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Is An "Individual" A Whole Or A Part In This Cosmic Scheme We Live In?

[The following article is a test in General Semantics. What do the words "individual," "whole," "part," mean to you? What feelings do you have invested in them? How readily would you accept new meanings for them? Wendell Thomas, author of several books, has recently sent to a publisher a new manuscript, **Toward A World Culture**, that integrates philosophy (or religion), science and ethical economics. He presents there a profound base for the person, family and community; in his view, "establishing viable ecological communities — with ethical economic patterns — is the most important thing in the human world." (He has been a member of Celso Intentional Community, Burnsville, N. C., for 30 years.) Read, re-read and study his comments on "individual." Give yourself a chance to rethink the reality behind this combination of letters. — Editor]

By Wendell Thomas

Musetta Giles asks me, in response to a letter of mine in **Green Revolution**, "If the individual isn't 'an independent private human mind and body,' then what in the world is it?" I'd like to converse with her on a radio program for a world of listeners, for she is a thinker wrestling candidly with our traditional culture.

What do we ordinarily mean when we talk so glibly about "the individual"? Do we mean a specific body? A specific mind? A specific soul? All three together? Is the soul a mind? Must the individual be human? Do only humans have mind or soul? Is my companionable dog a mere automatic machine? Confusion.

We are told that "the individual" (meaning a human being) is sovereign, supreme, and "of infinite worth." Is an incurable idiot this sovereign individual. A "feral" child? A fetus? When millions of South American mothers abort, that their already born children may survive, are they killing supreme beings? If not, when does the developing animal become "supreme"?

I do not know of any factor in Western culture more responsible for getting civilization into our current horrible predicament than our confusion and downright false ideas about the individual. Please let me explain. I'll try to be as brief as explanation permits.

"Individual" from Indivisible

The word **individual** comes from the Latin **individuum**, meaning something indivisible. In translations of the Greek Aristotle's scientific works, the word **individual** is used for Aristotle's **to de ti**, "a this" — such as "this stone," or "this mouse." Those who preach that "the individual" is sovereign, supreme, and "of infinite worth" do not, of course, mean "a (material) this." They vaguely assume that the individual is "the human soul." They have ingested the Platonic tradition of the church. Plato speculated that reason, mind, and soul were the same thing, the same spontaneously creative indivisible and immortal substance. Then he opined — in what I consider the world's worst philosophical blunder — that the soul is **immaterial**!

Real Space — Active and Immaterial

Since the only indivisible and immaterial thing is a mathematical point, Plato's notion that the soul is both indivisible active (or spontaneous) and immaterial is quite false; for a point cannot act! We need a sounder philosophy and theology. My study has led to the view of one spontaneously creative substance (indivisible material) which I call the soul, self, or individual; or our natural God; or active real space. This is the indivisible material whole.

You and I are this one cosmic whole individual manifested as distinct and unique bodily members of word-using societies in their natural environment. The

individual is, indeed, sovereign and of infinite worth; but this immortal creative individual is what we have in common — not what each human mind guards in his or her private body. **The soul is not a private thing inside the body; the body is a private thing inside the all-encompassing spatial soul.**

Ecological Community Important

A person is a common cosmic individual manifested through ecological community, family and private body. Personality is precious and to be developed and expressed. The best expression — given a certain body — is achieved through the best ecological community and affiliated private family. That is why the most important thing in the human world, as I see it, is to establish viable ecological communities.

Two Strong, cont'd

invited to speak his mind to members of the National Security Industrial Association, an organization formed in 1944 to "maintain and enhance the war-time communication between the armament industries and government" (included are all the giant corporations in the country — aircraft, electronic, steel, motor, chemical, food, etc.).

His subject was, "Research and Development for the Socio-Economic Environment of the 1970s," and his invitation said, "your accomplishments qualify you to speak with authority on the subject." He rather thought they had invited him in order to "present an image of wide-ranging discussion" and decided that instead of reasoning about basic premises he would "simply confront them and soberly tell them off."

He reproached them for not having invited anyone under 30 (some in that category were picketing outside). To their goals of urban development, continuing education and improved environment he added, "reviving American democracy, rescuing the majority of mankind from deepening poverty and ensuring the survival of mankind."

These goals, he told them, require research and experimentation, but not by them. "You people are unfitted by your commitments, your experience, your customary methods, your recruitment and your moral disposition. You are the military-industrial force of the United States, the most dangerous of men at present in the world. You not only implement our disastrous policies but are an overwhelming lobby for them. You expand and rigidify the wrong use of brains, resources and labor so that change becomes difficult."

"... The best service you people could perform is rapidly to phase yourselves out, passing on your relevant knowledge to people who are better qualified. ... Since you are the most of the research and development there is, we cannot do without you as people, but we cannot do with you as you are."

Goodman laughed at them for claiming socially useful items "spin off" from military inventiveness. "You remind me of TV networks who, after 20 years of nothing, boast that they did broadcast the McCarthy hearings and the Kennedy funeral!" (free and friendly laughter followed).

Goodman also reminded them that they acted as if "we have to develop in a certain technological style. ... If we had put our brains and money into developing electric cars we would now have electric cars; if we had concentrated on intensive agriculture, we would now find this the most efficient. ... You will probably concede that much of what you do is ugly and harmful. ... but that it is necessary for the American way of life, and therefore you cannot do otherwise. Since we believe, however, that that way of life is itself unnecessary, ugly and un-American, we cannot condone your present operations.



Top Left: leanto with barn in back; woodpile in center; pump house and cabin to the right; birches in background.

Above: Ferdi (left) and Gil Shepard using two-man saw to fell trees for cabin to be built.

Left: Bob and Ferdi sawing stove wood; Patsy and Geordi holding log on sawbuck.



They should be wiped off the slate." (Shouts of "Who are 'we'?" were answered by Goodman: "I and those young people outside.")

Results

This is straight talk from decentralists to centralists, from Davids to Goliaths. Back in 1928 many of these things were said by Borsodi in **This Ugly Civilization**. The "climate" has changed; now these things are said directly, face-to-face, at the invitation of the powers-that-be. What does this mean?

May we conclude that the depth of these new-old ideas, together with the integrity and the courage of their decentralist protagonists, has had and will have profound effect on the power-structure? While Goodman reports that his audience of 300 applauded only once (when he said some of his remarks may have been unfair and ignorant), twenty or more came to him at the close of his talk to express appreciation and support.

In a letter to **The Green Revolution**, Dr. Mumford said, "The senators were intelligently responsive, even Chairman Ribicoff, whose proposals I dashed cold water on. And the statement before the committee hit a wider and more varied section of the country than I dared to expect. Even the **Los Angeles Times** featured my attack on the whole system."

It may not be many years — if we can keep the bombs from falling — before decentralism becomes an implemented public policy. For that we'll need another round with the decision-makers, to open up economic aspects of centralization — the land and money monopolies as well as the technical aspects.

Letters, cont'd

pathetic, in fact symbiotic, to each other — are not the same organization.

As I see it the nation-wide School of Living should own the land and already-standing buildings at Heathcote and rent or lease or lend such of these facilities necessary to the community. The School of Living should retain privileges necessary to its functions at Heathcote (conferencing, research, publicity, publications-handling, records, storage, coordination, etc.).

The people living in the community are obviously going to be handling much of the business of the Center, due to proximity, interest and initiative. Still, a distinction should be made, and maintained between what is Center business and what is community business. Decisions necessary for the Center should, where preferable and possible, be left to the trustees or the membership of the School of Living itself.

I suggest this distinction between the Center and the community not because I can see any existing conflict of interest be-

When We, cont'd

between them but in the hope of avoiding conflicts which could arise later, as both organizations expand and increase their activities. For the present, if we can simply be aware that the Center and the community are two separate, though symbiotic, entities, we will be smoothing the paths of both of them. — Gordon Yaswen, Box 201, Modena, N. Y. 12548

Need For A Horse

We've been looking and asking for a work horse. We want to use it to skid our logs out of the woods. There are still a good many horses and ponies in the vicinity, but trained work horses are scattered rather thinly. We bid on a half-Belgian at an auction but she went for more than we were willing to pay. Prices quoted to us for work horses have been \$60 to \$125; ponies may go for \$20 at a local auction barn. Besides skidding cabin logs and firewood, our horse will probably also be used to do a little plowing, hay cutting and hauling.

The New Calf

During January our Holstein cow gave birth to a fine heifer calf. We call it Dawn since she was born at 7 o'clock in the morning. I fed the cow about 20 minutes prior to the birth and upon returning found the calf resting in the straw bedding. The mother vigorously licked the calf to dry it and to receive the beneficial moisture from the calf's body. Within half an hour the newcomer was on its quivering feet. Now after three weeks the calf is much larger, very strong and a spirited kicker.

The cow coming in fresh is a delightful boon to our diet. Fresh milk and cream every day is welcomed by all. About 14 quarts a day is plenty for the calf as well

as the six people in our community. Rebecca and I made a pound of butter not long ago by shaking cream in a gallon jar. When we saw those butter grains forming, we shook with added enthusiasm. After the butter was separated from the buttermilk we of course had to sample it on hot muffins.

More Building

Much building is planned in the near future. Aside from the log house, we'll put up a smokehouse, icehouse, outhouse and facilities to shelter children for the summer. Right now we're working on a place in the loft to be used primarily by Gil Shepard, who joined us nearly a month ago. Only the ceiling and floor remain to be insulated before the work is more or less done. The cost of this room approaches zero since only scrap lumber, cardboard, straw and reclaimed nails were used. We gave 50c for the secondhand window. The small heating stove and pipe is about the only expense put into this place. Everyone wants to move to this room, for it has the best view anywhere indoors.

Children in the Summer

During the summer we wish to host several children, either from an institution or from underprivileged homes. Perhaps from both. Most of us here are very much interested in children and enjoy working and playing with them. We wish to provide freer learning experiences as well as uncoerced social relationships. It is our hope that the children will find some kind of value and joy in the relationships of a short summer. It may be that if the children do come, it will help them, as well as us, to get a clearer idea of who we are and where we are headed.

Land For Homesteaders

The following people have contacted **Green Revolution** offering land at very reasonable rates. Write to them, including a self-addressed envelope, if you are seriously interested (outline your needs, wants, background, skills, goals and resources). These landholders are busy people, but generous and willing to consider serious applicants).

Robert Blum, Ferndale, N. Y. (part of 200 acre farm).

Joseph Locanthy, Watch Hill, Rd., Peekskill, N. Y. (30 acres near Eastern Shore of Virginia).

Mrs. William S. McVay, Box 569, Vernon, Fla. (plans to buy land if young people cooperate).

Mrs. Fred Wissing, 516 W. 7th, Traverse City, Mich. (100 acres on shore of Traverse Bay).

Ferdi & Rebecca Knoess, Pennington, Minn. (100 acres).

Elizabeth Seeberg, 3634 Nine Mile Rd., Cincinnati, Ohio (25 acres).