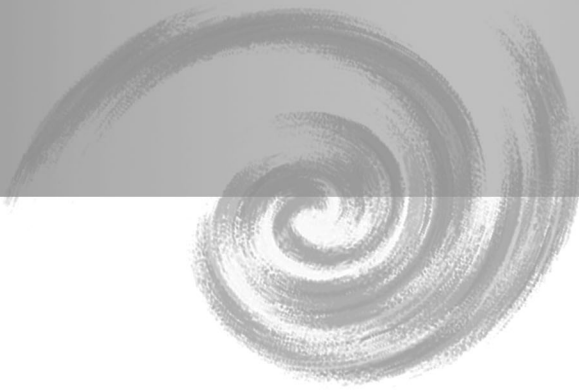




Environmental Crisis

The Quality of Life on Earth*

John F. Gardner

*We are destroying nature.
We don't destroy what we love.
We don't love nature.
Why don't we?*

The high school juniors at the Waldorf School of Garden City were asked one spring, as a project in English and as a way of increasing their grasp of problems connected with the environment, to interview concerned citizens of their own communities. As a trial run, some of the students interviewed me. The course of several such interviews is pretty well summarized in the following interchange, though a few of the questions are such as I have received from parents and teachers.

Q. Mr. Gardner, I wonder whether you have been following the material that is coming out about our abuse of the environment?

A. I have read enough to convince me that we are well into the greatest crisis humanity has ever faced.

Did you already know of the conditions that are now coming to light?

One learns something new every day, but the general picture has long been clear to those who love nature. This trend towards abusing the Earth has been noticeable for centuries. Thoreau saw it. Blake saw it. Maybe the Greeks foresaw that the Age of Iron would end this way. So long as only the Earth and the lower kingdoms of the Earth were suffering, most people didn't care too much. But now the question begins to be one of life or death for humankind. That makes it serious!

Do you think there's any hope of solving the problem?

We must try, or see the Earth destroyed. Teachers have possibly the most important job to do. They influence the way the next generation will think. That determines how they will feel, and therefore act. Teachers are in a position to dig down to the beginnings of attitudes.

What attitude, in your opinion, causes abuse of the environment?

I think our attitude towards nature starts, as do all attitudes, with certain ideas, certain inadequate conceptions. Modern souls have become estranged from nature. This means they are partly blind and partly don't care. Few of us are grateful to the world that sustains us. It rarely occurs to us that we should look to nature with thanks. This ingratitude has many causes. For example, the nature most of use is already sick; the freshness, the beauty it has to give are under a pall. Then, too, our very conception of nature makes reverence or gratitude seem inappropriate. We have been schooled in the mechanics, the dynamics, the mathematics, and the economics of natural processes, but less and less do we hear of the morality, the spirituality, the divine life. How can we love a mechanical nature?

We have been taught that all beings are engaged in a competitive struggle for existence, each locked in kill-or-be-killed, eat-or-be-eaten combat with others. Why should we be grateful to those who contest our very existence, who want to do us in? We are also taught that our rationality, esthetic taste, and moral idealism operate within a universal context that is ignorant of them, indifferent to them, and in the end hostile to them. We are shown human beings pitted against an all-powerful but basically inhumane world-process. Many believe that as humans we are born accidentally, survive precariously for a brief moment, and then are ignobly extinguished. If we conceive the natural process in this way as our ultimate enemy, will we not feel at least put off, probably aggressive, and eventually cruel in our dealings with nature?

Do you think modern science's idea of the world is false?

In details it is true, but the trouble is that scientists don't claim any longer to go beyond details. They leave it to others to formulate "world conceptions." But people need an idea of the whole; and when they look for the implications of the technical data supplied by science, they come to the discouraging ideas I have mentioned. These ideas are very widespread. They are being given by well-meaning teachers to children in the earliest grades of elementary school throughout our land today.

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Do you see any signs of a change?

It seems to me we are at the beginning of a profound change; otherwise we should not be suddenly aware of how estranged from nature we have become, and of how hazardous our condition is.

The new interest in nature is clear enough, but some of us have wondered whether it is not mostly fear – fear of the consequences to ourselves of what we have been doing wrong. How do you account for this new attitude?

The crisis of the environment has been preparing for a very long time: at least hundreds of years, probably more. The only thing new is the awakening. More and more people are beginning to see what has hitherto been systematically overlooked. Our consciousness has begun to change.

What do you imply by a change of consciousness?

I mean a different way of thinking, one that concerns itself with whole entities more than with collections of details. To see things this way requires intuition. It means learning to read words as well as spell letters. When you do this, the world changes. It begins to light up.

So you think we have been living mostly in darkness?

In so far as we are bright people, strong on critical thinking, trained in scientific method, I believe we negotiate with the world from the outside. We are outsiders. When you are on the outside of anything, you are in the dark about it. Much of the technical knowledge about nature today is still being gained by methods that are called experimental, but could better be called assault and battery. From an approach of this kind life retreats and meaning conceals itself. But life and meaning are what give light! The more we have learned about nature as matter and energy, the more we have lost touch with it as intelligence and beauty. In other words, progressive enlightenment of one kind has been deepening darkness of another. But I hope we are beginning, as Martin Buber said, to “turn.”

Can you apply this “turning” to the crisis of the environment?

Any turning away from intellectualism towards intuitive understanding will lead to a renewal of warmth and of conscience towards nature. If we can find again what the people of long ago found in the natural environment

– namely, values that match what is intimate and basic in ourselves – we shall find ourselves at home again in the universe.

But is it not characteristic of the scientific view that human beings consider themselves very much as belonging to nature and being inhabitants of the universe?

So they do, but since most of us still regard nature materialistically, we tend to see ourselves in the same way. We ourselves are but facts among facts, organisms among organisms. But it is impossible for a human being to develop respect, much less affection, for mere objects. Therefore, though we indulge our appetites, we do not basically respect ourselves. And this disappointment in ourselves, however unconscious, tends to become resentment against nature. We become destructive.

You feel that the turn towards intuitive thinking will bring a whole new mood, so that people will again honor and love nature?

Yes. What we honor and love and take joy in, we do not exploit or degrade.

I think I follow you, but most of us are still not sure we would know either intellect or intuition if we saw it. Can we get down to examples?

We don't lack for examples of intellectualistic thinking. It is the basic tool of our day, in every walk of life. It is spelled out formally in the so-called scientific method:

1. Use the physical senses to perceive the physical facts. Use machines to extend or refine physical perception. Dissect and sub-dissect; lay everything open to perception.
2. Measure, count, and weigh. Describe and name all parts, and parts of parts. Classify. Correlate.
3. Develop a generalization. Formulate a hypothesis.
4. Test this hypothesis by physical experiments.

By such procedures we can identify only material facts, and establish only abstract laws to explain them. Any attempt to pass beyond dead matter to what enlivens or inhabits matter can go no farther than the making of inferences. Inferences lack substance. They hardly carry conviction and rarely kindle enthusiasm. If we are to know realities of the inward dimension, we shall need

an inward form of perception as the basis for a higher kind of science.

Basis for a Higher Kind of Science

You seem to be stating a belief that it is possible to perceive with higher senses. How are these acquired?

They appear as the transformation of the power of thought, when love and patience are added to it. Thinking that is concentrated and strengthened by love begins to become a higher kind of perception. This begins as imagination. I have come to realize that imaginative thinking, or spiritually-perceptive thinking, does not need to guess about life. It can participate consciously in living realities.

What are we actually talking about? Suppose I'm looking at a rock, or a pool of water. Is an imaginative approach to these open to the ordinary person?

Yes, even though neither of these things is directly alive. The analytical and the imaginative kinds of thinking would *begin* with the same physical observation of the water. But then the two paths would diverge. Analysis would seek useful information by testing the water for weight, mineral content, boiling point, and so on. It would break the water down into two parts of hydrogen and one of oxygen. Imaginative thought, on the other hand, would abide with the unity of the water just as it appears. The observer would let the buoyancy, transparency, or fluidity of water become a matter of inner experience. This outer-inner experience would no doubt be pale at first, but through repeated effort it would become strong. To experience the *quality* of water in the *substance* of water with complete objectivity is a good enough example of what I mean by real imagination.

You believe, then, that the untrained observers can become more at one with the things they see, and that when they do this, they come to know these things from the inside? Penetrating them in this way, they find more than matter?

Yes. And this “more” is the only thing that can make them feel at home in the world, or deeply interested in it.

But I must ask again how can we apply practically what you call imagination to the present crisis of the environment?

When people are educated to *participate* in the life of

nature, they will not want to injure her; and they will not be easily fooled about whether they *are* hurting her by seemingly clever actions of one kind or another. They will see things in context, and alive. Out of the sense of the living whole we shall gain the instinct to distinguish between deeds that favor health, beauty, and sanity, over those that are destructive. This instinctively sound judgment will then serve as the control for practical undertakings.

Could you apply what you have said to some contemporary scientific or engineering problem?

Yes. Let's take a problem facing the Soviet government: Should Russia try to irrigate parts of central Asia and replenish the dying Aral Sea by reversing the course of certain rivers that now flow north into the Arctic Ocean, making them flow southwards? It appears that some scientists think this feat technically possible. Or better yet, consider the proposal on which our own government has already spent millions in preliminary studies: Should lakes be created by dams in Alaska, where there is heavy rainfall, and this water be piped down to irrigate several Western states, raise the level of the Great Lakes, and supply power as far south as Mexico?

I believe technical science cannot answer such questions. Scientific method as we know it depends upon experimentation, and there is no way to experiment with either of these vast projects. The wisdom required to foresee results without experiment goes beyond human compass. My question is: Have we any hope of access to a wisdom higher, more comprehensive, than our own?

Some kind of inspiration? Do you believe in that?

I must admit that I do. All the poets, saints, and seers who have cultivated imaginative forms of thought during the past millennia would agree that there is such a thing as inspiration, and that it brings practical wisdom. In former times inspiration was for many not a belief, but an experience. They asked, and they were answered: perhaps by the very mountains and rivers, and out of the air and light themselves. It lies in the nature of imagination that its objects all tend to become subjects at last; its facts become beings. Every being has wisdom to reveal. That is inspiration.

One hesitates to say what one really thinks about these things, because people become either bewildered or angry when they hear it suggested that religious traditions may not be all superstition. These traditions tell us that within and behind the external appearances of

nature lie divine will and wisdom. These rule through all levels, living and dead, above and below us. All beings have something to tell, about what is wise and what is foolish, to human beings who are humble enough to ask them and pure enough to hear them. To some who have prayed, the inspiration may come as a new thought when they waken in the morning. In some it grows as an obscure but persistent instinct for the right way. For seers it becomes a clear and conscious colloquy. But all who care, who seek to see life whole, who are not cut off by pride in their own cleverness, can find guidance that goes beyond human limitations.

Questions of Overgrowth

Leaving aside the possibility of divine guidance, I'd like to hear your own ideas about several of the difficulties now confronting us.

For example?

I'm thinking of two developments. The first is the geometrical increase of population; the second is our insatiable demand for goods that can be supplied only by plundering the Earth.

I do not believe in abstract extrapolations of the kind now being applied to the population problem. Mark Twain once observed that since the Mississippi River had shortened itself a mile or more every year by forcing a more direct channel through some of its bends, we could look forward in a thousand years or so to a Mississippi River only a mile long!

It is true, however, that we now have an overgrowth of population that is tending to overtax the natural environment. We do need to find a way to control this overgrowth. The only measures being proposed are contraceptive, and they must doubtless be worked on. But I am not persuaded that contraception goes to the root of the problem.

If procreation is not the root of overpopulation, what is?

Since I have said other strange things, perhaps you will forgive one more. One has the impression that although procreation obviously accounts for more babies being born, it does not account for any of the other forms of overgrowth that characterize our Western Civilization. Consider, for example, the explosion of scientific knowledge, the drive toward mass production, the extravagant consumption, the monetary inflation, the speed-up of our whole way of life, the phenomenon of megalopolis; and, above all, the prevalence of cancer

as the disease of our time. Undoubtedly each of these examples of hypertrophy has its own explanation, yet they all have something in common, and I believe at some level they have a common cause.

You think things in general today are getting too big and too many, and that what would control one would control all.

That may be overstating the case, but I am certainly interested in that line of thought. Hypertrophy seems to me to be an increase of gross *substance* unlimited by form. Formless growth, anarchic growth, growth for its own sake, is the problem. But the part should always remain subordinate to the whole. The single part's growth is healthy and serves its function well only when it remains proportional to the growth of all the other parts. Thus, we must look to the health and beauty of the whole if we wish to find the formative principle that should dominate the growth of the parts.

The analogy of other forms of overgrowth to that of cancer has been made before. But how does it help?

In cancer, as I understand it, the formative, proportion-keeping principle that should rule the whole organism is somehow broken through. In a certain area, then, the forces of sheer growth run rampant. The part takes for itself what should belong to the whole organism. As a result, the organism undergoes deprivation, distortion, and eventual destruction. I think of the overgrowth of cities and of scientific knowledge and of our appetite for material goods as being "cancerous" in this sense. In each case, there is unbridled expansion of the part at the expense of the whole. This can happen only when the mysterious *ruling idea* that should dominate the whole has been weakened. I admit I have hardly a clue as to what the ruling idea might be that would control such a phenomenon as overpopulation. But I should try to find it by looking at matters macroscopically rather than microscopically. Too much analysis leads away from the solution.

I believe, as I have said, that since we do not understand what we know, do not feel what we do, and develop powerful drives that threaten rationality, today soul and body are divorced from one another. I can well imagine that the body would become anarchical.

Are you suggesting that the metabolism of someone who thinks feelingly and feels thinkingly, who acts from harmony of feeling and thought, will be different, and that cancer will therefore not develop in such an individual?

In medical questions I have only the layman's right to use common sense. I am ready to believe that when individuals are at one with themselves, they will tend to hold their bodily form intact. Such individuals will be hardy enough to resist anarchic breakthroughs. And I feel there must be an analogy possible between what checks the overgrowth of cells and what, *apart* from contraception, would prevent a population explosion. Maybe one of these days someone will be able to complete this notion, which I cannot.

Agriculture, Industry, Politics

If you don't mind, I'd like to broaden our conversation about the crisis of the environment. After all, this is a total problem, yet we've been speaking of solutions chiefly from the viewpoint of education. Surely other social agencies should be able to do something helpful. You have pointed to where you think education is making its big mistake, but do you have any ideas about what has gone wrong with agriculture, or industry, or politics, that they could not foresee and forestall what is happening to the Earth?

I must repeat that my competence lies in education. While I am interested in other fields, my ideas about them are quite general.

I'd be glad to hear of any change that you think business might make to improve the health of the environment, so that we could all look forward to a happier life than now seems likely for the future.

I once heard it said that there is as much suffering in the world as there is egoism. I also remember that Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Waldorf education, made this point long ago.

It seems obvious that self-interest is the source of the trouble between our economy and the world of nature. Self-interest permits us to ruin nature without even noticing what we have done, much less feeling sorry about it. We each seek our own interest, and feel quite righteous about doing so. The hired worker works for a living; the enterpriser works for profit. The accepted theory in America is that the profit motive is what has made capitalism great. "Profit makes the wheels go round, produces wealth for all, brings about the affluent society..." and so on. Yet it seems obvious to me, despite Adam Smith, that when each worker seeks first and last self interest, the economy will lack overall foresight and prudence. It will also lack the spirit of service. And before long it will tear the environment to pieces just as a school of minnows tears to shreds a piece of bread cast into the water.

But if an activity becomes harmful, won't it be stopped for selfish reasons because profit falls off?

Not where nature is concerned – not until a resource has been exhausted, or a major catastrophe is practically unavoidable. The depletion of soils and of food values due to chemical forcing, the multiplication of insect hordes due to monoculture in farming, and so on, have long been well known. Yet they do not check present practices in agriculture, which is surely headed for disaster. When human beings are displeased by a product, they will eventually do without it and so change the producer's mind. They can and do speak to some extent for themselves. But no one speaks for nature.

You are suggesting that a farmer who cares less for profit and more for the soil, for the animals, and so on, would not exploit them. But won't these products be expensive, at least in the short run, when the neighboring farmer can produce more, and do it more cheaply, by forcing their growth?

Obviously, and that is why agriculture and animal husbandry cannot follow wise practices so long as the farmers who truly care for nature are at the mercy of those who aim primarily at short-term profit. The same thing applies to industry.

You mean that manufacturers who took adequate measures to protect the environment from pollution by their factories, who did not want to sell more than people really needed, who wanted to avoid waste by making products last as long as possible, might soon be out of business?

Doesn't it seem likely? One altruist among many egoists in business can find himself a sheep among wolves.

If that's the way things are, what do you propose? Even if people are selfish, we can't start with a different human race, or with angels!

No. I contend that people are no more selfish than they are unselfish. At least there is a world of sympathy and concern in most of us as we now are. The trouble lies in our ideas, not in our feelings. There is a false idea abroad that tyrannizes our economy. This is the idea of profit as the ultimate motive of economic enterprise. This idea sanctions selfishness in economic life, even when mankind recognizes clearly in all other areas that unlimited selfishness is destructive. It keeps businessmen from allowing their natural inclination towards compassion and fellowship, their gift for teamwork, to function. I believe that this form of the idea of profit

should be set aside. Regular business people could perfectly well replace self-seeking by a very different motivation – one that is more exciting, more satisfying, and far more appropriate to the situation in which we find ourselves on this planet.

What would such a motive be?

Service. Friendly collaboration. Care for the national future!

I agree with you that even as ordinary folks we do at times care! We do take pleasure in serving some people on some occasions, and perhaps what we call service activities are on the increase. But can service really become the motive for economic undertakings? One could imagine such a change if our whole society were engaged in an enterprise with a goal that could inspire all of us, and with leadership in which we had confidence. Then each of us would perhaps feel the importance of doing our best for the common cause. But that is hardly true of our present society. No one seems to grasp where we are going, or why; so most of us fall back upon looking out for ourselves.

I don't object to looking out for oneself. But we will succeed only when we are interested genuinely in the rest of the world. Otherwise, we will be self-defeating, no matter what we do. It is the essence of human nature to look beyond the self. We are happiest when we are caught up in the pursuit of truth, or are adorning the world with a new creation, or are enjoying friends. Looking outwards from ourselves, we are amused and inspired; we find work to do. It is the objective world that gives us our task; and if the world is pleased, we are pleased.

But I should like to return to your valid objection that one can hardly work for society as a whole when it has no common sense of purpose. This seems so often to be the case. We unite to some extent in a war, but in peace we fall into disunity. We look to peace as the time when all can prosper and experience pleasure without interference, and such an aim hardly encourages the spirit of service.

I don't think it is only because I am a teacher that I come back to education. If education does not give any sense of the higher meaning of life on earth, or even a little inspiration to moral development, or a small desire to protect and enhance nature for its own sake, then obviously we shall have no common goals for our peace, and we shall not know how we may best serve society.

But you believe that if the schools can awaken

imagination and intuition, we shall be able to do these things, and that business will then fall into the right perspective?

Precisely. I know we are far from where we should be, and it will take an immense force to rouse the nation out of egoism and materialism. But such an immense force is beginning to make itself felt.

What do you have in mind?

I mean the sense of the catastrophe that we will face if we go further in despoiling this planet. Substantial numbers of people are at last beginning to see that we cannot go on making physical production and consumption the aim of life. The earth can no longer stand it. If we are to find a goal other than material goods, it can only be goodness itself. As Plato said, humankind's real goal is not goods but goodness. Goodness can be achieved only by the free choice and effort of each individual, but it can also be achieved only when the spirit of the whole awakens in each of us.

I imagine that what you are proposing for economic life would sound communistic to many people.

Perhaps it would. But every 'ism' has its right application somewhere. Though Communism in the Marxist sense has been shown not to lead to it, communal purpose and effort are worthy aims. It was St. Paul, not Marx, who said, "Ye are many members, but one body."

I take it that your idea of communal effort has nothing to do with political communism as state ownership of the means of production, the rule of economic processes by bureaucrats, and so on?

I am certainly not in favor of political communism.

What I have in mind is an economy in which individuals are free to act out of their expertness and initiative, in which they associate and collaborate by choice, but in which their economic motive is the public welfare.

While one can sympathize with the social idealism that still draws people into the orbit of communism, the idea of having the state own and run business is surely ineffective. State-run operations have always seemed to me either musty and mousy or unduly grandiose and extravagant. The state has no economic sense. It takes no account of personal preference; it smothers personal initiative. There is surely a rightful sphere of activity for the state, but it has nothing to do with running the economy.

The Role of Government

I'm glad you mentioned the question of government, because I should like your opinion on what the government has done to bring us to our present state. Many people are saying that only big government can now force the economy into line by passing stringent new laws and releasing vast sums of money for reclamation of the air and water. Even conservatives appear to be asking the government to move in on business.

I have to remind you that I know still less, if possible, of politics than of business. There is, however, a certain advantage in ignorance. It simplifies questions greatly! I have a single strong conviction about what government has done wrong and what it could do right in regards to our treatment of natural resources and the Earth environment in general.

What would that be?

I believe that human beings should be able to express their preferences in certain matters and make them stick. If people want their children to have a healthful environment in the future, they should be able to say so. After they state their will in the matter, it should be absolutely binding on all economic activities that affect the environment. It should be the absolute limit within which these activities operate.

You believe that government exists to bring about such consensus and give force to it. By passing laws?

Yes, by passing and enforcing laws.

Is there anything new in your idea? Do we not now pass the laws we think necessary?

We pass many more laws than we enforce, unfortunately. And a massively broken law seems to me worse than no law at all.

But do we really pass the laws we want? I doubt it. The issues that come up for vote are often so remote from our experience, or so complicated, that most of us can hardly remember being asked the kind of direct and plain question we should feel competent to judge out of common sense and from the heart. Why were the voters not asked, long ago, to state unequivocally their desire as regards fresh air, clean water, and so on?

Do you think people really want a wholesome Earth more than they want nylon stockings, plastics, cars, and airplanes? Would they vote for the former, if it meant curbing the latter?

I don't know. Admitted that Americans have willfully closed their eyes to the cost of many processes in industry, mining, forestry, and agriculture. Admitted that, because of their schooling, they are insensitive to the higher Nature of nature, and so do not feel strongly about the ugliness and cruelty of what technology is doing. Still, they are not altogether dead to these concerns, and they are certainly alive to the issue of the survival of themselves and their children. They could have faced certain issues long since.

Why didn't they, then?

A. Partly, I think, because there are powerful economic lobbies busy in political life, where they don't belong. These interests would find it inconvenient if voters were to decide in purely human terms—spiritually envisioned and understood—how the Earth environment should be used.

But isn't that democracy: The interplay of pressure groups?

I think not. Economic pressures there must be, but their adjustment should take place not through politics but in the economic realm itself. If business people – consumers and middlemen, as well as producers – can get together for the purpose, economic questions can be judged by those who have experience, and managed by those who have ability, so long as their overall purpose truly, in the highest sense, is to serve the common welfare.

What I am advocating is a few simple but comprehensive standards of decency and common sense to be established by an electorate voting as equals. Don't forget that the essence of democracy is voting *as equals*. Individual persons are not the equals of pressure groups.

It is also foolish to have people vote as equals on questions concerning which they are not equal. The kinds of questions on which one person's feeling is as good as another's are bound to be elementary, unspecialized, simply human. They are neither economic questions, nor science questions, but matters of fair play, of conscience, of instinctive/intuitive consensus. Examples would be: "Shall we arrange that all children may have the opportunity for education independently of their parents' bank account?" "Shall we forbid the economic exploitation of human labor?" "Shall we guarantee support of the aged, infirm, and indigent?" "Shall we protect ourselves against hostile and criminal agents?"

I believe that were economic interests not diverting and confusing the electorate, and had these interests not the power to block legislative and police action, Americans today would almost be ready to come to a resolution that could be expressed somewhat like this: "We want laws to be passed that absolutely limit all forms of production and consumption that show signs of further ruining the Earth environment." And I hope they would be ready to vote a positive resolution to match the negative: "We want some kind of national policy that will give citizens, especially when they are young, the chance to work actively at the task of restoring and enhancing the health and beauty of nature."

I wonder if you realize how unconcerned most people still are? In any case, who can know, first of all, just how much production or consumption will ruin the Earth? Second, who can enforce the chaining or the transformation of technology, when Americans are accustomed to material affluence and look to machines to save them work? Remember, there will be millions more people every year to present their demands.

You are right, but so am I. Regardless of improbabilities and even impossibilities that derive from bad habits, bad education, and even trends beyond our control, the chance must exist for citizens to establish ideals and standards on matters in which the only interests are purely human interests in the best sense. At present, economic interests play forcefully into the legislative process, and in my opinion government must purge itself of these interests.

You want the government out of business entirely?

Right. If government tries to manage the economy, it must expect that economic forces will eventually manage it, which is everywhere happening. The true business of government is the safeguarding of simple standards for our communal life.

Separation of School and State

There is still another area that I think the state should retire from. This is the most important change of any I have to suggest. As it touches what I know most about, I propose it very strongly.

What do you have in mind?

The so-called public school system.

What advantage do you see in a move of this kind?

I have tried to state some of the advantages in a couple of articles on the subject. In them, I answer a few of the questions that arise whenever one suggests dismantling the public school system and replacing it by independent schools. The point I'd like to make now, however, is specific to the environment and to the discussion with which we began.

We started with your idea that we abuse the Earth because we don't love it. And we don't love it because we look at it as strangers. What we need is to be educated in intuition, you said. Right?

That is the very point I want to emphasize. There are many reasons for the fading of imagination, inspiration, and intuition in our day. [The Irish writer] Padraic Colum [1881-1972] says that the imagination used to be exercised in every home, every evening, by the telling and hearing of stories. The advent of the electric light bulb ended that with a single stroke. Many changes will have to take place in education if real imagination is to come alive again despite electric lights; but the step that could make all the difference would be granting education full independence.

It's hard to see how freeing schools from state control would work to develop intuitive kinds of knowledge. Why wouldn't it have the opposite effect, or other effects?

In the single case, an independent school may well ignore or even stultify the intuitive side of its children. Yet there is good reason to believe that the mere fact of freedom in education would, on the whole, move most schools towards qualitative, inward values.

Just imagine what it would mean if *all* students, or their parents, were in a position to seek out a school purely because of the values it stands for! Their personal *interest* would become actual *involvement*. This involvement would lead to enthusiasm and initiative among the parents as well as among the students. And then picture the teachers who are freed from externally imposed objectives and standards. They confront a particular student with but two goals: to find out what lies in this student, and to draw it out. Their task is to bring their own best to meet what is best in the student. Under these conditions, education can develop according to intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivations. Curriculum and methods will come alive. Not only will subject matter be more imaginatively and intuitively taught; the students will become far more creative.

Freedom stirs the will. The will is the creative part of us. When our thinking is willed through and through,

it no longer plays upon the surface of things, but penetrates. The surface of the world is matter; the depth is spirit. When thinking becomes active, *because it is free to care for what counts most*, it gains strength to pass beyond matter to what enlivens matter. It finds the creative spirit in all things. Should this spirit come alive in schools, we'd enter a new era. Our relation to nature would change radically, and wisdom would begin to replace cruelty in our treatment of the environment.

You hope a great deal from the freeing of education!

I do, indeed. It seems to me that when teachers can settle down to the real business of education—to awaken, empower, and improve human beings—they will be glad to do so. When children are so taught, they will respond. When external goals and pressures are removed, teachers and students will begin to listen to what life says to the heart and to the conscience. And this concern will bring to pass what we need more than anything if we are to stop the ravaging of the Earth.

At present we expect nature to serve our human purposes; we bend it to our pleasure. Yet we feel no lasting pleasure, and we have no real purpose. That is why our justified mastery becomes unjustifiable exploitation. Our emptiness craves to be filled. Joy would fill it. Meaning would fill it. Grateful love would fill it. But the external way of looking at things does not permit joy, or meaning, or reverence, or even gratitude. So, because of our emptiness of soul, the ignorant desire for material goods and services becomes insatiable. As long as this displaced craving rules in us, we shall not curb the suicidal mania to consume. To continue in this way would be to destroy this planet of unbelievable loveliness, which for mankind should be so full of hope.

John F. Gardner (1912-1998) served for a quarter-century as Faculty Chair and teacher of literature and life sciences at the Garden City Waldorf School on Long Island, NY, during which time the school grew from three grades to an established K-12 institution. In 1964, he launched the Waldorf Institute for Liberal Education at Adelphi University, which awarded him an honorary LittD., in 1974. John was a life-long lover of nature, especially of trees, and was known as an expert logger during his youth as a lumberjack in Washington State. A prolific writer and dynamic speaker, John authored three collections of essays on education. A fourth volume of his articles is currently being prepared for posthumous publication, and should be available in the coming year.