

Frinton *University*
Time-wasting

TECHNOLOGY

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EDITORIAL WITTER

Although we don't have a publishing schedule for *FTT*, we usually aim for at least two (and preferably three) issues a year. This issue (as Our Faithful Readers will have noticed) is therefore several months late. However, the temptation to write an editorial explaining why is tempered by the knowledge that issues of fanzines which publish such editorials, coupled with promises from their editors to do better in future, usually turn out to be the final issues. We shall not therefore tempt fate.

Instead, we make the usual misleading claim that *FTT* is (or purports to be) a science fiction fanzine (which of course doesn't mention the stuff at all), and advise that copies may be obtained by any of the following methods:

- your publication in exchange (we trade all-for-all);
- a letter of comment on this or previous issues;
- a contribution for use in future issues (but please outline your ideas to us first); or
- £2 in coin or stamps (but please note that as we prefer an active to a passive readership, this method should be adopted only by those who have no time for the previous three).

As before, runic inscriptions of unknown but appropriate portent decorate the margin of this paragraph in copies distributed to those who have failed to do any of the preceding four things; let them react accordingly!

A feast of reading delights awaits you; we detain you momentarily with a list:

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The cover and all internal illustrations are by Judith Hanna, with the exception of that on page 11, which has been taken from *New Internationalist*.

WOBBLY BITS HALL OF SHAME

All those who appeared here last time have corrected their styles of address -- even Matthias Hofmann, albeit that he doesn't understand *why* he should address his letters to both of us. "It amazes me," he says, "that you are putting so much emphasis on more or less superficial customs." Perhaps he should become this column's permanent fixture -- as a correspondent who shall remain nameless remarked, Hofmann "is very personable, but lives in a world in which the natural superiority of men is presumed".

This issue's prime culprit is someone who initially addressed his letters to both of us, but then to Joseph alone because, he says, he actually *wants* to appear here. One is almost tempted to deny him the pleasure -- but then again, why not let him savour his brief moment of prominence and humiliation? He is:

TARAS WOLANSKY

Weird creatures, these US conservatives. Joining him is fellow conservative TIMOTHY LANE, who apparently has trouble distinguishing between pronouns of the first person singular and those of the first person plural. Let the goolie-separating commence!

The Urban Jungle

Judith Hanna

This summer managed an inconvenient amount of sun -- we spent our weekends sitting out in it, instead of slaving over a hot fanzine. Smacked bottles for us, eh wot? There has been, just, room enough in our back garden for the two of us to sit out there, or for Joseph to stretch out and sunbake. His red canvas director's chair went up against the strawberry barrel and 'Little Gem' squash, with tarragon and a spinach gone to seed leaning over one shoulder, and the blackberry climbing the drainpipe at the corner of the house at the other. The folding picnic table and my matching red director's chair occupied the speedwell patch which serves us as lawn, with the table's legs straddling a rampant yarrow which put out umbels of palest blush-pink, and a wild rose bush which has so far not put out any flowers, and my back against the furry silver stems and hot cerise flowers of a rose campion (*Lychnis coronaria*). I much prefer a lawn which puts out pale blue flowers in spring to boring grass. Though my gardening books condemn speedwell as a weed, it is no more invasive than couch grass, much prettier, and doesn't need mowing.

However, as soon as Joseph would get nicely settled to his Heavy Reading and Sunning programme, in his corner, I would realise that I needed various things from the house. Though there was enough space for me to squeeze along past either the flower, sorrel, asparagus pea and broccoli bed on one side of the speedwell patch, or the coldframe, windowbox of melons, and pots of spaghetti marrow, basil and tomato bushes along the back of the house, the grumbling Joseph had to be persuaded to move in order to make it possible to get past the blackberry bramble for another cup of tea, a change of reading matter, or things to play gardens with.

We didn't have so much problem last year, when Joseph could put his chair further up the path, between the golden marjoram, silver thyme, sage, marigolds, winter savory in the herb bed along the fence, and the thicket of lemon balm, curry plant and more rose campion under the sycamore sapling. But this year that area has been occupied by two grobags, one of F1 Black Enorma aubergines, the other of Carnival Mixed sweet peppers (eggplants and capsicum in Australian). Or he could have had my patch if, for instance, I could move my chair to the path down the shady side of the garden, where I used sometimes to sit last year. Only this year that space has been taken up by two windowboxes of Romanesco broccoli, an old washing-up bowl planted with silver beet and fennel, a hanging basket of alpine strawberries, and another washing-up bowl planted with violets and wood anemones, self-sown marigold, forget-me-not ditto and a fern. And in the shady corner are a potato tub, a pot of jerusalem artichokes, and a couple of window boxes of par-cel -- looks like parsley, tastes like celery says the seed catalogue, and grows like buggery I tell you. A good doer, as *Gardener's World* is wont to say.



Naturally, the passage along the side of the house to the kitchen door is also full of my edible landscape. Past the strawberry tub, which is yielding very nicely, and the blackberry bramble, you reach a grobag of mangetout (snow) peas climbing the fence, beneath them a courgette (zucchini), which went into a decline went we left it for our Istanbul break (of which more details later in the zine). Zucchini picked fresh don't have the bitterness of those you buy in the shops. Then come the runner beans -- scarlet flowered Polestar vines, white-flowered Desiree and red-and-white Painted Lady. In front of the runner beans are grobags with Salad Bowl lettuce, a 'Saladini' salad leaf mix, more silver beet and a tomatillo. Then, after the sweet peas (which are poisonous) and jasmine and pansy pot, four pots with my four varieties of mint: ordinary, pepper, eau-de-cologne and variegated applemint. At the end of the row,

another flower pot: purple bugle and the purple leaf rosettes of *Lobelia cardinalis*, which has shown no signs of putting up its tall scarlet flower spikes. And that, apart from the compost worm bin and brew of slug tea, is that.

All quite a change from the sea of 'dreaded jungleweed' I wrote about in *FTT8* when we'd just moved here, in November 1989. One thing about a small garden, it's easy enough to keep persistent weeds under control, pulling up any new shoot as it appears. The past three years, we've had nice flowers to look at, plus herbs for flavouring -- a very cottage garden scramble of plants popped in wherever they'd fit, or where they self-seeded themselves. The bumblebees seemed to like it. This year, you will have gathered, has been different. This year, I've taken up permaculture in a big way. This year, we have a properly theorised backyard ecology.

Permaculture as I see it is mostly commonsense. The main reason it has had to be written up by Bill Mollison as a weighty and expensive *Permaculture Designers Manual* is because being brought up with common sense pottering about in your parents' own garden or farm growing your own food and acquiring a feel for how things grow is not so easy in the average city. The other reason is that it is kinda useful to have a compendium of others' experiences of what works under different conditions. The basic principles are:

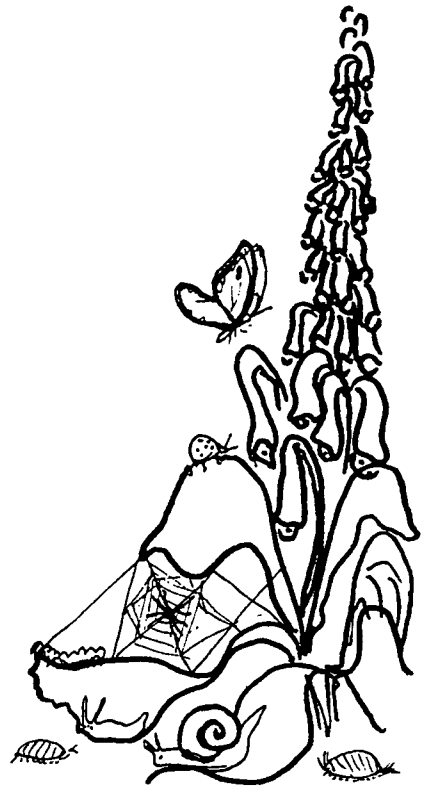
Work with nature, rather than against it: for instance, rather than spraying aphids, move ladybirds and their larvae onto the rose bushes or lettuce. Likewise hoverfly larvae. This, of course, would be easier if the organic gardening books actually showed you what these helpful larvae look like. Basically, ladybird larvae have ferocious predatory heads and rather grublike dark bodies. Hoverfly larvae are said to look like bird-droppings; rather like conventional caterpillars, but seem built back to front. In a small garden, picking off caterpillars, and squashing the leafminer grubs tunnelling through your sorrel leaves is manageable enough. Also, learn to know and appreciate your weeds. Chickweed, for instance, is perfectly edible, tasting much like lettuce, and has the encouraging property of indicating a soil in good condition.

The problem is the solution: that is, making use of what's there rather than fighting it. Slug tea is the perfect example. A recipe passed on to me by Yvonne Rousseau, it involves putting your local gastropods into a solution of about three parts water to one part sugar, plus a good pinch of salt. This upsets their osmotic balance, just like the traditional saucer of beer. Allow them to brew for a while. Then use the malodorous solution, diluted by up to ten, as a slug and snail repellent spray. Logical enough: you'd keep away from something that smelled of dead humans. Basically, instead of Joseph's nightly mollusc patrol horribly crushing, slicing and mangling the critters, they are cast into the brew, and their carcasses help keep their kinsfolk from the plants we don't want them to nibble. Seems to work.

This is a restatement of the principle that every output should be harnessed as the input for some other part of the system, and that pollution and waste are simply potentially useful inputs not properly harnessed. Composting is the other outstanding example. Permaculture is big on the role of animals, as well as plants within the garden system. If we had a garden with a proper lawn, for instance, I am quite taken with the idea of having a hamster, rabbit or pair of quail or bantams to graze it, rather than a nasty noisy fossil-fuel consuming lawn-mower. The birds, I think, win out: you could harvest their eggs with relatively little guilt -- though quail babies are beautiful, fully feathered in neat stripes from first hatching, not disgustingly naked pink mini-vultures like canary chicks. But I believe it is bad manners to eat any animal one has known well enough to give a name to.

Make the least change for the greatest possible effect: laissez-faire ecology, with cleverness valued over sweat and brute force. I guess my version is shaking self-seeding plants, like forget-me-nots, alyssum, foxgloves, honesty and pansies over the patches where I would like them to show up next year. Or, particularly in a mini-garden like ours, going for plants which are both edible and decorative, such as nasturtiums which make a terrific peppery leaf for salads. Laziness as a virtue -- or at least as cleverer than working up a lather.

Like most hobbies, backyard ecology-building isn't a way of saving money. In fact, you find all sorts of things to spend money on. Still, I tell myself, quite a lot of the spending has been start-up capital. First, during winter, there's the 'going wild with seed catalogues' fling: As a result, I have a two-foot long seed-propagator tray now full of seed packets. Then, with a garden as small and concreted over as ours,

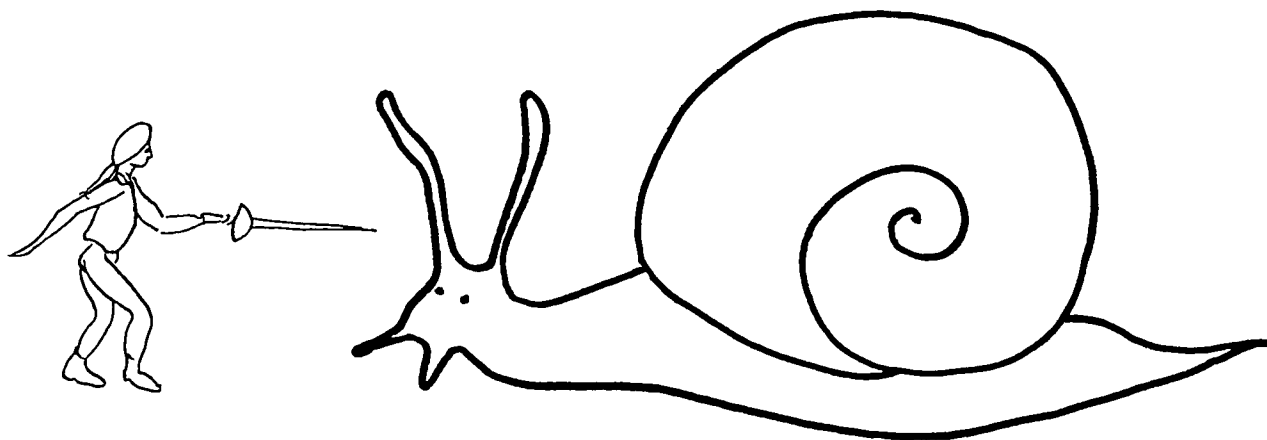


there's laying in your pots, grobags, and compost to fill them. Next year (assuming I haven't flitted to Australia) much of the old soil, refreshed with the worm compost, should be reusable either in the pots or spread onto the garden beds. I bought a cold frame, and two propagator frames with removable plastic trays and covers, and some 'enviro-fleece', all to give crops a bit of protection from the cold and so get them started early. And I have been buying large quantities of the magical 'swell-gell', a hygroscopic polymer which absorbs about 24 times its weight in water, thus considerably reducing the problems of plants drying out in hot weather or when you go away.

Those are the practical expenses. Then there are subscriptions to garden fandom, and the magazines it produces. Naturally, since all fans are paper addicts, I have taken out a raft of subscriptions so I can read about how to do gardening good and keep an eye on what dinky devices and catalogues appear in the ads at the back. Some of the magazines are the glossy, lavishly illustrated type -- *BBC Gardeners World*, which has gone organic and peat-free, and *Practical Gardening*, which hasn't but mentions the organic alternatives. Then you get the environmental activist newsletters -- *Organic Gardening*, which tries to be a proper magazine, *Permaculture Magazine*, which mixes 'how to grow stuff and save the world' practicalities with air-headed New Agers maundering about "re-programming the innermost Zone 00". As I wrote to *Permaculture*, this sort of evangelism strikes me as just as offensive as any other fundamentalist evangelism: brainwashing talk. And there is the *Henry Doubleday Research Association Newsletter* and *Heritage Seed Project Newsletter*, which are sensible, straightforward, and without fancy pictures.

The main thing we get out of the garden, of course, is pleasure. It is nice that we have been just about self-sufficient for greenery, and soft fruit as well as herbs, and that Joseph could pluck strawberries, blackberries and fuschia berries each morning to go with my muesli and yoghurt. It is certainly true that vegetables straight from the garden taste quite different from the tougher, tired, less tasty, rather boring stuff you buy in shops here. Our broad beans, for instance, tasted like the luxury I remembered from Mum's garden -- I had given up on shop-bought ones, which are not tasty. We should be, for a month or so, self-sufficient in tomatoes, and able to compare the three varieties I've sown: Moneymaker, Gardeners Delight, a cherry tomato with its first trusses of flowers out, and finally, Phyra, a small-garden variety specially for growing in pots or windowboxes. Since I am notoriously addicted to tomatoes, and find the sort you can get in the local shops disappointingly tasteless, I am looking forward to that.

But the main part of the pleasure is, for me, pottering about by way of helping things to grow, and with Joseph, sitting out on a fine day watching the variety of insect life that goes buzzing and fluttering and crawling about its business among our managed jungle. Nothing is more satisfying than watching nature at work, while you are being lazy.



From the Commons debate on Bill Walker's Constitutional Separation Bill, as recorded in *Hansard*, 9 February 1993:

Mr Bill Walker: "I stand before you, Madam Speaker, wearing the dress of highland Scotland -- " (*Interruption*)

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: "On a point of order, Madam Speaker. My hon. Friend the member for Tayside North suggested he was in highland dress; he is in nothing of the kind. He misled the House, and I have reason to believe that he is wearing little red pants under his kilt." (*Laughter*)

Madam Speaker: "Order. I have had enough colourful descriptions for one day."

The Invisible Elbow: markets revisited

edited by Judith Hanna

Last issue I wrote in "The Con of the Market" about markets, what's wrong with orthodox economic theory, and some possible ways of putting it right, including so-called Local Exchange Transaction Schemes as a working community substitute for money. Lots of you wrote back with all sorts of interesting comments, from markets you had known and worked in, to Canadian and Australian thoughts on how LETS schemes fit into the wider picture, to Sue Thomason mentioning that she is now involved in setting up a LETS scheme in the Whitby area. A contrast there between the awareness of the emerging alternatives, and the FTT review in the British Science Fiction Association's *Matrix* clubzine, which dismissed LETS as a nice idea but unlikely to work. However, they are spreading rapidly in this country: when I wrote last year some 30-odd had been set up. The UK count in early July this year stood at 130-odd.

Alexis Gilliland saw my challenge to economic orthodoxy as harking back to a "14th century Christian" anti-commercial moralism:

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"On p37 of Barbara Tuchman's *A Distant Mirror. The Calamitous 14th Century*, we find the following: 'the Christian attitude towards commerce... was one of active antagonism. It held that money was evil, that according to St Augustine, 'business is in itself an evil,' that profit ... was avarice, that ... charging interest... was the sin of usury, that buying goods wholesale and selling them unchanged at a higher retail price was immoral and condemned by canon law, that, in short,

St Jerome's dictum was final: 'A man who is a merchant can seldom, if ever, please God.'

"It followed that banker, merchant and businessman lived in daily commission of sin and daily contradiction of the moral code centring upon the 'just price'. This was based on the principle that a craft should supply each man a livelihood, and a fair return to all, but no more. Prices should be set at a just level, meaning the value of the labour added to the value of the raw material. To ensure that no one gained an advantage over anyone else, commercial law prohibited innovation in tools or techniques, underselling below a fixed price, working late by artificial light, employing extra apprentices or wife and underage children, and advertising wares or praising them to the detriment of others."

Which doesn't actually engage with what I said, though it raises a few interesting points. Adam Smith's seminal free-market essay, *The Wealth of Nations*, is indeed seen as the Enlightenment renunciation of the medieval Church's paternalistic anti-commercialism: the Protestant revolution in economics. In the context of its day, Smith's free-market justified the rise of the bourgeoisie and middle-class from a milieu which had previously been dominated by aristocracy and Church. But Alexis omits Tuchman's warning: "Division of rich and poor became increasingly sharp. With control of the raw materials and tools of production, the owners were able to reduce wages in classic exploitation." Thus the dark satanic mills, child labour and starvation wages of the nineteenth century produced their own reactions, which gave rise to socialist and communist theories, revolutions and evolution. It would not be too forced to compare the paternalism of soviet states to the paternalism of the Church. But all three of those paradigms have failed in practice, with capitalism though not yet dead visibly in deep doo-doo. It is not coming up with the answers because, as much as anything, it isn't asking the right questions.

As I pointed out, the small-scale local exchange initiatives now springing up around the world have in many respects more in common with Smith's idea of the market than with, for instance, the GATT apparatus or the semi-detached stratospheric transnational economy. Dale Speirs, below, tackles the 'money as commodity' problem which is part of what has gone wrong with the market. The other big market problem is the matter of 'externalities', such as environmental and social side-effects. Who pays for air pollution, for instance? It exacts a cost, in time lost to illness through asthmatic and other respiratory attacks, and the medical costs of treating them, in the costs of cleaning and restoring public buildings attacked by acid air and smoke. But those costs aren't charged to the owners of factories and power stations, or to drivers of cars; they tend to fall onto that byword for long-suffering and being put-up, the taxpayer. For which reason, Mike Jacobs, in his *The Green Economy* suggests that the market is more a clumsy 'invisible elbow', than a dextrous 'invisible hand'.

David Redd's doubts about my piece, on the other hand, were as much about the 'free market' as

about whether small-scale local trading systems constitute a step backward from civilisation:

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"No, the con of the market is the myth that a free market solves all ills. A directed market might solve the ills it is directed towards; a free market will create whatever kind of social system its parameters and influence tend towards. The market and market products are a formative influence on the next generation, and if the situations created by marketing forces are random then few of them will be benign. But nobody in government seems to understand feedback or systems analysis or even cause-and-effect. To me, green dollars or Stroud pounds and Totnes acorns have appeared because of central government ineptitude at running complex modern economic systems.

"I don't believe that LETS are a step forward. It seems a step backward, descending into little local semi-civilised barter systems which cut people off from full access to the benefits our civilisation offers over barbarism. (You can see other pointers to steps backwards in news items every so often: rises in fundamentalist bigotry and China seas piracy, decreases in literacy or social responsibility.) When the present social system makes people worse off if they stick to 'the rules', self-interest or survival or whatever will make people develop other systems.

"In a free market, the unscrupulous have an advantage over the honest; they have a wider range of strategies available. Where large organisations are involved, those who guide their policies and share their profits don't have to do anything illegal or immoral themselves, only to set up situations where their subordinates have few alternatives. For instance, a meat pie factory manager given profit targets to meet, or an airline executive told to maintain market share or else. When your meal ticket is on the line, ethics or public interest appear to come second. So the 'free' market actually has these ranges of behaviour built into it, against the interests of the customers. If police forces and the legal system had to operate with commercial efficiency, offenders would be simply shot on sight - so much more cost-effective than all those lawyers and prisons.

Yet the close of your 'The Con of the Market' is merely a pious hope that a few small-scale good ideas will somehow infiltrate the wider market sphere of, basically, self-interest and greed. I can't believe this. When the chips are down, a big business is a quasi-living organisation which will defend its own survival in whatever way it thinks it can manage. The Body Shop won't be selling ecologically sound products if it can't make money at them.

"The real question is, how do we get back to a society in which most people work in everybody's interest, not just their own? You saw with the deregulation of bus routes what a lousy public service competition within the wrong guidelines can give. To me, social and economic forces are too closely interwoven to be separated. Isn't there anybody to forecast socio-economic trends the way we forecast the weather? At least to try, even if the forecasts are no more successful than the average British hurricane warning.

"Your central sentence is 'Real markets are human scale; but humans are redundant to free market economics.' When you find a way of controlling self-interested people without restricting the freedom of the altruistic, you may be nearer a solution. But getting our market leaders to set up systems to put people first? This will require a major shift in social attitudes, and a generation reared on video shoot-em-ups and State support as of right isn't going to shift its attitudes easily. The only trickle-up of economic sanity from small-scale 'solutions' I can foresee is an end to mindless pursuit of infinite growth, and even that will only come because people's earning power falls as fewer people remain in productive jobs."

David's key points seem to lie in questioning the scale of effective solutions, and a vision of what civilisation ought to be and has been. David seems to agree with me about the problems; but I stick to my point that contemplating the macro-scale, all you see is the problems, stretching out on all sides like a huge, impenetrable brick wall. Banging your head against it may make you feel masochistically virtuous, but isn't terribly productive. Having spent ten years working as a 'save the world' campaigner, first on peace issues, then on transport and environment, I've become more and more convinced that solutions are produced by identifying what is within your power to sort out, and getting stuck into that. Certainly the macro-level is important -- when the global or national context is working against you, it can make right action difficult and dangerous, even impossible. As David says, the people at the top, running the system to keep themselves in power, won't easily be persuaded to change course. As Minister for Transport Steve Norris said when I interviewed him earlier this year: "I'm just the tanker captain -- you can steer a foot or so to the left or right, but it takes a long time to change course." (*Local Transport Today*, 1 April 1993). All the more important to act on the levels you can change.

From the activist perspective, you can dub it 'think globally, act locally'; from the EC perspective, it's the gloriously vague principle of subsidiarity, which actually means allowing decisions to be taken at the lowest appropriate level. A number of local councils around the country have been putting this into practice, by working with, or setting up, 'neighbourhood councils', 'community action forums' or similar and setting up staff teams with responsibility for work in a specific area, and a brief to get to know the

people they are working for. In York, for instance, this has included allocating each neighbourhood a budget, and allowing the neighbourhood council to decide what are the priorities for spending it - often this has been traffic-calming in residential streets. A similar York innovation has applied to housing renovations: provide each occupier with a note of the amount budgeted, and the options the council can provide within that, by way of repainting, new bathroom or kitchen. The householder can either choose from within that, or add in their own payment to have a more de-luxe treatment from the council's contractor, or ask for the money to be paid to their own contractor subject to a check by the council that the work has been done to a satisfactory standard. Likewise with setting up estate management committees, or the suggestion that old and disabled people should be given the money the Council allocates for their care and support, so that they are the employer and are able to hire or fire who comes into their house to look after them on their own terms.

David asks can't anyone "forecast the economic trends as we forecast the weather?" We do: both are similarly chaotic. But just as there are certain climatic near-certainties - the alternation of a summer and winter on a yearly cycle - there are certain economic near-certainties: the US per capita income and resource consumption are going to remain globally high, followed reasonably comfortably by other Western European and Australasian nations. Those of us with sesquipedalian vocabularies, our own computers and bourgeois backgrounds, however utopian our views, are less likely than others to find ourselves struggling with economic permafrost conditions.

Those were the two letters I wanted to argue with at length. I'll confine myself to brief points from here on. Derek Pickles, from his inside view of small-scale markets seems to agree with David:

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"I was one of 'a colourful plethora of small traders' as I stood on the pitching grounds of open markets for sixteen years. It might be colourful to the customer but it's hell on wheels when you're standing behind a stall, protected only by a canvas tilt which billows in the wind, periodically depositing several gallons of very cold water down the back of your neck. Last week was the fortieth anniversary of the East Coast floods and I remembered that I was one of only three stalls that set up on the pitching round that Saturday. The wind was so strong that, instead of putting the canvas on top of the stall, I had to put the canvas round three sides of the stall. Eventually I abandoned the struggle and packed up.

"The above is not a discussion of economics by a rather roundabout way of saying the 'trickling up' from lone or even small traders is a hard, hard business. It takes a hell of a lot of hand-weavers to exercise the economic power of Exxon, I know you say that but the big stumbling-block is that of organisation, the linking together of the different small units. You point to the problems with LETS and argue that they are better if they remain small systems with links between LETS to be only on the individual level."

Rather than envisaging any particular 'trickle-up', LETS seem to me to be getting away from waiting for 'trickle-down': they free up trade and exchange at the basic level of local supply and demand. Like you and David, I see Exxon, the Coca-Cola corporation and other megacorporations as too huge to tackle effectively head-on.

FTT is by no means the only fanzine which has engaged with the economic system; Dale Speirs' *Opuntia* has carried some fascinating material on the Kondratief long-wave theory, and drawing on Canadian thinking, particularly the Social Credit movement. He wrote to us:

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"Coming from a Social Credit family, I was brought up to believe that most of what ails our economies is that money has become a commodity instead of a means of exchange. The LETS system that you write about is a recognition that money should not be bought and sold like dry goods or vegetables.

The inaccurate nature of GDP indicators is recognised by economists, but as you said, 'Valuing unpaid work in monetary terms isn't easy.' I would make that sentence even stronger -- it's bloody impossible. Never mind calculating the value of housework, how do you even define it or guess how many hours are spent on it? Survey polls might be alright for handicapping elections, but when people are asked questions less tangible than 'Who will you vote for?', their answers become quite unreliable. My favourite example is the survey carried out by Alberta Agriculture, which asked farmers what type and how much pesticide they sprayed on their fields. The totals were then compared with actual quantities of chemical sold in Alberta; the variance was off the scale.

"Farmer-market type marketplaces are probably under-reported, making the dominance of megacorporations appear greater than it actually is. I know that if Revenue Canada ever audited the tax returns of some of our local flea market booth-holders, most of them would be before Court of Queen's Bench. One reason why the Canadian federal government introduced the General Sales Tax (VAT) was to flush out several billion dollars in unreported economic activity.

"Nor are trade deficits/surpluses any more accurate than GDPs. If I buy a book from the USA for \$20, I have officially caused \$20 of red ink for Canada. Yet I still have the book, which may increase in value over the years to the point where I sell it for \$60 cash to a dealer at an SF con. The \$60 transaction is unrecorded, the book is still in Canada, and officially there is still a \$20 loss to Canada."

Herman Daly's *Steady State Economics* points out that while GNP and GDP measure flows of money, what actually counts is the national levels, or 'stock', of goods or welfare, which are what make people, or a nation, well-off or not. Steve George, another Canadian, touches on this:

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"To an economist, a Pet Rock, that most useless of 'products', is equal in value to ten loaves of bread. Intrinsic value does not exist, only value dictated by demand. In such a system we are encouraged to believe that self-reliance has no value because money does not change hands, and so, unwilling to waste our time on tasks with no perceived value, we no longer do things for ourselves. The entire system is dependent upon our willingness to give up control of our lives to others by accepting the medium of money. The very concept of money encourages specialisation, the willing abandonment of many skills with intrinsic value to become expert at one skill with market value.

"Hence the epidemic of American specialist doctors and the decline of family practitioners. American economics professor and fan, Joe Wesson, recently pointed out to me how much more difficult it was for him to find a teaching position the more experienced he became. Experience equals greater remuneration, and there's little chance of that when there's a glut of inexperienced, inexpensive economists straining to fill the same jobs. Which may go a long way to explaining the state of the world."

The other Canadian fan who has looked deeply into the entrails of economics is Chester Cuthbert:

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"If you have read *The Great Depression of 1990* by Dr Ravi Batra (1985), you may agree with him that concentration of wealth by a top minority has been one of the most important factors contributing to the current 'recession'; and the fact that they control the income tax system allows them to escape paying their fair share of national expenses.

"You are wrong, however, in thinking that the LETS alternative is not widespread enough to be drawn to the attention of the tax system. When our Conservative government instituted our General Sales Tax, lectures on its application insisted that tax must be levied on trades. Having been retired from business for 27 years, I heard none of these talks and cannot provide details. The Barter System, as LETS is termed here, was first brought to my attention by a Venture business programme on CBC TV, which described it in operation in Courtenay, British Columbia. More and more people are being forced to use it as cash income decreases among the poor and in service businesses.

"Your comments on money are clear and concise, but almost everyone still thinks of wealth in terms of money, despite inflation in such countries as Brazil, Russia and Canada which demonstrates that real wealth is in goods and services.

"It is obvious that surpluses of production versus shortage of purchasing power in the hands of people who could use these surpluses are the cause of personal, business, municipal, provincial and national bankruptcies. Until the economic system is changed to promote production for use, instead of for profit, an adequate and universal guaranteed income must be instituted, and taxed back from those who don't need it.

"In Canada we have officially about 1.6 million unemployed with the number growing as firms 'downsize'. An ageing population is increasing the number of unproductive people, supported by our universal Old Age Security Pension; and we millions are living on unemployment insurance and welfare. Is it not obvious that labour by these millions is unnecessary? We must recognise that the function of technology is to do our work for us, and devote our time to other activities more useful and enjoyable."

It is, I think, worth quoting some further points from Chester, which Dale printed in *Opuntia* 12:

"Various writings on the so-called Economy of Abundance have convinced me that the capitalistic system, while probably the best to deal with scarcity, is consequently not the best to deal with the abundance produced by our efficient technology, because abundance or surplus of material goods means price reductions and no possibility of a profit overall... To let whole factories remain idle so that people can work is to defeat the whole idea of the machine. A guaranteed annual income is necessary on a universal basis so that we can enjoy the benefits provided by technology. Universal bankruptcy and the imminent breakdown of the money system is because of surplus real wealth, not because of shortage of anything...

"Over-production meant excess inventories which had to be financed a high interest rates. One of our most expensive surpluses is human labour, which must be financed by unemployment insurance or welfare. All surpluses have to be financed, and whether this is done by individuals or companies,

provinces or countries, these surpluses under our profit system mean bankruptcies of one sort or another. Such bankruptcies lead to recessions or depressions, to national deficits and world deprivation, simply because the capitalistic system has to be based on scarcity. A profit is only possible if there is scarcity, since abundance means price reductions. We must learn to produce for use, not for profit. It is senseless to allow technology to produce abundance under an economic system which will be bankrupted by abundance.

"Some individuals and businesses can continue to make profits, but these successful enterprises deal only in scarcities or unique services not readily available, and can set their prices. Collecting scarce items which are always in demand guarantees a profit which the abundance produced by our efficient technology denies currently to farmers and other efficient operators.

"Several books written by CEM Joad in the 1930s point out that good government provides freedom and economic security to its citizens. With our vastly improved technology, abundance can easily be provided. Because we don't distribute it fairly to our citizens by means of a Guaranteed Annual Income, the unsold surpluses are bankrupting the businesses which must finance them. It is clear that no-one would be robbed if everyone shared the benefits. To continue to think that more jobs will ease the recession is silly."

Brian Earl Brown offers a pertinent example:

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"I heard a recent interesting statistic, to wit, that a single mother with two children working full-time at minimum wage would still end up \$2000 below the poverty line in America. And President Reagan was opposed to raising the minimum wage because it would put people out of work! An even more fascinating study involved high school students who worked. Seems the more hours these kids worked, the worse their grades became. This suggests we should treat school as a full-time occupation and not let kids work elsewhere. This would dry up the employment market so that there would be jobs for people in their 20s with no education or skills who are currently on the dole. Of course this would seriously depress the economy because high schoolers who work spend their money on luxuries like cars and \$100 tennis shoes and jewellery, stuff that keeps our factories going. Give the jobs to welfare moms and they would only spend it on worthless things like food and housing. No, to keep our industries going we must encourage conspicuous consumption."

Jean Hollis Weber
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Australia

"A LETS system has been flourishing for some years in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney, an area with high unemployment and many people (in all age groups) on some form of public assistance. Over the past few years, the media have been running a lot of stories on how to survive in a recession, including examples of successful barter systems and LETS.

"You will not be surprised to learn that the Australian Taxation Office considers these schemes to be a form of tax avoidance and will scrutinise the records of LETS groups to see what 'income' the members have received, set a dollar value on that 'income', and tax it. Because many of the participants wouldn't have enough total income to be required to pay tax, of even more concern is the expectation that such 'income' will be counted against the allowable amounts before one's pension, unemployment or other welfare payments are reduced. Since the threshold for pension reduction is extremely low, this is of considerable concern (and not only to the people directly affected).

"It's clearly not practical for people to attempt to help themselves -- Big Brother will getcha for sure and then carry on about 'bludgers' and 'cheats'. I can see it now -- if a recognised charity helps you out with a food parcel, that's 'income'. Although probably the authorities will first attack baby-sitting clubs and other forms of work-exchange. The moral of the story is, I suppose, don't be open and honest about what you're doing, like the LETS people have been."

The threat of a good example?

Vicki Rosenzweig
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New York, NY 10034
USA

"I was most intrigued by the anthropological insights: living in a society where trust is assumed to be necessary only by the lender, it was interesting to see in the Irish approach a recognition that if I owe you something of value, that can put you in a position of power over me, and therefore it is well to be careful who you borrow from. Americans don't tend to notice this one until the bank forecloses, or the guys with baseball bats show up to demand what they owe the bookie. Ironically, I had seen private money mentioned before, by Robert Anton Wilson, who is generally classified as a right-wing libertarian (though he would probably reject that label)."

Others who wrote in on markets and money were Martin Gittins: "To say that advertising is a technique for artificially boosting demand is a bit simplistic. I think advertising creates a desire for goods that can thus be

overpriced and over-produced, upsetting traditional notions of supply and demand based on need rather than desire. Plus advertising can also create markets." Sounds like artificially boosting demand to me. I don't recall orthodox economic theory ruling out desire as a basis for demand; Steve Jeffreys who saw LETS as fannish: "The reliance on an administrator and a PC to keep track, makes it sound like an apa. I can see the fannish appeal, with its 'one for one' trades, of such a system"; Lloyd Penney "When the GST was introduced the (Canadian) government asked that for trades between one individual and another, the purchaser should send 7% of the sale price to the government. After we stopped laughing..." Pat Silver: "LETS sound like a very small-scale skill-swapping system a group of us have run informally for years, though we don't bother with records of who owes what to whom. In one way it is just formalising the old community attitudes that used to exist." Pascal Thomas "Groovy! It puts capitalism back in the hands of the working people where it belongs." Precisely, Pascal.

A FEW YEARS AGO MY GOV'T COULDN'T
PAY BACK THE BILLIONS OF DOLLARS OF
LOANS IT OWED TO WESTERN BANKS.



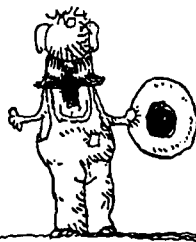
YEARS OF EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE
AND TODAY WE'RE ABLE ONLY TO
PAY BACK THE INTEREST ON OUR
LOANS!..



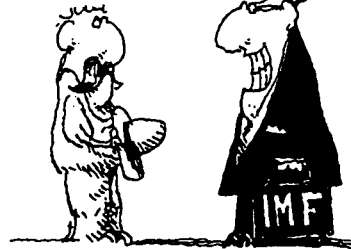
AS A RESULT, THEY WERE FORCED
TO CLOSE DOWN OUR HOSPITALS,
OUR SCHOOLS, THEY SMASHED OUR
UNIONS.



..WHAT WORD CAN POSSIBLY DESCRIBE
SUCH A HORRIFIC TRAGEDY?!



RECOVERY...



"Good to see the Labour Party have, as ever, got their fingers on the pulse. In the current edition of *Tribune*, Labour's environment spokesman, Jack Straw, reveals that Andrew Morton's potboiler on the Princess of Wales is in fact 'a remarkably subversive document'. 'It hadn't occurred to me before,' Straw explains, 'that the Royals were at the apex of a separate society of extremely rich people.' Apparently, Jack, the latest rumour is that the unemployed haven't got much money at all."

From the "Zeitgeist" column, *The Weekend Guardian*, 13 February 1993

From Transport Questions in the House of Commons, as recorded in *Hansard*, 8 February 1993:

Mr Tony Banks: "Will the Minister's River Thames committee consider the proposal to have on the river a floating heliport that could move around 22 sites between Battersea and the Thames Barrier? If he knows about the proposal to have 4000 annual civil flights and 400 military flights, will he tell us more about the 400 military flights? Will they be by helicopter gunships to ensure that the unemployed are following up the workfare scheme?"

Mr Steve Norris (Minister for Transport in London): "I know of that proposal and I agree with the hon. Gentleman that several aspects of it seem bizarre to say the least."

LETTERS

Edited by Joseph Nicholas

As you'll have noticed, we've once again split the letter column in two, one part to deal with responses to Judith's article in the previous issue and this part to handle everything else. Starting with:

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"Why is it generally believed that green views and technophilia are *a priori* mutually exclusive? I don't see any conflict. I'm a computer programmer and convention techie, but that doesn't stop me holding green views. Do greens really want to go back to primitive living? And if not, which bits of technology do they want to keep? Do

they realise what lies behind some of the apparently simple pieces of modern technology? If we were to throw away technology in the way that some of the extreme greens appear to want, do they realise that they are passing a death sentence (albeit not immediate in many cases) on a large number of people due to the abandonment of many medical and surgical techniques?

"This will serve as a useful example of the wider problem. Many drugs and vaccines are produced on an industrial scale, and some by highly sophisticated processes which cannot be duplicated with primitive methods. Yes, reductions in the incidence of disease were partly due to better sanitation and clean water supplies, but not all. Pneumonia was a killer until the advent of effective antibiotics. Surgical instruments require the production of metal and the facilities to machine that metal. In answer to claims that healthy humans do not contract serious disease is the fact that smallpox has been completely eradicated by the use of modern vaccines. And this is the sort of thing that greens apparently want to throw away.

"I agree that technology must be controlled and used wisely, but trying to blame all ills on it and becoming Luddites is not the answer. I don't think that technology is the cure for all ills, but throwing it away won't solve our problems either."

This argument has little resemblance to the green view of technology that I know. Greens recognise that technology brings great benefits -- cheap computers such as the ones on which FTT is written -- but are concerned to ensure that it is used appropriately rather than indiscriminately (cheap computers rather than "better" missile guidance systems), and that humanity doesn't engage in rampant technological development for no other reason than that it is able to, and without thought of the consequences. The distinction between greenery and technophilia is an artificial one, manufactured by those committed to a technocratic worldview and either unable or unwilling to engage with arguments which challenge and undermine it. That it is "generally believed" is a result of the establishment's access to and control of the media, although on a personal level the establishment is more technophobic than technophilic -- as shown by the over-representation in the bureaucratic and political elites of so-called "gifted amateurs" trained in philosophy and the classics, who have a marked distaste for science and industry. (The Thatcher revolution against this establishment pretended to overthrow such values but in fact exhibited the same technophobia; it stressed accountancy, estate agency and other financial services, but otherwise replicated the classicists' disdain for science as something unfit for a true gentleman.) Such distaste, however, doesn't stop the establishment appropriating a concern for technology in its struggle against the alternate societal values offered by the greens, since the larger the misrepresentation of an opponent's ideas the less attention paid to one's own hypocrisies and inconsistencies.

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"I don't know much about Islam, but it does strike me that there's something a bit odd about non-Muslims arguing among themselves about what constitutes real Islam. Shall we next decide whether Britain is a Christian society based on a debate between two Buddhists and a Hindu? I

don't even know if the question comes up, though this visiting American found the existence of an established church very odd. Here in the States, asserting that the

USA is or isn't a Christian nation is a good way to start an argument, in part because nobody seems sure if that means simply that Christianity is in the culture or if it means Christians are somehow more American than the rest of us."

Britain isn't a Christian society in the same sense that Islamic societies are Islamic societies because although Anglican Protestantism is formally part of the state apparatus, there is a clear distinction between religious and secular power -- unlike Islam. It's therefore perfectly possible, no matter how odd, for non-Muslims to question whether certain Arab states fulfill the Koranic definition of an Islamic society -- while the likes of Francis Fukuyama, arguing that Islamic societies can reform themselves along Western lines, reveal only their ignorance of the subject.

Vicki Rosenzweig "I don't see much point in commenting on Fosfax, since the one issue that I saw surprised me by its lack of interest and insularity (Joseph Major is clearly incapable of understanding Joseph's viewpoint, since it steps outside the us/them Cold War framework), but one fact might be worth mentioning: a recently released transcript of discussions over the police radio shows that the officers who beat up Rodney King were discussing beating the driver up before they even stopped his car. That ought to refute any claim that the officers were provoked by King's refusal to just lie there (although it's not clear why the prosecution in their first trial didn't introduce it as evidence)."

Vicki's letter was written in February, before April's retrial of the four LA police officers which found two of them guilty; the following letter was written in January, following the appearance of its author in the previous issue's "Loonywatch" column:

Alexander Slate "This is the first time I've ever been accused of being a right-wing loony. You might note, though, that while I disagree with many of your positions, I also agree with many. While I think that my opinions of the Rodney King beating and its aftermath are correct, I agree that there is room to misinterpret what I said, its impact, and my reasons.

"First of all, I think you've misplaced the emphasis. The important statement in the quoted paragraph is 'as public servants and guardians of the public trust, the police...are more responsible for their actions', not my statement regarding administrative punishment. But you are also under the misapprehension that administrative punishment necessarily means a light slap on the wrist. It could include fines, demotion, even dismissal.

"I would support such a punishment because it would indicate that the LA police force itself realises that the actions of its officers were wrong. I think it would be the best way to change their actions and attitudes, not through measures imposed from outside."

This is contradictory. If you wish to argue that the police are "more responsible" for their actions than anyone else, then logically you should also argue for heavier penalties than anyone else would face, not lighter "administrative punishments".

This aside, the arguments that have surrounded the trial (and retrial) of the four police officers strike a Briton like myself as quite decoupled from reality, and more concerned with abstract constitutional questions of civil liberties and due process than what actually happened. Suppose, for example, that you saw a videotape of a group of men beating the hell out of someone with wooden clubs, continuing to do so long after he had ceased to resist, and then congratulating themselves about it afterwards -- would you respond by arguing about "administrative punishments", or by urging that the men be arrested and tried for assault, assault and battery, intent to commit grievous bodily harm, and inflicting grievous bodily harm? And if you then saw the same group of men, in police uniforms, perpetrating the same beating, would you really argue that "fines, demotion, even dismissal" are more appropriate than assault and battery charges? I rather doubt it.

The suggestion that the LA police force should be left to reform itself rather than "through measures imposed from outside" is similarly unreal. What organisation has ever reformed itself except through pressure from without?

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would not believe how many bad American writers with goatee beards there are in these parts!"

"I'm somewhat perplexed by your ongoing feud with *Fosfax*. Who are these cretins, and why aren't they here in Prague offering big money to students who want to study 'American values'? This is what most of the US right seems to be doing these days -- either that, or hanging around in European coffee shops, pretending to be Hemingway. You

THE REBIRTH OF THE FUTURE

Francis Fukuyama's End Of History thesis enjoyed a vogue in 1991-1992, and although his moment has clearly passed -- not so much the end of history and a new world order as the new world disorder -- he continues to inspire comment. As follows:

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Kidlington
Oxfordshire OX5 2XA

"The idea that history has stopped with the rise of liberal democratic capitalism might come as a surprise to millions of people who have yet to see this fabulous beast in operation, and is an astoundingly skewed worldview, of the sort that places Central America on the map somewhere around Kansas. As quaint as previous beliefs that everything has now been discovered or invented, and science is at an end (until a new paradigm knocks it off its self-constructed pedestal). It's also a bad deal for Americans, who have only managed a couple of hundred years of real history before Fukuyama declares it's all over. Does he really mean this by 'post-historical': that history is entirely defined by the rise and fall of political ideologies, and that there are no other options left? It sounds a very self-justifying argument: 'my side is winning, so I declare the game over'."

Zy Nicholson
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Bath, Avon BA2 3HS

"I realise that in my previous letter I never said anything about Nietzsche interpretations; unforgivably, because it's probably the only thing I'm actually qualified to do. "Fukuyama's interpretation of Nietzsche is possibly the worst since the Nazis adopted him as a leading thinker of their movement, completely oblivious to the fact that he abhorred nationalism and would have been turning in his grave. *The Will To Power* is a posthumous and highly selective collection of Nietzsche's notes compiled by his sister Elizabeth, who was a xenophobe, a Teutonic purist, and general raving fascist loony who ingratiated herself with Hitler and claimed to speak on behalf of her brother, though she did nothing of the sort. It is no longer excusable to quote from *The Will To Power* without reservation, but this doesn't stop Fukuyama, and though he draws on *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and others his reading of Nietzsche is rather cursory. It's really very easy to quote from such a vast collection of *bon mots* in a way that supports your argument every time.

"Fukuyama draws comparisons with Pascal, as if Nietzsche believed in some kind of asceticism, with the implication that the *Übermensch* still stands for that highly disciplined physically 'perfect' Aryan Fascist Superman Ideal, as the Nazis held. This is bollocks. 'Man is something to be overcome,' says Zarathustra. The Overman is a difficult idea, but is concerned with the evolution of new values which arise from within human experience, and not a subjugation of that experience by metaphysics. The Overman is a manifestation of the Dionysian, of laughter and dance, mockery and chaos and euphoria, not of the stoic Apollonian, and not of the perfection of man according to some old Germanic definition.

"Nietzsche was not the 'father of nihilism', as Fukuyama suggests. The Nietzschean project was concerned with the *overcoming* of nihilism, and Nietzsche saw nihilism as a result of metaphysics (which here encompasses religion, ethics, science, philosophy). When Fukuyama refers to Nietzsche's hope for the 'birth of a new morality that would favour the strong over the weak', he has missed the point completely. There can be no morality as such for the Overman, as a *system* of values merely returns us to metaphysics. Fukuyama misunderstands this to such a degree that he even calls Nietzsche a relativist, when Nietzsche's thought is directed far beyond questions of relativism (as any fule kno).

"And what is this 'strong over the weak'? It's the sort of interpretation of the master-slave distinction that Joseph rightly dismissed as rather dodgy. Deleuze puts

it clearer as a distinction of active and reactive, a question of creativity rather than dominance and submission. (Art is Everything....) Fukuyama's interpretation allows him to equate it with *megalothymia*, from which he jumps to the conclusion that Nietzsche is talking about recognition. Unfortunately, there's a significant difference between creativity and *thymos*. If thymotic functions are responsible for Art then we are already at odds with Nietzsche's picture.

"Ultimately, in the singular stress it places upon the 'part of the soul' named *thymos*, Fukuyama's reading of Nietzsche becomes an exercise in reductionism that is both exclusive and destructive. His constant references to Stalin, Hitler and Saddam Hussein as examples of *megalothymia* suggest that he cannot fully grasp the concepts he has borrowed. And when he cites Nietzsche as part of a Western philosophical tradition from Plato onwards then I just despair -- Nietzsche antithesises the Platonic-Kantian metaphysical tradition, and has more in common with Heraclitus and Cratylus. But Fukuyama obviously hasn't read that far yet.

"I don't know if any of this makes sense. After three years of philosophy, I can't tell any more. I don't even know if it's in vogue that I *should* make sense. I think my favourite Nietzschean text is one that's used to great effect by Derrida: it's a small scrap of paper found among his notes on which is written, quite simply, 'I have forgotten my umbrella'."

A shift of subject, but remaining in philosophical mood:

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Great Bromley
Colchester
Essex CO7 7UL

"Cath Easthope's letter is to me as a red rag to a tory; there is a plethora of misconceptions. While I'm no big fan of the concept of an objective reality, I rather think Cath has thrown the baby out with the bathwater. Merely because it was widely (by no means universally) believed that the world was flat does not mean that the world *was* flat. The counter argument is that the world was flat

then, but is *not* flat *now*, i.e., as the paradigm changed, so did the past. Bollocks, frankly. Reverse causality, while theoretically possible, isn't big enough to effect the shape of the world. If it was, then 500 years ago Columbus landed in the Philippines, but later philosophical viewpoints placed the Americas in the way. Like I said, objective reality may not be up to much, but it won't go away.

"As for the anthropic principle....larfably easy. The anthropic principle is based on the assumption that there can only be one reality. However, if we take the multiple universes interpretation of quantum physics (rapidly becoming the interpretation of choice amongst physicists), then the problem vanishes. If the universe could have produced a self-aware object by now, then one of the infinite (and a high order of infinity, at that) universes would have produced such an object. Only those universes which had produced such an object (such as the set in which we exist) could be commented upon. The fact that we cannot observe these other universes, or comment upon them with any degree of assurance of their natures, does not make them any less objectively real. They are, however, logically irrelevant to any discussion of the universe, other than debunking the anthropic principle.

"Neither the anthropic nor the mediocrity principle need be true, as the observing being is not necessary for the existence of the universe. It doesn't care whether its existence can be attested to by an observer from within. Paradigm shifts don't change reality, merely the way it's perceived. Merely because we have only our perception and hearsay with which to interpret the universe does not mean that the universe itself changes; only the model of it which we carry in our heads.

"For Pam Baddeley, I'd add that paradigm shifts aren't quantum events, but are closer to the Hegelian/Marxist model of thesis (old paradigm), antithesis (the bold statement of the new paradigm), and synthesis (the new paradigm is refined and, if it falls the right side of Occam's Razor, accepted). A slow, tortuous process, which the likes of von Daniken and Velikovsky are constantly attacking (having never left the antithesis stage)."

DREAMS OF HEAVEN

But enough philosophising about the nature of the universe -- let's hear from those who want to conquer it:

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Oxfordshire OX12 7EW

"You've got to have a dream/If you don't have a dream/How can you have a dream come true?"

"Trite words, banal music, but 'Happy Talk' from *South Pacific*, like so many hits from the old musicals has a grain of truth that people can relate to. I'm not at all sure that it is a simple matter of space enthusiasts

realising their dreams and expecting the people of their countries to make sacrifices in order that they may do so. The whole world did watch the first landing on the Moon, and that landing did capture imaginations and generate hope. Those hopes are not yet entirely dashed. Space-related dreams are not confined to SF readers or those who actually work on space projects.

"Vague as the dreams may be, millions of people would think that space-related technological advances are preferable to war-related ones. They may not have any clear idea as to how it would work, but taking raw materials from the Moon and the asteroids and carrying out industrial processes in space is a popular dream, and many believe that such use of space will enable the restoration of the Earth to create a greener world for our children and grand-children. The right leaders with the right programmes, which could capture the dreamers' imagination and belief, could yet forward a greater use of at least near space. I do not see that as any more harmful than spending billions on propping up energy-hungry industries that rape the Earth to produce short-life tatty consumer goods.

"How will that help Third World countries? If government money and will in the North were turned to space, might not speculators see more profit in space technology than in beef raised on land cleared from rain forests? If the tiny minority in the South who grown rich from the North's exploitation of their countries were deprived of that money might they not look at the natural renewable resources of the forest?"

"Dreams carry us forward. The Channel Tunnel is not my dream, but enough people believed in it for it to become a reality, despite financial troubles and other delays. The dreams of cathedrals, bridges, ships, canals, new lands are perforce the dreams of yesteryear, but without such things the dreams we have are petty ones of great personal wealth and instant gratification. I would suggest that space is the only big dream left and therefore not too costly."

While not disagreeing that "space-related technological advances are preferable to war-related ones" or that space expenditure wouldn't be "any more harmful than spending billions on propping up energy-hungry industries", I think it's fallacious to argue that because one form of expenditure is preferable to another it is (or could be) more popular. If, say, a Tanzanian peasant farmer were asked what she thought of crewed spaceflight, she'd probably say that it might be interesting for those who can afford it but has no relevance to her needs. Her dreams are probably concerned more with obtaining a proper price for her cotton and sorghum in the local market, ensuring that her children are properly fed and get a good basic education, not having to walk miles each day to collect water and firewood (and preferably not having to collect them at all, but having water and electricity piped in), having access to family planning and other health services, keeping her cow healthy and strong....a range of "little dreams" that the average space enthusiast would find unbearably mundane, but dreams that are far more relevant, and hence more real, to her than crewed spaceflight -- and shared by a much greater proportion of humanity, no matter how often they watch spaceflight on television.

"The right leaders with the right programmes" could possibly make spaceflight more popular with more people, but sheer popularity won't impress those who control the pursestrings. (As I've argued before, the long timelag between initial investment and possible return is a deterrent to investment in the first place). Speculators won't therefore "see more profit in space technology than in beef raised on land cleared from rain forests" because the beef will always deliver what space technology can't: immediate returns, which is what speculators live for. (Immediate returns until the rain forests run out, anyway, but speculators couldn't care about that.) And the "tiny minority in the South who grow rich from the North's exploitation of their countries" won't "look at the renewable natural resources of the forest" if Northern support is withdrawn; they'll just loot their national treasuries and escape to their mansions in California and the south of France.

Anyway, if we need dreams to inspire us, why spaceflight? Why not be inspired by dreams of peace and justice for all; of environmental sustainability, of clean

water and sanitation throughout the Third World, cancellation of the global debt burden, reform of the international trading system, an end to commodity speculation and the arms trade, an end to inadequate diets and ethnic hatred? No technological advances are required to realise such dreams; only political will. It's true that this is often in short supply these days; but I contend that fighting to develop it is immeasurably more important than thinking up ways to mine the asteroids.

Pamela Boal

"There is nothing wrong with dreams of peace and justice for all, of environmental sustainability, of all the other matters you mention -- nothing except that no matter how many caring individuals dip into their pockets or talk about the problems at a distance they remain dreams. Altruism is a very rare human trait, and turning such dreams into reality has no rewards except for the altruist.

"The human animal still operates to a great extent on the principle of the survival of the fittest. Food, warmth, shelter and education for one's children are small dreams not confined solely to the South. Anyone born before World War Two in the London slums or the North-East knows all about them, and you have only to ask Shelter to establish the growing number of children being raised in conditions as bad as those we fought our way up from sixty years ago. Believe me, few individuals who have overcome those conditions and realised their small dreams go back to help those they have left behind. On the whole, various programmes to assist the poor (in any part of the world) do little more than make the giver feel good, although that little more is worthwhile because it helps the fittest to go forward.

"The Victorian poor lived in desperate conditions, but then so did the poor of previous generations. It was the Victorian rich who instituted education, health, prison and employment reforms -- the Victorian rich who were realising big dreams for their own gratification and with a belief in the future. Unless human nature changes drastically (and I don't see much sign of that), we need the haves with the big dreams to ease the lot of the have-nots."

This seems a very gloomy view of human nature. However, to maintain the gloom, I'd say that the reforms instituted by the Victorian rich were inspired solely by pragmatism; specifically, the need to develop a skilled urban proletariat to tend and operate the machines which fuelled the manufacturing boom of the mid-nineteenth century, so assisting them to maximise their profits. Anything the Victorian poor derived for itself was purely incidental.

THE OZYMANDIAS COMPLEX

Pat Silver

(address as before)

"Space research has produced, directly and indirectly, enormous advances in materials science, Earth sciences, human physiology, electronics, computing, and more besides.

Most research is done without any end in view, and many great advances in knowledge have come about as an unexpected result of such research. I consider it one of the great failings of the monetarist approach that investment in research is viewed as a waste, instead of the quick profit which makes accountants happy. I work in the aerospace industry, and have watched it throw away its future by refusing to invest in research and training. I am convinced that many of the economic problems it's suffering at present are due largely to this attitude, which in the longer term leaves companies with no direction and no future.

"Even more important, I believe that unless the human race is allowed to grow and learn it will stagnate and die. Several of the great civilisations of the past went into decline once they stopped struggling and expanding. On a smaller scale, I have watched any number of marriages and partnerships fall apart once a certain level of financial stability has been attained, and boredom sets in because there is no longer anything to aspire to. People need to feel that they are part of something which is alive and growing. Instead, we are developing a fortress attitude, hiding inside our current knowledge, too afraid to go outside and explore. So what do we when the inhabitants of Fortress Earth subside into apathy with no desire to continue the struggle of life?"

This is a very Western, and indeed a very science-fictional, point of view. (As John W. Campbell might have put it: we have run out of frontiers in the Wild West, so let's

find some new ones on Mars.) However, the claim that "the great civilisations of the past went into decline once they stopped struggling and expanding" is based on a misperception of their historical trajectory: specifically, an assumption that a failure to struggle and expand leaves them prone to eventual internal decay and ripe for overthrow from without by other, more vigorous civilisations. In fact, it is precisely those civilisations which did struggle and expand which were most prone to decay and overthrow, as one after the other they suffered from what Paul Kennedy (in *The Rise And Fall Of The Great Powers*) identifies as "imperial overstretch": too much to do, and insufficient resources with which to do it. Spain, France, Austro-Hungary, Great Britain, Germany, and Japan all lost their empires because their ambitions eventually outran their abilities. (Just as the USA has outreached itself, and is now firmly on the downward slope -- although the overseas military interventions of the Reaganaut eighties were clearly an attempt to assert otherwise.)

Those civilisations which have foregone territorial acquisition and technological innovation, on the other hand, and concentrated on building an ordered, fully rounded society have proven the most stable, the most long-lived, and thus in their own terms the most successful -- China, India before the Moghuls, pharaonic Egypt. People may indeed "need to feel that they are part of something which is alive and growing", but why should that growth entail exploration and conquest, like the civilisations of the past five hundred years? Why should it not be, in the footsteps of the civilisations of the preceding three millenia, the growth of understanding and insight, and the development of sustainable and satisfying lifestyles? (And why and how should this result in "developing a fortress attitude"?)

Pat Silver

"I disagree. It isn't necessary for a society to grow physically in the sense of the territory it controls, but I do think it is necessary for there to be some sort of movement and growth, either physically or intellectually, and I think it is necessary for the members of that society to be aware of and feel part of that growth. No structure based on living organisms is ever stable, and that applies to human society as much as it does to an ant colony. For that matter, chaos mathematics works just as well for dynamic physical structures too. If you try to constrain a system too tightly it eventually breaks out in some other way. You might slow the process, but you can't stop it entirely. Better in my opinion to guide the changes rather than try to prevent them. Having said which, I must admit that I write from the position of one of those who is never content and always restless."

We agree that growth need not be physical, and can be spiritual or intellectual; but not much else. It is true that some civilisations became too inner-directed and too stagnant -- Ming-ruled China, for example, which from the fifteenth century onwards progressively closed itself off from the outside world and adopted a set of rigid political precepts legitimised only by the fact that they were modelled on those of previous dynasties -- and by focusing too narrowly on the perfection of their own social order left themselves unprepared for any challenges from without -- Egypt at the end of the New Kingdom, for example, which then passed into the control of a succession of non-Egyptian powers from which it did not regain its independence until the 1920s -- but it is equally the case that many otherwise philosophically dynamic and well ordered civilisations fell not because their cultural outlooks ceased to evolve, or they failed to satisfy the needs of their people, but because they had overexploited their resource base and thereby undermined their stability. The archetypal example of this is Mesopotamia, home to the ancient civilisations of Sumeria, Akkad, Babylon, and Assyria, but which is now largely a desert, thanks initially to deforestation which reduced the water table and dried out the soil, then to irrigation which increased its salinity and destroyed its fertility. But Mesopotamia is not the only example (an entire chapter of Jared Diamond's *The Rise And Fall Of The Third Chimpanzee* is devoted to the subject).

My contention remains that to argue that civilisations eventually fall because they fail to look outward is a Western conceit derived from the past five hundred years of European imperial conquest rather than these civilisations' actual history. It's only because we ourselves are Westerners, and view their history through the distorting prism of the past five hundred years, that we fail to grasp this.

PEOPLE WHO LIKE BOOKS LIKE THIS WILL LIKE THIS BOOK

Let's change the subject entirely, and hear from:

David Bratman
1161 Huntingdon Drive
San Jose
California 95129, USA

"I've been going on a binge of reading recent British memoirs. My latest acquisition is the simply titled *Memoirs of Kinglsey Amis*. And very profitable reading it has been too, in its way. Not since Piers Anthony's *Bio Of An Ogre* has an author so vividly condemned himself out of his own mouth while remaining completely oblivious to what he's doing.

"On the evidence of this book, Amis is a real shit. But, I must add, he's an entertaining shit. Reading his memoirs is like reading the fanzines of certain fuggheads: you get all the benefit of their skill as raconteurs without having to endure their doubtless obnoxious company.

"The book consists of a series of character sketches of people Amis has known, or met at parties, in which he expertly retells the funniest stories he has heard from them, and otherwise dumps on his subjects unmercifully, regardless of whether they're living or dead. Friends, enemies, or the most casual famous acquaintances, are depicted by having their smallest personalty flaws magnified into grotesque psychological disorders. This goes on throughout the book, and makes you wonder how those people must have seen Amis, a topic he touches upon a few times, rather uneasily. For instance, the American writer Leo Rosten is pictured as an egomaniac so stingy that he gave the Amises only three small drinks apiece before taking them out for dinner. Only three! One wonders how Rosten's account of that evening would read. Elsewhere Amis loudly insists that though he does take a drink now and then, and the protagonists of his novels do so even more frequently, he's not a lush, and resents the accusation.

"In only one of his sketches does Amis abandon his caustic attitude and take the more circumspect one usually found in the much less revealing or interesting works that books of this type usually are. You've seen this sort of bland portrait: 'Just to show I'm balanced, I'll begin by saying that perhaps my subject has a few small character traits or opinions I'm not overwhelmingly fond of, but overall she's a charming person and a gracious hostess who's been grossly misunderstood by her critics, and I can't say enough good about her'. Stuck in the middle of this book, such an encomium sticks out most painfully. And who is the person whom our little shit so fawns upon? None other than *Margaret Thatcher*! Oh, ugh!

"Politically, Amis is one of those unstable people who migrate from one extreme to the other without the slightest indication that there's something in between. He remarks on his leftist youth without analysing it in any way, and adds that the Soviet invasion of Hungary is what changed his mind. Why he couldn't protest against that without becoming a Thatcherite I can't understand. What's truly amazing about his attitude is revealed in his one criticism of Thatcherism: its educational policies. He approves of most of the cuts and changes, except for the cut of what he called 'education for education's sake'. Of course he's a former English don, so he would say that. But he seems utterly unaware that cancelling government spending on the pleasant frills that make life worth living is the heart of what Thatcherism (and, in the US, Reaganism) was all about. In this he's like the American libertarians who are opposed to all government spending 'except the space programme, because that's *important*'.

"Amis seems vaguely aware that his politics are retrograde, so he tries to make up for it by recounting his visceral distaste for the more virulent forms of racism; not that he ever did anything about it, preferring to remain polite and reserved in the face of a racist rant than to tell these people where to get off. Still, the most fascinating chapter of the entire book is the account of a semester spent teaching in Nashville, Tennessee, in the mid-sixties. The attitude that 'of course Negroes [as they were called then] are repulsive, ugly and mentally inferior', coupled with bewilderment that the rest of the world can't see this, was by Amis's account endemic among the white population, even the educated. I've not encountered it in my infrequent visits to that region, so perhaps it's died off there; but it reappears in uncannily identical form in P. J. O'Rourke's more recent visit to South Africa, reported in his *Holidays In Hell*, together with a similar reticently repelled response by the neoconservative who's telling us about it.

"I've also been reading the memoirs of some British politicians of the soggy left. This is the portion of the political spectrum where I myself reside, so I have a certain degree of admiration for them, which is doubtless much increased by the six thousand miles separating me from the effects of their policies. But regardless of one's feelings about them, I'm amazed by how much better memoirs British politicians write, apparently without the help of ghostwriters, than American politicians manage with highly touted assistance. Even David Steel's *Against Goliath*, the least well-written and most disjointed of the three, makes better reading than Tip O'Neill's string of unconnected anecdotes or Ronald Reagan's total obliviousness to criticism. Denis Healey's *The Time Of My Life* is much more entertaining, and I bought it because on opening it to browse I immediately stumbled across the funniest Reagan anecdote I'd ever read, one which I've never encountered elsewhere. On visiting Washington in the company of Neil Kinnock, Healey was nonplussed to find himself greeted by Reagan as 'Mr Ambassador', much to the discomfort of the real ambassador. Later that day a senator explained that this was typical of Reagan, and that the President had once mistaken General Colin Powell for the janitor."

AND FINALLY

By way of introduction to the next letter, the author has recently been hired as a staff writer on Super Play magazine:

Zy Nicholson
(address as before)

"Given Joseph's long-standing fascination with helicopter gunships, you can't have failed to notice a best-selling game called *Desert Strike*, in which you fly around the Gulf blowing up anything that moves in an effort to stop 'a mad military dictator'. Get to the end of the game and George Bush shakes your hand at a White House press conference.... Now we have the sequel, *Jungle Strike*, in which you take the War On Drugs (and, of course, your massively weapon-laden helicopter gunship) to the 'evil Colombian drug barons'.

"Whilst the dubious message of these games goes largely without comment (and I haven't even touched on their sexism), the 'violence in video games' debate has focused on the ludicrous extremes of games like *Mortal Kombat*, where super-powered martial artists, ninjas and monsters beat the shit out of each other, heads and limbs flying and so on. Personally, I've never had any trouble reconciling my pacifist CND stance with my role-playing, wargaming, joystick-wagging hobbies. Playing *Risk* hasn't yet made me think that we should arm ourselves to the teeth against the hidden dangers of some 'unstable' new Europe; nor do I lust over military hardware statistics in survivalist magazines just because I've been playing *Syndicate*. Beating up my closest friends in a two-player game of *Streetfighter 2* is a good laugh, but has little connection with the real world.

"I was amused by your involuntary contributors to *FTT 14*'s 'Loonywatch', who made me wonder, for one brief cynicism-free moment, if you hadn't just made them up."

Andy Sawyer
1 The Flaxyard
Woodfall Lane
Little Neston
South Wirral L64 4BT

"I've just been filing away *FTT 14* with the shame-faced knowledge that as it's been sitting on my desk for the last three months I'll never get around to locking it now, and re-read the quote from Timothy Lane about Anita Hill in 'Loonywatch'. Wait a minute....

"Some women....use false sexual harrasment charges as a weapon'. Knowing the way the human mind works, I've no doubt that's so.

"Many such charges 'often are true'. Not to mention the many cases of sexual harrasment which don't reach the point of becoming 'charges' because the victim may be too busy to do more than grumble to colleagues or too intimidated by fear for their future physical safety or job security.

"Therefore, surely, we should be careful about dismissing charges of sexual harrasment too cavalierly? No -- Timothy Lane is 'very sceptical about such charges'.

"I'm confused. Can we run through this again, very slowly?"

You're confused? You're not the only one!

And on that note we shall conclude, with the traditional list of those whose

communications failed to satisfy the rigorous selection procedure without which this letter column would be at least twice as long -- as follows: Harry Andruschak, Nigel Babich (nee Rowe), Sheryl Birkhead, Valma Brown, Tom Collins, Don Fitch, Tom Fülöpp, Gerald Geary, Martin Gittins, Jenny Glover, Teddy Harvia, Matthias Hofmann, Rhodri James, Robert Lichtman, Mark Manning, Rolandas Maskoliunas, Par Nilsson, Andy Porter, Peter Stonham, Alan Sullivan, Michael Waite, Lesley Ward, C. R. Wickins, and Taras Wolansky. Our thanks to you all.

LOONYWATCH

More exciting journeys beyond the fringes of common sense

Australian fan Michael Hailstone is a believer in Conspiracy Theory -- one big one, which runs the world and which has duped us all. The World Bank, the IMF, AIDS, the greenhouse effect, the "new world order", the design of postage stamps, even papers missing from his desk at work -- absolutely *everything* is incorporated into a gargantuan vision of a world in which no one (bar Hailstone himself, of course) has any autonomy or capability for independent thought, and is pushed around at the whim of a secret cabal of Bavarian Illuminati princes or Masonic Californian surfers.

There are several objections to this. For one thing, a conspiracy of such a size would require the services of so many people to manage it that there could scarcely be anyone left outside it. For another, such a theory ignores ordinary statistical probabilities, particularly those relating to coincidence and accident. For a third, a conspiracy as all-pervasive as Hailstone believes would surely never have allowed him to spill its secrets for so long.

Not that this bothers Hailstone, who is convinced that the hole in the ozone layer is a trick to persuade us to accept the One World government the Conspiracy is offering us. In his *Busswarble* 3, he argues that the ozone layer can't be important because "no god would design a world so fragile and vulnerable that all that stood between life and death were a few mere wisps of ozone". This view is supported by one of his correspondents, Chris Masters, who in *Busswarble* 5 argues that the ozone hole "is most likely a natural phenomenon, which has been used by Them to fool the sheeple into buying more powerful and expensive sunscreens".

Who needs science fiction, when you can have this?

* * * * *

Charles Lipsig is a regular correspondent of the US fanzine *Fosfax*. In issue 160, he explained that US imperialism is more acceptable than other imperialisms because it kills fewer people:

"I am still beginning my adulthood, but when I reach the point where the next generation is becoming adults, I do not want to have to answer 'Where was the US military when they could have saved my relatives?' Similarly, I find myself asking these WW2 era peaceniks 'Where the hell were you, when I was being killed?' That is why I wish we had gone into Tibet, and stayed in Vietnam. That is why I support the US actions in Grenada, Panama and Kuwait. And when I look at how we failed to carry through and help the Kurds and Shi'ites in Iraq, I say that America does not use its military enough. If Joseph Nicholas is still reading, the US may sometimes have backed the wrong man, but we have saved more lives than we have taken, and we have tried."

Thus two wrongs do make a right, after all. In *Fosfax* 161, he had this to say:

"If we expect the government to keep out of women's wombs, then I want the government's hands off my entire anatomy. If the US goes national health care, then where I am to go when I want medical services that are not controlled by any goddamn government? Actually, Reed Waller's example is the perfect solution. I would rather pay to fund raisers (*sic*) for ill friends than pay the government in extra taxes. The money is usually more efficiently used through

private sources, as less is lost to bureaucratic heat death."

Comparing these two sets of remarks, we must surely conclude that Lipsig is prepared to pay taxes to kill people, but not to cure them.

* * * * *

Timothy Lane, one of *Fosfax's* editors, endorses Jeanne Kirkpatrick's tortuous distinctions between "totalitarian" and "authoritarian" dictatorships. In issue 160, he responded to criticisms of the US habit of overthrowing Third World governments it doesn't like and replacing them with friendly dictators by arguing that:

"The replacement (dictatorships) in Iran, Guatemala and Chile were not totalitarian, though all were authoritarian and rather unpleasant."

One can just imagine, can't one, the people of the Philippines during the Marcos years, or Haiti during the Duvalier era, giving thanks every night that they groaned beneath the yoke of an authoritarian gangster rather than writhed beneath the heel of a totalitarian thug. Can't one?

* * * * *

Meanwhile, in Parliament... *Hansard* records the following exchange during Agricultural Questions in the House of Commons for 29 April 1993:

Mr Amess: "Has my hon. Friend had an opportunity to consider the merits of the Basildon grape, which is grown by many of my constituents? Will he care to reflect that as Basildon leads the economic recovery of our nation, so perhaps Basildon is well placed to lead the drive of British producers of wine further into EC markets?"

Mr Soames (Minister for Food): "My hon. Friend is perfectly right. Essex wines, like Essex women, are the adornment of the crown of British life, as is my hon. Friend. Just as Basildon is the economic capital and leader of Britain, I have always been told that it drinks for Britain. We will do our very best to promote the Essex grape."

While Defence Questions for 22 June 1993 were enlivened as follows:

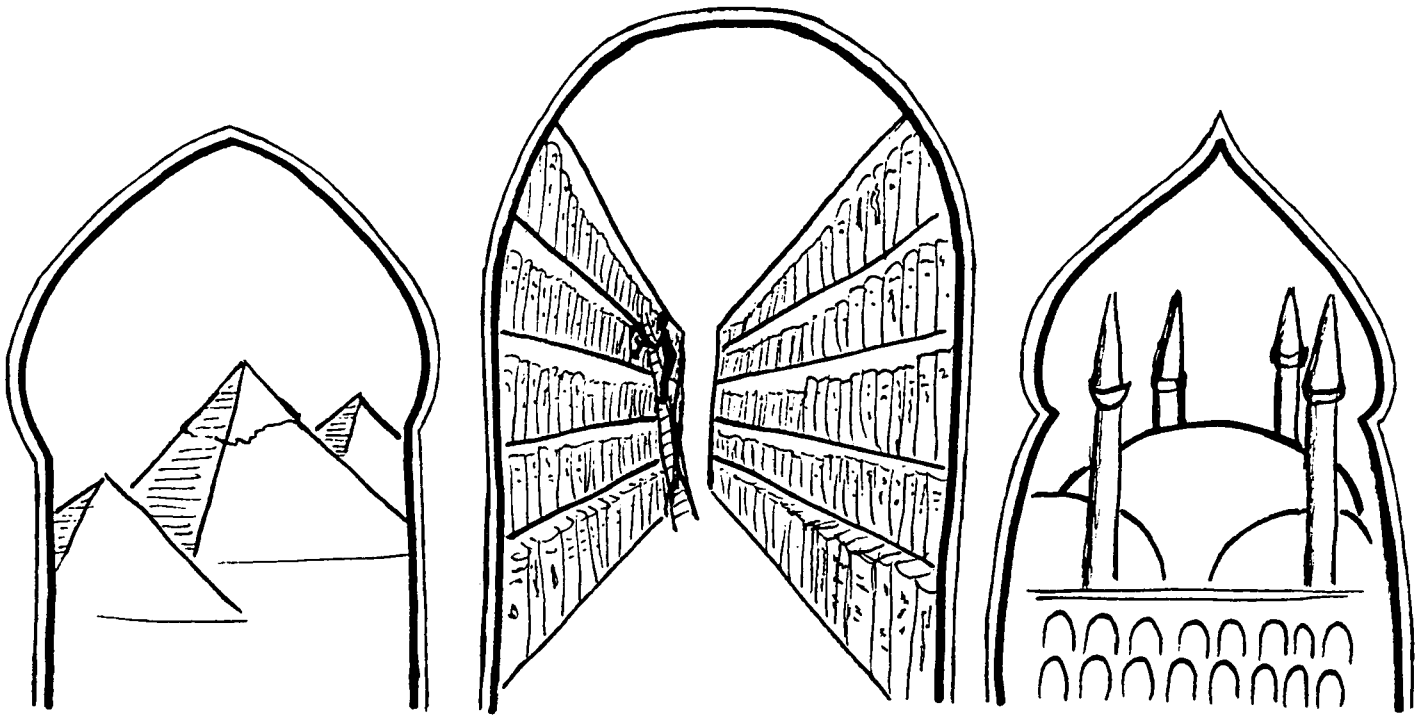
Mr David Evans: "Is the Minister aware that the list [of nuclear weapons states] is growing ever longer, with the Ukraine selling missiles to whoever is prepared to pay for them? Does not that mean that this country's safety is threatened even more? Does he agree that it is important that the [Labour Party's headquarters in] Walworth Road is protected because we want our children and grandchildren not only to read about the demise of socialism in libraries and schools but to be able to go down the Walworth Road to see for themselves where the last of the Bolsheviki lived and worked? Does he agree that the Walworth Road should be a nuclear-free zone because the safety of that lot is in our interests?"

Mr Jeremy Hanley (Minister of State for the Armed Forces): "I am pleased to reassure my hon. Friend that all tactical nuclear weapons have been withdrawn from the Ukraine and, as I said, strategic weapons are not under its control. I am sure you will agree, Madam Speaker, that it is just possible that if we had four seagoing versions of my hon. Friend we would probably need no other equipment. However, in the absence of three clones of my hon. Friend, I think we perhaps need to maintain our minimum deterrent."

If MPs can't take Parliament seriously, why should they expect us to?

* * * * *

Contributions for future instalments of this column will be gratefully received.



A TRIPTYCH

Joseph Nicholas

(As originally conceived, this article would have been both shorter and more extensive -- that is, it would have touched on more themes in fewer pages (but still with footnotes and a bibliography). But original conceptions never work out quite as planned, and as the thing grew more detailed in the telling a number of issues had to be either discarded or held over until next time. Think of this, then, as the first of two parts -- but don't let it hold back your letters of comment until the second.)

A Walk Through Cairo

"Gezira" is Arabic for "island", but also the name of the larger of the two islands in the Nile between the cities of Cairo on the east bank and Giza on the west (administratively separate but for all practical purposes part of the conurbation which also includes the cities of Heliopolis to the north and Helwan to the south). The southern half is occupied by the football fields and tennis courts of the (very exclusive) Gezira Sporting Club, and the northern half by a jumble of hotels, shops, restaurants, villas, and embassies. One could identify the embassies even without their flags and nameplates since, in a concession to the threat posed by the fundamentalists of the El-Gamaat el-Islamiya, the government had posted armed guards outside each: a pair of soldiers who lounged around on the pavement, large and nasty bayonets fixed to the barrels of their Kalashnikovs. I was smart enough not to try taking photographs of them, but as my route into Cairo each morning took me past a number of European embassies I was soon on nodding acquaintance with several of these soldiers. (While they in turn presumably remembered me because I was crazy enough to prefer walking to hiring a taxi. That, or my pony-tail and ear-rings.)

In addition to the Sporting Club, the southern half of Gezira is also home to the Cairo Tower, 180 metres of browning concrete constructed solely for the purpose of providing panoramic views over the city -- or they would be, if it wasn't for the pall of pollution and dust that hangs permanently over it. (Particularly the dust -- comparing sinus troubles with other people at my hotel, we all agreed that we had never gone through so many handkerchiefs in so short a period.) From the top of the tower, all the guidebooks claim, one can see the Pyramids of Giza -- which is true, if one takes "seeing" to include detecting their faint outline against the sunset. Much nearer, but only slightly less indistinct, is the Citadel -- the castle built by Saladin in 1176 -- on a spur of the Moqattam Hills that bound Cairo to the east. And below the Hills, running north from the Citadel, is the cramped brown huddle of Islamic Cairo: the city founded by the Fatimid dynasty in 969 from which modern Cairo essentially derives. (As settlements, the pharaonic cities of Memphis and Heliopolis had vanished before the dawn of the Christian era. Fustat, the Roman and Christian city, survives as the name of a suburb inhabited largely by Copts. The later Abbasid city on the northern fringes of Fustat was abandoned following the Fatimid conquest, and survives only in the mosque named after its governor, Ibn Tulun.)

Walking through Islamic Cairo grants insights into the life of the city that you'll never obtain through the window of a taxi. (It's also entirely safe, since the fundamentalists won't attack those they claim to wish to "liberate".) "At the Citadel end," says Michael Haag in the *Discovery Guide To Egypt* of the road to Bab Zuwayla, the southern gate of the Fatimid city, "the street is fairly quiet and fairly filthy; it becomes livelier, and you do not notice the filth so much, as you enter the bazaar area further north." But what is particularly noticeable about streets of this nature is an absence of the segregation between home and work that we in the West are used to -- the accepted convention that one lives in one place, shops in a second, and is employed at a third. There are bazaars which cater for the needs of the residents (as opposed to those, such as Khan El Khalili, which pander to the tourist market), but they seem far more integrated into the community than our High Street equivalents. In part this is probably a consequence of the fact that, thanks to the climate, trading takes place in the open air; but it is also because the range of activities is detectably wider. In the space of a few metres, I passed, one after the other, an open-fronted workshop where two boys were hammering out the dents in a car body panel, a street cafe where two elderly men drank coffee at a spindly table with a surface no larger than my computer screen, and a sheep tethered to a lamp-post, munching contentedly on a pile of fresh greens. A mosque stood on the opposite side of the street; drying laundry hung from windows overhead. Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells would probably call it little better than a slum; but on such a street you realise just why it is that, despite all the doom-mongering neo-Malthusian prognostications, Cairo works.

Cairo is officially one of the Third World's "mega-cities": a metropolis with more than ten million inhabitants (in Egyptian terms, a quarter of the nation's population), growing at the rate of one thousand people per day due principally to inward migration from the countryside. As they move in, so the city expands to meet them, newly-built apartment blocks marching south along both banks of the Nile, gobbling up more of the rich agricultural soil on which Egypt depends. But this isn't enough; and a purpose-built satellite city, the Tenth of Ramadan, has been developed north of Giza to accommodate the overspill. But that isn't enough, either; and people are erecting shanties on the roofs of apartment blocks and offices, pitching tents on patches of waste ground by the Nile, setting up home in the mausolea of the Mameluke necropolis. The infrastructure -- water, sewerage, power -- necessary to sustain them all has been left well behind; and apart from the army and the bloated state bureaucracy there is barely enough employment to go around. A grim prospect, you might think -- but if it's so grim, why does everyone seem to get along so well? Why is the crime rate so low? Why, the traffic pollution excepted, are environmental problems taken so seriously?

The answer is immediate: it's that a city where a sheep can munch grass in the street outside a mosque is clearly a city that, for all its surface problems, offers its inhabitants a better quality of life than one might expect from the housing estates

of, say, Milton Keynes. A housing estate is largely a dormitory for those who work elsewhere, and provides no sense of community for its inhabitants (in the atomisation of each family unit it is instead emblematic of the fragmentation of Western industrial society); whereas Islamic Cairo, and by extension the rest of the city, shanties and mausolea-dwellers included, is not just a community but a community of communities, a network in which activities remain small-scale, locally-based, and people-friendly. In the midst of hugeness, humanity: everyone remains a human being rather than becoming a statistic. Just as E. F. Schumacher, the godfather of "new economics", suggested some twenty-odd years ago in *Small Is Beautiful: A Study Of Economics As If People Mattered*.

Schumacher's subtitle was ironic: his argument was that people *do* matter, but that orthodox economic theory is incapable of recognising this, and instead regards them as there to serve the economy rather than the economy as existing to serve them. "Something is uneconomic when it fails to earn an adequate profit in terms of money," he wrote; and continued:

"The method of economics does not, and cannot, produce any other meaning. Numerous attempts have been made to obscure this fact, and they have caused a very great deal of confusion; but the fact remains. Society, or a group or an individual within society, may decide to hang on to an activity or asset *for non-economic reasons* -- social, aesthetic, moral or political -- but this does in no way alter its *uneconomic* character. The judgement of economics, in other words, is an extremely *fragmentary* judgement; out of the large number of aspects which in real life have to be seen and judged together before a decision can be taken, economics supplies only one -- whether a thing yields a money profit *to those who undertake it or not.*" (Emphases in original.)

Richard Douthwaite demonstrates something similar in his *The Growth Illusion* when he reports the results of a 1975 survey (the third in a rolling programme) carried out by the UK's then Social Science Research Council to establish the indicators by which people measured their quality of life. "Money and prices" and "Living standards and consumption" came third and fourth, respectively, selected by 18 and 17 percent of the respondents. "Family and home life" and "General contentment" led by 23 and 19 percent, with the remainder of the top ten given over to such items as housing, health, social relationships, and personal beliefs. These bi-annual surveys were discontinued after 1975, the then Labour government wanting to keep the IMF happy by cutting back on everything not related to the balance of payments, and abandoned altogether after 1979, the Thatcher government being uninterested in anything that could not be measured in strictly monetary terms; but subsequent, less formal and more *ad hoc* surveys, in both the UK and throughout the EC have produced similar results, with (in recent years) the environment and environment-related issues featuring more strongly, and monetary ones less so. In other words, what orthodox economics understands by the phrase "standard of living" has little to do with the way in which individuals and communities measure their quality of life. Consumption and production isn't everything; and the benefit to be derived from sitting in the garden on a warm summer afternoon is probably immeasurable to anyone but the sitter.

Thus the Cairenes appear to have grasped instinctively, and to have long ago internalised, the Schumacherian paradigm that the bulk of us in the West have only recently begun to comprehend. Or even, perhaps, to *recomprehend*, following the detour of the past five hundred years and the European-led drive for global integration which has now reached its apotheosis in the negotiations over the final, "Uruguay round" of GATT (the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade); that it is locally-oriented and community-scale activities of the kind on view in the streets of Islamic Cairo which are the most satisfying and environmentally benign. By contrast, the more outwardly-oriented activities we would recognise as typical of a Western-style market are exemplified by Khan El Khalili, a bazaar whose dependence on tourism leaves it vulnerable to the whims of the wider economy. And not just the national economy: given that one-third or more of the population of Egypt now depends to some extent on foreign visitors for its livelihood, the lurid reports of El-Gamaat el-Islamiya terrorism that have been circulating overseas during the past year or so have hurt

them just as much as any bomb or bullet.

But this of course has no effect on the local markets, and local economic activities therefore carry on regardless. The importance to Cairo of these local activities has recently been formally recognised by the municipal authorities, who had struggled for some years to devise a disposal and recycling programme to contain the environmental impact of the city's refuse before realising that the answer lay right under their noses -- that rather than import expensive Western technology and scientific expertise they should rely on the minority Coptic community who have traditionally made their living from recovering and recycling the junk. Plastic, glass, textiles -- the work is no less dirty and dangerous, but has been brought in from the margins to form a central part of the city's strategy for the next few decades. It is good economic sense; it is good environmental sense; and by bringing the two together Cairo is implementing a central principle of "new economics": that environmental factors are not externalities to be ignored in the pursuit of short-term profit (in the hope that someone else will deal with them) but costs which must be internalised so that resources are not exhausted and sustainability is achieved. Or, to put it more simply, how can there be an economy without an environment?

Some new economic ideas (which have no connection with New Age psychobabble), particularly the emphasis new economics places on environmental and social factors, were discussed by Judith in the previous issue; I don't therefore intend to repeat them here, other than to reiterate the central principle of new economics that the price of a product must reflect not just the cost of its production but also the costs and benefits to third parties, other species and future generations, the costs of pollution and resource depletion, and the costs of regulating our relationship to the environment as a sink for our wastes. Those wishing to explore these ideas in more detail should consult some of the books listed in the bibliography, although I'd single out as a good starting point the confusingly subtitled *Wealth Beyond Measure: An Atlas Of New Economics*, which demonstrates the working relationships between the four kinds of capital that orthodox economics either fails to recognise or treats as interchangeable: ecological, human, social and organisational, and manufactured. The book's explanatory diagrams are very reminiscent of those which appear in mainstream economics textbooks, with the exception that in this case they address the real world of real problems, with the complexities and variegations that quality of life issues involve, rather than the perfect world of orthodox economic theory, which reduces us to producers and consumers whose interactions are mediated solely by the amount of money we're willing to pay.

One drawback to most new economic ideas, however, is that at present they exist largely on paper, and apart from the LETS schemes discussed in the previous issue have yet to be put into practice. In his column in *New Economics*, the quarterly newsletter of the New Economics Foundation, Paul Ekins argues that new economics "has got as far as it can get with mere theory. It has squeezed every drop of theoretical juice out of the very limited new economic practice that currently exists", and that "progress...now depends on giving the concepts effective practical expression". This means more than LETS schemes; it means that a far greater number of people than have already done so need to adopt new economic practices if their viability is to be confirmed. Such changes cannot be legislated for; but they will "come about if people value the new non-capitalist gains in sustainability, community, justice and conviviality more highly" over those things "in which capitalism scores highly: price, comfort, convenience, choice, financial return".²

But that moment of transition may be at hand. In *The Guardian* for 24 August 1992, Larry Elliott drew attention to Soviet economist Nikolai Kondratieff and his idea of long-term economic cycles with peaks and troughs every fifty or sixty years, and suggested that on the basis of this theory, "a downswing started with the ending of the post-war boom in 1973 and will come to a head during the 1990s". He continued:

"The end of the last downswing was certainly accompanied by a fundamental shift in economic philosophy, and it is arguable that every Kondratieff cycle -- if they exist -- has thrown up a Smith, a Ricardo or a Marx to challenge economic

orthodoxy. One important caveat, however, is that each previous cycle was also rooted in deep-seated cultural, social and political change, and sometimes all three.

"Take the 1930s, for example. Keynes was not working in an intellectual vacuum, but reacting to the breakdown of the nineteenth century balance of power triggered by the rise of the United States, Russia, Germany and Japan, and the decline of France, Britain and Austria. With the US following an isolationist foreign policy, and Russia convulsed by revolution, the world was in a state of flux.

"This was reflected in the rise of importance of the newly-enfranchised working classes and the cultural landscape. It was the age of Freud and Jung, with their revolutionary ideas feeding through into literature and art. In 1931, when the Depression was at its worst, D. H. Lawrence had been dead a year, Joyce was living in self-imposed exile in Paris, and Huxley was writing *Brave New World*."

As then, so now -- following the collapse of the post-1945 balance of power, we are again in a state of political flux which will naturally feed through into culture and society, encouraging both greater questioning of the assumptions which underpin the status quo and a search for alternatives to them. The environmental movement, and new economists such as Paul Ekins, Michael Jacobs and James Robertson whose work has been inspired by the need to find some way of accounting for environmental questions, seem to me clear evidence of that.

One wonders, however, whether Paul Ekins has been to Cairo, and walked through the old Islamic city to see how the people there live. Sheep tethered to lamp-posts, boys repairing car body panels for their neighbours, old men drinking coffee outside a mosque -- it looked rather new economic to me. Might it be that, in some fashion, Cairo points a way forward, offering us an example from which we can all learn? After all, we Europeans -- according to Martin Bernal in *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots Of Classical Civilisation*, which showed how the early Greeks' own accounts of their influences and inspiration were rewritten from the eighteenth century onwards to exclude any taint of non-European-ness -- borrowed the basics of our culture from the Egyptians in the first place; so why should we not again learn from them what the fourteenth century Islamic historian Ibn Khaldun called "the habit of civilisation", and of which he believed Egypt provided the best example?

"Civilisation was continuous here, nowhere else in the world was it more firmly rooted," he claimed, arguing that although civilisation followed a cyclical pattern of growth and decay -- each decline caused, he believed, by over-consumption of resources -- settled, co-operative human life was its consistent goal. A sweep of four thousand years separated his own time from that of the earliest pharaohs: a long habit indeed!³

The Return Of Thomas Malthus

Malthus's first essay on population growth and agricultural production, arguing that "the power of population is infinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man", and that the human species would inevitably outstrip available resources, was published in 1798. The Industrial Revolution had begun a few decades earlier, but because its impact was not immediate, Malthus could not see -- and could scarcely predict -- how the changes it set in train would overtake his projections by, essentially, increasing production to meet increased population. And because he was wrong, say today's optimists, all neo-Malthusians are wrong too, because their projections similarly fail to anticipate possible future developments -- such as the way the Green Revolution in the Third World helped stave off famine, for example, or how the first *Limits To Growth* report was overtaken by the 1973 oil shock which forced a change to more efficient methods of energy use. Therefore there is nothing to worry about, and a glorious future awaits us. This proves things.

Except that it is hardly the Club of Rome's fault that its first report was overtaken

by the 1973 oil shock, and the Green Revolution -- although garbed with much self-serving rhetoric about feeding the hungry -- has had more to do with growing greater quantities of cash crops for export.⁴ Nor does the fact that these two examples disprove the neo-Malthusian doctrine mean that the neo-Malthusian doctrine will be constantly disproved. Past trends, as these examples demonstrate and as even the optimists will grudgingly concede, are no guide to future possibilities -- although it's no surprise (at least to me) that most of the optimists are American. The USA is, after all, a nation founded on the ideal of progress, and (literally and metaphorically) on a technology-driven march from sea to shining sea. (And eventually, John W. Campbell would argue, to the asteroid belt.) An optimistic outlook, and in particular an argument that the world exists to be filled with people because there is nothing which human ingenuity cannot overcome, is an inevitable corollary of such a history. To argue, however, that this outlook should be shared by all humanity is to project onto it a cultural experience which is too specific to hold much if any general lessons. Or, less theoretically, what worked for the USA in the past two hundred years won't necessarily work for everyone else during the next two hundred or even the next twenty. As Paul Kennedy puts it in *Preparing For The Twenty-First Century*, the prospects of certain corporations and groups of individuals "are the basis for the many optimistic works by Kenichi Ohmae, George Gilder, Ben Wattenberg, and others that forecast humankind's ever-increasing prosperity. On the other hand," he continues:

"there are billions of impoverished, uneducated individuals in the developing world, and tens of millions of unskilled, nonprofessional workers in the developed world, whose prospects are poor, and in many cases getting worse. Their plight is the concern of the pessimistic writings about the demographic explosion and environmental catastrophes by the Ehrlichs, the Worldwatch Institute, and others, and it also inspires studies on future career trends and their social implications, like the work of Robert Reich. Initially, it might seem that only one school of thought must be right, but it could be that each has examined different aspects of a single phenomenon, so that the optimists are excited about the world's 'winners' whereas the pessimists worry at the fate of the 'losers'. But if both are correct, the gap between rich and poor will steadily widen as we enter the twenty-first century, leading not only to social unrest within developed countries but also to growing North-South tensions, mass migration, and environmental damage from which even the 'winners' might not emerge unscathed."⁵ (Emphasis in original.)

Perhaps it's just that the end of the millenium is approaching, but Malthus does seem to be coming back into fashion. Paul Kennedy's book, despite its title, has less to do with preparing us for the twenty-first century than with explaining why we are so unprepared for it -- in particular, how the poorer countries in which the rate of population growth is currently highest cannot (for a number of reasons) follow the same path as the industrialising nations of one hundred and fifty years ago, and therefore how we'll all suffer from the environmental excesses forced upon them by the need to survive. In addition, the desire of India and China, two of the world's most populous nations, to continue their pursuit of the Western model of development will inevitably contribute to both their and our environmental impoverishment regardless of what the rest of the Third World does.⁶

Kennedy's response to these problems is to argue that (by unspecified means) the West should help India and China escape from their poverty while reducing its own damage to the environment (thus setting them an appropriate example), while the rest of the Third World is to be saved by large-scale biotechnology to increase world food production and alleviate the pressures to destroy rainforests and overgraze marginal lands. However, he ignores the drawback that, to succeed, these approaches would require a degree of international co-ordination which the TNCs who control such technology and Western governments concerned to placate the immediate demands of their own populations are unlikely to provide; thus neither are realistic. (Never mind that to offer technology as "the" way out of the hole is to again project a specific American solution onto the rest of humanity; nor does it help provide work for the unemployed and underemployed of the Third World, who would try all the

harder to emigrate to the First.) The result of our unpreparedness for the twenty-first century, then, is that we shall lurch from one short-term panacea to another, persistently failing to address the underlying crisis.

At root, Kennedy has failed to grasp the true nature of the crisis -- that we face not a crisis of resources, but a crisis of pollution and environmental degradation, and to deal with which requires a radical rather than an incremental response. We need to find not ways of carrying on as we are, but of changing the way we live -- of modifying our relationship to the environment so that it becomes, instead of one of exploitation and conquest, one of partnership and sustainability. We need, in other words, a third revolution.

This is the theme of Paul Harrison's *The Third Revolution: Population, Environment And A Sustainable World*. The first revolution, he argues, was the agricultural revolution -- not that which accompanied the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century, but that of the neolithic era, as the human species made the transition from hunter-gatherer agriculture to pastoralism, driven by the need to develop increased supplies of food to cope with increasing population. (Like Jared Diamond in *The Rise And Fall Of The Third Chimpanzee*, Harrison also argues that this transition reduced the range and quality of our diet and increased our hours of work.) The second revolution was the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century, driven by the European powers' need to develop alternative sources of energy to replace wood cut from forests which had been reduced to mere fractions of their former extent. Now, however, it is not immediate exhaustion of resources which confronts us, but the fact that we are pushing the limits of the carrying capacity of our environment: it is the renewables, air, water and soil, which we are destroying. The third revolution, therefore, must be the transition to sustainability:

"The global scale of our impact today means that the human race is playing with high explosives. Environmental change is not always smooth. It can pass critical thresholds where massive shifts occur. In the case of changes in climate and ocean circulation the shifts could be catastrophic. We don't know exactly where the trigger points lie: we only know that we cannot risk passing them. Survival demands that we play safe.

"The scale and speed of adaptation required over the next half century are greater than any the human race has faced before. We must pass through a Third Revolution, just as momentous as the first two. It has already begun in small ways. Eventually it will affect all aspects of our lives, cultures and societies. The end result will be to reduce our impact on the environment to a sustainable level.

"Somehow we must abolish poverty and achieve social and economic development for the world's majority. Yet we must do so without endangering the chances of future generations and other species. We cannot pick and choose which elements to work on. We must work on population, consumption and technology and on all the factors that influence them."⁷

Population, consumption and technology are the three key factors which determine our impact upon the environment. Increased population naturally leads to increased consumption; but also means -- and this is the point which the optimists exploit as the basis of their "no worries" scenario -- the development of new technologies to resolve the problems of resource demand and pollution density generated by population pressures. In this way, we move from the gathering phase, in which a resource is considered to be limitless and we simply collect what's there, to the mining phase, in which we continue the practices and attitudes of the gathering phase, depleting the resource below the level at which it can renew itself, until continuing scarcities force us to adjust our relationship to the resource to one of sustainable management. We've seen the process at work before -- in wildlife, forests, farming, cities, waste management, air pollution -- but have a tendency to put off taking the third step until it has become absolutely unavoidable. Harrison calls this the Hamlet Syndrome: we know what needs to be done -- in Hamlet's case, to kill Claudius -- but dither about taking the necessary action until events force our reluctant hand -- in Hamlet's case, too late to save himself and his friends.

However, Harrison detects -- like Larry Elliot, quoted earlier -- signs that the shift in our values, necessary to make the adjustments required, has begun. "Such shifts are determined by historical forces," he remarks, "But once in motion on a large scale the new values motivate human action and themselves become historical forces. Witness the rise of Christianity or Islam, the democratic revolutions of 1776-1848, or the socialist revolutions of 1917-75." He suggests that "the current value shift is possibly the most far-reaching in our attitude to nature since the rise of transcendental religions between 600 BC and AD 700. The new values have already gestated, in developed countries and among the intelligentsia of more urbanised Third World countries," and these new values "are now spreading with the speed of a new religion. And the global nature of our environmental crisis -- like the threat of hell fire in early Christianity -- is the most persuasive of its evangelists".

This of course begs the question of exactly what value shifts Harrison has in mind. Two of his previous books, *The Third World Tomorrow: A Report From The Battlefield In The War Against Poverty* and *The Greening Of Africa: Breaking Through In The Battle For Land And Food*, provide numerous examples of how the rural poor of the Third World, when given the tools and the encouragement, seize all the opportunities they can to increase their agricultural yields, both to feed themselves and their families and have a surplus to sell in the local market, and to improve the quality of their lives while protecting the environment which sustains them. Further examples, in the First World as well as the Third, appear in Paul Ekins's *A New World Order: Grassroots Movements For Global Change* -- the North Shore Bank in Chicago, the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, CEFEMINA in Costa Rica, Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka, the Seikatsu Club Consumers' Co-operative in Japan, and more. All share overlapping aims of satisfying local needs through local resources, building self-reliant ways of life and protecting land and resources.

Doubtless because good news sells fewer books than doom-mongering, these success stories are not well known (and certainly not as well-known as they should be), and may not survive the gigantic levelling down which would result if the Uruguay round of the GATT negotiations is "successfully" concluded. We would then be presented with a free trade regime under which Western-based TNCs will use their greater size, capital and economies of scale to loot the globe's resources for their exclusive short-term benefit and -- because a GATT panel has already ruled that such treaties are protectionist and thus inimical to the promotion of free trade -- strike down international agreements on protecting biological diversity, reducing carbon dioxide emissions, and eliminating CFCs. "Harmonising standards" in this fashion, in order to create "a level playing field" (to appropriate the doublespeak TNCs use to conceal their intentions), would turn international competition into a race for the bottom, in which health insurance schemes, worker safety legislation, pollution standards, anything you name, could be challenged as "hidden subsidies". Free trade under GATT wouldn't just export Western goods and services to the Third World; it would also export Third World economic pressures and social conditions to the West.

Clearly, GATT -- a creation of the immediate post-1945 years when free trade was seen as the holy of holies which alone could prevent further wars, is overdue for reform. Such a reform could start by rejecting the idea that protectionism is inherently bad, and recognising that the theoretical justification for free trade -- that it permits nations to exploit their comparative advantage by specialising in what they do best) -- has been undermined by the globalisation of production which has occurred since 1945. Like much traditional economic theory, the argument in favour of free trade derives from models a century or so old, in this case the ideas of David Ricardo, and those who tout it today (GATT, the Conservative Party, *The Economist* magazine) either ignore or have failed to grasp the differences between then and now. The key difference is that the majority of international trade is no longer carried on between nations but between different branches of the same TNC. As Tim Lang reported in *New Statesman & Society* for 20 November 1992:

"The GATT signatory countries account for 90 percent of the world's trade, but behind the myth of national economies, a handful of corporations dominate most markets. TNCs have more power than many nation-states. In 1985, the combined

sales of the world's largest TNCs exceeded US\$3 trillion, equivalent to one-third of the world's Gross Domestic Product. Over 40 percent of international trade is carried out within TNCs. The top 500 TNCs control two-thirds of world trade.

"These companies are tightly geographically bunched. By 1989, the world's top 20 agrochemical companies accounted for 94 percent of world trade. Nine of these companies were from Europe, six from the US and five from Japan. The top 14 car companies produce four out of five of the world's cars. Of these, three based in the US produce 33 percent of the world's output. Six based in Japan produce 25 percent. And Europe's companies have 21.5 percent."^a

And if you think this is bad, look out for the Multilateral Trade Organisation, which will be brought into being to administer this wonderful new world once the GATT "Final Act" has been ratified and which will be accountable only to itself. National governments would be reduced to the role of service providers, subordinated to the TNCs and the international markets they manipulate. Some freedom.

- The new protectionism, by contrast, argues that trade should be local or regional by preference, national where necessary, and international only where unavoidable. New protectionism, argue Tim Lang and Colin Hines in *The New Protectionism: Protecting The Future Against Free Trade*, is built around what they call "the three Es" -- the economy, global equity, and the environment. Attacking the free traders' claims that protectionism is luddism under another name, ignores market pricing, causes economic depressions, and leads to racism and authoritarianism, they outline a ten-point agenda for the new protectionist era:
 - redirecting economic policy away from its present global focus, to encourage local production to meet local needs, and co-operation rather than competition;
 - rebuilding and supporting local communities, to give people back control over their lives and work;
 - engaging in international aid and trade to foster self-reliance and the exchange of appropriate technology and skills, rather than to generate profit;
 - sharing the burdens and benefits of technology more equitably, so that investment is redirected to meet local needs rather than build high-technology infrastructure and all who want work have it;
 - reforming or dismantling existing international institutions, so that instead of maximising economic growth they encourage local and regional economies, the adoption of sustainable practices, and protection of the environment;
 - smoothing out the flow of capital between the West and the Third World, to eliminate present disparities of income;
 - curtailing the power of existing trading blocs to dictate terms to the Third World;
 - imposing controls on the activities of, and even breaking up, TNCs;
 - raising the standards of environmental and public protection; and
 - changing the West's patterns of consumption, so that we no longer consume more than our fair share of global resources.

It's an ambitious agenda, and although large parts of it focus on local and regional, people-to-people rather than government-to-government initiatives, international success would require just the kind of international co-operation envisaged by Paul Kennedy. But unlike our present economic system, this agenda recognises that people want integrated political, economic and environmental policies; that they don't want either welfare or a job, either wages or environmental protection, either wealth or quality of life, but all of them. Orthodox economics, on the other hand, fetishises economic growth for the sake of economic growth, and is inherently environmentally destructive and socially divisive -- Richard Douthwaite's *The Growth Illusion* is particularly strong on the anti-social effects of such growth. Our present economic system is incapable of building prosperous and sustainable economies -- indeed, an economic system which has to expand continuously to avoid collapse cannot possibly begin to deal with the problems it creates; it can only deliver more of what we have already -- more international debt, more depressed commodity prices, more Third World population pressures, more global poverty, more unemployment, more pollution, soil erosion and deforestation. Only by repudiating GATT, adopting the radical alternative offered by the new protectionist agenda, and commencing the Third Revolution's

transition to sustainability will we begin to tackle the global environmental crisis and the plight of the world's poor. Only then will we avoid the Malthusian trap and begin to properly prepare ourselves for the twenty-first century.

Groaning Hinges Of The World

"Let's meet where the continents meet" was the slogan behind Istanbul's bid for the 2000 Olympics; and on our last morning in the city there was a sponsored fun-run up and down the street outside our hotel to raise money for the bid, complete with giant inflatable Coke cans, cheerleaders with pom-poms, and a marching band. It was very Western.

Take the tram down to Sirkeci Station, however, and walk across the street to the ferry terminals along the Golden Horn, and the contours of an older, more Eastern Istanbul begin to emerge. The boats are these days made of steel rather than wood, and powered by diesels rather than sail, but in its essentials the scene couldn't have been very different from that which greeted the traveller of five hundred or even a thousand years ago. Ferries surged back and forth, to the Asian shore and the Princes' Islands; watersellers (several of them boys and girls who could not have been more than eight or ten years old) hawked their wares; shoeshiners advertised their skills by buffing vigorously away at a pair of shoes kept especially for the purpose (some expressed a strong desire to polish my trainers irrespective of their whiteness); older men sat with bathroom scales before them, offering an opportunity for passersby to find out how much they weighed; and a lunchtime snack of fried fish could be purchased from any one of a number of little boats rocking precipitately at the quayside, the catch having doubtless been hooked early that morning from the Sea of Marmara or one of the many little bays along the Bosphorus.

A trip along the Bosphorus reinforces the impression that modern, or Western, ways have been merely superimposed over an older and more deeply felt lifestyle. The waterside villages clearly still make their living by fishing -- at one stop, we saw a family shelling mussels; at another, two men sat mending their nets over afternoon tea -- and the architecture is highly traditional: wooden houses with carved beams, built on piles along the shore. Here and there are more ostentatious (and more visually intrusive) houses: weekend villas for Istanbul's wealthier inhabitants -- but even these carry forward the older Ottoman tradition of summer retreats for the city's rulers. And on either shore rear up the Genoese and Ottoman castles built to control what has been, since the classical era, an international waterway.

It tends to be forgotten, even by European historians who ought to know better, that the Byzantine Empire was not a successor to Rome but a continuation of it: "Rome in the East" as it became following the collapse of the Western half of the Roman Empire in the fifth century. Byzantium survived when Rome fell, argues Michael Grant in his *History Of Rome*, because of both its better geographical location -- whereas the Western emperor had to guard both the Rhine and the upper and middle Danube against barbarian invaders from the east, Constantinople had to defend only the lower Danube, and so could pay greater attention to problems in Western Asia -- and its sounder social and economic structure. But his book stops with Justinian's partial recovery of Italy and North Africa in 565 AD, and one has to look elsewhere to follow the history of a state which Gibbon dismissed as "uniform and tedious", Voltaire declared to be "a worthless collection of oracles and miracles", and Montesquieu labelled "a tragic epilogue to the glory of Rome". Worthless? Tragic? The immense land walls of Constantinople -- four miles in length, from the Golden Horn in the north to the Sea of Marmara in the south -- make plain that it was a thriving city when imperial Rome had been reduced to a sheep farm and London was still a village. Moreover, Constantinople was only conquered twice in its history: once in 1204, when the Venetians and Franks sacked it in revenge for the failure of the emperor to pay them the tribute agreed; and again in 1453, when after fierce fighting around the Edirne Gate the wall was breached and the troops of Fatih Sultan Mehmet (Mehmet the Conqueror) poured through. (The last emperor, Constantine XI Palaeologos, died fighting in the gap.) A plaque in the wall by the Gate commemorates the conquest.

The fall of Constantinople, it's popularly supposed, sparked the European Renaissance as Byzantine scholars fled west, taking their classical treasures with them. In fact, the European Renaissance had been under way for at least a century, the scholars having seen the inevitability of the Ottoman conquest and left much earlier. Instead, the fall of Constantinople signified two things: firstly, that the world of Islam now extended from the valley of the Indus to the Iberian peninsula; and, secondly, that Europe became determined not to let it get any further. In general, it has not, having failed either to conquer any additional territory or supersede all other religions. The latter point is most perplexing to Islamic theologians who, having been taught that Islam is the last and greatest of the world's great religions, believe that it was predestined to become the world's only religion. Why has it not? And how can its stalled historic mission be resumed?

Late in our last afternoon in Istanbul, we sat by the fountain in the little park between Sultan Ahmet Camii (the Blue Mosque) and the Byzantine cathedral of Hagia Sophia, reading the previous day's edition of *The Guardian*. (In south-eastern Europe, English-language newspapers arrive a day late.) On the bench next to us sat some Turks, who became interested in the headlines about recent PKK attacks on Turkish embassies in Western Europe, and with whom we fell into conversation as we shared bits of the paper. Most of our conversation was inconsequential -- where we came from, how long we'd been in Istanbul, what we'd seen -- but occasional items of politics drifted through, such as mention of their Kurdish friends who did not feel oppressed by the Turkish government and had no time for the PKK, and explanations from us of the differences between the *The Guardian* and *The Sun*. One of them was an electrical engineer who enjoyed a good standard of living by Turkish criteria, but knew that when translated into pounds sterling or German marks his income would be very low. Then Judith began to ask about Islam, the position of women in Islam, and his opinion of Islamic fundamentalists. Were there any in Turkey, for instance? "Yes," said our engineer acquaintance, "people like me. I'm an Islamic fundamentalist."

He was quick to distinguish, however, between his kind of fundamentalist -- those who wish to live according to the Koranic precepts -- and those who exploit Islam for political ends -- the people he described as wanting "to rule the world and make everyone like them": the people that we in the West think of when we hear the phrase "Islamic fundamentalist". It is their actions, he implied, which not only violate the Islamic injunctions of tolerance towards "the people of the Book" (who are not to be forcibly converted but allowed to come to the religion in their own time) but bring shame on Islam itself. (And the position of women, he confirmed, was laid down in the Koran: veiled, deferential, born to inferiority.)

It was an interesting conversation. Boarding the aircraft for the flight home the following day, we read in the previous day's edition of *The Guardian* that, even as we sat chatting in the park, Iranian Baseej militants of the Society for the Suppression of Vice were rounding up people in Teheran for such un-Islamic crimes as wearing make-up (for women) and sunglasses (for men). A week after our departure, a mob of Turkish militants attacked and burned a hotel in the provincial town of Sivas, killing three dozen writers and artists, in revenge for the publication of extracts from Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in a daily newspaper edited by one of them. This incident was fairly widely reported in the West -- but mainly because it did involve Rushdie. As he pointed out in *The Guardian* for 13 July 1993, fundamentalist assaults on other secular intellectuals have gone almost wholly unreported in the West because they do not fit the preferred stereotype of a mullah pointing a gun at us:

"This imbalance in our attention represents a kind of victory for fanaticism. If the worst, most reactionary, most medievalist strain in the Muslim world is treated as the authentic culture, so that the mullahs get all the headlines while the progressive, modernising voices are treated as minor, marginal, 'Westoxicated' -- as small news -- then the fundamentalists are being allowed to set the agenda.

"The truth is that there is a great struggle in progress for the soul of the Muslim world, and as the fundamentalists grow in power and ruthlessness, those courageous men and women who are willing to engage them in a battle of

ideas and of moral values are rapidly becoming as important for us to know about, to understand and to support as once were the dissident voices in the old Soviet Union."

It's tempting to conclude that one reason for Islamic zealots' resort to the gun is simple frustration at the failure of Islam to fulfill its predestined role -- that the threat of a bullet can succeed where sublime truth cannot -- and even more tempting to argue that because Islam was devised principally as a means of imposing peace on the warring desert tribes of thirteen hundred years ago it's irrelevant to the problems of the contemporary era and has therefore run its natural course. The insistence on fidelity to Koranic precepts seems little more than an attempt to evade further confrontation with the contemporary era by refusing to acknowledge its existence; and the resort to the gun is perhaps the last throw of a faction which suspects that Islam may already have been defeated. In the long term, neither response is likely to succeed -- the resort to Koranic precepts because of the sheer pettiness of its proscriptions (the un-Islamic nature of sunglasses), and the resort to the gun because of its exposure of the internal contradictions of a religion which preaches tolerance with one voice while issuing *fatwahs* with another. There's a certain level of paranoia evident in both responses -- in the first because it implicitly assumes that Islam has (somehow, somewhere) been led astray, and that if it can return to its roots it can recapture its true identity; and in the second because it ascribes all of Islam's contemporary problems to a deliberate Western conspiracy against it, which must be countered in the same way as the counterattacks of the sixteenth century if its historic mission is to be fulfilled.⁹

Underlying such arguments is the presumption that Islam has collided with modernity, and lost. Yet this presumption ignores the point that modernity itself has been overtaken by events -- that the modernist project to construct an ordered, rational world, derived from nineteenth century notions of evolution-as-progress-towards-perfection, has run aground on the imperfectibility of the human species and the crimes perpetrated in the name of order. If modernism has an identifiable moment of failure -- a moment where it appears in both its purest and its most repellent form -- it is surely the bureaucratisation of the Holocaust: a slaughter grounded in a twisted scientism, meticulously recorded. (A similar case could be made out for strategic nuclear targeting policy and the deliberately emotionless language in which its effects are described, with the difference that millions have yet to be killed in a nuclear war.) The result is that we in the West no longer believe in the notions of order and control implicit in the technocratic worldview which developed from the late seventeenth century onwards and which shaped the later stages of the period of European expansionism. We no longer subscribe to the previously dominant theories of reducibility, comprehensivity, and predictability; instead, we have entered what we like to call (perhaps for want of a better term) the post-modernist era, in which -- it is theorised -- we treat the world as a cultural supermarket from which we select those elements with which we feel most comfortable, and from which we construct atomised mini-societies tailored to suit our specific needs.

Thus we have not so much *re-aligned* ourselves with a new hegemonic force as *de-aligned* ourselves from them all. The old blocs -- political, social, economic, and cultural -- have either broken up or are in the process of breaking up, and in the rise of new political fractions and religious cults, new social movements and single-issue pressure groups, might be detected a search for something with which to replace the old order. It may be that some Islamic theologians have recognised as much, and are exploiting the uncertainty which that search implies by offering us Islam as the replacement we need; but from a post-modernist perspective Islamic answers to our questions are clearly insufficient. Indeed, from a post-modernist perspective it's clear that Islam has collided not simply with modernity but with the same forces which destroyed the modernist project -- and, considering how much more totalist the Islamic programme is than the modernist one we've recently discarded, it surely stands little if any chance of gaining wider acceptance. Bluntly, if a set of precepts developed three hundred years ago is seen no longer to work, why should a set developed thirteen hundred years ago serve any better?

Some might argue that new economics stands in the same position as Islam and modernism, and that to accept its solutions would be only to substitute another, newer programme for those they once offered. Such an objection would conflate means with ends, in the same way that both modernism and Islam blur the distinction between the two -- modernism with its notions of control and rationality as both process and end-product, and Islam with its allegedly timeless solutions to all socio-cultural questions. New economics, by contrast, is a method of measurement rather than a method of existence; by determining, and helping us regulate, the environmental impact of our activities it can guide our transition to environmental sustainability, but (most crucially) it does not tell us what to do or how we should live once we have achieved it. In this sense, the means -- new economics -- is quite distinct from the end -- sustainability. To confuse the two is wilful misrepresentation.

The history of Istanbul may provide some metaphorical guidance. As Constantinople, it was one of the great entrepôts of the Middle Ages -- the world came to trade, from Genoa and Venice, Kievan Rus, Bactria and Damascus, the Persian Gulf. Its citizens merrily bought and sold without a care for ideology or doctrine, in the process transforming the city into one of the richest and most glittering of the age. Its sack by the Venetians and Franks in 1204 arguably so impoverished it that it was unable to withstand the later assault by the Ottomans in 1453; but the only groups to really suffer as a result of the conquest were the rulers (who fled) and the Orthodox clergy (who henceforward had to get along without them). Those citizens who wished to convert did so, and all carried on as before. As then so now: some of its citizens may be genuine fundamentalists, but others may only outwardly conform, the better to get on with what they consider to be the more important things in life. Like humanity in general, Constantinople has absorbed, adapted -- and carried on.

A larger metaphor relates to the geographical position of the city itself: permanently poised between East and West, neither definitely in one nor definitely in the other, perpetually in transition between the two. Istanbul fascinates precisely because it appears to straddle the ideological and cultural faultlines that run between Europe and Asia, Christianity and Islam, secular democracy and theocratic authoritarianism, scientific rationalism and religious mysticism; between, in short, the modern world and the ancient past. In the same wise, we like to think of ourselves as existing in a moment of perpetual transition, forever moving forwards from what we think of as the old into what we think of as the new. But "carrying on" as we have, never quite completing the transition, is no longer enough; at the end of the twentieth century, the demands we now face are of a fundamentally different order from those we've had to tackle before. We need, perhaps, a new set of metaphors for the coming era -- and certainly a new set of intellectual and spiritual conflicts to motivate us.

FOOTNOTES

1. Page 35. He adds a caution that we should not overlook the phrase "to those who undertake it", because "the methodology of economics is (not) normally applied to determine whether an activity carried on by a group within society yields a profit to society as a whole", and in fact assumes that "the common good will be maximised if everybody, every industry and trade, whether nationalised or not, strives to earn an acceptable 'return' on the capital employed". The true result of this, of course, is widespread pollution and resource degradation.

2. *New Economics*, Winter 1992. The New Economics Foundation is at 88-94 Wentworth Street, London E1 7SE; a supporting membership, which includes a subscription to the newsletter, costs £15 a year (£8 for the unwaged). A leaflet is enclosed with the European copies of this issue.

3. At the time Ibn Khaldun wrote, the beginning of the pharaonic era could be dated, thanks to ancient king lists, to around 2500 BCE. Recent archaeological research suggests that the beginnings of wider Egyptian civilisation can be pushed back to around 4500 BCE. As Michael Rice argues in *Egypt's Making*, there is clear if fragmentary evidence for contact between the lands of Egypt and Sumer in pre-pharaonic times; the question is whether the creation myths developed later incorporate garbled references to what Flinders Petrie believed was the actual migration of the Falcon tribe from Dilmun (prehistoric Bahrain) via the Horn of Africa. Rice, while not overtly accepting this suggestion, does not argue against it.

4. Most importantly, the Green Revolution enforced a switch in agricultural methods from a traditional, peasant-based form to a Western-style mechanised, "scientific" one, which requires imports of chemical fertilisers and hybrid seed varieties from the First World to sustain itself from year to year, and helps dispossess peasant farmers as their small landholdings are aggregated into the larger farms necessary for the economical application of the new methods. Third World nations which have adopted Green Revolution methods thus end up spending more of their scarce foreign currency reserves on imports, and devoting more of their taxation revenue to providing subsidised food for the peasants who have flocked to the cities to seek alternative work. For more detailed explanations of this process, see Susan George's *How The Other Half Dies* and (especially) *Ill Fares The Land*. For alternatives to the Green Revolution, tailored to meet the real needs of Third World farmers, see Paul Harrison's *The Greening Of Africa: Breaking Through In The Battle For Land And Food*.

5. Pages 333-334. Later, on page 345, he adds: "Perhaps we should distinguish here between reformers who advocate prudent measures in the near future to control population and limit vehicle emissions, for example, and apocalyptic writers who argue that all will be lost unless a drastic change in human behaviour occurs now. In denouncing the latter as both alarmist and erroneous, some conservatives tend to lump all reformers into the same camp. Yet it is proper to note a distinction between the moderate and more radical reform proposals, especially since it is the former that have better prospects of swaying politicians." Thus Kennedy uncovers the chief method by which US conservatives, and particularly conservative US industrialists, concealed key environmental arguments from the Reagan and Bush administrations, chiefly because of the threat the adoption of environmental considerations already accepted as standard by the rest of the world pose to their short-term profitability.

6. "India's natural and human resources entitle us to think of becoming a major powerhouse of the world economy," claimed Finance Minister Manmohan Singh in an interview with *The Guardian's* Kevin Rafferty, 7 June 1993. He argues that this can be achieved using foreign investment as a motor of economic growth, apparently forgetting that TNCs (trans-national corporations) are unlikely to invest in India primarily for the benefit of Indians -- while India's own investments would presumably continue to be squandered on such environmentally and economically unsound megaprojects as the Narmada Dam. A saner view is expressed by former Environment Minister Maneka Gandhi, who pointed out that to develop India to the same level as the industrialised West would require the resources of two-and-a-half globes -- the implication being that it should abandon this path and seek another.

7. Page 327. The following quote from this book, to save another footnote, is from page 302.

8. Meanwhile, as he reported in the same article, "the United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations calculated that inward investment within the world's three most powerful regions, the US, Europe and Japan, which it called 'the Triad', tripled between 1980 and 1988 from US\$142 billion to US\$410 billion. This was one-third of worldwide inward investment, and this centralisation is growing." Having produced this report, the Centre was abolished by Boutros Boutros-Ghali as a service to the permanent members of the Security Council, who have a vested interest in concealing the realities of the so-called "new world order" behind the screen the UN so conveniently provides.

9. This latter paranoia achieves its most extreme form in advertisements of the kind placed by Dr Khalim Siddiqui and the (unelected) Muslim Parliament in British national newspapers during July 1993, calling a "world conference" on Bosnia. "When, if ever, will the new Crusade stop?" it began; and continued: "The Balkans have been the battlefield of two great civilisations. A new phase of the old struggle has begun. We have seen a glimpse of the methods the West and its surrogates will use against Islam. Where will the axe fall?" Conspiracy theory of this kind -- in which Croatia and Serbia are believed to be acting on the orders of the Vatican and Washington DC -- is so ludicrous that it self-destructs the moment it's voiced.

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From a House of Commons debate on tourism and deregulation, as recorded in *Hansard* for 9 July 1993:

Mr Iain Sproat (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage): "If one likes camembert cheese, one probably likes it reasonably warm and reasonably soft

This is *FTT* 15, from:
Judith Hanna & Joseph Nicholas
5A Frinton Road
Stamford Hill
London N15 6NH
United Kingdom

and runny. Under our batty regulations, one has to keep even camembert cheese in a refrigerator so cold that the cheese comes out not warm and runny as it should but cold and hard like a piece of refrigerated rubber."

Mr Tony Banks: "That is how it should be eaten."

Mr Iain Sproat: "The hon. Gentleman is entitled to his views, but they are unusual."

Later in the same debate:

Mr Tony Banks: "I do not think that I am a pervert because I happen to prefer my camembert and brie cold out of the fridge. It is still a soft cheese in comparison with cheddar and one can still get the taste of it. ... Clearly we shall not agree, but I refuse to back off because I prefer my cheese cold rather than oozing towards me like a glutinous threatening blob. However, enough about Tory Members."

"Every so often, alas, old memories flood back and it all gets stirred up again."

John Major, a Prime Minister

"You always know when he's in a state, because it goes to his bladder."

A colleague of a Prime Minister

Quoted in *Commentator*, journal of the DHSS section of the National Union of Civil & Public Servants

"If you're desperate to do your bit to boost Tory party finances (current overdraft £19.2 million) you could always apply to join, along with 'senior City figures', a very select club. Members pay £1000 and are then 'invited to drinks at Central Office or the Commons'. According to *The Times*, a party spokeswoman confirmed that the club had only 300 members, but added: '£300,000 is not to be sniffed at'. No indeed. As any respectable Soho clipjoint, operating on exactly these time-honoured principles, would agree. Any arrangement you make with our lovely hostesses, sir, is strictly between yourselves...."

From the "Zeitgeist" column, *The Weekend Guardian*, 11 September 1993