LAUCKS FOUNDATION

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As a public service, Laucks Foundation calls attention to published material that might contribute toward clarification of issues affecting world peace, equity among peoples and environmental responsiblity.

Eulah C. Laucks
President
P.O. Box 5012
Santa Barbara, CA.
93150-5012

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"All my observations and all my experience have, with remarkable consistency, convinced me that, if today's planetary civilization has any hope of survival, that hope lies chiefly in what we understand as the human spirit. If we don't wish to destroy ourselves in national, religious, or political discord; if we don't wish to find our world with twice its current population, half of it dying of hunger; if we don't wish to kill ourselves with ballistic missiles armed with atomic warheads or eliminate ourselves with bacteria specially cultivated for the purpose; if we don't wish to see some people go desperately hungry while others throw tons of wheat into the ocean; if we don't wish to suffocate in the global greenhouse we are heating up for ourselves or to be burned by radiation leaking through holes we have made in the ozone; if we don't wish to exhaust the non-renewable mineral resources of this planet, without which we cannot survive; if, in short, we don't wish any of this to happen, then we must–as humanity, as people, as conscious beings with spirit, mind, and a sense of responsibility–somehow come to our senses."

— Vaclav Havel

[Quoted from the book **Summer Meditations** by Vaclav Havel (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.), as excerpted in Utne Reader, May/June 1993, p. 92]

Thoughts for these times from Henry Geiger, founder, and for over 40 years until his death a few years ago, publisher and editor of **MANAS**.The following excerpt is taken from the front page article "The Psychic Ferment" (**MANAS**, Vol. IV, No. 16, April 18, 1951):

Now and then, the boil and bubble of anxious world-wondering and world-weariness throws up a genuine symptom of the future—some premonitory evidence of the direction that human inquiry soon may take. Naturally enough, these symptoms are most frequently disclosed by writers, whether serious or popular, for writers seem to be agencies—whether consciously or not—of a kind of psychic prophecy. They "feel" and articulate great swellings of human sentiment and foreshadow changes in polarity of great masses of mankind. Heine, Amiel, and others of the nineteenth century were able to foresee and to describe both the psychological and material disasters of the twentieth century. In *Looking Backward,* Edward Bellamy anticipated much of the technology and something of the social theory that was to come. More recently, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* depicted the unsouled horror of a society technologized not only mechanically, but politically and psychologically, and George Orwell completed this horrid dream of the future in *Nineteen-Eighty-four.*

Not only "serious" utopian fiction reflects a dread of the future. The science-fiction novelists, presently enjoying an extraordinary vogue, seem to agree that the Earth is no longer a fit place from which to Govern the Universe. From being heroes of technological genius, the earthmen of many of the science-fiction tales of today have changed into guilt-ridden neurotics who need the help of trans-galactic wisdom from the denizens of the outer rim of the cosmos. From being bright models of efficiency and adventuresome daring, earthmen are now often the objects of pity for the men from Mars, Venus, Jupiter and points endlessly beyond. There might have been an actual convention of science-fiction writers, and a gathering of the sense of the meeting, so consistently do they seem to agree that human beings have made an almost irreparable mess of their planetary existence.

A ferment is a transition state, preparatory to some new development. It should finally lead to some sort of precipitation—a viable birth, perhaps, of some new form

of thinking and imagining, and therefore of living—or at least an explosion or eruption to end the uncertainty and clear the atmosphere. Just because the ugly part of the ferment, the threat of another world war, presses the most insistently upon our fears and because we know, or think we know, what war means, we tend to ignore the other aspects of the turbulence in thought and feeling

But do we know, really, what modern war is? A recent editorial in the Washington *Post* quoted from the dispatch of a war correspondent in Korea, leaving us with the impression that *no one* knows about modern war: not the men who are fighting it, for they, as the editorial remarks, "are slipping into the language of the sports world, as if the campaign were a kind of giant pheasant hunt"; and hardly the victims, for they seldom have time to measure the experience. As the war correspondent's dispatch tells it:

> This armored column today took a little hamlet north of Anyang . . . . a napalm raid hit the village three or four days ago . . . . the inhabitants throughout the village and in the fields were caught and killed and kept the exact postures they had held when the napalm struck—man about to get on his bicycle, 50 boys and girls playing in an orphanage, a housewife strangely unmarked, holding in her hand a page torn from a Sears-Roebuck catalogue crayoned at mail order number 3,811,294 for a $2.98 "bewitching bed jacket—coral."

We have all read something like this, in a story from Grimm, or the *Arabian Nights,* but in those tales the sorcerer or witch only put the people to sleep with some malign spell. Now, in Korea, it is the sleep of death, and the magic is flaming, jellied gasoline. This is no longer "war," in any familiar sense, but some sort of technological diabolism, impersonal, all-consuming, which knows no distinction between an armed and threatening enemy and "50 boys and girls playing in an orphanage." This magazine is sometimes accused of having a strongly pacifist flavor . . . well, what would you propose as an alternative, in these circumstances?

The world and the people in it are certainly getting ready for a change. Either we shall all become like beasts, rooting and snarling at one another, recalling Circe's transformation of the followers of Ulysses into swine, or a great revulsion, slow in beginning, but due to spread like the light of a new dawn, will restore us to our humanity. "Are we," the Washington *Post* asks, "all becoming hardened to the degeneration of warfare into barbarism?" But this is no mere "barbarism." Barbarism, while crass and brutal, is practiced with candor and without high-sounding ethical pretensions. But mod-

ern wars, fought between rival technologies, in which "villages are blotted out, civilians killed indiscriminately with soldiers," are justified by idealogical slogans. To kill for gain—that is barbarism; but to exterminate for freedom—that, we say, is superior to the vulgar, acquisitive wars of the past.

It seems reasonable to suggest that modern man will not be able to continue with this sort of fighting accompanied with this sort of talking for very long. Something will snap, either in his brain or his heart. Either he will die or he will be reborn. Either he will become more human or he will become less human...

If there is any one thing that modern man needs and will ask for in a new religion, it is a credible account of man's relationship with the rest of nature, with the world and the universe. We have an Einstein Theory to relate the elements of physical experience into one grand whole, but what about the experiences of the feelings and the mind? To what or whom do *we*—not our bodies, but we, ourselves—belong? We are not "characters in search of an author," perhaps, but we are, all of us, men in search of a purpose. The golden rule is a nice thing to believe in, but mere niceness will not do in the twentieth century. We want to know how goodness works, and why one thing is good and not another.

What happens when a child is born? When those little round eyes look up and see, for the first time, is it a moment of great beginning? Is it a new chapter in some hidden destiny, or do the texts of the physiologists tell us everything that is to be known? And when the lights of perception glow in those eyes, in later years, what does that mean? *Who* is the being behind those "windows of the soul," as someone has called them? Is there some community of being between the light of the sun and the stars and the feeling in a man's heart? Are we a part of the grandeur of the universe? We should like to know, and to know for certain. A man who can believe great things of himself can be capable of great things. This, really, is our true hunger. It is for a faith in ourselves, that we count for something, that we have a calling which fits in with the rest of nature's majesty. It is a need that calls for daring of the mind, a generosity of heart. Most of all it calls for a fearlessness in the face of the present ignobility of man—an invincible conviction that greatness hides somewhere, somehow, within us, and that we, every one of us, can be born into its realization.

The excerpt below is from the chapter "Alaska:The Underworld Erupts" from **Under Western Skies:Nature and History in the American West**, by Donald Worster (Oxford University Press, N.Y.1992) pp. 220-224. The questions Professor Worster raises about the Exxon Valdez disaster in Prince William Sound, (questions that, indeed, the whole history of fossil fuels in Alaska raises), are large questions that go to the very core of our modern economic culture: (Reprinted with permission of the author)

Why was Exxon, despite all its rational planning and command of expertise, so fundamentally careless? Why have governments and corporations everywhere—in Bhopal, India; Three Mile Island, Pennsylvania; Basel, Switzerland; Chernobyl, U.S.S.R.; and so forth—behaved so irresponsibly toward the environment? And why have so many ordinary citizens living in the urban, industrial era done so much unwitting damage to the earth's fabric of life and yet been so unconcerned about it? Why has carelessness in our dealings with nature become a way of life?

Explaining the modern intensity of environmental destruction may not seem to require any new or complicated theory. There is a history of such behavior going all the way back to Australopithecine ape-man. Forests burned down because ancient hunters fell asleep by their camp fires. Farmers starved by their own depletion of soils. We humans entered the world as an often greedy, shortsighted, violent, capricious species, and ever after we have been depleting game, eroding lands, overpopulating habitats, looking for easy ways to get ahead and instead undermining our existence. Taken as individuals or as collectivities, we have never been free of ecological foibles or immune to their consequences. Though it may not flatter a contemporary executive, ensconced in an air-conditioned penthouse of chrome and glass, to think so, he has all the potential for darkness and folly that his naked, unwashed ancestors had. The debacle in Prince William Sound expressed that grim potential. It was waiting in our genes a million years ago.

All the same, the human impact on nature has changed substantially over time, so that we cannot dismiss it with the glib phrase, "Things have always been that way." In fact, things are getting worse. If we are to understand the growing seriousness of environmental problems, the causes of such disasters as occurred in Prince William Sound, there are some peculiar characteristics of modern people and their history that need confronting.

The most obvious change has been in the scale of the tools we wield. Over the last 300 years science has shown us how to construct increasingly more efficient ways to extract, ship, refine, process, and manufacture

the goods and energy we consume. Fire was a potent, deadly tool for early man, but today we have dreamed up nuclear fission reactors, chlorinated hydrocarbons such as DDT, chain saws and logging mills, and a 987-foot tanker that can float over a million gallons of oil from the Alaska pipeline to southern California. Science has put into our flawed grasp a power that is unprecedented in history.

Part of the distinctiveness of modern ecological disasters lies in the fact that they involve large, complicated technologies that could not have sprung directly from any single individual's brain. They require the research, capital, and labor of many people to bring them into being, and in turn those people require an intricate degree of organization. Most of that organization in the United States has taken the shape of private, profit-seeking corporations, although like other nations, we are turning increasingly to government to develop some of the most advanced technologies, such as those of the military and of space exploration. Whatever the type or scale of organization controlling science and technology, it is bound to be driven by the same ancient human desires, the same ambitions for wealth, power, comfort, self-expression, and group aggrandizement. But the very fact that the organization is a modern one, which typically means a very big one, has changed fundamentally the context, the meaning, and the expression of the old sharp desires.

What Exxon wants these days is found nowhere near its international headquarters: black, viscous deposits of decayed marine life lying deep under the permafrost of the Arctic slope, deposits it wants to mine some 4000 direct-flight miles away from its board rooms. In other words, it wants something its officers may never have seen nor had the slightest personal relationship with, a substance that exists as purely an abstraction, one that can be translated into money. So do the consumers who buy the company's gasoline; they want an abstraction called mobility. To get that freedom to come and go at will, they have all joined as producers and consumers in exploiting a part of the earth that has no immediate presence, no visibility, no affection in their lives.

No wonder today's consumers have become so careless. They regularly assume that neither they nor their immediate friends and neighborhood will suffer from the destructive consequences of their unleashed desires. The higher they climb up the ladder of success, the greater the distance they seek between themselves and their consequences—the farther they want to live from the pollution and ugliness they have caused. Only after intense public criticism did the chairman of Exxon decide to visit the scene of the oil spill, and then it was three weeks after it happened.

If that change in scale, that distancing of people from their sources of

supply in nature, were not enough, there has also occurred a major shift in our thinking about ourselves. Call it a change in self-image. Many seem to believe that in the process of becoming so clever, rich, and powerful, we have also become superior creatures all around. We are more trustworthy than our ancestors—more civilized, more rational.

That shift in self-image began in the so-called Age of Reason, which historians place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was the point of origin for almost all the political, scientific, economic, and industrial revolutions that have created the modern world. The leading philosophers of that age began to celebrate the human mind and its wonderful potential for transforming the earth. If we can puzzle out the laws of gravity and celestial motion, they supposed, if we can create factories that spin thread, weave cloth, and turn out an abundance of everything, then we humans must surely be a very noble, special species. We are capable of the most elegant reasoning, the most astonishing technical wonders. There is nothing conceivable that we cannot do. We can even free ourselves from those primeval frailties of emotion, superstition, and vice. Potentially, therefore, we are godlike in our intellectual and moral endowment. As an American philosopher, Elihu Palmer, remarked: "The organic constitution of man induces a strong conclusion that no limits can justly be assigned to his moral and scientific improvements."[77]*

The most striking implications of that new optimism about human nature appeared in the field of economics, which applied scientific analysis to the problem of creating wealth. What scientific economics discovered was that human greed informed by rationality could become miraculously productive. Heretofore, greed had been widely viewed as one of the worst human vices, requiring laws, regulations, and a general attitude of suspicion to keep it safely under control. But following the teaching of men like Adam Smith, greed came to be regarded not as raw selfishness but as the rational pursuit of self-interest—which is to say, it became a virtue. Each person was assumed to be the best judge of his or her welfare, capable of using reason to discover what that welfare entails; no one else could know it better. Let each, therefore, exercise the reason with which he or she has been endowed, seeking to maximize personal gain, and the whole society will benefit. This new moral philosophy of rationalized greed came to be seen as the most efficacious way to progress, or what we today call "growth." To promote progress and achieve growth, Smith and others of his day recommended, we should eliminate all the outmoded laws aimed at controlling selfishness, do away with most social constraints on the individual. Set free from external interference, humans

*Principles of Nature (1801)

will advance toward a utopia of wealth and enlightenment, securing a material abundance for each and all.

The 1980s were a period of nostalgic return to those laissez-faire principles of Adam Smith and his age, and nowhere more so than among the parties responsible for the spilling of oil off the coast of Alaska. The federal government, which had never been very critical of the oil industry, relaxed its regulation completely in that decade; for example, the requirement that tankers shipping out of Prince William Sound must have double hulls was dropped after lobbying by the oil companies, Exxon leading the effort. Had the *Exxon Valdez* had a double hull, most of the oil would not have been spilled. It did not have that hull because such a requirement would raise construction costs by 2 to 5 percent, and the owners wanted to cut costs and raise profits. During the same deregulation decade the Coast Guard in Alaska began scaling back its marine traffic surveillance, replacing its radar system with a cheaper though less effective system. While President Ronald Reagan and the Congress were increasing the overall military budget by several trillion dollars, they slashed the Coast Guard's budget severely, apparently confident that the invisible hand of rational self-interest would keep all the ships prudently on course. The same spirit of deregulation, the same program of cost-cutting, and the same trust in rational greed as the ideal basis of society could be found in the state of Alaska. When 85 percent of the state's budget had been coming from oil revenues and taxes, there had been little inclination to ask unfriendly questions about the reliability of corporate self-interest. "We trusted them," said a state official after the spill. Such was the explanation heard all over Alaska as to why the spill occurred—the plaintive wail of the victimized, of the innocent bystander who feels duped and misled by sharpies. But then who really was the victim, and who was the criminal, in a culture where endless economic growth, maximum freedom of enterprise, a strong passion for fast automobiles and low taxes were the slogans that got the most votes? Did any of the actors in the spill—the tanker crew, the corporations, the bureaucrats, or the voting majority of citizens—really show themselves to be a noble species?

In the lost archaic world of the Inupiat hunters and gatherers an individual had to put up with external restraints, social and ecological, that modern Americans would find intolerable. There were rules establishing when and where hunting was permitted and how it should be done (you should humbly approach your prey and ask its permission before taking its life). There were elaborate rituals and taboos, passed down generation after generation, embedded deeply in the religious life of the tribe, that

were supposed to guide the individual in securing a living. Procreation was not taken to be a private or unlimited right, but was carefully hedged about by a group-defined, group-enforced sense of environmental limits. Failure to maintain those collective checks on the wild disorder of private appetite might lead, it was feared, to destroying everybody's future. Modern societies, in contrast, have celebrated the ideal of the self-reliant, self-determined individual set free from almost all such restraints, whether those of nature or of society. We trust ourselves, far more than our ancestors did. Some of us want to extend that self-trust even farther, getting rid of almost all laws, rules, traditions, and pressures as illegitimate infringements on private rights, or at best as necessary evils to be kept to the barest minimum.

Freedom to do as one pleases, to go and come as one likes, have become, at least among the middle and upper classes, the dominant ambition. That freedom was reflected in the oily sheen on Prince William Sound and in so many other scenes of environmental deterioration, some of them sudden and dramatic like the spill, others slow and obscure like the global greenhouse effect. Will vigilance alone counterbalance that insistence on being free of all regulation? Will any technological solution, say, a new design of tankers or an advanced radar system, satisfactorily address the more profound cultural forces underlying that deterioration? The root of our predicament lies in the simple fact that, though we remain a flawed and unstable species, plagued now as in the past by a thousand weaknesses, we have insisted on both unlimited freedom and unlimited power. It would now seem clear that, if we want to stop the devastation of the earth, the growing threats to our food, water, air, and fellow creatures, we must find some way to limit both.

LAUCKS FOUNDATION, INC.
P. O. Box 5012, Santa Barbara, CA. 93150-5012

Mary Laucks
8708 NE. 20th St.
Bellevue, WA. 98004

Education for Peace Equity among Peoples Environmental Responsiblity