

SEEDS OF NEW BEGINNINGS

FOR those familiar with the works of Ortega y Gasset the reading of the daily newspaper is likely to drive them to a review of what he says about "society" and the illusions associated with this term. In *Man and People* (Ortega's sociology, published by Norton in 1957) he wrote:

The automatically optimistic interpretation of the words "social" and "society" cannot be maintained and we must have done with it. The reality "society," in its very root, signifies both its positive and its negative meanings, or . . . every society is at the same time, to a greater or lesser extent, *dissociety*—which is a living together of friends and of enemies. . . . This is enough to make us realize that giving the name of "society" to a collectivity is a euphemism that falsifies our vision of collective "life." So-called "society" is never what the name promises. It is always at the same time, to one or another degree, *dis-society*, repulsion between individuals. Since on the other hand it claims to be the opposite we must radically open ourselves to the conviction that society is a reality that is *constitutively* sick, defective—strictly, it is a never-ending struggle between its genuinely social elements and behaviors and its dissociative or antisocial elements and behaviors.

This is a way of saying—accurately, we think—that conflict between good and evil is our normal condition in association with our fellows, and that admirable moments of social harmony are rare indeed. They might be compared to those brief intervals of "revolutionary love" when, for a brief episode, whole populations are transported to ecstasy by the triumph of the revolutionary cause, each one seeing in everyone else brothers and sisters and friends. Only a short century of American history separated the glorious period of the Founding Fathers from the days of the robber barons and the post-Civil War scandals of ruthless acquisition.

What of today? What, for us, is the everyday normal condition, which changes hardly at all? For answer we go to a book published fifteen years ago—*The Dissenting Academy*, edited by Theodore Roszak—to the contribution of Robert Engler, a

teacher of political science. His subject is the Shame of the Universities, but he begins with an outline of our national condition. Except for a few details, it might have been written yesterday:

A nation whose political origins are in the age of reason, we live on the edge of violence. A people whose ideological roots are in the ethic of individual power and responsibility, we dwell in a setting of collective irresponsibility.

Internationally, the United States is on a collision course, whether through a direct confrontation bringing World War III closer, or through an endless series of counterrevolutionary actions against national liberation movements. We are never more than an incident away from a nuclear holocaust.

The United States is the world's great military power. We serve as arms merchants to much of the world. We have military agreements with more than sixty nations. . . . The United States is the self-anointed policeman of the Western and the Eastern world. We support corrupt ruling oligarchies whose first commitment is to order—the order of scarcity upon which their own power and privilege are based. In the holy name of anticommunism we frustrate the rising egalitarian demands for social change that might bring land, food, and political expression to the many. We also make increasingly remote the possibility that such expectations might yet be realized peaceably.

At home our resources and institutions have been recruited to support this self-image of beleaguered guardian of universal morality. Troubled congressmen admit, in the privacy of their offices, that they do not know how to stop the warfare juggernaut. Thoughtful journalists say they have never seen the military perspective so dominant in Washington. . . . Challenged at every point, from communism as demonological conspiracy to capitalism as messianic liberation, we redouble our military efforts. . . . The recurring concern of those who hold power is how to buy time and maintain privilege by cutting in the malcontents, or at least their political leaders, whether on the Lower East Side or in Latin America.

A passage from the Aug. 1 *Washington Spectator* adds only a contemporary touch to what Engler wrote in 1968. Summarizing the blindness in Washington concerning the roots of the unrest and war in Central America, the *Spectator* editor, Tristram Coffin writes:

Words like "Communism," "Soviet Union," "Castro," which seem to have such weight in Washington, mean little to weary, thirsty illegals wandering in the dark of the night. Instead, a visitor to the border area is told that the masses of the smoldering continent to the south are motivated by basic emotions:

A fierce longing for enough food to eat and a richer life for themselves and their children. A resentment of those who, for one reason or another, enjoy the good life—in some cases, at their expense. . . . A longing to escape the cycles of tyranny and war. (The *Arizona Republic* reports in an editorial: "The Guatemalan army still is arguably the most brutal in Latin America. It thinks nothing of slicing off the heads of infants and driving pointed stakes into the stomachs of pregnant women.")

The bishop of Chiapas, the Mexican area bordering Guatemala, gave a "horrible recital of the murder by the Guatemalan soldiers of six-month infants . . . causing a sudden exodus of 30,000 of these poor, hapless peasants who do not any more know what Marxist Leninism looks like, talks like or even has the slightest idea." (Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez, D-Tx.)

A former president of Ecuador, Galo Plaza, is quoted as saying:

In Nicaragua there was a drastic reaction after the overthrow of a family that owned the country for generations; in El Salvador there was and is a struggle against a small, privileged group with extensive land holdings and great wealth in a small country. In Guatemala, a reactionary government went to cruel extremes in successfully thwarting change.

The common denominator among many opposing these various governments has been a demand for social justice, for respect for human rights, and for a return to democracy.

A reading of the late Scott Nearing's *Dollar Diplomacy* (1925) will show that our present policies in relation to Latin America have changed hardly at all throughout the course of the century;

and consultation of Juan José Arevalo's book, *The Shark and the Sardines* (Lyle Stuart, 1961), will dramatize the feeling of Latin Americans about the United States. This former president of Guatemala presents 250 pages of documented diatribe against our imperialism, including an interesting confession by Brigadier General Smedley F. Butler, a former commander of the Marines:

I spent thirty-three years . . . most of my time being a high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer for capitalism.

I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909-1912. I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City (Bank) boys to collect revenue in. I helped in the rape of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street.

What sort of people in what sort of country allow such policies to become "normal"? We return to Prof. Engler for a succinct reply:

Meanwhile, absorption in our daily routines, from meaningless work and insatiable buying to frenetic recreation and rudderless politics, feeds the comforting lie that all is well—or as well as can be expected. An official alchemy, supported by all the arts and instruments of mass persuasion, perpetuates the illusion that corporate determination of productive priorities is privacy, that multinational business goliaths are just like small boys selling lemonade, that unfettered consumption of gadgetry and sex are exercises of social power, that primacy of personal enhancement is inevitably socially beneficial, that poverty is character weakness, that organized insecurity is welfare, that addiction is deviant behavior, that boredom is freedom, that mass political impotence sustains the pluralist idyll, that paranoid hysteria is reason, that anticommunism is prodemocracy, that force is strength, that totalitarian drift is life-affirming direction, that our cumulative disabilities are cultural lags affirming the basic rightness of our course (for what system is perfect?). Institutionalized myths protect us from adding up the score, while assuring that somehow time, technology, and morality are on our side. The American way remains inviolate.

In his concluding paragraph Engler says:

The odds may be overwhelmingly against the radical reconstruction needed for a democratic society. But genuine education represents a buying of time. The university offers the ideal and the potential mechanism for a community of intelligence and conscience which might yet develop dialogue in the larger community. If the teachers and the students, theoretically the last of the unorganized and unintegrated, do not recognize the imperative, then where else can this society turn?

It is natural for teachers and other thoughtful persons to think hopefully of the coming generation and of education as a major agency of change for the future, as does Prof. Engler. His article, however, "The Shame of the Universities," is concerned with the unlikelihood of much being accomplished by the present-day centers of higher learning. As he says:

Once American colleges were built as cathedrals and their function was to recruit gentlemen in the service of God. The newer public universities were designed to prepare the middle class for agrarian and mechanical arts and for teaching. Now that we are a society of professionals, technicians, office workers, and consumers, the new mandate is clear: training for marketable skills and unlimited consumption. It is not surprising that many of the newer houses of learning are architecturally indistinguishable from office buildings, supermarkets, and airports. These are the refineries for white-collar America. Soon half of our high school population will be on stream. . . .

The professors are interested in income, status, the respect of their peers, and power—or access to the ears of power. . . . Grantsmanship becomes an essential academic art. Universities on the make bid heavily for faculty who can bring money and prestigious research. (Universities also take very generous overhead cuts on research grants transmitted through the institution.) Minimum teaching demands are placed on their time and these men become recognized as leaders in their professions. These commercial talents attract graduate students who quickly learn where the rewards are, how to pursue them, and with whom. Ten campuses now annually generate one third of all the social science and humanities doctorates. Big research money, going to name universities, serves to distort research, the more richly supported areas drawing heavy attention and others being neglected. . . .

What is the style and character of the knowledge being offered in the schools? Essentially marketable skills. Professors are experts who teach techniques,

whether in economics, sociology, politics, or the behavioral sciences. Research is elevated as the ultimate goal. . . . To cry out that something in the social structure is fundamentally wrong is to lose one's professional cool, and possibly the next grant, a consultancy, an academic reputation. Meanwhile, sociologists continue to teach the skills and grace necessary for successful living in a bureaucratic world.

All this gives pungent point to Ortega's insistence that "we must radically open ourselves to the conviction that society is a reality that is *constitutively* sick, defective—strictly, it is a never-ending struggle between its genuinely social elements and behaviors and its dissociative or antisocial elements and behaviors." We may add that society is *always* like that. Any given establishment is the organization of power, often very largely for misuse by manipulators, and the perpetuation of injustice. Prof. Engler reaches this conclusion in choosing a quotation from Robert Lynd's *Knowledge for What?* (1939) to formulate the challenge to our time:

. . . no culture can be realistically and effectively analyzed by those who elect to leave its central idols untouched; and, if fundamental change is required, it does no good to landscape the ground on which these idols stand.

The universities are hardly places where change and innovation can begin. As for the students:

Competitive zeal and junior gamesmanship and grantsmanship become their equipment for survival and success in the academic marketplace. Idealism comes to be deprecated whether about learning or about the society. Playing it cool is the model, the professor merely reinforcing what prevails in the so-called real world outside. . . .

The students who maintain the spirit of curiosity and caring often do so in spite of their education. . . . The most socially conscious students are exciting to work with. At the same time the readiness to display wholesale contempt for the past, the indiscriminate assault upon "the Establishment" (Berkeley, General Motors, and the Pentagon are all held to be the same—an understandable view from the perspective of those who feel acted upon), the outbursts of anti-intellectualism and the preference for instant experience and gut values, the attraction to direct confrontation rather than conciliation, can be

frustrating. . . . A credibility gap in government is tragic, but not unprecedented. On campus it is fatal. The United States needs the perceptions and imagination of those able to cut through the powerfully manned defenses of a sick social order. It needs the reasoning power for defining with integrity the nature of the malaise.

This seems a way of saying that we cannot look to any institutional formation of the present society for the defining of "the nature of the malaise." Our institutions are the producers of the malaise.

Yet we have had a number of illustrious individual definers in recent years, starting, say, with Scott Buchanan who concluded his essay, "The Corporation and the Republic," by asking:

How do the political habits formed by members of corporations fit with the habits that republican forms of government have developed in their citizens heretofore? The answers to this question are not definite or final; such as they are, they can best be summarized by a sharp observer of a few years ago, Mark Twain: "It is by the goodness of God that in our country we have these unspeakably precious things: freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the prudence never to practice either." It may be that the corporation is the school of political prudence in which we learn not to practice what the political republic has always preached.

We can do no more than name the somewhat later generation of definers, on whom MANAS has relied for raising critical questions and relevant quotation for the past fifteen or twenty years. An incomplete list would include: A. H. Maslow, Rachel Carson, Ivan Illich, E. F. Schumacher, Wendell Berry, Howard Odum, Wes Jackson, John and Nancy Todd, and John Jeavons, all of whom have contributed important books and papers which are both diagnostic and prescriptive. A thorough reading of these authors would provide clear orientation for those who are wondering what they ought to do and what will help to lay the foundations of another sort of human community. While the duality that Ortega speaks of will inevitably appear, there will always be at the beginning those golden hours of visionary striving and fulfillment, making a better establishment in the future—perhaps one that knows enough to be ashamed of itself and to devise psychological punishments for the hunger for power

and elite egotisms. Several of the conventional moralities of the past included such constraints, and there is no reason why we cannot improve on these schemes in years to come. Recognizing the general truth in Ortega's account of "society," always at the same time *dis-society*, is a way of saying that the project of becoming fully human is at once a moral drama and the program of future evolution for mankind.

It is time, surely, that we set limits to the authority and scope of Galileo's mechanistic rules, and began to think about the world and ourselves much as we do spontaneously, from simple common sense. And it is time to recognize that while we may be some sort of "animal," we are also minds capable of vision and a genius which no animal ever had. We are, then, as Roszak put it in a recent book, *Unfinished Animals*, and perhaps, as the Platonists and Neoplatonists suggested, on the way to becoming gods, however devious that way now seems.

We shall doubtless have establishments and institutions for unpredictable millennia; so long as human development is uneven, this way of supplying direction and setting limits seems indispensable, and its mechanisms may serve well so long as we remain aware that an ideal human life will have learned to do without them.

This will mean, then, keeping that ideal of the future always before us, as a spur to aspiration and a check on our conceits. If we are able to work out metaphysical conceptions of human development which amplify the vision and rationalize the processes of present and future development, well and good. William James predicted that this would happen, when at last we have learned to understand ourselves. Meanwhile, when looking for the seeds of new beginnings, it will be well to devote our search to the uninstitutionalized fields of individual enterprise and thought, where originality and innovation remain possible.

REVIEW

SAMSARA AND NIRVANA

AN intellectually demanding book, yet one worth inspecting, if not careful study, is *Religion and Nothingness* (University of California Press, 1982, \$28.50) by Keiji Nishitani, a Buddhist philosopher of the Kyoto School—which has, as one of its purposes, to bring about a meeting of East and West in a "unity beyond differences." In his foreword, Winston L. King asks:

What happens now when a Buddhist philosopher (Nishitani) working from his own Eastern Buddhist basis seeks to relate his perceptions of the universe to the Western corpus of Christian faith and philosophical thought? . . . It is evident at once in reading the following pages that Nishitani perceives the long-dominant Christian and Greek rationalist traditions as irretrievably undermined by their own inherent logic and by the modern scientific world view. They have been devoured by their own progeny, the consequences of their own intrinsic qualities. What is left? An underlying nihilism, a spiritual vacuity, and a pervasive sense of meaninglessness, coming explicitly to the surface in the philosophies of Nietzsche, Sartre, and Heidegger. Second, the West—and all those cultures affected by Western influences—present the spectacle of a massive superstructure of brilliant, scientific achievement strung precariously over a chasm of meaninglessness, and are apparently incapable of building themselves new foundations from within their traditional resources. Hence they are in desperate need of a more enduring foundation unassailable even by scientific and philosophical skepticism.

According to Nishitani's translator, Jan Van Bragt, the Kyoto School, developed by Kitaro Nishida (1870-1945) at the State University of Kyoto, has alone, in Japan, been able to deal both appreciatively and effectively with the European philosophical tradition from the strength of Buddhist thinking. Mr. Van Bragt gives this clue:

The use of paradox is everywhere apparent in the writings of the Kyoto School, and contradiction is clearly considered not only to be logically meaningful but to be the sole means to drive the mind on to truly real reality. This trait is most pronounced in Nishida's definition of the real as a "self-identity of absolute contradictories" (or more freely and familiarly rendered, as a "coincidence of opposites"). Whatever other differences there may be between them, on this point Nishitani follows in the footsteps of Nishida, whose "dialectic is not so much the

process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, but a discovery of contradictions and the unity or identity in these contradictions."

Readers for whom this "theory of knowledge" seems confusing or oppressive will need to give it sustained attention in order to profit from Nishitani's book. Yet they might prepare themselves by asking: What can I say about the world or any part of it that will not be in danger of successful contradiction, sooner or later? Or they might reflect that they are quite unable to say anything about the "whole" of reality, but only something about some part of it. To say something with meaning to people living in the world requires the use of limits of some sort. What can you say about the world that doesn't involve definitions? Yet reality has no limit, so we can't talk about or define it. Or, trying to do so inevitably involves paradox. We might say that Nishitani uses the capacities of the mind to instruct in its incapacities when it comes to ultimate reality. And in passing we might remark that the ability of the mind to do this may be its most impressive and precious quality.

What happens in space is not final reality for the reason that, some day it will stop happening. What happens in time has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and so is less than reality. However, the very eternity of the sequence of these finite happenings or "semi-realities" may constitute the way in which the relative participates in the absolute. But for thinking in terms of the world and what we know about it, the greatest intellectual offense (perhaps moral offense, too) is to mistake the part, any part, for the whole. It is, then, from the ground of the changeless, the "unknowable" in the sense of undefinable, that Nishitani considers what it is possible for us to understand as the meaning of life.

An early passage in his book will show his comprehensive grasp of Western thought:

The idea of a cosmic order may be traced back to Pythagoras and Plato, before them to the Upanishads, and still further back to several peoples of the ancient world. Even in modern times, such natural scientists as Kepler and Newton regarded their own research and pursuit of the laws of nature as a quest for the secrets of a divine cosmic economy. Then, as is well known, once natural science and its image of the world had been established,

the teleological conception of the natural world gave way to a mechanistic one, bringing a fundamental change in the relation between man and nature. It was a process of disengaging the approach to nature from the religious world view that had been its matrix.

The great Lisbon earthquake of 1755 affords an appropriate symbol of what was taking place. On the one side, we see the English clergy, for instance, attributing the earthquake to the Catholicism of the city's inhabitants. On the other, we see the people of Lisbon thinking that they had brought the disaster upon themselves by permitting heretics (Protestants) to reside in their city. But behind these controversies was the profound and extensive shock that the earthquake inflicted on the mind of Europe. The chronicles of the history of philosophy tell us of the ill will the disaster engendered between Voltaire and Rousseau. We know, too, that Kant wrote a treatise on the disaster in the following year, in which he attacked as blasphemous the "misguided human teleology" that would label such a natural phenomenon as divine punishment or presume to detect in it "the aims of divine solicitude."

As this intellectual process continued, the natural world assumed more and more the features of a world cold and dead, governed by laws of mechanical necessity, completely indifferent to the fact of man. While it continues to be the world in which we live and is inseparably bound up with our existence, it is a world in which we find ourselves unable to live as man, in which our *human* mode of being is edged out of the picture or even obliterated. We can neither take this world as it is nor leave it. This is the paradoxical position from which the world makes itself present to us, a position much like what Dostoevski describes in *Notes from the Underground*: unable to affirm, unable to deny, and no recourse left but to bang one's head against it. It is a world that leads man to despair. But for Dostoevski the matter did not end there, for from within that very despair there came to birth an awareness of nihilism penetrating deep beneath the world of natural laws and inhuman rationality with which science is preoccupied. At this depth the awareness of nihilism opens up a horizon that enables a freedom beyond necessity and a life beyond rationality. For Dostoevski it meant reinstating the question of religion together with and over against the question of nihilism.

There is a sense in which this book is a protracted examination of the great paradox that, to pursue self-knowledge as though the self were some object to be seen and grasped is the pursuit of an illusion. True knowledge of the self is the not-knowing of objects. But all our knowledge is of objects! Nishitani says:

I call this self-awareness a knowing of non-knowing because it is a knowing that comes about not as a *refraction* of the self bent into the self. . . . When Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty asked Bodhidharma, "What is the first principle of the holy teachings?" the Patriarch replied, "Emptiness, no holiness." The Emperor, confused by this answer, inquired further, "Who is this standing before me?" "No knowing," answered Bodhidharma. The story as such is well enough known, but what I should like to suggest here is that this "No knowing" that strikes out from beneath the very bottom of the universe like a bolt of lightning is quite the same thing we have been speaking of as the non-knowing in which the self is on its home-ground as what it is in itself. It is only through making this non-objective self in itself (and its non-objective self-awareness) a home-ground that the self as subject becomes possible.

One might suppose that this "home-ground" is Nirvana, or the release from the endless migrations and pain of conditioned existence in the world—"alternating between birth and death like an endlessly rotating wheel." Yet there is a sense even of transcendence of Nirvana, in the vow of the *Bodhisattva*, through compassion, to remain in the world in the service of illusion-bound men. Nishitani says:

Once again, we are faced here with a situation in which nirvana is nirvana only when it is not nirvana. When we persist in our pursuit of what is *truly* true, among the things that are true, the *truly* true appears in the mode of paradox or absurdity, under conditions ordinarily considered as altogether contradictory to truth. . . . The field of nirvana appears, only when one does not cling to nirvana and when nirvana is turned around so as not to be nirvana. It was remarked earlier that nirvana is essentially "life" because it is a dying to *samsaric* life, which is essentially a "death." But when we pursue the *essentiality* of this essential life to its very end, non-essential life appears where essential life reaches its outer limit, its point of consummation, where it is, as it were, on the point of being totally consumed. In other words, true nirvana appears as *samsara-sive-nirvana*. Here life is sheer life and yet thoroughly paradoxical. We can speak, for example, of essentiality in its true essence as non-essentiality. If we could not speak in such terms as these, life would not truly be life. It would not be life at once truly eternal and truly temporal.

This makes an appropriate (or perhaps "inappropriate") end of our attempt at "review."

COMMENTARY

NEW ALCHEMY EXHIBIT

ACCORDING to the *New Alchemy* Quarterly for last summer, the Boston Museum of Science will eventually have a walk-in living exhibit of bioshelter showing the "biological dynamics of an ecosystem of gardens, ponds, vines and associated animals," now being prepared for the museum by Earle Barnhart and Peter Burgeon of the New Alchemy Institute. This is additional evidence of the spreading influence of these modern "alchemists" who are working to transform the originally infertile soil of Cape Cod into a source of organic wealth—better, you could say, than gold. (See *Frontiers* for an account of the Bioregional Development Plan for the fifteen towns on Cape Cod, originated by the Institute.)

The bioshelter exhibit was proposed by two Museum of Science people who visited the New Alchemy headquarters in East Falmouth and decided that "the science of living ecosystems was best learned from the real thing."

Unlike a static exhibit of mechanical models and posters, this one is composed largely of living organisms. The exhibit will be initially "seeded" with soil, water, plants, animals and micro-organisms. Over time, these initial populations will grow and change, coming to some sort of accommodation to available space, to their environment, and to each other.

The exhibit ecosystem is designed to be a relatively self-contained microcosm, demonstrating such ecological principles as water purification, nutrient cycling, complex food chains and biological pest regulation.

The exhibit will have five components: a fish farm; hydroponics; these two operating in combination, with the fish pond water used in the hydroponics installation; another combination relating fish ponds with gardens; and finally a recycling component which converts plant wastes into fish food.

The bioshelter is planned to occupy about a third of an existing greenhouse room in the

Museum, overlooking the Charles River. "It will complement two related exhibits, one demonstrating the physics of solar energy, the other showing how plant structures have developed to efficiently use solar energy."

Another article in the Quarterly has this thoughtful beginning:

New England, not California, is the harbinger of America's future, because it is America's first steady state region. It has a stable population that will not grow measurably, and will more likely decline, in the lifetime of those now living. The region has reached its stability not out of planning, but of circumstances and necessity.

The steady state for New England is a reality that we have to live with. But it is a non-threatening reality that offers room for internal growth and change if we look to our traditional capacity for shepherding our resources. The combination of need and circumstance leading to a sustainable society in New England may never be more propitious than in the last quarter of the 20th century.

By whatever measure New England can reduce the 73% of its energy that comes from fossil fuels from outside the region, it is also contributing in a small way to the preservation of those resources for their most essential long-term purposes.

The articles goes on, telling what the New Englanders may be able to do for themselves. (For a list of publications, courses, etc., write to the New Alchemy Institute, 237 Hatchville Road, East Falmouth, Mass. 40836.)

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

USEFUL EVESDROPPING

MORAL education is surely what the world is most in need of, and at the same time the area of learning of which we know the least. The chief obstacle to the communication of moral ideas is the human habit of moralizing, of preaching. It is a basic—and admirable—quality of human beings that no one of us likes to be told what to do, that is, what we *ought* to do. That, we say, is for *us* to decide. In this we are surely right. Yet the fact remains that now and then we do learn from others at least something about what we ought to do, but only as we adopt it as our own idea. How does this happen? Mainly, we think, from overhearing the dialogues of others, not with us but with themselves. We don't mind learning in this way. It becomes learning on our own initiative, not in response to moral pressure.

What seems an example of such dialogue is found in Hannah Arendt's book, *Between Past and Future* (1961), in the section on education. There she speaks of the obligation of the teacher, whose work is to introduce the world to the child, to *take joint responsibility* for the condition of the world. People who don't understand this, she said, should not be permitted to teach, adding that they ought not to bring children into the world!

But the world is a mess, becoming more of a mess and more threatening, day by day! How is such a situation introduced? Obviously, by not starting with the mess, but with what is healthful and good about the world, which includes a lot more than we ordinarily notice. It will probably work best to leave the bad things alone until the children ask questions about them, since questions are evidence that they are ready to begin to think about such matters.

But then, in relation to the bad things, how are you going to explain them? Will you locate scapegoats for the bad in human experience? Whose theory of the origin of good and evil will

you repeat? Or will you leave that question open, by reason of the fact that any answer you give is likely to be too simple, and therefore misleading, and a misleading answer is almost sure to add to the evil in the world.

How, then, have some educators dealt with this problem?

In many places in his writings Wendell Berry talks about the land of his farm in Port Royal, Kentucky. Over some ten or fifteen years he has been working to restore it to stable fertility. He accepted this task as *his* responsibility, giving as reason that his forebears, American settlers, misused the land without really knowing what they were doing. But he knows, or is learning, what they did wrong, and as a member of the family of man is slowly putting things right on his farm. It is a long job, consuming the time of a generation, and some of the farm was too far gone to be completely salvaged, but he goes on working at it. And it is fair to say that a certain happiness—a legitimate happiness—attends this work. He becomes, therefore, a good man to read.

There are some others with the same outlook. Recently *The Lore of the Land* (Schocken, 1983, \$14.95), by John Seymour, came in for review. Seymour, like Berry, is a farmer who writes, or a writer who farms. (His book is charmingly illustrated by his wife, Sally.) He begins his introduction by saying:

The "owner" of a piece of land has an enormous responsibility, whether the piece is large or small. The very word "owner" is a misnomer when applied to the land. The robin that hops about your garden, and the worms that he hunts, are, in their own terms, just as much "owners" of the land they occupy as you are. "Trustee" would be a better word. Anyone who comes into possession, in human terms, of a piece of land, should look upon himself or herself as the trustee of that piece of land—the "husbandman"—responsible for increasing the sum of living things on that land, holding the land just as much for the benefit of the robin, the wren and the earth-worm, even the bacteria in the soil, as for himself.

Of course we have a right to use the land for our own purposes, to grow food, for example, or timber,

or to make it beautiful to our eyes. We have a right—and a duty—to maintain a due order and balance among all the other forms of life on it. Man is part of Nature too and must take his part in the dance of Life and also of Death. If the caterpillars destroy our cabbages we have a right to sort 'em out. We do not have the right, though, to sort 'em out by using some indiscriminate poison that is going to do all other kinds of living things to death.

As well as rights, we have a positive duty with regard to land. According to the Book of Genesis, God put the Man and the Woman in the Garden to "dress it and keep it." Whether we look upon Genesis as divinely inspired or not, it is obvious that we should do just this. We should hand the land on to the next trustee better, more fruitful, more beautiful, and richer in living creatures than it was when we took over. The trusteeship of the land is a daunting responsibility. It is part of the Earth's surface that we are given charge of, full of living creatures other than mankind, in trust for future generations of humans as well as all forms of life.

But why, someone may ask, do we choose illustrations of those who accept responsibility for the condition of the world from those who work the land (John Seymour works it in England), when only four or five per cent of Americans are now left in agriculture? Well, for one thing, that may be a large part of what is wrong with us—consult Berry, Wes Jackson, and John Jeavons for the evidence. Yet another reason would be that the symbolism of gardening, growing things, is vivid and easy to remember, and needed by the young as part of their education. Where else could you go for so compact and communicable an account of the processes of life?

We have already quoted two thirds of Seymour's Introduction and now give the completing last paragraph:

The reason why our land is so desperately badly husbanded now is that it is held in too large units. The loving care that a good husbandman can devote to a piece of land can only be spread so far; when one person "owns" hundreds of acres he is forced to resort to mechanical and chemical warfare; the bulldozer and the poison spray take the place of Adam's spade and Eve's pruning shears. I am not inveighing against chemicals and machinery but simply against the thoughtless abuse of these things made necessary

by over-swollen land holdings. It can be seen over and over again that a smallholding is more fruitful, more beautiful, and richer in varied life than a vast agribusiness. This book is not intended for the agribusinessman, but for the holder of a piece of land of a size that he can really husband and cope with, and treat with the tender loving care that we should give to the soil and its denizens. Neither does this book tell people how to grow food; there are plenty of good books on that subject. It is to exhort people to care well and humanely for the land in their charge, to show how it is possible to tend the land beautifully: to plant it with trees, to establish well cared-for hedges instead of wire fences, to build good timber gates instead of buying steel ones that quickly rust and become eyesores, to drain wet places where drainage is needed and to do all the other operations that generally come under the heading of "estate management" when applied to huge estates. If the "estate management" side of things is looked after, the food production part comes much more easily and will be more successful. And, further, when you come to hand over the land to the next generation, you can do so with pride.

Far better than telling people what they ought to do is to tell about people who are already doing it, and what they are accomplishing. Those who live in cities, for example, might learn from the activity of a small group (Five Points) in Los Angeles who began bettering their community by once a week really cleaning the streets. Streets are usually regarded as a sort of no-man's-land, but not by the members, mostly women, of this group. Their activity first puzzled, then excited the admiration of the local residents, some of them starting to help. The children became involved. The next step was to plant saplings in holes cut in the sidewalk. The appearance of the neighborhood began to change, acquiring a lived-in look. Another step was to paint out graffiti, replacing it with colorful murals. The local businessmen, manufacturers and retailers, after recovering from their amazement, began to help—pay for the trees, the paint, the lunches of volunteers. Circles of involvement are continuing to grow. All who take part learn something of the spirit of community. It is a good feeling—this taking of responsibility for a job that will never be finished.

FRONTIERS

"Local Self-Reliance Is the Goal"

IN *Environment* for July/August David Morris summarizes the chief points and themes of his book, *Self-Reliant Cities* (Sierra Club paperback, \$8.95), reviewed in MANAS for June 22. He starts his article by briefly describing the beginnings of a long-term change, a movement toward self-consciousness and autonomy on the part of the urban centers of the United States. It is the medium-size cities—"Only eight per cent of our population lives in seven cities of 1,000,000 or more"—which are able to experiment and initiate needed reforms. Morris says:

The signs are there, harbingers of a new way of thinking. From the hills of Seattle to the arid flatlands of Davis, from the industrial city of Hartford to the university town of Madison, cities are beginning to redefine their role in our society. Long viewed as little more than real estate developers and social welfare dispensers, the municipal corporation is asserting the more important function of overall planning and development. Buffeted by natural resource crises beyond their control, cities are encouraging local sources of energy, food, and raw materials. Burdened by deteriorating physical plants, cities are designing new, less expensive, and more efficient life-support systems. Vulnerable to branch plant closings, cities are beginning to favor development that comes from within, that relies on hundreds of small businesses rather than one or two large facilities.

The city is becoming an ecological nation. As such, the city maximizes the long-term value of its finite piece of land by creating elegant, biologically based systems. Local self-reliance is the goal.

This deliberate movement on the part of cities and regions was the recommendation of Arthur Morgan, fifty years ago, now vindicated by the activity of progressive urban governments. Yet the obstacles are several and large. As Morris says:

Although local self-reliance, recycling, small-scale production, solar energy, and preventive rather than treatment systems may make more sense, we have to confront and transform institutions built in another era, when resources were plentiful, growth

was the objective, and affluence was a never-ending spiral.

We are cursed with giant central power plants, interlocking directorates between big corporations, big factories, big government, production systems far removed from their markets, bloated bureaucracies that are on the whole unproductive, if not downright destructive, and hierarchical organizational structures that remove the top policy makers from the impact of their decisions. We are cursed but not condemned.

We are at a turning point in history. The opportunity exists to marry local political authority to the advantage of modern technology to make more independent, self-reliant communities. Only at the local level can we design humanly scaled production systems that meet our unique local requirements. We can seize the opportunity and potential that comes from a period of rapid social change, and design a society in which we, and our children, would want to live. So far, to be sure, the positive signs are few. Yet they point the way to a new vision, a new context, and a new way of thinking.

Morris is convinced that the power picture will change:

In 1920, 4,000 power plants served the nation. In 1980, the same number did so. By 1990, as many as one million power plants will be in operation and by the year 2000 more than four million. These will be tiny plants, but they will represent a considerable political constituency. One of the major tasks of cities will be to develop institutional mechanisms to integrate these new technologies into existing structures.

Solar storage units, rooftop collectors, and another form of solar energy—food production—will require considerable space—a need that appears to be incompatible with the prevailing image of the congested American city. However, the fact is that the average city of more than 100,000 people has a density of fewer than seven people per acre, closer to that of Staten Island than Manhattan—the classic example of an urban area with a density of 140 people per acre. John Jeavons and Michael Shepard determined, on the basis of three years' growing experience, that a full, balanced diet may eventually be grown on as little as 2,500 square feet per person in a sixth-month growing season.

Regions, too, can plan. In the *Cape Cod Times* for July 17, Greg Watson of the New Alchemy Institute describes the problems of the

fifteen towns on the Cape—haphazard commercial development, traffic congestion, waste disposal and water pollution—all the result of rapid population growth. Only regional planning, he says, is the answer.

. . . individual towns cannot battle these problems on their own. They must work together because Cape Cod is a bioregion, meaning the environments of each of the 15 towns are intricately linked. For example, all of the Cape's towns share a sole source aquifer. If one town pollutes the aquifer all other towns may be affected. While there has been a long-standing cry for regional planning, and actions toward that goal have been started by the Cape Cod Planning and Economic Development Commission, towns thus far have really not been able to coordinate their efforts.

Now the New Alchemy Institute in East Falmouth is offering to coordinate efforts to help Cape towns design region-wide regulations that encourage development while preserving the unique historic personality of each town.

Called the Cape Cod Bioregional Development Plan, New Alchemy's strategy would update and codify information concerning the soils, geology, hydrology and vegetation for the Cape as a whole. That information would be programmed into a computer which would produce a series of maps designed to assist towns to assess the impact on the Cape environment of various development proposals and growth scenarios. . . . When completed, this plan will describe the kinds of zoning laws, sub-division by-laws and building codes that the Cape bioregion should adopt to ensure the coexistence of sustained economic development, environmental quality and the health and safety of all Cape residents.

The idea is to develop a proposal made through "the participation of every citizen and organized group on Cape Cod." The present problem was defined by Ian Menzies in the *Boston Globe* for June 20:

Back in 1920 only 45,000 people lived on Cape Cod. By 1965 the number had grown to 73,557. By 1970 it was 96,363, and five years later 126,481. Today it is an estimated 158,525. What will it be by the year 2000?

According to the Cape Cod Planning and Development Commission, 230,038.

During summer vacation time, this number will double to more than half a million.