

The Body and the Earth

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On the Cliff

The question of human limits, of the proper definition and place of human beings within the order of Creation, finally rests upon our attitude toward our biological existence, the life of the body in this world. What value and respect do we give to our bodies? What uses do we have for them? What relation do we see, if any, between body and mind, or body and soul? What connections or responsibilities do we maintain between our bodies and the earth? These are religious questions, obviously, for our bodies are part of the Creation, and they involve us in all the issues of mystery. But the questions are also agricultural, for no matter how urban our life, our bodies live by farming; we come from the earth and return to it, and so we live in agriculture as we live in flesh. While we live our bodies are moving particles of the earth, joined inextricably both to the soil and to the bodies of other living creatures. It is hardly surprising, then, that there should be some profound resemblances between our treatment of our bodies and our treatment of the earth.

That humans are small within the Creation is an ancient perception, represented often enough in art that it must be supposed to have an elemental importance. On one of the painted walls of the Lascaux cave (20,000-15,000 B.C.), surrounded by the exquisitely shaped, shaded, and colored bodies of animals, there is the childish stick figure of a man, a huntsman who, having cast his spear into the guts of a bison, is now weaponless and vulnerable, poignantly frail, exposed, and incomplete. The message seems essentially that of the voice out of the whirlwind in the Book of Job: the Creation is bounteous and mysterious, and humanity is only a part of it--not its equal, much less its master.

Old Chinese landscape paintings reveal, among towering mountains, the frail outline of a roof or a tiny human figure passing along a road on foot or horseback. These landscapes are almost always populated. There is no implication of a dehumanized interest in nature "for its own sake." What is represented is a world in which humans belong, but which does not belong to humans in any tidy economic sense; the Creation provides a place for humans, but it is greater than humanity and within it even great men are small. Such humility is the consequence of an accurate insight, ecological in its bearing, not a pious deference to "spiritual" value.

Closer to us is a passage from the fourth act of *King Lear*, describing the outlook from one of the Dover cliffs:

The crows and choughs that wing the midway air

Show scarce so gross as beetles. Halfway down

Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade!

Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.

The fishermen that walk upon the beach

Appear like mice, and yond tall anchoring bark

Diminished to her cock--her cock, a buoy

Almost too small for sight.

And this is no mere description of a scenic "view." It is part of a play-within-a-play, a sort of ritual of healing. In it Shakespeare is concerned with the curative power of the perception we are dealing with: by understanding accurately his proper place in Creation, a man may be made whole.

In the lines quoted, Edgar, disguised as a lunatic, a Bedlamite, is speaking to his father, the Earl of Gloucester. Gloucester, having been blinded by the treachery of his false son, Edmund, has despaired and has asked the supposed madman to lead him to the cliff's edge, where he intends to destroy himself. But Edgar's description is from memory; the two are not standing on any such dizzy verge. What we are witnessing is the working out of Edgar's strategy to save his father from false feeling--both the pride, the smug credulity, that led to his suffering and the despair that is its result. These emotions are perceived as madness; Gloucester's blindness is literally the result of the moral blindness of his pride, and it is symbolic of the spiritual blindness of his despair.

Thinking himself on the edge of a cliff, he renounces this world and throws himself down. Though he falls only to the level of his own feet, he is momentarily stunned. Edgar remains with him, but now represents himself as an innocent bystander at the foot of what Gloucester will continue to think is a tall cliff. As the old man recovers his senses, Edgar persuades him that the madman who led him to the cliff's edge was in reality a "fiend." And Gloucester repents his self-destructiveness, which he now recognizes as another kind of pride; a human has no right to destroy what he did not create:

You ever-gentle gods, take my breath from me.

Let not my worser spirit tempt me again

To die before you please.

What Gloucester has passed through, then, is a rite of death and rebirth. In his new awakening he is finally able to recognize his true son. He escapes the unhuman conditions of godly pride and fiendish despair and dies "smilingly" in the truly human estate " 'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief ..."

Until modern times, we focused a great deal of the best of our thought upon such rituals of return to the human condition. Seeking enlightenment or the Promised Land or the way home, a man would go or be forced to go into the wilderness, measure himself against the Creation, recognize finally his true place within it, and thus be saved both from pride and from despair. Seeing himself as a tiny member of a world he cannot comprehend or master or in any final sense possess, he cannot possibly think of himself as a god. And by the same token, since he shares in, depends upon, and is graced by all of which he is a part, neither can he become a fiend; he cannot descend into the final despair of destructiveness. Returning from the wilderness, he becomes a restorer of order, a preserver. He sees the truth, recognizes his true heir, honors his forebears and his heritage, and gives his blessing to his successors. He embodies the passing of human time, living and dying within the human limits of grief and joy.

On the Tower

Apparently with the rise of industry, we began to romanticize the wilderness--which is to say we began to institutionalize it within the concept of the "scenic." Because of railroads and improved highways, the wilderness was no longer an arduous passage for the traveler, but something to be looked at as grand or beautiful from the high vantages of the roadside. We became viewers of "views." And because we no longer traveled in the wilderness as a matter of course, we forgot that wilderness still circumscribed civilization and persisted in domesticity. We forgot, indeed, that the civilized and the domestic continued to *depend* upon wilderness--that is, upon natural forces within the climate and within the soil that have never in any meaningful sense been controlled or conquered. Modern civilization has been built largely in this forgetfulness.

And as we transformed the wilderness into scenery, we began to feel in the presence of "nature" an awe that was increasingly statistical. We would not become appreciators of the Creation until we had taken its measure. Once we had climbed or driven to the mountain top, we were awed by the view, but it was an awe that we felt compelled to validate or prove by the knowledge of how high we stood and how far we saw. We are invited to "see seven states from atop Lookout Mountain," as if our political boundaries had been drawn in red on the third morning of Creation.

We became less and less capable of sensing ourselves as small within Creation, partly because we thought we could comprehend it statistically, but also because we

were becoming creators, ourselves, of a mechanical creation by which we felt ourselves greatly magnified. We built bridges that stood imposingly in titanic settings, towers that stood around us like geologic presences, single machines that could do the work of hundreds of people. Why, after all, should one get excited about a mountain when one can see almost as far from the top of a building, much farther from an airplane, farther still from a space capsule? We have learned to be fascinated by the statistics of magnitude and power. There is apparently no limit in sight, no end, and so it is no wonder that our minds, dizzy with numbers, take refuge in a yearning for infinitudes of energy and materials.

And yet these works that so magnify us also dwarf us, reduce us to insignificance. They magnify us because we are capable of them. They diminish us because, say what we will, once we build beyond a human scale, once we conceive ourselves as Titans or as gods, we are lost in magnitude; we cannot control or limit what we do. The statistics of magnitude call out like Sirens to the statistics of destruction. If we have built towering cities, we have raised even higher the cloud of megadeath. If people are as grass before God, they are as nothing before their machines.

If we are fascinated by the statistics of magnitude, we are no less fascinated by the statistics of our insignificance. We never tire of repeating the commonizing figures of population and population growth. We are entranced to think of ourselves as specks on the pages of our own overwhelming history. I remember that my high-school biology text dealt with the human body by listing its constituent elements, measuring their quantities, and giving their monetary worth--at that time a little less than a dollar. That was a bit of the typical fodder of the modern mind, at once sensational and belittling--no accidental product of the age of Dachau and Hiroshima.

In our time Shakespeare's cliff has become the tower of a bridge--not the scene of a wakening rite of symbolic death and rebirth, but of the real and final death of suicide. Hart Crane wrote its paradigm, as if against his will, in *The Bridge*:

Out of some subway scuttle, cell or loft

A bedlamite speeds to thy parapets,

Tilting there momentarily, shrill shirt ballooning,

A jest falls from the speechless caravan.

In Shakespeare, the real Bedlamite or madman is the desperate and suicidal Gloucester. The supposed Bedlamite is in reality his true son, and together they enact an eloquent ritual in which Edgar gives his father a vision of Creation. Gloucester abandons himself to this vision, literally casting himself into it, and is renewed; he finds his life by losing it. Gloucester is saved by a renewal of his sense

of the world and of his proper place in it. And this is brought about by an enactment that is communal, both in the sense that he is accompanied in it by his son, who for the time being has assumed the disguise of a madman but the role of a priest, and in the sense that it is deeply traditional in its symbols and meanings. In Crane, on the other hand, the Bedlamite is alone, surrounded by speechlessness, cut off within the crowd from any saving or renewing vision. The height, which in Shakespeare is the traditional place of vision, has become in Crane a place of blindness; the bridge, which Crane intended as a unifying symbol, has become the symbol of a final estrangement.

Health

After I had begun to think about these things, I received a letter containing an account of a more recent suicide. The following sentences from that letter seem both to corroborate Crane's lines and to clarify them:

"My friend _____ jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge two months ago.... She had been terribly depressed for years. There was no help for her. None that she could find that was sufficient. She was trying to get from one phase of her life to another, and couldn't make it. She had been terribly wounded as a child.... Her wound could not be healed. She destroyed herself."

The letter had already asked, "How does a human pass through youth to maturity without 'breaking down'?" And it had answered: "help from tradition, through ceremonies and rituals, rites of passage at the most difficult stages."

My correspondent went on to say: "Healing, it seems to me, is a necessary and useful word when we talk about agriculture." And a few paragraphs later he wrote: "The theme of suicide belongs in a book about agriculture..."

I agree. But I am also aware that many people will find it exceedingly strange that these themes should enter so forcibly into this book. It will be thought that I am off the subject. And so I want to take pains to show that I am on the subject--and on it, moreover, in the only way most people have of getting on it: by way of the issue of their own health. Indeed, it is when one approaches agriculture from any *other* issue than that of health that one may be said to be off the subject.

The difficulty probably lies in our narrowed understanding of the word *health*. That there is some connection between how we feel and what we eat, between our bodies and the earth, is acknowledged when we say that we must "eat right to keep fit" or that we should eat "a balanced diet." But by health we mean little more than how we feel. We are healthy, we think, if we do not feel any pain or too much pain, and if we are strong enough to do our work. If we become unhealthy, then we go to a doctor who we hope will "cure" us and restore us to health. By health, in other words, we mean merely the absence of disease. Our health professionals are

interested almost exclusively in preventing disease (mainly by destroying germs) and in curing disease (mainly by surgery and by destroying germs).

But the concept of health is rooted in the concept of wholeness. To be healthy is to be whole. The word *health* belongs to a family of words, a listing of which will suggest how far the consideration of health must carry us: *heal, whole, wholesome, hale, hallow, holy*. And so it is possible to give a definition to health that is positive and far more elaborate than that given to it by most medical doctors and the officers of public health.

If the body is healthy, then it is whole. But how can it be whole and yet be dependent, as it obviously is, upon other bodies and upon the earth, upon all the rest of Creation, in fact? It immediately becomes clear that the health or wholeness of the body is a vast subject, and that to preserve it calls for a vast enterprise. Blake said that "Man has no Body distinct from his Soul..." and thus acknowledged the convergence of health and holiness. In that, all the convergences and dependences of Creation are surely implied. Our bodies are also not distinct from the bodies of other people, on which they depend in a complexity of ways from biological to spiritual. They are not distinct from the bodies of plants and animals, with which we are involved in the cycles of feeding and in the intricate companionships of ecological systems and of the spirit. They are not distinct from the earth, the sun and moon, and the other heavenly bodies.

It is therefore absurd to approach the subject of health piecemeal with a departmentalized band of specialists. A medical doctor uninterested in nutrition, in agriculture, in the wholesomeness of mind and spirit is as absurd as a farmer who is uninterested in health. Our fragmentation of this subject cannot be our cure, because it is our disease. The body cannot be whole alone. Persons cannot be whole alone. It is wrong to think that bodily health is compatible with spiritual confusion or cultural disorder, or with polluted air and water or impoverished soil. Intellectually, we know that these patterns of interdependence exist; we understand them better now perhaps than we ever have before; yet modern social and cultural patterns contradict them and make it difficult or impossible to honor them in practice.

To try to heal the body alone is to collaborate in the destruction of the body. Healing is impossible in loneliness; it is the opposite of loneliness. Conviviality is healing. To be healed we must come with all the other creatures to the feast of Creation. Together, the above two descriptions of suicides suggest this very powerfully. The setting of both is urban, amid the gigantic works of modern humanity. The fatal sickness is despair, a wound that cannot be healed because it is encapsulated in loneliness, surrounded by speechlessness. Past the scale of the human, our works do not liberate us--they confine us. They cut off access to the wilderness of Creation where we must go to be reborn--to receive the awareness, at once humbling and exhilarating, grievous and joyful, that we are a part of Creation, one with all that we live from and all that, in turn, lives from us. They destroy the communal rites of

passage that turn us toward the wilderness and bring us home again.

The Isolation of the Body

Perhaps the fundamental damage of the specialist system--the damage from which all other damages issue--has been the isolation of the body. At some point we began to assume that the life of the body would be the business of grocers and medical doctors, who need take no interest in the spirit, whereas the life of the spirit would be the business of churches, which would have at best only a negative interest in the body. In the same way we began to see nothing wrong with putting the body--most often somebody else's body, but frequently our own—a task that insulted the mind and demeaned the find it easier than ever to prefer our own other creatures and to abuse, exploit, and otherwise hold in contempt those other bodies for the greater good or comfort of our own.

The isolation of the body sets it into direct conflict with everything else in Creation. It gives it a value that is destructive of every other value. That this has happened is paradoxical, for the body was set apart from the soul in order that the soul should triumph over the body. The aim is stated in Shakespeare's Sonnet 146 as plainly as anywhere:

*Poor soul, the center of my sinful earth,
Lord of these rebel powers that thee array,
Why dost thou pine within and suffer dearth,
Painting thy outward walls so costly gay?
Why so large cost, having so short a lease,
Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,
Eat up thy charge? Is this thy body's end?
Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss,
And let that pine to aggravate thy store;
Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross;
Within be fed, without be rich no more.
So shalt thou feed on death, that feeds on men,*

And death once dead, there's no more dying then.

The soul is thus set against the body, to thrive at the body's expense. And so a spiritual economy is devised within which the only law is competition. If the soul is to live in this world only by denying the body, then its relation to worldly life becomes extremely simple and superficial. Too simple and superficial, in fact, to cope in any meaningful or useful way with the world. Spiritual value ceases to have any worldly purpose or force. To fail to employ the body in this world at once for its own good and the good of the soul is to issue an invitation to disorder of the most serious kind.

What was not foreseen in this simple-minded economics of religion was that it is not possible to devalue the body and value the soul. The body, cast loose from the soul, is on its own. Devalued and cast out of the temple, the body does not skulk off like a sick do to die in the bushes. It sets up a counterpart economy of its own, based also on the law of competition, in which it devalues and exploits the spirit. These two economies maintain themselves at each other's expense, living upon each other's loss, collaborating without cease in mutual futility and absurdity.

You cannot devalue the body and value the soul--or value anything else. The prototypical act issuing from this division was to make a person a slave and then instruct him in religions "charity" more damaging to the master than to the slave. Contempt for the body is invariably manifested in contempt for other bodies--the bodies of slaves, laborers, women, animals, plants, the earth itself. Relationships with all other creatures become competitive and exploitive rather than collaborative and convivial. The world is seen and dealt with, not as an ecological community, but as a stock exchange, the ethics of which are based on the tragically misnamed "law of the jungle." This "jungle" law is a basic fallacy of modern culture. The body is degraded and saddened by being set in conflict against the Creation itself, of which all bodies are members, therefore members of each other. The body is thus sent to war against itself.

Divided, set against each other, body and soul drive each other to extremes of misapprehension and folly. Nothing could be more absurd than to despise the body and yet yearn for its resurrection. In reaction to this supposedly religious attitude, we get, not reverence or respect for the body, but another kind of contempt: the desire to comfort and indulge the body with equal disregard for its health. The "dialogue of body and soul" in our time is being carried on between those who despise the body for the sake of its resurrection and those, diseased by bodily extravagance and lack of exercise, who nevertheless desire longevity above all things. These think that they oppose each other, and yet they could not exist apart. They are locked in a conflict that is really their collaboration in the destruction of soul and body both.

What this conflict has done, among other things, is to make it extremely difficult to set a proper value on the life of the body in this world--to believe that it is good,

howbeit short and imperfect. Until we are able to say this and know what we mean by it, we will not be able to live our lives in the human estate of grief and joy, but repeatedly will be cast outside in violent swings between pride and despair. Desires that cannot be fulfilled in health will keep us hopelessly restless and unsatisfied.

Competition

By dividing body and soul, we divide both from all else. We thus condemn ourselves to a loneliness for which the only compensation is violence--against other creatures, against the earth, against ourselves. For no matter the distinctions we draw between body and soul, body and earth, ourselves and others--the connections, the dependences, the identities remain. And so we fail to contain or control our violence. It gets loose. Though there are categories of violence, or so we think, there are no categories of victims. Violence against one is ultimately violence against all. The willingness to abuse other bodies is the willingness to abuse one's own. To damage the earth is to damage your children. To despise the ground is to despise its fruit; to despise the fruit is to despise its eaters. The wholeness of health is broken by despite.

If competition is the correct relation of creatures to one another and to the earth, then we must ask why exploitation is not more successful than it is. Why, having lived so long at the expense of other creatures and the earth, are we not healthier and happier than we are? Why does modern society exist under constant threat of the same suffering, deprivation, spite, contempt, and obliteration that it has imposed on other people and other creatures? Why do the health of the body and the health of the earth decline together? And why, in consideration of this decline of our worldly flesh and household, our "sinful earth," are we not healthier in spirit?

It is not necessary to have recourse to statistics to see that the human estate is declining with the estate of nature, and that the corruption of the body is the corruption of the soul. I know that the country is full of "leaders" and experts of various sorts who are using statistics to prove the opposite: that we have more cars, more superhighways, more TV sets, motorboats, prepared foods, etc., than any people ever had before--and are therefore better off than any people ever were before. I can see the burgeoning of this "consumer economy" and can appreciate some of its attractions and comforts. But that economy has an inside and an outside; from the outside there are other things to be seen.

I am writing this in the north-central part of Kentucky on a morning near the end of June. We have had rain for two days, hard rain during the last several hours. From where I sit I can see the Kentucky River swiftening and rising, the water already yellow with mud. I know that inside this city-oriented consumer economy there are many people who will never see this muddy rise and many who will see it without knowing what it means. I know also that there are many who will see it, and know what it means, and not care. If it lasts until the weekend there will be people who

will find it as good as clear water for motorboating and waterskiing.

In the past several days I have seen some of the worst-eroded corn fields that I have seen in this country in my life. This erosion is occurring on the cash-rented farms of farmers' widows and city farmers, absentee owners, the doctors and businessmen who buy a farm for the tax breaks or to have "a quiet place in the country" for the weekends. It is the direct result of economic and agricultural policy; it might be said to *be* an economic and agricultural policy. The signs of the "agridollar," big-business fantasy of the Butz mentality are all present: the absenteeism, the temporary and shallow interest of the land-renter, the row-cropping of slopes, the lack of rotation, the plowed-out waterways, the rows running up and down the hills.

Looked at from the field's edge, this is ruin, criminal folly, moral idiocy. Looked at from Washington, D.C., from inside the "economy," it is called "free enterprise" and "full production."

And around me here, as everywhere else I have been in this country--in Nebraska, Iowa, Indiana, New York, New England, Tennessee--the farmland is in general decline: fields and whole farms abandoned, given up with their scars unattended, washing away under the weeds and bushes; fine land put to row crops year after year, without rest or rotation; buildings and fences going down; good houses standing empty, unpainted, their windows broken.

And it is clear to anyone who looks carefully at any crowd that we are wasting our bodies exactly as we are wasting our land. Our bodies are fat, weak, joyless, sickly, ugly, the virtual prey of the manufacturers of medicine and cosmetics. Our bodies have become marginal; they are growing useless like our "marginal" land because we have less and less use for them. After the games and idle flourishes of modern youth, we use them only as shipping cartons to transport our brains and our few employable muscles back and forth to work.

As for our spirits, they seem more and more to comfort themselves by buying things. No longer in need of the exalted drama of grief and joy, they feed now on little shocks of greed, scandal, and violence. For many of the churchly, the life of the spirit is reduced to a dull preoccupation with getting to Heaven. At best, the world is no more than an embarrassment and a trial to the spirit, which is otherwise radically separated from it. The true lover of God must not be burdened with any care or respect for His works. While the body goes about its business of destroying the earth, the soul is supposed to lie back and wait for Sunday, keeping itself free of earthly contaminants. While the body exploits other bodies, the soul stands aloof, free from sin, crying to the gawking bystanders: "I am not enjoying it!" As far as this sort of "religion" is concerned, the body is no more than the lusterless container of the soul, a mere "package," that will nevertheless light up in eternity, forever cool and shiny as a neon cross. This separation of the soul from the body and from the world is no disease of the fringe, no aberration, but a fracture that runs through the

mentality of institutional religion like a geologic fault. And this rift in the mentality of religion continues to characterize the modern mind, no matter how secular or worldly it becomes.

But I have not stated my point exactly enough. This rift is not *like* a geologic fault; it is a geologic fault. It is a flaw in the mind that runs inevitably into the earth. Thought affects or afflicts substance neither by intention nor by accident, but because, occurring in the Creation that is unified and whole, it must; there is no help for it.

The soul, in its loneliness, hopes only for "salvation." And yet what is the burden of the Bible if not a sense of the mutuality of influence, rising out of an essential unity, among soul and body and community and world? These are all the works of God, and it is therefore the work of virtue to make or restore harmony among them. The world is certainly thought of as a place of spiritual trial, but it is also the confluence of soul and body, word and flesh, where thoughts must become deeds, where goodness is to be enacted. This is the great meeting place, the narrow passage where spirit and flesh, word and world, pass into each other. The Bible's aim, as I read it ' is not the freeing of the spirit from the world. It is the handbook of their interaction. It says that they cannot be divided; that their mutuality, their unity, is inescapable; that they are not reconciled in division, but in harmony. What else can be meant by the resurrection of the body?

The body should be "filled with light," perfected in understanding. And so everywhere there is the sense of consequence, fear and desire, grief and joy. What is desirable is repeatedly defined in the tensions of the sense of consequence. False prophets are to be known "by their fruits." We are to treat others as we would be treated; thought is thus barred from any easy escape into aspiration or ideal, is turned around and forced into action. The following verses from Proverbs are not very likely the original work of a philosopher-king; they are overheard from generations of agrarian grandparents whose experience taught them that spiritual qualities become earthly events:

I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding;

And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and

nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone

wall thereof was broken down.

Then I saw, and considered it well. I looked

upon it, and received instruction.

Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding

of the hands to sleep:

So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth ;

and thy want as an armed man.

Connections

I do not want to speak of unity misleadingly or too simply. Obvious distinctions can be made between body and soul, one body and other bodies, body and world, etc. But these things that appear to be distinct are nevertheless caught in a network of mutual dependence and influence that is the substantiation of their unity. Body, soul (or mind or spirit), community, and world are all susceptible to each other's influence, and they are all conductors of each other's influence. The body is damaged by the bewilderment of the spirit, and it conducts the influence of that bewilderment into the earth, the earth conducts it into the community, and so on. If a farmer fails to understand what health is, his farm becomes unhealthy; it produces unhealthy food, which damages the health of the community. But this is a network, a spherical network, by which each part is connected to every other part. The farmer is a part of the community, and so it is as impossible to say exactly where the trouble began as to say where it will end. The influences go backward and forward, up and down, round and round, compounding and branching as they go. All that is certain is that an error introduced anywhere in the network ramifies beyond the scope of prediction; consequences occur all over the place, and each consequence breeds further consequences. But it seems unlikely that an error can ramify endlessly. It spreads by way of the connections in the network, but sooner or later it must also begin to break them. We are talking, obviously, about a circulatory system, and a disease of a circulatory system tends first to impair circulation and then to stop it altogether.

Healing, on the other hand, complicates the system by opening and restoring connections among the various parts--in this way restoring the ultimate simplicity of their union. When all the parts of the body are working together, are under each other's influence, we say that it is whole; it is healthy. The same is true of the world, of which our bodies are parts. The parts are healthy insofar as they are joined harmoniously to the whole.

What the specialization of our age suggests, in one example after another, is not only that fragmentation is a disease, but that the diseases of the disconnected parts are similar or analogous to one another. Thus they memorialize their lost unity, their relation persisting in their disconnection. Any severance produces two wounds that are, among other things, the record of how the severed parts once fitted together.

The so-called identity crisis, for instance, is a disease that seems to have become prevalent after the disconnection of body and soul and the other piecemealings of the modern period. One's "identity" is apparently the immaterial part of one's being--also known as psyche, soul, spirit, self, mind, etc. The dividing of this principle from the body and from any particular worldly locality would seem reason enough for a crisis. Treatment, it might be thought, would logically consist in the restoration of these connections: the lost identity would find itself by recognizing physical landmarks, by connecting itself responsibly to practical circumstances; it would learn to stay put in the body to which it belongs and in the place to which preference or history or accident has brought it; it would, in short, find itself in finding its work. But "finding yourself," the pseudo-ritual by which the identity crisis is supposed to be resolved, makes use of no such immediate references. Leaving aside the obvious, and ancient, realities of doubt and self-doubt, as well as the authentic madness that is often the result of cultural disintegration, it seems likely that the identity crisis has become a sort of social myth, a genre of self-indulgence. It can be an excuse for irresponsibility or a fashionable mode of self-dramatization. It is the easiest form of self-flattery--a way to construe procrastination as a virtue--based on the romantic assumption that "who I really am" is better in some fundamental way than the available evidence proves.

The fashionable cure for this condition, if I understand the lore of it correctly has nothing to do with the assumption of responsibilities or the renewal of connections. The cure is "autonomy," another mythical condition, suggesting that the self can be self-determining and independent without regard for any determining circumstance or any of the obvious dependences. This seems little more than a jargon term for indifference to the opinions and feelings of other people. There is, in practice, no such thing as autonomy. Practically, there is only a distinction between responsible and irresponsible dependence. Inevitably failing this impossible standard of autonomy, the modern self-seeker becomes a tourist of cures, submitting his quest to the guidance of one guru after another. The "cure" thus preserves the disease.

It is not surprising that this strange disease of the spirit---the self's search for the self--should have its counterpart in an anguish of the body. One of the commonplaces of modern experience is dissatisfaction with the body--not as one has allowed it to become, but as it naturally is. The hardship is perhaps greater here because the body, unlike the self, is substantial and cannot be supposed to be inherently better than it was born to be. It can only be thought inherently worse than it *ought* to be. For the appropriate standard for the body--that is, health--has been replaced, not even by another standard, but by very exclusive physical *models*. The concept of "model" here conforms very closely to the model of the scientists and planners: it is an exclusive, narrowly defined ideal which affects destructively whatever it does not include.

Thus our young people are offered the ideal of health only by what they know to be lip service. What they are made to feel forcibly, and to measure themselves by, is the

exclusive desirability of a certain physical model. Girls are taught to want to be leggy, slender, large-breasted, curly-haired, unimposingly beautiful. Boys are instructed to be "athletic" in build, tall but not too tall, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, narrow-hipped, square-jawed, straight-nosed, not bald, unimposingly handsome. Both sexes should look what passes for "sexy" in a bathing suit. Neither, above all, should look old.

Though many people, in health, are beautiful, very few resemble these models. The result is widespread suffering that does immeasurable damage both to individual persons and to the society as a whole. The result is another absurd pseudo-ritual, "accepting one's body," which may take years or may be the distraction of a lifetime. Woe to the man who is short or skinny or bald. Woe to the man with a big nose. Woe, above all, to the woman with small breasts or a muscular body or strong features; Homer and Solomon might have thought her beautiful, but she will see her own beauty only by a difficult rebellion. And like the crisis of identity, this crisis of the body brings a helpless dependence on cures. One spends one's life dressing and "making up" to compensate for one's supposed deficiencies. Again, the cure preserves the disease. And the putative healer is the guru of style and beauty aid. The sufferer is by definition a customer.

Sexual Division

To divide body and soul, or body and mind, is to inaugurate an expanding series of divisions--not, however, an infinitely expanding series, because it is apparently the nature of division sooner or later to destroy what is divided; the principle of durability is unity. The divisions issuing from the division of body and soul are first sexual and then ecological. Many other divisions branch out from those, but those are the most important because they have to do with the fundamental relationships--with each other and with the earth that we all have in common.

To think of the body as separate from the soul or as soulless, either to subvert its appetites or to "free" them, is to make an object of it. As a thing, the body is denied any dimension or rightful presence or claim in the mind. The concerns of the body--all that is comprehended in the term nurture--are thus degraded, denied any respected place among the "higher things" and even among the more exigent practicalities.

The first sexual division comes about when nurture is made the exclusive concern of women. This cannot happen until a society becomes industrial; in hunting and gathering and in agricultural societies, men are of necessity also involved in nurture. In those societies there usually have been differences between the work of men and that of women. But the necessity here is to distinguish between sexual difference and sexual division.

In an industrial society, following the division of body and soul, we have at the

"upper" or professional level a division between 4 c culture" (in the specialized sense of religion, philosophy, art, the humanities, etc.) and "practicality," and both of these become increasingly abstract. Thinkers do not act. And the "practical" men do not work with their hands, but manipulate the abstract quantities and values that come from the work of "workers." Workers are simplified or specialized into machine parts to do the wage-work of the body, which they were initially permitted to think of as "manly" because for the most part women did not do it.

Women traditionally have performed the most confining--though not necessarily the least dignified--tasks of nurture: housekeeping, the care of young children, food preparation. In the urban-industrial situation the confinement of these traditional tasks divided women more and more from the "important" activities of the new economy. Furthermore, in this situation the traditional nurturing role of men, that of provisioning the household, which in an agricultural society had become as constant and as complex as the women's role--became completely abstract; the man's duty to the household came to be simply to provide money. The only remaining *task* of provisioning--purchasing food--was turned over to women. This determination that nurturing should become *exclusively* a concern of women served to signify to both sexes that neither nurture nor womanhood was very important.

But the assignment to women of a kind of work that was thought both onerous and trivial was only the beginning of their exploitation. As the persons exclusively in charge of the tasks of nurture, women often came into sole charge of the household budget; they became family purchasing agents. The time of the household barterer was past. Kitchens were now run on a cash economy. Women had become customers, a fact not long wasted on the salesmen, who saw that in these women they had customers of a new and most promising kind. The modern housewife was isolated from her husband, from her school-age children, and from other women. She was saddled with work from which much of the skill, hence much of the dignity, had been withdrawn, and which she herself was less and less able to consider important. She did not know what her husband did at work, or after work, and she knew that her life was passing in his regardlessness and in his absence. Such a woman was ripe for a sales talk: this was the great commercial insight of modern times. Such a woman must be told--or subtly made to understand--that she must not be a drudge, that she must not let her work affect her looks, that she must not become "unattractive," that she must always be fresh, cheerful, young, shapely, and pretty. All her sexual and mortal fears would thus be given voice, and she would be made to reach for money. What was implied was always the question that a certain bank finally asked outright in a billboard advertisement: "Is your husband losing interest?"

Motivated no longer by practical needs, but by loneliness and fear, women began to identify themselves by what they bought rather than by what they did. They bought labor-saving devices which worked, as most modern machines have tended to work, to devalue or replace the skills of those who used them. They bought manufactured

foods, which did likewise. They bought any product that offered to lighten the burdens of housework, to be "kind to hands," or to endear one to one's husband. And they furnished their houses, as they made up their faces and selected their clothes, neither by custom nor invention, but by the suggestion of articles and advertisements in "women's magazines." Thus housewifery, once a complex discipline acknowledged to be one of the bases of civilization, was reduced to the exercise of purchasing power.

[She did continue to do "housework," of course. But we must ask what this had come to mean. The industrial economy had changed the criterion of housekeeping from thrift to convenience. Thrift was a complex standard, requiring skill, intelligence, and moral character, and private thrift was rightly considered a public value. Once thrift was destroyed as a value, housekeeping became simply a corrupt function of a corrupt economy: its public "value" lay in the wearing out or using up of commodities.]

The housewife's only remaining productive capacity was that of reproduction. But even as a mother she remained a consumer, subjecting herself to an all-presuming doctor and again to written instructions calculated to result in the purchase of merchandise. Breast-feeding of babies became unfashionable, one suspects, because it was the last form of home production; no way could be found to persuade a woman to purchase her own milk. All these "improvements" involved a radical simplification of mind that was bound to have complicated, and ironic, results. As housekeeping became simpler and easier, it also became more boring. A woman's work became less accomplished and less satisfying. It became easier for her to believe that what she did was not important. And this heightened her anxiety and made her even more avid and even less discriminating as a consumer. The cure not only preserved the disease, it compounded it.

There was, of course, a complementary development in the minds of men, but there is less to say about it. The man's mind was not simplified by a degenerative process, but by a kind of coup: as soon as he separated working and living and began to work away from home, the practical considerations of the household were excerpted from his mind all at once.

In modern marriage, then, what was once a difference of work became a division of work. And in this division the household was destroyed as a practical bond between husband and wife. It was no longer a condition, but only a place. It was no longer a circumstance that required, dignified, and rewarded the enactment of mutual dependence, but the site of mutual estrangement. Home became a place for the husband to go when he was not working or amusing himself. It was the place where the wife was held in servitude.

A sexual difference is not a wound, or it need not be; a sexual division is. And it is important to recognize that this division--this destroyed household that now stands

between the sexes--is a wound that is suffered inescapably by both men and women. Sometimes it is assumed that the estrangement of women in their circumscribed "women's world" can only be for the benefit of men. But that interpretation seems to be based on the law of competition that is modeled in the exploitive industrial economy. This law holds that for everything that is exploited or oppressed there must be something else that is proportionately improved; thus, men must be as happy as women are unhappy.

There is no doubt that women have been deformed by the degenerate housewifery that is now called their "role"--but not, I think, for any man's benefit. If women are deformed by their role, then, insofar as the roles are divided, men are deformed by theirs. Degenerate housewifery is indivisible from degenerate husbandry. There is no escape. This is the justice that we are learning from the ecologists: you cannot damage what you are dependent upon without damaging yourself. The suffering of women is noticed now, is noticeable now, because it is not given any considerable status or compensation. If we removed the status and compensation from the destructive exploits we classify as "manly," men would be found to be suffering as much as women. They would be found to be suffering for the same reason: they are in exile from the communion of men and women, which is their deepest connection with the communion of all creatures.

For example: a man who is in the traditional sense a good farmer is husbandman and husband, the begetter and conservator of the earth's bounty, but he is also midwife and motherer. He is a nurturer of life. His work is domestic; he is bound to the household. But let "progress" take such a man and transform him into a technologist of production (that is, sever his bonds to the household, make useless or pointless or "uneconomical" his impulse to conserve and to nurture), and it will have made of him a creature as deformed, and as pained, as it has notoriously made of his wife.

The Dismemberment of the Household

We are familiar with the concept of the disintegral life of our time as a dismembered cathedral, the various concerns of culture no longer existing in reference to each other or within the discipline of any understanding of their unity. It may also be conceived, and its strains more immediately felt, as a dismembered household. Without the household--not just as a unifying ideal, but as a practical circumstance of mutual dependence and obligation, requiring skill, moral discipline, and work--husband and wife find it less and less possible to imagine and enact their marriage. Without much in particular that they can *do* for each other, they have a scarcity of practical reasons to be together. They may "like each other's company," but that is a reason for friendship, not for marriage. Aside from affection for any children they may have and their abstract legal and economic obligations to each other, their union has to be empowered by sexual energy alone.

Perhaps the most dangerous, certainly the most immediately painful, consequence of

the disintegration of the household is this isolation of sexuality. The division of sexual energy from the functions of household and community that it ought both to empower and to grace is analogous to that other modern division between hunger and the earth. When it is no longer allied by proximity and analogy to the nurturing disciplines that bound the household to the cycles of fertility and the seasons, life and death, then sexual love loses its symbolic or ritualistic force, its deepest solemnity and its highest 'oy. It loses its sense of consequence and responsibility. It becomes "autonomous," to be valued only for its own sake, therefore frivolous, therefore destructive--even of itself. Those who speak of sex as "recreation," thinking to claim for it "a new place," only acknowledge its displacement from Creation.

The isolation of sexuality makes it subject to two influences that dangerously oversimplify it: the lore of sexual romance and capitalist economics. By "sexual romance" I mean the sentimentalization of sexual love that for generations has been the work of popular songs and stories. By means of them, young people have been taught a series of extremely dangerous falsehoods:

- 1) That people in love ought to conform to the fashionable models of physical beauty, and that to be unbeautiful by these standards is to be unlovable.
- 2) That people in love are, or ought to be, young--even though love is said to last "forever."
- 3) That marriage is a solution--whereas the most misleading thing a love story can do is to end "happily" with a marriage, not because there is no such thing as a happy marriage, but because marriage cannot be happy except by being *made* happy.
- 4) That love, alone, regardless of circumstances, can make harmony and resolve serious differences.
- 5) That "love will find a way" and so finally triumph over anykind of practical difficulty.
- 6) That the "right" partners are "made for each other," or that "marriages are made in Heaven."
- 7) That lovers are "each other's all" or "all the world to each other."
- 8) That monogamous marriage is therefore logical and natural, and "forsaking all others" involves no difficulty.

Believing these things, a young couple could not be more cruelly exposed to the abrasions of experience--or better prepared to experience marriage as another of those grim and ironic modern competitions in which the victory of one is the defeat

of both.

As experience frets away gullibility, the exclusiveness of the sentimental ideal gives way to the possessiveness of sexual capitalism. Failing, as they cannot help but fail, to be each other's all, the husband and wife become each other's only. The sacrament of sexual union, which in the time of the household was a communion of workmates, and afterward tried to be a lovers' paradise, has now become a kind of marketplace in which husband and wife represent each other as sexual property. Competitiveness and jealousy, imperfectly sweetened and disguised by the illusions of courtship, now become governing principles, and they work to isolate the couple inside their marriage. Marriage becomes a capsule of sexual fate. The man must look on other men, and the woman on other women, as threats. This seems to have become particularly damaging to women; because of the progressive degeneration and isolation of their "role," their worldly stock in trade has increasingly had to be "their" men. In the isolation of the resulting sexual "privacy," the disintegration of the community begins. The energy that is the most convivial and unifying loses its communal forms and becomes divisive. This dispersal was nowhere more poignantly exemplified than in the replacement of the old ring dances, in which all couples danced together, by the so-called ballroom dancing, in which each couple dances alone. A significant part of the etiquette of ballroom dancing is, or was, that the exchange of partners was accomplished by a "trade." It is no accident that this capitalization of love and marriage was followed by a divorce epidemic--and by fashions of dancing in which each one of the dancers moves alone.

The disintegration of marriage, which completes the disintegration of community, came about because the encapsulation of sexuality, meant to preserve marriage from competition, inevitably *en-closed* competition. The principle that fenced everyone else out fenced the couple in; it became a sexual cul-de-sac. The model of economic competition proved as false to marriage as to farming. As with other capsules, the narrowness of the selective principle proved destructive of what it excluded, and what it excluded was essential to the life of what it enclosed: the nature of sexuality itself. Sexual romance cannot bear to acknowledge the generality of instinct, whereas sexual capitalism cannot acknowledge its particularity. But sexuality appears to be *both* general and particular. One cannot love a particular woman, for instance ' unless one loves womankind--if not all women, at least other women. The capsule of sexual romance leaves out this generality, this generosity of instinct; it excludes Aphrodite and Dionysus. And it fails for that reason. Though sexual love can endure between the same two people for a long time, it cannot do so on the basis of this pretense of the exclusiveness of affection. The sexual capitalist--that is, the disillusioned sexual romantic--in reaction to disillusion makes the opposite oversimplification; one acknowledges one's spouse as one of a general, necessarily troublesome kind or category.

Both these attitudes look on sexual love as ownership. The sexual romantic croons, "You belong to me." The sexual capitalist believes the same thing but has stopped

crooning. Each holds that a person's sexual property shall be sufficient unto him or unto her, and that the morality of that sufficiency is to be forever on guard against expropriation. Within the capsule of marriage, as in that of economics, one intends to exploit one's property and to protect it. Once the idea of property becomes abstract or economic, both these motives begin to rule over it. They are, of course, contradictory; all that one can really protect is one's "right" or intention to exploit. The proprieties and privacies used to encapsulate marriage may have come from the tacit recognition that exploitive sex, like exploitive economics, is a very dirty business. One makes a secret of the sexuality of one's marriage for the same reason that one posts "Keep Out/Private Property" on one's strip mine. The tragedy, more often felt than acknowledged, is that what is exploited becomes undesirable.

The protective capsule becomes a prison. It becomes a household of the living dead, each body a piece of incriminating evidence. Or a greenhouse excluding the neighbors and the weather for the sake of some alien and unnatural growth. The marriage shrinks to a dull vigil of duty and legality. Husband and wife become competitors necessarily, for their only freedom is to exploit each other or to escape.

It is possible to imagine a more generous enclosures household welcoming to neighbors and friends; a garden open to the weather, between the woods and the road. It is possible to imagine a marriage bond that would bind a woman and a man not only to each other, but to the community of marriage, the amorous communion at which all couples sit: the sexual feast and celebration that joins them to all living things and to the fertility of the earth, and the sexual responsibility that joins them to the human past and the human future. It is possible to imagine marriage as a grievous, joyous human bond, endlessly renewable and renewing, again and again rejoining memory and passion and hope.

Fidelity

But it is extremely difficult, now, to imagine marriage in terms of such dignity and generosity, and this difficulty is explained by the failure of these possessive and competitive forms of sexual love that have been in use for so long. This failure raises unavoidably the issue of fidelity: What is it, and what does it mean--in marriage, and also, since marriage is a fundamental relationship and metaphor, in other relationships?

No one can be glad to have this issue so starkly raised, for any consideration of it now must necessarily involve one's own bewilderment. We are apparently near the end of a degenerative phase of an evolutionary process--a long way from any large-scale regeneration. For that reason it is necessary to be hesitant and cautious, respectful of the complexity and importance of the problem. Marriage is not going to change because somebody thinks about it and recommends an "answer"; it can change only as its necessities are felt and as its circumstances change.

The idea of fidelity is perverted beyond redemption by understanding it as a grim, literal duty enforced only by willpower. This is the "religious" insanity of making a victim of the body as a victory of the soul. Self-restraint that is so purely negative is self-hatred. And one cannot be good, anyhow, just by not being bad. To be faithful merely out of duty is to be blinded to the possibility of a better faithfulness for better reasons.

It is reasonable to suppose, if fidelity is a virtue, that it is a virtue with a purpose. A purposeless virtue is a contradiction in terms. Virtue, like harmony, cannot exist alone; a virtue must lead to harmony between one creature and another. To be good for nothing is just that. If a virtue has been thought a virtue long enough, it must be assumed to have practical justification--though the very longevity that proves its practicality may obscure it. That seems to be what happened with the idea of fidelity. We heard the words "forsaking all others" repeated over and over again for so long that we lost the sense of their practical justification. They assumed the force of superstition: people came to be faithful in marriage not out of any understanding of the meaning of faith or of marriage, but out of the same fear of obscure retribution that made one careful not to break a mirror or spill the salt. Like other superstitions, this one was weakened by the scientific, positivist intellectuality of modern times and by the popular "sophistication" that came with it. Our age could be characterized as a manifold experiment in faithlessness, and if it has as yet produced no effective understanding of the practicalities of faith, it has certainly produced massive evidence of the damage and disorder of its absence.

It is possible to open this issue of the practicality of fidelity by considering that the modern age was made possible by the freeing, and concurrently by the cheapening, of energy. It can be said, of course, that the modern age was made possible by technologies that *control* energy and thus make it usable at an unprecedented rate. But such control is at best extremely limited: the devices by which industrial and military energies are used control them only momentarily; their moment of usefulness sets them loose in the world as social, ecological, and geological *forces*. We can use these energies only as explosives; we can control the rate, intensity, and time of combustion, but our effective control ends with the use of the small amount of the released energy that we are able to harness. Past that, the effects are on their own, to compound themselves as they will. In modern times we have never been able to subject our use of energy to a sense of responsibility anywhere near complex enough to be equal to its effects.

It may be that the principle of sexual fidelity, once it is again fully understood, will provide us with as good an example as we can find of the responsible use of energy. Sexuality is, after all, a form of energy, one of the most powerful. If we see sexuality as energy, then it becomes impossible to see sexual fidelity as merely a "duty," a virtue for the sake of virtue, or a superstition. If we made a superstition of fidelity, and thereby weakened it, by thinking of it as purely a moral or spiritual virtue, then perhaps we can restore its strength by recovering an awareness of its practicality.

At the root of culture must be the realization that uncontrolled energy is disorderly--that in nature all energies move in forms; that, therefore, in a human order energies must be *given* forms. It must have been plain at the beginning, as cultural degeneracy has made it plain again and again, that one can be indiscriminately sexual but not indiscriminately responsible, and that irresponsible sexuality would undermine any possibility of culture since it implies a hierarchy based purely upon brute strength, cunning, regardlessness of value and of consequence. Fidelity can thus be seen as the necessary discipline of sexuality, the Practical definition of sexual responsibility, or the definition of the moral limits within which such responsibility can be conceived and enacted. The forsaking of all others is a keeping of faith, not just with the chosen one, but with the ones forsaken. The marriage vow unites not just a woman and a man with each other; it unites each of them with the community in a vow of sexual responsibility toward all others. The whole community **is** married, realizes its essential unity, in each of its marriages.

Another use of fidelity is to preserve the possibility of devotion against the distractions of novelty. What marriage offers--and what fidelity is meant to protect--is the possibility of moments when what we have chosen and what we desire are the same. Such a convergence obviously cannot be continuous. No relationship can continue very long at its highest emotional pitch. But fidelity prepares us for the *return* of these moments, which give us the highest joy we can know: that of union, communion, atonement (in the root sense of at-onement). The principle is stated in these lines by William Butler Yeats (by "the world" he means the world after the Fall):

Maybe the bride-bed brings despair,

For each an imagined image brings

And finds a real image there;

Yet the world ends when these two things,

Though several, are a single light ...

To forsake all others does not mean--because it *cannot* mean--to ignore or neglect all others, to hide or be hidden from all others, or to desire or love no others. To live in marriage is a responsible way to live in sexuality, as to live in a household is a responsible way to live in the world. One cannot enact or fulfill one's love for womankind or mankind, or even for all the women or men to whom one is attracted. If one is to have the power and delight of one's sexuality, then the generality of instinct must be resolved in a responsible relationship to a particular person. Similarly, one cannot live in the world; that is, one cannot become, in the easy, generalizing sense with which the phrase is commonly used, a "world citizen." There can be no such thing as a "global village." No matter how much one may love

the world as a whole, one can live fully in it only by living responsibly in some small part of it. Where we live and who we live there with define the terms of our relationship to the world and to humanity. We thus come again to the paradox that one can become whole only by the responsible acceptance of one's partiality.

But to encapsulate these partial relationships is to entrap and condemn them in their partiality; it is to endanger them and to make them dangerous. They are enlivened and given the possibility of renewal by the double sense of particularity and generality: one lives in marriage and in sexuality, at home *and* in the world. It is impossible, for instance, to conceive that a man could despise women and yet love his wife, or love his own place in the world and yet deal destructively with other places.

Home Land and House Hold

What I have been trying to do is to define a pattern of disintegration that is at once cultural and agricultural. I have been groping for connections--that I think are indissoluble, though obscured by modern ambitions--between the spirit and the body, the body and other bodies, the body and the earth. If these connections do necessarily exist, as I believe they do, then it is impossible for material order to exist side by side with spiritual disorder, or vice versa, and impossible for one to thrive long at the expense of the other; it is impossible, ultimately, to preserve ourselves apart from our willingness to preserve other creatures, or to respect and care for ourselves except as we respect and care for other creatures; and, most to the point of this book, it is impossible to care for each other more or differently than we care for the earth.

[a long section on Homer's *Odyssey* omitted here]

The Necessity of Wildness

Domestic order is obviously threatened by the margin of wilderness that surrounds it. Marriage may be destroyed by instinctive sexuality; the husband may choose to remain with Kalypto or the wife may run away with godlike Paris. And the forest is always waiting to overrun the fields. These are real possibilities. They must be considered, respected, even feared.

And yet I think that no culture that hopes to endure can afford to destroy them or to set up absolute safeguards against them. Invariably the failure of organized religions, by which they cut themselves off from mystery and therefore from the sacred, lies in the attempt to impose an absolute division between faith and doubt, to make belief perform as knowledge; when they forbid their prophets to go into the wilderness, they lose the possibility of renewal. And the most dangerous tendency in modern society, now rapidly emerging as a scientific-industrial ambition, is the tendency toward encapsulation of human order--the severance, once and for all, of

the umbilical cord fastening us to the wilderness or the Creation. The threat is not only in the totalitarian desire for absolute control. It lies in the willingness to ignore an essential paradox: the natural forces that so threaten us are the same forces that preserve and renew us.

An enduring agriculture must never cease to consider and respect and preserve wildness. The farm can exist only within the wilderness of mystery and natural force. And if the farm is to last and remain in health, the wilderness must survive within the farm. That is what agricultural fertility is: the survival of natural process in the human order. To learn to preserve the fertility of the farm, Sir Albert Howard wrote, we must study the forest.

Similarly, the instinctive sexuality within which marriage exists must somehow be made to thrive within marriage. To divide one from the other is to degrade both and ultimately to destroy marriage.

Fidelity to human order, then, if it is fully responsible, implies fidelity also to natural order. Fidelity to human order makes devotion possible. Fidelity to natural order preserves the possibility of choice, the possibility of the renewal of devotion. Where there is no possibility of choice, there is no possibility of faith. One who returns home--to one's marriage and household and place in the world--desiring anew what was previously chosen, is neither the world's stranger nor its prisoner, but is at once in place and free.

The relation between these two fidelities, inasmuch as they sometimes appear to contradict one another, cannot help but be complex and tricky. In our present stage of cultural evolution, it cannot help but be baffling as well. And yet it is only the double faith that is adequate to our need. If we are to have a culture as resilient and competent in the face of necessity as it needs to be, then it must somehow involve within itself a ceremonious generosity toward the wilderness of natural force and instinct. The farm must yield a place to the forest, not as a wood lot, or even as a necessary agricultural principle, but as a sacred grove--a place where the Creation is let alone, to serve as instruction, example, refuge; a place for people to go, free of work and presumption, to let themselves alone. And marriage must recognize that it survives because of, as well as in spite of, Kalypto and Paris and the generosity of instinct that they represent. It must give some ceremonially acknowledged place to the sexual energies that now thrive outside all established forms, in the destructive freedom of moral ignorance or disregard. Without these accommodations we will remain divided: some of us will continue to destroy the world for purely human ends, while others, for the sake of nature, will abandon the task of human order.

What forms or revisions of forms may be adequate to this double faith, I do not know. Cultural solutions are organisms, not machines, and they cannot be invented deliberately or imposed by prescription. Perhaps all that one can do is to clarify as well as possible the needs and pressures that bear upon the process of cultural

evolution. I am certain, however, that no satisfactory solution can come from considering marriage alone or agriculture alone. These are our basic connections to each other and to the earth, and they tend to relate analogically and to be reciprocally defining: our demands upon the earth are determined by our ways of living with one another; our regard for one another is brought to light in our ways of using the earth. And I am certain that neither can be changed for the better in the experimental, prescriptive ways we have been using. Ways of life change only in living. To live by expert advice is to abandon one's life.

"Freedom" From Fertility

The household is the bond of marriage that is most native to it, that grows with it and gives it substantial being in the world. It is the practical condition within which husband and wife can enact devotion and loyalty to each other. The motive power of sexual love is thus joined directly to constructive work and is given communal and ecological value. Without the particular demands and satisfactions of the making and keeping of a household, the sanctity and legality of marriage remain abstract, in effect theoretical, and its sexuality becomes a danger. Work is the health of love. To last, love must enfold itself in the materiality of the world--produce food, shelter, warmth or shade, surround itself with careful acts, well-made things. This, I think, is what Millen Brand means in *Local Lives* when he speaks of the "threat" of love---"so that perhaps acres of earth and its stones are needed and drawn-out work and monotony/to balance that danger..."

Marriage and the care of the earth are each other's disciplines. Each makes possible the enactment of fidelity toward the other. As the household has become increasingly generalized as a function of the economy and, as a consequence, has become increasingly "mobile" and temporary, these vital connections have been weakened and finally broken. And whatever has been thus disconnected has become a ground of exploitation for some breed of salesman, specialist, or expert.

A direct result of the disintegration of the household is the division of sexuality from fertility and their virtual takeover by specialists. The specialists of human sexuality are the sexual clinicians and the pornographers, both of whom subsist on the increasing possibility of sex between people who neither know nor care about each other. The specialists of human fertility are the evangelists, technicians, and salesmen of birth control, who subsist upon our failure to see any purpose or virtue in sexual discipline. In this, as in our use of every other kind of energy, our inability to contemplate any measure of restraint or forbearance has been ruinous. Here the impulse is characteristically that of the laboratory scientist: to encapsulate sexuality by separating it absolutely from the problems of fertility.

This division occurs, it seems to me, in a profound cultural failure. That failure is in

the loss of any sense that sexuality and fertility might exist together compatibly in this world. We have lost this possibility because we do not understand, because we cannot bear to consider, the meaning of restraint. The sort of restraint I am talking about is illustrated in a recent *National Geographic* article about the people of Hunza in northern Pakistan. The author is a woman, Sabrina Michaud, and she is talking with a Hunza woman in her kitchen:

"What have you done to have only one child?" she asks me. Her own children range from 12 to 30 years of age, and seem evenly spaced, four to five years apart. 'We leave our husband's bed until each child is weaned,' she explains simply. But this natural means of birth control has declined, and population has soared."

The woman's remark is thus passed over and not returned to; but if I understand the significance of this paragraph, it is of great importance. The decline of "this natural means of birth control" seems to have been contemporaneous with the coming of roads and "progress and the opening up of a previously isolated country. What is of interest is that in their isolation in arid, narrow valleys surrounded by the stone and ice of the Karakoram Mountains, these people had practiced sexual restraint as a form of birth control. They had neither our statistical expertise nor our doom-prophets of population growth; it just happened that, placed geographically as they were, they lived always in sight of their agricultural or ecological limits, and they made a competent response.

We have been unable to see the difference between this kind of restraints cultural response to an understood practical limit--and the obscure, self-hating, self-congratulating Victorian self-restraint, of which our attitudes and technologies of sexual "freedom" are merely the equally obscure other side. This so-called freedom fragments us and turns us more vehemently and violently than before against our own bodies and against the bodies of other people.

For the care or control of fertility, both that of the earth and that of our bodies, we have allowed a technology of chemicals and devices to replace entirely the cultural means of ceremonial forms, disciplines, and restraints. We have gathered up the immense questions that surround the coming of life into the world and reduced them to simple problems for which we have manufactured and marketed simple solutions. An infertile woman and an infertile field both receive a dose of chemicals, at the calculated risk of undesirable consequences, and are thus equally reduced to the status of productive machines. And for unwanted life--sperm, ova, embryos, weeds, insects, etc.--we have the same sort of ready remedies, for sale, of course, and characteristically popularized by advertisements that speak much of advantages but little of problems.

The result is that we are bringing up a generation of young people who feel that they are "free from worry" about fertility. The pharmacist or the doctor will look after the fertility of the body, and the farming experts and agribusinessmen will look after the

fertility of the earth. This is to short-circuit human culture at its source. It is, in effect, to remove from consciousness the two fundamental issues of human life. It permits two great powers to be regarded and used as if they were unimportant.

More serious is the resort to "authorized" modes of direct violence. In land use, this is the permanent diminishment or destruction of fertility as an allowable cost of production, as in strip-mining or in the sort of agriculture that good farmers have long referred to also as "mining." This use of technological means cuts across all issues of health and culture for the sake of an annual quota of production.

The human analogue is in the "harmless" and "simple" surgeries of permanent sterilization, which are now being promoted by a propaganda of extreme oversimplification. The publicity on this subject is typically evangelical in tone and simplistically moral; the operations are recommended like commercial products by advertisements complete with exuberant testimonials of satisfied customers and appeals to the prospective customer's maturity, sexual pride, and desire for "freedom"; and the possible physical and psychological complications are played down, misrepresented, not mentioned at all, or simply not known. It is altogether possible that the operations will be performed by doctors as perfunctory, simplistic, presumptuous, and uninforming as the public literature.

I am fully aware of the problem of overpopulation, and I do not mean to say that birth control is unnecessary. What I do mean to say is that any means of birth control is a serious matter, both culturally and biologically, and that sterilization is the most serious of all: to give up fertility is a major change, as important as birth, puberty, marriage, or death.

The great changes having to do with a woman's fertility--puberty, childbirth, and menopause--have, like sexual desire, the unarguable sanction of biological determinism. They belong to a kind of natural tradition. As a result, they are not only enduring, but they belong to a process--the life process or the Wheel of Life--that we have learned to affirm with some understanding. We know, among other things, that this process includes tragedy and survives it, even triumphs over it. The same applies to the occasions of a man's fertility, although not so formidably, a man being less involved, physically, in the *predicament* of fertility and consciously involved in it only if he wants to be. Nevertheless, he comes to fertility and, if he is a moral person, to the same issues of responsibility that it poses for women.

One of the fundamental interests of human culture is to impose this responsibility, to subject fertility to moral will. Culture articulates needs and forms for sexual restraint and involves issues of value in the process of mating. It is possible to imagine that the resulting tension creates a distinctly human form of energy, highly productive of works of the hands and the mind. But until recently there was no division between sexuality and fertility, because none was possible.

This division was made possible by modern technology, which subjected human fertility, like the fertility of the earth, to a new kind of will: the technological will, which may not *necessarily* oppose the moral will, but which has not only tended to do so, but has tended to replace it. Simply because it became possible--and simultaneously profitable--we have cut the cultural ties between sexuality and fertility, just as we have cut those between eating and farming. By "freeing" food and sex from worry, we have also set them apart from thought, responsibility, and the issue of quality. The introduction of "chemical additives" has tended to do away with the issue of taste or preference; the specialist of sex, like the specialist of food, is dealing with a commodity, which he can measure but cannot value.

What is horrifying is not only that we are relying so exclusively on a technology of birth control that is still experimental, but that we are using it *casually*, in utter cultural nakedness, unceremoniously, without sufficient understanding, and as a substitute for cultural solutions--exactly as we now employ the technology of land use. And to promote these means without cultural and ecological insight, as merely a way to divorce sexuality from fertility, pleasure from responsibility--or to *sell* them that way for ulterior "moral" motives is to try to cure a disease by another disease. That is only a new battle in the old war between body and soul--as if we were living in front of a chorus of the most literal fanatics chanting: "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out! If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off!"

The technologists of fertility exercise the powers of gods and the social function of priests without community ties or cultural responsibilities. The clinicians of sex change the lives of people--as the clinicians of agriculture change the lives of places and communities--to whom they are strangers and whom they do not know. These specialists thrive in a profound cultural rift, and they are always accompanied by the exploiters who mine that rift for gold. The pornographer exploits sexual division. And working the similar division between us and our land we have the "agribusinessmen," the pornographers of agriculture.

Fertility as Waste

But there is yet another and more direct way in which the isolation of the body has serious agricultural effects. That is in our society's extreme oversimplification of the relation between the body and its food. By regarding it as merely a consumer of food, we reduce the function of the body to that of a conduit which channels the nutrients of the earth from the supermarket to the sewer. Or we make it a little factory which transforms fertility into pollution--to the enormous profit of "agribusiness" and to the impoverishment of the earth. This is another technological and economic interruption of the cycle of fertility.

Much has already been said here about the division between the body and its food in the productive phase of the cycle. It is the alleged wonder of the Modern World that so many people take energy from food in which they have invested no energy, or

very little. Ninety-five percent of our people, boasted the former deputy assistant secretary of agriculture, are now free of the "drudgery" of food production. The meanings of that division, as I have been trying to show, are intricate and degenerative. But that is only half of it. Ninety-five percent (at least) of our people are also free of any involvement or interest in the maintenance phase of the cycle. As their bodies take in and use the nutrients of the soil, those nutrients are transformed into what we are pleased to regard as "wastes"--and are duly wasted.

This waste also has its cause in the old "religious" division between body and soul, by which the body and its products are judged offensive. Once, living with this offensiveness was considered a condemnation, and that was bad enough. But modern technology "saved" us with the flush toilet and the water-borne sewage system. These devices deal with the "wastes" of our bodies by simply removing them from consideration. The irony is that this technological purification of the body requires the pollution of the rivers and the starvation of the fields. It makes the alleged offensiveness of the body truly and inescapably offensive and blinds an entire society to the knowledge that these "offensive wastes" are readily purified in the topsoil--that, indeed, from an ecological point of view, these are not wastes and are not offensive, but are valuable agricultural products essential both to the health of the land and to that of the "consumers."

Our system of agriculture, by modeling itself on economics rather than biology, thus removes food from the *cycle* of its production and puts it into a finite, linear process that in effect destroys it by transforming it into waste. That is, it transforms food into fuel, a form of energy that is usable only once, and in doing so it transforms the body into a consumptive machine.

It is strange, but only apparently so, that this system of agriculture is institutionalized, not in any form of rural life or culture, but in what we call our "urban civilization." The cities subsist in competition with the country; they live upon a one-way movement of energies out of the countryside--food and fuel, manufacturing materials, human labor, intelligence, and talent. Very little of this energy is ever returned. Instead of gathering these energies up into coherence, a cultural consummation that would not only return to the countryside what belongs to it, but also give back generousities of learning and art, conviviality and order, the modern city dissipates and wastes them. Along with its glittering "consumer goods," the modern city produces an equally characteristic outpouring of garbage and pollution--just as it produces and/or collects unemployed, unemployable, and otherwise wasted people.

Once again it must be asked, if competition is the appropriate relationship, then why, after generations of this inpouring of rural wealth, materials, and humanity into the cities, are the cities and the countryside in equal states of disintegration and disrepair? Why have the rural and urban communities both fallen to pieces?

Health and Work

The modern urban-industrial society is based on a series of radical disconnections between body and soul, husband and wife, marriage and community, community and the earth. At each of these points of disconnection the collaboration of corporation, government, and exert sets up a profit-making enterprise that results in the further dismemberment and impoverishment of the Creation.

Together, these disconnections add up to a condition of critical ill health, which we suffer in common--not just with each other, but with all other creatures. Our economy is based upon this disease. Its aim is to separate us as far as possible from the sources of life (material, social, and spiritual), to put these sources under the control of corporations and specialized professionals, and to sell them to us at the highest profit. It fragments the Creation and sets the fragments into conflict with one another. For the relief of the suffering that comes of this fragmentation and conflict, our economy proposes, not health, but vast "cures" that further centralize power and increase profits: wars, wars on crime, wars on poverty, national schemes of medical aid, insurance, immunization, further industrial and economic "growth," etc.; and these, of course, are followed by more regulatory laws and agencies to see that our health is protected, our freedom preserved, and our money well spent. Although there may be some "good intention" in this, there is little honesty and no hope.

Only by restoring the broken connections can we be healed. Connection is health. And what our society does its best to disguise from us is how ordinary, how commonly attainable, health is. We lose our health--and create profitable diseases and dependences--by failing to see the direct connections between living and eating, eating and working, working and loving. In gardening, for instance, one works with the body to feed the body. The work, if it is knowledgeable, makes for excellent food. And it makes one hungry. The work thus makes eating both nourishing and joyful, not consumptive, and keeps the eater from getting fat and weak. This is health, wholeness, a source of delight. And such a solution, unlike the typical industrial solution, does not cause new problems.

The "drudgery" of growing one's own food, then, is not drudgery at all. (If we make the growing of food a drudgery, which is what "agribusiness" does make of it, then we also make a drudgery of eating and of living.) It is--in addition to being the appropriate fulfillment of a practical need--a sacrament, as eating is also, by which we enact and understand our oneness with the Creation, the conviviality of one body with all bodies. This is what we learn from the hunting and farming rituals of tribal cultures.

As the connections have been broken by the fragmentation and isolation of work, they can be restored by restoring the wholeness of work. There is work that is isolating, harsh, destructive, specialized or trivialized into meaninglessness. And there is work that is restorative, convivial, dignified and dignifying, and pleasing.

Good work is not just the maintenance of connections--as one is now said to work "for a living" or "to support a family"--but the *enactment* of connections. It is living, and a way of living; it is not support for a family in the sense of an exterior brace or prop, but is one of the forms and acts of love.

To boast that now "95 percent of the people can be freed from the drudgery of preparing their own food" is possible only to one who cannot distinguish between these kinds of work. The former deputy assistant secretary cannot see work as a vital connection; he can see it only as a trade of time for money, and so of course he believes in doing as little of it as possible, especially if it involves the use of the body. His ideal is apparently the same as that of a real-estate agency which promotes a rural subdivision by advertising "A homelife of endless vacation." But the society that is so glad to be free of the drudgery of growing and preparing food also boasts a thriving medical industry to which it is paying \$500 per person per year. And that is only the down payment.

We embrace this curious freedom and pay its exorbitant cost because of our hatred of bodily labor. We do not want to work "like a dog" or "like an ox" or "like a horse"--that is, we do not want to use ourselves as beasts. This as much as anything is the cause of our disrespect for farming and our abandonment of it to businessmen and experts. We remember, as we should, that there have been agricultural economies that used people as beasts. But that cannot be remedied, as we have attempted to do, by using people as machines, or by not using them at all.

Perhaps the trouble began when we started using animals disrespectfully: as "beasts"--that is, as if they had no more feeling than a machine. Perhaps the destructiveness of our use of machines was prepared in our willingness to abuse animals. That it was never necessary to abuse animals in order to use them is suggested by a passage in *The Horse in the Furrow*, by George Ewart Evans. He is speaking of how the medieval ox teams were worked at the plow: "... the ploughman at the handles, the team of oxen--yoked in pairs or four abreast--and the driver who walked alongside with his goad." And then he says: "It is also worth noting that in the Welsh organization ... the counterpart of the driver was termed *y geilwad* or the *caller*. He walked *backwards* in front of the oxen singing to them as they worked. Songs were specially composed to suit the rhythm of the oxen's work . . ."

That seems to me to differ radically from our customary use of any living thing. The oxen were not used as beasts or machines, but as fellow creatures. It may be presumed that this work used people the same way. It is possible, then, to believe that there is a kind of work that does not require abuse or misuse, that does not use anything as a substitute for anything else. We are working well when we use ourselves as the fellow creatures of the plants, animals, materials, and other people we are working with. Such work is unifying, healing. It brings us home from pride and from despair, and places us responsibly within the human estate. It defines us as we are: not too good to work with our bodies, but too good to work poorly or

joylessly or selfishly or alone.

Wendell Berry, The Unsettling of America (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1976)