

AMISH AND AMERICAN?

MAKING SPACE FOR WHOLENESS AMIDST COMPARTMENTALIZATION
IN A MODERN LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

by

Eric Brende

Submitted to the Department of
Political Science in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the
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ABSTRACT

A barrier to liberty in the modern world overlooked by liberal political theorists (e.g. Rawls), I suggest, is over-compartmentalization--the joint effect of the spatial, temporal, and qualitative discontinuities resulting from overspecialization. The problem is best seen in relief against a more "whole" alternative, in this case, that of the Amish. Compartmentalization both has crimped the free movement of persons trying to enact their choices, and, by engulfing those persons in huge systems whose agendas they cannot control, has quashed their capability to make choices at all. Not only liberty, but fairness, is at stake: these impediments are not only generally objectionable (and removable as we shall see), but also affect certain groups much more than others--not only those who wish to fill their lives with more than the preoccupation of a single specialty (a large majority, I presume), but also special segments who either 2) seek an Amish-like way of life or 3) would wish to avoid succumbing to unfortunate psychological or sociological susceptibilities of various kinds or 4) lack the adroitness and resourcefulness it takes to hop from compartment to compartment or 5) are subordinates in large organizations.

It is not necessary to eliminate technological civilization to redress these inequities. Nor is it desirable. Multifarious disjointed activities complement more "simple," unified practices by adding "breadth," to "depth," of choice and by supplementing them technologically and educationally where they are lacking. Conversely, the "whole life"--especially if the Amish precedent is indicative--benefits dwellers of the compartments in various palpable ways--culturally, psychologically, ecologically, sociologically. From all this it follows not only that barriers to the whole life should be removed, but also that the whole life should be the target of

governmental support as a "public good." There truly is a niche for wholeness in a compartmentalized society.

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Biographical Note

Eric Brende, originally from Topeka, Kansas, graduated from Yale College *Summa cum Laude* in 1984 with a B. A. in English Literature, and from Washburn University in 1986 with a second B. A. in Biology. He entered the Political Science Department and Program for Science, Technology, and Society at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1987 after receiving a Mellon Graduate Fellowship in the Humanities and a National Science Foundation Citation for Excellence. He was a tutor in the History of Science at Harvard University in the academic year 1990-91 and a teaching assistant in Political Philosophy at M. I. T. in the fall of 1991.

He also has worked as a full-time farm hand with the Amish for three summers and one autumn harvest season.

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Introduction

Is life in the "free" societies of the modern industrialized West really free? Have the revolutionary technical, scientific, economic, and juridical changes of the last two centuries culminated in a "liberation" of humankind in a material and a political sense? Obviously many people think so, now not only in the West, but lately in the revolutionizing Eastern Bloc. Many social and political thinkers, in particular, have sought to clarify the nature of this freedom, to justify it theoretically, and to secure and consolidate the advances that have given rise to it. Perhaps no more adamant group has been the liberal egalitarians, those who--in roughest terms--construe freedom not merely as the *absence* of external political *constraints* (giving rise in turn to unfettered economic initiative and industry as in 19th century Britain), but also as the *presence* of *opportunities* to act on one's freedoms; and moreover, the presence of a distributional scheme to make such opportunities accessible in a manner *fair* to everyone. Championing fair opportunities are the theorists John Rawls, Amartya Sen, Ronald Dworkin, to mention three contemporaries.

But there is reason to question whether even these thinkers have gone far enough. What they and practically everyone else take for granted are the material and economic foundations of our novel modern liberties: the system of competitive technical and economic specializations that can be credited, among other things, with increasing material wealth and expanding available job categories. This advanced technological organization we all serve and submit to in our multifarious occupations, which interlock like components in a vast mechanism. Doesn't anyone wonder whether this system may in some way inhibit our freedom even as it seems to expand it?

Of course--as members of the convulsing Eastern Bloc may well be aware--Karl Marx was one long ago who aired strong reservations about modern technological systems, pointing to the virtual enslavement of the exploited factory laborer. And there have been other memorable voices of criticism--Durkheim, who questioned the tendency of the division of labor to dissolve the "collective conscience," hence the principal basis of social "solidarity" and individual psychological stability, and ultimately liberty itself; "romantics" like Ruskin and Morris who decried the obsolescence of skilled workmanship; and more recently a social critic like Jacques Ellul, who alleges we have made our means into our ends and thereby obtain ever-increasing technical virtuosity and material luxuriance at the cost of

ever-decreasing spiritual vitality--in a word, freedom.

Do the liberal egalitarians seem to be concerned with the admonitions of these critics? Not overmuch. One response they have easy recourse to (assuming Marx's critique is outdated) is to point out an advantage found in Ellul's argument itself: yes, modern technology merely provides us the means. That is the beauty of it. It is left to us to fill in the rest--whether communal solidarity, workmanship, or moral fortitude or something else found wanting by technological critics. That is what it means to be free. To be too specific about the outlines of a just society is to decide for others what they ought to decide for themselves. The technological mechanism comes benignly short of this smugness. It provides merely the *opportunity* to do what we want.

But--and here is the critical question for the liberal egalitarian--do the previously mentioned sorts of critiques exhaust the unpleasant possibilities? Are the primary barriers to freedom posed by technological society really only moral and sociological "blank spots" that readily may be filled in by personal choice? Or are there other perhaps more *concrete* or *structural* barriers that impede choice, and flout the intentions of the individual? Could our "means" actually be getting in our way? Technological advancement seems to be correlated with many signs of sociological sickness, which affect the "well-off" almost as much as the

materially "disadvantaged": high rates of depression, divorce, teenage maladjustment (delinquency, unwanted pregnancy, drugs, apathy), crime, homelessness. Does it seem plausible that these blights are entirely chosen?

In what follows, I hope to establish the existence of a fundamental stratum of *concrete* barriers to choice endemic to technological society which have been given insufficient-to-no attention by previous critics of modern life, not to mention liberal egalitarian thinkers. These barriers are not mere moral lacunae, but real (in principle quantifiable) *spatial* and *temporal* discontinuities in our living environments. They are caused by the specialization of functions necessary for efficiency and affluence in a highly technological and rationalized society; and they are barriers to freedom not only in themselves but also because of the way they necessarily alter the *quality* of our living experience and, moreover, sharply delimit realms of direct personal control within cubicles (the *administrative* problem, to be discussed in a later section). In a word, technological society *compartmentalizes* human life.

I also hope to point out that the existence of these barriers, however grave, hardly requires the wholesale dismantling of the technological system. It is possible to critique, and not eliminate, advanced technology. Certainly technological society is here to stay (barring a catastrophe).

Moreover, modern advances offer undeniable benefits, whatever their drawbacks. What is called for, however, is the promotion, for those who would elect it, of an alternate, more unified way of life exemplified, say, by the Amish, whom I have studied. This more "whole" alternative would coexist with and complement the barriers of technological fragmentation: call it the "whole life." While inefficient in industrial terms, it is highly efficient in its own--namely in providing means, where technological society lacks them, for the individual to choose at once social solidarity, manual and mental skills, and certain moral associations, or other values wanting in technological and highly "rationalized" environments (actually, that last-named commonly used term may be a misnomer, for the result is not all that rational). Moreover, whereas the sort of "whole life" I advocate might have been materially quite insecure or limiting two hundred years ago, today--thanks to a coexistent technology--it is in no danger of falling to the ills often blamed on "backwardness": hunger, plague, famine, objectionably onerous labors, geographic isolation, parochialism, and above all, absence of vocational choice. All these technological society makes obsolete. This means that technological society and the "whole life" need not be adversaries, but *complementary* halves of a greater social whole.

Amish success in the midst of contemporary American society attests to the promise of this mutualism. It also

attests to the fact that *this mutualism goes both ways*. For those who would choose to remain ensconced in technological society--presumably a majority--the existence of "non-technologized" pockets offers tremendous benefits. The Amish even now can be considered a "public good" offering generalized advantages even to lovers of technology: benefits such as soil and resource conservation, historic preservation, relief of social agency rolls, insurance in case of a catastrophe, and so forth. If there were more people living like the Amish--even if not you or I--we all would be better off.

The question remains: how can we justly promote such a modified scheme? But more pressing for now, what in greater detail are the obstacles which technological society poses to freedom and justice? And in what way do these obstacles expose the shortcomings of modern liberal egalitarian thought? Since Rawls's theory has received perhaps greatest attention, since it is worked out so thoroughly, and since it is perhaps the most scrupulous of any in preserving equal rights and opportunities for individuals and correcting for the caprices of the market and of chance, it seems natural to focus on it. (Mention of other political philosophers such as Sen and Dworkin will come in as need be).

This essay will have six parts: first, an overview of the unnoticed barriers to freedom erected by technological society (17 pages); second, a demonstration of the inadequacy

of Rawlsian political philosophy at dealing with such barriers (23 pages); third, as a foil illuminating technological society and allowing an appreciation of the more "whole" alternative and its feasibility, an extended exposition of Amish life (39 pages--this part will have two main sections: one dwelling on the spatial, temporal, and qualitative unity or "efficiency" of the "whole life" [10 pages]; the other, on the greater room this advantage gives autonomy--that is, greater direct personal control over the factors shaping one's destiny [29 pages]; all bearing in mind some of the challenges and defects of Amish life); fourth, in order to give technological society its "fair" shake, an exposition of its benefits complementing the "whole life" (four pages); fifth, to round out the presentation, the benefits of the "whole life" complementing technological society, showing that the two can reinforce, and not antagonize, each other (five pages); finally, to remove fears that the "whole life" is practically unattainable in this age, some specific proposals on policy (twelve pages).

The movement of the writing, then, goes like this: first, to show the problem of fragmented living and the liberal failure to come to terms with it; then, to show the Amish antithesis of the problem and some of its own problems; next, how both kinds of living, in creative combination, with their problems, offer each other what each lacks; and finally, how we can bring about a not-unfeasible resolution.

Section I

The Barriers of Compartmentalization.

Compartmentalization is taken for granted as a "natural" result of advanced technological life in modern times. Every society has some degree of compartmentalization, after all, and even ours has extended itself by a gradual development. It would almost seem as innocuous and familiar as the trees in our front yard. No one seems to be looking, however, at the forest. Taken in their entirety, the many extra compartments of our technological landscape add up to a large barrier. Like woods or a hedge, their simple physical presence gets in our way. They are just as real and cumbersome as any brick wall--and many of them in fact are contained within brick walls. Our modern attitude, for all its seeming "materialism," is surprisingly "spiritualistic" on this matter: it all but denies the physical reality of these obvious obstacles. Perhaps as beneficiaries of so much technology, we have been trained to hold in contempt the impediments of space and time, and treat them as if they didn't exist.

Nevertheless, they exist, and even ironically are created in part by the very technology that is supposed to be eliminating them. They operate along the following dimensions:

1. *Spatial*. When life is divided across space, it is *less handy*. Like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that have been scattered across the room, the parts of our lives are more trouble to assemble--require more running around--than if they remained in one place. In contemporary America, when all the costs are factored in, the average citizen (who cannot wink himself from here to there) spends one quarter of a working year in real travel time. This period takes into account time that must be spent working simply to pay for transportation costs. In effect, eight hours a day during the months of January, February, and March are devoted to getting from point "A" to point "B." This brings us to a related barrier.

2. *Temporal*. When activities or aspects of life are divided across space, they must also be divided across time. They cannot be engaged in simultaneously. This means that life in an overly compartmentalized society is *less dense*. The Amish farmer is able to exercise his body, enjoy natural beauty, practice manual skills, teach skills to his children, socialize, manage a complex enterprise, and earn a living *all at once*. For the average American to do the same things would take a tremendous amount more time. Observe that, in spite of the wonderful "time-saving" devices modern technology has bequeathed on us, we complain that life is "hectic" and we never seem to have enough time to do what we want. This complaint reveals that most of our time is not

really "rich" time that we can savor, but "threadbare" time--relatively unfilled time--that we must "get over with" to move onto the next thing.

3. *Qualitative.* An integrated whole is different in quality from the mere sum of its parts. A fragmented life somehow often can be less smooth, "rich," or meaningful--therefore *less digestible* an experience. It is far easier and more pleasant to eat a cake than lumps of flour, sugar, salt, egg, and milk consumed consecutively. But when compartmentalization goes to an extreme, we seem to find ourselves frequently doing the latter rather than the former.

Viewed on these lines, spatial, temporal, and qualitative, compartmentalization I think constitutes a formidable general barrier to human freedom. Taking still another dimension, which I will call *administrative*, compartmentalization can be seen directly to reduce individual autonomy and responsibility by shrinking spheres of personal influence to minuscule proportions. But I will save a discussion of this problem for Section III, part 2, where it will receive special and expanded attention.

Who feels the pinch most? For many, to be sure, fragmentation at the same time may provide great advantages. Besides overall material wealth, achieved through greater efficiency, it increases opportunities to excel in innumerable highly specialized skills. The concert pianist may with no

regrets spend half his waking hours in a practice room--literally a small cubicle. On the other hand, for many others, this splintering of living activities ironically may reduce opportunities in many vital respects. At least four or five groups are significantly affected. These groups overlap, yet remain analytically distinct:

1. Those who consciously wish to lead a whole life, that is, an integrated, well-rounded, perhaps strikingly "unambitious" life like that of the Amish farmer that I will describe below. (This may be a small group).

2. Anyone not explicitly seeking such radical holism but still attempting to find fulfillment in more than a single dimension of personal development--say in areas like mental and manual skill, or social solidarity hinted at above. (This may be the vast majority of people).

3. Those who, for whatever reasons, may be prone to the psychological and social ills which seems to be caused or exacerbated by industrial fragmentation. These ills, again, include high rates of depression, divorce, teenage maladjustment, crime, and homelessness. (This is probably a sizable minority, or even majority, encompassing both rich and poor alike, and it suffers very intensely).

4. Those who, whatever goals they seek, are relatively less adroit at navigating among the spatially and temporally disjoint compartments (home, work, school, store, gym, church, nature preserve) of industrial society. (This is an

indeterminate group but is singularly disadvantaged).

5. Subordinates in large organizations (almost everyone--this problem will be covered, again, in Section III, part 2).

How specialization leads to compartmentalization.

Compartmentalization is the chief problem I am concerned with, and it occurs when activities or aspects of life that could be combined and integrated so as to yield, in one time and place, a single experiential whole are instead separated in any of these respects.

Specialization occurs when someone or some group develops facility in a certain activity to the exclusion of other activities. Specialization is often called "the division of labor" and is commonly used as a way of raising economic productivity or the efficiency or excellence (in a narrow sense) of any human pursuit or dimension of life.

Compartmentalization and specialization are thus not interchangeable terms. The former refers to spatial, temporal, and experiential discontinuities, the latter to human purposes, plans, and projects as these narrow. Yet the two are closely connected. The former tends to be the consequence or the *experiential implication* of the latter.

Now it is possible that a specialist might still combine his exacting pursuit with other valuable activities, yielding out of all of them a single greater experiential whole. A

highly skilled shoemaker who is incompetent at all other jobs nonetheless might be able to cut leather soles while working as a team with his wife, children, and next-door neighbors as they are seated on the front lawn discussing philosophy and enjoying the beauty of the surrounding woods and chirping birds--all, perhaps, as an expression of deeply felt religious beliefs. Yes, specialization without undue compartmentalization is possible. In fact, a certain degree of specialization--and even compartmentalization--is necessary and beneficial to life.

The catch is, however, that in order to specialize (by definition) one must exclude aspects of life which may detract from or be incompatible with the selected specialty. In proportion as one strives to specialize, past a certain balancing point the chances increase that these aspects will be driven out. Although it is still quite possible that some will remain perfectly complementary with the specialty--for example, breathing with automobile assembly-line work--nevertheless there is no obvious way in principle to ascertain in advance *which* may be at risk. Therefore all are (even breathing is endangered in some sweatshops). One must look, it seems, case by case. For example, while the automobile assembly-line worker may still breathe, he may not include his eight-, six-, and four-year old daughter and sons in his work without reducing the efficiency which the specialized work environment was originally set up to

promote. The result--because children now stay at home instead--is *de facto* compartmentalization: fatherhood is split from work.

Thus (past a certain mean point) specialization *tends* to, but need not always in a particular case or respect, result in compartmentalization. When these modifications reach detrimental levels, they can be labelled *over-compartmentalization* and *over-specialization*.

Is life in a compartmentalized milieu mandatory? Compartmentalization follows from specialization. But what does specialization follow from, and is it mandatory in an (unremedied) industrial society, hence, for example, in a theory such as Rawls's that accommodates such industrialism? Do we have to be specialists, hence "compartmentalists?" Must we be encumbered by these barriers? Hence, are whole-life seekers or other victims of such strictures truly being "discriminated against?"

The obvious success of Amish practices suggests not. But the Amish enjoy special political privileges and cultural assets that the rest of us now lack and would still lack without significant changes (these assets will be described below). For an individual or even a group to set off and attempt to live like the Amish without these advantages would be a tall order indeed, if not an unattainable one. I will attempt to describe the most obvious economic obstacle

confronting a hypothetical non-Amish whole-life seeker--namely, competition from specialists--in a later section (when discussing Rawls's theory and the imperatives of competition in an increasingly specialized marketplace--pp.38-40 below). Then, the answer appears that without special assistance, the Amish-emulator is doomed.

As we shall see still further on, however, it is not necessary to answer this question once and for all; only to raise it hypothetically. For in any event (as we shall see), counting the "whole life" as a *bona fide* public good will obviate the need for such an absolute determination, which in principle and in fact may be impossible to arrive at. A "public good" provides grounds for public assistance independent from those of "discrimination."

Nonetheless, in the last analysis, even if it is possible for non-Amish people to escape the clutches of the present barriers to the "whole life," it seems clear they could do so only with extraordinary effort. It is significant if this is indeed the case.

Secondary effects of compartmentalization. As if compartmentalization, taken as a general barrier to opportunity, were not bad enough in itself, it brings on secondary effects, as hinted, that intensify the hardships for certain susceptible (possibly overlapping) constituencies, or at least does so apparently. I want to suggest that it has

contributed--(again, without anyone's choosing this contribution)--to, among other things, the severest psychological and social ills of the day. (These contributions will be described below). Let me underscore, however, that it is not the burden of this paper to prove a causal connection between the barriers of compartmentalization and modern social maladies, only to suggest the connection. It appears to be a strong possibility from consideration of the obvious facts and observations of relevant experts. Still, even this possibility is enough for my purposes. For either we can assume the truth of it pending empirical verification, and build the remaining argument contingently. Or, more likely, since such verification may never come or may not be considered incontrovertible if it does, then we still assume the truth of it, only now on the grounds that, given our very uncertainty, the only safe course is to assume such a connection. When human lives are dangling in the balance, better safe than sorry. Error on the negative side carries no risks (as we shall later see for policy purposes) but error in the optimistic direction is a catastrophe.

Depression: Us vs. the Amish. There have been many studies performed attempting to measure the levels of psychological well-being in American society, but one in particular may be illuminating given the purpose of this paper. Studying and interviewing them closely over a period

of ten years, psychiatrist Janice Egeland found that the 12,000 Amish people living in and around Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, suffered unipolar depression (sometimes called "common cold" depression) at a rate that turns out to be five to ten times lower than that of a comparable group in Baltimore, Maryland.¹ Such depression, which appears induced to a significant degree by environmental factors, is to be distinguished from the more severe, biologically triggered "bipolar," which the Amish suffered at a rate equal to Baltimore residents. Thus, if we can take the level of "common cold" depression as a measure, the Amish appear psychologically more healthy than the rest of us. What makes the Amish worthy of special scrutiny is the marked difference of the basic socioeconomic structure of their subculture from that of the larger society around them. Moreover, three summers' experience working on two separate Amish farms (one near Lancaster) has given me detailed first-hand knowledge of this structure--which is "whole" rather than compartmentalized. Thus, at hand is a good opportunity for comparison and

¹J. A. Egeland and A. M. Hostetter, "Amish Study I: Affective disorders among the Amish, 1976-80," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, (1983, v.140), pp.56-61. Note also: Martin Seligman has made the comparison to Baltimore in his "Why is there so much depression today? The waxing of the individual and the waning of the commons," *The G. Stanley Hall Lecture Series* (Washington D. C.: 1988).

potential correlation.²

Why, in more detail, would we be more depressed than the Amish? Of course, this malady probably has multiple causes, no same combination of which may apply in a single case. Nevertheless, a couple of the prime causes suggested by Martin Seligman, who has drawn attention to the Amish attainment, seem to resonate with the problem of the compartmentalized barriers I have been describing. "Common cold" depression, he says, is caused in part by a condition of "learned helplessness," a state in which "the individual finds himself helpless to achieve his goals or to escape his frustrations."³

If I have made one point so far, it is that compartmentaliz-

²Some convergent findings strongly reinforce the connection between socio-economics and depression levels. For as Seligman points out (ibid.) modern depression rates are much higher evidently than not only those of the Amish but also those of Americans who lived earlier in this century, when socioeconomic structures everywhere were more Amish-like.

³Op. cit., p.23. Yet Seligman seems to follow another track when providing his overall explanation of Amish success. He argues that their Protestant asceticism and highly defined social roles have created a "minimal self" that turns its attentions away from maximizing its own satisfactions and toward meeting the needs of others and obeying duty and custom--hence his decrying of the "waning of the commons" in modern life. I would second this account (and my support comes below in my account of how the Amish reconcile their individual choices through religion--see p.68ff). Yet I would point out it can only go so far. An army or a totalitarian state is also highly indoctrinated and regimented, and often its members selflessly oriented. Amish social codes, from my direct personal observations, while wonderfully salutary in certain respects, in certain others may go too far and actually constitute a cause of mental anguish and/or paranoia for certain Amish people. Thus, to an extent it may be that the Amish are healthy in spite of these factors, not because of them. This would then point strongly to a supplementary explanation to Seligman's--one, I would add, that reveals the freedoms rather than the confinements of the Amish.

ation makes it more difficult for (to quote Seligman) "the individual. . . to achieve his goals." A modern citizen must fumble and bumble, dart and wend, among a staggeringly disunited array of spheres of human activity to piece together a life--or just to get through a day. Could these obstacles do anything but add to the modern person's sense of "helplessness?"

Interestingly (if I may anticipate a bit) it may be useful to quote Rawls on the same point: "We can think of a person as being happy when he is in the way of a successful execution (more or less) of a rational plan of life drawn up under (more or less) favorable conditions, and he is reasonably confident that his plan can be carried through."⁴ A vital assumption here is "(more or less) favorable conditions." If compartmentalization weakens this assumption, which it must for it imposes the barriers described above, then this makes for a clear case for the increase of unhappiness (of which a risen depression rate is assumed to be one indicator). Rawls, then, might not find it hard to agree with Seligman.

Now, if we go one step further and insert certain key goals ("values" or "functionings") into the sought plans, we see even more reason for the thwarting of life plans--hence for depression. At one level, it might not really matter

⁴*A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Belknap Press, 1971), p.409.

which goals to insert, because we are testing for differences in the level of integration. Taken as mere "markers," one will serve as well as another in tracing its accessibility given the socio-economic structure. Yet at another level, the particular goods used do make a difference. There are certain goods that appear, at least at a distance, to be what most people seek in life and would say "mean the most to them." Seligman, for one, says that attachment to family and community is a key safeguard against depression.⁵ Now subject to the same compartmentalizing tendencies that isolate other values, these, too, would be relatively harder to realize.

As for the other goals of possible secondary importance, it is suggestive that psychiatric hospitals make it a practice to incorporate arts and handicrafts, as well as physical exercise in their patients' rehabilitation programs. (The Menninger Foundation employs these methods). All these kinds of humanizing pastimes, too, (if available at all) are contained in the separate cubicles we must try to integrate in leading our modern lives.

Again, it is interesting to compare Rawls. Appropriately, his list of what he calls "human goods" or "familiar values" contains the following: "personal affection and friendship, meaningful work and social cooperation, the pursuit of knowledge and the fashioning and

⁵Op. cit., p.2, p.23.

contemplation of beautiful objects."⁶ These echo or at least significantly overlap the kinds of values mentioned above, not to mention the notions of social solidarity, mental and manual skills, and perhaps moral vitality alluded to in the introduction. For the sake of uniformity and since several items seem to be either redundant or derivative of simpler elements anyway, I would reduce Rawls's list to the following: "personal affection, and aesthetic and intellectual engagement" (the latter two would encompass everything from work to poetic and philosophical contemplation). I would also include one additional item, for reasons that will become obvious if they are not already: physical invigoration.

Since he says these values occupy "an important if not central place in our life,"⁷ it seems reasonable to assume that Rawls, again, would not find it hard to agree, at an implicit level, with psychiatric personnel on some of the most searing sources of human unhappiness. The failure to realize these, as opposed to other values, could well intensify the frustration--or perhaps the depression--that might be suffered by someone having difficulty juggling the pieces of his life.

Moreover, it is convenient to isolate these values because they are common and thus easy to trace: they prevail also among the Amish. Considering their importance in life,

⁶*A Theory of Justice*, op. cit., p.425.

⁷*Ibid.*, p.425.

this is no coincidence. It will be most helpful to refer to this list whether discussing depression or not. When turning to the Amish later in this essay, thus keep in mind how the absence of compartmentalization would alleviate two possible sources of discontent, or more gravely, depression: first, removing barriers to an individual's achieving any goals; second, removing barriers to the achievement of *generally valued and psychologically salutary goals*.⁸

All this, at any rate, is to suggest that, in some respect or other, over-compartmentalization quite conceivably lists among important factors contributing to the modern plague of depression.

Other Social Ills. Before proceeding to an examination of the Rawlsian response, however, consider some other possible effects of fragmented life. For one, compartmentalization seems least of all suited to children. (I would suggest that the pronounced and rising signs of psychological maladjustment they exhibit--the delinquency,

⁸By now the difference between my emphasis and a Marxian one should be clearer: fragmentation in life as a whole, not merely at the work place. Yet Marx may have had the former in the back of his mind all along. Once the shackles of capitalism are thrown off under communism, then one might freely "hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening [and] criticize after dinner" to avoid "a particular, exclusive sphere of activity." The communist sounds startlingly similar to an Amish farmer. See Marx's *German Ideology* in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Tucker ed., New York: Norton, 1978, p.160.

drugs, pregnancy, and sheer apathy--are no accident⁹). Since they are not yet of sufficient age to execute a life-plan of their own, they are determined largely by that of the parents. But in their parents' lives they are put in only one compartment--home life. From their parents' point of view, they constitute another separate effort that must be exerted out of joint with all the other disjointed efforts. The result is less parental attention. Children increasingly are turned over to specialists and specialized institutions, for whom and for which, by definition, the children represent "students" or "clients"--not so much whole persons with a gamut of psychological needs which require the most careful attention in delicate formative years. Can teachers, day-care supervisors, or peers really fulfill the functions of parents (or other older close relatives) in such areas as love and character-building?

The peer group has become a default substitute for the family in the world of modern youth, but a substitute of dubious value indeed. In the more extreme form, the youth gang becomes a micro-substitute for the whole society, with its own code of laws, social hierarchy, territorial

⁹For a thorough but readable account, see Urie Bronfenbrenner, "The Origins of Alienation," *Scientific American*, (January 1974), pp.52-61. Is this account dated? Actually, the article is valuable in this very respect because, since it was written, the very tendencies it outlines have starkly worsened. See also "The Split Society: Children vs. Adults," in *The End of Innocence*, ed. Charles M. Haar, 1974.

boundaries, and "national defense system." This should be no surprise since not only the family, but the social whole in which it is imbedded, has been broken down.

And to talk about children is really to talk about adults--for who are they but grown up children? The level of psychological or social adjustment of adults to an important extent can be only the reflection of the psychological or sociological conditions they experienced as children. Depressed or maladjusted children can make for depressed or maladjusted grown-ups. It would be impossible really to measure how many of the grave social ills of a society--say, as in ours, the high rates of crime, homelessness, poverty, and drug or alcohol addiction alluded to several times above--have their origins in poor family and neighborhood life. And yet those origins appear to be undeniable. If we fail often to recognize this simple connection, that may merely reflect itself a social fact: the rigid age-compartmentalization found in modern society. In particular, the question needs to be asked: will a child relegated to a single parcel, out of many, in the lives of the adults who oversee him or her, grow up adept at juggling the many compartments it takes to succeed in adulthood? In youth may well be sown the seed of its own frustration. Child psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner indeed argues that to avoid alienation, children need to be involved all along in the whole of the adults' world in the course of becoming adults

themselves. We become human, he says, only by the fullest possible contact with other, primarily older, humans. Modern "split" social arrangements drastically dilute the richness of such contacts.¹⁰

Compounding the difficulties for youth is the modern tragedy of divorce. As if not bad enough for the parents, it has been said that a growing child experiences divorce as a death, made perhaps worse by the blame a child instinctively places on himself for the misfortune. While "underdeveloped" societies suffer high rates of infant mortality, in this sense "developed" countries are blighted by "parental mortality." But divorce itself would seem, again, an unchosen consequence in part of compartmentalization. The divorce of man and wife in the modern world, it could be argued (and will appear plainer by contrast when examining the Amish) began with the divorce of the father's work interests from those of the mother and household, and the new reliance of the marital bond solely on the capability to sustain a romantic feeling over time through every hardship and change of life, rather than on more complex holistic ties and supports. Put another way, modern marital interactions have been assigned a box--the one called "home life." This leaves them relatively unreinforced.

Now, how well can liberal egalitarian theory accommodate all these infelicities (basic structural and secondary)?

¹⁰Ibid., esp. "The Split Society. . ."

Section II

Rawls and the unfairnesses of compartmentalization. In his *Theory of Justice* and subsequent articles, philosopher John Rawls elaborates the theoretical physiology of a fair society.¹¹ Each person is to have a fair chance to pursue his or her own vision of the good life and in a way that he or she sees fit. No single comprehensive moral doctrine may serve as a basis for justice; instead the basic social structure is arranged so as to provide the *means* whereby individuals can enact their own distinctive goals and ideals. These means Rawls calls "primary goods," and they include "rights and liberties, powers and opportunities, income and wealth." "These goods," Rawls says, "normally have a use whatever a person's rational plan of life."¹² Moreover, their distribution must fulfill Rawls's stipulation of fairness: "justice as fairness requires that all primary social goods be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution would be to everyone's advantage."¹³ (He revises this statement further to make inequality benefit most the least well off. The

¹¹Op. cit.

¹²Ibid., p.62.

¹³Ibid., p.150.

revised statement is known as the "difference principle."¹⁴⁾

That last qualification may seem a bit curious. How could "an unequal distribution. . . be to everyone's advantage"? One way Rawls himself mentions--which arguably prevails in a modern technological society to which his theory applies--is by providing monetary incentives to entrepreneurs and inventors, say, to build factories and produce commodities which raise the overall level of wealth and opportunity, thus (seemingly) improving *everyone's* lot in these respects. Rawls's allowance thus makes room for the bonanzas that can flow from personal industry and initiative when these are well rewarded.

But if Rawls sanctions these possible benefits of technological society, he fails, as mentioned, correspondingly to institute adequate safeguards against at least one important detriment. The same industrial system that creates wealth and jobs, again, fragments human life. Here I do not refer merely to the over-specialization in the work place--part of a predicament (that Marx focused on) of the factory worker whose tasks were broken down into meaningless bits. Rawls has explicitly (if fleetingly) addressed this part of the Marxian objection.¹⁵ What Rawls, however, omits to point out and what I view as a worse contemporary threat, again, is

¹⁴Ibid., p.83 and p.302.

¹⁵Ibid., p.529.

that larger fragmentation of which the fragmented job is only a piece (yet this larger fragmentation is still driven to an extent by industry and economics, I suspect. See pp.38-40 below). In fact, it would be possible in this scenario for someone to enjoy utter fulfillment at work, yet still suffer from an overall "environmental schizophrenia." Modern life is divided artificially into compartments which we all know as "home," "work," "school," "gymnasium," and "church," among others. The separations are spatial, temporal, and qualitative, and they all contribute to the difficulty for any person of integrating the contents of the sundry cubicles. Among the downtrodden in particular are certain (overlapping) groups named above that have special reason to prize wholeness.

A Rawlsian counterargument of "limited social space" and a response. It might be countered that, despite appearances, the debilitating factors in Rawls's social structure would affect everyone more or less equally, or in a manner that could be deemed fair under the circumstances. Rawls has after all advocated "fair shares" of primary goods for every citizen, thus furthering the fairness of life-prospects--opportunities to advance individuals' own conceptions of the good. And as I have hinted, the widening of these opportunities depends to an extent on the same forces that fragment life. The fragmentation could thus be viewed as an

unavoidable side-effect of fair procedure.

Furthermore, Rawls's plan respects the "general fact" of pluralism in modern society, which precludes the establishment of any single comprehensive moral doctrine as a guiding ideal. Perhaps if this "fact" were otherwise, a system more favorable to integration and psychological and social health might be desirable. A concession Rawls makes tempts us with the possibility: "We may indeed lament the limited space, as it were, of social worlds, and of ours in particular, and we may regret some of the inevitable effects of our culture and social structure. As Sir Isaiah Berlin has long maintained (it is one of his fundamental themes), there is no social world without loss."¹⁶ Thus, what we end up with may be far from the best of all possible worlds, but at least, given the facts, it is the lesser of evils. And if some impediments to certain modes of living are built into the Rawlsian system, we all face the same impediments.

So might run a plausible counterargument. Maybe if only the opportunity to enjoy what I call a "whole life" were at stake, the reply would be satisfactory. Maybe, maybe not. One wonders if all "facts" of modern society are equally immutable. And indeed later in this paper I will attempt to show that seemingly unavoidable economic pressures can be counterbalanced--that even now certain policy makers (namely

¹⁶"Priority of the Right and Ideas of the Good," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 17:4, p.265.

in the agricultural sphere) recognize the value of a "whole life" and have for years been creating special economic oases for it. Their policies have not worked because the recognition is only partial, and so the measures self-contradictory and self-defeating. A clearer vision would mean more effective policy. And more avenues to wholeness.

At the same time, when clinical depression or other acute social ills enters the picture, the implications are most stark and cannot go unaddressed, for reasons that will be described below. Thus, whether wholeness is sought, or sickness risked, justice is in jeopardy.

Modern compartmentalization and Rawls, revisited. Before looking in more detail again at these groups stymied by the walls of compartmentalization, it is necessary to determine to what extent a thinker like Rawls assumes and incorporates it in his theory. The *Theory of Justice* depends of course on at least some division of labor in society. For without it we would all be farmers (or given a low population-density, possibly hunter-gatherers), and there would be no meaning to the freedom to choose a life-plan. The question, then, is how much specialization and whether it is optional or unavoidable. (I will assume that specialization leads to compartmentalization in the way described above, pp.17-19).

I suspect Rawls did not consider this much of an issue. Such answer as he provides is conveyed in the sections titled

"The Aristotelian Principle" and "The Idea of a Social Union"¹⁷ but largely implicitly or perhaps inadvertently. He seems both to approve and encourage existing modern specialization to a significant extent (enough to raise a three-fold inconvenience--cf. pp.14-15 above) and to discourage or even rule out low-specialization alternatives. Yet these results come more by default than intent, I believe.¹⁸ Rawls does not so much mandate over-compartmentalization as fail to institute sufficient safeguards against it, or even to identify it as a problem.

This incaution is partly evident in his presentation of the Aristotelian Principle:

. . . other things equal, human beings enjoy the exercise of their realized capacities (their innate or trained abilities) and this enjoyment increases the more the capacity is realized, or the greater its complexity. The intuitive idea here is that human beings take more pleasure in doing something as they become more proficient at it, and of two activities they do equally well, they prefer the one calling on a larger repertoire of more intricate and subtle discriminations.¹⁹

Rawls counts the Aristotelian Principle among the "general facts" of life and society.²⁰ It is not a human good or rather, a concept of the good life, in itself, but "part of the background that regulates . . . judgements" of the

¹⁷Op. cit., pp.424-33, pp.520-29.

¹⁸This section is condensed from my unpublished paper "The Aristotelian Principle."

¹⁹Ibid., p.426.

²⁰Ibid., p.432.

good,²¹ a structural feature of normal human psychological and biological development.²² At first glance, these claims seem common-sensical affirmations of a healthy and beneficial human tendency (and I myself have indicated the necessity of a certain amount of specialization, p.18).

Yet if Rawls had been attentive to the dangers associated with fragmentation or the desires of some to be well-rounded, he perhaps would have shaded the description differently. As things stand, rather than acquiring a knack or general "know-how" for various skills and perhaps merely maintain them in an integrated balance like the Amish farmer or his wife, the person living in keeping with the principle would de-emphasize the several pursuits and focus on one or few. Only in this way, after all, can that person attain the virtuosity which Rawls describes.

For the cut-off point for further aspiration is when we begin to exceed "innate capacities" and must overcome "increasing strains of learning as the activity becomes more strenuous and difficult." "Natural talents," he says, "have an upward bound."²³ But clearly the limit imposed upon someone like the Amish farmer is not innate capacity. He could readily plunge himself into perfecting any or all of the individual tasks if he so chose without undergoing undue

²¹Ibid., p.432.

²²Ibid., p.427.

²³Ibid., p.428.

"hardships" to his person.²⁴ Rather, the limit is imposed by the activities themselves--something *external* to him--which, if they are to survive as a self-reinforcing group, must be maintained in a balance or more-or-less unchanging golden proportion. If anything, the farmer's difficulties would lie in *keeping* himself from accentuating his various skills--in overcoming the temptation to specialize. This farmer would savor the challenge of all-around mediocrity--of staying the way he is. (Interestingly, one of the most common infringements of Amish community regulations which they call their *Ordnung* occurs because of the specializing temptation).

Rawls makes the Aristotelian Principle optional, however, so in fact it is not essential enough to the *Theory* to exclude the more all-around approaches I have described.

Economics. Yet at one point, Rawls connects it closely to other "plain facts," and these "facts" are basic to his theory (and as we shall see, thus render his stipulation of "other things equal,"²⁵ inherently hard to meet). Accordingly, they much more directly determine the course of life and conceptions of the good. The "facts" appear principally to be economic ones:

²⁴Ibid., p.428.

²⁵Ibid., p.426.

Not only is there a tendency in this direction [toward increasing complexity] postulated by the Aristotelian Principle, but the plain facts of social interdependency and the nature of our interests more narrowly construed incline us in the same way.²⁶

Presumably when Rawls speaks of "our interests more narrowly construed," he is talking, at least in part, of interests as they fit into the economic system--a large portion of the realm of more settled and inescapable "general facts" on which Rawls builds his theory. According to him, for efficiency's sake (and he employs Pareto efficiency) the best economic arrangement, whether property is privately owned or not, is the competitive free market. True, efficiency is supposed to be subordinate to Rawls's two principles of justice, but unless the conflict I am trying to identify is brought to the surface, they will be unintentionally violated. In the absence of recognition of a disharmony with fairness, what the (unrevised) Aristotelian Principle does not force on us, economics may. Pressures of competition and mechanical specialization--driven in part by personal industry and economic incentives that Rawls admits and would, it seems, unequally reward (see above p.32), have hastened already in the United States the demise of many non-specialized practices, and notable in the area of farming. The so-called "agri-businessman" now does with virtuosic intensity in his own area of specialization what a husbandman

²⁶Ibid., pp.428-9.

does merely satisfactorily amongst his several more amateurish tasks. The result is often logical matter of course: he is outflanked by "conquerors" and must follow suit and specialize, or perish. Thus, economic "facts" supersede Rawls's more elevating commendations of the Aristotelian Principle. Although implicitly Rawls's principles of fairness may rule out this misfortune (because, say, unequal financial rewards ought to make everyone better off), we ought explicitly be made aware of the dangers to avoid inadvertent or unrecognized injustices--especially in the trade-off between productivity and pursuit of the "whole life."

Ronald Dworkin, in an alternate theory of liberal egalitarianism, presents an interestingly expanded role for the free market, which, however, places in perhaps greater jeopardy opportunities for the unambitious whole-life seeker. For Dworkin, the market is not only the economic context of fair distribution--it is the *mechanism* of fair distribution, at least if subject to certain modifications which offset the unfair advantages of certain categories of luck and natural talents. The market serves this purpose, says, Dworkin, because it takes into account automatically the costs of one's choices in terms of how they affect everyone else. Thus it gives choices, as it were, a "just price." It also, unlike such an inflexible-seeming schema as is implied in Rawls's Difference Principle (which seems to focus on the quantities of material resources which people end up

holding), is perfectly suited to the inordinately various tastes, preferences, and capabilities that guide individuals in their pursuit of what they hope will make them happy. A person, by virtue of the subtleties in his make-up, may well prefer more leisure time to some arbitrary level of income. Rawls, he implies, gives "equal treatment" when he should treat each "as an equal." The first approach seems to yoke everyone to a universal formula of end-state material means, whereas the second respects the huge differences in persons' consumptive tastes and choices of pastime. In effect, Dworkin argues, the second approach more genuinely respects the autonomy of the individual in leading his own life.

It may sound, then, as if Dworkin would have more room for the more unambitious agrarian I have described since what that putterer seeks is not so much material advantages as a proper balance among material and non-material dimensions of life. But one should not move so fast. For if what I have remarked above is correct, then--since what the agrarian can "afford" to do may all depend on what everyone else is doing (instead of on a universal distributional formula)--the slow homebody may have "priced" his mediocrity out of the market. The net effect of everyone else's preferences may be to exclude his preferences: to make their costs prohibitively expensive. This seems to be, in fact, the likelihood as I have depicted it above. This is not a

definite possibility, to be sure, but all the same it is a highly conceivable one, and since it all depends on forces external to the party in question, this person's fate is precarious. Dworkin replaces "rigidity" with uncertainty.

Dworkin does allude, however, to other possible grounds on which such a farmer's life may be protected--namely the grounds of a "public good"--but I will discuss this notion later.²⁷

The compartments: decreasing the accessibility of the "whole life" and (quite possibly) the prospects of psychological and sociological health. And thus we come again--maybe whether we want to or not--to modern specialized society. Bear in mind in what follows, however, that the compartmentalization and inconvenience that result are only comparative, and are apparent only when set against the relative unity of a group like the Amish--a unity that doubtless pales in turn, on comparison with that of other groups (and note: it may be possible to have too little compartmentalization too).

Thus, Rawls cannot be gainsaid when he states, in a passage that would seem to accept favorably most modern divisions of labor and of other activities,

²⁷"Liberalism," in *A Matter of Principle* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978). I owe much of this interpretation to the ideas of David O. Brink.

. . . the Aristotelian Principle holds for institutional forms as well as for any other human activity. Seen in this light, a just constitutional order, when adjoined to the smaller social unions of everyday life, provides a framework for these many associations and sets up the most complex and diverse activity of all. In a well-ordered society each person understands the first principles that govern the whole scheme as it is to be carried out over many generations, and all have a settled intention to adhere to these principles in their plan of life. . . .

. . . the public realization of justice is a value of community.²⁸

Rawls even goes so far as to correct "the worst aspects" of the division of labor: "no one need be servilely dependent on others and made to choose between monotonous and routine occupations which are deadening to human thought and sensibility. Each can be offered a variety of tasks so that the different elements of his nature find a suitable expression."²⁹ But as Rawls goes on to say, these allowances still make ample room for myriad other social subdivisions (and there would seem to be an unresolved tension between the assurance made above and the reality of modern economic pressures that seem to be allowed). Thus, Rawls's "union of social unions" nonetheless enwraps a society which is comparatively less internally integrated than the alternative in view.

What does this mean for the individual in pursuit of his good, and in particular, of his "familiar values"? Now, all

²⁸Op. cit., p.529.

²⁹Ibid., p.529.

of the same three or four functionings blent together, say, in Amish work (see p.14 above and next section) are separated. There may be some overlap among compartments, yes, because the loss of integration is *relative*. So when looking at the following specializations (not excluded by Rawls's limits) which are fundamental to the socio-economic structure we are all so familiar with, one is really looking at *tendencies*:

The home specializes in personal affection.

The gymnasium or joggers' track specializes in physical exertion.

The work place specializes (for the fortunate) in rational analysis, judgment, or perhaps creativity.

The classroom or church specializes in the same or somewhat "higher" mental and spiritual concerns.

These are the specializations. What are the compartmentalizations that follow?

The home is intensely personal (or at least is supposed to be), while the work place, church or classroom, and gym are relatively impersonal or even coldly competitive (thus making understandable expressions like "it's a jungle out there"; a "dog-eat-dog world"; a "rat-race.")

Also, the gym is physically invigorating, but, relatively speaking, not the home, work place, or classroom.

Finally, the work place (if fortunate), classroom, or church stimulate rational, creative, and contemplative development; but not the home or the gym (hence those

disparaging descriptions of the housewife as "barefoot and pregnant").

Given the separation of these key "functionings," a relative increase occurs in the three barriers of compartmentalization cited above: absence of handiness, of density, and of unifying consistency. These losses (most concretely, the first two) contribute to the infelicities already mentioned affecting those seeking a "whole life" (whether explicitly or implicitly), and most severely, those susceptible to sundry psychological and social ills.

Related issues: A trade-off between depth and breadth?

One of the key assumptions attached to Rawls's notion of primary goods, which people require to advance their conceptions of the good, is that, since they are considered neutral "means," it is better to have more than less of them. Even if (once the veil of ignorance is removed) recipients ultimately choose not to make use of the extra, the greater amount is said to "enlarge their means for promoting their aims whatever these are."³⁰ As I will attempt to show, this is not as benign an assumption as it may seem. In the social structure realized on its basis, it may work so as to shrink these "means" in some respects while enlarging them; and it may do so at greater cost to some persons than to others.

³⁰Op. cit., p.143.

others. (Admittedly, Rawls includes a *ceteris paribus* clause;³¹ so my critique becomes an identification of some untoward outside factors that would modify the way primary goods are worked out in the theory).

Now one primary good is opportunity,³² and this is surely enhanced not only in the way Rawls specifically emphasizes, namely by keeping "positions and offices open to all."³³ As hinted above (p.35) it is also increased in a way that Rawls does not explicitly stress: by increasing the division of labor, which increases in turn the number and variety of "positions and offices." (Rawls does suppose a "background of diverse opportunities"³⁴). And whether he intends it or not, this second enlargement is performed for him by the stupendous specialization that he allows to issue from his coupling of the Aristotelian Principle to a competitive free market. But then if all this is true, and if my observations on the troublesome tendencies of that specialization are valid, then Rawls fails to draw attention to something else. It is this: as opportunity for life-plans *expands*, the achievable depth of life-plans *shrinks*, insofar as the expansion occurs because of specialization and

³¹Ibid., p.396.

³²Ibid., p.92; p.143.

³³Ibid., p.60.

³⁴Priority. . . , " op. cit., p.257.

compartmentalization, *because the specialization scatters desirable values making them harder to obtain and integrate.* This trade-off may be significant whether or not it results in psychological debilitation, although in this eventuality it displays its most serious ramifications for justice. And thus, depth may be sacrificed for breadth.

Would Sen's substitution of "functionings" and "capability sets" for "primary goods," "values," and alternative "life-plans" be of any help (see also account of Sen below, p.51-2)? Since they are perhaps more sensitive to substantive freedoms, the answer is yes, so far as it goes. A person's "capability set"³⁵ is composed of various "functioning"-bundles, each of which represents a possible life the person could actually attain.³⁶ Although it would be up to the person to carry that life out, there is no grey area between means and a person's ability to make use of those means. Thus if a person's opportunity actually to achieve different lives (capability set) increased in size only by a decrease in the fullness of each actually achievable life (size of the functioning bundle), that trade-off would be detected. The capability set, though larger, would be made up of smaller members. But Sen has not supplied any criteria by

³⁵Only Sen's "well-being freedom" is relevant here, not "agency freedom," so I will not muddy the discussion with the distinction between the two.

³⁶"The Territory of Justice," p.8.

which to decide between breadth and depth of capability, or to consider the significance of a trade-off between these two phenomena. His concern (as noted below) is to correct for individual variation in persons' capacities to make use of "primary goods." Yet since the decrease of depth due to specialization is a social phenomenon, it would diminish *everybody's* capacity. It remains to be seen whether Sen is interested in a generalized trade-off.

A fourth disadvantaged group. Still, Sen's concern points us to an easily overlooked, but possibly staggering, inequality aggravated by an amazing subdivision of labor. I have already mentioned possible injustices dealt to whole-life seekers (both explicit and implicit) and to persons susceptible to certain psychological or sociological ills. There is another overlapping group. This indeterminate constituency would consist of those individuals comparatively less agile in navigating among compartments, "shifting gears," going here and there to meet this or that goal, and not losing their way or presence of mind. It seems highly unlikely that everyone is equally gifted in these skills. The system literally would leave the less-so in the lurch.

Psychological and social ills. Assuming compartmentalization brings on a high risk of an increase in psychological and social pathologies, how well can Rawlsian theory, as it

stands, accommodate these problems? Now that we have a better idea of the degree of compartmentalization in a "Rawlsian society," we are in a better position to examine the secondary effects. Consider now only one possible case, that of depression.

It is the reciprocal trait of psychological states to behave not only as effects or outcomes but as causes or preconditions of behavior themselves. Thus, the depression, say, that may result from a person's inability to attain his life's goals may, in turn, incapacitate that person from further pursuit thereof, and even from any participation in the democratic life of society. The effect would be the same as subtracting a primary good, and it would over time undermine the stability of the system by robbing it of its supporters. In fact, the misfortune *would* subtract what Rawls has called a "natural" primary good, if we use his distinction between this and a "social" primary good.³⁷ But if we go this far, since I am speaking of mental capacity inasmuch as it is or can be directly affected by the basic social structure, then it would be better to call it a full-fledged social primary good. Rawls allows for the eventual possibility of expanding (social) primary goods to include "the absence of physical pain."³⁸ Would he along the same vein accept "the

³⁷*Theory*, p.62.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p.257.

absence of psychological incapacity?" If so, this would seem a corrective, at least at first glance.

Yet in the first place, there are some practical problems. Assuming that such a remedy could be applied only after the ailment surfaced (of course, before that, how could anyone identify the problem?) it is not clear that psychological debilitation can be reversed, whether taken to the degree of moral incapacity or not. Certainly, it could not be with the same sureness as physical pain generally can be. And even if it can be, there is another problem. If we take into account, for instance, the millions or tens of millions of people who appear to be suffering from it in modern societies (it has been said to be the precipitant of a large portion of the increasing homeless population), then it appears there may well not be enough mental health personnel and agencies to go around, particularly of the quality (not of this world) it would take to achieve satisfying recovery in every case. The problem may be more serious still: if the psychological discontent is endemic to the basic socio-economic structure and in part the underlying moral psychology of the *Theory of Justice* (as I am here supposing), then such clinical efforts may be superficial and ineffectual: they would be treating the symptoms and not the disease. For a genuine resolution, it may take some modification of those fundamentals themselves.

Those were the practical complications; there is also at

least one ethical one. This is the notion that we would all share fairly, due to the fair distribution of primary goods, in any psychological consequences of Rawls's envisioned political society. This was the saving grace here postulated that would help make his political conception of justice seem the lesser of evils. Yet few assumptions could be more dubious. It seems highly unlikely that all people are equally naturally susceptible to psychological distress; rather it would appear far more probable that there is a large range in the degrees of such vulnerabilities. (These weaknesses might be owing to genetic, environmental, or elusive temperamental differences--it doesn't matter). A system that is *uniformly* prone to bring out these maladies thereby discriminates against people *more* prone to come down with them. To be sure, Rawls speaks, for example, of "the absence of physical pain" as a potential primary good, and so it appears that a primary good might guarantee a total compensation, regardless of individual differences (and of social impracticalities).

One possible objection to this provision comes from Amartya Sen. He has suggested that in general Rawls's notions of primary goods are at best equivocal, and at worst singly focused on equality of *means* rather than of *freedoms actually to realize* bundles of "functionings" (i.e. "doings" and

"beings").³⁹ Thus they are insensitive to individual differences in the capacity to make use of those means. Thus, for instance, under Rawls it would not be clear to Sen whether, instead of possibly guaranteeing the provision for a full mental recovery they might merely guarantee, say, roughly one visit to a psychiatrist a month for every citizen--a measure that would be superfluous in the case of the mentally well and insufficient in the case of the mentally sick. Yet in his "Reply to Sen" (unpublished) Rawls makes a convincing case that such eventualities would be adequately covered by his theory because, for example, it presupposes certain basic moral capabilities which in turn require minimum health levels. Besides, he says, primary goods are indexed by *expectations*, thus are even more stretchable.

Nevertheless, even if total provision for a full recovery were extended, and even if such were practically feasible in clinical terms, there is another possible objection: an important inequality remains. We are not talking about setting a broken leg or removing an appendix. Again, psychological ailments can be troublingly intractable. Even if possible, recovery can be slow, torturous, and precarious (especially in cases compounded by substance-abuse). Is it fair to ask only some and not others to

³⁹"The Territory of Justice," p.8 and p.23.

undergo such a dangerous ordeal? Would not prevention be fairer? This points to a closer look at what may be the root of the problem, then: social and economic structures presupposed in the *Theory of Justice* and endemic to modern life.

One way better to grasp these problems is in the light of a less-compartmentalized alternative.

Section III -- Part I

The Amish. As the example of the Amish should show, the absence of compartmentalization permits convenience and quality of life in areas where technological society lacks them--namely in handiness, density, and meaningful continuity (digestibility) mentioned above (or rather negatively implied). If I am correct, this felicity not only increases overall liberty (in the special respects I have demarcated), it also decreases damage that might be done to those among the Amish (as with hypothetical extra-Amish parties) susceptible in the various respects described above, or to the prospects of any "whole-life" seekers (explicit or implicit), thus preempting the associated unfairnesses.

Amish time is divided roughly between two activities, work and recreation. These amount to densely interwoven unions of Rawls's "human goods."

I. *Work.*

Personal affection: a) *Husband and wife.* It would (of course) be a mistake to view the traditional Amish home as nothing but a bastion of serenity and social harmony. In the course of three summers' residence as a hand in an Amish home, I've seen Amish fathers quarrel with Amish mothers and Amish children disobey their parents. In the aftermath, I've sat through long evenings of uncomfortable silence. Nevertheless, such breaches in the social fabric tended to be rewoven by the common interests and interrelated tasks that, in part, unite the parental pair. True, there was a clear division of roles, with the man doing the hard physical work and the woman the household and gardening tasks. But since the work took place on the same premises (instead of being spaced miles apart in separate cubicles), it was easy for them to see and feel the necessity and complementarity of the contributions they each were making to the vital enterprise of the household. The wife cooked the meals, but the husband cured the sausage which she served and fixed the sink from which she drew water. The wife washed the clothes, but the husband kept the old-fashioned washing machine and pump in repair. In fact, wife and daughters were always on call to

help in the fields if help was needed. By the end of the season when the crop was ready to be sold and hauled away, it embodied the united efforts of husband, wife, and the children. On the framework formed by these practical interactions, it was only natural for Amish husbands and wives to develop a subtle, unspoken understanding. Although Amish spouses are not known to be emotionally demonstrative in public (from a distance, a typical couple resembles the pair in the *American Gothic*), it was not uncommon in the privacy of the home to witness outward displays of affection. One time, for example, after Father came in from a hard day's work, Mother confronted him saying, "Eric said the hay feels hot in the barn. [Readers should realize that when hay is put away damp, it can spontaneously combust]. Maybe you'd better go look at it." Father gazed at her intently. "Why would I go out and look at hay," he said in a low voice, "when I can stay here and look at you?" There was a lengthy amplification of this amorous negotiation. Cooperation in work was an important thread strengthening the marital bond. Divorce, by the way, is virtually unheard-of among the Amish. (This is a phenomenon probable not explicable on grounds of religion alone, since divorce is low generally speaking among non-industrialized peoples, but nearing the 50% rate among both Protestants and Catholics in the modern West).

b) *Children*. On the farm, Amish parents literally use their work as a way of raising their children, training,

teaching, and nurturing them by their presence and through the disciplined interactions with plants and animals. Conveniently in the process, children become skilled farmers and potential parents themselves, ready to hand down the lessons to the next generation. One day a wagon pulled into the farm overflowing with people. All were members of the Stoltzfus family, and there were at least eight of them. They had come to get some extra seedlings to transplant to their own farm. Three of the children, Emma, Sol, and Sim, were too young to be much good at selecting and uprooting choice plants, so they commandeered me to give them a tour of the farm. I showed them the chickens, the turkeys, the newborn piglets, and the sows. This was much to their fascination. Soon they were asking me where I was from, what I was doing here, and what I did for a living. They were all under age ten, I was twenty-two, and we were having a conversation. Later when weeding in the garden by myself, I suddenly became sensible of the presence of the eight-year-old beside me. He was manfully tugging a weed larger than he was. After I thanked him, he responded, "Work first, then play, and you'll be happy all the day."

c) *Grandparents.* Grandparents usually live on or near the premises, and help out here and there where they can. As important members of the extended family, they provide relations and emotional cushions where the parents may be lacking.

d) *Neighbors*. Amish life would have been inconceivable without a tight meshwork of mutual assistance. In my own experience, not a day passed without some form of barter between neighbors, either in goods or services, or without the accompanying exchange of good spirits. The sorghum and wheat harvests entailed some of the heaviest sustained labor I endured, yet because they occasioned friendly reunions they were also among the most fondly anticipated tasks. Close community ties added support to Amish marriages.

Invigoration: the integrating role of manual work. A common thread tying all of these interactions together is manual work. It might be worthwhile to say a few words about physical drudgery on the farm, in part, to meet some possible criticisms.⁴⁰ I have thus far spent three summers working--often from dawn until dusk--as a live-in farm hand with the Amish. My personal findings significantly modify prevailing stereotypes on the nature of agrarian toil. (I also draw on some survey data).

All human endeavors involve a certain amount of repetition. Farming is no exception. Yet it probably entails less than most common modern occupations. In answer to the question, "Do you enjoy your work so much you have a hard time putting it down?", farmers gave far more "yes" responses than any other working group, including

⁴⁰ *A Theory of Justice*, op. cit., p.429.

"business/professional." And they did so more in 1955 than in 1980. 1955 was a time when far less machinery relieved them of manual work.⁴¹ Amish expert John Hostetler estimates that today, virtually 100 percent of Amish farmers would give an affirmative reply (personal interview).

There may be more than one reason for this surprise. The first thing is the type of repetition. Modern tasks tend to require mental repetition. Farming is physical. This does two things.

To begin with, as it becomes habitual, work actually *frees* up the mind to venture about as it will--in conversation with co-workers, daydreams, appreciation of natural surroundings, contemplation, or perhaps even some misty composite of all four. Or it can simply rest. That is the first advantage of physicality.

In the second place, physical activity is invigorating. It helps circulate blood to every furthest capillary. It relaxes muscles and keeps them limber. It provides--like the heart itself--both nutrition and a sort of rhythm enlivening mental processes. You can even sing to its beat, and some Amish people do! By contrast, sedentary mental repetition can actually jam up the mind while it stymies the physical pulse. (This is one reason why I have my doubts about the so-called "electronic cottage").

⁴¹Norval D. Glenn and Charles N. Weaver, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, (v.46, Winter 1982), pp.459-70.

For both of these reasons, far from an obstacle to personal fulfillments, repetitious work acts as a catalyst of them--a stimulus and framework in which various functionings can be simultaneously overlaid and realized. (It is true that too much onerous physical work can be stunting in every way, but such work is characteristic not of family farms but historically of certain types of inorganic environments, such as mines and certain kinds of manufacture).

As for the second major cause of farmer-satisfaction, besides the *type* of repetition is the *extent*. Because farming is a totalistic occupation, the key principle in play is not specialization, but the opposite: variation. The farmer oversees his own mini-economy. As I see it, the main challenge is not the monotony, but something nearly antithetical: the unpredictability. I was astonished how in my own duties as a hand I rarely did the same job any two days in a week. A society trained as specialists would find it liberating, but also disconcerting, to have to balance and coordinate a diversity of tasks, within a larger agenda set by weather and the seasons. This brings me to the final major category of functionings being traced.

Aesthetic and intellectual engagement. a) The challenge of manager. The judgment of both the Amish farmer and his wife is constantly called upon. Like business managers, they face decisions hour by hour, day by day, week by week, month by month, and year by year, related to the different levels

of their operations as these are affected by the weather and sometimes by market conditions. They conceive and implement the appropriate plans, organize and oversee a crew (both human and non-), and with its help bring those plans to fruition.

b) *Manual skill and creativity.* Unlike many other managers, the farmer frequently weds mental and physical operations, often in ways that call upon refined skills and creativity. This happens not only in certain ordinary chores, but also farm repairs and craft sidelines like cabinetry and carpentry.

c) *Opportunities for contemplation.* There is no way to measure or observe contemplation in the act. However, unless they are unusually demanding, farming or household chores often provide just the kind of mindless physical rhythms which are good undercurrents for mental reflection. And they are often set against a beautiful backdrop of natural scenery accompanied by soothing sounds and pleasant aromas (when away from the pigpen). I can only speak for myself, but while weeding, shelling peas, or driving horses, I frequently drifted off into pleasant daydreams. How large a subset of these were contemplative, however, given the nature of the process, I cannot assess or recollect.

In addition, the slow winter months provide many occasions for fireside reading. But I am anticipating the next section.

II. *Recreation.* Now that the principle is established, there is less need to spend time on examples. In recreation the Amish exhibit the same densely interwoven crosscut of functionings--affective, aesthetic, intellectual--often catalyzed or reinforced by physical movement. We may recognize this confluence ourselves in our own forms of recreation, for the Amish engage in the same kinds we do: fun and games, field sports, singing, dancing, reading, letter-writing, and religious worship (here one additional form of recreation--sleep--often becomes a communal experience!) The complementary relationship of work with recreation should be obvious. The two interlock to form a larger experiential whole through time--the work-rest cycle. Moving from one to the other yields a delicious sense of contrast.

III. *Costs.* To say that the Amish farmer's life abounds in variety and density of experience is not to say it is for everybody. It discourages precisely, for example, the single-minded or highly refined and specialized pursuits which thrive in modern fragmented society. While it may be suitable to cultivating a general wisdom or meditative disposition (Socrates and Jesus were both hand laborers), a full time farmer could hardly lead a simultaneous career as a concert pianist, a professor at a prestigious university, or a laboratory research scientist (though all three could more easily be part-time gardeners). Farmers simply don't have

the time (I doubt the winter off-season would be enough) to devote to maintaining professionalism, and farming areas tend to lack the necessary facilities and personnel. They usually are located far from the cultural or research centers that traditionally have generated these pastimes. Bright Amish youth learn this lesson the hard way. Their talents and wits sometimes find little sustenance amid the wheat shocks and lead them to abandon their heritage (although as we shall see, this may be due less to agrarianism than to an idiosyncratic factor I will discuss below). While a few return to pastoralism after getting an advanced education, others become doctors, professors, and business executives for whom full time agriculture is and incompatible pastime. Contrarily, a city-bred college professor I know tried to lead the "good life" and run a ranch while fulfilling his professional obligations--only to ruin the ranch. The lesson seems to be: the city mouse and country mouse must make up their minds. But they must also have the opportunity to travel on the roads of their own choosing.

Section III -- Part 2

Further depth of choice for the "whole life." So far I have examined the benefits of an integrated life inasmuch as

it affects the ease of *carrying out* choices. I implied that more activities or aspects of life may readily and satisfyingly be indulged in and savored if barriers of compartmentalization (spatial, temporal, and qualitative) are absent--in a word, permitting greater depth of choice.

But I have yet to examine the faculty of choice itself. To what extent can one *make* a choice in the first place? Consider as a backdrop what may be the Achilles tendon of the modern world: why, in our land of opportunity, would it be so difficult for someone without special assistance to begin to lead a life as an unambitious, well-rounded farmer? The pressures from specialized competition are one factor, yes, as we have seen, but what is the source of this impasse? Does intensely technical competition fall within a larger pattern of phenomena related to compartmentalization? And do these phenomena also tend to restrict individuals' capacities to *make* choices? If the answer is yes, then there is even greater cause to suppose, say, Seligman's "learned helplessness" as an explanation of modern depression. But I will let the reader fill in the pieces of that speculation.

How could compartmentalization go hand in hand with inability to *make* choices? The answer I will propose is this: even as it *impedes* the *realization* of sundry goals and values, compartmentalization also *removes* pieces of life from individuals' *direct control*. This is because it places these elements out of reach not only *physically*, but also in the

same stroke, as it were, *administratively*. If, as I argued, compartmentalization is really just the experiential implication of specialization, specialization also implies smaller and smaller "fields" of personal jurisdiction. The focus of one's efforts takes in a smaller and smaller field of controlled elements, and by design or default, other persons or events end up "making decisions" for one, namely in the many areas affecting one's life one is not focusing on--that is, the remainder of one's life. A life of small, specialized activities is prey to the commands and strictures of immense, compartmentalized organizations (to which these activities are designedly subordinated) and to the imperatives of the marketplace (a system representing the uneasy marriage of limited economic planning and happenstance).

The word "field" is meant here in part literally. Long ago Thomas Jefferson contrasted the self-mastery of the independent country yeoman with the subservience of the city laborer. At root, I believe, he was forewarning of life of specialized pastimes in which other persons (often hidden from view) or adventitious circumstance orchestrated and effectively controlled huge aspects of an individual's destiny. And today, as if in fulfillment of Jefferson's admonition, even upper-level managers must take commands issued down in a long chain from higher, unseen tiers in their organization--or be fired. Every Amish farmer, meanwhile, remains his own boss and co-writes the code of governing

ordinances for the community in which he resides and conducts business. The Amish, since they do not specialize greatly and are self-sufficient on the whole, directly oversee and control most of the vital components of their existence.⁴² (How in greater detail the Amish have succeeded in spite of commercial pressures, where my hypothetical farmer failed, is a subject that will be explored both immediately below and later on in the paper in a discussion of current governmental policies that exclusively benefit the Amish. But note one thing to be mentioned immediately below: he was not part of a supportive and semi-self-sufficient community that buffered competition.)

The key difference separating the two cases is whether one's most vigorous relationship is to a part or to the whole. Instead of being a cog in the larger economy, each Amish farmer manages his own *mini*-economy which he thereby of course can control largely as he sees fit. At the same time, he belongs to a supportive community deliberately limited in size to 25 to 50 families--which thereby he also readily may help govern. Small size gives him a tighter relationship to the

⁴²Actually, a study performed by Lester M. Salamon provides dramatic evidence directly in support of the psychological benefits of agrarian self-mastery. Independent black farmers who owned their own land thanks to New Deal land-reform programs showed significantly higher confidence in their ability to shape their lives, and at the same time, lower hypertension and better health than other more dependent local blacks. These blacks, Salamon points out, created a stronghold of support for the Civil Rights movement in the South. See "The Time Dimension in Policy Evaluation: The Case of the New Deal Land-Reform Experiments," *Public Policy*, 27(2), Spring 1979, pp.129-83.

whole community. I would venture that in a large-scale industrial enterprise, even if "democratically" organized, the ratio of one's input to the net decision-making outcome is so tiny as almost not worth registering. Certainly this is the tendency we see in labor unions (I am a former teamster--I know). And at any rate, the pressure to achieve efficient coordination among the functions of the enterprise--which itself occupies a competitive niche in the larger industrial economy--sharply straitens both individual and joint choices.

I would posit a basic rule: *the smaller and more subordinate one's specialty within the whole, or one's role within the specialized compartment, the less leverage one exerts over the elements of one's life affected by that whole.*

Interestingly, in spite of the imposition of certain autocratic political or socio-economic arrangements, it appears that individuals retain large realms of personal autonomy when they do not overly specialize. Under feudalism, for instance, the serf had no taskmaster standing over him all day long, but was his own manager. Though he was chained to the land, that land also gave him a domain for his autonomy. He could not make the major decision whether to leave or not, but he was closely in touch with all of the important factors affecting his life on a day-to-day basis, and was thereby able to be seated in command over them, or at least have direct influence over them. A robust proximity to the "whole" gave the serf leverage.

In society like ours, by contrast, one travels about and dips into small crevices of large-scale systems over which one has only the most oblique knowledge and control. Such large-scale systems include not only the competitive market-economy and corporate enterprise, but governmental bureaucracy, education public and private, and the entertainment industry--the last of which makes even one's living room, when the television set is on, a branch outlet for national advertising and corporate-controlled opinion-molding. One cannot possibly exert the same leverage over these systems that one enjoys in a more "holistic" milieu.

One moves either between or within small cubicles whereupon one either is borne along more-or-less passively by modern transportation systems (in a cubicle too) or is pressured or even commanded (within the cubicle of one's destination) to conform to some agenda worked out by a collectivity of persons and activities distantly removed from one's life. This is because the cubicle occupies a subordinate and small position within the totality of interlocking elements that make up the whole.

From all this it follows that not only the work place, indeed, but any place is the occasion of a loss of personal control. In modern society everywhere we see distant and/or large-scale entities literally taking over the vital functions of our lives and removing control and decision-making from the

"grass roots." Technologists and technology, government bureaucracy, economic and educational systems, even television and other media effectively make decisions that compromise individual say over the most intimate aspects of family and community living. On such dangers, Rawls has issued only the faintest of warnings (see above p.43).

Once again, the issues become clearer when examined in light of the Amish success.

The Amish adult as his/her own boss. The independence of the Amish farmer depends on both himself as an individual in the management of his own affairs and his collegial relationship to other members of the community in enacting rules governing their common conduct:

a) *At the homestead.* Some mention has been made of the extensive responsibilities of the farmer or farmer's wife in overseeing their multi-faceted, semi-self-sufficient operations. Another word for such responsibility is freedom. To be responsible for one's own destiny in this way, is not continually to have to take orders from someone else or have no idea who is making important decisions for you. Interestingly, it was considered the highest praise in Lancaster County for someone to say of the farmer's wife: "She's a real manager." The matron of the household I worked at was so skilled that, after her children grew up, a large nearby *supermarket* (non-Amish-run) hired her as a supervisor.

The responsibilities of the Amish farmer I worked for in Kentucky were quite demanding, in a way that I will elaborate below.

The Amish exert great personal control over not only their "business" but, for example, as we have seen, how their children are raised. Amish youth are not the wards of large scale education-processing systems over which parents have only the remotest influence, nor prisoners of peer opinion (a system of conformity all its own) since contact with other youth is moderated by continual adult involvement, nor hostages of entertainment or propaganda concocted in the board rooms of national broadcasting and advertising firms-- since Amish watch no TV. Such parental control is of inestimable value in preempting the causes mentioned above of alienation of youth. In short, young Amish lives are closely enmeshed with the primary "nerve-centers" of their development, and these "centers" (their parents) in turn, moderate all the other important factors that affect them.

b) The Amish farmer as a boss among equals who coauthor the code of their lives. By writing the rules of their own community, the Amish prevent external forces of technology and economics from ruling them. Here, incidentally, we see one of the greatest assets, foretold above, enabling the Amish to survive in a complex, competitive world. How to get such a decision-making process going from scratch and habituating

a collection of diverse "modern" individuals to it poses a singular challenge to the Amish-emulator. To try to initiate such a tradition among neophytes--along with all the other "traditions" they would have to learn--almost would be like trying to get the fragmented parts of an organism, once dead, to spring back into a living synchrony. Group decision-making is one of the most complex forms of human inter-coordination, and lies at the core of Amish success. (Note however: in many larger Amish settlements, much of the decision-making may be conducted by a council of bishops who represent their individual districts.)

In this decision-making process, because the group is kept small (25 to 50 families) and everyone has an approximately equal say, the individual farmer usually has a large leverage over the "forces" affecting him. It is hard to imagine greater personal control amid cooperation.

In the Hoover Old Order Mennonite community (Old Order Mennonites are virtually equivalent to the Amish) in which I worked as a hand for two summers, the process calls on the direct participation of all members (any baptized adult). At the same time, non-members are excluded even from witnessing it. The group, I have been told, will assemble in a closed council and, in order of declining age, allow each man (women enjoying voting rights only) the turn to air his opinion on the agenda at hand. When all viewpoints have been expressed, if there appears to be a general consensus, the bishop (who

presides over the affair) will proclaim it with such an introduction as, "It looks like we've decided that--." If there have been some dissenters, these usually defer to the wisdom of the majority and humbly concede, "Well, it doesn't suit me just right, but I'll go ahead and. . ." Any strong disagreement, if not resolved in subsequent councils, will likely lead either to voluntary fission or excommunication of the contentious party--an infrequent but real possibility. The problem of serious internal disagreement will be explored in greater depth below. For now, look at an example of how one decision was arrived at.

The telephone. The particular decision I am considering, as a case well-illustrating Amish governing processes, is one which forbid use of non-Amish neighbors' telephones (the Amish may own none themselves) except in emergencies and which decreed that, to meet the resurging demand, a central community pay-phone be installed for non-emergency (or emergency) calls.

Why, at the same time, did the Amish so tightly restrict the use of the phone, and yet deliberately make available one phone for community use? Generally speaking, all Amish groups ban phone-ownership and for the same three or four stated reasons they ban automobile ownership (while here again, certain forms of public transportation are allowed, such as buses and trains):

1. The phone (like the car) is generally speaking an unjustifiable and costly luxury that has no pressing practical use. (The ban in many communities on indoor toilets more clearly demonstrates the same principle of luxury-avoidance).

2. The phone (like the car) would probably trigger a "keep-up-with-the-Jones's" mania (that phrase was actually used). The first buyer would, in effect, be flaunting a possession that would represent a brazen assertion of his own ego (or *Hochmut* as the Amish call it) and tempt everyone else to follow suit for the sake of personal pride.

3. The phone (like the car) would reduce community cohesion. By vastly and artificially enlarging the radius of human contact, it would eliminate the need to rely on and form bonds with one's immediate Amish neighbors, whether for practical assistance or friendship. This is perhaps the most important reason. Yet it is closely connected to the last one.

4. By tying users closely to the wider world, the phone (like the car) would ensnare them in worldly concerns and pressures--the very "forces" that I mentioned above. The term the Amish frequently use is "the rat race." In fact, in the Mennonite community I worked in, serious consideration was being given on this ground to severing connections with

the one phone they had allowed.⁴³ This brings us to the question, why was the solitary pay phone installed at all?

The telephone illustrates not only Amish restrictiveness, but also permissiveness in using modern technology. In a word, the Amish are intelligently discriminating in the way they choose and apply technical advances. They are not averse a) to enjoying what they consider to be a real benefit both to the individual and the the community (e.g., select medical advances and kinds of mass-produced items for household and farm use); and b) to adapting to worldly changes when this seems necessary or prudent in increasing the likelihood of their survival. It is important here to note that the Amish do sell their crops on the market and thus are in competition with users of large-scale machinery--with whom surprisingly they manage to keep up (if the crop is labor-intensive). But this means an occasional concession. Such was the pay telephone.

The practical, pressing use of the pay telephone was to link up and tightly coordinate community produce shipments with large-scale buyers representing regional supermarket chains. A last-minute change in events without access to the

⁴³This community was unusually methodical and conscientious--some would say perfectionistic or even puritanical--in deciding its rules. John Hostetler implies this is not surprising in a new Amish settlement starting off on "new ground" as mine was. More typically, however, and in older settlements, the reasons behind technological adoptions are messier. See his book *Amish Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p.364 and pp.354-61.

telephone could have meant disaster--a wasted crop or the pointless arrival of a semi-trailer truck and no more future dealings with that buyer. I helped pack thousands of cantaloupes into boxes at the central community loading dock (designed just for receipt of a "semi"), and it would have been quite distressing if the truck never had showed up or had come eight hours early.

For all that, the community was considering eliminating the phone. It found that once the line (so to speak) was crossed, it was quite difficult for users who coordinated long-distance shipments to keep from establishing tighter and tighter links with urban merchants and in effect become their hostages. Phone users were getting caught up in the "rat race," making daily trips to the phone, arranging intricate business deals, and building castles of paper. The community wanted to say "no," or at least in some way contain this spillage.

It was, incidentally, only by accident that I found out the contents of the council in which this issue was being discussed (since meetings are closed). One day I asked a fellow who had kept me waiting where he'd come from and why he's spent so much time there. "In council--didn't you know?" he replied.

"What was the meeting about?" I quickly returned.

He hemmed and hawed. I continued to stare at him. Then he sighed, shrugged his shoulders, and told me. I tried to

keep it a secret.

Choice is not necessarily all it's cracked up to be.

If what I am saying holds true, the implication is rather odd. It would mean that millions or even hundreds of millions of people in the modern world have been drastically stunted in the power to make any meaningful choices (not to mention move in an environment in which they can propitiously realize their choices) and surrender large amounts of their autonomy to industrial taskmasters⁴⁴ or to the blind pressures of technology and economics impinging on them externally (or in the case, say, of child-rearing, to impersonal school systems and government agencies), and in the main, lodge themselves in cubbyholes of a super-technological mechanism that severely abridges the realm of control over their own lives. And yet we see no one dragging them backwards kicking toward this prisonhouse. How can this

⁴⁴A predicament given some dimensions by the study cited above. Measured by the same poll revealing farmer satisfaction, the modern laborer does not seem overly contented at work. In answer to the question, "Do you enjoy your work so much you have a hard time putting it down," most non-farming respondents said "no." And there seemed to be an overall decline in work enjoyment since 1955--a period during which specialization and compartmentalization were increasing. Affirmative responses in the poll went thus:

	1955	1980
Farmers	65.0%	50.0%
Business/Professional	57.2%	42.8%
Manual laborers	50.0%	27.1%
Clerks/Sales help	43.2%	24.9%
Overall	51.7%	33.5%

disparity be explained? We are "prisoners," yet we don't revolt--and even consider ourselves "free."

One possible way to account for this enigma is a certain attraction of choiceness. If people had the choice, many might choose not to have to choose. In this light, the very beauty of modern compartments is that all of the important decisions have already been made for the occupant.

With choice comes responsibility, and with responsibility, mental fatigue, incessant worry, headaches, ulcers, short tempers, self-blame, blame of others, blame of circumstance, and above all in the case of the farmer, blame of "Mother Nature" who in her sublime fickleness seems always to be tossing out the most irksome changes of plan, and invariably without giving reasonable notice. (The farmer may wonder who is the harsher taskmaster--man or nature). Having continually to make important choices is a lot of work. It also makes life less secure inasmuch as one must rely wholly on oneself or one's neighbors, and on the unsteadiness of nature, for one's well-being. Although perhaps from a position of initial detachment, many of us might *not* choose to forfeit this awesome responsibility, just the same we might not object too strenuously if, once lodged in industrial society, we found ourselves stripped of it.

During the busy harvest season, the Amish farmer I worked for suffered frequent tension headaches. His wife had an ulcer which would flare up. My farmer gave me a pointer

should I ever decide to farm myself. "Don't try to do everything," he said. "Just pick one thing a day to accomplish and do it. One thing." His recurring downfall was to get up in the morning, vacillate over which of many sundry, somewhat interrelated tasks to perform given the weather conditions, and then not do any of them. The managerial complexities were such that, if efficiency was his aim, it was actually most efficient simply to choose arbitrarily and put the complexity out of his mind. I myself--as his farm hand with my own temperament and talents to dispose of as he liked (I was really a surrogate son)--was one of the complexities that (alas) stymied him most. Responsibility was like a cloud that hung over his wide-brimmed straw hat. True, he wouldn't have exchanged this responsibility for the world, for it obviously gave much of the meaning to his life, but. . . one mistake at a critical moment in the harvest--a misjudgment about the weather, soil conditions, prices, or a technical error--could cost half the year's income. He rarely made such mistakes. But tension took its payment.

Reconciling choices in community. My farmer could console himself that, in case of such a fiasco, he had his neighbors to fall back on, just as he would cushion their mishaps if the same happened to them. And this is not to mention the general support of ongoing mutual assistance and

fellowship. But life in community brings its own challenges. Again these are obstacles sprung from choice itself. Compounding the difficulties of individual choice is the presence of other members of a voluntary association all making their choices. How is any unity or steadiness to come of this? Amish Christianity--clearly dogmatic in its application and long a barrier to secular humanists seeking enlightened use of technology--nonetheless has been a strong factor in providing the sort of moral atmosphere and precepts necessary to preserve the holistic community. Perhaps most critically, the Amish reverently heed Christ's example of self-sacrifice for the good of others and believe that, at times, they must cheerfully take up their own cross. The value of personal sacrifice does not make the Amish dour; quite the contrary. It is always expected that the joys of rebirth and renewal come on the heels of self-abnegation. Without a doubt, such forbearance, though not always sufficient, has helped many Amish communities navigate through many harrowing passageways. Still, communities sometimes do fall apart from disagreements.

It has helped avert to such calamities that the Amish balance the call to self-denial with practical measures that greatly reduce the extent to which sacrifice is necessary. The most important provision is one that postpones membership into community until the prospective is mature and sure enough to be able to be able to make a lifelong commitment. The

period of discernment, in effect, screens out incompatibles. To set the scene for an exposition of this provision, however, first consider the content of a typical Amish sermon with its call to daily self-denial.

The Sermon. Picture yourself seated, as I was, on a long wooden bench next to several other Amish men and boys dressed in their best Sunday suspenders. We crane our heads, now, with the rest of the well-attired community assembled in the one-room school house (women sit opposite us), to hear the inspirational words of the week--telling us how we might better get along with our fellows in Christian love and understanding. As the message begins, one's eyes pass over a sea of pale white foreheads and burnished cheekbones--two-toned markings of those who momentarily have removed their straw hats after a week of hard work side by side in the hot sun.

Today's Gospel reading is Luke 14:1-24. The deacon begins:

There was a man who gave a great banquet, and he invited a large number of people. When the time for the banquet came, he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, "Come along: everything is ready now." But all alike started to make excuses. The first said, "I have bought a piece of land and must go and see it. Please accept my apologies." Another said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen and am on my way to try them out. Please accept my apologies." Yet another said, "I have just got married and so am unable to come."

When the master found out he fell into a rage.

"Bring in here the poor, the crippled, and blind and the lame. . . . I tell you, not one of those who were invited shall have a taste of my banquet."

When the Gospel is over, there is some settling as we wait for today's major preacher, Levi, to begin.

He expresses the hope that we have come with the "right preparation. I know many of you have." (That word "many" is pointed.) If "thankfulness" for God's many gifts imbues us, he exhorts, "You will be filled. Filled with the word of God, the bread of life."

Next comes an analogy.

If a person is hungry "in a natural sense," he doesn't need "sugar coating on his bread. The bread alone will satisfy him." But "most of us" have never gone hungry for natural food. So we often want to dress it up and "fancify" it.

Just so with the spiritual life. If we have prepared room in our hearts, creating a hunger there, we will savor the taste of the Gospel. Like natural food eaten when properly famished, it will fill us with thankfulness. If we don't stimulate our spiritual stomachs, time will extinguish taste, and we will pursue vain entertainments.

Not that there are not other obstacles. Whence comes the strength to endure "trials, tribulations, and temptations?" From a "willingness" to suffer through. Just as we prepare a "hunger" for food, so do we acquire a taste for these encumbrances, and we discover, as Christ predicts

for us, "My cross is easy and my burden light." If we shrink from difficulty, however, "We follow two masters, we place a severe burden on ourselves. We are of two leanings."

Christ leads us only one direction: "the straight and narrow path. . . . Some may try to take a detour and still hope to reach the same outcome." They lack the necessary "willingness."

Levi then draws on the Gospel reading, which teaches that "the low shall be exalted and the proud laid low." Is our humility only skin deep? Or does it come from the "heart"? "If we are haughty at heart, then even if we try to hide it, it will show itself in various ways."

The man with merely natural appetites--the "natural man"--invites only his friends over for dinner because he knows they will invite him back. He excludes the "blind, lame, sick, elderly." The man with natural appetites also spurns friendly invitations. To be sure, like the man described in the scripture "we have to buy land because we stress the wholesomeness of farming," but we can never therefore "jam our schedule so full" of pressing engagements that we never make visits but only excuses.

"There is (out in the wider world) a stress on independence: I take care of myself, you take care of yourself." But this is the way of the "natural man"--not of Christ. Christian love and brotherly aid can be a cross to bear, but if we bring to our duties the necessary

"willingness," the burden will be light and we can even come to be thankful for it.

The limits of self-sacrifice: measures reducing or mitigating conflicting interests and sham consensus. But exhortations to endure hardship for others can only take one so far. What if the strains become too great? This threshold may well be reached, not only in ordinary interchanges, but perhaps more significantly, in the process of forging important community decisions. As we have seen, communities sometimes split apart from disagreements. There thus must be some way of reducing the *occasions* of such conflict.

But this raises an additional question. There is cause now to doubt Amish tranquillity or "self-sacrifice" even when communities seem on the surface to agree--as they usually do. For if strong disagreements necessarily lead to oustings or divisions, who *would* ever disagree? The cost would seem too high. Community consensus--even if achieved in the name of "self-sacrifice"--would thus seem a sham: agree with the majority *or else*. People are looking out for their own necks, not the good of others. The message of the minister becomes superfluous. Potential dissenters would swallow their objections whether implored to "sacrifice" or not.

For to leave the fold, even voluntarily, would mean the loss not merely of rapport, but of a life-long investment. To have been a member of an Amish community is to have interwoven

one's whole being, thread by thread, in with a multi-faceted social whole, connecting one geographically, financially, emotionally, sociologically, intellectually, spiritually. To sever these bonds would be a minor form of suicide. Is such recourse even thinkable? Superficial serenity thus masks fear, and "self-sacrifice," furtive self-interest. Or so would it seem.

Real-life Amish experience arguably bears out such apprehensions to a certain extent. Yet at the same time, there is cause for qualified optimism. True, such pseudo-agreement readily can and does occur not only in Amish, but also non-Amish, organizations with "face-to-face" governing procedures, and indeed have led to a "conformity" problem that John Hostetler and Jane Mansbridge have discussed (vis a vis the Amish and small democracies in general, respectively).⁴⁵ But a couple of Amish provisions (validated implicitly by Mansbridge) reduce both the extent to which shams occur and the costs borne *when* they occur. And such provisions, if carried to their logical extensions, could avert most of this mishap. Although the Amish place certain obstacles in front of this realization, their ways suggest an ideal well within grasp.

Bear in mind, as well, that every Amish settlement has its own rules and procedures, its own personalities and

⁴⁵Hostetler, *op. cit.*, pp. 360-61; and Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 1980).

"personality," and some may be more accommodating than others. In fact, although the communities I visited were relatively free from furtive conformity (in Lancaster County, Kentucky, and Belize), from the literature it appears they can be more or less so.

The provisions that mitigate covert conflict are these: chiefly, delay of right of membership until certainty of compatibility; and secondarily, in case of subsequent departure, limitation of sanctions to certain, and not all, aspects of community contact.

Delay of membership. The Amish, as Anabaptists, split from the rest of Christendom 450 years ago (I am here lumping them with their Mennonite progenitors) precisely on the issue of informed choice. They regarded the reigning Christian practice (still prevalent today) of baptizing a newborn into a faith it couldn't understand as a mockery which, as if not deplorable enough in itself, led directly to the widespread mediocrity of belief and practice permeating existing Christian churches--precisely a problem of furtive conformity like that we are trying to avoid. What sort of Christian, the Amish founders asked, can someone be with no knowledge or experience of the religion he is being initiated into? Amish society thus confined membership to adults--that is (in other words) free and rational beings exercising a conscious and

informed choice.⁴⁶ Today, sociologist Marc Olshan goes so far as to describe the existence of Amish society in the midst of a (seemingly) antagonistic modernity as testifying to the *epitome* of choice. The Amish, paradoxically, he says, epitomize modernity.⁴⁷ Their very anachronism can only mean they are a self-made or "artificial" people--a *consciously willed* people. On this view, the Amish have inherited not a timorously conformist, but an openly rebellious character. The archetypal Amish person, indeed, was willing to make himself a public martyr for his renegade beliefs.

True to their iconoclastic colors in *part*, the Amish today to varying degrees permit youth the opportunity to explore the world around them before committing themselves to community and Christianity. This makes becoming Amish entirely voluntary, and membership self-selected. One could indeed almost say, the Amish are "self-made" men and women. The pre-commitment period has acquired the nickname of *rumspringa* ("running around") in Lancaster County. Amish youth buy cars, go to movies, travel, and sometimes begin attending other churches. A few tour the country looking for an Amish community just right for them. (One limitation they suffer at this time of choice is the lack of a broad

⁴⁶See Hostetler, *op. cit.*, Ch. 2 for a brief history of the origins of Anabaptism and Amish society.

⁴⁷"Modernity, the Folk Society, and the Old Order Amish: An Alternative Interpretation," *Rural Sociology*, 38(2), 123-35, Spring, 1988.

education--a deficiency that will be explored below. Another problem is, at times, overweening parental expectations, but this, I think, is a condition found in non-Amish societies too.) Approximately one third of youth on their *rumspringa* elect to leave the Amish for good. The rest remain.

It is easy to see reason why their level of commitment, after viewing and weighing alternatives, should be more secure than if they had lacked such an opportunity. And this is, in part, what originators of adult baptism hoped to achieve in delaying initiation rites. Matured members have had the chance to discern whether they really *belong* with the Amish--whether they will get along with the personalities and truly agree with the practices and precepts of community.

What does all this have to do with true concord in governing decisions? If Amish persons are in considerable agreement with the rest *before* entering community, then in *subsequent* decision-making, chances are high that agreement will be more than skin-deep. An underlying "unity of interests," in fact, is precisely the secret for success, according to Mansbridge, for any face-to-face community trying to hammer out consensus without duress. Such a "unity of interests" is heightened when Amish individuals have an extended opportunity to select the community right for them. If, on the other hand, interests don't really converge in a deep way--if, for example, Amish youth choose too hastily (or their parents strong-arm them as sometimes happens)--then

subsequent agreements will probably be superficial.

Mansbridge points to three principal areas of convergent interests (the last two, especially, are encouraged in a small-scale Christian community):

1. When personal interests converge.
2. When one adopts another's interests as one's own.
3. When one adopts the interest of the community as a whole as one's own.⁴⁸

All three areas are operative among the Amish since, under "ideal" circumstances, they are given the chance,

1. To choose a community good for them in the narrow sense (where they can make a living).
2. To choose a community whose personalities, or at least "personality," they get along with.
3. To choose a community whose precepts and principles they believe are true.

Thus, even if agreement wanes in one respect, it can be made up for in others. One Amish farmer I knew in Kentucky confided to me that he really didn't think the community's rule banning all motors was necessary. He certainly would have bought a motor or two for himself if he could have to pump his water or bale his hay. But his larger identification with the interests and aims of the community as a whole, and with the interests of various particular members who were his friends, more than compensated for his sacrifice, and he

⁴⁸Op. cit., p.27.

didn't have any trouble "going along" with the rule. Nor was this mere calculated self-interest, narrowly construed, on his part since he actively adopted the good of others as his own good. What made them happy helped make him happy.

One obstacle, however, that most Amish communities retain which prevents full realization of these benefits, is the religious stigma which is often attached to non-assent to a community dictum. Non-compliance--whether by members or non-members--is officially branded "worldly," or worse, heretical, and in either case, if left unrepented, proclaimed grounds for perdition. This is not merely because it flouts the community's will (and salvation is thought possible only through life in a Christian community⁴⁹), but because the violated rule may itself be (officially) considered "true" in some absolute sense. That rule, combined with many or all the other rules, is precisely the true mark that gives an Amish community special claim as *the* gateway to heaven. Wearing shorts in public, for instance, may be regarded a damnable sin for any human being anywhere.

This stigma creates a number of problems. First, it dampens freedom of discussion, especially among those with a minority viewpoint. This, in turn, limits choice in the selection of rules. Second--and no less importantly--it forces the Amish to make membership in the community, should

⁴⁹See Hostetler, *op. cit.*, Ch. 4, for a fuller exposition of such Amish beliefs. Also, review Ch. 2 for their origins.

it come about, *lifelong*. Officially there is only one true "church," one gateway to heaven, and after entering, only one consequence of turning back. Less absolute claims--say, that an Amish church is only one possible way among Christian approaches--would make possible shorter-term renewable memberships and periodic leaves of absence. This, in turn, would give members the option of gracefully bowing out if they found they no longer agreed with community sentiment. Decision-making, in the meantime, would be all the freer.

Thus the Amish, I believe, would do better to make a clearer distinction between essential (Protestant) Christian, and purely derivative, articles of their community codes. Unofficially, I think they do this already, as testified by occasional transgressions I saw being "winked" at and the ready use Amish made of loopholes in the rules (in Lancaster, one officially could not have a telephone in the house, so one built a phone booth in the barnyard instead). The "essential" elements would include those which are universal requirements for all (Protestant) Christians (admittedly a matter of great dispute in itself). "Derivative" elements would encompass those rules which merely help a particular community in a particular time fulfill its Christian ideals (thus, for example, the wearing of monastic garb is not mandatory for all Catholics, but only one way of expressing the Catholic faith for a selected group). If the Amish have trouble presently (officially) making such a distinction, I suspect the problem

is related to their narrowly parochial education, which will be discussed below.

Still, all told, the intimacy of the Amish union, coupled with and reinforced by the free choice one has in membership, yield an extraordinarily high degree of genuine unity on potentially divisive issues--far higher, in fact, than the most unified face-to-face democracy Mansbridge studied. This unity minimizes the need for most "adversary democracy" procedures she describes, such as the secret ballot, which presuppose the existence of fundamental differences in interest. The closest the Amish come to an "adversary" procedure is the ancient Biblical practice of selecting ministers by lot--a measure that avoids "majority rule" in voting for a "popular" leader--always a highly subjective and potentially divisive decision because it involves differences in personality.

For those who cannot or will not attain such a unity as the Amish enjoy, more such procedures would be called for. These protect and weigh the interests of the minority against those of the majority and prevent a sham consensus.⁵⁰ The cost of decreased unity, however, whatever its advantages, would seem to be loss of some of the attractions that would lead people to form small-scale communities in the first place.

⁵⁰Op. cit., pp.15-17, pp.273-77, and pp.281-92.

Limited sanctions. Say, however, our farmer above decided the rule impinged on him too severely to be endured. In Amish environs this is highly unlikely if he had tested out the community thoroughly before joining, so let us say he goofed, made an impulsive decision, and found himself in adversarial waters. Alternatively, let us say circumstances in the wider world have drastically changed and posed the community prickly new dilemmas that no one could have possibly foreseen on joining--in which case the whole character and meaning of being a member may have changed. Now, if he quits or is ousted, he may face the stigma of an officially declared "perdition," but no Athenian exile. Chances are, if he disagreed so strongly, he was not alone, and others will accompany him in the formation of a new group of like-minded persons. In fact, all new Amish fellowships are formed this way, and there are dozens of different ones in nineteen different states. He and his followers may even discover an existing community waiting to welcome him with open arms, saving him the trouble of starting from scratch. (A solitary renegade without compatriots is rare because highly distinctive individuals tend not to join Amish communities in the first place).

Given this, the exiled party will resume life--a little beleaguered perhaps--as part of a new social whole whose complex ties grow to replace the conduits of nourishment of the abandoned unity. In this position, he can readily endure

the sanctions imposed on him (light by comparison with those inflicted on Socrates):

1. No more attendance at the old church.

2. No eating at the same table with previous associates (separate tables in the same room are allowed).

3. No substantial economic interactions with previous associates. (Enforcement and interpretation of this rule appears somewhat discretionary at least in Lancaster County. The farmer I worked for in Pennsylvania almost daily assisted at his brother's farm even though the brother had left the Old Order Amish and become part of a "New Order" Amish group that allowed electricity and in-house telephones.)

4. No riding in vehicles with previous Amish associates.

Not that I am advocating (or detracting from) these sanctions, but from all this merely concluding: even in the case of insuperable disagreements, the Amish "ejectee" has a life, and not a bad one at that. He resides in the same place. He has lost some close associations, but probably made new ones. He avoids the barrenness of pure exile. He has not committed a form of suicide. Incidentally, since this outcome is thinkable, it eases the pressures on possible dissenters in community discussions, reducing the likelihood of sham.

Still, the disadvantages of such a dislocation cannot be ignored (whether such penalties or other kinds of costs are incurred). The problem is best avoided by the person's making sure of close compatibility before joining an Amish

community (or ideally, in offering different, optional levels of commitment). Of course, drastically changing circumstances can never be controlled for.

Section IV

Technological Society Deepens Amish choice. Does all this mean that from the point of view of "deep" choice, modern industrial culture is intrinsically worthless--at best a holding pen for people who are not rugged enough to make it all the way to agrarianism? No; even from such a possibly "deep" point of view, the existence of our industrial society has important values. While it may go far in excess of what it needs to, a technological society enhances both material and moral aspects of the spartan agrarian's choice.

Material. Quite simply, whole-life seekers can benefit from (though they may not absolutely need) advances of modern science and industry. I have already pointed out use of the telephone. While the Amish are highly ambivalent about that and accepted it only as an accommodation, they have no reservations about innumerable other byproducts of modern science and industry (which they could still do without if they wished): hand-held flashlights; machine-made cloth and thread; mass-produced hand and horse-drawn

implements; and for some Amish groups even (non-vehicular) motorized machinery, such as pumps, hay-balers, corn-pickers, and gas-powered refrigeration devices. The Amish, it would appear, enjoy a first-world standard of living. They at least would be considered well-off in relation to the large majority of the world's population.

Moral and educational. The existence, side by side, of two such starkly different possible worlds, "technological" and Amish, enhances choice. This is true not only in terms of sheer volume (what again might be called "breadth of choice"), but also in quality (heightening "depth of choice"). When there is a definite possibility of going either direction, any choice made becomes more meaningful than it would otherwise be. All told, an Amish person has a more robust decision in front of him today than 100 years ago when there was both less variety of outside opportunity and less of a difference between Amish and non-Amish ways. This consideration, indeed, helped Olshan conclude the Amish "epitomize" modern choice. (Again, the Amish, as Anabaptists, that is, adult baptizers, are not "born" Amish. They make the decision to enter the community upon reaching what is considered the age of consent, roughly eighteen or older.)

Here lurks one area where, in fact, the Amish may serve as a negative example, and the presence of modernity (namely, in some of the educational opportunities it offers) a

potential blessing. I suspect the Amish do not provide their youth sufficient education to make a circumspect choice. To be sure, frowning on "book learning" and forbidding post-eighth-grade education serve an invaluable purpose when the most important skills and knowledge for the life one leads are acquired through natural, real-life contacts and interactions while growing up on a family farm. Amish youth can barely stand the long wait, as it is, before that day of liberation when they will have been set free from the schoolhouse to be initiated into the world of adult responsibilities. I became the object of pity and wonderment when it was found out that at the age of twenty-eight, I was still in school.

Nevertheless, the Amish severely limit the available grounds on which a choice can be made--this, especially considering that school is limited in the name of not only practicality but also some questionable interpretations of Biblical scriptures. And what good is "informed choice" (that which only an adult can make, in contrast to an infant, before Baptism), when there is not enough "information"?

On arriving in an Amish community in Belize, Central America, I remarked, gazing at the steep cone-like hills that encircled the village, "My, these hills must be of volcanic origin."

The retort of the Amish youth who stood near me was: "Those hills were here when God first made the earth."

I then pointed out to him the fact that a 10,000 foot volcano now exists in Mexico in a place that was flat as a pancake last century.

"Well, these hills were here when God created the earth."

The youth, age fifteen, was sturdy, responsible, outgoing, and (in other respects) knowledgeable. He was doing quite well considering that formal Amish schooling in Belize, by recent community fiat, extends only to the fourth grade.

The Amish farmer I worked for in Pennsylvania once pointed to the white trail left by an airplane high in the blue sky. "The jet stream," he exclaimed.

Most Amish are trained from childhood (to degrees varying from community to community) that to leave the fold is to be imperiled with perdition. The outside world is the playground of the unchurched and the fallen Christians, who are presided over, in turn, by the devil. Even many other Amish communities are suspect and fail to attain an acceptable level of holiness or doctrinal orthodoxy. Side by side two Amish communities may sit virtually indistinguishable to the outsider (such as in Kitchener, Ontario) and consider each other "lost." The issue that divides them and that becomes the litmus test of "truth" (as is the case now in Kitchener) may be as minor as whether the proper color of a buggy should be black or natural wood. (Admittedly, clashing personalities

and long-mounting ideological conflict help trigger such feuds, so they may represent the tip of a deeper iceberg⁵¹).

The question remains, do many of the Amish know enough to be able to make a meaningful choice? Most Amish, if given the choice, I suspect, would prefer not to know more than they do, thus not to *have* to make a real choice. (For true choice, as we have seen, is difficult). But some would. The intellectually gifted among the Amish feel the worst of this reduction. Either they endure extreme frustration in attempting to rise to the peak of their powers and be able to make such a choice, or they leave the community for good when reaching maturity and never really have the chance to choose on satisfactory grounds. Either eventuality is wrenching.⁵²

Amish parochialism thus highlights the value of *meaningful* choice, in particular by showing the saving possibilities of broader offerings outside--including educational ones. (Is narrowness, by the way, then necessary to perpetuate an Amish-like way of life? While it may have helped the Amish hold tight to their youth, I think a better education could also induce them to remain, and do so more justly. Good education, however, is not easily gotten under any circumstances.)

⁵¹Hostetler, op. cit., Ch. 13.

⁵²See *ibid.*, pp.304-7.

Section V

. . . and the Amish are good for industrialism. Grounds for not only removing barriers, but actively promoting Amish ways.

There is an important question left dangling. Is there anyone out there besides the Amish who would lead their demanding way of life? And how could we ever know for sure whether, if the persons really tried, they could establish such a life without any modifications in the basic structure of society favoring them? Maybe the reason no one is doing it is simply lack of interest and dedication.

In other words, the constituency for the opportunity I am marking out is in question. It may not only lie outside the mainstream, it may be a figment. And what basis for government subsidy or preferential legal treatment is that? The task then would seem to be to show that such rugged communitarians exist, yet are thwarted by the absence of some public program that would ease their prospects in a competitive market economy.

One way, however, to obviate the need for such a demonstration would be to show that, whether or not they exist, it would be nice if they existed--nice for everybody, including those who would not want to lead such a life themselves. The task, in other words, would be to demonstrate that a group like the Amish can count as a *bona fide* "public

good" (definition supplied below). Then, even if no one presently wants to lead such a life, we still would have grounds for encouraging somebody to do so. If no one takes to it anyhow, we will have at least tried our best. This, of course, is an entirely different sort of argument from the one relying on fairness which I was making earlier (suggesting we should redress inequalities to those wronged by compartmentalization), yet it would nicely resolve this practical query arising from that investigation. It would kill two birds with one stone: now not only would opportunities open up for the potentially disadvantaged parties, these opportunities would be specially promoted and socially affirmed. And we wouldn't have to try to figure out whether the disadvantaged parties actually were willing to turn to the "whole life."

The Amish as a "Public Good." In simple words, the Amish are good for us. The "whole life"/"industrial life" complementarity goes both ways. The Amish (or a similarly "whole" group) can indeed be regarded as a "public good" in an industrial society and should be supported on the same grounds as are parks, roads, national defense, and public education. What the Amish share with these public programs is this: while they provide benefits to everyone, at the same time in a pure market system they would be undersupported. Individuals would not find it rational to contribute when their

contributions would have a negligible effect on the procurance or size of the benefit they would receive. But if no one contributed, no benefit would come at all. Hence, individuals would find it preferable jointly to be *required* to contribute.

Such a public good must meet the following five criteria:

1. Widespread, but not universal, contribution is both necessary and sufficient for large quantities of the good to be produced.
2. If the good is produced, it is available even to non-contributors.
3. Contribution is a non-negligible cost.
4. The effect of individual contributions on the amount of the good available to them is negligible.
5. The amount of the good that each individual would gain from widespread contribution outweighs the costs of his share of contribution.⁵³

Although most people probably would prefer not to return to the land and the "simple life" because it would be (seemingly) too hard a lifestyle to endure and because they are already committed and accustomed to their industrial roles, nevertheless they benefit from the fact that somebody out there is leading such a life. In short, the "simple life" produces spinoffs, and unless I am mistaken, these spinoffs meet the "public goods" criteria:

1. Someone is preserving our heritage, our collective memory of our roots (the Amish in fact settled here before the American revolution).

⁵³Slightly modified excerpt from David O. Brink, "Cooperative activity and public goods" (unpublished).

2. Like grandmothers and home-made apple pie, although you might not want to be or to make one yourself, you are glad to be able to return to them for periodic renewal and refreshment.

3. Such ways of life seem, in some general way that is difficult to articulate, to add to rather than subtract from the overall health and vigor of society, especially seen over the long run.

In fact, such an inkling is bolstered by specific features of the Amish:

a) They hold the land in trust: their methods conserve and enrich the soil, rather than wash it away and destroy it as most modern practices do.

b) They use far fewer other non-replenishable resources than the rest of us.

c) They thus help to keep prices for such things lower.

d) Amish methods are minimally polluting.

e) The Amish can readily and do function as a "social relief agency" for unwanted or shiftless youth who, under the auspices of the Fresh Air Fund of Brooklyn, can spend their summers away from the arid cityscapes.

f) The Amish can and do easily care for their own in times of distress or infirmity. Also, mental illness, crime, indigence, family break-down, drugs and alcohol abuse, unwanted pregnancy, and other signs of social disintegration are low among the Amish. All this lightens the burden of

social agencies that must alleviate such ills for everyone else.

g) An Amish-like culture serves as "civilization insurance." In case of an economic or other catastrophe, a widely dispersed, self-sufficient agrarian population would buffer us from total oblivion.

It would seem if more people--though maybe not you or I--emulated the ways of the Amish, this country would be a better place for *all* of us.

Thus, such a Spartan agrarianism, though not presently popular, qualifies as a public good, a value that we might not want to fulfill individually on our own but nevertheless merits generalized approval and preferential governmental treatment (hence, if appropriate, say some obligatory tax concession from all of us) in the hopes that it may become more popular. Interestingly, such treatment would fall in a long line of precedents: sundry European and New World governments seeking to develop previously unusable land and to raise overall economic prosperity have at various times (even as recently as the 1970s in Belize) invited the Amish into their domains and granted them a special haven.

Section VI

Proposals. I am not using these arguments as a basis for rejecting Rawls's *Theory* in particular or liberal egalitarianism in general. In fact, if certain adjustments are made, instead of the "lesser of evils," they can give us "the best of both worlds." They could insure both breadth and depth of personal opportunity and in the process, avoid necessarily aggravating certain persons' susceptibilities in grave areas while maintaining an acceptable material standard of living and enhancing the general public good.

But it is in the area of practical implementation that an advocate of the "whole life" faces perhaps the most serious difficulties. A patch of Amish people still appears highly incongruous in a technological age. Scoffers will laugh at the thought of modelling a public reform on them, much less diverting taxpayers' support toward new Amish oases.

Turning back the clock?

Trying to stop Progress?

Yearning for a naively simpler time?

Such queries one will read in the quizzical looks of hearers of "whole life" proposals. The underlying thought seems to be this. The "whole life" just doesn't fit in with the modern world. And for this reason, trying to put it in effect is highly impractical. This brings us back to Rawls,

who speaks of "limited social space" in any culture, precluding the possibility of pursuing every way of life.

Yet in the final analysis, the prime obstacle to supporting Amish-like ways is this skepticism itself. For as I have just attempted to show, in selected significant respects, the relationship between Amish life and technological society is far from antagonistic. The two can be seen even to *need* each other. A more detailed look at various practical measures--some of which I will propose below and some of which are *already* in effect--underscores the potential for this symbiosis. About all that remains is for some rebellious souls, like the Amish progenitors, willing to take up the challenge of a ground-breaking choice--and perhaps endure a few quizzical stares.

A sample intermediate plan. Before moving to the more radical proposals, consider a possible sort of intermediate plan. I argued in the sections on social ills that it would not do (for both practical and ethical reasons) simply to expand the list of primary goods even if they are interpreted to be as substantive as Sen's functionings. That could well be too little too late. Especially for those worst affected, it would address they symptoms and not the underlying cause. But some further material has been introduced. Contributing to the problem may be not merely susceptibility to malaise but also the lack of a certain adeptness (which may or may not

always dispose one to "downfall"). Conceivably, such adeptness may be readily taught, unlike the ability to avoid, say, psychological collapse. Hence, for the benefit of that portion of the population for whom it would apply, it might be instilled as a preventative; yet it wouldn't matter if those susceptible were unidentifiable because instruction could be universal. Thus, without touching the basic structure of society or conceptions of the good, we might preempt a certain amount of suffering (I suspect this might not be the greater portion) through conventional, practical channels. "Home economics" courses have long been offered in secondary schools; why not "life-plan integration" courses? Such an approach might take many people some distance.

But this is hardly enough. For many people it would not do, whether the tendency is to depression, to lack of adeptness, or to some other disadvantaging tendency (even normality). For them, modifications in the basic structure are called for. (These would have to be accompanied by an ongoing general publicity campaign as already hinted). And besides, as indicated above, the general public good provides additional grounds for more substantial efforts.

A new homestead act. For those who may need or want it, and for a more generally robust society, an alternative to highly specialized and scattered compartmentalization should be offered to complement it. This would take the form of a

low-specialization preserve, a kind of protected bastion for small-scale diversity. Call the measure a post-modern homestead act. The phrasing would point to its return in spirit to the ideal underlying its precedent in America: the opportunity to make a fresh start on an equal footing with others, no matter one's background. Those freely entering would have to agree to abide by certain rules that would prevent encroachments of economics and technology, or other possible intrusions of large-scale, compartmentalized systems. Arrangements could perhaps be modelled after existing systems that have passed the test of real life, such as those of the Amish.

Financial and administrative reinforcements. The U. S. government is presently paying farmers billions of dollars as a way of inducing them not to produce (thanks to highly specialized modern farming techniques that have led to unmanageable grain and produce surpluses). Meanwhile, to encourage settlement of vast tracts of unused lands, two separate communities in the state of Minnesota have inaugurated their own homestead programs. While it was in effect, the Koochiching County measure offered up to forty acres of land for any person who would reside on the premises for at least ten years and had proven resources for self-

sufficiency.⁵⁴ (Note: these forsaken lands are not the same ones the government is subsidizing). Some decades back, other rural re-orientation programs, administered federally during the New Deal, yielded (at low cost) dramatic long-term successes--financial and psychological--only recently made known.⁵⁵ These developments suggest that my proposals do not lie out of the realm of possibility. In fact, they could be implemented immediately. I would suggest certain additional concrete measures as supplements or alternatives to land giveaways.

1. *Financial.* Direct subsidy on account of neediness can create dependency and lower esteem or morale of its recipients (hardly desirable if the goal in part is to lower chances of depression). By contrast, tax exemptions for good reasons can have opposite effects--they can invigorate and reinforce a sense of self-directed purpose. The Amish are already exempt from Social Security Tax on the grounds that their religion requires them to provide for the aged of their community. It seems likely that this exemption explains much about both their unrelenting spirit of independence and their financial solvency at a time of disaster for other family farmers. (Social Security self-employment tax is quite steep). The Amish in particular--since their gross income is

⁵⁴*The New York Times*, Dec. 15, 1988, p.35; and Je. 18, 1989, p.23.

⁵⁵Salamon, op. cit.

rather small--appear vulnerable to cash levies. To a significant degree, their business is aimed not at earning a high profit on the market, but internal consumption, and this decreases cash-flow. For example, a young Amish farmer I know working forty acres in Kentucky netted approximately \$4000 in 1988, and for the size of his family, this income was not atypical. It left little margin to satisfy creditors and tax collectors.

Could modern-day homesteaders qualify for Social Security exemptions? Since this exemption depends on the supposition of a future provision--which they have no certainty of--in this sense, no. But in another sense, perhaps: using their existing provisions--the food they presumably would be growing--could they not earn exemptions by supplying the aged in their immediate vicinity with vital goods? Or provide goods and services to any identifiably needy persons around them, such as unwanted children, the handicapped, or sick? As it happens, the Amish might already qualify on this score. In the Lancaster area many of them participate in "The Fresh Air Fund"--a Brooklyn-based program that seeks temporary summer homes in refreshing rural environments for underprivileged children from New York City. Some of these children have found permanent abodes with the Amish, exchanging their inner-city slang for Pennsylvania Dutch as a first language. Such ministrations as this, as I have already indicated, helps qualify the Amish as a "public

good."

Property and school tax. Besides Social Security Tax, which exacts an inflexible percentage of one's income, even more threatening may be property and school taxes (the Minnesota lands were deserted mainly because of the failure of their former owners to be able to pay these) which can be even more rigid. All could be adjusted, eliminated, or rebated in credits for those meeting the conditions of "homesteaders"--and not on the grounds, again, that they are needy but on contrary ones: that they are pursuing a many-faceted way of life and therefore are less dependent on the governmental agencies and subsidies that fill in the gaps for most other people and, moreover, spread benefits for the people that surround them. The envisioned homesteaders would require less extensive school systems because they would be teaching their children much of what they need to know on the job. Road maintenance would be less urgent because of the geographical unity of small-scale society (current Amish buggy wheels, which have metal rims, however, tend to tear up blacktop pavement so the Amish might do well to make an adjustment here). And again, regarding Social Security and other such assistance programs, it would be easier for the aged, infirm, and unwanted to find care in an integrated social environment with a variety of personally tended niches than amid social fragmentation. Or at least, so would I expect based on my observations of the Amish.

Exemption from income tax? Incidentally, such charity may be implementing, in effect, Rawls's Difference Principle on a small scale (and of course, voluntarily instead of compulsorily). In a close-knit community such as that of the Amish, especially when regulated by norms of Christian goodwill, it would seem highly incongruous to act counter to the Difference Principle, which, again, states that inequalities shall be to the greatest benefit of the least well-off. For an Amish person to grow wealthier or benefit in other substantial respects (acquiring other of Rawls's "primary goods") while leaving those around him grasping in the dust would be most unseemly. Behavior in accord with an approximation of the Difference Principle (of course, it would be capped by an income limitation in keeping with the Amish disapproval of luxury) is a matter of course for the Amish. Thus the addition of a governmentally mandated tax for the sake of wealth-redistribution would be a redundancy. Amish behavior again obviates the need for imposing such exactions in the first place.

The "whole life" as a unique public good. Moreover, it would appear that the kind of care, attention, and monetary assistance the Amish lavish both on each other and on outsiders whom they may have occasion to aid (say adopted children or temporary refugees from urban areas) is often much more effective than any which a governmental agency could manage. This would be true by virtue of the two major

benefits of the whole life described: the rich convergence of its dimensions and the greater personal control it affords. Two young girls, both suffering mental handicaps, were adopted by the Amish family I worked for in Kentucky. No one else would probably have taken them in their condition, and the life they were leading on the farm, feeding chickens, petting puppies, prancing across pastures, helping Mom with the canning, imitating Dad's carpentry beside him on scrap boards in the wood shop, and yes, getting spanked for disobedience and trying to get out of chores--all under the watchful eye of the parents or other older caretakers--was beyond compare to life in an orphanage.

What would be the fate of such disadvantaged youth into adulthood if they lacked such nurturance? Continued institutionalization? Homelessness? Some wayward marginal existence? In Amish society, they were assured a secure niche to old age. Interestingly, in this way it appears that certain potential victims of adult depression may benefit from the "whole life" even if they don't undertake homesteading themselves. Conditions for positive mental and sociological health may have "spillover" effects.

Again, it appears we have grounds not only for exempting the Amish from burdens, but actively subsidizing, or at least in some way supporting, the kinds of efforts they undertake. If anything, we should be taxed to promote the Amish.

2. *Administrative.* Following dubiously upon the directives of original Homestead and Land Grant college acts of the nineteenth century, agricultural colleges and bureaus across the country now employ faculty or send out "agents" everywhere advising farmers how better to fine-hone their specialized skills and thereby earn more money in the competitive market.⁵⁶ The aggregate effect of this approach is manifest: cultural devastation, abandonment, and death (literally because of unbelievably high accident and suicide rates) in farming communities; soil exhaustion, poisoning and depletion of the water table, and emptied landscapes dotted by collapsing barns and rusting equipment, and agricultural bonanzas visible in lower prices for the consumer at the grocery store--which however would be lower still if the government weren't spending billions on the removal of farmland from production. One irony here is that agricultural supports are often justified by the claim that farming is "a way of life," not merely a "business." Facing just that tension--if I may rephrase it as one between less-competitive integrated living and starkly competitive specialization--has thus been not only my task throughout

⁵⁶For a history of the drift and depredations in these agricultural programs, see Jim Hightower, *Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1973). Hightower maintains that the part of the original charter mandating the improvement of rural life has been ignored or subordinated, along with every other goal, to the supreme value of "efficiency."

this paper, but also that of partly unknowing agricultural policy makers in real life. Is there a resolution for this public dilemma?

Wouldn't it be both less costly all around and more effective as policy simply to retrain a certain portion of the agricultural faculty and agents? Couldn't some of them be promoting not competition, but interdependence, integration, and community solidarity, and by way not of over-specialization, but diversity, small-scale stewardship, mutual aid, and thrift (yet while not depriving recipients of modern farming techniques where and if appropriate)? Every year countless hopefuls apply for a handful of forest ranger openings in our nation's park system. Would there be any shortage of applicants to fill spots as the stewards of a new Agricultural Parks system? Would there be any shortage of successful Amish farmers to consult on how to build it? (See book list at end for more practical guidelines).

Conclusion. I have argued that Rawls's *Theory of Justice*, a work representative of modern liberal egalitarian thought, fails to come to terms with a profound problem endemic to modern technological society: the fragmentation of life and the accompanying strictures on human freedom affecting, in turn, various social ills. The very inequalities which Rawls at first glance would seem to permit on the grounds they would increase wealth and opportunity for

everybody, also on closer examination, through industrially-induced fragmentation would be associated with a general drop in depth of choice for most, and a more particularized drop in mental and sociological health for many. (Thus would it appear in the last case, anyway, and there is no risk in proceeding on this appearance, but a great risk in not doing so). Thus, if licensed, these inequalities would not leave everyone better off. Nor would they be fair.

Is there a way out? Are we stuck in a "limited social space" with a limited livable scope? Or can we, alongside the fragmentation, foster wholeness and unity and achieve the best both avenues have to offer? Oddly enough, agricultural policy makers have been asking similar questions. Their mistake has been to try to give with one hand what they take with the other. They want to preserve what they call "a way of life, not a business." But they also, in effect, push on farmers the very sharp-edged implements that undermine this "way of life" and engorge our society with surplus edibles (perhaps in the name of making us all "better off"). Cannot they--and we--make up our minds? Do we all want to be (perhaps fat) city mice? Or do we want at least to allow room for some of us to be country mice?

A sampling of pertinent literature on the Amish:

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- Kraybill, Donald B. *The Riddle of Amish Culture*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.
- Olshan, Marc A. "Modernity, the Folk Society, and the Old Order Amish: An Alternative Interpretation," *Rural Sociology*, 46, 297-309, Summer, 1981.
- Savells, Jerry, "Economic and Social Acculturation among the Old Order Amish in Select Communities: Surviving in a High-Tech Society," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 19(1), 123-35, Spring, 1988.
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