

Sex and the Single Tax

by MEIGHAN VAN NIEUWSTADT

IN the early part of our century, Sigmund Freud recognized two great groups of instincts, those in the service of death and those in the service of life. The ultimate goal of the death instinct is to return to the constancy of inorganic matter. The goal of the life instinct is to expand and regenerate, even at the cost of some pain. The most studied of the life instincts is the sexual one. Freud's concept of the sexual instinct is broad, embracing all human pleasure—eating, reading, productive work. Leading Freudian revisionists, such as Eric Fromm and contemporary philosophers such as Alan Watts, have evolved the concept of polymorphous eroticism, that is, the universe imagined as one loving interrelation of all life. The key to revisionist thinking is unity and relation. Up exists, not of itself, but in comparison with down, dark in comparison with light. Every explosion is simultaneously an implosion. So a man lives not as a skin-encapsulated entity but as a factor in the equation that is his society, his world. Cut off from his world, he has no more real existence than a hand lopped off at the wrist. So if Freud's insight is that to live is to function, Fromm's is that to live is to relate. If a man is active, forward moving, at one with himself, others and life, he lives in health. If he is static and isolated he returns to the "constancy of inorganic matter" and travels a road leading to death.

Thus when we say a man is insane, we mean that he does not understand what others are saying, that his actions are inappropriate to his circumstances and that his speech does not convey anything to others. In short, insanity is aloneness. In the isolation of his asylum cell he lies on the floor, curled up in a fetal position, having regressed "to the constancy of inorganic matter."

Immobility and isolation are thus the twin servants of Thanatos, the spirit of death. In our day there is the Negro man who has no place in his own family because his wife supports him, whose efforts to become are consistently frustrated until at last he is not a man but a ghost. Not for nothing did James Baldwin entitle his biography "Nobody Knows My Name." Is it any wonder that when Karl Marx heard Communism criticized for allowing the state to take the place of the family, he scoffed. Family life, he said, is a bourgeois luxury. There is no family life at levels where the mother slaves all day in the mill while her children run in the streets, ragged and neglected. "Behind all this," wrote Henry George, "is social disease. Criminals, paupers, prostitutes, women who abandon their children, men who kill themselves in despair of making a living. The existence of great armies of beggars and thieves proves that there are large classes who find it difficult with the hardest toil to make an honest and sufficient livelihood—a large class who just exist, and to whom the raising of two children means inevitably a boy for the penitentiary and a girl for the brothel."

If unjust taxes strip away man's earnings, he is isolated from the product of his own labor. Locked out of the earth, denied the opportunity to labor, he is isolated first from Nature, then through poverty from his fellow man, and finally by bitterness and frustration from himself. From this cumulative alienation springs much of what is unnatural in society today. In apathy and despair, perhaps in mental illness, he regresses towards "the constancy of inorganic matter." The vital seed that is human life falls on bare rock and rootless shrivels.

Today Thanatos and Eros lock in

mortal combat. Which would you serve? Shall man be left indefinitely between the hammer of repression and the anvil of isolation? In our work in the Henry George School we fight for the right of men, women and children to live on the earth in a meaningful, loving inter-relation. Economic justice, while providing bread for the body, would at the same time offer opportunity for achievement, the bread of the soul thus freeing the lowest from despair and the highest from guilt and anxiety. If the insights of modern psychology are that man must both function and relate or die, we should ask, function how? relate to what? A man cannot walk on air or eat platitudes. Growing up alone on an island, if he didn't die outright, he could neither speak nor have human thoughts. Clearly, just as a flint striking steel creates sparks, so does a man become himself only with other men. Society is a precondition for man's life as man.

But a rigid society, whether class-structured or government-planned, is itself an example of the "return of the constancy of inorganic matter." The necessity of an adequate social basis for meaningful life is amply dramatized in literature. Daniel Defoe in his novel "Moll Flanders" wrote of the felons transported to Virginia, "When they come here, we make no difference, the planters buy them and they work in the fields till their time is out.

When tis expired they have encouragement given to plant for themselves for they have a certain number of acres allotted by the country and the merchants trust them with tools and necessaries, upon the credit of their crop before it is grown, so they plant each year a little more than the year before . . . many a Newgate bird becomes a great man and we have several justices of the peace and magistrates of the towns that have been burned in the hand." In "Vanity Fair" Becky Sharp writes in her journal "Tomorrow I begin my new post as governess to Lord D . . . He is the owner of large estates and no doubt I shall be treated with great contempt." Behold an honest but landless working girl treated with contempt and felons transformed into gentlemen by their acres.

Is real life better? Writing in the 19th century about the Tewksbury Almshouse, Henry George said "Babies don't generally live long here, they told the farmer's wife who brought them a little waif. And neither did they—seventy-three out of seventy-four dying in a few weeks, their little bodies sold off at a round rate per dozen to the dissecting table, and a six months' infant left there two days losing three pounds in weight. Nor did adults, the broken men and women who there sought shelter—fare better. They were robbed, starved, beaten, turned into marketable corpses as fast as possible."

The Real Estate Editor of the Detroit Free Press, John Woerpel, who has reported favorably and fully on LVT on several occasions, had a jocular reference to this subject recently. It seems that at a convention of the Michigan Society of Architects one Judd Arnett was championing the land tax. Said Mr. Woerpel, "the idea must be gathering an aura of respectability when Ole Arney plunks for it."

Arnett told the architects: "It is a strange thing about politicians. They will fool around with almost any law of economics you can think of; down through the years they have trifled with tariffs and played loose with our balance of payments; they have fiddled around with the income tax, the excise tax and the business tax . . . There is hardly anything a politician won't do these days to stimulate trade or beef up prosperity—but he won't fool around with the property tax except in the direst of circumstances. Then he is mostly inspired to raise it."

So Editor Woerpel suggests making a real study of "some version of LVT in Detroit," adding, "If the experts show it is a dastardly plot, as I once feared, we can kill it off for good."