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December is the one issue where each year we cover pretty much the same major themes of poverty, homelessness, oppression, crime, punishment, prisons, morality, religion in society and human services, the family and children, philanthropy, social advocacy, and societal collapse. However, we do not have enough material this time for separate sections on the interface of religion and human services, and on philanthropy.

Table of Contents

Poverty & the Poor ........................................... -2-
The Gulf Between the Haves & Have Nots .................. -3-
The Transfer of Wealth Upward .............................. -7-
Homelessness .................................................. -8-
Crime .......................................................... -10-
Punishment ...................................................... -12-
The Jail & Prison Scene ...................................... -13-
Torture .......................................................... -15-
Religion in Society ........................................... -16-
  Modernists' Chaotic & Confused Religiosity .............. -16-
  Contemporary Idolatries .................................. -17-
  Miscellaneous Other Points About Religion in Society . -21-
The Family ...................................................... -22-
Children ......................................................... -23-
Public Morality ............................................... -26-
The Collapse of the Culture of Modernism & Its Social Institutions ........................................ -27-
  The Collapse of the Democratic Process ................. -27-
  Collapse of Civic Institutions ............................ -28-
  Collapses of Citizen Functionality ....................... -30-
Entitlement Mentalities & Litigiousness .................... -32-
Distfunctional Formalization as a Response to Distfunctionality .............................................. -34-
How to Become or Remain Either Mentally Stupid or Morally Stupid, or at Least Passive & Distfunctional as a Human Being .............................................. -35-
The Spectre of (Military) Dictatorship .................... -35-
War & Preparations for War ................................. -36-
Some people have said that being poor is one of the hardest jobs in the world because it takes such vast amounts of time and energy.

At least 80% of the Peruvian work force lacks a steady job (AP in SHJ, 8 July 1993). No wonder there is "unrest" there.

Since Summer of 1996, when the US welfare system was very extensively revised, a number of results have become apparent, confirmed by data as recent as 1998.

1. Certain elements of the impact are difficult to judge because of the economic boom that the US has enjoyed since that time.

2. It apparently had been too easy to get on welfare, because a lot of people left welfare voluntarily merely in response to anti-welfare rhetoric, and in the face of the requirement that they would have to perform even a minimal amount of work, and in some cases, meet with caseworkers.

3. Like all programs that are aimed at the total systems level, there are some hardships and casualties, but the overall decline in people on welfare has been dramatic, due mostly to voluntary withdrawal from welfare, or involuntary dismissal from it because of refusal to work despite work capability. Here, it should be noted that the work requirement does not mean that a person has to find a paid job, but has to be willing to accept workfare when offered.

4. The decline of the welfare rolls happened in face of the fact that in previous decades, welfare rolls always kept going up, and never went down.

5. One thing that became apparent that either had not been known or not acknowledged before was that many people on welfare actually had paid income which they concealed.

6. Despite unending rhetoric that the poor should find jobs, hardly anything has been done to actually create real jobs for them except in the human service sector, e.g., as child care workers for the children of other poor people.

7. The expansion of child care programs has enabled many welfare recipients to begin to hold jobs. It is a good question whether, in the aggregate, the children are better or worse off. After all, some people in the low social strata are very poor at childrearing, or at least at rearing their own children, and some measure of objectification as found in formal day care may actually be an improvement for their children.

8. Apparently, a great many poor families who lost their cash payments managed to continue receiving food stamps, and this accounted for actually a remarkably large amount of support.

9. The direst consequences predicted by some critics did not occur, in good part because state legislatures rejected them.

10. The promised crack-down on so-called deadbeat dads has not taken place.

11. While the law was changed with a rhetoric of saving money, welfare spending has actually increased, because all the money saved, plus then some, has simply been given to human services instead. This, of course, is consistent with a long-standing PPP pattern of giving less and less money to the poor directly, and more and more to services. In other words, welfare for the poor and/or lazy has been replaced by welfare for human services workers.
*Many well-intentioned (especially liberal) people do not like to hear it said, but it is true: often, the poor are poor because they have little sense, or are even outright incompetent. For instance, rather than doing without something because they cannot afford it, or saving money to buy something, they will buy "on time," and then be in debt forever trying to pay off interest on loans. Similarly, an amazingly large proportion of the poor think they "need" cable TV, even though the fee for cable TV, if saved each month, could put some money in their pocket—or their bank account. Many poor people buy expensive (not to mention unhealthy) packaged and prepared foods, and eat out at fast-food restaurants. They may do this because cooking was never taught in their families, or because they are not used to planning, and cooking requires planning all the way from shopping onward. One lesson is that the acquisition of competencies would reduce the poverty of many people even if their income did not increase.

The Gulf Between the Hayes & Have Nots

*Gaskell, E. C. (1911). *Mary Barton.* London: J. M. Dent & Sons. This novel is an English classic, along the lines of Dickens and written and originally published in the same era (1840). It describes the awful conditions of the poor (mostly mill workers) in Manchester, the separation between the classes, the few and feeble attempts to bridge this gulf, and the eventual rupture between them. In Chapter 4, we find the following "Manchester Song."

1. How little can the rich man know  
   Of what the poor man feels,  
   When Want, like some dark demon foe,  
   Nearer and nearer steals!

2. He never tramp'd the weary round,  
   A stroke of work to gain,  
   And sicken'd at the dreaded sound  
   Telling him 'twas in vain.

3. Foot-sore, heart-sore, he never came  
   Back through the winter's wind,  
   To a dark cellar, there no flame,  
   No light, no food, to find.

4. He never saw his darlings lie  
   Shivering, the grass their bed;  
   He never heard that maddening cry,  
   'Daddy, a bit of bread!'

*We keep reporting on the bizarre ways privileged people sometimes try to help the needy. These things probably are bizarre because the privileged are not coherent on the issue, and do it mostly to assuage guilt.

An example a few years back was a dance in Nashville billed as a charity event for the needy, to be held after a concert by "Public Enemy No. 1" and other rap groups, with 6,000 people in attendance. In the hallway leading from the concert to the dance, a crowd began to stampede, at least 26 people were injured, and 2 teenage girls were trampled to death. Furthermore, youths pelted police and firefighters with cans of food that had been brought as entry fees for the dance!

*In 1997, Sotheby's (the prestigious art auction house) sold a painting by an Australian aboriginal for $206,000. He had sold it 25 years earlier for a few dollars' worth of food. After the Sotheby's sale, he and his family were discovered to be living near a campfire out in the bush, totally destitute. Sotheby's was asked to contribute 4% of the proceeds to the man, but this was coldly rejected (*Weekend Australian*, 5 July 97).

*Some US families find it tough getting by on $170,000 annual income. Of course, there are the dance lessons for the girls, soccer uniforms for the boys, tutors at $250 an hour to cram for SAT exams (*Time*, 29/12/98).

*The average CEO of a large company earns 200 times more than the average worker, up from a 40-fold difference in the 1970s (*Time*, 29/12/97).

*An elderly professor used to drive 14 minutes to get from his home to his university, but when he decided that he should no longer drive, he discovered that it took him 1.5 to 2 hours each way...*
using public transport. This sort of vignette also brings out the situation of poor people who have no cars.

*Moves to convert society into a "cashless" one jeopardize lowly people who cannot deal with the complexities of electronic finance, and who may be denied things like credit cards that they are not capable of managing properly.

*In the early 1990s, there was an influx of more than 16,000 jobs into one US city, mostly because of a multi-billion dollar construction boom, but none of it had any impact on the local underclass, especially those living in public housing projects (Newsweek, 15/8/94).

*Of 24,000 employees of Microsoft, about 21,000 are millionaires from their stock options (Newsweek, 8 Dec. 97)

*There is an incredible and very immoral paradox in the fact that at the same time as there is so much hunger in the world, and such great poverty even in the richest countries, the entertainment, art and media world stages grand spectacles of human food destruction. On a single page of the Syracuse Herald Journal (21/8/92), there was a feature about the Leukemia Society of America staging a 500-gallon strawberry gelatin bath in which people would slither around in order to somehow raise funds thereby, often in their business suits, the cleaning of which later would require additional senseless consumption. The second rather large feature dealt with artists creating butter sculptures of large size, using up as much as 700 pounds of butter per sculpture. Butter structures do not hold up very well and so all this food gets wasted too.

*One quarter of all the food produced in the US, an estimated 96 billion pounds, goes to waste (BR, 12/17).

*It has long been known, and well documented, that the poor are much more generous than the rich.

*George Robert Sims (1847-1922) wrote a long poem entitled, "In the Workhouse: Christmas Day" (source item from Doug Mouncey). Because of its length, we present only a few stanzas.

1. It is Christmas Day in the Workhouse,
And the cold bare walls are bright
With garlands of green and holly,
And the place is a pleasant sight:
For with clean-washed hands and faces,
In a long and hungry line
The paupers sit at the tables,
For this is the hour they dine.

This is also the one day in the year that the "guardians" (overseers of the poor) and their ladies come to serve upon the residents, and they are incredulous when an old man refuses his pudding.

2. But the pauper sat for a moment,
Then rose 'mid a silence grim,
For the others had ceased to chatter,
And trembled in every limb.
He looked at the guardians’ ladies,
Then, eyeing their lords, he said,
"I eat not the food of villains
Whose hands are foul and red:

3. "Whose victims cry for vengeance
From their dank, unhallowed graves."
"He’s drunk!" said the workhouse master,
"Or else he’s mad, and raves."
"Not drunk, or mad," cried the pauper,
"But only a hunted beast.
Who, torn by the hounds, and mangled,
Declines the vulture’s feast."
4. "Do you think I will take your bounty,
And let you smile and think
You're doing a noble action
With the parish's meat and drink?
Where is my wife, you traitors--
The poor old wife you slew?
Yes, by the God above us,
My Nance was killed by you!

His wife then died from hunger the previous Christmas.

5. "Last winter my wife lay dying,
Starved in a filthy den;
I had never been to the parish--
I came to the parish then.
I swallowed my pride in coming,
For, ere the ruin came,
I held up my head as a trader,
And I bore a spotless name.

6. "I came to the parish craving
Bread for a starving wife,
Bread for the woman who'd loved me
Through fifty years of her life;
And what do you think they told me,
Mocking my awful grief?
That 'the house' was open to us,
But they wouldn't give 'out relief.'"

*The Jubilee laws of ancient Israel stipulated that land sold reverted to its owners every 50 years. This was to assure that there would not develop a landless and rootless underclass.

*If people think that our (the TI's) workshops are demanding and the modules long, they should consider the following. St. John Chrysostom (ca. 344-400), who was a priest in Antioch and later archbishop of Constantinople, would often preach for two hours at a stretch—and his audiences would still call for more, even though in those days, they had no pews to sit in, but mostly were standing all this time (CH, 1995, Issue No. 44). Of his sermons, 90 have survived. One of his themes was very consistent with the Jewish teaching that what one acquires must be righteously acquired, even in its indirect dimensions. For instance, he said to the rich: "You say you have not sinned yourselves. But are you sure you are not benefiting from the previous crimes and thefts of others?"
"When your body is laid in the ground, the memory of your ambition will not be buried with you; for each passerby as he looks at your great house will say, 'What tears went into the building of that house! How many orphans were left naked by it, how many widows wronged, how many workmen cheated out of their wages?' Your accusers will pursue you even after you are dead" (p. 25).

*Will Carleton wrote "farm ballads" between ca. 1870-1900. One of them was "Over the Hill From the Poor-House." It is very long, and we will present only parts of it, and some of these re-arranged for better continuity.

...When they sent me to prison, the hardest grief I felt
Was when my poor old mother beside me feebly knelt,
And cried and prayed all round me, till I got melted down,
And cried as I wouldn’t have cried that day for half the horses in town.
2. And the Starvation Army they play,
   And they sing and they clap and they pray,
   Till they get all your coin in the drum,
   Then they'll tell you when you're on the bum: (Chorus)

3. Holy Rollers and Jumpers come out,
   And they holler, they jump and they shout,
   "Give your money to Jesus," they say,
   "He will cure all diseases to-day." (Chorus)

4. If you fight hard for children and wife,
   Try hard and get something in life,
   You're a sinner and bad man they tell,
   When you die you will sure go to hell; (Chorus)

5. Working men of all countries unite,
   Side by side for our freedom we'll fight;
   When the world and its wealth we have gained,
   To the grifters we'll sing this refrain:
   You will eat, bye and bye,
   When you've learned how to cook and to fry;
   Chop some wood, 'twill do you good,
   And you'll eat in the sweet bye and bye.

The Transfer of Wealth Upward

*Since most of the time, it is the rich and powerful who are in control of a society, even if nominally it is democratic, it is they who assure that there are an infinity of mechanisms for transferring the wealth upward to themselves and to their own kind. This is as true—if not more so—in poorer countries as in wealthier ones. For instance, much as in the US some of the richest corporations may go years without paying taxes, so it was also found that half of the 200 highest-earning corporations in Ecuador paid no taxes at a time when 60% of its population was living in poverty. In fact, tax cheating is said to have been a long-standing normative practice in Latin American countries (SHJ, 28/8/98).

*Pension funds have long been a major target of de facto thieves. There are supposed to be $650 billion(!) in the US Social Security trust fund, but in actuality, there is hardly any money because it has all been loaned to the US government to cover its deficits. Some day when more people have retired (ca. 2012), the money is supposed to be paid back—but the government may not be able to (SHJ, 7 April 98). Few people are aware of this.

*Individual states have similarly raided pension funds and other special trust funds. NY State raided its state employment retirement funds (one of the biggest in the US) for $4 billion in 1990. In 1998, it took $3.5 million from a trust fund for reimbursing victims of lawyer fraud. And it similarly raided various other funds. Often, it then launches bonds (by-passing the legislative process) to cover its debts, which means that taxpayers will have to pay back a multifold what was stolen (SHJ, 14/10/97). The state retirement fund (like many others) also owns a large share in a health care chain which, in turn, had vast sums stolen by its executives, thereby inflicting big losses on the pension fund (e.g., SHA, 17/8/97).

*The US Congress gave away broadcasting bandwidth to private broadcasters that at public auction would have brought $70 billion—a long way to the public debt reduction (Time, 1 Sept. 97).

*One transfer mechanism is for local governments to give a tax break to a firm, which takes the money (which can be a very large sum) and then quits the local area to do business elsewhere. This seems to have been happening all over the US.

*When the biggest pyramid scheme in US history went bankrupt, it was put by the courts under a trustee. He charged $1.4 million a year or $1,160 per hour, and naturally has been in no hurry to resolve the situation, which could drag on for decades, devouring all of whatever assets are recovered—and possibly even more, to be paid by public taxes.
*Families in the US who are not poor have been cheating large-scale when applying to the federal government for college grants for their children. About 4.4% lied about their income, stealing at least $109 million; and yet more stole other student benefits (Newsweek, 20/7/98).

*In 1998, it finally became public knowledge that the costs for connecting schools and libraries to the Internet—which was supposed to be done for free—had been charged by telephone companies in hidden ways to the telephone bills of US telephone users (Newsweek, 22/6/98).

*It has been reported that we are in the midst of yet another wave of false accounting methods that misstate profits and losses in firms and financial institutions. These manipulations usually benefit some rich people, and ultimately get paid for by people further down (e.g., Time, 23/2/98). When stock shareholders are defrauded by their companies, and then sue, it is their lawyers who get rich, ending up with about 30% of all settlements (Time, 10 Aug. 98).

*US pension plans often charge hidden fees that enable the functionaries of the plans to retire handsomely. A person who pays $25,000 into a pension plan so as to retire 35 years later may be charged $227,000 (Time, 20/7/98).

*A United Parcel Service driver stands to get $36,000 a year in pension after 30 years. A UPS executive who retired in 1997 is receiving $543,000 per year in pension.

*It has been estimated that "rogue contractors" cheat the US Medicare program of anywhere between $100-400 billion (Mouth, 9/98). Other sources claim a mere $23 billion loss (Newsweek, 11 Aug. 97).

*Third World countries have been driven to exploit their natural resources so ruthlessly in recent decades that capital wealth has actually declined.

*The US tax code allows gamblers to deduct their gambling losses if they later win and pay taxes on that. Thus, US taxpayers are subsidizing other people’s gambling losses! (SHJ, 27/8/98). Of course, it is only intelligent and well-to-do gamblers who can do this, since the street corner crap-shooter is not the one who will fill out tax forms.

*Katie Dolan, a long-time advocate for handicapped people in Washington State, and a literata, wrote "Riches From the Poor."

1. The rich man was a gambler 3. He begged at great big telethons
   The rich man was a sport Referendums were his ploy
   The rich man was a diner Initiatives and levies and
   but he wanted more support Special session bought his toys.

2. So he begged his biggest dollars 4. The rich man has just everything
   from men who could not talk of which a man could dream
   from she who had no sustenance He has however lost his hearing
   and tots who couldn’t balk so he cannot hear them scream.

*While large corporations have been audited much less frequently by the US tax authorities than individuals with low income, 58% of those corporations that have been audited have underpaid their taxes (Time, 6 Oct. 98). This is yet another de facto transfer of wealth upward through the tax structures.

**Homelessness**

The criminalization of homelessness is reportedly ever increasing in the US (e.g., Newsweek, 9 Feb. & 2 March 98), with action against eating near fountains, panhandling, eliminating in public
(even though no public toilets are available), sleeping outdoors, and even sitting around. It seems that there are not many intermediate steps left between this and killing these people.

*Since between 1988-1997, San Francisco has been making war on homeless people by making war on people who would give them food. For instance, police in riot gear would arrest people serving warm meals in public places to the homeless, and even charge them with felonies. The homeless themselves were slapped with over 40,000 court citations and arrest warrants (Next City, Spring 98). One would have thought that the AIDS capital of the US would be a little more charitable to the homeless.

*In San Francisco, where an estimated 15,000 people live on the streets, in cars or shelters, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals opened a $7 million animal shelter in early 1998. The shelter has sections that look like human habitats, with couches, tables, Persian rugs, television sets, pictures on the wall, etc. Shortly thereafter, the organization decided that it would be a good idea to also permit homeless adults to stay overnight at the shelter in "dog apartments," citing two rationales: "It would give our dogs a chance to know what it would be like to have an overnight roommate," and "for the homeless people it's an offer to get them off the street and give them shelter with a dog buddy who will be their best friend overnight." However, because the shelter was not designed for humans, overnight guests cannot bathe or eat there, nor would homeless people be allowed to bring their own pet to stay with them overnight. Advocates for the homeless say that at least, the plan was not intended to hurt the homeless, as were several other plans proposed by the city or officials. They also noted that the animal shelter was actually vastly more attractive than the shelter for the homeless that the city had opened shortly before (SF Chronicle, 19/3/98; NY Times, 22/3/98; source items from Michael Kendrick & Barbara Fisher).

*In 8/98, it was discovered that the county in which Syracuse is located had for at least 10 years grossly under-reported the number of its homeless people. For instance, for at least that time, not a one of the approximately 300 homeless people who had been given beds in the various shelters for the homeless had ever been reported as being homeless. In fact, the major homeless shelter in the county was not even officially listed as existing. In 1997, the county even reported that it had no one staying in any homeless shelters, and that only two families in the county were homeless, even though other tallies identified 1,700 people homeless at that time (SHJ, 10/8/98).

*One thing that kills a lot of street people is that whenever they have any contact with the shrink system, they get put on mind drugs, despite the fact that they are known to also be heavy drinkers. A homeless man in Syracuse who was found dead on a downtown city bench was determined to have died from a combination of prescribed shrink drugs and drinking. Be it also noted that the shrink system will give such a person drugs but will not find a place for him to stay. Amazingly, these things can happen while a person is on all sorts of "evaluation and treatment plans."

*Lars Eighner, a severely overweight, phlebitic, arthritic, migraine-ridden homeless homosexual man who eats from dumpster has become a bit of a literary cult hero because he has written a book on homelessness (Travels With Lizbeth, his dog), several books on "gay erotica," and occasional articles. He even has a web page. Time (26/1/98) devoted a whole page to him.

*A friend of ours calls a certain population "housed homeless." While this is a rather peculiar verbal phrase, it actually refers to a very meaningful phenomenon.

*There was a wonderful article (with pictures) on the history of hoboism in the 8/98 issue of the Smithsonian. In it were these lines. "Do you know how a hobo feels? Life is a series of dirty deals. This is the song of the wheels."
Below are parts of various hobo songs of unknown provenance.

Hobo song No. 1: All around the water tank,
Waiting for a train,
A thousand miles away from home,
Sleeping in the rain.

Hobo song No. 2: Go to sleep, you weary hobo,
Let the towns drift slowly by,
Can't you hear the steel wheels hummin’?
That's a hobo's lullabye.

Though your clothes are torn and ragged,
Though your hair is turnin' grey,
After you've spent a lifetime seeking,
You'll find a home someday.

"Rods" were long steel rods running underneath many kinds of railroad cars to strengthen the frame. Hobos often hung onto them, which was nearly impossible and cost many lives. One way to ride the rods better was to lay a board across two of them—still extremely risky.

The bum on the rod is a social flea
Who gets an occasional bite,
The bum on the plush is a social leech,
Blood-sucking day and night.

The bum on the rod is a load so light
That his weight we scarcely feel,
But it takes the labor of dozens of men
To furnish the other a meal.

There is also a genre of hobo jokes, as noted in last December's issue. Here are a few more.

1. Boxcar Harry: "Beg pardon, ma’am, but do you happen to have some pie or cake that you could spare an unfortunate wanderer?"
Lady of the House: "No, I'm afraid not. But wouldn't some bread and butter do?"
Boxcar Harry: "As a general rule it would, ma’am but you see, this is my birthday."

2. Mrs. Subbubs (to tramp): "Out of work, are you? Then you're just in time. I've a cord of wood to be cut up and I was just going to send for a man to do it."
Tramp: "That so, mum? Where does he live? I'll go and get him."

3. Tramp: "Would you please 'elp a pore man whose wife is out o'work?"

Every year, we issue a call to our readers to furnish us with hobo and related poetry and songs, but the pickings have been meagre.

Crime

There are an estimated 650,000 juvenile gang members in the US.

More than 50% of all youth offenses take place during those times when youths are least likely to be under adult supervision, i.e., between the time school lets out around 2 or 3 pm, and 8 pm (Newsweek, 27/4/98)—no wonder, considering that three mothers out of four of school-aged children
work outside the home. In fact, mother may be employed as a "Mighty Mom" (a form of security officer) at the mall. One mall at least (in Minneapolis, of all places) has security officers stationed every 10 feet in certain sections, because youths may roam in gangs of 50 (Toronto Star, 21/6/96).

*On the one hand, we are told that crime in the US is down; on the other hand, we are informed that the murder rate among boys 14-17 is double that of 1985 (Newsweek, 27/10/97).

*In Florida, an old national guard armory was restored to serve simultaneously as a charter school, a Boys and Girls Club—and a police station (Newsweek, 27/4/98).

*It is estimated that there are 500,000 murderers who are on the loose in the US who have either never been caught, or who have served time and then been released (Newsweek, 11 May 98).

*If an immigrant to the US only speaks a language spoken by 300 persons in another continent, he or she can go on a jolly crime spree with virtual immunity from police—unless an officer on the scene speaks the language or has a translator by his/her side. That is the upshot of a 1998 court ruling (AP in SHI, 1 April 98, but not an April Fools' joke), a form of PC run amok. This will only turn the public against lawyers, the government, and criminals, and toward radical right-wing movements.

*In NY State alone, a match of welfare rolls against arrest warrants against "fugitive felons" (including parole and probation violators) identified 1,800 false claims for welfare worth $10 million, and led to the apprehension of 250 wanted felons (AP in SHI, 9/9/98).

*A crime that used to be extremely rare is becoming increasingly common, and that is so-called identity theft. Crooks may steal somebody's charge cards, telephone credit lines, credit accounts, and name, to the point where one is almost forced to assume a new identity oneself in order to escape a crook's predations along these lines. Part of the problem is that computerized systems have a very poor capacity for reversing and clearing up such mistakes in identity, and law enforcement is not particularly interested in pursuing such crimes. In fact, prior to 1995, it was not even a crime to steal people's identity. Some people's entire lives have been ruined.

*A new kind of crime that has become particularly popular in Germany consists of attacks on horses. All over Germany, people have been sneaking up on horses, particularly tame ones while they are grazing in meadows, and have inflicted cut and stab wounds upon them. Experts suspect that at least a proportion of this crime is motivated by a sexual perversion. One can only wonder how such a crime can become so common across an entire country without there being much publicity or explicit promotion thereof. How do people know that the way to enact their culturally-induced meanness or perversity is to go out and wound horses, of all things?

*According to some reports, stalking is becoming an American pathology (and increasingly in other societies as well), with an estimated 1 million women and 400,000 men in the US being unrelentingly harassed and terrorized by pursuers every year. Stalking has been facilitated by the ability of stalkers to track and access their victims by recourse to computer media (called cyberstalking). Half of the stalkers threaten to hurt their victims or their pets, or to damage their property; 2% end up committing homicide. Reportedly, people who start stalking will hardly ever be deterred from their pursuit. Perhaps surprisingly, police have not been taking it serious when a woman has stalked a man, though this can equally lead to violence. Though there have always been instances of stalking, it was not defined as a crime in the US until a 1990 California law, and subsequently in all states (SHI, 26/8/98).

*Because of the increase in computer, financial and Medicare fraud, there are more white collar convicts who are much more difficult to surveille during their probation because they are so smart. Also, they are less likely to confess and admit guilt. Many are arrogant, having been used to "sit at the head of the table," and are belligerent, litigious, and slimily persuasive. The probation officer
of junk bond king Michael Milken was chagrined to see him get approval for a private jet trip to Israel to receive an award, with dinners with violinist Isaac Stern and one at the Knesset. Probation officers are sighing for the good old days when they surveilled violent and drug offenders (Nwk., 2 March 98).

**How to blow up airliners and earn millions.** A young woman from North Korea put a bomb on a South Korean airliner in 1987 that blew the plane apart in midair and killed all 115 people aboard. She was sentenced to death but pardoned in 1990, upon which South Korea’s intelligence agency hired her. She has also written two best-sellers that made her a millionaire (AP in SHJ, 22/12/93). The people she killed are dead, dead, dead.

**Wertham, F. (1949). The show of violence.** Garden City, NY: Doubleday. In this book, Wertham (who has also written about the killing of handicapped people under the Nazi regime) focused on the question of "legal insanity" and responsibility for crimes committed by "insane" people. He recited many tales of gruesome crimes, and of the insanity and immorality/amorality of people who committed them. However, at least at this point in his life, he did not seem to recognize/admit the reality of evil, and that some of these people could be evil as well as crazy, or evil but not crazy at all. For instance, on p. 93, he said that a man who sexually molested, killed, dismembered, and ate children had "an illness like any other," as if what he did were the equivalent of sneezing and coughing because one has the flu.

**Sometimes, the authorities create crime.** E.g., street vendors have been part of the New York street scene since time immemorial, but as a result of the work of a "quality of life task force," whole sections of New York City have been declared off-limits to street vendors and their pushcarts. Considering all the ills that plague the city, it is astonishing to learn that the police sometimes have launched sweeps of the street to cleanse them of street vendors that involve entire armies of as many as 500 officers with riot gear, and a myriad of vehicles (CW, 12/94).

**Police in Rochester, NY, saw what appeared to be a man armed with a rifle sitting in the back seat of a car, and spent two hours trying to talk him out of the car and surrendering his weapons. It turned out that they were talking to a mannequin made up to look like "Pistol Pete," and who was holding an antique pop gun between his knees. The mannequin belonged to a man who has made all sorts of dummies modeled on historical figures, such as Wild Bill Hickocks and Crazy Horse (AP in Laconia Evening Citizen, 23/10/93; source item from Karen Barker). The amazing thing is that they did not end up shooting the mannequin.

**Law experts are beginning to argue that a defendant in criminal cases has the right to plead guilty or not guilty, and to decide whether to take the stand or not, but not the right to determine what kind of defense to muster.** Of course, this means that even more of the current scene would be put under the control of lawyers, generating ever more work for them, and thereby of course, lavish livelihoods (Time, 19/1/98).

**Punishment**

**As of 1995, Brazil embarked on a provocative experiment in criminal justice.** The law offers indicted persons a trade-off by, on the one hand, reducing formal legal process requirements while, on the other hand, depenalizing certain relatively minor criminal offenses. The offender must be prepared to waive certain constitutional rights in return for agreeing to certain sanctions or restitutions. This also greatly speeds up the processing of such criminal offenses. We await with great interest reports on how this has worked once sufficient experience has accumulated.

**Sentencing an offender to community service, perhaps as an alternative to imprisonment, is not particularly new in the US, but calling it "volunteering" is.** In Syracuse, there is a roster of services to which offenders may be sentenced by judges, and the offender must pay $1 per hour of
community service given, with a total minimum of at least $30, probably to cover the administrative cost of matching an offender with a service (source item from Carol Flowers).

*William Calcraft was the executioner in London for 45 years, from 1829 to 1874, which set a record. Amazingly, he was described as a "simple and kindly creature," but nonetheless used such a short drop on his scaffold that many of his victims suffered unnecessarily long while strangulating. His successor, William Marwood, who was described as a "God-fearing man and good husband" was much more scientific, and calculated the length of each victim's drop so that death would be instantaneous rather than slow strangulation. He said about his predecessor that "he hanged them, I execute them." He was described as "the last of the great hangmen" (Newman, 1978).

*In New York State, the execution chamber will be located in the idyllically named Green Haven prison. It used to be at Sing-Sing prison between 1910-1963.

*Some states do all their judicial killings in batches of multiple victims ("like hogs at a slaughter") in order to save money and effort. Strangely enough, one advocacy group objected to such "mass executions" because this "takes away from the individuality of the person."

*In some states there is great irony in the death penalty, because the state medical examiner is required to perform an autopsy on the executed person because, after all, it is legally defined as a homicide (Newsweek, 8/8/94).

*The US Supreme Court ruled that innocent people can be sentenced and put to death as long as all judicial procedures were properly carried out. For instance, a man in Texas cheerfully confessed to 600 murders in 26 states, possibly all fictitious. He certainly did not commit the murder for which he was sentenced to death. This reminded us of the "Hymn to a Pillory" written by Daniel Defoe (ca. 1660-1731).

1. Hail hieroglyphic state machine,
   Contrived to punish fancy in:
   Men that are men in thee can feel no pain,
   And all thy insignificants disdain.
   Contempt, that false new word for shame,
   Is, without crime, an empty name,
   A shadow to amuse mankind,
   But never frights the wise or well-fixed mind:
   Virtue despises human scorn,
   And scandals innocence adorn.

   But justice is inverted when
   Those engines of the law,
   Instead of pinching vicious men,
   Keep honest ones in awe;

2. Thy business is, as all men know,
   To punish villains, not to make men so.
   Whenever then thou art prepared
   To prompt that vice thou should'st reward,
   And by the terrors of thy grisly face
   Make men turn rogues to shun disgrace;
   The end of thy creation is destroyed,
   Justice expires of course, and law's made void.

The Jail & Prison Scene

*The 5,100-place Angola prison in La. had once become the most violent in the US, with 40 murders in a single year, and daily rapes and stabbings. Prisoners put on make-shift armor before going to bed. The federal courts took over supervision in 1975, only relinquishing it in 1998! (AP in SHJ, 25/9/98).
We had reported before on the popular pastime of prisoners "serving" prison personnel, i.e., throwing "bodily fluids" (including feces) at them. In New York State at least, a prison employee who gets plastered with such bodily fluids has no right to find out whether the prisoner at issue has any transmissible disease. Forcing such serving prisoners to be tested for such diseases was promptly decried by civil rights radicals as a violation of the prisoner's right to privacy. As we keep saying, things like these could turn one against prisoners. In recent years, there were an average of 134 such service incidents per year in NY State prisons.

In response, NY State made it a felony in 1996 for a prison inmate to hurl "body fluids" or feces at prison employees. (However, it is still legal for inmates to do it to each other.) We suspect that this is yet another futile flailing law.

With both prisoners and the prison system becoming meaner in tandem with each other, the US government has invented yet another new kind of prison, called by the peculiar term "Administrative Maximum Facility," or ADX for short, also called the "supermax," the "new Alcatraz," the "Big One," and the "Hellhole of the Rockies." Among its many features is that solitary confinement is the norm, and no one is told who is kept at it--a bit like in the Gulag. We predict that history will repeat itself, and that so many inmates will go insane that the concept will be abandoned for long-term confinement for most prisoners.

In the US in 1987, the various states spent more on higher education than on prisons, but by 1998, the proportions had become reversed.

Percentage-wise, the Netherlands imprisons less than 10% the numbers of the US. Of course, in the Netherlands, killers find ready employment in the medical professions.

More than half of the 1.7 million people imprisoned in the US never receive a single visitor.

In US prisons, meals are served at times that are as abnormal as schedules in the old time institutions used to be: breakfast at 5:20, lunch at 10:30, and supper at 3:30 pm. Of course, this is a schedule designed to minimize cost by being able to dismiss the kitchen personnel by around 4:30 pm, if not sooner. However, food in US prisons may be the best in the world.

We have reported before on the US practice--quickly imitated across the world--to move prisoners from one prison to another. This practice has also enabled the US prison system to return mail addressed to a prisoner at prison X with the notation "UNK," for unknown. This reminds us very much of the Russian gulag into which people disappeared, never to be heard of again.

At any given time, ca. 40 state prison systems in the US are under court order to rectify crowding. In some prisons, for every new convict admitted, one has to be released. One reasonable remedy proposed has been to release burnt-out older prisoners, rather than hateful and/or uncontrolled young ones. Because prison life ages inmates quickly, they are pretty burnt out by age 55, and unlikely to commit crimes. In fact, high age is one of the best predictors of low recidivism.

In stark contrast to American prisons, prisons in Latin America are often vastly more humane. Prisoners are allowed to engage in crafts that earn them some income; there is much more relaxed visiting; and their families can even come to live with prisoners for a while. Mexican prisons are less violent than those in the US, and perhaps some of the violence in the US is due to the harsh conditions.

Scores of captains and guards at municipal prisons in NY City were found to be tax evaders.
A federal judge ruled that prisoners cannot be prohibited "sexually explicit" literature, photographs or films, not even if they have been convicted of "repetitive and compulsive" sexual crimes. Litigious inmates had sued, claiming that such a ban would not allow them access to the Bible (SHJ, 30/6/98). This too could turn one against prisoners.

We have long taught that human services can be just as confining as prisons, even without the guards, guns and high walls. At a nursing home for senile people in February 1998, one resident remarked that "It's harder to get out of here than jail."

One irony in the conversion of innumerable institutions to prisons is that institution living is an excellent preparation for eventual living in a prison.

In Cardiff, Wales, a 25-year old prisoner in pain and dying of stomach cancer was kept handcuffed and chained to a bed in a hospice for the terminally ill during the last three days of his life, until four hours before his death. Although he was not living in prison, but in a hospice, he was still under sentence, and prison officers refused repeated requests from doctors and relatives to remove the chains, until finally a lawyer obtained a court order less than four hours before his death on 3 January 1997 (Disability in Action (UK), February 97, p. 9).

People outside of prison have suddenly begun to find it chic to wear jeans made in prison by an operation called Prison Blues. Marketing materials proclaim the words "straight from prison" and "made on the inside to be worn on the outside," and show many old-time photographs of prison scenes. Prison Blues T-shirts have slogans on them such as "wear them out," "sentenced to life on planet earth" and "final countdown" (AP in SHA, 10 May 98).

Last December, we carried the mother of all hobo songs. The mother of all American prison songs is somewhat uncertain. Its current version is "Birmingham Jail," but it had many forerunners, including "Barbourville Jail," and some apparently still older. The words to its mournful tune include the following: Down in the valley, Valley so low, Hang your head over, Hear the wind blow, Hear the wind blow, love, Hear the wind blow, Hang yore head over, Hear the wind blow. Write me a letter; Send it by mail; Send it in care of the Birmingham jail.

Torture

Even Time (6 April 98) admitted that the US is the prime inventor, and a major exporter, of torture devices. Sophisticated torturers are increasingly turning to electroshock stun devices.

Israelis call their use of torture (mostly on Arabs) "physical pressure." Apparently, the Israeli public is opposed to torture of Jews by Nazis, but supports torture of Arabs by Jews. Little learned, and short memory!

A French police inspector whose department used torture during the Algerian war of liberation began to hear his victims' screams even when he was at home. He said he could even tell at what stage of torture the victims were, because the voices would be different after the beatings with a fist, the belt or the baton behind the ear, being hung by the wrists, "after the bath," and above all after the electricity when "it becomes really too much." He sorely wished that the prisoners would show "a bit of consideration for us and speak out without forcing us to spend hours tearing information word-by-word out of them." Eventually, he began to try to settle all disagreements with anybody in his life by recourse to violence, and suddenly found himself tying up and beating his wife and children. He came to a shrink and asked for help so that he would manage to be able to torture Algerians without pangs of conscience (Newman, 1978).
Religion in Society

We will deal with this topic in three sections.

Modernists' Chaotic & Confused Religiosity

*At the time of the American Revolution, over 98% of the population of the United States was Protestant, and 75% of all Americans belonged to churches of Puritan extraction. Over half the states had an established religion (FT, 1/98). Thus, when the founding fathers spoke of truths that make freedom necessary, they obviously could not have meant by "truth" what many people today mean by it.

Americans have continued to have one of the highest rates of belief in God, but the nature of this belief has changed over the years. In the 1930s and 40s, Americans tended to believe in a Biblical type of God, but of those who believe in God today, about 30% believe instead in a God cast in a different image, such as either multiple divinities, an Eastern God, or a "higher consciousness." In fact, 3-4% even believe that they themselves are God, which is probably one of the highest percentages of such a belief in history, but certainly utterly consistent with modernistic values of radical individualism, entitlement, etc. Amazingly, more than half self-declared born-again Christians do not believe in a traditional trinity, 50% do not believe in Satan, and 30% de facto do not believe in the divinity of Christ which shows what a problematic construct born-again-ness is these days. Regardless of what kind of religious belief people profess, 20% fewer than some decades ago say that religion is important in their lives. In fact, the Gallup poll concluded that "most Americans don't know what they believe and why."

*In architecture, there is a concept called "tensegrity" which refers to the combination of tension, compression and integrity that holds structures together. Obviously, if any of these three become either too strong or too weak, the structure crumbles. Yet in the culture of modernism, many people believe that they can weaken one of the key components of comituous polity, or increase another one, without paying some grievous cost to structural stability.

The amazing thing about the culture of modernism is that never before in human history has there been such a systematic rejection of any morality external to the human being, and never before have entire societies (such as the US) declared themselves amoral in public affairs, professing a form of agnosticism about ethics. For example, when New York State passed a law prohibiting the use of children in pornographic films, it made certain to specify that the law was not based on any moral/religious grounds, but on concern for the "mental health" of the children. However, there is no significant example in historical eras before the present of a society successfully maintaining moral life without the aid of religion, as already pointed out by the historians Will and Ariel Durant. Ironically, while delegitimizing religion in public life, modernists apply negative moral categories to their opponents. They solemnly exalt such religious constructs as multiculturalism, diversity, gender equality and androgyne, while branding their opponents as homophobic, chauvinistic, bigoted, etc.

The way that modernistic people separate their morality from their religious faith can almost be called a dissociation in the clinical sense that is bound to leave people in a form of insanity, albeit a normative one. This can also be likened to carrying on a discourse in two different languages, namely language A for issues of religion and language B for issues of morality, without any translation or connection between the two. What adds to this peculiar schizophrenia is that Americans at least are usually quite intense verbally about whatever religion they profess to hold (e.g., Wolfe, 1998).

*The Utne Reader of 7/98 carried a cover story about "designer religions" and what it called "mix-and-match spirituality," meaning that every modernistic person makes up their own religion (Source info. from Dr. Betty Burton).

*In reaction or response to the meteoric rise of the all-male Promise Keepers, a somewhat similar women's movement was founded called Women of Faith. Its rallies grew from 36,000 in
1996 to about 350,000 in 1998. Critics claim that the movement dishes out mostly psychological therapy cloaked in the Ten Commandments. Things could be worse!

*One way people these days respond to the innate human urge to be religious is to cultivate a sense of what one writer has called "spirituality without belief." New Age practices often seem to fall into this category, as do superstitious human service practices such as massage at a distance, "waving-hands-before-eyes therapy," and "facilitated communication."

*One US federal court ruling in the past has been that nativity scenes may be displayed on public properties as long as they include non-religious symbolism, or as long as they also display symbols from religions other than Christianity. The former has been called the "plastic reindeer rule," because a creche with Jesus, Mary, Joseph, etc., may be displayed as long as there are also objects such as plastic reindeers, snow persons, etc., present. The latter has led to scenes where one might see a cross, a menorah, and a Buddhist symbol, and so on, all juxtaposed to each other.

In some schools, Valentine's Day has been abolished because Valentine was a Christian saint, and children can only send each other "special person cards." During Easter, children are permitted to get chocolate eggs from "the special bunny," but not the Easter Bunny.

All this started when Jews demanded equal space with Christmas displays in public places, and upon winning in court, this quickly blew up the minor Jewish feast of Hanukkah to Christmas-size, and displaying the menorah—which is why this got called "the Menorah Principle" or rule. Next, Afro-Americans muscled in on Christmas by outright inventing a Kwanzaa feast. One NJ district that was not particularly "diverse" ended up pairing its Christmas symbols with menorahs, Kwanzaa symbols and golden Buddhas. Can Shinto, shaman and Satanism symbols be far behind? And why all this overloading of Christmas? Why not some reverse party-crashing, with crosses and stars of David being slapped onto the Eid Ul-Fitr (Islamic) religious feast, observed for years at Syracuse University in late January-early February?

*The Israeli Supreme Court often cites US court cases as precedent—but rarely refers to the Bible or the Talmud for precedents (USN&WR, 4 May 98).

*In early 1998, a book (Talking to Heaven) by a man claiming to be a medium (i.e., to the dead) was No. 1 on the NY Times best-seller list. Only a few notches down was a New-Ageist book, Conversations With God: Book 1, which purports to be something like a dictation by God, described by some people as "religion without the hard parts." The book reports that everyone (even Hitler) goes to heaven, and people need not feel guilty about how they have sex. We are talking 1 million + sales of such books each. We predict that if there should be a really big financial market melt-down, works like this will proliferate and thrive even more.

*The peculiar ideas that some modernists have about religion was expressed in a howler as follows (Hanamura, 1998): "His parents, though deeply religious, had been family-oriented and had made every effort to create a warm and loving home life."

Contemporary Idolatries

*When human beings shape their religions, they tend to do it within the images and metaphors that are particularly prominent of their own day. Earlier generations had commonly looked forward to a warrior-god, because warfare was one of the dominant motifs in their culture. It is no coincident that a religion called Christian Science sprang up at the very time when people began to look to science for salvation.

At a time when people's minds are absolutely obsessed with the media, and particularly TV, it should not surprise us that some religions and sects spring-up that are centered around the media, or in which the media play a central role. An example is the prediction by a sect leader in 1998 that God would make an appearance on Channel 18 at midnight on 31 March. When it did not happen, the guru told people to "keep watching" (AP in SHJ, 25/3/98).
*Morbid fear of the number 13 costs American business an estimated $1 billion a year in absenteeism, cancellations, and reduced commerce on the 13th of each month. In Paris, there is a service that hires out people to attend dinner parties to make sure that there are not 13 in attendance, because of the belief that this would result in a fatality (Discover, 11/87)

*Volkswagen ran an ad in France that showed Christ at the Last Supper saying "My friends, let us rejoice, for a new Golf is born" (Golf is a VW car) (NC Register, 2/98). Christ as ad personality?

*We keep saying that the things that people put their hopes and trust in are their gods. A survey (Science 27/3/98) found that US scientists put their faith first and foremost into their own scientific community. Far down in second place are the US Supreme Court and the field of medicine. After another big gap comes education. Then there is another big gap, with various other entities registering very low confidence ratings: organized religion, the government, etc. Scientists are known to have a very low rate of religious belief, very similar to people in the news business, but they have an extremely high rate of idolatry.

*Otherwise very serious researchers in Minnesota concluded in 1990 that religious belief is 50% genetic. Apparently, some people have the God gene, and some don't (Newsweek, 26/1/98).

*The idolatrous delusions of our scientists were well exemplified by what the prominent astrophysicist Fritz Zwicky said in a lecture at Oxford University in England in 1948: "We might just as well visualize cold-bloodedly, since it appears inevitable, the reconstruction of the universe...In the wake of...large-scale nuclear fusion there will, no doubt, follow plans for making other planetary bodies habitable by changing them intrinsically, and by changing their positions relative to the sun" (Discover, 7/85, p.57).

*In early 1998, a Harvard physics PhD announced his plan to clone humans, because that is what God wants, and cloning was "the first serious step in becoming one with God" (Time, 19/1/98).

*It is extremely amusing indeed to learn that one of the big reasons why social scientists are increasingly turning toward evolutionary theory is because of "the decline in popularity of Marxist approaches" (Scientist, 3 Jan. 97). Always chasing one idol or another!

*To dyed-in-the-wool evolutionists, the recently resurgent idea of an "intelligent design" in the universe is like a red flag to a bull. They consider it merely a foil for fundamentalist creationist religions, and a form of anti-science (e.g., Science, 6 Sept. 96). However, there are solidly established scientists who do not fall into the camp of fundamentalist creationists who believe in intelligent design. In fact, Einstein believed in it.

*In the Western world, it was customary to hold a crucifix before the eyes of a person about to be executed, so that if he/she wanted it, this would be the last thing he/she would see. Two interesting facts about the American Stock Exchange in New York are that first of all, American flags are hanging all over the trading floor, and secondly, there are cardiac arrest stations everywhere. Apparently, traders drop like flies with heart attacks, especially when stocks plunge (Time, 10 Nov. 97), but at least their last sight is that of Old Glory. In the future, the hapless condemned may get a DNA chart or a computer held before their eyes for a vade tecum meditation.

*Around 1970, American novelist Norman Mailer observed the launch of an Apollo rocket, and when the rocket took off, he pointed at it and started exclaiming uncontrollably, "Oh my God, Oh my God, Oh my God, Oh my God!" He subsequently called Cape Kennedy where these rockets were launched the "the antechamber of the new creation" (Time, 3 Aug. 98).
Many modern sports arenas these days resemble the Roman Colosseum, and at events in these buildings, Americans behave somewhat like the Roman populace at the circuses. About 125 million people in the US view the football Super Bowl every year on TV, and in some years, virtually half of all television viewers are tuned to the game (CH, 2/98).

A former president of Yale said that in America, there are now so many religions that religion cannot serve as a unifying force while sports and politics can, and this is why the latter should be viewed as the "civil surrogates" of religion. Indeed, it is found that sports will unite many people across all social classes (Newsweek, 29/12/97).

Castro's communists tried to banish religion from Cuba, but the result was a confirmation of the old adage that when religion is kicked out the door, the kobolds (i.e., goblins) come flying in through the windows. An estimated 70% of Cubans now practice Santeria, another term for which is voodoo, and which a Yale art historian has called "just as beautiful as Zen, Buddhism or being a Catholic." In the US, the Supreme Court ruled in 1993 that the ritual sacrifice of chickens, goats and other animals to Santeria saints is a constitutionally protected practice of religion (Nwk., 19/1/98). Of course, so is the sacrifice of the unborn, and of the impaired newborn.

Cross-dresser Marilyn Manson (actually a male) comes close to bringing Satan onto the pop concert stage, not to mention having embraced Satanism in his personal life. It leaves one in gruesome wonder what it means that millions of Americans adore him, and worshipfully pay dearly to partake of his performance Sabbaths.

Because modernists are addicted to newness, the New Age movement made a grave mistake in calling itself "new," because nothing new can be new very long. Accordingly, there has been a dramatic decline in New Age followership in the US, which will probably spread to New Age cultures around the world (NC Register, 24/5/98). Not to mention: New Age is dull compared to a Manson concert!

It is always amusing when imperial structures that make the most grandiose claims are revealed to have feet of mud. From 1972 through at least 1995, the CIA, with the Pentagon, have employed "psychics," in part under pressure from some of the most prominent US senators who, it turns out, believe in this sort of thing. The psychics program began when the CIA concluded that the Russians were dangerously ahead of the Americans in the use of the paranormal, and that swift action was imperative to close the psychics gap. One intelligence general would hold spoon-bending sessions, and one of the psychics reported that there was a Martian colony hidden below the New Mexico desert. The psychics had an amazingly large success rate of 25%. One psychic even received a Legion of Merit Award for his visualizations. However, it turned out that this may have been a "facilitated communication" effect in that interrogators of the psychics apparently unconsciously cued and steered them to find what the interrogators already knew themselves. In all, the Defense Department spent at least $20 million on this project (Time & Newsweek, 11 Dec. 95).

Computer scientists have developed extremely elaborate computer-based simulated environments which can be made very real by encasing a person in goggled helmets and body movement monitors attached all over the body. For instance, such systems can give pilots the illusion that they are flying a plane, and even having a dog fight. Illusions thusly created are called "virtual reality." This development underwent the most extreme and idolatrous craze interpretation, such as the claim that "with the technology of virtual reality, we can change the world" (Discover, 6/90). A major developer of this technology was Thomas Furness of the University of Washington in Seattle who describes himself "like an evangelist...it requires a kind of religious fervor...to get the word out." One envisioned product is a "personal reality simulator" that enables people to withdraw into a totally computer-simulated world where they can be virtually anything, including act like gods, perpetrate any violence (and presumably sex act), and so on. There are claims that such visual worlds can be constructed for people with quadriplegia in which they can move and behave as if they were not handicapped. Of course, such a development might not only create even more violent
people than we are already getting from the media violence, but also socially very isolated, immature
and alienated ones. We are reminded of the moneys who were permitted to administer electric brain
stimulation to themselves, and preferred doing this to any other activity, including eating, until they
died.

*Some people have predicted that cyberspace will elevate humanity to a greater collective--and
benign--consciousness, and a collapse of individual egos. One Internet guru said that cyberspace will
put "the flesh back into the word," in allusion to the Gospel of John where "the Word became
flesh." Cyberspace technology is said to protect democracy, the environment and human rights.
No wonder some universities have even provided their toilets with Internet access! (Time,
21/11/94). This seems to us like the modernistic equivalent of St. Paul’s injunction to "pray
unceasingly" (1 Thessalonians 5:17), considering that to many people, computers and the use of the
computer is their religion. In fact, such "prayer" before the computer is much more devout and
intense these days than the practice of just about any other religion that we know of! It is also
noteworthy that computers should be installed in toilets at the same time as many facilities still lack
access for physically handicapped people to the toilets.

*To many people, Internet surfing and bulletin-boarding has become a religion. It certainly
tends to replace church-going because so many people spend up to 40 hours a week (beyond their
work week) and much of their nights in front of a computer terminal.

*Through genetic engineering, mad scientists are trying to grow meat artificially by cultivating
meat cells "in vitro," and getting them to reproduce, thus abolishing the need for animals as meat
sources--for better or for worse (World Monitor, 4/89).

*When US presidential candidates Bush and Dukakis were asked in 1988 who their heroes were,
they both named medical scientists who had relatively high social profiles (Science, 21/10/88).

*A good example of modernistic people preferring high-tech to low-tech means of operating
when there is really no advantage in the high-tech strategy is the following discovery we made.
Namely, we noted that people at Syracuse University send faxes to their colleagues on campus when
the information being transmitted is not at all urgent and could just as readily be sent through the
daily interoffice mail system.

*Jeff Heath from Australia traveled through the Pacific Islands a few years ago to examine the
situation of handicapped people, and published his findings in a monograph. Two of his vignettes
are particularly exemplifying of the irrational lust for a high-technology strategy where a low-
technology one is either preferable or the only one feasible. Old-fashioned foot-operated sewing
machines are cheap to buy, cost nothing to run, and are easy to maintain--yet the vocational services
on one little Pacific island gave a handicapped woman an electric sewing machine to earn her living
with. Since her village did not have electricity, she had to leave her home every Monday and travel
to a distant town to stay at a friend’s house that had electricity and work there, and then return
Friday afternoon to her family. On another Pacific Island, a physically handicapped man had been
getting around on an exceedingly crude hand-made wooden wheelchair when a rehab specialist
procured him a modern Australian metal chair. It lasted less than two years under island conditions,
after which the man reverted to his old chair which, by the time Heath reported the incident, he had
been using for 19 years.

*There is a relationship between the kind of idol that one embraces, and how one gets destroyed
by it in the end. If a nation embraces military nationalism as its idol, it will probably perish in a
nationalistic war. Today, one of the idols that people have embraced is that of a secular rights
radicalism; and as a result, one of the things that is eating up the nations that have embraced this
idol is an explosion of lawyers, and litigation of infinite proportions.
*Underdeveloped nations and regions regularly fall victim to the lies of the high-consumption imperial powers. Poor nations are being drained of their natural resources and have little to show for it over the long run. Having discovered vast oil reserves, Mexico ended up with a wrenching depression. A similar fate has befallen the Shetland Islands off the north of Scotland. Located in the midst of vast oil and gas fields, big harbors and oil installations were built on the islands, but because the profits from all of this are not being shared with them but flow to urban imperial centers such as London, all the islanders ended up with was a gross collapse of their culture, their feeling of integrity and well-being—and economic depression besides.

Miscellaneous Other Points About Religion in Society

*Apparently, all religions have some version of contemplation, i.e., a gathering of one’s mind ("collecting oneself") for encountering the sacred and the deeper meanings (Zaleski & Kaufman, 1997).

*A very disproportionate number of US movie figures are "scientologists" (e.g., Time, 10 Feb. 97; Newsweek, 20/1/97). The reason for this is not clear. However, one can surmise that celebrities are attracted to religions that tell them that it is ok to be rich, powerful, and to remain stars. Scientology has built 10 special "celebrity centers" to cater to artists and actors, and publishes a periodical called Celebrity.

*Keep your rear guard up! The chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts that gave tax funds to exhibits of deviate art (see previous TIPS issue) said that he is frustrated by having to fight "rear guard battles" against the religious right. One of the pieces of art (which is never shown in the newspapers or on TV) in one of these controversial exhibits is a man's rear end with a riding crop sticking out of it. The man obviously had failed to have his rear guard up.

*There is a US federal park in Key Largo, Fla. that includes underwater terrain. People have protested strenuously that the presence of an underwater statue of Christ in the park constitutes the use of federal funds for religious purposes, and thus violates the federal separation of church and state—but the same people consider it perfectly appropriate to use federal funds to pay for a display of an effigy of Christ submerged in urine.

*Some people have warned that Western democracies are moving ever closer to something that one might call the "Jewish and Christian Removal Act," meaning that more and more, people with serious Jewish or Christian religious convictions are being de facto excluded from all sorts of memberships and participations (admissions to academic careers, into the professions, etc.) This exclusion is transacted as informally and insidiously as discrimination was once practiced against Jews in general (FT 5/98). Relatedly, it has become an absolute PC no-no, and in part even a legal one, to deprecate or make fun of any "diversity" class (Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Arabs, Africans, "blacks," homosexuals, etc., etc.)—except Christians, and especially Catholics. One of innumerable recent examples has been the Catholic-bashing in TV shows, such as the "Ally McBeal" show.

*Some newspaper published the following prayer about former President Bush: "Our advice to Bush's doctors is to cure him with shock therapy." "Put him in a place surrounded by a map of Iraq...and pictures of Saddam Hussein on the map. Or Bush can find a better way of curing himself, namely suicide." "Please God, give him a slow death to make him suffer more because of his crimes." "Please God, make him blind and crippled, cut off his hands and make him mute." (AP in Syracuse Herald Journal, 20/1/93). People in the West who take the Judeo-Christian ethic for granted, while at the same time detesting it, often are simply not aware of how overtly rough different moralities can be. In many cultures with other moral traditions, wishing people dead is actually normative, and the death of a death-wished person, group, or even entire class is overtly celebrated when it does occur.

*Some of those "multiculturalists" are not very nice. (Is it still legal to say that?) An Iraqi newspaper published the following prayer about former President Bush: "Our advice to Bush's doctors is to cure him with shock therapy." "Put him in a place surrounded by a map of Iraq...and pictures of Saddam Hussein on the map. Or Bush can find a better way of curing himself, namely suicide." "Please God, give him a slow death to make him suffer more because of his crimes." "Please God, make him blind and crippled, cut off his hands and make him mute." (AP in Syracuse Herald Journal, 20/1/93). People in the West who take the Judeo-Christian ethic for granted, while at the same time detesting it, often are simply not aware of how overtly rough different moralities can be. In many cultures with other moral traditions, wishing people dead is actually normative, and the death of a death-wished person, group, or even entire class is overtly celebrated when it does occur.
*When conservative minister and politician Pat Buchanan was invited to speak at Syracuse University in 10/98, he was "greeted" by "Satanists for Pat," "Lesbian Avengers," and "Ladies Against Women." Some of these kept interrupting his speech, and the lesbians staged a kiss-in during it. The Satanists praised Buchanan for "making Hell on Earth." Buchanan called this the most disrupted event he had ever been to.

*The culture of the US National Football League has been marked by corruption and decadence, the latter with a great deal of sexual offenses and drug and alcohol abuse. Finally, some players took deviancy too far and formed a Christian sports group, which precipitated an investigation by the National Football League, at which even Newsweek (17/8/98) was amused. Maybe (the masculine?) sports religion will some day be reported to have stamped out the last of Christianity in the 21st century.

*The media started paying attention to arson at Christian churches when a disproportionate number of churches with Afro-American congregations had been set afire. This was immediately decried as a racial hate crime. Actually, for several decades prior to that, there had been a large number of arsons at Christian churches in general to which nobody had paid attention. Eventually, USA Today did a survey published in 1996 that found that over an 18-month period, 158 churches in the US had been set afire, half of these Afro-American ones. In Texas alone, there were 30 such fires, one-third of them at Afro-American churches. While there is undoubtedly some racist fire setting, media publicity declined dramatically when it was found that Afro-Americans were involved in setting a great many of these fires.

*The leaders of a reform movement in the US were accused of holding to a "dogma" that was "a sentiment semi-religious in its development, and...almost invariably characterized by intolerance and bigotry. The leaders of those who acknowledge its obligations and advocate its sanctity are like the subtle prelates of the dark ages." No, the accusation was not directed at anti-abortionists, Wolfensberger, normalization or Social Role Valorization, but at pre-Civil War abolitionists. The speaker was a federal judge, and the people he meant were certain citizens from Oberlin, Ohio, who had defied the federal Fugitive Slave Act by rescuing a run-away slave from slave hunters (Life Advocate, 7/93).

*Vice President Gore wants to be president so badly he swallowed the feminist propaganda that at one time, all religions were goddess religions which got squeezed out by masculine religions spawned in India and the Near East, with the last goddess religion being stamped out in Lithuania as recently as the 15th century (in his Earth in the Balance).

*When people went to their pastors to confess their sins, receive spiritual guidance or consolation, the pastor used to be the soul of discretion. Catholic priests even tried not to know who their penitents were, and to forget what they confessed. But when President Clinton sought guidance from 3 clergymen in Fall 1998, two of them started making public announcements about it and the President, and one of them even announced the fact in a Sunday sermon, and posted it on the Internet! (Time, 28/9/98).

The Family

*Of unwed couples in the US who do not live together but who have premarital sex, 80% of the women hope to marry the man, but only 12% of the men expect to marry the woman, showing that women are very gullible about the motives of the men (World, 22/8/98). Co-habitating is promoted by some people as a form of trial marriage, but according to at least some studies, it contributes to, rather than diminishes, marital instability: in the US, 40% break up before they are married, and of the remainder who do marry, close to half end in divorce (BRMM, 9/98). Obviously, modernistic sex education no longer tells people about the nature of the male animal.
American morality and family life were rather well symbolized by country music singer Tammy Wynette who became famous for singing "Stand By Your Man"—but was married to five different men. She should have sung, "Stand By Your Men."

After World War II, visual images overwhelmingly depicted the American family as consisting of a married couple in its 30s with two children, while increasingly, we see families depicted in the media with merely one child.

In 1986, there were an estimated 9.7 million fathers in the US who were not supporting their children. By 1996, the number had grown to 19.3 million, owing their children $45 billion in support (Casa Cry, 2/98). Who knows, perhaps this has something to do with the explosion in sex education in the mid-1980s.

In 1997, a publicly-funded $25 million research study—no less—on 20,000 teenagers trumpeted its sensational finding that it is beneficial for teenagers to be loved by their parents. That money could have been well spent helping families stay together.

In 12/97, NJ became the first state to explicitly allow (however, by court decree, rather than legislation) homosexual couples to adopt children. An editorial cartoon about this decision showed a bureaucrat handing a child his adoption papers saying, "The good news is you've been adopted; the bad news is your new mother's name is Bruce." Other states had earlier (usually also by court decree) allowed unmarried people living together (hence potentially including homosexual couples) to adopt. For instance, despite the fact that NY State did not at that time recognize homosexual "marriages," a 16-month old infant boy was adopted by a lesbian couple in Syracuse in 12/97, and both women were retroactively listed as parents on the boy's birth certificate. One of the women was the child's birth mother who said that she had "wanted to experience pregnancy and birth," and that is why she had herself inseminated by sperm donated by a male cousin of the other woman (SHJ, 8 Dec. 97). The child calls both women "mama."

While everybody is jumping up and down in delirious happiness about having homosexual couples adopt children, apparently no one had thought to ask the children themselves whether they preferred to have an old-fashioned married mother and father adoptive couple. So much for "choice."

Parents used to be opposed to inter-faith marriages, but one reason this opposition has greatly declined is now they are deliriously happy if at least their child is not marrying a drug addict, a cult member or a person of the same sex (Newsweek, 15/12/97).

Schools in the US that provide day care centers for the children of their girls commonly do not require that the mothers visit their children or stay after school for parenting classes, which seems to make unwedded motherhood undemanding and fosters irresponsibility. Some people have demanded that when under-aged girls become pregnant out of wedlock, they should be required to surrender some of their autonomy in exchange for mandatory acts of responsibility (Newsweek, 19/1/98). We would add that the same fate should be inflicted on the fathers.

To women in the Afro-American culture, one of the rarest prizes is a handsome man with a steady job who is not rough on women (Nwk., 26/5/97).

By 1996, divorce rates in Russia had reached 76% (Newsweek, 8 Dec. 97).

Children

Somebody pointed out that it is rare nowadays to see parents actually bodily carrying an infant, with infants more and more being likely to be carried about in a rigid carrier. Since humans evolved
carrying infants body-to-body, this new practice might have a very deleterious effect upon infant development.

*The average American child spends 70% more time during the year watching TV than in school (Newsweek, 27/4/98).

*By 1997, reproduction rates had fallen below the population replacement level in 51 countries out of 185, representing 44% of the world's population (NC Register, 5 April 98). This does not speak well of the valuing of children.

It is worth contemplating what is happening in a culture that has decided not to reproduce itself, i.e., that prefers to depopulate itself. One reasonable answer would be that perhaps there is famine, resource depletion, warfare, etc. However, it is countries with unprecedented prosperity and an unprecedented period of peace, such as in France, Germany and Italy, that nowadays have ceased reproducing themselves. Some of the 51 countries that have done this are in the second and third world. This is happening at the same time as some parties, including International Planned Parenthood, keep screaming "overpopulation." Ironically, it is the people of North Africa, Turkey and the Balkans that are moving into the European population vacuum, which permits them to continue to reproduce prolifically, which they might have ceased doing if they were not given such easy access to depopulating areas.

*One of 500 women in the US who get pregnant are HIV-infected. In 1996, 1,600 babies were born with HIV, about a quarter of whom progressed to full-blown AIDS within about a year. There have been some efforts for some years to make HIV-testing of pregnant women routine, with the usual objection to this from the AIDS lobby (AP in SHI, 14/10/98).

*In 1996, 4,650 children died in the US from gun fire. However, this was the lowest number since 1989 (AP in SHI, 9 Oct. 98).

*In 8/98, we heard for the first time the argument that children should be taken to school in school buses not because the schools were too far to walk to, but because it was no longer safe for children to walk to school because of predation upon children.

*In desperation, some parents put their uncontrolled teenagers in so-called behavior modification "attitude adjustment" facilities, schools or camps. There are 2,000 in the US, or run out of the US, and they come in various categories, such as military-style, religious, or special problem-focus such as drugs. A few even specialize on homosexual youths. Some of these are called "attitude-adjustment wilderness camps." Civil libertarians are up in arms about this because they claim that it deprives teenagers of their civil liberties, never mind any rights of parents (Time, 26/1/98).

*Reader's Digest (5/98) carried an article that described the US foster care system as "devastating." It said that there are a half a million children in foster care at a cost of $12 billion a year. The article included several vignettes of children who were being destroyed by being ping-ponged back and forth between obviously incompetent parents and various foster settings.

*The number of foster children in the US has increased 61% over 10 years. Most of these children are "black and brown." Each year, 25,000 leave foster care because the state no longer reimburses the foster parents of children over the age of 18. This means that once they turn 18, these young adults are on their own, e.g., in making their living, providing their food and shelter, and making all their own decisions. While some states provide "transition programs," most foster children apparently find themselves with no resources at the age of 18. They cannot count on public assistance money either, because such assistance for single adults without children was recently terminated. The director of the Child Welfare League of America claims that most male foster children then find themselves in homeless shelters, on drugs, or in jail. (Malveaux column, Syracuse Herald Journal, 19 May 1998, p. All; item written by Kathryn Smith.)
*Much as oodles of prison systems have been put under federal court supervision, almost half of the state welfare systems have been under consent decrees or court settlements because of their poor performance.

*Many readers may be surprised to learn that a major resister to adoption of children of disfunctional mothers is the Child Welfare League of America, as well as several pro-abortion groups. The motive of the League may well be that the more disfunctional mothers there are who have children living with them, the more government money goes to welfare agencies. Pro-abortion groups have opposed adoption because they think that it undermines the case for abortion, insofar as anti-abortion groups have been urging unwed mothers to bear their children (instead of abort them), and give them up for adoption if they do not want to rear them (NC Register, 24/5/98).

*Many people seem not to know the people to whom they entrust their children. Nannies these days kill their child charges, and a woman who ran a day care center in MD first poisoned, and then shot to death, her new husband of barely a year (SPS, 1 Aug. 96).

*Child care workers are among the lower-paid workers in the US, only a bit above the minimum wage, slightly below parking lot attendants and even animal caretakers. Apparently, it is considered to require more skills to take care of animals than of children (SHJ, 29/4/98).

*Even as conditions in Russia were going further and further downhill, and the situation of Russian children was getting worse and worse, Russia in 1998 ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, showing how meaningless such "rights" are.

*In the discarded notebook of a Syracuse University student, we found the poem "Small Fry."
Here comes that good for nothin' boy
He’s such a devil I could whip him with joy.
He’s been carousin’ at the burlycue
Just watch me teach him with the sole of my shoe.
Small fry, struttin’ by the poolroom;
Small fry should be in the schoolroom.
My, My, put down that cigarette,
You ain’t a grown-up high & mighty yet.
Small fry, dancin’ for a penny.
Small fry, countin’ up how many.
My, My, first listen here to me!
You ain’t the biggest catfish in the sea.
You practice peckin’ all day long
to some old radio song.
Oh yes, oh yes oh yes.
You better listen to your maw,
paw someday practice the law
and then you’ll be a real success,
Yes.
Small fry, you kissed the neighbor’s daughter;
Small fry, should stay in shallow water.
Seems I should take you ’cross my knee,
You ain’t the biggest catfish in the sea.
You’ve got your feet all soakin’ wet,
You’ll be the death of me yet.
Oh me, oh My,
small fry.
Public Morality

*How the executive and legislative branches of the US government have been lying to the people for years about the real budget deficit is becoming ever clearer, and also that the lies have been getting bigger every year. Every year since the early 1980s, the government has borrowed money from trust funds (such as Social Security) and called the borrowed money "income," even though it has to be paid back eventually. This borrowed money was not reported as being part of the national debt! Thus, in 1985, the national debt was under-reported by about 25%, and this underreporting has been getting bigger every year, hitting about 45% in 1989. For instance, the reported federal deficit in 1989 was $152 billion when the real figure was $275 billion! All this money must be paid back by future generations who, at that time, may have much less money to pay.

*Economy columnist Robert Samuelson stated that neither the government nor the press has been honest in explaining to Americans the long-term federal fiscal situation of the US. Existing obligations and the aging of Americans will bring vastly rising federal costs and bigger government, there may be little or no reduction in the federal deficit, and eventually and inevitably, there must be a sharp rise in taxes. He all but accused President Clinton of lying, and we certainly have more faith in Samuelson than Clinton (Newsweek, 15/3/93).

*A former US Dept. of Commerce undersecretary for trade reported in 1997 that the Department (under his former boss, Secretary Ron Brown) had had strong ties to the Democratic fund-raising scandal. To one’s amazement, one also learns that the former undersecretary is now dean of the Yale School of Management (Nwk., 31/3/97). Being a top functionary of a corrupt government department certainly has its rewards.

*When a state lottery was approved in NY State in the early 1960s, the public was promised that the revenues would go to support education. On in 1998 did it become clear that this had been a 30-year lie insofar as the state simply put less money into education the more it took in from the lottery, and that there were no plans to change this (AP in SHI, 14/4/98).

*A headline in a 1 Nov. 98 Syracuse newspaper proclaimed "Pataki Kept Majority of Promises." Pataki is the state’s governor, and the fact that he had kept at least some promises was seen as worthy of a headline, apparently in light of the fact that lying is the normative communication among American politicians these days.

*Governmental units as far away as Maine, Vermont and NY City have been shipping both sewage and nuclear waste to be dumped near a small, poor, powerless Hispanic town in Texas on the Mexican border. New York has done this since 1992, often to the tune of 400 tons of sludge every day (SHI, 3 Sept. 98).

*For 50 years, officials at a nuclear weapons plant in Washington State with the largest concentration of radioactive waste claimed that they were not polluting the ground and the ground water--until it became indisputably evident that it had, and that plutonium--one of the most toxic substances there is--was spreading underground, and no one knows how to stop it or clean it up (SHI, 23/3/98). It is things like that that could make one suspicious of the nuclear industry and the government.

*A study by the State Attorney General of New York State found that in 1996, telemarketing firms for charities on the average kept 63% of what they took in, and about a quarter of them paid out less than 20% to the charities at issue. Some campaigns did not take in enough money for themselves to pay anything out to the charity, and some of them even ended up costing the charity money. One of the charities that was taken was the National Right to Life committee that received only 8% of what its fund-raiser (MDS Communications) took in (SHA, 4 Jan. 98). Thus, if one donates via such fund drives, one in essence donates to fund-raisers, not to charities.
Researchers found that almost the entire US currency is contaminated with traces of cocaine. Once cocaine gets onto US paper money, it is impossible to get it out again. Paper money—and to a lesser degree coin money—is also highly contaminated with bacteria (42% & 13% respectively). A good proportion of these bacteria come from bad toilet habits. Thus, the expression, "filthy lucre," is literally true. The good news is that the way to clean coins is to swallow them, and to catch them again when they come out from the other end in virtually mint condition (Discover, 10/98).

During the economic crisis in Japan that started in 1997, many Japanese saw themselves forced into bankruptcy. However, unlike in America, failed Japanese businessmen focus on repaying their debts rather than rushing out to start all over again, as in America. Newsweek (27/7/98) wistfully noted that this may perhaps be the more honorable course, but does little to stimulate the economy.

While the Macarena dance was sweeping the nation, only a few sane voices have pointed out that the Spanish lyrics that go with the music were an ode to fornication.

The Collapse of the Culture of Modernism & Its Social Institutions

Parts of this topic overlap with the previous one.

The Collapse of the Democratic Process

A writer (Plough, Summer 95, p. 19) sighed "I am growing so weary of the left, who won’t talk about teenage pregnancy, and of the right, who won’t address the lack of jobs. Who will begin to offer an alternative that is beyond the old categories of left and right, liberal or conservative, something community-based, value-centered, and solution-oriented? Who will bring together the need for moral formation on the one hand, and social justice on the other?"

"...Community is not what many think it is—town meetings, or conversations. If community is to happen we’ve got to rebuild the human infrastructure of life in our neighborhoods. Our choices are very stark: either community on the one hand, or razor wire on the other."

Economist Robert J. Samuelson said (Newsweek, 13/3/95, p. 22), "We are a nation in denial. There’s a sanctioned avoidance of problems that almost everyone knows will worsen with time."

A law professor—no less—wrote (FT, 5/98) that by the way they have been functioning in recent decades, lawyers and judges in the US are destabilizing the social structure, bringing about alienation of the public, and undermining their faith in a meaningful legal process and polity altogether.

More and more, the US Supreme Court has taken on issues of minutiae that should be matters of not even state, but local, law.

First Things (1/98) characterized modern constitutional discourse in the US as "a veritable babel."

Newsweek (8/8/94) lamented that there had been such persisting violations of constitutional processes by succeeding US administrations that people had lost their will to defend the constitution. Apparently, they would rather revel in sex affairs in high places.

The adoption of a charter of rights and freedoms by Canada in 1982 has yielded a result that Canadians may not have anticipated, namely the establishment of a Canadian Supreme Court that has revealed itself as the new de facto government of Canada, in being vastly more activist than the most activist liberal US Supreme Court decisions. Its decisions seem to be totally divorced from any democratic process and legal basis or content, and reflect pure liberal ideology of the judges. This Supreme Court has even suggested that no laws be passed without it being consulted (FT, 8/97).
*When politicians claim that the US government is having a "surplus" fiscal year (as in 1997-98), they are lying, because the government owes 10 times as much to the Social Security trust fund as the alleged "surplus."

*In 1970, there were 45 indictments of politicians and public officials in the US, but 970 in 1990 (Newsweek, 30/3/98).

*A Rand study reported that between 1982-92, there had been 670 terrorist acts in the US, or 4 times as many as international terrorist acts in which Americans are the target (Parade, 16/8/98).

*It is no longer unusual for US politicians to spend as much as $60 per vote received (Time, 15/6/98), especially during off-year elections when fewer citizens vote. Presidential candidate Forbes spent $440 per vote just in a state (Iowa) primary (Nwk., 15/4/96). One must also add in what the losers spend per vote. The biggest spenders tend to win. One implication is that votes are becoming increasingly de facto buyable, which cannot be good for democracy.

**Collapse of Civic Institutions**

*Political scientists have begun to speak of a construct called "civic culture," which roughly refers to a society's or subculture's ability to work together for the public good. (We call it comitious polity.) Among European countries, Scandinavian ones are said to score highest on this social capital, and the south of Italy, and parts of Spain and France, the lowest. In Italy, there is a tendency for people to trust nobody outside their family, and it is very difficult to do anything collectively. Amazingly, the experts say that trust is the ultimate glue of a civic culture. They also point out that civic societies tend to be among the wealthiest in the world, but that it was not wealth that caused civickness, but civickness that produced the wealth (AP in SHJ, 17/9/97). In light of all this, we should take note that in Western societies, there is an extensive collapse of trust where previously it existed, the collapse of trust in government in the US being an example.

*As long ago as 1976, sociologist Daniel Bell noted in his book Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism that there is something intrinsically contradictory within modernistic capitalism. Namely, it fosters a consumer culture which in turn contributes to a culture of hedonism which, further in turn, weakens the very work ethic on which capitalism depends. He also noted that capitalism first disrupted rural families and communities starting about a century ago, and then began to destroy urban families and communities after World War II.

*According to a Time article (26/1/98), Japanese culture in recent decades has been a culture of deceit, as a result of which there has been a collapse of trust.

*There has been an outbreak of poisonings of all sorts of foods and drinks all over Japan, in supermarkets, at vending machines, in offices, at festivals, etc. (SHJ, 3 Sept. 98). This is very bizarre, and a sign of breakdown of internal comity, often probably enacted by people who cannot explain why they do this.

*Crime is rising all over the world, which should tell us something--other than that crime reporting has risen. For instance, crime is up sharply in nearly every Latin American country (Nwk., 27/4/98). The message we should be hearing is that modernistic values cannot maintain comitous polity.

*In many US states, there does exist a possibility for citizens to pass a law directly by a citizen's initiative or referendum, though this is rather difficult to accomplish. Legislatures absolutely detest this option and have been making war against it. For instance, Colorado lawmakers tried to restrict citizens' rights to voter initiatives, and even after an Appeals Court struck down this effort, the legislators persisted (in 10/98) in taking the case to the US Supreme Court. The last thing elected officials want--once they are elected--is true democracy.
*When the US federal budget (for $500 billion) was passed in 10/98, it had over 3,800 pages, was 16 inches high and weighed 30 pounds. It was said that no single living human being had read all of it.

*Trying to comply with the complicated US tax code costs taxpayers 3 billion hours of time yearly, and $40 billion (Time, 17/4/95).

*In many of our workshops, we recite the signs of the collapse of society, and list the different systems and glues within society that are at different stages of collapse. Sometimes, one of the systems goes into an acute episode of collapse in the very locale where we had just predicted doom, but where many skeptics would not believe it. An example is the tap water in Sydney, Australia, being declared unfit to drink twice in the same month in 1998 (AP in SHJ, 27/8/98). The collapse of the drinking water supply had been on our list when we presented there in 1997. However, rarely do people who disagreed earlier come around to agreement on the basis of a prediction having come true. What does that tell us?

*In 9/98, the US government, via the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, arranged a $3.65 billion bailout for Long Term Capital Management (LTCM), a private investment firm hedge fund for the rich whose speculations had turned sour. LTCM had been so uppity that it had not even accepted investments of less than $10 million, and it had 2 Nobel laureates on its staff, as well as Wall Street’s highest-regarded and brightest traders and computer experts. Amazingly, the firm’s chief executive and his crew will be paid a "management fee” of 1% of assets a year, plus 12.5% of any profits made with the rescue money! The firm had borrowed $19 for every dollar of its own cash until its debt (at one point, $120 billion!) was higher than that of most nations, and its collapse was feared to trigger a world financial collapse. Events like these were virtually totally squeezed out of US news by the nation’s preoccupation with the presidential sex scandal (SHJ, 26/9/98; Newsweek, 5&12 Oct. 98).

*A peculiar development in the financial market has been an influx of people barely out of their childhood managing huge investment funds. People still in their 20s may manage funds of over $2 billion (Time, 22/6/98). These are people who have never lived through a bull market. These people, and the people who entrust their money to them, still have an education coming to them.

*In 1945, there were 46 workers contributing to the US Social Security fund for every beneficiary thereof. Already by 1950, the ratio had shrunk to 16 to 1. As of 1992, it had shrunk to 3 to 1, and this is predicted to shrink to 2 to 1 by 2025. This points to a severe intergenerational conflict in the future that may take all sorts of forms that we can hardly imagine today, especially since the US government has long "borrowed” (some people call it stolen or embezzled) money from the Social Security funds and spent it in its general budget, and there is no telling what will happen when this money is needed by the elderly (Parade, 21/2/93).

*An increasing number of banks have been demanding fingerprints before cashing checks of people who do not have an account in their bank (CR, 8/98). This is consistent with the ever increasing capacity for, and practice of, surveillance and control in our collapsing societies.

*Belatedly trying to stave off a disaster in the computer world on 1 January 2000, many large technology companies have been hiring programmers away from everybody else, such as local government units, who may therefore not be able to meet the deadline themselves.

*We were gratified to learn that more than 30 million pagers were incapacitated when a satellite malfunctioned in Spring of 1998. We eagerly look forward to even bigger cyberspace disasters.
*A teenager caught by the FBI hacking into private and government sites was anything but penitent. He said that he gave his teenage friends access to at least 100 such secret sites, and that they would avenge him by hacking furiously at them. Why did he do it? "It's power, dude, you know, power" (SHJ, 5 March 98).

*In Fall 1997, the US State Department had to shut down part of its international computer system because of apparent "break-ins." In consequence, sensitive information had to be sent on paper by couriers to various offices around the world (SHJ, 23/3/98).

*Since the mid-1980s, scholars at Fordham University have been completing an Index of Social Health for the US for the last 25 or so years, based on government statistics in 16 areas (employment, access to affordable housing, infant mortality, earnings, and so on). The scale ranges from 0 to 100. The highest score, with 77.5, was in 1973, and 1991 the lowest with 38. The Fordham scholars pointed out that while the economy keeps growing, the social health index keeps trending downward, underlining once again that the two cannot be equated (AP in SHJ, 16/10/95). Note that this is widely called a quality of life index, which we consider to be quite appropriate as long as it characterizes populations rather than individuals, since we reject the meaningfulness of a concept of quality of life in regard to individuals, but believe that it can be applied meaningfully on a population level.

The point of the above is as follows. Even as all of society is going to hell, and people and social structures are cracking left and right, the news media told the US in 10/94 headlines that "Things are looking up in America" (SHJ, 37/10/94), and that the "nation's social health improved, index says" (AP in SHJ, 24/10/94), etc. A major source of all this misplaced euphoria was apparently the Fordham Institute for Innovation in Social Policy, and its Index of Social Health. If they are right, we'll eat crow.

*One thing that is amazing is that people in Russia have learned so little, first from what brought on the Communist revolution to begin with, and from what brought on the collapse of that revolution 70 years later. For instance, the fact that the Orthodox church had been in bed with the czarist government had much to do with fueling the revolution—and no sooner was communism overthrown than the church was back in, and part of, government. And the new class of modernist Russian yuppies now brandishes signs that say "kill the poor!" (Newsweek, 22/2/93).

*One social reality that people do not reflect upon sufficiently, even though they may perceive it once they do, is that it is very easy to replicate a disfunctional and destructive social system, but extremely difficult to replicate genuinely good things. The reason is quite clear, however: so many good social arrangements are utterly dependent upon the presence of unique individual actors or combinations of actors—and by definition, uniqueness is not multiplicable and transferrable. Therefore, people should try to emulate rather than transfer positive social arrangements. This requires that they first deeply understand what it is that made them positive, and then survey the situation where they want to do something positive to see what personal resources and relationships are available there that could be marshalled into a good thing—not necessarily the same good thing that they observed elsewhere, but a good thing nonetheless. Unfortunately, the modernistic mind has been entrained into technocratic and bureaucratic thinking that easily falls prey to the idea that a good social arrangement can be replicated in an unlimited fashion, much like a mechanical gadget could be assembled virtually anywhere in the world.

Collapses of Citizen Functionality

*Fidelity (in its November and December 1990 issues) carried a two-part article that was profoundly insightful in explaining the origin and nature of modern architecture, which is traceable largely to the German architect Walter Gropius. While virtually any other kind of housing looks different in different parts of the world, it is these boxy modern buildings that look the same all over the world. The article explained how this architectural style, which is now ubiquitous, arose from the values of modernism, has been promoted virtually as a religion both in East European communist
and Western capitalist countries, and is thoroughly anti-human and anti-family. Together with LeCorbusier, it was Gropius who decided that such boxy buildings also needed to be "dwelling machines," or "machines for living in." (Actually, when one views humans as machines, it makes a lot of sense to build machines for them to live in.) Strangely enough, people who live in the high-rise boxes of both east and west display the same symptoms of dysfunctionality and malaise—right down to the nature of the graffiti that these buildings apparently evoke. In the west, residents in these buildings disproportionately take to drugs, and in the east to vodka.

* German shrinks and educators have declared that one-third of German children are behaviorally disturbed.

* Americans have been spending so much money they didn't have that the average consumer now pays 14.8% of after-tax income on debt service (Nwk., 24/8/98).

* Parents may be worried about their jobs and health care, but the high school youngsters in Syracuse spent between $500-900 per couple on their proms in 1993 (SHJ, 15/5/93). Apparently, the social pressures to go to the prom in a big and splashy way are irresistible to most youths and their families.

* Gambling has been much on the increase in the US and has become a national vice. In 1996, an estimated $586 billion of legal wagers alone were placed, not of course counting the illegal ones. This is more than people spend on groceries and cars combined. The social costs of gambling are said to be huge, and are of course borne largely by neither the gamblers nor those who conduct and profit from the games of chance, but by the rest of society and, in part, by taxpayers. Of course, some of the costs are not financial but mental, as when families split up (SHJ, 22/3/98). According to some authorities, more and more people are not merely gambling more money in the US ($500 billion a year in casino and state lottery betting alone), but are also becoming pathologically addicted to gambling. There are some people who say that if there is to be any state at all, it should work to the good of its citizens. Here, the state works toward their downfall (BRMM, 11/96). The good news is that the financial meltdown in so many Asian countries has dramatically reduced gambling income in the US, because so many big rollers had been rich Asians.

* Americans have been losing their scruples about declaring bankruptcy, which used to be so shameful that one might commit suicide or leave one's community. After all, bankruptcy is a form of theft. Formerly, Americans about to go bankrupt would show signs such as skipping payments, asking for postponements, etc. Nowadays, people with perfect credit ratings who never missed payments will suddenly declare bankruptcy. This phenomenon is attributed to citizens no longer being capable of dealing realistically with credit cards (Nwk., 28/10/98).

* Experts believe that in a culture where both legal and illegal copying of documents, videotapes, etc., has become routine, people have fewer inhibitions about counterfeiting money, which they do very easily now, even at places like Kinko's copy centers. Relatedly, instead of just a few people counterfeiting large sums of money, an increasing number of people are copying small amounts whenever they have a cash need. Such counterfeiters are harder to trace and catch, and prosecuting them all could run up huge bills.

* DeMarco's book, The Heart of Virtue, claims that unlike in previous generations, children are not exposed to any systematic teaching of virtuous habits from birth, and that therefore, the active pursuit of the virtuous life in later years becomes that much more important. He also makes the point that virtue is not merely the absence of vice. He then sketches 28 attributes of the virtuous life, and illustrates each with an annotated story from great works of literature.

* The three virtues to which virtually all entrants into religious orders once pledged themselves were poverty, chastity, and obedience. Within modernism, these have been replaced by materialistic consumerism, hedonistic sexual license, and individualistic self-willed self-determination.
*Children used to learn a great deal from great works of literature, including from pieces written for adults. Many of these works contributed mightily to positive ideals and virtues. Today, child literature is rapidly turning into what one might call politically correct psychotherapy tales. For instance, common themes have nothing to do with building up the virtues, but with coping with, or reconciling oneself to, the disfunctionalities of modernity, such as parental divorce, a sibling’s drug problem, etc.

*It used to be that if a man claimed to have seduced and debauched a lady, the lady might sue for loss of reputation. Now, women have begun to sue President Clinton for asserting that he did not have sex with them. Apparently, they are proud of it and want the world to know that they have "had" the President. We also wonder how many women are imagining that they have had sex with him, or at any rate are falsely claiming it.

*Another strange modernism is for estranged spouses of politicians to write books telling all about their spouse or ex-spouse.

*One of the "autistic" children Bruno Bettelheim worked with imagined that there was such a thing as a "blinderator" engine that kept people from seeing and understanding things (reported in Bettelheim’s book, The Empty Fortress). Unfortunately, the child was not so crazy after all because there are people-disabling blinderators all around us. After all, politicians and government constantly try to keep people from seeing and knowing the truth, as does advertisement and many other of the principalities and powers of the world.

Entitlement Mentalities & Litigiousness

*People in the food business have been successful in passing all sorts of laws across the US that would make it illegal for citizens to say something derogatory about a particular food product, or even an agricultural or food management practice. These are called "food slander laws." One may be sued if one says that a particular food is not very healthy, might be polluted, or could cause disease. For instance, somebody might be sued for questioning the safety of American beef. In normative types of lawsuits, plaintiffs have to prove that one’s statement is false, but in these kinds of suits, one would bear the burden of truth against the plaintiff (CR, 9/96). This kind of development goes hand-in-hand with the transfer of wealth that we covered extensively in the 12/96 issue of TIPS, and the concomitant transfer of power upward.

*There are some peculiar new twists on the ideology of suffering. In 1996, the US Supreme Court ruled that a person can sue for pain and suffering that not he/she but a relative endured before dying (AP in SHJ, 9 Dec. 96). This is benefiting from twice-removed calamities, not to mention that there could be a third benefit of inheriting from the deceased. Similarly, a woman in the Syracuse area died when her car skidded into an icy lake. The family sued the county for $200,000 for the woman’s suffering. The Court of Appeals ruled that the woman was no longer conscious once she hit the water and therefore did not suffer. In addition to this particular absurdity, there apparently is here a theory that in a sense, suffering can be legally inherited: if the woman had suffered before she died, it would have been as if the family had suffered the same pains as she, and would therefore be entitled to whatever it is she would have been entitled to (SHJ, 26/10/94).

*Consumer Reports did a survey of its members on how they had fared with legal services, and of 30,000 responders, one-third were unhappy with what they got (CR, 2/96). Unhappiness was particularly likely to be high where there was an opposing side, unlike in tax planning, will-writing and (usually) adoption. In fact, in adversarial cases, dissatisfaction was 2, 3, and sometimes more time higher, depending on the issue at stake.

*Because of litigiousness, warning labels on children’s toys have become absolutely insane, and include the following: metal-tipped darts can cause puncture wounds, plastic helmets will not protect one in construction accidents, a sled should not be towed behind a car, and a Batman cape will not
enable a child to fly. One sled package warns buyers and users to wear a helmet at all times; allow no more than three riders on a sled; avoid hitting trees, stumps, rocks, branches or man-made obstacles; avoid sledding near streets, roadways, driveways or sidewalks, and that the "product does not have brakes." One observer said that half a book comes plastered on each sled. However, a review of 3,500 publications has not found a single study that proved that such warning labels reduce accidents, underlining that the warnings serve merely the function of legal defensiveness. Some people are actually motivated to use a product wrongly because of its warning label. For instance, teenagers may inhale aerosol propellants in household spray cleaners in order to get high, and thus a warning that the propellant causes hair loss or facial disfigurement is a greater deterrent to them than that it is poisonous when inhaled (Reader's Digest 5/98).

*In the late 1970s, about 18,000 small airplanes were built in the US annually, but then it was discovered that the law permitted an airplane manufacturer to be sued whenever a plane broke down or was involved in an accident, even if it had already flown reliably for a quarter-century! The result was a 95% drop in the US manufacture of such planes because of fear of lawsuits, with some small aircraft manufacturing firms going bankrupt. Cessna used to spend $25 million a year on promoting flying, and instead channelled all of this money into lawyers’ fees. The number of airports for small planes declined 60%, and the process of getting a pilot's license became so complicated and demanding that the number of new pilots also fell off by about 60% (Time, 8 Aug. 94). This is a very good example of how lawyers are managing to shut down virtually every process in society except litigation and paperworking.

*In Ontario, a woman sued because she found childbirth painful, asserting that she was entitled not to have "any pain whatsoever during labor and childbirth," further claiming that ever since, she has had depression, a post-traumatic stress syndrome and a sleeping disorder, suing not merely for $1.2 million for herself but also for $600,000 for each of her twin babies (Winnipeg Free Press, 10 March 98; source item from Zana Lutfiyya).

*It has been proposed—apparently only half in jest—that food-serving places require a written release from customers before they serve their coffee hot. Those customers who do not sign get their coffee cold. Of course, this is an allusion to the woman who spilled hot coffee over herself and then sued and won a zillion dollars damage award for having been served coffee that was very hot.

*A Caucasian graduate student sued the National Science Foundation for discrimination because a certain percentage of university fellowships had been reserved for minority members. The NSF settled before going to trial, with the student receiving $14,400 and his attorney $81,000 (Science, 26/6/98). Obviously, the attorney should have been sued for discrimination.

*A worst-case scenario occurred at an eating place in New York City when 25 lawyers and law students got sickened from bad fish (SHJ, 24/6/98). The eating place might just as well fold and its owners go underground.

*The parasitism of the lawyering class in the US has almost overnight given rise to innumerable lawyer jokes. Here is one submitted by Kristjana Kristiansen. The ethics committee of the American Medical Association and the American Psychological Association have agreed that painful experiments should be carried out on lawyers instead of on rats. They give three reasons: (a) There are more lawyers than rats, especially near academic research centers; (b) public opinion is more concerned about rats' welfare than lawyers'; (c) there are some things you just cannot get a rat to do.

*The revulsion of society against the parasitic lawyering class that promotes litigiousness and formalization was also powerfully symbolized in a 1997 movie, "The Devil's Advocate," which portrayed lawyers as the new legions of Lucifer (Newsweek, 27/10/97).
*We suspect that only armed insurrection or total economic collapse will put an end to lawyer parasitism in the US.

Disfunctional Formalization as a Response to Disfunctionality

*A good example of legal flailing has been the passing of ever more laws by the US Congress to make an ever increasing number of local crimes federal offenses. Among many other things, this is totally incapacitating the federal court system, and particularly the Appeals process. Supreme Court judges have even complained that they are being turned into police court judges (SHJ, 12 March 98).

*Under law in the US, every single report of alleged child abuse must be investigated. One unforeseen consequence is that somebody could be reporting the same parent every single day for years on end, and every day's complaint would have to be investigated, which of course means that the person reported upon would have no time to do anything except respond to perpetual investigations. Further, the person reported has no right to learn the identity of the reporter (AP in SHJ, 11 March 98).

*We were amazed to hear a discussion on public radio that implied that the US government was still not doing enough about AIDS, and that it needed to set an example to the population by doing more. What amazed us was that here is a condition that could be kept in check if only people practiced a bit more sexual morality and controlled their impulses, but instead they are looking to the government to solve the problems of their lack of morals and self-control—as if government was in a good position to do any such thing. This attitude reflects both an entitlement mentality, and a formalization mentality, i.e., that governmental processes are the answers to all problems, including those one causes oneself.

*We are seeing more and more laws being passed against things which we thought had been illegal already, or against things which had not previously been outlawed because no one had thought that somebody might perpetrate them. Above, we already noted the new laws against "serving" prison officers. Another example: when a nursing home attendant raped a comatose nursing home resident, the State of New York passed a law in 1998 to make "abuse of a vulnerable elderly person" illegal, as if rape had not been illegal all along. Another example is laws beginning to be passed in 1998 that laser pointers may not be pointed toward people, and/or that they may not be sold or used by minors or school pupils because they cause retinal damage. Similarly, we more and more see laws getting passed that mandate that other laws that had been passed earlier be obeyed. Obviously, what all this symbolizes is that the laws in such instances are nonfunctional, but that people continue under the impression that they can fix nonfunctional laws by passing yet more laws and regulations on top of each other in a never-ending pyramid. Of course, this is merely yet another sign of the collapse of a society, and of desperate and futile attempts at flailing against such collapse, or at pretending that the collapse is not occurring.

Along similar lines, business firms, government offices, schools, etc., are more and more proclaiming themselves "drug-free sites," as in "drug-free workplace." Some states have declared that anybody that receives state grants must agree to be a drug-free workplace for the carrying out of the grant. It strikes us as strange that since the drugs being referred to--cocaine, marijuana, etc.--are already illegal, why must there be additional demands that they should not be indulged in at a particular place? After all, are there demands made that sites declare themselves to be upholders of all other laws as well? It sounds to us like the original laws are not working if there have to be laws and proclamations and regulations mandating that the law not be violated.

The outlawing of what is already outlawed has a parallel in jailing already jailed people; a truly bizarre charade is the new practice (as we covered before) of law authorities going into prisons in order to "arrest" someone who is already a prisoner.

*US tax bills tend to be so big and complicated that errors in drafting them are quite common. A few years ago, a measure dealing with tax write-offs for race horses referred to "houses" instead
of "horses," very likely in consequence of an error in transcribing a dictation. Another error in 1997 will cost the US government an estimated $880 million over a decade (SHJ, 24/6/98).

*As of 1998, even people with law degrees have been saying that they were no longer able to understand their telephone bills, which could run to 17 pages. In response to numerous outcries, at least some phone companies have promised to provide a more intelligible format by the year 2001 (AP in SHJ, 10 Sept. 98).

How to Become or Remain Either Mentally Stupid or Morally Stupid, or at Least Passive & Disfunctional as a Human Being

As astute TIPS readers (and probably even the astuteness-challenged ones) will have noticed, we are not very optimistic about either the morality, intellectuality, or competence of modernistic people. In fact, we believe that the values and the culture of modernism render people and societies irrational, insane in at least a certain sense, utterly selfish and self-centered, incompetent, and disfunctional. From our observation of modernistic trends and practices, we believe that we can now present a crash course on the title of this little essay, namely, on how to become or remain either mentally stupid or morally stupid, or at least passive and disfunctional as a human being, within the contemporary societal context of modernism. We are indebted to several friends of the TI for helping us put together our curriculum.

1. Crave, and intensively pursue and defend, material wealth and objects.
2. Be preoccupied with material objects and processes even if one does not possess these.
3. Hedonistically indulge oneself in every way possible: food, drink, sex, drugs--prescription and non-prescription, legal and/or illegal ones.
4. Concentrate unhealthily or obsessively on one’s bodily health and appearance: diet, aerobics, jogging, running, body-building, other exercise, plastic surgery, one’s teeth, one’s hair.
5. Concentrate obsessively on one’s mental self: embrace self-cults, pursue self-actualization, do whatever makes one feel good, nurture one’s grievances, insist on all one’s rights all the time, uncritically or undiscerningly join/form self-advocacy and support groups.
6. Participate in the cultural obsession with the media: always have on radio, TV, video, "walkman," other audio entertainment--certainly while awake, and perhaps even when sleeping, and when company is present and one is "conversing": rent videos as often as possible, and be sure to have cable TV so one can spend as much time as possible in front of the TV--and every family member should have his/her own set.
7. Obsessively follow spectator sports: never miss a chance to catch a game, especially those on TV or radio.
8. Embrace the modernistic pop music culture (especially rock and rap) with unintelligible or junk lyrics.
9. Expose oneself often to music at deafening levels, including in one’s car, so that one will suffer hearing loss and become socially more isolated, and hence less intelligent.
10. Avoid silence, perhaps via much of the above (e.g., nos. 6, 7, 8, 9), and also by seeking out other noisy contexts, e.g., for entertainment and recreation, such as loud bars, aerobics classes; sleep with radio, TV or other noise-maker on; always bring along electronic noise sources when one goes into nature to "get away from it all."
11. Avoid solitude: always be with others, join groups, and do everything in groups; work, recreate, and worship alone as little as possible; if being alone is inevitable, never use it for thinking and reflection, but instead turn on sight/sound equipment.
12. Tune out/avoid truly informative sources of culture and news (such as TIPS), and expose oneself only to those that are low-level, pap, junk or pleasing.

The Spectre of (Military) Dictatorship

Every year, we keep reminding readers that the military is almost always still functional when nothing else is. This is why people keep turning to the military for salvation when their society
collapses, or why the military finds it so easy to take over in a collapsing society even if it is not invited to do so.

*There have been (not very well publicized) efforts in the US Congress to mandate the establishment of a national ID card!

*We can certainly understand why people are turning to radical movements these days. For example, a leader of a Florida "militia" said: "The low-life scum that are supposedly representing us in Washington, D.C., don’t care about the people back home anymore. We’re grasping at straws here trying to figure out what we can do to get representation, and this is our answer" (Time, 19/12/94).

*An editorial--no less--in the Syracuse Herald Journal (20/3/98) morosely concluded that nothing short of an armed insurrection would terminate undemocratic oligarchic rule by the elected state government officials!

**War & Preparations for War**

*According to one not very surprising study, men who excel in combat had disproportionately shown anti-social behaviors in their previous civilian lives. Furthermore, combat veterans tend to engage in anti-social behaviors later on, and to make poorer husbands (AP in SHJ, 16/12/94).

*According to the UN High Commission on Refugees, there are 27.4 million refugees in the world today, 30 million of whom are internally displaced (i.e., within their own country), and 80% of these are women and children.

*In the past, it was well understood that anybody who went to war might never be heard of again. Many millions of soldiers in World War II ended up missing. In the Vietnam War, 300,000 Vietcong and North Vietnamese ended up missing, but the entitlement attitude of modernistic Americans is such that for years and years, there has been a never-ending temper tantrum about a few dozen missing American warriors.

*In fiscal year 1998, the US was spending more on nuclear weapons than at the end of the cold war (Casa Cry, 4/98).

*According to the Brookings Institute, nuclear weapons have cost the US taxpayer vastly more between 1940-1996 than the government has ever admitted, and more than the entire US national debt (Casa Cry, 8/98).

*At the US Army’s Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland, a class of military trainees was shown an expensive computer said to be able to withstand nuclear and chemical attacks—but no eating or drinking was permitted in the class because a coffee spill might ruin the keyboard (Readers Digest, 1/96).

*There has been absolute panic in the field of American science about the cutbacks on war spending since the end of the Cold War. There has been a flood of publications from scientists to their colleagues telling them what they now must do in order to continue to be lavishly funded. One of the leading recommendations is to interpret science as beneficial to future health care, and to bend scientific enterprises in that direction. (If deathmaking won’t bring in the bacon, life-making may.) Another thrust is to intensify publicity about space travel so as to get more support for space research. A third one is to get into PR and convince the public of the long-term benefits of basic science research.

*While the Pentagon has always been shameless in its requests for funds, there have been occasions when Congress forced weapon systems on it that it did not need or want. Always, this
has to do with Congressional graft, and efforts to boost the economy in the districts of some powerful Congress members. E.g., in 1998, Congress forced a $1.5 billion helicopter carrier on the Navy, and $388 million worth of C-130 transport planes on the Air Force. These are the very planes that proved to be unsuited for their primary mission of dropping parachuters (SHJ, 2/10/98).

*A courageous US Lt. Col. in the Pentagon said, "There is not one compelling reason to buy a single additional bomber, submarine or tank today, save the preservation of the industrial base. Yet even this is a dubious cause" (Nwk., special issue).

*Of the money given to US weapons contractors between 1985-95, $85 billion could never be accounted for (Casa Cry, 4/98). This is no wonder considering that metal screws costing about 50¢ in a hardware store were sold to the US government for $75 apiece, and so on.

*An F-16 fighter jet consumes almost twice as much gasoline in one hour as the average US motorist uses in one year (Casa Cry, 9/98).

*During World War II, the US had one admiral for every 130 ships. By 1997, it had one admiral for every naval ship (Casa Cry, 9/98).

*Around 1997, the US government employed 6,500 full-time people to promote and handle the sale of arms abroad (Casa Cry, 5/98).

*The weapons manufacturers that get paid out of tax money take some of it and, in turn, give it back to the politicians and candidates for office in order to influence them in their favor.

*The weapons industry has been promoting the expansion of NATO to Poland, Hungary and the Czech republic despite overwhelming public opinion in these countries against it, because the arms people stand to earn eventually up to $250 billion needed to bring the weaponry of these countries into concordance with the rest of NATO (Casa Cry, 4/98).

*Between 1991-95, 50 of the 53 African countries received US military aid to the tune of about $5 billion (Casa Cry, 8/98).

*It was from the US that Iraq received biological technology and certain bacterial strains with which it generated the capacity for biological warfare (CBS "60 Minutes," 22/2/98). This was neither given any publicity, openly admitted, nor apologized for. The anthrax organism that Iraq got ready for biological warfare in the Gulf War, and against which US troops were vaccinated with a possibly very toxic and unproven vaccine, had originally also been obtained by it from the US in the first place (Newsweek, 24/11/97).

*One theory is that the so-called Gulf War syndrome was caused by the US government hastily giving soldiers inadequately researched vaccination shots, as we covered before. Continuing this practice, the Pentagon violated federal rules in giving an encephalitis vaccine to US soldiers in Bosnia in 1996, as even the US Food & Drug Administration said. To their credit, 14 sailors including two pilots refused the mandatory vaccination against a potential attack of anthrax given to armed forces personnel in the Persian Gulf, and two of them were discharged as a punishment--and all members of the armed forces were then ordered to take the shots (AP in SHJ, 21/1 & 9 April 98).

*The US has been training Indian and Pakistani nuclear scientists for decades--and then wonders that they build atomic bombs (Casa Cry, 9/98). This is like giving Iraq biological and other weapons capacities, and wondering that what went around is coming around.
*Man bites dog yet again.* In 1987, Brian Willson sat in front of a Navy munitions train, as he and others had done before. This time, the train crew, instead of stopping as it had before, did not even slow down, but ran over him and cut off his two legs. After the incident, only one crew member returned to work, and the others applied for workers’ compensation because of emotional and physical distress. Furthermore, the crew members filed a suit in 1988 against Willson seeking big money for loss of earnings, and emotional and physical distress (source item from Chris Liuzzo).

*We remind readers of extensive narratives in earlier Dec. issues of TIPS where we explained at length the various ways in which warfare contributes to human misery, impairments, and the need for human services. For instance, a government study concluded in 1984 that above-ground nuclear tests in Nevada have caused, or will cause, up to 212,000 cases of cancer downwind. The government did not release the study until 1998 (AP in SHJ, 17/9/98).*

**Social Advocacy**

*In 1992, the government of the Canadian Province of British Columbia appointed an advocate for service quality in the Ministry for Children and Families. The advocate is appointed to a five-year term, and functions very similar to a Scandinavian-type Ombudsman.*

*One ombudsman form is that of the Children’s Advocate in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan. This office was established in 1995 as an arm of the legislative assembly, as is customary in classical ombudsman forms. It has the authority to promote the interest of children vis-à-vis provincial government services, with a range of more specific charges and powers typical for such offices. Even a child may contact the Children’s Advocate Office with concerns or complaints. However, the ombudsman can only make recommendations, not disposition, and may not investigate decisions of a court. A problematic element is that the office is supposed to conduct public education on the rights of children with reference to the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, which is essentially an anti-family resolution that disempowers parents. As of early 1997, the office had four staff members. Saskatchewan is one of Canada’s least populated provinces, but the population is scattered over a huge area.*

*While we were in Australia in 1996, we learned that 30% of all the children who are under the umbrella of so-called protective services were deemed to be handicapped.*

*There are more than 8,000 victim advocacy and criminal justice organizations concerned with the rights of victims of violent crimes (SHJ, 17/6/98).*

*A recent critique (SHJ, 28/2/97, p. C2) of the so-called child advocacy field claimed that these groups are really advocates for the parents rather than for the children. An analysis of the demands of such child advocacy groups revealed that they have been asking for things which make the parents’ life easier or cheaper: health care for children at school, public transportation to and from school, pre-school and after school child care (so that parents can work), tax relief for their children and for college, etc.*

*One of the hallmarks of Prader-Willi syndrome is compulsive eating, often until the person dies from obesity complications. Because many such persons are mildly retarded, the self-determination culture, abetted by the courts, has ruled that such persons must be allowed to eat themselves to death (MR, 8/97). Of course, before death occurs, there are innumerable other disasters, including social conflict, loss of a work role, arrests for stealing food from stores, or theft of money to buy food, trading sexual favors for food or food money, etc.*

*In Summer 1998, an entire periodical devoted to self-determination by handicapped people was launched out of Columbus, Ohio.*
*The major reason some people are objecting to growing cloned human embryos without heads as sources of transplant organs is that "embryos without brains would have zero potential to say no" (Science, 28/11/97).

*A Pogo cartoon series in Spring 1991 poked fun at the idea that only people who "are" or "have" this or that can competently and legitimately talk about "it." The point one cartoon character made was that only dead actors can speak on behalf of dead actors, since nobody else really knows what it is really like to be a dead actor, and anybody else who dares speak on behalf of dead actors will be sued.

*People rarely think about the (apparent) fact that handicapped people are vastly more likely to be discriminated against than Afro-Americans (Mouth, 3/98).

*In early 1998, Chuck Burkhouse reported to us that in 1997, a group of physically handicapped activists had gone to the Pennsylvania state capitol (Harrisburg) and, as part of their demonstration, had "desecrated" a veterans' memorial there. (Apparently, the rationale for this—if any—was that the military inflicts wounds and bodily impairments.) This made them all feel much better—but hurt their cause with millions of veterans probably for a generation to come. This is yet another example of people using advocacy as a means to transact their own woundedness and to experience catharsis, but in the process doing dirt to people who are not the enemy. The means that advocates employ should always be well thought through in relation to what is most likely to win the support, cooperation, and compliance of those who have to make the changes that the advocates want, and many of these short-term feel-good actions do exactly the opposite.

*With so many special interest groups demanding their "rights," somebody began to demand "land rights for gay whales"—apparently as a spoof, but one cannot be certain anymore these days.

*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes? In Latin, this saying means, "who watches (or guards) the watchmen?", or "who guards the guardians?" This is a key question in social advocacy, and in other domains as well. For instance, a few years ago it was reported that guards at art exhibits are one of the greatest dangers to the art pieces, including because they tend to deface art, either out of boredom or as a mockery of what the effete art world considers to be art. Only days after we wrote this, a PC piece of art at the Syracuse museum was slashed by unknown parties, but no one thought to suspect the guards.

*We were impressed by a poem about "the value of one member" by an unknown author (reprinted in The Arc Today, Fall 95).

What is the value of one member?
Ten little members standing in line, One disliked the president, and then there were nine.
Nine ambitious members offered to work late, One forgot her promise, then there were eight.
Eight creative members had ideas good as heaven, One lost enthusiasm, then there were seven.
Seven loyal members got into a fix, They quarreled over programs, and then there were six.
Six members remained with spirit and drive, One moved away, and then there were five.
Five steadfast members wished there were more, One became indifferent, then there were four.
Four cheerful members who never disagreed, Until one complained of meetings, then there were three.
Three eager members! What do they do? One got discouraged, and then there were two.
Two lovely members, we are nearly done, One joined a bridge club, then there was one.
One faithful member was feeling rather blue, Met with a neighbor and then there were two.
Two earnest members, each enrolled one more, Doubling their members, and then there were four.
Four determined members just couldn’t wait, Until each won another, then there were eight.
Eight excited members signed up sixteen more.
In another six verses, there’ll be a thousand twenty-four!
News of the Season

*According to a report on national public radio, Americans spend more money on candy for Halloween than for any other occasion, including Christmas, Valentine’s Day, or Easter, an average of $4 for every man, woman, and child (submitted by Kathryn Smith).

*In 1997, Christmas trees appeared as decorations in Syracuse stores in late September. Then we noted the first Christmas show on TV as early as November 23. The same day, there were all sorts of ads with Christmas music in them. Apparently, there is some big mighty guru up in the media sky somewhere (unless it was some unrecognized control ghost) that decided that Sunday, November 23 was the day that the Christmas season should start on television. On Thanksgiving evening, not just one but several Christmas shows were shown on various TV channels. Two days after Thanksgiving, the radio airways were filled with Christmas music, and there had been several Christmas carol performances already in Syracuse. Of the five major non-cable local TV stations, one had four hours of Christmas music during the evening, another one had a 2-hour Christmas movie at the same time.

*A contemporary pop culture idea of a proper Christmas video for children is reflected in the "South Park" TV series in which Jesus and Santa Claus have a kung-fu fight to near death, cheered on by obscene 3rd-graders (Newsweek, 29/12/97).

*The items in the song, "The Twelve Days of Christmas," would have cost a little over $13,000 in 1996, due largely to the high entertainment costs. Ten lords a-leaping alone would have cost $3,200 (source item from Margaret Sager).

*Increasingly, people’s outdoor Christmas decorations are being stolen. Some people have responded by nailing and wiring them down, others hang them only above people’s reach, others spray them with rotten egg odor (called Magic Circle Deer Repellent).

TIPS Subscriptions as Gifts

Have you ever thought of giving a TIPS subscription as a gift? Such a subscription could be given to friends, to people one thinks should become familiar with what TIPS covers even if they are not friends, and/or on special occasions such as Christmas/Chanukkah. In fact, to certain enemies, one might want to give TIPS as a form of torture. In that case, we are prepared to keep the donor’s identity anonymous. Otherwise, we would be prepared to send a gift notice with the first issue of a subscription.

Human Service News

*In 1992, the American Psychiatric Association listed 60 mental disorders, but by 1994, its list had grown to 410. The shrinks have finally come clean and have begun to claim that everybody is crazy, except that some people are much crazier than others, and that it is all genetic. This puts all of humanity under their jurisdiction (cover story of Newsweek, 26/1/98). If we do not have some full-blown mental disorder, then at the very least we all have a so-called "shadow syndrome" or "subclinical" version of one of them. Some wits have called this "mental illness lite." More and more people are being put on mental drugs for what shrinkery calls "subclinical symptoms," and virtually anyone can nowadays qualify to have such symptoms. People who don’t like the way they look are said to have "body dysmorphic disorder," and are promptly put on drugs such as Prozac before they do something worse to themselves, such as becoming anorexic. In the shrink world, the term "environmental dependency syndrome" arose, apparently in the late 1990s, for what we call "externalism." Interestingly, positive traits are not thought of as being "conditions" or "syndromes," even though they may be just as abnormal (genetically or otherwise) as negatively valued traits.
*We need to be aware of the fact that when a behavior is put into the class of psychopathologies by the shrinks, it is de facto said to be more or less beyond rational human control. A peculiar thing about reductionistic claims is that genetics keeps getting invoked for behaviors that are judged to be undesirable, but rarely for positive traits or deeds. Furthermore, the negative ones are often interpreted as being beyond the control of the affected individual, while one virtually never hears the same said about positive ones.

*The Modern Library ranked the century’s 100 greatest English language novels, and somewhat to our surprise, we noted that at least 12% had a mentally retarded character in them, and a full 20% in the top 50 did (Newsweek, 3 Aug. 98). We were able to determine this because the TIPS editor collects such novels, has a large number of them, and has a list of what others to acquire.

*We learned (from David Race) that there either is, or at least recently was, an organization in England calling itself Women in Learning Difficulties (WILD). Apparently this group does not consist of women who have got themselves into difficulties learning, but of mostly academics who work in mental retardation which, in England, has unfelicitously come to be referred to as "learning difficulties." This is a bit like saying that someone without eyes has seeing difficulties.

*In 1998, Washington State passed a law that the capacity of the state institutions should not be any further reduced below the 1997 level until 2003 (TASH Newsletter, 4/98). We were also told that Washington State is bringing handicapped people back into its institutions, and reopening institutional units. We have long been warning that the era of de-institutionalization may be drawing to a close, and that a new asylum era may be dawning, even if it is disguised so as not to look like the old asylum era.

*Chuck Burkhouse made the interesting observation that human service perversions tend to come in craze waves, with everybody copying other people’s perversions, ”and that is why I relish innovative perversions," by which of course he means not that he wants to embrace them but that he finds a novel perversion intellectually stimulating.

*The Story of Catherine. Catherine was profoundly mentally retarded from birth. She never spoke a word, and occasionally emitted animalistic noises. There was no evidence that she ever took any interest in what went on around her, or participated in it. However, she was always included in various kinds of gatherings and events. Since this happened in Germany, and Germans have traditionally been singing people, a great many songs were sung in Catherine’s presence, but she never seemed to take note of these.

Catherine’s health was never good. She had several bouts of meningitis, and a leg that went bad on her had to be amputated. Somewhere along the line, she was placed in a church-run institution. One day, when she was 20 years old, the institution physician telephoned the director of the institution and asked him to come to Catherine because she was dying. However, when the physician and the director entered her death chamber, they came upon an unprecedented phenomenon. Catherine was singing songs about death and the hereafter, and particularly one song with the words, ”Where will my soul find its home; peace, peace, peace, heavenly peace.” Her otherwise idiotic-looking face was transformed, radiant and spiritualized. After singing for half an hour, she fell silent and died. Amazingly, it was determined that she had had virtually no cerebral cortex, and it was inferred that she somehow must have stored some of the songs that she had heard in what little gray matter she had, and that upon the approach of death, her personality managed to marshal the small functioning capacity of her brain in a most extraordinary manner, to the point of being able to distinguish the death-related songs from all the others that she had heard, to realize that it was these kinds of songs that were appropriate for the occasion, and to take control of her speech mechanism. This seemed to be a triumph of the human spirit over the body at the hour of death.

This story has a great deal of documentation behind it, was publicly presented by a German professor at a conference in Germany in 1974, and had been submitted to us (in German) by professor Eduard Naudascher in 5/98; it also appeared in a book of readings which he published in 1989.
*More Americans (58%) believe that they are above average in intelligence than that they are below (36%) (Time, 27/4/92). Maybe they learned from "Lake Wobegone" that all children are above average.

*The Australian federal human rights commissioner said in early 1991 that of the 12 human rights defined by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, all but one were being seriously abused in the Australian state of Victoria in regard to the mentally ill; and that in all probability, the 12th would soon be breached as well. We consider that a remarkable instance of honesty, and representative of the way things are in much of the world, including the US (source item from Michael Steer).

*Children with hydranencephaly have been said to emit a "cracked-pot" sound when one knocks on their heads (Holmes et al., 1972). It seems to us that somebody confused the hollow sound of emptiness that one might get by knocking on certain gourds and hydrocephalic heads with the concept of a mentally disordered person being a "crack pot."

*Professor Steven Taylor of Syracuse University has pointed out that the Quasimodo doll that was produced in consequence of the Disney film "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" looks different than Quasimodo does in the film--in fact it "looks quite stupid" (Boston Globe, 21/6/96; source item from Mark Tumeinski).

*We were informed that starting around 1990, some people used the name of the state of Iowa as a quasi-acronym code word for "idiot walking around."

*We were amazed to learn that drivers of the huge trailer trucks that we encounter on interstate express roads not only tend to have a low average IQ, but that furthermore, they do not have to be literate to get a driver's license--at least not in New York State. This explained why at a certain low-ceiling underpass in Syracuse, trailer trucks constantly got their tops shaved off despite more than 10 maximum-height warning signs before they got there, i.e., they could not read the signs. An obvious role-valorizing societal action implication is to let illiterate truck drivers only drive low, narrow, and simple trucks.

*The American Association of Retired Persons had some interesting studies conducted about people's ideas about the elderly. The American public now considers the age of 65 to be "old" whereas 20 years earlier, it had been 62.5. However, adolescents view people between 45-50 to be "old"--the very people whom old people view as young. Most US adults--especially women--tend to exaggerate the poor health, loneliness and financial problems of older people. Those adults who themselves have such problems are particularly likely to project the same problems onto older people, and onto their own anticipated old age. When children were asked to draw pictures of older people, they drew more positive portraits of older people whom they knew personally than of a "generic" old person, suggesting that familiarity with older individuals may positively affect children's attitudes (MM, 5/95).

*A Pennsylvania engineer who has worked for the same company for 78 years was, at age 102, the oldest worker in the US in 1998. He dressed in a business suit every day and worked a half-day, 5 days a week, coordinating internal patents for his firm, and giving training classes (AP in Syracuse Herald-Journal, 13/3/98, p. A6).

*The failure of computer program designers to anticipate that the year 2000 would inevitably arrive may prove to be a role-valorizing bonanza for retired programmers who may be enticed out of retirement for two or three years to help fix the programs (MM, 1/98).
A citizen advocate who got married asked his protégé to be the best man at his wedding, which is certainly a very valued role, even if only a short-enduring one (CA Forum, 3/98).

On 1-4 June 1999, the second international normalization and SRV Conference will be held at Boston University in Boston, Massachusetts. (Long-time TIPS readers remember that the first such conference was held in May 1994 in Ottawa, Ontario.) This conference will focus primarily on the practical application and implementation of SRV, and will have numerous parallel sessions, as well as several plenary presentations and panel discussions. Inexpensive accommodations are available at Boston University. The final arrangements for the conference are still being made, including costs and speakers. For further information, please contact Deborah Reidy at Cornerstone, 116 Pleasant St., Suite 314, Easthampton, MA 01027 USA, phone 413/527-8810, fax 413/527-8797.

The Training Institute also plans to present three one-day training events immediately following the conference on the following topics: The Liberation of Handicapped People From Bondage & Dependency, Especially on the Human Service System (June 7); The Historic & Near-Universal Idea of Two "Types" of Intelligence, & How This Concept Can be Employed Towards the Positive Valuation of Intellectually Limited People (June 8); Deeply Embedded Concepts About What we Call "Mental Retardation" as Expressed Throughout History in Visual Iconography & Language, & Implications for Our Day (June 9). For information on these events, please contact the Training Institute at the TIPS letterhead address.

Some Signs of the Times

*Postman, N. (1985). Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of show business. New York: Penguin Books. Postman analyzes how several technological developments have profoundly affected how humans relate to reality and nature, and perceive the world. For instance, the invention of eyeglasses in the 1100s suggested to humans that they need no longer be slaves to the happenings of nature or the ravages of time, and it was this idea which eventually, through many twists and turns, resulted in the splitting of human genetic material in the 1900s, 800 years later. The invention of the clock had the effect of dissociating time from human events and from nature (e.g., the movement of the sun across the sky), and instead supported the idea of a world of mathematically measurable sequences, such as seconds or minutes. By adopting the clock as a way to mark time, humans have therefore become alienated from nature, and have superseded the authority of nature. Indeed, "Eternity ceased to serve as the measure and focus of human events. And thus, though few would have imagined the connection, the inexorable ticking of the clock may have had more to do with the weakening of God's supremacy than all the treatises produced by the philosophers of the Enlightenment..." (pp. 11-12). This should not be surprising, given that the clock became widespread during the Enlightenment, a time when God was first declared irrelevant and human reason was seen as supreme.

Postman argues that until the advent of telegraphy and photography, the United States was a society that conversed largely through print, "thought" in print, and was very literate, including its lower members. However, telegraphy overcame the boundaries of distance and time, so that what happened in one place could be reported almost immediately far away; and photography shaped people's minds to conceive of all levels of reality as visual, pictorial images. Television brought together and actualized these two developments, and eventually shaped people's minds so that they are no longer oriented primarily to the printed word. This has had vast and harmful repercussions to the conduct of politics and government, education, and even religion.

Postman (pp. 68-69) notes that most of what is called "news" in modern society consists of bits of information which are totally irrelevant to any meaningful action on the part of those who take it in. For instance, what ordinary person in Syracuse, NY, can do much that is meaningful upon hearing about a million people starving in the Sudan? Prior to the age of telegraphy, what Postman calls the "information-action ratio" was sufficiently close that people had a much greater sense of being able to control or affect what they learned about, since what was conveyed to them as "news" was probably very close to home. This increase of irrelevant information led to a peculiar
development, namely, the invention of ways and contexts in which to use otherwise useless information—such as via cocktail party chatter, quiz and game shows, crossword puzzles, and of course, the ultimate expression in the board game Trivial Pursuit (p. 76).

Postman (p. 107) argues that "disinformation" is not merely false information, but also includes misleading, irrelevant, fragmented, or superficial information.

How externalism, as in dependence on television, leads to here-and-now-ism was captured by Postman (p. 137) who noted that because television presents everything in the here-and-now, with no prerequisites to understanding and without any continuity and context, people whose minds are shaped by television are actually being rendered incapable of, or unfit for, remembering.

Elsewhere we have noted that contemporary Western societies—and American society in particular—believe that there are solutions to everything, that solutions should be quick-fix in nature, and that solutions lie in all sorts of technology. Postman (p. 130) notes that television commercials convey precisely this message.

Postman also notes that just as the discourse on computers in education is about how and how much to use them, rather than whether they should be incorporated at all, so too the discourse on television revolves around such things as its content (e.g., is there too much violence and sex on television?), rather than on the reality that Americans have surrendered unto television sovereignty over all of their social institutions (p. 156). In contrast to 99+% of the discourse on computers in education, Postman (p. 118) wonders whether replacing with computers what a human teacher does—instruction, interaction with students, etc.—might not mean the loss of everything that is significant about education, even if the students do learn certain things.

We are told so often by people in our audiences that our teaching format—lengthy lectures which demand close and undivided attention, followed by questions and discussion on all that has gone before—is too difficult for people, and is not the way that people can best learn. It is not atypical for people to react to this format by behaving very immaturity, almost having temper tantrums at having to sit and listen for long periods of time. Yet in the US in the 1850s, in the famous debates between Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln, one of them would sometimes speak for three hours, to which the other would respond for the same length of time. For all this, there were enthusiastic audiences composed of quite ordinary people who would not only sit through it all, but who would return for evening sessions of four more hours of lecture (p. 44). As we tell our audiences over and over, these are mental habits and disciplines that can be learned, even by ordinary people, and that are good for the mind to learn and practice.

Postman (p. 146) notes that it is a modern idea that education must be entertaining. No educational philosopher, thinker or writer, from Confucius to Plato until the present age, ever made that assertion or promoted that idea. While they all had something to say about what facilitates learning, they assumed that learning is difficult, that learning must be sequential, "that perseverance and a certain measure of perspiration are indispensable, that individual pleasures must frequently be submerged in the interests of group cohesion, and that learning to be critical and to think conceptually and rigorously do not come easily..." (p. 146)—ideas that would be, and indeed are being, totally rejected by modernistic people.

Interestingly, Postman claims that some of the most eminent American jurists of the past believed that democracy "posed the danger of releasing an undisciplined individualism" (p. 56), and for this reason they tried to create rational law. Their fear certainly seems well-founded, given what democratic American society has evolved to be today.

Postman warns about interpreting technologies as neutral, and claims that "each technology has an agenda of its own," and that only those who know nothing about the history of technology could hold to the belief that technology is neutral (p. 84). While it is possible for a technology to be used so that its inherent logic and potentialities are not actualized—such as where television is so controlled by government as to serve merely as a radio with pictures, or as a propaganda machine—technologies in fact push towards their logical actualization, which in the case of television is full-time, round-the-clock, year-round entertainment.

This is a very insightful book that should make any thoughtful reader disengage him/herself from watching most television, at the very least for "news," including news magazines (such as "60 Minutes") and documentaries. It points out that television has such great power because it is a seducer rather than a tyrannical oppressor, and that while people will rise up and revolt against
imprisonment, they will not against "a sea of amusements" (p. 156). Seduction is much more powerful in controlling people's epistemology than overt oppression, because through it people can be maneuvered into loving their oppression, or a Postman puts it, "to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think" (p. vii). This is certainly true of modernistic society which does indeed adulate technology.

*There is excellent news from Afghanistan: a campaign is underfoot there to destroy all TV sets and cassette music players (Time, 28/9/98). Societies that fail to at the very least destroy TV will probably all collapse.

*In just a short 5 years in the mid-1990s, filmmakers have increased the sound level on their films by an average of 20 decibels (Newsweek, 6 July 98).

*Until recently, when a teenager carried a telephone beeper, it meant almost certainly that s/he was a drug runner. This is one of the reasons why in many schools, beepers have been banned. Now, US firms are almost giving away beepers to juveniles, the deal being that the youngster will then be beeped once a week, and when s/he calls back the number on the beeper, s/he will hear a commercial (CR, 9/96).

*In the modernistic culture, the lust to achieve prominence in the media is becoming a major and pervasive sickness. One result is that the public cannot tell the difference between someone being a media celebrity and a media notoriety. The most decadent people may be invited to give speeches at institutions of higher learning, as long as they had previously achieved media exposure, even if it be of the notoriety type. Even 20-year old Louise Woodward, who was the nanny who shook a baby in her charge to death and thereby achieved notoriety, marvelled at how people in America would ask her to sign baseball caps.

*One person alienated from nature asked at a governmental hearing why it was necessary to spend tax funds for meteorological satellites "when we have a TV weather channel" (Science, 13/3/98, p. 1640).

*An astute observer has written an article (source item from Michael Kendrick) on how to replace production in one's work with appearance, through "appearance-based training." Of course, there is nothing new about the strategy itself except its explicit articulation, and the systematic delineation of its strategies and tactics.

*During the July 1996 Summer Olympic games, the US weekly news magazines carried extensive coverage of the games and the athletes who were competing. In the July 22/96 issue of Newsweek, an entire 10 pages were devoted to various articles on "the Science of Sport" that interpreted the human body as, in essence, a machine, the sciences of physics and engineering as the proper sources of knowledge of how it works, and using "all the tools of science" to improve its athletic performance. Throughout the article, there were repeated references to biomechanical analyses, and the use of technology to enable the body to work harder, faster, longer.

*Watching the 1996 summer Olympics on NBC TV, we were struck by two things which probably did not used to be the case in earlier decades. One was that many of the men were rather inarticulate and communicated with a lot of grunting. Another was that the women increasingly seemed to have infantile nasal ways of speaking, in parallel with a most peculiar trend in American society where more and more women are speaking with immature nasal intonations—a development not paralleled among males. Even one of the major network women announcers was highly nasal. It used to be that nasality was encountered mostly in Appalachia, and particularly in Appalachian song, but if this trend continues, we could see American English in a matter of generations becoming a more nasal language, such as French. Furthermore, when the athletes of either sex were interviewed, even the ones who were more fluent in their speech were amazing banal in what they had to say. They might have been better off merely grunting, and indeed, the grunners seemed to
come out ahead by not saying anything banal. A number of athletes of both sexes also had very poor enunciation/articulation.

We were also struck by how many of the athletes suffered from asthma. This is certainly remarkable considering that these are the people who are supposed to be in top physical condition, but who obviously, together with the rest of the population, are increasingly victims of environmental degradation. Finally, we were struck by how much the discourse of the athletes dwelt on their bodies. It became very obvious that theirs is a world in which the materialization of our culture expresses itself in extreme body preoccupation. It made at least this viewer wish that there was a way by which part of the competition would be made to consist of evidence of the competitors' growth in matters of the spirit, other than the tremendous self-discipline and will power that progression to Olympic-level bodily skills obviously takes. As with the Winter Olympics, we were very disenchanted with competitions that are won by a thousandth of a second, thanks to electronic media monitoring of an athlete's departure and arrival. Nor do we like it that in some competitions, even the lowest performance was almost indistinguishable from the highest. We believe that this takes much of the meaning out of many kinds of competition, and that the human element of actually being able to perceive that one athlete is superior to another should be reintroduced. This might mean changing the rules for some competitions so that differences in performance become more noticeable, and giving people who cannot be distinguished from each other the same medal. In other words, what would be wrong with giving three gold medals in the 100-meter dash if one cannot tell the front runners apart?

We also observed that some sports seem to bring the human body into greater beauty and harmony, while others distort it and/or develop muscle groups that are out of proportion with the rest of the body. One of the prime examples of the latter appears to be female gymnastics, where according to a "60 Minutes" CBS TV report (21/7/96), about 60% of girl gymnasts are anorexic, and many end up depressed and suicidal. From earliest age, girls start getting trained like animals by oppressing parents and later coaches. Further, one commentator pointed out that it is a peculiar situation when a sport is of a nature that children have an advantage over adults.

And as has been the case with the Winter Olympics and the Barcelona Olympics, we were not very happy with the fact that we did not encounter one single mention of the Paralympics which follow immediately after the regular Olympics. We were particularly put out to see a big article headlined with an announcement that the Olympics was being succeeded by a "couch potato olympics," instead of telling us about Paralympics.

By the way, there is no comparison between the Paralympics and the Special Olympics in that the Paralympics are terribly real, no clowns or huggers would be permitted, and only the three top performers in a competition receive medals.

*Some people have referred to modernistic culture as a "culture of complaint," because so often, people feel that they are being victimized and their rights and entitlements are being violated. There is even a book by that title.

*UNESCO is working on a Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights which we find rather amusing, particularly in light of the series of broader UN declarations on human rights over the years, and which never went down to such a low level as the genome. Maybe some years hence, there will be a UN Declaration on Cosmic Plasma and Human Rights, or even a "Declaration of the Rights of Gnomes."

*A surprising number of Americans are keeping lions as pets. In a Philadelphia suburb, one such pet lion got loose, and the local parents were advised that the lion needed to eat 8-10 pounds of "fresh meat" each day to survive, and to safeguard their children accordingly (AP in SHI, 5 Jan. 95). After all, lions have rights too.

*In one animal rights fiction story, a character in Eden gets caught by a grizzly bear, and the narrator informs one that "it was a good death." We assume that the victim smiled all the time while his entrails were being ripped out and chewed on, considering that this is what bears tend to
go for first before they address the rest. Our modest suggestion is to feed all the animal rights people to the bears.

*Some futurists are predicting things such as the following within the next 25 years: profoundly retarded people will be cured; computers will be able to read minds and project their readings onto computer screens; skyscrapers may reach up to 1,000 stories and a mile high; high school students will have to be prepared to change jobs or careers at least 10 times during their lifetime; universities as we know them will disappear; and the US population may become entirely a population of minorities with no single ethnic majority. We advise that all this be taken cum grano salis.

*Carolyn Bardwell Wheeler sent us a calendar someone had designed to meet the needs of the modern age. Because jobs always pile up at the end of the month, this calendar has five extra days for every month. Because they also pile up on Fridays, there are three Fridays for every week. Mondays have been eliminated because very few people like them, and Saturdays and Sundays have been eliminated so that no one ever has to pay overtime rates. Because everybody wants their rush jobs done yesterday, the dates all run backward. Someone can place an order for work on the 7th and have it delivered on the 3rd.

News Related to Science, Technology, Academia & Scholarship

Academia, Scholarship & Publishing

*According to one observer of the academic field, there has been a tendency for academics in the humanities to shift their publication priorities from original research to publication of critiques; and more and more, it is expected that they publish books. At one time, extremely few academics ever published a book, while nowadays, someone who does not publish a book is a practical nothing in academia. Also, not long ago, at a conference of scholars of English, there would have been many papers on the major British writers such as Swift, Pope, Johnson, etc., but now the papers deal largely with things such as women writers, incest, and madness (Academe, 11/95).

*A nightmare event occurred at a book publisher in Wilmington, Delaware. The building collapsed one evening, burying 30 manuscripts in process of being published. Because of the danger of further collapse, the city demolished the rest of the building the next morning while the publisher was still out of town. It is believed that some authors had not kept copies of their manuscripts, and thus, the labor of several lifetimes of scholarship may have been lost.

*Someone noted acerbically that "the more you reject the null hypothesis, the more likely it is that you'll get tenure" (Contemp. Psychol., 1991, 36(2)).

**One way to lessen the risk inherent in undertaking a major (research) project is to make sure that you spend enough money on it. After a research department or funding agency has invested enough in your goals, it has a real stake in your success and becomes very reluctant to admit that your project is not working out. No one ever got ahead in science by saving money." (Peter Feibelman, cited in Science, 6 May 94).

*The British Medical Journal has begun to ban the use of all dead languages in its journal after a writer used a Latin phrase erroneously (Globe & Mail, 28/9/91).

*The first time one is cited in a scholarly publication, one has achieved something close to immortality, and usually also advances to the status of an authority.

*In 6/98, we first learned from the news that there is such a thing as a "sexual anthropologist." That put us to wondering what an asexual anthropologist would be like.
*Poor Ghandi! In India, one can get PhDs in Ghandian studies, and most of the people who do have never lived like Ghandi himself. We cannot help but wonder how people in the future will live who get doctorates in Wolfensbergerian studies and never lived like Wolfensberger.

*To our amazement, we discovered that some universities have an "office of the pro-vice chancellor," to which one of our associates asked incredulously, "do they also have an anti-vice chancellor?" In today's PC and diversity academia, we can answer with a resounding "no."

Science

*On 12/97, astronomers observed an explosion 12 billion light-years away that was so powerful that it was the mightiest explosion ever glimpsed by humans, equalling all the light emitted by the whole rest of the known universe, which is why astronomers have nicknamed it "Big Bang II" (Newsweek, 18/5/98; Science, 19/6/98).

*Science is in a major paradigm crisis; by this we mean that the dominant scientific paradigm that has prevailed particularly since the age of Newton is giving out (e.g., Discover, 11/90). Therefore, also in crisis are all the worldviews that had closely allied themselves with science, including various forms of scientism, and therefore also major sectors of liberalism and secular humanism. What is undoing classical science is mostly a combination of insights into two phenomena: the existence of what scientists call chaos, and the utterly embarrassing findings of quantum mechanics. We will discuss chaos first.

Around 1980, scientists became fascinated with so-called "chaos theory," and articles on chaos have appeared in most major scientific journals, as well as the news digest literature such as Time and Newsweek. Certain processes in nature are orderly, such as laminar flow of fluids or gases. Other processes are disorderly or "chaotic," such as turbulent movement of such substances. In orderly states, linear equations can usually describe what goes on, whereas chaotic ones require non-linear equations of motion. Many kinds of transitions from orderly to chaotic states are poorly understood. However, the good news is that the transitions from order to chaos are generally orderly. While overall, chaotic processes have statistically intelligible properties, a specific chaotic process is unpredictable. This new scientific discipline has discovered that even minor irregularities and perturbations in otherwise regular processes very quickly multiply each other, and can rapidly lead to large deviations from what had been (or would have been) predicted. Among other things, large distributed computing systems are now believed to be inherently unpredictable as a result of "chaos," and to be therefore subject to wide swings in output. This is one thing now believed to have been responsible for some of the phenomena of the 10/87 stock market crash. The study of chaos has given humans a whole new window on an astonishing dimension of reality. For people who have labored through statistics courses, it may come as a big shock to learn that mathematicians until now did not have an adequate definition for randomness. Neither tables of random numbers nor even computer-generated random numbers have been found to be truly random. Then a brilliant young mathematician came along who provided the field for the first time with a "quantitative definition of chaos," which is the mathematicians' concept of randomness. Mathematicians are now talking with great gusto about "creating chaos" (i.e., among numbers), and their tentative definition of chaos is as follows: "To say a system is chaotic to a particular degree means it is a specific distance from random after a specific number of iterations." One characteristic of chaos is that "a little bit of uncertainty in initial conditions is quickly and enormously magnified."

As physicists speak about it, chaos does not always mean that the outcome is disorderly; quite to the contrary: chaos can be the process through which order arises spontaneously.

However, there are states of chaos that are more chaotic than chaos itself. The difference between ordinary chaos and chaotic chaos is that ordinary chaos has many predictable elements as, for instance, the emergence of randomness, which scientists know how to deal with. In contrast, chaotic chaos is unpredictable and does not necessarily result in randomness (Discover, 1/91). Systems may long function in what appears to be an orderly, quantitative and predictable fashion, but at a certain point, a very tiny irregularity or random element in a system can suddenly tip the system around a corner where the previous order rapidly disintegrates and becomes chaotic, not only
in a mathematical sense, but often also an experiential one. Such kinds of sudden and dramatic changes in systems are consistent with the Hegelian phrasing that there are points where quantitative change turns into qualitative change. Even if such Hegelian change is not necessarily the same as chaos, the two phenomena appear to be, at the very least, concordant.

All this is extremely relevant to the social scene which is very chaotic. We can see all the time how initially small variations can quickly lead to large consequences, including large perversions.

The concept of "non-linearity" plays a prominent role in the theory of chaos. Curiously, years ago it was noted that social systems are multi-loop non-linear feedback systems, and we may now see a bit better why on the one hand, social systems can be so chaotic, and why on the other hand, following the laws of chaos--so to speak--they are also relatively predictable.

One of the ways chaos theory contributes to a crisis in scientific ideology is that at the heart of classical science has been a process known as reductionism which tries to reduce natural phenomena to ever smaller substrata or parts, phenomena, processes, laws and explanations. While this particular strategy has always been questioned by some people, it now appears to have been just plain wrong, one reason being that chaos appears on all levels of nature, from the highest to the most reduced.

We now turn to quantum issues. Among the phenomena that experiments in quantum mechanics have identified in recent years is particles being in two places at once, particles and waves changing into each other only when no one is looking, and particles communicating somehow with each other at a speed faster than light.

There are also beginning to be rumblings that classic evolutionism may fall together with the classic scientific paradigm. One of its problems is that natural selection looks simply less and less likely as a sufficient process to explain what has happened. On the one hand, the biological forms that do evolve sometimes simply seem to be too outlandish to be the result of chance, while on the other hand, forms that one could have reasonably expected to evolve have apparently not done so.

All of this raises the question whether something akin to the so-called "forms" of Plato do exist after all. Do some things simply not happen in the cosmos because there are no "forms" for them? Indeed, a collapse of the current scientific paradigm could be interpreted as a victory for the Platonists over the Aristotelians.

Few people are aware that out-and-out atheism is largely an invention of the mid-18th century. Even the age of Enlightenment was still enamored at least of deism, as exemplified by many of the "founding fathers" of the US. "Hard atheism" appeared to need the rise of modern science, and particularly of Darwinism, in order to be able to make extensive in-roads on human mentality. So with the collapse of the modern scientific paradigm, we may also see a collapse of "classic atheism," but we have to be clear that this collapse is not at all likely to lead to a turning to the major traditional belief systems, because the prevailing cultural values are just simply not consistent with it, and are much more likely to push people toward undisciplined do-it-yourself and feel-good religions, as discussed in an earlier section. Thus, what is apt to lie ahead is more of a conflict among different accounts of the supernatural than a combat between those who believe in a supernatural and those who are rigorous materialists. Thus, it is quite conceivable that with the collapse of the classic scientific paradigm, even the scientists will begin to turn in larger numbers to all sorts of religious and quasi-religious absurdities, including new-age religions--and this seems to be what is currently happening. However, so far, the mainstream of science has not as yet taken in the momentous paradigm convulsion that is taking place, and it will take even longer for the educated public to do so.

This paradigm crisis is also a profound embarrassment to many religious people and leaders who have tried feverishly to accommodate traditional religious beliefs to what they thought was a solidly-emplaced science that demanded that religion become "rational"--indeed, even scientific, and perhaps even materialistic.

Some new-age gurus have latched onto chaos theory and have predicted a dramatic and spontaneous change in the state of the world--but they anticipate it to go to the better whereas it seems obvious to us that things everywhere are going from bad to worse, rather than from bad to less bad.
Although it was Darwin who gave us an image of nature as a raw and bloody claw, neither he nor many biologists after him could quite stomach their own discoveries or visions. For instance, Darwin fudged by claiming that the "war of nature is not incessant, that no fear is felt, that death is generally prompt, and that the vigorous, the healthy, and the happy survive and multiply." Baloney!

*Scientific publications with 50, 100, 200, and even 500 authors have been on the rise since the early 1980s. Physics took the lead in this, and medicine is catching up (Science, 7 April 95).

*A sociologist made the interesting observation (Science, Vol. 250, p. 1020) that American culture is full of "vulgar psychology," but extremely little "vulgar sociology," meaning that psychological thinking has penetrated the culture much more than sociological thinking. He speculated that the focus of sociology on probabilistic behavior of collectivities, groups and classes is deeply offensive to the American psyche and its aggrandizement of the individual who supposedly can rise above all. Also, there seems to be an unconscious sentiment that sociology would readily become an agent of social control (which alienates libertarians), or that it would be an agent of radical social and cultural reform (which alienates conservatives).

*Geneticists claimed to have discovered about 10 different genes in fruit flies that render the flies who have them stupid, by interfering with either their learning or memory. The first such gene to be discovered was named "dunce" (Science, 3 Jan. 92).

*Greedy and morally blind scientists and bioengineering corporations have started a rush to patent DNA sequences. (This is a bit like trying to claim ownership over air, rain, and sunlight.) It would take the patent office about 100 years to examine all such applications it had received by 1996 (Science, 3 May 96).

*One is again reminded of the incredible pretensions of science, and particularly Star Wars: In 3/89, an asteroid capable of wiping out much of life on the earth passed less than 2 moon distances from the earth, but was not detected until it had passed, and even then only by an amateur. It is believed that impacts by such bodies account for at least some of the mass extinctions of higher life on earth in previous eons.

*Alfred Nobel, who endowed the Nobel prize scheme, had a fictitious brother, Ignatius--generally known as plain Ig--who has been credited with inventing soda pop. It is therefore also not surprising that the prize established by Ig Nobel is also not as well known as that of his brother. In 1991, the MIT Technology Museum, in consort with the Journal of Irreproducible Results, announced the award of seven satiric Ig Nobel prizes. One went to former Vice President Dan Quayle "for demonstrating better than anyone else the need for science education," another to junk bond czar Michael Milken "because the world is indebted to him," another to the inventor of Beano which is a godsend for people suffering from flatulence, etc. (Science, 11/91).

Technology Related to Agriculture & Animal Husbandry

*In Third World countries, national policies are often adopted by Western-educated people at the top who typically are very alienated from their roots. These policies are commonly those thought up by foreign consultants, and the people who benefit therefrom are primarily the consultants and the country's top stratum. The typical outcome is that a nation gets ever deeper into debt, and the bulk of the population is grievously hurt somehow. Even where the standard of living may rise, these policies often have other devastating impacts, such as profound dislocations, family instability, drug addiction, etc. One example given was that of a country where the consultants urged that agriculture should be converted from rice to peanuts. As the men were taught how to grow peanuts, the women were left to cultivate the daily rice food crop far away in swampy terrain, as a result of which their life expectancy dropped by 7 years.
Science said that all over Africa, agriculture was in a state of collapse, much of it caused by attempts at westernizing agriculture, subsidized by untold billions of dollars from abroad over a period of several decades. One of these destructive strategies was to make agriculture dependent on expensive, and mostly imported, fertilizer. This disrupted traditional strategies fatally, over-stimulated the land in the short run, and then resulted in top-soil loss in the long run, with the countries being much too poor to keep up the artificial fertilizing.

In 1983, Bangladesh exported 70 million frogs whose legs were to be eaten in wealthier countries. As a result, there has been a dramatic increase in insects that formerly were eaten by the frogs, and the country had to spend more money importing insecticides than it earned from the frogs. This is a typical example of how the Western world seduces the Third World into its own destruction, and how the countries of the Third World fall for, and collaborate in, this destruction.

*Many people are aware of the fact that fishing fleets now use miles and miles of continuous, thin, but tough plastic nets that capture everything that swims. Sometimes, miles of these nets get lost and start floating through the ocean like ghosts, since they are lighter than water. They ensnare thousands of animals until a net gets so heavy that it sinks. Eventually, the dead animals in the net decay and fall off, and the net rises again and starts catching animals all over. In this fashion, these "ghost nets" keep catching and killing vast amounts of animals over and over because they themselves are made of imperishable plastic. It is estimated that the length of these ghost nets that are drifting around the world's oceans could girdle the globe three times. The long-term impact of all of this is absolutely staggeringly incomprehensible, but certainly grossly disastrous; yet one hears very little about the ghost net problem.

*Farmers into goat herders. Many people do not realize that artificial irrigation of the soil makes it infertile in the long run. Any irrigation water that is not distilled (which hardly any is) carries at least some salts. When the irrigation water is used up/evaporates, the salt remains. Sometimes, the salty water even seeps into the water table and destroys its freshness for several ten thousand years. Some years ago, sophisticated forms of irrigation started using only some of the irrigation water, permitting the excess to carry off most of the salt, but this process only postpones the inevitable. An example is the California San Joaquin Valley. A hundred years ago, it was the breadbasket of California and grew tall wheat. Today, the soil has become so laden with salt that less and less wheat can be grown, and even more salt-tolerant crops are beginning to rebel. It is feared that another hundred years of irrigation will turn the valley into a salty desert such as portions of Utah and Death Valley.

*Here is what the most "progressive" animal husbandry is doing. Milk cows are kept indoors, and forced to drink anti-freeze by the gallon (which apparently keeps their milk drinkable and their meat edible), and they are controlled by electric shocks to eliminate in a fashion that minimizes the need for clean-up (AW, 25/5/93).

*Are animal husbands turkeys? Because consumers lust for ever more white meat on the turkeys they roast and eat, turkey-growers have been breeding turkeys to have more white meat on them. Since most of the white meat on a bird is on the breast, the birds have been bred to have ever bigger breasts. This has gone so far that now, such specially-bred turkeys can no longer mate naturally, because their breasts are so huge that the male turkey cannot get near enough to a female to impregnate her. Thus, almost all the turkeys raised for food are products of artificial insemination. Humans may marvel at the progress science has wrought, but we doubt that the turkeys are much impressed!

*We have noted before that the widely-hailed green revolution is based on utterly destructive long-term dynamics. A hundred years ago, farmers across the world grew thousands of different grains and produce items. Yet today, 30 crops provide 90% of the world's calories, with 4 (corn, wheat, rice, and sorghum) supplying more than half. The bulk of the food of the world consists of an amazingly narrow range of staples, led by rice and wheat. At a great distance follow sugar, potatoes (both sweet and non-sweet), maize (corn), and at a yet greater distance sorghum, millet and
cassava. However, in some parts of the world, some of these play a vastly greater role than others. For instance, cassava (which we know mostly in the form of tapioca) ranks fourth-highest in lowland tropical zones where crops such as wheat and non-sweet potatoes play a relatively minor role. The advantage of cassava is that it can grow on marginal land. It is gained from the root of tall bushes.

One of the disastrous strategies of the green revolution has been the vast reduction in genetic variability of food crops. Only 6 varieties of corn now account for over 70% of the US crops; 4 varieties of rice account for 65%, 9 varieties of wheat for 50%, and 4 of potatoes for 72%. US seed companies have been bought out by larger corporations, including drug and petro-chemical firms. All they seem to care about is to make a profit, and thus they inflict death by homogeneity of food staples upon a future world, much as they have been inflicting death in many other ways. The current estimate is that 75% of the vegetable varieties currently planted in Europe will soon be extinct if they are not already, and unless policies change.

Sadly, what is being bred into the food plants is mostly marketing convenience: uniform ripening time, ease of harvesting, ability to travel well to market, yield, and color. At the same time, protein and vitamin content of many of our more popular foods have declined. Some leafy vegetables have lost half of their vitamin C. European and North American potatoes have less protein and vitamin C than the traditional varieties which they are replacing. Modern apples have less vitamin C than older varieties, and on and on.

Another atrocity is that more and more poisons are being put on crop seeds to preserve or fertilize them, but the poisons find their way into the growing plant. Also, fewer and fewer food crops are able to develop a pest resistance of their own because they are so artificially protected. If some kind of a crop disaster should occur to more than one of the rapidly declining major crops or varieties in the world in the same year, famine of catastrophic proportions can be expected. Such disasters are a statistical near-certainty.

Evidence is also accumulating that even some of the very common chemical food preservatives can trigger violent allergy reactions, including asthma. Some of these preservatives are also in wine and certain medications.

**Computer Technology**

*Scientists have begun to refer to "a-life," by which they mean "artificial life," by which they mean self-reproducing automata and computer viruses (Science, 23/9/94).

*By now, virtually every literate person knows that the people who put their faith in computers have shot themselves in the foot once (again), in that all computers up until recently had been programmed to read the last two digits of a year as falling between 1900-1999, because this enabled programmers to enter only the last 2 digits rather than the full 4 digits of the year. The impending approach of the year 2000 means that computers will be reading the upcoming "00" as 1900 rather than 2000. While corrections began to be made recently, no one will know what disasters will happen upon 1 Jan. 2000.

*The inventor (Robert Wright) of the World Wide Web has a terrible memory for people's names and faces. When he was interviewed for a major story in Time (19/5/97), he asked the interviewer several times what his name was.

*It has been estimated that about $2 billion worth of software has been stolen over the consumer Internet (Newsweek, 14/11/94).

*Consumer Reports (9/96) found that ads for several spell checker software packages (one of these for Windows 95) were full of spelling errors.

*When the US Pentagon changed over a computer system, almost 10,000 National Guard payments were delayed for a year, to the tune of about $100 million (AP in SHJ, 13/8/94).
Like many large organizations, Syracuse University has contracted with one particular firm to provide all of its telephones. In our Training Institute, we had been using a so-called "speed dialing" feature of these telephones to transfer calls from one TI extension to another. After using this feature for several years, we discovered to our amazement that transferring calls manually rather than by means of the automatic "speed dialing" is much speedier. In fact, "speed dialing" takes 6 times(!) longer to transfer a call.

We find it hilarious to read that new automated equipment systems that connect computers, phones, copiers, fax machines and printers into a digital network might "end the office paper chase." We can just imagine what happens when all of these machines are connected to copiers, printers and fax machines--but utopianism runs eternal.

Katharine Temple reviewed these books (CW, 8/96), and said that "the popular mythos tells us that computer networks are powerful, global, fast, and inexpensive. There, you'll find entertainment, expertise, education. It's important to be on-line." However, instead, "our networks can be frustrating, expensive, unreliable connections that can get in the way of useful work. It is an over-promoted, hollow world, devoid of human warmth and kindness. The heavily promoted information infrastructure addresses relatively few social needs or business concerns. At the same time, it directly threatens precious parts of our society, including schools, libraries and social institutions."

The country of Colombia brought in a high-priced law professor to help it write a new constitution. A lot of people put in a great deal of effort to hammer out this constitution, but while the final draft was being typed, a computer swallowed it up without a trace and refused to give it back, apparently because of a technician error, and stupidity in not keeping back-ups. The drafting committee had to scurry through waste buckets and personal notes in order to try to re-constitute--so to speak--the constitution. The high-powered professor declared all of this to be a unique event (USN & WR, 15/7/91).

An Internet "user" (Michael Fahey) proposed that if computers produced error messages in the Japanese haiku genre, they might read somewhat like this (Source material from Zana Lutfiyaa):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Rather than a beep} & \quad \text{Windows 95 crashed.} \\
\text{Or a rude error message} & \quad \text{I am the Blue Screen of Death.} \\
\text{These words: "File not found."} & \quad \text{No one hears your screams.} \\
\text{You step in the stream,} & \quad \text{A crash reduces} \\
\text{but the water has moved on.} & \quad \text{your expensive computer} \\
\text{This page is not here.} & \quad \text{to a simple stone.} \\
\text{Three things are certain:} & \quad \text{A file that big?} \\
\text{Death, taxes, and lost data.} & \quad \text{It might be very useful.} \\
\text{Guess which has occurred.} & \quad \text{But now it is gone.} \\
\text{First snow, then silence.} & \quad \text{With searching comes loss} \\
\text{This thousand dollar screen dies} & \quad \text{and the presence of absence:} \\
\text{so beautifully.} & \quad \text{"My Novel" not found.} \\
\text{Serious error.} & \quad \text{Yesterday it worked} \\
\text{All shortcuts have disappeared.} & \quad \text{Today it is not working} \\
\text{Screen. Mind. Both are blank.} & \quad \text{Windows is like that.}
\end{align*}
\]
Having been erased,
The document you’re seeking
Must now be retyped.

Miscellaneous News

*A research study at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana showed that US farm families of German extraction were radically different from what it called "Yankee farmers." Yankee farmers have long viewed their farms as a business, and within the family, there is very little attachment to the farm. Farm families of German stock have seen themselves as heirs of a long family tradition which they hoped their children (who tend to be more involved in farm work) would carry on. They were also able to trace their family history many more generations back than Yankee farmers. They use farming methods which are less destructive of the soil, and they are more ready than Yankee farmers to hand the farm over to a son or daughter. All in all, they have great similarities with farmers in Germany, despite generations of separation.

*Even though the US has some of the fastest local fire departments in the world, it has more fire deaths than nearly any other industrialized nation.

*"Incidents" at nuclear power stations in New York State revealed that the operators of the plant had a very inadequate understanding of the plant's design and operating procedures, which underlines that humans can create systems that become too complex for them to manage (SHJ, April 97).

*Apartment dwellers are warned that toilet snakes are not just a humorous fiction or "urban fairy tale," as they say these days. Apparently, a lot of people keep reptiles, including snakes who either on their own crawl into toilets and advance into the plumbing system, or are flushed down the toilet when their owners try to get rid of them. At any rate, in any building, and particularly in apartment houses where there are many toilets, a snake is apt to pop up in any number of toilets in the building. Just one more thing to worry about in addition to the tarantula or scorpion under the toilet seat.

*One observer has collected "the best of the worst"--country music song titles, such as "All My Exes Live in Texas," and "You Can Have Your Kate and Edith Too." Soon, there will surely come "Beyond The Best of the Worst."

*The media seem to teem with take-offs on "Men Who Run With Wolves." "Women Who Run With Wolves" was not enough, so along came "Real Men Are Wolves" (we agree), "Women Who Run With Wolves" (we like those), and "Women Who Run With Men Who Run With Wolves." Now there is "Women Who Run With Poodles."

*The New York Post ran a headline, "Headless Body Found in Topless Bar" (Syracuse Herald-Journal, 17/3/1993), which we find bottomlessly base, and bare of all good taste.

*A Sufi poem starts, "I'm drunk and you're insane. Who's going to lead us home?" (Parabola, 5/98).