in Dalmatia, but living much of his life in the United States, who wrote about the effects that tools (technology), and especially large-scale industrial tools, and their institutions such as medicine, transportation, the school system, and later, the computer, have on a society. He served as a priest in New York City in the 1950's and early 1960's, and founded a center for critical studies in Mexico in the late 60's and 70's. He wrote about what tools *do* to a society, and especially about the way that tools come to form institutional systems that turn from means to ends in themselves, so that we end up serving the technological institutions at just about any cost. He pointed to the way that such systems thus become counter-productive and compound the very problems they were meant to solve. He also focused on what industrial tools *say* to a society about who we are, and the way they have remade our concept of what human beings are *for* and the way that we think about ourselves.

Tools For Conviviality is one of his early works, useful because in it he gathers many of these concepts together in one place and presents a broad picture of our society in light of them. It's probably the best entry point to his thought.

The selections of the book below, and the page numbers in square brackets, are taken from the Opensource edition, available at https://archive.org/details/illich-conviviality/page/n1/mode/2up.

Contents:

Introduction

During the next several years I intend to work on an epilogue to the industrial age. I want to trace the changes in language, myth,

ritual, and law which took place in the current epoch of packaging and of schooling. I want to describe the fading monopoly of the industrial mode of production and the vanishing of the industrially generated professions this mode of production serves.

Above all I want to show that two-thirds of mankind still can avoid passing through the industrial age, by choosing right now a postindustrial balance in their mode of production which the hyperindustrial nations will be forced to adopt as an alternative to chaos. To prepare for this task I submit this essay for critical comment...

I here submit the concept of a multidimensional balance of human life which can serve as a framework for evaluating man's relation to his tools. In each of several dimensions of this balance it is possible to identify a natural scale. When an enterprise grows beyond a certain point on this scale, it first frustrates the end for which it was originally designed, and then rapidly becomes a threat to society itself These scales must be identified and the parameters of human endeavors within which human life remains viable must be explored.

Society can be destroyed when further growth of mass production renders the milieu hostile, when it extinguishes the free use of the natural abilities of society's members, when it isolates people from each other and locks them into a man-made shell, when it undermines the texture of community by promoting extreme social polarization and splintering specialization, or when cancerous acceleration enforces social change at a rate that rules out legal, cultural, and political precedents as formal guidelines to present behavior. Corporate endeavors which thus threaten society cannot be tolerated. At this point it becomes irrelevant whether an enterprise is nominally owned by individuals, corporations, or the slate, because no form of management can make such fundamental destruction serve a social purpose.

Our present ideologies are useful to clarify the contradictions which appear in a society which relies on the capitalist control of industrial production; they do not, however, provide the necessary framework for analyzing the crisis in the industrial mode of

production itself I hope that one day a general theory of industrialization will be stated with precision, that it will be formulated in terms compelling enough to withstand the test of criticism. Its concepts ought to provide a common language for people in opposing parties who need to engage in the assessment of social programs or technologies, and who want to restrain the power of man's tools when they tend to overwhelm man and his goals. Such a theory should help people invert the present structure of major institutions. I hope that this essay will enhance the formulation of such a theory.

It is now difficult to imagine a modern society in which industrial growth is balanced and kept in check by several complementary, distinct, and equally scientific modes of production. Our vision of the possible and the feasible is so restricted by industrial expectations that any alternative to more mass production sounds like a return to past oppression or like a Utopian design for noble savages. In fact, however, the vision of new possibilities requires only the recognition that scientific discoveries can be useful in at least two opposite ways. The first leads to specialization of functions, institutionalization of values and centralization of power and turns people into the accessories of bureaucracies or machines. The second enlarges the range of each person's competence, control, and initiative, limited only by other individuals' claims to an equal range of power and freedom.

To formulate a theory about a future society both very modern and not dominated by industry, it will be necessary to recognize natural scales and limits. We must come to admit that only within limits can machines take the place of slaves; beyond these limits they lead to a new kind of serfdom. Only within limits can education fit people into a man-made environment: beyond these limits lies the universal schoolhouse, hospital ward, or prison. Only within limits ought politics to be concerned with the distribution of maximum industrial outputs, rather than with equal inputs of either energy or information. Once these limits are recognized, it becomes possible to articulate the triadic relationship between persons, tools, and a new collectivity. Such a society, in which modern technologies serve politically interrelated individuals rather than managers, I will call "convivial".

After many doubts, and against the advice of friends whom I respect, I have chosen "convivial" as a technical term to designate a modern society of responsibly limited tools. In part this choice was conditioned by the desire to continue a discourse which had started with its Spanish cognate. The French cognate has been given technical meaning (for the kitchen) by Brillat-Savarin in his Physiology of Taste: Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy. This specialized use of the term in French might explain why it has already proven effective in the unmistakably different and equally specialized context in which it will appear in this essay. I am aware that in English "convivial" now seeks the company of tipsy jollyness, which is distinct from that indicated by the OED and opposite to the austere meaning of modern "eutrapelia", which I intend. By applying the term "convivial" to tools rather than to people, I hope to forestall confusion.

"Austerity", which says something about people, has also been degraded and has acquired a bitter taste, while for Aristotle or Aquinas it marked the foundation of friendship. In the Summa Theologica, II, II, in the 186th question, article 5, Thomas deals with disciplined and creative playfulness. In his third response he defines "austerity" as a virtue which does not exclude all enjoyments, but only those which are distracting from or destructive of personal relatedness. For Thomas "austerity" is a complementary part of a more embracing virtue, which he calls friendship or joyfulness. It is the fruit of an apprehension that things or tools could destroy rather than enhance eutrapelia (or graceful playfulness) in personal relations. {Hugo v. Rahner, Man at Play, New York, 1972.)

Chapter I. Two Watersheds

[Colin's note: In the first chapter, which we simply briefly summarize here, Illich presents the notion that industrial tools and institutions such as medicine, transportation systems, and schools, often pass through two different watersheds or significant points of development. At one watershed, they become more efficient and useful than they had ever been before; at the next watershed, however, as they become used beyond a certain intensity, speed, or concentration, they become *counterproductive,* and frustrate the very

ends they were meant to achieve. After this second watershed, usually, the tools and institutions *themselves* become the ends we are seeking to sustain.

Before writing this work, Illich had recently published three books critiquing three of these modern institutions in detail: schools, transportation, and medicine. His thesis in each of these books is that each of these institutions, while useful within limits, have now passed a second watershed and become counterproductive: schools make people dumber, transportation makes us all slower, and medicine makes us sick. Throughout the book, he writes with these studies in the background, and many of his readers would know them. In the two chapters from which we present selections below, he presents the basics of a general philosophy of technology and many of its social applications.

In general, in this first chapter, he introduces the notion that society has become dominated by our tools, which have enslaved people. By contrast he wants to invert the dominant tool structure.]

Chapter III. The Multiple Balance

The human equilibrium is open. It is capable of shifting within flexible but finite parameters. People can change, but only within bounds. In contrast, the present industrial system is dynamically unstable. It is organized for indefinite expansion and the concurrent unlimited creation of new needs, which in an industrial environment soon become basic necessities.

Once the industrial mode of production has become dominant in a society, it may still admit shifts from one type of output to another, but it does not admit limits to the further institutionalization of values. Such growth makes the incongruous demand that man seek his satisfaction by submitting to the logic of his tools.

The demands made by tools on people become increasingly costly. This rising cost of fitting man to the service of his tools is reflected in the ongoing shift from goods to services in over-all production. Increasing manipulation of man becomes necessary to overcome the resistance of his vital equilibrium to the dynamic of growing industries; it takes the form of educational, medical, and administrative therapies. Education turns out competitive consumers; medicine keeps them alive in the engineered

environment they have come to require; bureaucracy reflects the necessity of exercising social control over people to do meaningless work. The parallel increase in the cost of the defense of new levels of privilege through: military, police, and insurance measures reflects the fact that in a consumer society there are inevitably two kinds of slaves: the prisoners of addiction and the prisoners of envy.

I will identify six ways in which all people of the world are threatened by industrial development after passage through the second watershed: (1) Overgrowth threatens the right to the fundamental physical structure of the environment with which man has evolved. (2) Industrialization threatens the right to convivial [60] work. (3) The overprogramming of man for the new environment deadens his creative imagination. (4) New levels of productivity threaten the right to participatory politics. (5) Enforced obsolescence threatens the right to tradition: the recourse to precedent in language, myth, morals, and judgment. I will describe these five threats as distinct though interrelated categories all having in common a destructive inversion of means into ends. (6) Pervasive frustration by means of compulsory though engineered satisfaction constitutes a sixth and more subtle threat...

1 . Biological Degradation

The precarious balance between man and the biosphere has been recognized and has suddenly begun to worry many people. The degradation of the environment is dramatic and highly visible. For years car traffic in Mexico City increased steadily under a sparkling sky. Then, within a couple of years, smog [61] descended and soon became worse than in Los Angeles. This phenomenon can be easily discussed and appreciated by people who have never studied science. Poisons of unknown potency are discharged into the biotic system of the earth. There is no way to retrieve some of them, nor any means to predict how some of them may suddenly combine their action so that the whole earth, like Lake Erie or Baikal, will die. Man has evolved to fit into one niche in the universe. The earth is his home. This home is now threatened by the impact of man.
The one-dimensional debate among proponents of various

panaceas for the ecological imbalance will only inspire the false expectation that somehow human action can be engineered to fit into the requirements of the world conceived as a technological totality. Bureaucratically guaranteed survival under such circumstances means the expansion of industrial economics to the point where a centrally planned system of production and reproduction is identified with the guided evolution of the Earth. If such an industrially minded solution becomes generally [63] accepted as the only way of preserving a viable environment, the preservation of the physical milieu can become the rationale for a bureaucratic Leviathan at the levers which regulate levels of human reproduction, expectation, production, and consumption. Such a technological response to growing population, pollution, and affluence can be founded only on a further development of the presently prevailing institutionalization of values. The belief in the possibility of this development is founded on an erroneous supposition, namely, that "The historical achievement of science and technology has rendered possible the translation of values into technical tasks - the materialization of values. Consequently, what is at stake is the redefinition of values in technical terms, as elements in technological process. The new ends, as technical ends, would then operate in the project and in the construction of the machinery, and not only in its utilization." (Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, Boston, 1970).

The re-establishment of an ecological balance depends on the ability of society to counteract the progressive materialization of values. Otherwise man will find himself totally enclosed within his artificial creation, with no exit. Enveloped in a physical, social, and psychological milieu of his own making, he will be a prisoner in the shell of technology, unable to find again the ancient milieu to which he was adapted for hundreds of thousands of years. The ecological balance cannot be re-established unless we recognize again that only persons have ends and that only persons can work toward them. Machines only operate ruthlessly to reduce people to the role of impotent allies in their destructive progress.

2 . Radical Monopoly

When overefficient tools are applied to facilitate man's relations

with the physical environment, they can destroy the balance between man and nature. Overefficient tools corrupt the environment. But tools can also be made overefficient in quite a different way. They can upset the relationship between what [64] people need to do by themselves and what they need to obtain ready-made. In this second dimension overefficient production results in radical monopoly.

By radical monopoly I mean a kind of dominance by one product that goes far beyond what the concept of monopoly usually implies. Generally we mean by "monopoly" the exclusive control by one corporation over the means of producing (or selling) a commodity or service. Coca-Cola can create a monopoly over the soft-drink market in Nicaragua by being the only maker of soft drinks which advertises with modern means. Nestle might impose its brand of cocoa by controlling the raw material, some car maker by restricting imports of other makes, a television channel by licensing.

Monopolies of this kind have been recognized for a century as dangerous by-products of industrial expansion, and legal devices have been developed in a largely futile attempt to control them. Monopolies of this kind restrict the choices open to the consumer. They might even compel him to buy one product on the market, but they seldom simultaneously abridge his liberties in other domains. A thirsty man might desire a cold, gaseous, and sweet drink and find himself restricted to the choice of just one brand. He still remains free to quench his thirst with beer or water. Only if and when his thirst is translated without meaningful alternatives into the need for a Coke would the monopoly become radical. By "radical monopoly" I mean the dominance of one type of product rather than the dominance of one brand. I speak about radical monopoly when one industrial production process exercises an exclusive control over the satisfaction of a pressing need, and excludes nonindustrial activities from competition.

Cars can thus monopolize traffic. They can shape a city into their image - practically ruling out locomotion on foot or by bicycle in Los Angeles. They can eliminate river traffic in Thailand. That motor traffic curtails the right to walk, not that more people drive

Chevies than Fords, constitutes radical monopoly. What cars do to [65] people by virtue of this radical monopoly is quite distinct from and independent of what they do by burning gasoline that could be transformed into food in a crowded world. It is also distinct from automotive manslaughter. Of course cars burn gasoline that could be used to make food. Of course they are dangerous and costly. But the radical monopoly cars establish is destructive in a special way. Cars create distance. Speedy vehicles of all kinds render space scarce. They drive wedges of highways into populated areas, and then extort tolls on the bridge over the remoteness between people that was manufactured for their sake. This monopoly over land turns space into car fodder. It destroys the environment for feet and bicycles. Even if planes and buses could run as nonpolluting, nondepleting public services, their inhuman velocities would degrade man's innate mobility and force him to spend more time for the sake of travel.

Schools tried to extend a radical monopoly on learning by redefining it as education. As long as people accepted the teacher's definition of reality, those who learned outside school were officially stamped "uneducated". Modern medicine deprives the ailing of care not prescribed by doctors. Radical monopoly exists where a major tool rules out natural competence. Radical monopoly imposes compulsory consumption and thereby restricts personal autonomy. It constitutes a special kind of social control because it is enforced by means of the imposed consumption of a standard product that only large institutions can provide.

The control of undertakers over burial shows how radical monopoly functions and how it differs from other forms of culturally defined behavior. A generation ago, in Mexico, only the Opening of the grave and the blessing of the dead body were performed by professionals: the gravedigger and the priest. A death in the family created various demands, all of which could be taken care of within the family. The wake, the funeral, and the dinner served to compose quarrels, to vent grief, and to remind each participant of the fatality of death and the value of life. Most of these were of a ritual nature and carefully prescribed-different from region to region. Recently, funeral homes were established in the major cities. At first undertakers had difficulty finding clients

because even in large cities people still knew how to bury their dead. During the sixties the funeral homes obtained control over new cemeteries and began offering package deals, including the casket, church service, and embalming. Now legislation is being passed to make the mortician's ministrations compulsory. Once he gets hold of the body, the funeral director will have established a radical monopoly over burial, as medicine is at the point of establishing one over dying.

The current debate over health-care delivery in the United States clearly illustrates the entrenchment of a radical monopoly. Each political party in the debate makes sick-care a burning public issue and thereby relegates health care to an area about which politics has nothing important to say. Each party promises more funds to doctors, hospitals, and drugstores. Such promises are not in the interest of the majority. They only serve to increase the power of a minority of professionals to prescribe the tools men are to use in maintaining health, healing sickness, and repressing death. More funds will strengthen the hold of the health industry over public resources and heighten its prestige and arbitrary power. Such power in the hands of a minority will produce only an increase in suffering and a decrease in personal self-reliance. More money will be invested in tools that only postpone unavoidable death and in services that abridge even further the civil rights of those who want to heal each other. More money spent under the control of the health profession means that more people are operationally conditioned into playing the role of the sick, a role they are not allowed to interpret for themselves. Once they accept this role, their most trivial needs can be satisfied only through commodities that are scarce by professional definition.

People have a native capacity for healing, consoling, moving, learning, building their houses, and burying their dead. Each of these capacities meets a need. The means for the satisfaction of these needs are abundant so long as they depend primarily on what people can do for themselves, with only marginal dependence on commodities. These activities have use-value without having been given exchange-value. Their exercise at the service of man is not considered labor.

These basic satisfactions become scarce when the social environment is transformed in such a manner that basic needs can no longer be met by abundant competence. The establishment of radical monopoly happens when people give up their native ability to do what they can do for themselves and for each other, in exchange for something "better" that can be done for them only by a major tool. Radical monopoly reflects the industrial institutionalization of values. It substitutes the standard package for the personal response. It introduces new classes of scarcity and a new device to classify people according to the level of their consumption. This redefinition raises the unit cost of valuable service, differentially rations privilege, restricts access to resources, and makes people dependent. Above all, by depriving people of the ability to satisfy personal needs in a personal manner, radical monopoly creates radical scarcity of personal - as opposed to institutional - service.

Against this radical monopoly people need protection. They need this protection whether consumption is imposed by the private interests of undertakers, by the government for the sake of hygiene, or by the self-destructive collusion between the mortician and the survivors, who want to do the best thing for their dear departed. They need this protection even if the majority is now sold on the professional's services. Unless the need for protection from radical monopoly is recognized, its multiple implementation can break the tolerance of man for enforced inactivity and passivity...

Some of the symptoms of radical monopoly are reaching public awareness, above all the degree to which frustration grows faster than output in even the most highly developed countries and under whatever political regime. Policies aimed to ease this frustration may easily distract attention from the general nature of the monopoly at its roots, however. The more these reforms succeed in correcting superficial abuses, the better they serve to bolster the monopoly I am trying to describe.

The first palliative is consumer protection. Consumers cannot do without cars. They buy different makes. They discover that most cars are unsafe at any speed. So they organize to get safer, better, and more durable cars and to get more as well as wider and

safer roads. Yet when consumers gain more confidence in cars, the victory only increases society's dependence on high-powered vehicles - public or private - and frustrates even more those who have to, or would prefer to, walk.

While the organized self-protection of the addict-consumer immediately raises the quality of the dope and the power of the peddler, it also may lead ultimately to limits on growth. Cars may finally become too expensive to purchase and medicines too expensive to test. By exacerbating the contradictions inherent in this institutionalization of values, majorities can more easily become aware of them. Discerning consumers who are discriminatory in their purchasing habits may finally discover that they can do better by doing things for themselves.

The second palliative proposed to cure growing frustration with growing output is planning. The illusion is common that planners with socialist ideals might somehow create a socialist society in which industrial workers constitute a majority. The proponents of [70] this idea overlook the fact that anticonvivial and manipulative tools can fit into a socialist society in only a very limited measure. Once transportation, education, or medicine is offered by a government free of cost, its use can be enforced by moral guardians. The underconsumer can be blamed for sabotage of the national effort. In a market economy, someone who wants to cure his flu by staying in bed will be penalized only through loss of income. In a society that appeals to the "people" to meet centrally determined production goals, resistance to the consumption of medicine becomes an act of public immorality. Protection against radical monopoly depends on a political consensus opposed to growth. Such a consensus is diametrically opposed to the issues now raised by political oppositions, since these converge in the demand to increase growth and to provide more and better things for more completely disabled people.

Both the balance that defines man's need for a hospitable environment and the balance that defines everyone's need for authentic activity are now close to the breaking point. And still this danger does not concern most people. It must now be explained why most people are either blind to this threat or feel

helpless to correct it. I believe that the blindness is due to the decline in a third balance - the balance of learning - and that the impotence people experience is the result of yet a fourth upset in what I call the balance of power.

3 . Overprogramming

The balance of learning is determined by the ratio of two kinds of knowledge in a society. The first is a result of the creative action of people on their environment, and the second represents the result of man's "trivialization" by his manufactured milieu. Their first kind of knowledge is derived from the primary involvement of people with each other and from their use of convivial tools; the second accrues to them as a result of purposeful and programmed training to which they are subjected. Speaking the mother tongue [71] is learned in the first way, while some pupils learn mathematics in the second. No sane person would say that speaking or walking or nursing a child is primarily the result of education, while competence in mathematics, ballet dancing, or painting usually is...

Crucial to how much anyone can learn on his own is the structure of his tools: the less they are convivial, the more they foster teaching. In limited and well-integrated tribes, knowledge is shared quite equally among most members. All people know most of what everybody knows. On a higher level of civilization, new tools are introduced; more people know more things, but not all know how to execute them equally well. Mastery of skill does not yet imply a monopoly of understanding. One can understand fully what a goldsmith does without being one oneself Men do not have to be cooks to know how to prepare food. This combination of widely shared information and competence for using it is characteristic of a society in which convivial tools prevail. The techniques used are easily understood by observing the artisan at work, but the skills employed are complex and usually can be acquired only through lengthy and programmed apprenticeship. Total learning expands when the range of spontaneous learning widens along with access to an increasing number of taught skills and both liberty and discipline flower. This expansion of the balance of learning cannot go on forever; it is self-limiting. It can be optimized, but it cannot be forcibly extended. One reason is [72]

that man's life span is limited. Another - just as inexorable - is that the specialization of tools and the division of labor reinforce each other. When centralization and specialization grow beyond a certain point, they require highly programmed operators and clients. More of what each man must know is due to what another man has designed and has the power to force on him.

The city child is born into an environment made up of systems that have a different meaning for their designers than for their clients. The inhabitant of the city is in touch with thousands of systems, but only peripherally with each. He knows how to operate the TV or the telephone, but their workings are hidden from him. Learning by primary experience is restricted to self¬ adjustment in the midst of packaged commodities. He feels less and less secure in doing his own thing. Cooking, courtesy, and sex become subject matters in which instruction is required. The balance of learning deteriorates: it is skewed in favor of "education". People know what they have been taught, but learn little from their own doing. People come to feel that they need "education".

Learning thus becomes a commodity, and, like any commodity that is marketed, it becomes scarce. The nature of this scarcity is hidden - at a high cost - by the many forms education takes. Education can be programmed preparation/or life in the future in the form of packaged, serial instructions produced by schools, or it can be constant communication about ongoing life through the output of the media and through the instructions built into consumer goods. Sometimes these instructions are attached to the item and must be read. In more thoroughly designed goods, the shape, color, and provoked associations speak to the user about the way the item must be handled. Education can also become a periodic remedy for workers whose original training gets left behind by industrial innovation. When people become obsolete and need constantly to renew their educational security, when the accountant must be reprogrammed for each new generation of [73] computers, then learning has indeed become scarce. Educator becomes the most vulnerable and confusing issue in the society.

Everywhere the direct cost of training rises faster than the total

output. This has been interpreted in either of two ways...
Those who treat education as a means for production
and those who treat education as the supreme luxury product
agree on the need for more education. They upset the balance of [74]
learning in favor of more teaching. They assume that a modern
world is inevitably so alien that it has passed beyond the reach of
people and can be known only by mystagogues and disciples.

The transformation of learning into education paralyzes man's
poetic ability, his power to endow the world with his personal
meaning. Man will wither away just as much if he is deprived of
nature, of his own work, or of his deep need to learn what he
wants and not what others have planned that he should learn. The
overdetermination of the physical environment renders it hostile.
Radical monopoly makes people prisoners of welfare. Men
overwhelmed by commodities are rendered impotent and in their
rage either kill or die. The corruption of the balance of learning
makes people into puppets of their tools.

Poets and clowns have always risen up against the oppression of
creative thought by dogma. They expose literal-mindedness with
metaphor. They demonstrate the follies of seriousness in a
framework of humor. Their intimate wonder dissolves certainties,
banishes fears, and undoes paralysis. The prophet can denounce
creeds and expose superstitions and mobilize persons to use their
lights and wits. Poetry, intuition, and theory can offer intimations
of the advance of dogma against wit that may lead to a revolution
in awareness. Only the separation of Church and State, of
compulsory knowledge from political action, can redress the
balance of learning. The law has been used, and can be used again,
to this purpose. The law has protected societies against the
exaggerated claims of its priests, and can protect it against the
claims of educators. Compulsory school attendance or other
compulsory treatment is analogous to compulsory attendance at a
religious ritual. The law can disestablish it. The law can be used
against the rising cost of education, and against the use of
education in the reproduction of a class society.

To understand the rising cost of education, we must recognize
two facts: first, that nonconvivial tools create educational side

effects which at some point become intolerable and, second, that [75] education which employs nonconvivial tools is economically unfeasible. The first recognition opens our eyes to the possibility of a society where work and leisure and politics would favor learning and that could function with less formal education; the second recognition permits us to set up educational arrangements that favor self-initiated, self-chosen learning, and that relegate programmed teaching to limited, clearly specified occasions.

Throughout the world, highly capitalized tools require highly capitalized men. Following the Second World War, economic development penetrated even "backward" areas. Spot industrialization created an intense demand for schools to program people not only to operate but also to live with their new tools. The establishment of more schools in Malaysia or Brazil teaches people the accountant's view of the value of time, the bureaucrat's view of the value of promotion, the salesman's view of the value of increased consumption, and the union leader's view of the purpose of work. People are taught all this not by the teacher but by the curriculum hidden in the structure of school. It does not matter what the teacher teaches so long as the pupil has to attend hundreds of hours of age-specific assemblies to engage in a routine decreed by the curriculum and is graded according to his ability to submit to it. People learn that they acquire more value in the market if they spend more hours in class. They learn to value progressive consumption of curricula. They learn that whatever a major institution produces has value, even invisible things such as education or health. They learn to value grade advancement, passive submission, and even the standard misbehavior that teachers like to interpret as a sign of creativity. They learn disciplined competition for the favor of the bureaucrat who presides over their daily sessions, who is called their teacher as long as they are in class and their boss when they go to work. They learn to define themselves as holders of knowledge stock in the specialty in which they have made investments of their time. They learn to accept their place in society precisely in the class and [76] career corresponding to the level at which they leave school and to the field of their academic specialization.

Industrial jobs are arranged so that the better-schooled fit into

the scarcer slots. Scarce jobs are defined as more productive, so people with less schooling are barred from access to the more desirable goods produced in the new industries. Industrially produced shoes, bags, clothes, frozen foods, and soft drinks drive off the market equivalent goods that had been convivially produced. As production becomes more centralized and more capital-intensive, the screening process performed by tax-supported schools not only costs more for those who get through it, but double-charges those who do not.

Education becomes necessary not only to grade people for jobs but to upgrade them for consumption. As industrial output rises, it pushes the education system to exercise the social control necessary for its efficient use. The housing industry in Latin-American countries is a good example of the educational diseconomies produced by architects. All the major cities in such countries are surrounded by vast tracts of self-built favelas, barriadas, or poblaciones. Components for new houses and utilities could be made very cheaply and designed for self-assembly. People could build more durable, more comfortable, and more sanitary dwellings, as well as learn about new materials and systems. But instead of supporting the ability of people to shape their own environment, the government deposits in these shantytowns public utilities designed for people who live in standard modern houses. The presence of a new school, a paved road, and a glass-and-steel police station defines the professionally built house as the functional unit, and stamps the self-built home a shanty. The law establishes this definition by refusing a building permit to people who cannot submit a plan signed by an architect. People are deprived of their ability to invest their own time with the power to produce use-value, and are compelled to work for wages and to exchange their earnings for industrially defined [77] rented space. They are deprived also of the opportunity to learn while building.

Industrial society demands that some people be taught before they can drive a truck and that other people be taught before they can build a house. Others must be taught how to live in apartment buildings. Teachers, social workers, and policemen cooperate to keep people who have low-paying or occasional jobs in houses

they may not build or change. To accommodate more people on less land, Venezuela and Brazil experimented with high-rise tenements. First, the police had to dislodge people from their "slums" and resettle them in apartments. Then the social workers had to socialize tenants who lacked sufficient schooling to understand that pigs may not be raised on eleventh-floor balconies nor beans cultivated in their bathtubs.

In New York people with less than twelve years of schooling are treated like cripples: they tend to be unemployable, and are controlled by social workers who decide for them how to live. The radical monopoly of overefficient tools exacts from society the increasing and costly conditioning of clients. Ford produces cars that can be repaired only by trained mechanics. Agriculture departments turn out high-yield crops that can be used only with the assistance of farm managers who have survived an expensive school race. The production of better health, higher speeds, or greater yields depends on more disciplined recipients. The real cost of these doubtful benefits is hidden by unloading much of them on the schools that produce social control...

4. Polarization

The present organization of tools impels societies to grow both in population and in levels of affluence. This growth takes place at the opposite ends of the privilege spectrum. The underprivileged grow in number, while the already privileged grow in affluence. The underprivileged thus strengthen their frustrating claims, while the rich defend their presumed rights and needs. Hunger and impotence lead the poor to demand rapid industrialization, and the defense of growing luxuries pushes the rich into more frantic production. Power is polarized, frustration is generalized, and the alternative of greater happiness at lower affluence is pushed into the blind spot of social vision.

This blindness is a result of the broken balance of learning. People who are hooked on teaching are conditioned to be customers for everything else. They see their own personal growth as an accumulation of institutional outputs, and prefer what institutions make over what they themselves can do. They repress

the ability to discover reality by their own lights. The skewed balance of learning explains why the radical monopoly of commodities has become imperceptible. It does not explain why people feel impotent to correct those profound disorders which they do perceive.

This helplessness is the result of a fourth disruption: the growing polarization of power. Under the pressure of an expanding mega-machine, power is concentrated in a few hands, and the majority becomes dependent on handouts. New levels of [83] luxuriant overproduction grow faster than the output of commodities which this wanton production imposes.

A 3 percent increase in the standard of living of the U.S. population costs twenty-five times as much as a similar increase in the living standard of India, despite the greater size and more rapid growth of the Indian population. Significant benefits for the poor demand a reduction of the resources used by the rich, while significant benefits for the rich make murderous demands on the resources of the poor. Yet the rich pretend that by exploiting the poor nations they will become rich enough to create a hyperindustrial abundance for all. The elites of poor countries share this fantasy.

The rich will get richer and many more of the poor will become destitute during the next ten years. But anguish about the hungry should not prevent us from understanding the structural problem of power distribution that constitutes the fourth dimension of destructive overgrowth. Unchecked industrialization modernizes poverty. Poverty levels rise and the gap between rich and poor widens. These two aspects must be seen together or the nature of destructive polarization will be missed.

Poverty levels rise because industrial staples are turned into basic necessities and have a unit cost beyond what a majority could ever pay. The radical monopoly of industries has created new types of demeaning poverty in societies of sometimes profligate affluence. The former subsistence farmer is put out of business by the green revolution. He earns more as a laborer, but he cannot give his children their former diet. More importantly,

the U.S. citizen with ten times his income is also desperately poor. Both get increasingly less at greater cost.

The other side of modernized poverty is related but distinct. The power gap widens because control over production is centralized to make the most goods for the greatest number. Whereas rising poverty levels are due to the structure of industrial [84] outputs, the gaping power lag is due to the structure of inputs. To seek remedies for the former without simultaneously dealing with the latter would only postpone and aggravate the world-wide modernization of poverty.

The surface effects of industrially concentrated power can be obviated by income equalization. Progressive taxes without loopholes can be supplemented by social security, income supports, and equal welfare benefits for all. Confiscation of private capital beyond a certain limit can be attempted. Keeping maximum close to minimum income is an even tougher way to stem personal enrichment through the management of corporate power. But such curbs on personal income will be effective only in regulating private consumption. It has no effect on equalizing the privileges that really count in a society where the job has become more important than the home. As long as workers are graded by the amount of manpower capital they represent, those who hold high denominations of knowledge stock will be certified for the use of all kinds of timesaving privileges. The concentration of privileges on a few is in the nature of industrial dominance.

With the introduction of agriculture and animal husbandry, patriarchal government and some centralization of power became feasible. At this stage political means could be used to get the power of many slaves under one man's control. One man could transform a multitude into a tool for the realization of his design. Religion, ideology, and the whip were the principal means of control. But the amount of power controlled was small. The centralization of power which now seems normal could not have been imagined even a century ago.

In modern society, energy conversion enormously exceeds the body power of all men. Manpower stands to mechanical power in a

ratio of 1:15 in China and 1:300 in the U.S.A. Switches concentrate the control over this power more effectively than whips ever could. The social distribution of control over power inputs has been [85] radically changed. If capital means the power to make effective change, power inflation has reduced most people to paupers.

As tools get bigger, the number of potential operators declines. There are always fewer operators of cranes than of wheelbarrows. As tools become more efficient, more scarce resources are put at the service of the operator. On a Guatemalan construction site, only the engineer gets air conditioning in his trailer. He is also the only one whose time is deemed so precious that he must be flown to the capital, and whose decisions seem so important that they are transmitted by shortwave radio. He has of course earned his privileges by cornering the largest amount of tax money and using it to acquire a university degree. The Indio who works on the gang does not notice the relative increase in privilege between him and his Ladino gang boss, but the geometricians and draftsmen who also went to school, but did not graduate, feel the heat and the distance from their families in a new and acute way. Their relative poverty has been aggravated by their bosses' claim to greater efficiency.

Never before have tools approached present power. Never before have they been so integrated at the service of a small Hite. Kings could not claim divine right with as little challenge as executives claim services for the sake of greater production. The Russians justify supersonic transport by saying it will economize the time of their scientists. High-speed transportation, broad band-width communication, special health maintenance, and unlimited bureaucratic assistance are aU explained as requirements to get the most out of the most highly capitalized people.

A society with very large tools must rely on multiple devices to keep the majority from claiming the most expensive packages of privilege. These must be reserved for the most productive individuals. The most prestigious way to measure a person's productivity is by the price tag on his education consumption. The higher a person's knowledge capital, the greater the social [86] value placed on the decisions he "makes" and the more legitimate

is his claim to high-level packages of industrial outputs.

When the legitimacy of educational certification breaks down, other more primitive forms of discrimination are bound to assume renewed importance. People are judged to be less valuable manpower because they are born in the Third World, because they are black, because they are women, because they belong to the wrong group or party, or because they cannot pass the right battery of tests. The scene is set for the multiplication of minority movements, each one claiming its share, and each one destined to be foiled by its own intent.

Hierarchies must rise and conglomerate as they extend over fewer and larger corporations. A seat in a high-rise job is the most coveted and contested product of expanding industry. The lack of schooling, compounded with sex, color, and peculiar persuasions, now keeps most people down. Minorities organized by women, or blacks, or the unorthodox succeed at best in getting some of their members through school and into an expensive job. They claim victory when they get equal pay for equal rank. Paradoxically, these movements strengthen the idea that unequal graded work is necessary and that high-rise hierarchies are necessary to produce what an egalitarian society needs. If properly schooled, the black porter will blame himself for not being a black lawyer. At the same time, schooling generates a new intensity of frustration which ultimately can act as social dynamite.

It does not matter for what specific purpose minorities now organize if they seek an equal share in consumption, an equal place on the pyramid of production, or equal nominal power in the government of ungovernable tools. As long as a minority acts to increase its share within a growth-oriented society, the final result will be a keener sense of inferiority for most of its members.

Movements that seek control over existing institutions give them a new legitimacy, and also render their contradictions more acute. [87] Changes in management are not revolutions. The shared control of workers and women, or blacks and the young, does not constitute a social reconstruction if what they claim to control are industrial corporations. Such changes are at best new ways to administer an

industrial mode of production which, thanks to these shifts, continues unchallenged. More commonly, these changes are professional insurgencies against the status quo. They expand management, and, at an even faster rate, they degrade labor. A new desk usually means more capital-intensive production in one firm and a new guarantee of so-called underemployment somewhere else in society. A majority loses further productive ability, and a minority is forced to seek new reasons and weapons to protect its privilege.

New classes of underconsumers and of underemployed are one of the inevitable by-products of industrial progress. Organization makes them aware of their common plight. At present articulate minorities - often claiming the leadership of majorities - seek equal treatment. If one day they were to seek equal work rather than equal pay - equal inputs rather than equal outputs - they could be the pivot of social reconstruction. Industrial society could not possibly resist a strong women's movement, for example, which would lead to the demand that all people, without distinction, do equal work. Women are integrated into all classes and races...

5. Obsolescence

Convivial reconstruction demands the disruption of the present monopoly of industry, but not the abolition of all industrial production. It does imply the adoption of labor-intensive tools, but not the regression to inefficient tools. It requires a considerable reduction of all kinds of now compulsory therapy, but not the elimination of teaching, guidance, or healing for which individuals take personal responsibility. Neither must a convivial society be stagnant. Its dynamics depend on wide distribution of the power to make effective change. In the present scheme of large-scale obsolescence a few corporate centers of decision¬ making impose compulsory innovation on the entire society. Continued convivial reconstruction depends on the degree to which society protects the power of individuals and of communities to choose their own styles of life through effective, small-scale renewal.

I have shown that social polarization is the result of two

complementary factors: the excessive cost of industrially produced and advertised products, and the excessive rarity of jobs that are considered highly productive. Obsolescence, on the other hand, produces devaluation - which is the result not of a certain general rate of change but of change in those products which exercise a radical monopoly. Social polarization depends on the fact that industrial inputs and outputs come in units so large that most people are excluded from them. Obsolescence, on the other hand, can become intolerable even when people are not directly priced out of the market. Product elaboration and obsolescence are two [89] distinct dimensions of overefficiency, both of which underpin a society of hierarchically layered privilege.

It does not really matter if forced obsolescence becomes destructive of old models or of old functions, if Ford discontinues the distribution of spare parts for its 1955 model, or if the police rule old cars off the road because they lack features that safety lobbyists have made standard. Renewal is intrinsic to the industrial mode of production coupled to the ideology of progress. Products cannot be improved unless huge machines are retooled - and in the technical sense engineers have given this word. To make this pay, huge markets must be created for the new model. The most effective way to open a market is to identify the use of what is new as an important privilege. If this identification succeeds, the old model is devalued and the self-interest of the consumer is wedded to the ideology of never-ending and progressive consumption. Individuals are socially graded according to the number of years their bill of goods is out of date. Some people can afford to keep up with the Joneses who buy the latest model, while others still use cars, stoves, and radios that are five to ten years old-and probably spend their vacations in places that are just as many years out of style. They know where they fit on the social ladder.

The social grading of individuals by the age of the things they use is not just a capitalist practice. Wherever the economy is built around the large-scale production of elaborate and obsolescent packages of staples, it is only the privileged who have access to the newest model of services and goods. Only a few nurses get the most recent course in anesthesiological nursing, and only a few

functionaries get the new model of a "people's car". The members of this minority within a minority recognize each other by the recent date at which the products they use came onto the market, and it makes little difference whether they use them at home or at work. [90]

Industrial innovations are costly, and managers must justify their high cost by producing measurable proof of their superiority. Under the rule of industrial socialism, pseudo science will have to provide the alibi, while in market economies, appeal can be made to a survey of consumer opinion. In any case, periodic innovations in goods or tools foster the belief that anything new will be proven better. This belief has become an integral part of the modern world view. It is forgotten that whenever a society lives by this delusion, each marketed unit generates more wants than it satisfies. If new things are made because they are better, then the things most people use are not quite good. New models constantly renovate poverty. The consumer feels the lag between what he has and what he ought to get. He believes that products can be made measurably more valuable and allows himself to be constantly re¬educated for their consumption. The "better" replaces the "good" as the fundamental normative concept.

In a society caught up in the race for the better, limits on change are experienced as a threat. The commitment to the better at any cost makes the good impossible at all costs. Failure to renew the bill of goods frustrates the expectation of what is possible, while renewal of the bill of goods intensifies the expectations of unattainable progress. What people have and what they are about to get are equally exasperating to them. Accelerating change has become both addictive and intolerable. At this point the balance among stability, change, and tradition has been upset; society has lost both its roots in shared memories and its bearings for innovation. Judgment on precedents has lost its value. One of the major objections against a stationary-state economy is the fear that the production of a limited and durable number of goods would set intolerable limits on the freedom of innovation and of scientific exploration. This would be justified if I were discussing the transition from the present industrial society to its next model; clean and limited production of goods and unlimited growth in

the service sector. I am not, however, discussing the evolution of industrial society, but the transition to a new mixed mode of production.

Industrial innovations are planned, trivial, and conservative. The renewal of convivial tools would be as unpredictable, creative, and lively as the people who use them. Scientific progress is also dulled by the present identification of research with industrial development. Most of the cost of research derives from its competitive nature and pressure; most of its tools are restricted to people who have been carefully programmed to look at the world through the prisms of profit and power; most of its goals are set by the need for more power and efficiency. Leisurely scientific research does not exclude a bevatron or some ultracentrifuges; removal of access restrictions now created by schools would again admit the curious, rather than the orthodox, to the alchemist's vault; and study for its own sake would produce more surprises than team research on how to eliminate production snags.

A changeless society would be as intolerable for people as the present society of constant change. Convivial reconstruction requires limits on the rate of compulsory change. An unlimited rate of change makes lawful community meaningless. Law is based on the retrospective judgment of peers about circumstances that occur ordinarily and are likely to occur again. If the rate of change which affects all circumstances accelerates beyond some point, such judgments cease to be valid. Lawful society breaks down. Social control does not accommodate community participation and becomes the function of experts. Educators define how people are to be trained and retrained throughout their lives - shaped and reshaped until they fit the demands of industry and are attracted by its profits. Ideologues define what is right or wrong. The tooling of man for the milieu becomes the major industry when this milieu changes beyond a certain rate; then man's need for language and law, for memories and myths, imposes limits to the change of tools. [92]

6. Frustration

I have identified five realms in each of which the efficiency of

tools can upset the balance of life. Faulty technology can render the environment uninhabitable. Radical monopoly can force the demand for affluence to the point of paralyzing the ability to work. Overprogramming can transform the world into a treatment ward in which people are constantly taught, socialized, normalized, tested, and reformed. Centralization and packaging of institutionally produced values can polarize society into irreversible structural despotism. And, finally, engineered obsolescence can break all bridges to a normative past. In each or several of these dimensions a tool can threaten survival by making it unfeasible for most people to relate themselves in action to one of the great dimensions of their environment.

In the assessment of society it is not sufficient to select just one of these realms. Each one of these balances must be preserved. Even clean and equally distributed electricity could lead to intolerable radical monopoly of power tools over man's personal energy. Not only compulsory schools but pervasive teaching media can be used to upset the balance of learning or to polarize society into an oppressive meritocracy. Any form of engineering can lead to unendurable obsolescence. It is true that man's physical niche is threatened; but just as he evolved within one particular physiological environment, so he also evolved within a social, political and psychological environment which can also be irreversibly destroyed. Mankind may wither and disappear because he is deprived of basic structures of language, law, and myth, just as much as he can be smothered by smog. Future shock can destroy what is human just as much as radical monopoly or social polarization.

I have argued that in each of five realms conceptual criteria can be used to recognize escalating imbalance. These criteria serve as guidelines for political processes by which the members of a technological society can develop constitutive boundaries within [93] which tools must be kept. Such boundaries circumscribe the kind of power structures that can be kept under the control of people. By growing beyond this range, tools escape political control. Man's ability to claim his rights is extinguished by his bondage to processes over which he has no say. Biological functions, work, meaning, freedom, and roots - insofar as he can still enjoy them -

are reduced to concessions, which optimize the logic of tools. Man is reduced to an indefinitely malleable resource of a corporate state. Without constitutive limits translated into constitutional provisions survival in dignity and freedom is squelched.

Present research is overwhelmingly concentrated in two directions: research and development for breakthroughs to the better production of better wares and general systems analysis concerned with protecting man for further consumption. Future research ought to lead in the opposite direction; let us call it counterfoil research. Counterfoil research also has two major tasks; to provide guidelines for detecting the incipient stages of murderous logic in a tool; and to devise tools and tool systems that optimize the balance of life, thereby maximizing liberty for all.

Counterfoil research is not a new branch of science, nor is it some interdisciplinary project. It is the dimensional analysis of the relationship of man to his tools. It seems obvious that each person lives in several concentric social environments. To each social environment there corresponds a set of natural scales. This is true for the primary group, for the production unit, for the city, the state, and the organization of men on the globe. To each of these social environments there correspond certain characteristic distances, periods, populations, energy sources, and energy sinks. In each of these dimensions tools that require time periods or spaces or energies much beyond the order of corresponding natural scales are dysfunctional. They upset the homeostasis which renders the particular environment viable. At present we tend to define human needs in terms of abstract goals and treat [94] these as problems to which technocrats can apply escalating solutions. What we need is rational research on the dimensions within which technology can be used by concrete communities to implement their aspirations without frustrating equivalent aspirations by others.

The barriers beyond which destruction looms are of a different nature from the boundaries within which a society freely constrains its tools. The former establish the realm of possible survival; the latter determine the shape of a culturally preferred

environment. The former define the conditions for uniform regimentation; the latter set the conditions of convivial justice. The boundaries of doom are constitutive requirements common to all postindustrial societies. Statutory characteristics setting more narrow bounds than those absolutely necessary are the result of joint options made in a commonweal, as a result of its members' defining their life style and their level of liberty.

Supersonic transports could be easily ruled out to protect the environment, air transport to avoid social polarization, cars to protect against radical monopoly. The balance of purpose I want to highlight at this point provides a further criterion by which to select desirable tools. In view of this balance it might even be possible to exclude public transportation moving at high velocity.

There is a form of malfunction in which growth does not yet tend toward the destruction of life, yet renders a tool antagonistic to its specific aims. Tools, in other words, have an optimal, a tolerable, and a negative range. Tolerable overefficiency also disturbs a balance, but a balance of a subtler and more subjective kind than those discussed before. The balance here threatened is that between personal cost and return. It can be expressed more generally as the perception of the balance between means and ends. When ends become subservient to the tools chosen for their sake, the user first feels frustration and finally either abstains from their use or goes mad. Compulsory maddening behavior in Hades was considered the ultimate punishment reserved for blasphemy. [95]

Sisyphus was forced to keep rolling a stone uphill, only to see it roll hack down. When maddening behavior becomes the standard of a society, people learn to compete for the right to engage in it. Envy blinds people and makes them compete for addiction.

Wherever the maximum velocity of any one type of commuter vehicle grows beyond a certain mph, the travel time and the cost of transportation for the median commuter is increased. If the maximum velocity at any one point of a commuter system goes beyond a certain mph, most people are obliged to spend more time in traffic jams, or waiting for connections, or recovering from accidents. They will also have to spend more time paying for

the transportation system they are compelled to use.

The critical velocity depends to a certain extent on a variety of factors: geography, culture, market controls, level of technology, and money flow. With so many variables affecting a quantity, it would seem that its value could fluctuate over a very wide range. Just the contrary is true. Once it is understood that we refer to any vehicular velocity in the transportation of people within a community, we find that the range within which the critical velocity can vary is very narrow. It is, in fact, so narrow and so low that it seems improbable and not worth the time of most traffic engineers to worry about.

Commuter transportation leads to negative returns when it admits, anywhere in the system, speeds much above those reached on a bicycle. Once the barrier of bicycle velocity is broken at any point in the system, the total per capita monthly time spent at the service of the travel industry increases.

High output leads to time lack. Time becomes scarce, partly because it takes time to consume goods and to undergo therapies, and partly because dependence on production makes abstention from it more costly. The richer we get in a consumer society, the more acutely we become aware of how many grades of value - of both leisure and labor - we have climbed. The higher we are on the [96] pyramid, the less likely we are to give up time to simple idleness and to apparently nonproductive pursuits. The joy of listening to the neighborhood finch is easily overshadowed by stereophonic recordings of "Bird Songs of the World", the walk through the park downgraded by preparations for a packaged bird-watching tour into the jungle. It becomes difficult to economize time when all commitments are for the long run. Staffan Linder points out that there is a strong tendency for us to over-commit the future, so that w hen the future becomes present, we seem to be conscious all the time of having an acute scarcity, simply because we have committed ourselves to about thirty hours a day instead of twenty-four. In addition to the mere fact that time has competitive uses and high marginal utility in an affluent society, this overcommitment creates a sense of pressure and harriedness...

Transportation beyond bicycle speeds demands power inputs from the environment. Velocity translates directly into power, and soon power needs increase exponentially. In the United States, 22 percent of the energy converted drives vehicles, and another 10 percent keeps roads open for them. The amount of energy is comparable to the total energy - except for domestic heating - required for the combined economies of India and China. The energy used up in the United States for the sole purpose of driving vehicles built to accelerate beyond bicycle speed would suffice to add auxiliary motors to about twenty times that many vehicles for people all over the world who want to move at bicycle speeds and do not or cannot push the pedals because they are sick or old, or because they want to transport a heavy load or move over a great distance, or because they just want to relax. Simply on the basis of equal distribution on a world-wide scale, speeds above those [98] attained by bicycles could be ruled out. It is of course mere fantasy to assume an egalitarian consensus sufficiently strong to accept such a proposal. At closer inspection though, many communities will find that the very same speed limit necessary for equal distribution of mobility is also very close to the optimum velocity giving maximum value to community life. At 20 mph constant speed Phileas Fogg could have made his trip around the world in half of eighty days. Simulation studies would be useful for exploring imaginative policies that seek optimal liberty with convivial power tools. To whose advantage would Calcutta's traffic flow stabilize if speeds were limited to 10 mph? What price would Peru's military pay for limiting the nation's speed to 20 mph? What gains in equality, activity, health, and freedom would result from limiting all other vehicles to the speed of bicycles and sailing ships?..

Counterfoil research is concerned first with an analysis of increasing marginal disutility and the menace of growth. It is then concerned with the discovery of general systems of institutional structure which optimize convivial production. This kind of [99] research meets psychological resistance. Growth has become addictive. Like heroin addiction, the habit distorts basic value judgments. Addicts of any kind are willing to pay increasing amounts for declining satisfactions. They have become tolerant to escalating marginal disutility. They are blind to deeper frustration

because they are absorbed in playing for always mounting stakes. Minds accustomed to thinking that transportation ought to provide speedy motion rather than reduction of the time and effort spent moving are boggled by this contrary hypothesis. Man is inherently mobile, and speeds higher than those he can achieve by the use of his limbs must be proven to be of great social value to warrant support by public sacrifice.

Withdrawal from growth mania will be painful, but mostly for members of the generation which has to experience the transition and above all for those most disabled by consumption. If their plight could be vividly remembered, it might help the next generation avoid what they know would enslave them.

Summary of Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame Press, 1981)

Compiled by Malcolm Schluenderfritz and Colin Miller

General Introduction

The following is a summary of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (AV). It is compiled for teaching and discussion purposes, not least because the book itself can be technical and difficult at times. The difficulty of the book, however, has largely to do with its academic audience; the arguments themselves are not difficult for those of us who are not professional philosophers to grasp. It lends itself well to summary, not least in the attempt to grasp his *big picture* argument and its consequences for living as Christians today.

MacIntyre died in 2025. He is commonly held to be one of the most important philosophers of the 20th century, and AV is his best-known work. Originally from Scotland, he spent his youth (up to about age 55) as a Marxist, and converted (or reverted) to Catholicism after writing AV. He never got a PhD, but he settled down teaching at Notre Dame for the longest portion of his career up to his recent death. AV was the work that put him on the map back in the early '80's, and he went on to write a half-dozen other monumental works and countless articles. All of them developed basic positions he sketched in AV, most of them brilliantly, but none of them as earth-shattering as AV itself. His writing defies categorization, spanning the history of philosophy, ethics, epistemology, philosophy of language, and theology.

He is widely taken up by Christians for a variety of purposes, though he challenges received ways of understanding the Christian tradition as often as he underwrites them. In this book, you can expect him to be making significant contributions to our notions of tradition, community, interpretation, knowledge, "relativism," discipleship, virtue ethics, human action, history, the person, the social sciences, and psychology, to name just those that come to mind.

AV is also a withering critique of present society, both its liberal and conservative status quo, and most other positions too. It's a lifechanging book, and it revitalized the notion of the Church for many of us, even though it doesn't treat the Church directly at all. It will show us why small communities of Christian practice are, basically, the only possible way the Church can continue to thrive today.

In addition to summarizing MacIntyre's argument as faithfully as possible, I (Colin) have also included occasional commentary, usually with reference to the applicability of the text to the Christian life. Below, those comments are clearly marked off from the summary itself. What follows is designed to convey the gist of this very important work in an accessible way. I think it does that well enough.

Chapter 1: A Disquieting Suggestion

MacIntyre introduces his main thesis with an analogy. He asks us to

> Imagine that the natural sciences were to suffer the effects of a catastrophe. A series of environmental disasters are blamed by the general public on scientists. Widespread riots occur, laboratories are burnt down, physicists are lynched, books and instruments are destroyed. Finally a Know-Nothing political movement takes power and successfully abolishes science teaching in schools and universities, imprisoning and executing the remaining scientists. Later still there is a reaction against this destructive movement and enlightened people seek to revive science, although they have largely forgotten what it was. But all that they possess are fragments: a knowledge of experiments detached from any knowledge of the theoretical context which gave them significance; parts of theories unrelated either to the other bits and pieces of theory which they possess or to experiment; instruments whose use has been forgotten; half-chapters from books, single pages from articles, not always fully legible because torn and charred. Nonetheless all these fragments are embodied in a set of practices which go under the revived names of physics, chemistry, and biology. Adults argue with each other about the respective merits of relativity theory, evolutionary theory and phlogiston theory, although they possess only a very partial knowledge of each. Children learn by heart the surviving portions of the periodic table and recite as incantations some of the theorems of Euclid. Nobody, or almost nobody, realizes that what they are doing is not natural science in any proper sense at all. For everything that they do and say conforms to certain canons of consistency and coherence and those contexts which would be needed to make sense of what they are doing have been lost, perhaps irretrievably. The hypothesis which I wish to advance is that in the actual world which we inhabit the language of morality is in the same state of grave disorder as the language of natural science in the imaginary world which I described. What we possess, if this view is true, are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived. (AV, 1-2, all page numbers from the 3rd Edition.)

This is the argument that he's going to unpack for us throughout this work. He'll argue that there was (1) once a time when moral thought and practice was in relatively good working order. Then came (2) a breakup of moral thought and practice analogous to the one he describes in his example. Finally, there came (3) a time, which he thinks we are in now, when we use bits and pieces of moral language in more or less arbitrary and

incoherent ways, but without knowing it. It is this that leads to our interminable debates about morality, which are embodied in our culture in many ways.

Chapter 2 – Emotivism

MacIntyre starts into his argument by noting that, in our society, moral disagreements are interminable. Moreover, we have no agreed-upon, rational way to reach an agreement about them. MacIntyre presents three commonly debated topics as examples: war, abortion, and property rights. He summarizes some of the common positions on these topics, and states that these debates are typical of the fundamental debates in today's world.

MacIntyre notes that debates about these matters share "conceptual incommensurability." This means that while arguments about a particular issue are often logically valid, opposing sides depend on radically different first premises which there is no rational way to weigh against one another. For instance, one party argues for a state regulation of wealth based on the first principle of *equality*, and another argues against such regulation based on the first principle of private *property rights*. But there is no logical way to weigh *equality* against *property rights*, and so we *begin* at an impasse. And this sort of thing occurs in virtually all our moral debates. This means our moral engagements amount to merely *asserting* one premise against another. We are ships passing in the night. This, he says, is what we should expect if our moral language had suffered the kind of breakdown described in the last chapter.

MacIntyre then says that what he has suggested about the *history* of our moral concepts has today become a common position about *all morality*. In other words, modern people think moral debate is fruitless not because there has been a catastrophic breakdown to a well-functioning moral system, but because all moral argument is by nature irrational and always has been, because it's never been anything more than the assertion of my own preferences.

This idea is a form of what is often called "relativism" – that all moral judgments, are nothing more than expressions of my own personal opinion, and therefore always relative to each individual. MacIntyre further specifies our culture's relativism by calling it "emotivist". Emotivists make moral judgements based merely on their feelings or "intuitions," and, as a moral theory, emotiv*ism* is the philosophical claim that all moral judgements ultimately boil down to the assertion of one feeling or intuition against another. There is nothing rational about them, however much they might make a *show* of being reasonable. Emotivist thinkers distinguish between moral judgments and factual judgments. In their view, when making a moral judgment such as "murder

is wrong", what we really mean is "I dislike murder, and I wish you would not murder others."

Emotivism is the view MacIntyre is going to be contending with throughout this book. Ultimately, he thinks that if his own view is not true, emotivism wins. Even though he thinks it's fundamentally incoherent, he notes that today emotivism has wide cultural influence. We are all inclined to slide into thinking that our judgements of right and wrong, spiritual and unspiritual, the voice of God or the devil, can be based in what we feel or intuit. So it is in response to emotivism that MacIntyre will defend his own theory.

Chapter 3: Emotivism: Social Content and Social Context

In this chapter MacIntyre is going to analyze our society as the kind of society in which emotivism is at home. For MacIntyre, philosophy of all kinds always has a corresponding social embodiment: there are no purely abstract truths (or lies), for these are always embedded in communities of practice that make those ideas live and persuasive.

The key social aspect of emotivisim, MacIntyre argues, is that it makes all our relationships *manipulative*, or, especially under the influence of capitalism, *competitive*. In manipulative relationships, we treat others as means to achieve our ends, rather than ends in themselves.

MacIntyre thinks that the best way to get a grip on this central aspect of our emotivist society is by thinking of it as a play with central "characters". This notion of a character is a supremely penetrating concept of social *and* moral analysis, for it serves to allow us to identify in any given social order where the real moral, spiritual, psychological and political "weight" lies: what it looks like and feels like to live within that society. Thus "characters", in MacIntyre's use of the term, do not just have roles, but *believe* in their roles. They think they are important, because others do too. Cultures are thus largely defined by their stock characters.

MacIntyre argues that the three main characters of our time all represent an emotivist position on morality: (1) the rich aesthete (by which he means, basically, consumerists obsessed with money, entertainment, comfort and security), (2) the therapist, and (3) the bureaucratic manager. All three represent fundamentally manipulative social relations.

The rich aesthete is only concerned with whatever competitive economic advantage will allow him to preserve his way of life and experiences. He represents our dominant attitude to economic life.

The therapist is involved in manipulating our emotions in whatever way is necessary for us to function within the everyday middle-class American status quo. Emotional peace is the goal, regardless of how his client arrives there, and what he is peaceful *about*. Feelings are all that matter. He represents the dominant attitude toward the soul in our culture.

The bureaucratic manager, as the rest of the book will bear out, is in many ways the most important character, and in a way sums up the other two characters. The manager's job is to facilitate the working of an institution set up for some pre-ordained end, usually making money. As such, the manager takes whatever "endgame" he is handed as a given, and is only concerned with technique, with efficient manipulation.

All three characters are "emotivist" because none of them is involved in considering or reflecting on moral ends, but only on technical means. The aesthete does not consider *if* he should be a consumer, but only how he may continue being one. The therapist does not consider the nature of the soul, or what it's good is, but only how he may make it content with its lot. The manager does not trouble himself with what his company accomplishes, but only with the technique that achieves it most effectively. They thus mirror and reinforce emotivist society, in which argument about ultimate concerns is off the table because it is presumed to be irrational, because it is simply a matter of emotion. All that moral stuff is "bracketed."

As members of emotivist society, we all have a lot of each character in our own characters. We all instinctively think comfort and security are high priority, attach great significance to emotional well-being, and imagine our lives as technicians sitting before a control panel or computer screen, manipulating outcomes. We all, finally, tend towards the view that moral judgments, however much they may be worth *standing* for, are nevertheless not worth *reasoning* about. The three characters represent, in other words, the most common forms of life in our society, and so our (emotivist) common sense.

MacIntyre adds that, within our culture, the emotivist "self" – the conception of a "person" that it implies – takes on a sort of "ghostly" character. You can't find it, it's ephemeral and hard to pin down. This is because our moral principles have become disembedded from the local moral communities, traditions, and histories in which they used to make sense. Now we still have moral principles, but we are not sure why. Our older, more stable, moral self-hood was lost in the transition to modernity, which thought it could "liberate" individual selves from their social context (more on this below). But the irony is of course that the emotivist is the creation of a very particular modern society, which MacIntyre has been outlining.

This modern self and its social context forms the deep *agreement* which underlies our modern political debates. All take for granted the isolated, ghostly, uncontextualied individual, shorn of local community. So there come to be only two options. On the one side are the champions of individual liberty (capitalism), on the other the champions of bureaucratic planning (socialism). But both groups agree that these are the only two modes of existence that are available, because they agree that the emotivist self is the only kind of human possible.

Chapter 4: The Predecessor Culture

MacIntyre says that the social changes that made possible the emergence of the emotivist can be traced to certain key philosophers. To understand this claim, we have to examine the history of the Enlightenment project to provide a *rational* basis for morality, for it is only in the light of this project's failure that the emotivist view that morality is *irrational* has become dominant. MacIntyre sets out to do so by working backward, chronologically speaking, from three famous philosophers: Soren Kierkegaard, Immanuel Kant, and David Hume.

Kierkegaard was the first to suggest that morality was a matter of the arbitrary choice of first principles. But he was responding to Kant's failure to provide a purely rational basis for morality. For Kant, if moral imperatives are rational, then they must be the same for all rational beings, rather like the rules of arithmetic. And so Kant developed his famous "categorical imperative", whereby we can say we have a moral duty if and only if the action in question is something we would will for all other rational people to do. It's not far from the golden rule.

Kant's attempt, MacIntyre thinks, however, quickly breaks down, for it never actually amounts to what it claims to be. Among other failures, Kant ultimately gives no *rational* reason why we *should* do what we can will all other rational people to do. He ends up simply *asserting* that many of us have this intuition. And so Kant's project of founding morality on reason ends up being irrational. Kierkegaard rightly saw Kant's failure, and so concluded that morality simply *was* irrational.

Kant himself, however, was reacting to the failure of Hume to found morality on *desire*. This is the view that what we desire to do tells us what is good. Hume failed to explain, however, which of our many desires are supposed to be taken as *legitimate* guides, and which should be redirected or reeducated. We can't decide between our many rival desires merely on the principle of following our desires.

Thus the Enlightenment attempt to found morality on reason alone failed, and the net result of this was to pave the way for our modern view that morality itself has no rational basis.

Chapter 5: Why the Enlightenment Project Had to Fail

In this chapter MacIntyre argues that the enlightenment project of justifying morality, key players of which we have just surveyed, failed because it was impossible from the beginning. For it was the attempt to build a system of morality around the fragments of an at-one-time coherent system, but without reincorporating the other essential fragments.

The basic shape of that project was as follows. All enlightenment thinkers actually shared a broadly similar view of what rules of morality are – the specific "should" and oughts": don't lie, be humble, respect your elders, etc. For they all grew up in broadly the same quasi-Christian European culture. So they all *agreed* on what a good person should do.

They also agreed about the nature of any possible rational justification of morality. They all think such a justification would be based on some *key features of human nature* as it currently is: reason (Kant) or desire (Hume) or usefulness (Bentham, Mill – to whom we'll come shortly). We *ought* to do things because we are such and such a kind of being.

The only thing they really disagreed about was which part of human nature the rules should be derived from. The project was then to show how the "oughts" are grounded in that human nature.

MacIntyre, however, argues that any form of this project was bound to fail, because it left out one essential part of moral scheme which had preceded the Enlightenment. The rules and human-nature-as-it-is were indeed two key parts of that scheme. But there was also a third one: human-nature-as-it-*should*-be.

In other words, all pre-Enlightenment morality, MacIntyre says, had three parts.
1. A view of human nature as it is.
2. A view of human nature as it *should* be.
3. A set of rules or moral precepts the following of which would, over time, transform a person from #1 to #2.

The inclusion of #2 meant, in philosophical jargon, that the moral scheme which preceded the Enlightenment was a "teleological" one. "Teleology" is an account (-ology) of the human's final end or goal (teleo-, from the Greek *telos*, a goal). The end or goal of a human is what we were made for, and therefore what we should be. For Aristotle, whom MacIntyre will use as the chief representative of this view, this was social life in an ancient Greek city. For Christians, it's loving God and our neighbor, or life in the Garden of Eden, or something like that. For others, it has been pleasure (Epicurus/hedonism), or glory in battle (ancient Rome or Homer). Each of these "teleologies" provides a (different) account of what the best is for human being, or in

other words, what his "essential nature" is – or yet again, as it is sometimes put, what true "human flourishing" looks like. Each of those I have given disagrees with each other – they provide a *different* end – but unlike almost all modern moralities, they *do* provide one.

It's also essential to note that, on these pre-modern accounts, human-nature-as-it-is (#1) is *not* in optimal working order. For these thinkers, we are currently deformed in some way: we are sinful, or we are poorly educated, or we are deformed by our society, or corrupted by our lusts, or underdeveloped by reason of our poverty, or whatever. Thus the task of ethics, all the way up until about the year 1500, was always to guide the initially un-formed or de-formed state of human nature toward its goal.

The Enlightenment philosophers, by contrast, in accordance with MacIntyre's initial moral catastrophe scenario, only inherited two fragments of this original three-part moral schema. But, as such, trying to work out how (#3) could be derived from (#1) without (#2) necessarily proved impossible. For the rules of morality were never meant to be derived from human-nature-as-it-is, but from human-nature-as-it-should-be (#2). Indeed, because the stock of moral norms (#3) were originally derived from human-nature-as-it-should-be, in order to lead human-nature-as-it-is *toward* the way it should be, such norms will usually be those that human-nature-as-it-is has a strong tendency to *disobey.* Human-nature-as-it-is will never provide a good basis for morality.

Chapter 6: Some Consequences of the Failure of the Enlightenment Project

In this chapter MacIntyre circles back and treats in more depth another major school that tried to justify morality by basing it on reason, the "utilitarians." These thinkers, and most famously Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and his disciple John Stewart Mill (1806-1873), say that an action is good if it results in the most good for the most people – if, in other words, the action is *useful.* "Utilitarian" thus means "those who judge morality by usefulness." This school of thought was a response to Kant's failure and so an effort to find a different kind of ground for morality.

But, MacIntyre thinks, this solution is full of problems, most of which are recognized by philosophers today. The biggest problem he names is that utilitarianism by its very nature is committed providing a definition of what "happiness" is, and then quantifying "amounts" of it, so that happiness deriving from particular actions can be weighed against one another. Usually the answer has been happiness means maximizing a certain kind of pleasure and minimizing a certain kind of suffering or pain. Yet these are in fact impossible to quantify, and so impossible to make the rational ground for morality. For there are many kinds of pleasures and pains, and so many kinds of happiness. Appeals to pleasure can't help me decide between drinking a beer

and swimming, and appeals to happiness can't help me decide between a career in the military and joining a monastery. So we can add utilitarianism to the list of failed Enlightenment projects.

So we are now left in the position that MacIntyre dramatized at the beginning. We continue to use moral expressions (whether we know it or not) as if they were part of coherent or rational tradition, but the vast majority of people (usually without ever being aware of it) are able to name no such rational grounds. And yet we still use moral expressions to get what we want. This, once again, is "emotivism."

This leads to some noteworthy practical social consequences. On the one hand, MacIntyre reminds us, it means we are a highly *manipulative* society. And this sheds light, MacIntyre thinks, on three "emotivist" features our unprecedented social order: rights, protest, and unmasking.

By "rights" MacIntyre means those rights which are alleged to belong to human beings as a part of their very moral nature. He's not questioning, of course, the existence of *legal* rights, which obviously exist because they are codified in law. He means the concept of moral "rights" that I possess simply by existing, that inhere somehow in my person. Such rights, like the concept of utility, he thinks is another modern fiction. And this for at least two reasons. First, rights of this kind don't appear in the history of human culture until at least 1400 CE. This does not mean that such rights do not exist, but it should make us suspicious that perhaps they showed up to compensate for the incoherence involved in the breakup of the three-part moral scheme MacIntyre has been outlining.

The questionable nature of rights is further substantiated by the fact that professional philosophers have been unable to come up with any good reasons for asserting that they exist. Every philosophical attempt to provide a basis for them has failed, as evidenced by the continued and divergent attempts to provide one.

So MacIntyre claims that, like utility, inalienable moral rights are a fiction. So it is no surprise that when rights and utility are pitted against one another, as they often are in contemporary moral debate, or against concepts of traditional morality, there is no rational way of deciding how to weigh them. This situation, MacIntyre goes on, leads to the incoherence of modern politics, which are fundamentally based on debates between an individualism that appeals to rights and bureaucratic organizations that appeal to utility. But if both these concepts are incommensurable fictions, then these political debates, like their moral counterparts, can have only the appearance of rationality.

And this sheds light on the prominent role played by *protests* and *indignation* in our culture. These, he thinks, arise from the fundamental irrationality of our moral utterances. Protests are generally focused on the idea that the rights of a particular

individual or group of individuals are being infringed on in the name of utility. And they are characteristically not arguments, but theatre. Their shrillness stems from the inability of the protestors to win an argument, while the self-righteousness of the protestors stems from their counterbalancing inability to actually lose an argument. And so protestors are generally talking to themselves.

Such an absence of rationality also points to the importance of "unmasking" in modern discourse. Although most people use their own moral arguments in good faith, it is also paradoxically quietly assumed that everyone (else) is using their supposedly moral positions to mask an arbitrary will to power. Because of this, modern political discourse becomes an endless unmasking of ulterior motives and hidden power grabs. And this is in a way exactly right, for at the end of the day all there can be to emotivism is the assertion of one power against the other. Politics today therefore tends to take on the form of pointing out one power inequity after another.

At this point, MacIntyre returns to consider the central character of modern society, the bureaucratic manager. His special status and authority arises from his claim to have special knowledge and expertise in controlling social realities like corporations, economics and government. But, MacIntyre asks us to consider, what if not only rights and utilities are fictions, but also the managers' claim to social effectiveness? What if he in fact can't organize and control people the way he claims, because the knowledge required to be an "expert" in "social engineering" does not exist?

> What would it be like if social control were indeed a masquerade? Consider the following possibility: that what we are oppressed by is not power, but impotence; that one key reason why the presidents of large corporations do not, as some radical critics believe, control the United States is that they do not even succeed in controlling their own corporations; that all too often, when imputed organizational skill and power are deployed and the desired effect follows, all that we have witnessed is the same kind of sequence as that to be observed when a clergyman is fortunate enough to pray for rain just before the unpredicted end of a drought; that the levers of power – one of managerial experience's own key metaphors – produce effects unsystematically and too often only coincidently related to the effects of which their users boast. (75)

This is what he's going to spend the next two chapters establishing.

Chapter 7: "Fact," Explanation, and Expertise

There are two parts of the manager's claim to authority: (1) a domain of morally neutral means ("the system") of which he is the expert, and (2) the existence social "laws" (like in social science) which he successfully manipulates in order to achieve

desired outcomes. The first of these presumes an independent realm of "facts", as in the sciences, which can be differentiated from "values", for only in this way could a bureaucratic system be "value free" or morally neutral. This chapter will argue that no such "facts" and hence no "neutral" system exists.

The idea, MacIntyre says, that we can collect objective facts free from values or theoretical interpretation is an error now widely recognized by philosophers of science. Yet "the facts" has become something of popular mythology in our culture. In reality, however, there are no bare facts: we always interpret the world through a particular *theory* that we impose on it, and most of the time the particular theory we are imposing is unknown and invisible to us: we forget we are looking through particular glasses, and the world seems like it's just "there." This is no bad thing, nor is it a thing that we could ever get beyond; it's just part of being human.

And this "theory" that we are always using to see the world also always involves *moral* theories. This, MacIntyre would say, has a lot to do with the fact that the very language we speak always "creates a world" for us, and that our language is never "value-neutral." Again, this is not something that MacIntyre thinks is a bad thing, it's just what human beings *are*. It is in part *by language*, including its "moral" aspects, that we know the world in the first place. Far from being an impediment to knowledge, it's necessary for it. But if our language always contains "values", and our world is always constituted by language, this means that there is no "value-free" realm of facts that the manager can manipulate in a morally neutral way.

What so often seems to us simply the morally neutral world of "facts", MacIntyre says, is actually shot-thru with morality even in the very names that we apply to things. For part of naming a thing is being able to say various things about it, including at least theoretically being able to articulate what it is that makes that thing a good or a bad version of what it is. We all know more or less what good dog, a good watch, or a good chair is, and we could all name things that would make each of those things "bad." A good dog comes when called, a bad dog bites his owner, and so forth. In this way the word "dog" takes its meaning from the role it plays in our lives; the essence of "dog" (what a dog is) is "functional" in this way. In other words, in this view, even natural objects like this are "teleological" – they are defined by what they are good for (and what they are good for is defined by what we *use* them for). What they are cannot be separated from what they should be, or what a good version of one would be like. Facts could not be separated from values. This was the view of the philosopher Aristotle, who will eventually become the hero of this book (and who, as we saw in chapter 5, also applies this teleological view to the human being). Such a view was taken as common sense up until about 500 years ago.

As Aristotle's works fell out of favor around 1500, however, the attempt was made to specify an object purely in terms of physics or biology – it's bare material constitution. Indeed, today this is how we *usually* think about what something is. By the question "What is it *physically*?" we just mean, "What is it?" And this is how we have come to treat human beings as well, not least under the influence of medical science, which, it is claimed, treats the material body without claiming anything about how we *should* behave morally. "Facts," it is thought, have become separable from "values."

Yet this fact-value distinction has been almost universally rejected by philosophers of science during the last 75 years. It's a popular mythology, but it cannot be critically sustained: "bare facts" is a fiction. Not only how we see, and what we theoretically value, but how we live, is always already included in anything we "describe."

This means that the project of creating an objective or morally neutral "human science" is not possible. But this is exactly what would have to be possible for the "manager" (i.e., the CEO or technician or technocrat) to have the kind of neutral "scientific" knowledge that continues to justify our belief in his efficacy and his continued authority in our society. The bureaucrat is thus never neutral, but is always managing a reality that his own (socio-politico-economic) position in society itself helps first to create and then maintain. He *makes* a certain kind of world and certain ways of life while he is managing them.

Thus, bureaucratic management, another key part of our world that masquerades as rational, is revealed to be emotivist – another Nietzschean assertion of the will to power. And of course MacIntyre would not have us miss the fact that this assertion is in service of a very specific regime: the current status quo.

But if the bureaucratic manager is the symbolic embodiment of this present regime, even if his own moral bluff has been called, the question remains if, even on his own terms, he can make good on his claim to effective social control. Do CEOs, technocrats and politicians really rule the world?

Chapter 8: The Character of Generalizations in Social Science and Their Lack of Predictive Power

Do CEOs, technocrats and politicians really rule the world? Do they, more precisely, successfully manipulate it for their own ends? In order to claim this about them, they would have to be successful, like the "hard" sciences are, at predicting the results of their social interventions. They generally do make these claims, at least implicitly, and this is the basis for their authority and social prestige. For instance,

regarding the puzzle of "ending homelessness", I once heard a Catholic Charities CEO say, at a fundraiser, "We know what works." Do they?

MacIntyre claims that they do not, and as evidence he cites the overwhelmingly negative track record of social scientists, statisticians, or anyone, to predict the future. What is the underlying cause of this failure? MacIntyre lists four sources of systemic unpredictability in human affairs.

1. The nature of radical innovation. If nobody has invented the wheel, nobody can imagine anybody having done so, or it will have already been invented! (This only applies to radically new inventions, not improvements on existing concepts or technology.) This means that the future developments of science and technology are unpredictable—and so the future of our society is unpredictable.
2. Each individual is unable to predict his own future actions; or more precisely, unable to predict his own future *decisions*. If someone can predict his own future decisions, they are no longer future decisions; they are already made. So, even if, in theory, an adequate grasp of circumstances made it possible to predict the actions of *others*, because our *own* actions are among the conditions which will influence the actions of others, and we can never predict them. In other words, as Dostoyevsky so convincingly showed in *Notes From the Underground*, the human will is always unpredictable, especially our own, and *especially* when we think we know exactly what someone, including ourselves, will do.
3. Game theory is premised upon the rational calculation of what self-interested rational actors would do within a given set of circumstances. And some thinkers believe that it can be used to predict the future course of human affairs. On the contrary, MacIntyre says, it proves the opposite. Game theory situations are infinitely reflexive: I'm trying to figure out what you will do, which means I need to know what you think I will do, which means I will have to know what you think I will do given what you think I think you will do, and so on forever. In short, all rational and self-interested players in a game are trying to simultaneously predict the behavior of others, while making themselves unpredictable. Especially in real life, where all are playing multiple games at once, the results are utterly unpredictable.
4. Purely contingent happenings also affect human affairs. MacIntyre gives as examples the molehill that killed William III or the cold that kept Napoleon from exercising direct command at Waterloo.

MacIntyre says that this means that human life has a certain irreducibly large measure of unpredictability to it. There are, to be sure, plenty of phenomena that do make life somewhat predictable – scheduling patters, daily routines, regularities in nature and

psychology, etc. But these exist along side the unpredictable items, making the whole ultimately, and especially management of large complex human systems, unpredictable.

All this means that the bureaucratic managerial project is not in fact what it seems to be. As MacIntyre puts it: "The concept of managerial effectiveness is after all one more contemporary moral fiction and perhaps the most important of them all. The dominance of the manipulative mode in our culture is not and cannot be accompanied by very much actual success in manipulation. I do not of course mean that the activities of purported experts do not have effects and that we do not suffer from those effects and suffer gravely. But the notion of social control embodied in the notion of expertise is indeed a masquerade. *Our social order is in a very literal sense out of our, and indeed anyone's, control. No one is or could be in charge* [my italics]...Hence the manager as *character* is other than he at first sight seems to be: the social world of every day hard-headed pragmatic no-nonsense realism which is the environment of management is one which depends for its sustained existence on the systematic perpetuation of misunderstanding and of belief in fictions. The fetishism of commodities has been supplemented by another just as important fetishism, that of bureaucratic skills...It follows from my whole argument that...in the social world of corporations and governments private preferences are advanced under the cover of identifying the presence or absence of the findings of experts...The effects...have been to produce *not* scientifically managed social control, but a skillful dramatic imitation of such control. It is histrionic success which gives power and authority in our culture. The most effective bureaucrat is the best actor" (107).

[Colin's comments: With this chapter, then, MacIntyre has both dealt a death blow to his own previous commitment to Marxism, and provided an invaluable service for Christianity. The former, because most Marxist projects depend upon social engineering for the planning of an idealized social order either in state socialism or in the transition to communism. Planning and prediction on such a scale, he has shown, is simply not within the capacity of human beings.

Rather, he's presented what is essentially an argument for *localism.* In particular here I mean that he has shown the limits of human practical reason, or the scale at which we are able to comprehend and act rationally in our world. These limits are therefore also the limits of our social and political claims and predictions. Our ability to engineer social outcomes is much more minimal than has been assumed, and is fraught with uncertainty and error even on small levels such as the family. Try to get even a small group of people to do what you want (like your kids), or try to orchestrate

something basic like the traffic flow through a small town, and we see in practice the kind of unpredictability MacIntyre has been discussing.

Our strategies in these kind of projects are so often not only just somewhat off, but indeed achieve exactly the *opposite* of what we intended, and this in a way that could not even *in principle* have been predicted ahead of time. If this is true even on such a limited scale, it follows that bureaucrats' and politicians' claims to be able to predict the outcomes of their policies on statewide or nationwide or worldwide scales are masquerades indeed, but masquerades that they usually believe themselves and that secure them power, though not the kind of power they claim. Presidential candidates' claims to improve the economy, for instance, cannot be anything more than lightly educated guesses, for our economy is so bewilderingly complex that no one could possibly claim to understand it, much less control it. Yet to be a politician at all today, MacIntyre says, is to learn to trade in such fictions. Indeed the lack of predictive power that MacIntyre showcases in this chapter is perhaps the biggest blind spot, as well as Achilles' heel, of our age of mass-politics and mass-bureaucracy. Human reason and prediction can only operate on a much smaller, local, parochial, neighborhood level, and that with the mixture of much error. Christian involvement in politics therefore, when aimed at an end, should only be hyper-local. Or, when it is not, it should always be done entirely *on principle*, and without any view to achieving any particular outcome.

But in so disabusing us of our belief in planning and social engineering, and so closing the door on Marxism (socialism) and also most capitalist economic theorizing, he has left the door wide open to Christianity as an alternative *social theory*. Or, more simply put, if the world doesn't work the way we have all been taught by various kinds of social sciences that it works, the Gospel just might be true. Money, power, and sex – the major categories social science has used to analyze the world – might not in fact get to the bottom of things. But if that "real world" of "every day hard-headed pragmatic no-nonsense realism" isn't how reality really works, we are no longer bound to be embarrassed by our naïve acceptance of the Gospel in the light of the claims of the experts who tell us the real deal. It turns out after all there is no "real world" realer than what the Church gives us and there is no "prudence" or "being realistic" that we have to "hold in tension" with and so water down the Sermon on the Mount.

How does reality work? The way the Gospel says it works: that the best insurance is poverty and alms, that suffering love and prayer is the most effective way of achieving anything, that violence is always counterproductive and issues in chaos rather than more control, that the poor are Jesus Christ and not a statistic to be managed, money makes you a slave rather than a master, that the powerful are dominated by their own lusts for power, that only hobbits win in the end, that the grain

of the universe is with those who carry crosses, and so on. MacIntyre has open the door wide for a *Christian* sociology.

Chapter 9: Nietzsche or Aristotle?

This is the hinge chapter that will turn MacIntyre from his negative critique of the modern world to his own positive alternative in the second half of the book. He's going to conclude this first half by saying that there are really only two basic alternatives: Nietzsche or Aristotle. If emotivism, as the dominant moral philosophy of our age, is true, then there is in fact no rational basis for morality whatsoever. This would make Nietzsche right. For he stated better than anyone else that there is in fact nothing more to moral language than the assertion of our own power, and he proposed that, because of this, the only thing to do is for those who can to assert that power and "make up" their own, new morality. These brave, free-thinkers would be the new race of "supermen", like the great Greek heroes of old. As such, Nietzsche successfully demolished all the Enlightenment attempts to provide a rational foundation for morality.

But there is another option, MacIntyre contends. The philosophy of Aristotle stands opposed to Nietzsche at just about every point, including the kind of social world it makes and requires. Indeed the pre-modern moral world that MacIntyre spoke of as suffering the catastrophe he outlined in chapter 1, he thinks, was in essentials an Aristotelian world. So either "something like" Aristotle will turn out to be true (in which MacIntyre includes Christianity as an option), or Nietzsche will turn out to have been right after all. So it is to investigating the claims of Aristotle, and a "philosophy of virtue" in particular, that MacIntyre now turns.

Chapter 10: The Virtues in Heroic Societies

Here and in the following chapters MacIntyre starts to develop his own account of the virtues. But not all accounts of the virtues are the same. So he gives us a selective history of what the virtues meant and how they functioned in important societies. He starts with "heroic societies", by which he means societies like we read about in Homer's *Iliad* or *Odyssey*.

Each individual in a heroic society had a given role and status within a well-defined system of such roles. The key structures were those of kinship and household; these structures define the identity of individuals and prescribe both what is expected of them and what they can expect from others. The virtues, in such societies, are those excellences, whether of body or mind, that allow individuals to fulfill their roles. The morality of these heroic societies was thus a particular, *local,* one. This is helpful for us,

MacIntyre thinks because, contrary to modern assumptions, all morality is to some degree tied to the socially local and particular, and this means it is part of a historic *tradition.* Seen in this light, the modern self again shows its ghostly character: the casting off of tradition and thus the freedom to choose any and all stories would be for Heroic society, and is also for us, to strip ourselves of our humanity.

Chapter 11: The Virtues at Athens

The details are interesting, but need not detain us.

Chapter 12: Aristotle on the Virtues

MacIntyre reminds us that he is not presenting Aristotle as merely as an individual, but a key representative of the tradition which, he is arguing, is the sole alternative to modern emotivism.

For Aristotle, as we have already seen, evaluative statements are in a certain way statements of fact, because they always evaluate to what extent a given action or quality of a person furthers his pursuit of their full human flourishing, the goal or *telos* toward which they move. Human beings instinctively move (or grope) towards this goal in *all* of their actions, whether they know it or not. We *desire* true "goods" because they make us flourish or thrive as the kind of social and rational animals we are. Such flourishing is of course to be distinguished from momentary or fickle pleasure, gladness, or comfort (which is why it's good to avoid the most common translation – "happiness" – which can suggest just that). For instance, in its Christian version, Thomas Aquinas would say the persecuted or even those suffering martyrdom are "flourishing," even if they are supremely uncomfortable, because they are doing what is most in accord with their final end. Suffering and "flourishing" are thus not incompatible. Thus Aristotle carefully distinguishes the good for human beings from money, honor, pleasure or other transitory goods.

Virtues, then, are those qualities that allow an individual consistently to overcome obstacles to human flourishing. Virtues (as well as their opposite vices) are cultivated, like other skills, by repeated practice. They are habits of moral action. We acquire the virtue of *temperance* by repeatedly saying no to our bodily desires for excess, of *generosity* by repeatedly giving, of *forgiveness* by forgiving 70 times 7, and so forth. Individuals may sometimes act rightly without a virtue, by luck or by natural endowment, but only habits give the ability to act rightly in a consistent way. A virtue covers a whole life, a whole *way of living.*

Because of this, virtues cannot be reduced to a set of rules. We don't have virtues in order to follow the rules, we have rules to guide us into the virtues. If we get things

the other way around, we'll be permanently frustrated, for there will always be cases where the proper application of the rules is difficult to determine – perhaps most cases are like this. The ability to discern the proper application of a principle or law is itself the task of the virtues, and *practical wisdom* in particular, a central virtue for the Aristotelian scheme. All this means that having the virtues simply *is* to some simply what it is to flourish: their exercise is what makes us truly "happy."

[Comment: If this is true for Christians, and if, as MacIntyre will be at pains to show through the rest of the book, virtues always require a community, this means that a certain emphasis on "going to heaven" or even "being a saint" can foster a certain unhelpful individualistic unworldliness, precisely because in reality we only get to heaven by "embodying heaven" in our virtues now right here in our material confines, and always with others. Heaven will be a communal existence of always communal and ultimately embodied virtues, which bind our salvation inextricably to one another. So because virtues are means that are also ends, we don't get to heaven unless we practice those virtues, communally, now.]

It's very important not to interpret this account of the virtues in an individualistic way. This is what the focus on rules does. Rules, MacIntyre says, are a substitute for the community of shared life and friendship that gives living examples of what the virtuous person looks like and forms beginners by word and example in the daily tasks and practices of everyday life. As such, friendship is more important even than justice for obtaining the virtues, since justice is the virtue that allows the apportioning of praise and blame within an *existing community* (of friends). And since one can't be friends with everyone within the polis, this underlying friendship is sustained through a network of small groups of friends.

Chapter 13: Medieval Aspects and Occasions

In this chapter MacIntyre deals with odds and ends interesting for philosophers and historians, but that we can leave to the side.

Chapter 14: The Nature of the Virtues

In this chapter MacIntyre develops his account of virtue around his key concept of a practice. "Practices" are complex, cooperative human activities such as farming, the arts, architecture, the running of a school, a farm, a homeschool coop, a community garden, or a hospitality house, in which the virtues take shape. As such, they are the social context – the communities – that allow for the achievement of particular goods *internal* to those communities through human attempts at achieving particular shared goals, such as a successful harvest or well-adjusted children. Working towards such a

goal simultaneously expands both human powers of achieving excellence (virtues) and the human *understanding* of the goods or goals they are seeking, and so our understanding of the practice itself. In other words, practices are open-ended and self-reflective.

Moreover, because they allow us to enhance our very notion of the good we are seeking *as* we are seeking it, any particular practice opens us up to other practices that we may conclude we need to take up in order to achieve the goods of the first practice. This openness beyond itself is potentially limitless, so that beginning with one simple practice, say, violin playing, one may later find oneself involved in practices that concern human life as such. For example, you may find that going to church or providing hospitality is eventually necessary for your practice of violin playing to continue to make sense and to continue to develop. In other words, practices include the notion of moral and intellectual growth.

MacIntyre goes on to explain some of the key terms in this initial definition. The first is the difference between an internal and an external good. He illustrates this by the analogy of a child who doesn't care for chess but is playing it merely to obtain some candy as a reward for winning. The candy is an external good, and the child has no reason to avoid cheating at the game to obtain more candy. On the other hand, if the child comes to care for the experience of playing chess as such, the child will come to realize that cheating defeats the whole internal purpose of chess. The internal goods of chess are those defined by the rules of chess.

Achieving excellence in any practice involves submission to certain standards. Anyone who begins to participate in a practice can only do so by accepting that he is a beginner and that he has to learn from those who have gone before him. He must accept an authority, or become an apprentice to a task, to a teacher, master, and community. It is only this community of authority and its teachers that will show him the way to develop the virtues he will need to be a member of it and help it achieve its common task. He is involved thereby in the quest for common goods, which are the internal goods of the practice, as opposed to goods just for him, which are real goods, but are external to the practice. External goods are always the property of some particular individual, and there is always competition for external goods, whereas internal goods are beneficial for the whole community that participates in a particular practice.

Practices have to be distinguished from institutions, even though they are closely related. Chess is a practice, and chess clubs are institutions. No practice can survive without institutions, but at the same time every practice is always in danger of being corrupted by its institutions. That is because institutions concern themselves with acquiring and allocating the external goods of power and wealth, initially at least to the

benefit of the practice. But very often, the practice comes to serve the institution (think of NFL football), rather than vice-versa, and the goal becomes, typically, money making. One of the roles of the virtues is to protect the internal goods of the practice from the acquisitiveness inherent in institutions.

In fact, the building and sustaining of institutions is an important practice. But in our modern world where there are mainly only individuals and very few practices, all goods tend to be external goods. In this environment, institutions will balloon, as collections of external goods, and further threaten the few practices that do exist. The market, MacIntyre is suggesting, is the greatest institution, since it is perhaps the ultimate pursuit of individual goals. Thus modern commercial society always endangers the virtues, because a society without virtues will be dominated by competition, because it can only recognize external goods rather than internal ones.

Chapter 15: The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life, and the Concept of a Tradition

In this chapter MacIntyre develops two other concepts in his account of the virtues: the unity of a human life and the concept of a tradition.

It is difficult for modern people to conceive their lives as a true unity because modern life is partitioned into many different compartments – the "political", the "religious", the "public", the "private", the "social", the "economic." All these often become not just parts of life but *compartments* of life that in some ways have their own internal logic and are separate from the rest.

But a virtue is a disposition that applies to the whole of life; the same virtues can (and must) be applied in any social setting. A "virtue" that leads to success only in some particular pursuit is merely a professional skill. So at this point MacIntyre says that in order to achieve a picture of our lives as organic whole we have to see our lives as an ongoing *narrative or story.* For narrative, MacIntyre argues, is in fact the way that we naturally go about describing human actions. We do not take individual motions of human bodies – or "bare behavior" – that have meanings in themselves and add them up until we figure out what they are doing. Rather, we tell (ourselves, and others if asked) stories about what we, or other actors, are doing, linking together the past, present, and future in complex ways. Without such a story, actions would simply be unintelligible bodily motions to us. In this way, narrative history is the essential genre for characterizing human actions.

This is important for the moral life because it means that stories, as well as the stories that are other people's lives – parents, teachers, heroes, saints – are primary means of moral formation. They are also the primary way of understanding our lives as a unity and identity. Our dominant stories will determine who we are. This incudes, of

course, the (false but common) dominant story that we have no dominant story, or that I get to pick my dominant story. On the contrary, we all are always already "storied" (which doesn't mean, however, that we can't grow into new stories).

In all this stuff about narrative, MacIntyre is engaging and showing us through a central claim of many different schools of ("postmodern") thought of the last 75 years or so. Namely, that events and actions are only ever *given* meaning by those with sufficient power to so invest them, by imposing meaning on an otherwise meaningless set bare behavior or random events. MacIntyre's approach does not reject this view wholesale – he has plenty of room for social situatedness and the historically contingent – but for him not just *any* interpretation of a course of events is possible, because history, and human actions as part of that history, ultimately have their own sort of intelligibility *as stories*.

So human beings are essentially story-telling animals. We can't answer the question "what am I to do?" if we can't answer the question "of what stories am I a part?" In this way, MacIntyre would say that the concept of a "person" is that of a character from a particular history. Stories are what make us "responsible" – they provide an essential ground of "morality." *All* human actions (voluntary ones) are therefore moral actions, because they all are part of a single meaningful story, no part of which can be detached from rest. And this means both that there can be no compartmentalization of life and that there is no area of life that is non-moral (as has sometimes claimed, for instance, about war or economics).

Human life is thus a (narrative) quest or adventure that can succeed or fail. To set out on such a quest, we have to have at least some idea of the final goal; for without at least a vague idea of where we are going, we can't get started. At the same time, we are not searching for something we fully understand ahead of time; we only fully understand it through the quest itself, since the quest is a sort of education. Practices are this sort of adventure.

[Comment: This is important for the Christian life, for it means that, even within a divinely revealed morality like Christianity, our moral quest is always something we have to *work out within a community as we go*. Revelation does not simply give Christians all the right "answers" ahead of time (as an exhaustive set of rules or whatever): "a quest is not at all that of a search for something already adequately characterized" (219). We also need a community for this quest: "The catalogue of the virtues will therefore include the virtues required to sustain the kinds of households and the kind of political communities in which men and women can seek for the good together and the virtues necessary for philosophical enquiry about the character of the good."]

Another way of naming aspects of the story established by the history of such a communal quest is what we call a "tradition." As part of an adventure, traditions are not static, top-down determinations, a-la Fiddler on the Roof. They are debates about the good life that share particular communities, histories and commitments to the common good, within practices, extended through time. A true tradition is not opposed to rational argument or even conflict; rather, any true tradition contains within itself a certain kind of argument and even conflict about its own identity and purpose. Yet traditions are the touchstones that guide us as we move from the past into the future. As MacIntyre will go on to show in subsequent books, we cannot act or even *think* without traditions. There is no such thing as a tradition-less human being. The only question is, *which* tradition?

Chapter 16: From the Virtues to Virtue and After Virtue

This chapter is about the corruption of the tradition of the virtues over the last 200 years. Interesting for our purposes are the two figures he names as, in certain ways, the last representatives of this tradition: Cobbett and Austen. They are noteworthy for the kinds of community they represent and that they thought was necessary for the virtues to flourish.

William Cobbett (1763-1835) was an agrarian, championing the virtues of the rural folk, and decrying the influence of usury and greed in commodifying and so destroying rural life. By naming Cobbett MacIntyre is flagging that peasant life, or the life on the land, represents the most obvious arena in which a life of practices has disappeared. It is not a coincidence that this disappearance has been virtually identical with the development of industrialism and capitalism, the twin forces that drove the breakup of the agrarian economy in the west.

Jane Austen (1775-1817) in her novels wrote about women who are seeking the telos of a particular kind of social existence by means of married life. In Austen's time, unmarried women for the first time found themselves as social outcasts due to the commodification of labor in the factory system. Once this happens, the woman's historically central place in society as vital to the productive family that procures much of their own sustenance, disappears. Austen wants to recapture that place in the *practice* of the productive family – a small enclave within industrial capitalism for the possibility of the practice of virtue.

Within this Austen emphasizes the virtue of "constancy", which allows an individual to resist the modern temptation to the disintegration (compartmentalization) of the human life. Constancy is perhaps *the* virtue necessary for our age, MacIntyre suggests, for it is precisely the determination to practice the virtues over the whole

course of one's life, opposing the compartmentalization necessary for the industrial economy. MacIntyre goes on to say that in a sense Austen is the last representative of the virtue tradition. From her time forward, the virtues can only be found in restricted and very intentional social spaces.

Chapter 17: Justice as a Virtue: Changing Conceptions

According to MacIntyre, Aristotle saw justice as the necessary basis for political life; a group without a common conception of justice – which is always in part simply agreement on the goodness of a particular way of life – would be unable to form a sustainable community. Just this situation now faces our society. For, as he has shown, not only do we have no moral consensus as a society, but we could have none. We simply have too many disparate concepts of justice and virtue, and we have no way of rationally settling the debates between them. Thus Marx was right when he saw conflict at the heart of modern society, even as he was wrong that this must be characteristic of all (non-communist) societies.

This, MacIntyre points out, has implications for how we understand our constitution and the function of our government, particularly the Supreme Court. It is often thought that the Supreme Court is supposed to apply some set of consistent principles to the judgment of particular laws and cases. But given the state of moral discourse in our society, as he puts it, "politics is civil war carried out by other means."

Thus, whatever we might think about the moral desirability of patriotism, MacIntyre infers, it can't be practiced under such circumstances, for the simple reason that we lack a *patria*, or homeland, in any traditional sense of a shared and agreed upon cultural way of being human. Conflict and fragmentation are our fundamental realities. Thus the government of a modern nation does not represent a moral consensus of the people, but is rather an artifice for imposing a bureaucratic unity because we have no cultural unity. As such, the duties of patriotism become unclear, and "the concept of loyalty to the country or community becomes detached from obedience to the government."

MacIntyre clarifies that he is not voicing an anarchist critique of government as such. Certain forms of government is necessary and legitimate, but our modern government is not such a form. The tradition of the virtues, in other words, is not only at variance with our economic order, but the political order as well. We may still use governance in pragmatic ways to secure the rule of law in particular cases and achieve other limited goals; but we must reject any systemic form of modern politics if we wish to remain morally coherent.

Chapter 18: After Virtue: Nietzsche or Aristotle, Trotsky *and* St. Benedict

MacIntyre now reassesses the two fundamental moral possibilities before us today: Nietzsche and Aristotle. Nietzsche represents the emotivist tradition, and especially the self-conscious *embrace* of the fundamental irrationality of morality – indeed the fundamental irrationality *of our lives* – by the unabashed assertion of our own (will-to-) power. Aristotle represents the recovery of local practices, tradition, and the virtues, embodied for much of its history in various forms in the Christian tradition, but elsewhere as well (and MacIntyre is *not* here making a veiled argument for Christianity, since he did not convert until several years later). So: Nietzsche or Aristotle? The stakes are high, for Nietzsche also represents various form of totalitarianism arising from the assertion of bare power, most obvious in MacIntyre's mind Soviet communism, and colonial/global capitalism. On the other hand Aristotle, or "something like" his account, represents for him really the only possibility of humane social existence.

MacIntyre has argued that Nietzsche is fatal against all Enlightenment attempts to give a rational basis for morality (Hume, Kant, the utilitarians, etc.): they all succumb to Nietzsche's critique as simply assertions of their own will and preferences. Yet, MacIntyre argues, the Aristotelian tradition does not fail in this way. For it arises out of the practice-based communal traditions that MacIntyre has outlined, and thus avoids the sharp edge of Nietzsche's critique, which is focused on the individualistic and subjective nature of morality of the modern world. This is the first reason to think that Nietzsche doesn't win.

The second is that Nietzsche fails is the failure of his own positive program. For Nietzsche's new morality of the heroic "superman" who creates his own morality is actually, on MacIntyre's terms, an impossibility for any human being. For such a superman submits to no authority in society, and has no good other than himself. But if the Aristotelian tradition is correct, it is only in and through shared practices that we can come to an understanding of the good and of virtue in the first place. Moreover, all human beings, even Nietzsche's superman, simply *do* exist in communities of some kind, and always have their morality largely constituted thereby. It is thus no surprise that the droves of de facto emotivist-Nietzschians today, all aspiring to create their own moral universe, by and large have the same morality.

All this means that the Aristotelian tradition emerges as the only viable moral option today.

There will be all kinds of different critics of the position MacIntyre has outlined. The most compelling of these, he thinks, will be the Marxists. Such thinkers argue that Marx managed to rescue the modern notion of human autonomy from the

individualists and instead place it within a certain form of community in which the many problems of the modern world can be resolved.

Yet, MacIntyre argues, Marxism is not actually morally distinct from the rest of modernity. For to justify its own social strategy, Marxists are left to appeal to the same abstract modern principles of utility and right that other modern thinkers do. Secondly, Marxism presents itself as a guide to political practice. But whenever Marxists achieve power they become the same individualistic bureaucratic managers that they critique as oppressive. This was what the Marxist Trotsky had seen happening in the Soviet Union. Thus MacIntyre holds the Marxist political tradition to be exhausted, along with all the other political traditions in our society.

This does not mean, however, that MacIntyre's argument leads only to a general social pessimism. For the development of small enclaves of Aristotelian social forms can indeed provide space for the practice of the virtues, even today. As he says in conclusion (p.263):

> It is always dangerous to draw too precise parallels between one historical period and another; and among the most misleading of such parallels are those which have been drawn between our own age in Europe and North America and the epoch in which the Roman empire declined into the Dark Ages. Nonetheless certain parallels there are. A crucial turning point in that earlier history occurred when men and women of good will turned aside from the task of shoring up the Roman imperium and ceased to identify the continuation of civility and moral community with the maintenance of that imperium. What they set themselves to achieve instead-often not recognizing fully what they were doing- was the construction of new forms of community within which the moral life could be sustained so that both morality and civility might survive the coming ages of barbarism and darkness. If my account of our moral condition is correct, we ought also to conclude that for some time now we too have reached that turning point. What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us. And if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without grounds for hope. This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes pan of our predicament. We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another-doubtless very different-St. Benedict.

23 . Wendell Berry

Two Economies

Some time ago, in conversation with Wes Jackson in which we were laboring to define the causes of the modern ruination of farmland, we finally got around to the money economy. I said that an economy based on energy would be more benign because it would be more comprehensive.

Wes would not agree. "An energy economy still wouldn't be comprehensive enough."

"Well," I said, "then what kind of economy *would* be comprehensive enough."

He hesitated a moment, and then, grinning, said, "The Kingdom of God."

I assume that Wes used the term because he found it, at that point in our conversation, indispensable; I assume so because, in my pondering over its occurrence at that point, I have found it indispensable myself. For the thing that troubles us about the industrial economy is exactly that it is not comprehensive enough, that, moreover, it tends to destroy what it does not comprehend, and that it is *dependent* upon much that it does not comprehend. In attempting to criticize such an economy, we naturally pose against it an economy that does not leave anything out, and we can say without presuming too much that the first principle of the Kingdom of God is that it includes everything; in it, the fall of every sparrow is a significant event. We are in it whether we know it or not and whether we wish to be or not. Another principle, both ecological and traditional, is that everything in the Kingdom of God is joined both to it and to everything else that is in it; that is to say, the Kingdom of God is orderly. A third principle is that humans do not and can never know either all the creatures that the Kingdom of God contains or the whole pattern or order by which it contains them.

The suitability of the Kingdom of God as, so to speak, a place name is partly owing to the fact that it still means pretty much what it has always meant. Because, I think, of the embarrassment that the phrase has increasingly caused among the educated, it has not been much tainted or tampered with by the disinterested processes of academic thought; it is a phrase that comes to us with its cultural strings still attached. To say that we live in the Kingdom of God is both to suggest the difficulty of our

condition and to imply a fairly complete set of culture-borne instructions for living in it. These instructions are not always explicitly ecological, but it can be argued that they are always implicitly so, for all of them rest ultimately on the assumptions that I have given as the second and third principles of the Kingdom of God that we live within order and that this order is both greater and more intricate than we can know. The difficulty of our predicament, then, is made clear if we add a fourth principle: though we cannot produce a complete or even an adequate description of this order, severe penalties are in store for us if we presume upon it or violate it.

I am not dealing, of course, with perceptions that are only Biblical. The ancient Greeks, according to Aubrey de Sélincourt, saw "a continuing moral pattern in the vicissitudes of human fortune," a pattern "formed from the belief that men, as men, are subject to certain limitations imposed by a Power—call it Fate or God—which they cannot fully comprehend, and that any attempt to transcend those limitations is met by inevitable punishment."[1] The Greek name for the pride that attempts to transcend human limitations was *hubris*, and hubris was the cause of what the Greeks understood as tragedy.

Nearly the same sense of necessary human limitation is implied in the Old Testament's repeated remonstrances against too great a human confidence in the power of "mine own hand." Gideon's army against the Midianites, for example, was reduced from thirty-two thousand to three hundred expressly to prevent the Israelites from saying, "Mine own hand hath saved me."[2] A similar purpose was served by the institution of the Sabbath, when by not working, the Israelites were meant to see the limited efficacy of their work and thus to understand their true dependence.

Though I hope that my insistence on the usefulness of the term, the Kingdom of God, will be understood, I must acknowledge that the term is local, in the sense that it is fully available only to those whose languages are involved in Western or Biblical tradition. A person of Eastern heritage, for example, might speak of the totality of all creation, visible and invisible, as "the Tao." I am well aware also that many people would not willingly use either term, or any such term. For these reasons, I do not want to make a statement that is specially or exclusively Biblical, and so I would like now to introduce a more culturally neutral term for that economy that I have been calling the Kingdom of God. Sometimes, in thinking about it, I have called it the Great Economy, which is the name I am going to make do with here—though I will remain under the personal necessity of Biblical reference. And that, I think, must be one of my points: we can name it whatever we wish, but we cannot define it except by way of a religious tradition. The Great Economy, like the Tao or the Kingdom of

God, is both known and unknown, visible and invisible, comprehensible and mysterious. It is, thus, the ultimate condition of our experience and of the practical questions rising from our experience, and it imposes on our consideration of those questions an extremity of seriousness and an extremity of humility.

I am assuming that the Great Economy, whatever we may name it, is indeed—and in ways that are, to some extent, practical—an economy: it includes principles and patterns by which values or powers or necessities are parceled out and exchanged. But if the Great Economy comprehends humans and thus cannot be fully comprehended by them, then it is also not an economy in which humans can participate directly. What this suggests, in fact, is that humans can live in the Great Economy only with great uneasiness, subject to powers and laws that they can understand only in part. There is no human accounting for the Great Economy. This obviously is a description of the circumstance of religion, the circumstance that *causes* religion. De Sélincourt states the problem succinctly: "Religion in every age is concerned with the vast and fluctuant regions of experience which knowledge cannot penetrate, the regions which a man knows, or feels, to stretch away beyond the narrow, closed circle of what he can manage by the use of his wits."[3]

If there is no denying our dependence on the Great Economy, there is also no denying our need for a little economy—a narrow circle within which things are manageable by the use of our wits. I don't think Wes Jackson was denying this need when he invoked the Kingdom of God as the complete economy; rather, he was, I think, insisting upon a priority that is both proper and practical. If he had a text in mind, it must have been the sixth chapter of Matthew, in which, after speaking of God's care for nature, the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field, Jesus says: "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? . . . but seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."[4]

There is an attitude that sees in this text a denial of the value of any economy of this world, but this attitude makes the text useless and meaningless to humans who must live in this world. These verses make usable sense only if we read them as a statement of considerable practical import about the real nature of worldly economy. If this passage meant for us to seek *only* the Kingdom of God, it would have the odd result of making good people not only feckless but also dependent upon bad people busy with quite other seekings. It says, rather, to seek the Kingdom of God *first*; that is, it gives an obviously necessary priority to the Great Economy over any little economy made within it. The passage also clearly includes

nature within the Great Economy, and it affirms the goodness, indeed the sanctity, of natural creatures.

The fowls of the air and the lilies of the field live within the Great Economy entirely by nature, whereas humans, though entirely dependent upon it, must live in it partly by artifice. The birds can live in the Great Economy only as birds, the flowers only as flowers, the humans only as humans. The humans, unlike the wild creatures, may choose not to live in it—or, rather, since no creature can escape it, they may choose to act as if they do not, or they may choose to try to live in it on their own terms. If humans choose to live in the Great Economy on its terms, then they must live in harmony with it, maintaining it in trust and learning to consider the lives of the wild creatures.

Certain economic restrictions are clearly implied, and these restrictions have mainly to do with the economics of futurity. We know from other passages in the Gospels that a certain preparedness or provisioning for the future is required of us. It may be that such preparedness is part of our obligation to today, and for *that* reason we need "take no thought for the morrow."[5] But it is clear that such preparations can be carried too far, that we can provide too much for the future. The sin of "a certain rich man" in the twelfth chapter of Luke is that he has "much goods laid up for many years" and thus believes that he can "eat, drink, and be merry."[6] The offense seems to be that he has stored up too much and in the process has belittled the future, for he had reduced it to the size of his own hopes and expectations. He is prepared for a future in which he will be prosperous, not for one in which he will be dead. We know from our own experience that it is possible to live in the present in such a way as to diminish the future practically as well as spiritually. By laying up "much goods" in the present—and, in the process, *using up* such goods as topsoil, fossil fuel, and fossil water—we incur a debt to the future that we cannot repay. That is, we diminish the future by deeds that we call "use" but that the future will call "theft." We may say, then, that we seek the Kingdom of God, in part, by our economic behavior, and we fail to find it if that behavior is wrong.

If we read Matthew 6:24-34 as a teaching that is *both* practical and spiritual, as I think we must, then we must see it as prescribing the terms of a kind of little economy or human economy. Since I am deriving it here from a Christian text, we could call it a Christian economy. But we need not call it that. A Buddhist might look at the working principles of the economy I am talking about and call it a Buddhist economy. E.F. Schumacher, in fact, says that the aim of "Buddhist economics" is "to obtain the maximum of well-being with the minimum of consumption,"[7] which I think is partly the sense of Matthew 6:24-34. Or we could call

this economy (from Matthew 6:28) a "considerate" economy or, simply, a good economy. Whatever the name, the human economy, if it is to be a good economy, must fit harmoniously within and must correspond to the Great Economy; in certain important ways, it must be an analogue of the Great Economy.

A fifth principle of the Great Economy that must now be added to the previous four is that we cannot foresee an end to it: The same basic stuff is going to be shifting from one form to another, so far as we know, forever. From a human point of view, this is a rather heartless endurance. As cynics sometimes point out, conservation is always working, for what is lost or wasted in one place always turns up someplace else. Thus, soil erosion in Iowa involves no loss because the soil is conserved in the Gulf of Mexico. Such people like to point out that soil erosion is as "natural" as birdsong. And so it is, though these people neglect to observe that soil conservation is also natural, and that, before the advent of farming, nature alone worked effectively to keep Iowa topsoil in Iowa. But to say that soil erosion is natural is only a way of saying that there are some things that the Great Economy cannot do for humans. Only a little economy, only a good human economy, can define for us the value of keeping the topsoil where it is.

A good human economy, that is, defines and values human goods, and, like the Great Economy, it conserves and protects its goods. It proposes to endure. Like the Great Economy, a good human economy does not propose for itself a term to be set by humans. That termlessness, with all its implied human limits and restraints, is a human good.

The difference between the Great Economy and any human economy is pretty much the difference between the goose that laid the golden egg and the golden egg. For the goose to have value as a layer of golden eggs, she must be a live goose and therefore joined to the life cycle, which means that she is joined to all manner of things, patterns, and processes that sooner or later surpass human comprehension. The golden egg, on the other hand, can be fully valued by humans according to kind, weight, and measure—but it will not hatch, and it cannot be eaten. To make the value of the egg *fully* accountable, then, we must make it "golden," must remove it from life. But if in our valuation of it, we wish to consider its relation to the goose, we have to undertake a different kind of accounting, more exacting if less exact. That is, if we wish to value the egg in such a way as to preserve the goose that laid it, we find that we must behave, not scientifically, but humanely; we must understand ourselves as humans as fully as our traditional knowledge of ourselves permit. We participate in our little human economy to a considerable extent, that is, by factual knowledge, calculation, and manipulation; our participation in the Great

Economy also requires those things, but requires as well humility, sympathy, forbearance, generosity, imagination.

Another critical difference, implicit in the foregoing, is that, though a human economy can evaluate, distribute, use, and preserve things of value, it cannot make value. Value can originate only in the Great Economy. It is true enough that humans can add value to natural things: We may transform trees into boards, and transform boards into chairs, adding value at each transformation. In a good human economy, these transformations would be made by good work, which would be properly valued and the workers properly rewarded. But a good human economy would recognize at the same time that it was dealing all along with materials and powers that it did not make. It did not make trees, and it did not make the intelligence and talents of the human workers. What the humans have added at every step is artificial, made by art, and though the value of art is critical to human life, it is a secondary value.

When humans presume to originate value, they make value that is first abstract and then false, tyrannical, and destructive of real value. Money value, for instance, can be said to be true only when it justly and stably represents the value of necessary goods, such as clothing, food, and shelter, which originate ultimately in the Great Economy. Humans can originate money value in the abstract, but only by inflation and usury, which falsify the value of necessary things and damage their natural and human resources. Inflation and usury and the damages that follow can be understood, perhaps, as retributions for the presumption that humans can make value.

We may say, then, that a human economy originates, manages, and distributes secondary or added value but that, if it is to last long, it must also manage in such a way as to make continuously available those values that are primary or given, the secondary values having mainly to do with husbandry and trusteeship. A little economy is obliged to receive them gratefully and to use them in such a way as not to diminish them. We might make a long list of things that we would have to describe as primary values, which come directly into the little economy from the Great, but the one I want to talk about, because it is the one with which we have the most intimate working relationship, is the topsoil.

We cannot speak of topsoil, indeed we cannot know what it is, without acknowledging at the outset that we cannot make it. We can care for it (or not), we can even, as we say, "build" it, but we can do so only by assenting to, preserving, and perhaps collaborating in its own processes. To those processes themselves we have nothing to contribute. We cannot make topsoil, and we cannot make any substitute for it; we cannot do what it does.

It is apparently impossible to make an adequate description of topsoil in the sort of language that we have come to call "scientific." For, although any soil sample can be reduced to its inert quantities, a handful of the real thing has life in it; it is full of living creatures. And if we try to describe the behavior of that life we will see that it is doing something that, if we are not careful, we will call "unearthly": It is making life out of death. Not so very long ago, had we known about it what we know now, we would probably have called it "miraculous." In a time when death is looked upon with almost universal enmity, it is hard to believe that the land we live on and the lives we live are the gifts of death. Yet that is so and it is the topsoil that makes it so. In fact, in talking about topsoil, it is hard to avoid the language of religion. When, in "This Compost," Whitman says, "The resurrection of the wheat appears with pale visage out of its graves," he is speaking in the Christian tradition, and yet he is describing what happens, with language that is entirely accurate and appropriate. And when at last he says of the earth that "It gives such divine materials to men," we feel that the propriety of the words comes not from convention but from the actuality of the uncanny transformation that his poem has required us to imagine, as if in obedience to the summons to "consider the lilies of the field."

Even in its functions that may seem, to mechanists, to be mechanical, the topsoil behaves complexly and wonderfully. A healthy topsoil, for instance, has at once the ability to hold water and to drain well. When we speak of the health of a watershed, these abilities are what we are talking about, and the word "health," which we do use in speaking of watersheds, warns us that we are not speaking merely of mechanics. A healthy soil is made by the life dying into it and by the life living in it, and to its double ability to drain and retain water we are complexly indebted, for it not only gives us good crops but also erosion control as well as both flood control and a constant water supply.

Obviously, topsoil, not energy or money, is the critical quantity in agriculture. And topsoil is a quantity; we need it in quantities. We now need more of it than we have; we need to help it to make more of itself. But it is a most peculiar quantity, for it is inseparable from quality. Topsoil is by definition *good* soil, and it can be preserved in human use only by good care. When humans see it as a mere quantity, they tend to make it that; they destroy the life in it, and they begin to measure in inches and feet and tons how much of it they have "lost."

When we see the topsoil as the foundation of that household of living creatures and their nonliving supports that we now call an "ecosystem" but which some of us understand better as a "neighborhood," we find ourselves in debt for other benefits that baffle our mechanical logic and

defy our measures. For example, one of the principles of an ecosystem is that diversity increases capacity—or, to put it another way, that complications of form or pattern can increase greatly within quantitative limits. I suppose that this may be true only up to a point, but I suppose also that that point is far beyond the human capacity to understand or diagram the pattern.

On a farm put together on a sound ecological pattern, the same principle holds. Henry Besuden, the great farmer and shepherd of Clark Country, Kentucky, compares the small sheep flock to the two spoons of sugar that can be added to a brimful cup of coffee, which then becomes "more palatable [but] doesn't run over. You can stock your farm to the limit with other livestock and still add a small flock of sheep." He says this, characteristically, after rejecting the efforts of sheep specialists to get beyond "the natural physical limits of the ewe" by breeding out of season in order to get three lamb crops in two years or by striving for "litters" of lambs rather than nature's optimum of twins. Rather than chafe at "natural physical limits," he would turn to nature's elegant way of enriching herself *within* her physical limits by diversification, by complication of pattern. Rather than strain the productive capacity of the farm—a healthier, safer, and cheaper procedure. Like many of the better traditional farmers, Henry Besuden is suspicious of "the measure of land in length and width," for he would be mindful as well of "the depth and quality."[8]

A small flock of ewes, fitted properly into a farm's pattern, virtually disappears into the farm and does it good, just as it virtually disappears into the time and energy economy of a farm family and does it good. And, properly fitted into the farm's pattern, the small flock virtually disappears from the debit side of the farm's accounts but shows up plainly on the credit side. This "disappearance" is possible, not to the extent that the farm is a human artifact, a belonging of the human economy, but to the extent that it remains, by its obedience to natural principle, a belonging of the Great Economy.

A little economy may be said to be good insofar as it perceives the excellence of these benefits and husbands and preserves them. It is by holding up this standard of goodness that we can best see what is wrong with the industrial economy. For the industrial economy does not see itself as a little economy; it sees itself as the *only* economy. It makes itself thus exclusive by the simple expedient of valuing only what it can use—that is, only what it can regard as "raw material" to be transformed mechanically into something else. What it cannot use, it characteristically describes as "useless," "worthless," "random," or "wild," and gives it some such name as "chaos," "disorder," or "waste"—and thus ruins it or cheapens it in preparation for eventual use. That western deserts or eastern mountains were

once perceived as "useless" made it easy to dignify them by the "use" of strip mining. Once we acknowledge the existence of the Great Economy, however, we are astonished and frightened to see how much modern enterprise is the work of hubris, occurring outside the human boundary established by ancient tradition. The industrial economy is based on invasion and pillage of the Great Economy.

The weakness of the industrial economy is clearly revealed when it imposes its terms upon agriculture, for its terms cannot define those natural principles that are most vital to the life and longevity of farms. Even if the industrial economists could afford to do so, they could not describe the dependence of agriculture upon nature. If asked to consider the lilies of the field or told that the wheat is resurrected out of its graves, the agricultural industrialist would reply that "my engineer's mind inclines less toward the poetic and philosophical, and more toward the practical and possible,"[9] unable even to suspect that such a division of mind induces blindness to possibilities of the utmost practical concern.

That good topsoil both drains and retains water, that diversity increases capacity, are facts similarly alien to industrial logic. Industrialists see retention and drainage as different and opposite functions, and they would promote one at the expense of the other, just as, diversity being inimical to industrial procedure, they would commit themselves to the forlorn expedient of enlarging capacity by increasing area. They are thus encumbered by dependence on mechanical solutions that can work only by isolating and oversimplifying problems. Industrialists are condemned to proceed by devices. To facilitate water retention, they must resort to a specialized water-holding device such as a terrace or a dam; to facilitate drainage, they must use drain tile, or a ditch, or a "subsoiler." It is possible, I know, to argue that this analysis is too general and to produce exceptions, but I do not think it deniable that the discipline of soil conservation is now principally that of the engineer, not that of the farmer or soil husband—that it is now a matter of digging in the earth, not of enriching it.

I do not mean to say that the devices of engineering are always inappropriate; they have their place, not least in the restoration of land abused by the devices of engineering. My point is that, to facilitate both water retention and drainage in the same place, we must improve the soil, which is not a mechanical device but, among other things, a graveyard, a place of resurrection, and a community of living creatures. Devices may sometimes help, but only up to a point, for soil is improved by what humans do not do as well as by what they do. The proprieties of soil husbandry require acts that are much more complex than industrial acts, for these acts are conditioned by the ability *not* to act, by forbearance or self-restraint, sympathy or generosity. The industrial act is simply prescribed

by thought, but the act of soil building is also *limited* by thought. We build soil by knowing what to do but also by knowing what not to do and by knowing when to stop. Both kinds of knowledge are necessary because invariably, at some point, the reach of human comprehension becomes too short, and at that point the work of the human economy must end in absolute deference to the working of the Great Economy. This, I take it, is the practical significance of the idea of the Sabbath.

To push our work beyond that point, invading the Great Economy, is to become guilty of hubris, of presuming to be greater than we are. We cannot do what the topsoil does, any more than we can do what God does or what a swallow does. We can fly, but only as humans—very crudely, noisily, and clumsily. We can dispose of corpses and garbage, but we cannot, by our devices, turn them into fertility and new life. And we are discovering, to our great uneasiness, that we cannot dispose at all of some of our so-called wastes that are toxic or radioactive. We can appropriate and in some fashion use godly powers, but we cannot use them safely, and we cannot control the results. That is to say that the human condition remains for us what it was for Homer and the authors of the Bible. Now that we have brought such enormous powers to our aid (we hope), it seems more necessary than ever to observe how inexorably the human condition still contains us. We only do what humans can do, and our machines, however they may appear to enlarge our possibilities, are invariably infected with our limitations. Sometimes, in enlarging our possibilities, they narrow our limits and leave us more powerful but less content, less safe, and less free. The mechanical means by which we propose to escape the human condition only extend it; thinking to transcend our definition as fallen creatures, we have only colonized more and more territory eastward of Eden.

Like the rich man of the parable, the industrialist thinks to escape the persistent obligations of the human condition by means of "much goods laid up for many years"—by means, in other words, of quantities: resources, supplies, stockpiles, funds, reserves. But this is a grossly oversimplifying dream and, thus, a dangerous one. All the great natural goods that empower agriculture, some of which I have discussed, have to do with quantities, but they have to do also with qualities, and they involve principles that are not static but active; they have to do with formal processes. The topsoil exists as such because it is ceaselessly transforming death into life, ceaselessly supplying food and water to all that lives in it and from it; otherwise, "all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust."[10] If we are to live well on and from our land, we must live by faith in the ceaselessness of these processes and by faith in our own willingness

and ability to collaborate with them. Christ's prayer for "daily bread" is an affirmation of such faith, just as it is a repudiation of faith in "much goods laid up." Our life and livelihood are the gift of the topsoil and of our willingness and ability to care for it, to grow good wheat, to make good bread; they do not derive from stockpiles of raw materials or accumulations of purchasing power.

The industrial economy can define potentiality, even the potentiality of the living topsoil, only as a *fund*, and thus it must accept impoverishment as the inescapable condition of abundance. The invariable mode of its relation both to nature and to human culture is that of mining: withdrawal from a limited fund until that fund is exhausted. It removes natural fertility and human workmanship from bread. Thus the land is reduced to abstract marketable quantities of length and width, and bread to merchandise that is high in money value but low in food value. "Our bread," Guy Davenport once said to me, "is more obscene than our movies."

But the industrial use of *any* "resource" implies its exhaustion. It is for this reason that the industrial economy has been accompanied by an ever-increasing hurry of research and exploration, the motive of which is not "free enterprise" or "the spirit of free inquiry," as industrial scientists and apologists would have us believe, but the desperation that naturally and logically accompanies gluttony.

One of the favorite words of the industrial economy is "control": we want "to keep things under control"; we wish (or so we say) to "control" inflation and erosion; we have a discipline known as "crowd control"; we believe in "controlled growth" and "controlled development," in "traffic control" and "self-control." But, because we are always setting out to control something that we refuse to limit, we have made control a permanent and a helpless enterprise. If we will not limit causes, there can be no controlling of effects. What is to be the fate of self-control in an economy that encourages and rewards unlimited selfishness?

More than anything else, we would like to "control the forces of nature," refusing at the same time to impose any limit on human nature. We assume that such control and such freedom are our "rights," which seems to ensure that our means of control (of nature and of all else that we see as alien) will be violent. It is startling to recognize the extent to which the industrial economy depends upon controlled explosions—in mines, in weapons, in the cylinders of engines, in the economic pattern known as "boom and bust." This dependence is the result of a progress that can be argued for, but those who argue for it must recognize that, in all these means, good ends are served by a destructive principle, an association that is difficult to control if it is not limited; moreover, they must recognize that our failure to limit this association has raised the specter of

uncontrollable explosion. Nuclear holocaust, if it comes, will be the final detonation of an explosive economy.

An explosive economy, then, is not only an economy that is dependent upon explosions but also one that sets no limits on itself. Any little economy that sees itself as unlimited is obviously self-blinded. It does not see its real relation of dependence and obligation to the Great Economy. Instead, it calls the Great Economy "raw material" or "natural resources" or "nature" and proceeds with the business of putting it "under control."

But "control" is a word more than ordinarily revealing here, for its root meaning is to roll against, in the sense of a little wheel turning in opposition. The principle of control, then, involves necessarily the principle of division: one thing may turn against another thing only by being divided from it. This mechanical division and turning in opposition William Blake understood as evil, and he spoke of "Satanic wheels" and "Satanic mills": "wheel without wheel, with cogs tyrannic/Moving by compulsion each other."[11] By "wheel without wheel," Blake meant wheel outside of wheel, one wheel communicating motion to the other in the manner of two cogwheels, the point being that one wheel can turn another wheel outside itself only in a direction opposite to its own. This, I suppose, is acceptable enough as a mechanism. It becomes "Satanic" when it becomes a ruling metaphor and is used to describe and to organize fundamental relationships. Against the Satanic "wheel without wheel," Blake set the wheels of Eden, which "Wheel within wheel in freedom revolve, in harmony and peace."[12] This is the "wheel in the middle of a wheel"[13] of Ezekiel's vision, and it is an image of harmony. That the relation of these wheels is not mechanical we know from Ezekiel 1:21: "the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels." The wheels of opposition oppose the spirit of the living creature.

What had happened, as Blake saw accurately and feared justifiably, was a fundamental shift in the relation of humankind to the rest of creation. Sometime between, say Pope's verses on the Chain of Being in *An Essay on Man* and Blake's "London," the dominant minds had begun to see the human race, not as a part or a member of Creation, but as outside it and opposed to it. The industrial revolution was only a part of this change, but it is true that, when the wheels of the industrial revolution began to revolve, they turned against nature, which became the name for all of Creation thought to be below humanity, as well as, incidentally, against all once thought to be above humanity. Perhaps this would have been safe enough if nature—that is, if all the rest of Creation—had been, as proposed, passively subject to human purpose.

Of course, it never has been. As Blake foresaw, and as we now know, what we turn against must turn against us. Blake's image of the cogwheels

turning in relentless opposition is terrifyingly apt, for in our vaunted war against nature, nature fights back. The earth may answer our pinches and pokes "only with spring,"[14] as e.e. cummings said, but if we pinch and poke too much, she can answer also with flood or drouth, with catastrophic soil erosion, with plague and famine. Many of the occurrences that we call "acts of God" or "accidents of nature" are simply forthright natural responses to human provocations. Not always; I do not mean to imply here that, by living in harmony with nature, we can be free of floods and storms and drouths and earthquakes and volcanic eruptions; I am only pointing out, as many others have done, that, by living in opposition to nature, we can *cause* natural calamities of which we would otherwise be free.

The problem seems to be that a human economy cannot prescribe the terms of its own success. In a time when we wish to believe that humans are sole authors of the truth, that truth is relative, and that value judgments are all subjective, it is hard to say that a human economy can be wrong, and yet we have good, sound, practical reasons for saying so. It is indeed possible for a human economy to be wrong—not relatively wrong, in the sense of being "out of adjustment," or unfair according to some human definition of fairness, or weak according to the definition of its own purposes—but wrong absolutely and according to practical measures. Of course, if we see the human economy as the *only* economy, we will see its errors as political failures, and we will continue to talk about "recover." It is only when we think of the little human economy in relation to the Great Economy that we begin to understand our errors for what they are and to see the qualitative meanings of our quantitative measures. If we see the industrial economy in terms of the Great Economy, then we begin to see industrial wastes and losses not as "trade-offs" or "necessary risks" but as costs that, like all costs, are chargeable to somebody, sometime.

That we can prescribe the terms of our own success, that we can live outside or in ignorance of the Great Economy are the greatest errors. They condemn us to a life without a standard, wavering in inescapable bewilderment from paltry self-satisfaction to paltry self-dissatisfaction. But since we have no place to live but in the Great Economy, whether or not we know that and act accordingly is the critical question, not about economy merely, but about human life itself.

It is possible to make a little economy, such as our present one, that is so short-sighted and in which accounting is of so short a term as to give the impression that vices are necessary and practically justifiable. When we make our economy a little wheel turning in opposition to what we call "nature," then we set up competitiveness as the ruling principle in our

explanation of reality and in our understanding of economy; we make of it, willy-nilly, a virtue. But competitiveness, as a ruling principle and a virtue, imposes a logic that is extremely difficult, perhaps impossible, to control. That logic explains why our cars and our clothes are shoddily made, why our "wastes" are toxic, and why our "defensive" weapons are suicidal; it explains why it is so difficult for us to draw a line between "free enterprise" and crime. If our economic ideal is maximum profit with minimum responsibility, why should we be surprised to find our corporations so frequently in court and robbery on the increase? Why should we be surprised to find that medicine has become an exploitive industry, profitable in direct proportion to its hurry and its mechanical indifference? People who pay for shoddy products or careless services and people who are robbed outright are equally victims of theft, the only difference being that the robbers outright are not guilty of fraud.

If, on the other hand, we see ourselves as living within the Great Economy, under the necessity of making our little human economy within it, according to its terms, the smaller wheel turning in sympathy with the greater, receiving its being and its motion from it, then we see that the traditional virtues are necessary and are practically justifiable. Then, because in the Great Economy *all* transactions count and the account is never "closed," the ideal changes. We see that we cannot afford maximum profit or power with minimum responsibility because, in the Great Economy, the loser's losses finally afflict the winner. Now the ideal must be "the maximum of well-being with the minimum of consumption," which both defines and requires neighborly love. Competitiveness cannot be the ruling principle, for the Great Economy is not a "side" that we can join nor are there such "sides" within it. Thus, it is not the "sum of its parts" but a *membership* of parts inextricably joined to each other, indebted to each other, receiving significance and worth from each other and from the whole. One is obliged to "consider the lilies of the field," not because they are lilies or because they are exemplary, but because they are fellow members and because as fellow members, we and the lilies are in certain critical ways alike.

To say that within the Great Economy the virtues are necessary and practically justifiable is at once to remove them from that specialized, sanctimonious, condescending practice of virtuousness that is humorless, pointless, and intolerable to its beneficiaries. For a human, the good choice in the Great Economy is to see its membership as a neighborhood and oneself as a neighbor within it. I am sure that virtues count in a neighborhood—to "love thy neighbor as thyself" requires the help of all seven of them—but I am equally sure that in a neighborhood the virtues cannot be practiced as such. Temperance has no appearance or action of its own,

nor does justice, prudence, fortitude, faith, hope, or charity. They can only be employed on occasions. "He who would do good to another," William Blake said, "must do it in Minute Particulars."[15] To help each other, that is, we must go beyond the coldhearted charity of the "general good" and get down to work where we are: "Labor well the Minute Particulars, attend to the Little-ones,/And those who are in misery cannot remain so long/If we do but our duty: labor well the teeming Earth."[16] It is the Great Economy, not any little economy, that invests minute particulars with high and final importance. In the Great Economy, each part stands for the whole and is joined to it; the whole is present in the part and is its health. The industrial economy, by contrast, is always striving and failing to make fragments (pieces that it has broken) *add up* to an ever-fugitive wholeness.

Work that is authentically placed and understood within the Great Economy moves virtue towards virtuosity—that is, toward skill or technical competence. There is no use in helping our neighbors with their work if we do not know how to work. When the virtues are rightly practiced within the Great Economy, we do not call them virtues; we call them good farming, good forestry, good carpentry, good husbandry, good weaving and sewing, good homemaking, good parenthood, good neighborhood, and so on. The general principles are submerged in the particularities of their engagement with the world. Lao Tzu saw the appearance of the virtues as such, in the abstract, as indicative of their loss:

> When people lost sight of the way to live
> Came codes of love and honesty. . . .
> When differences weakened family ties
> Came benevolent fathers and dutiful sons;
> And when lands were disrupted and misgoverned
> Came ministers commended as loyal.[17]

And these lines might be read as an elaboration of the warning against the *appearances* of goodness at the beginning of the sixth chapter of Matthew.

The work of the small economy, when it is understandingly placed within the Great Economy, minutely particularizes the virtues and carries principle into practice; to the extent that it does so, it escapes specialization. The industrial economy requires the extreme specialization of work—the separation of work from its results—because it subsists upon divisions of interest and must deny the fundamental kinships of producer and consumer; seller and buyer; owner and worker; worker, work, and product; parent material and product; nature and artifice; thoughts, words, and deeds. Divided from those kinships, specialized artists and scientists identify themselves as "observers" or "objective observers"—that is,

as outsiders without responsibility or involvement. But the industrialized arts and sciences are false, their division is a lie, for there is no specialization of results.

There is no "outside" to the Great Economy, no escape into either specialization or generality, no "time off." Even insignificance is no escape, for in the membership of the Great Economy everything signifies; whatever we do counts. If we do not serve what coheres and endures, we serve what disintegrates and destroys. We can *presume* that we are outside the membership that includes us, but that presumption only damages the membership—and ourselves, of course, along with it.

In the industrial economy, the arts and the sciences are specialized "professions," each having its own language, speaking to none of the others. But the Great Economy proposes arts and sciences of memberships: ways of doing and ways of knowing that cannot be divided from each other or within themselves and that speak the common language of the communities where they are practiced.

Two Economies by Wendell Berry

Every Man An Artist:
Readings in the Traditional Philosophy of Art

Edited by Brian Keeble, Foreword by Seyyed Hossein Nasr

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