

orient ourselves in relation to our fellow creatures and the rest of the universe. Only this purposeful metaphysical enquiry, Schumacher felt, could lead us to attain a higher degree of self-realization and higher levels of being. In *A Guide for the Perplexed* he continued his own metaphysical search.

In the first chapter of *Guide for the Perplexed* he notes: "The maps produced by modern materialistic Scientism leave all the questions that really matter unanswered; more than that, they deny the validity of the questions....The ever more rigorous application of the 'scientific method' to all subjects and disciplines has destroyed even the last remnants of ancient wisdom—at least in the Western world. It is being loudly proclaimed, in the name of 'scientific objectivity' that values and meanings are nothing but defense mechanisms and reaction formations; that humans are nothing but complex biochemical mechanisms powered by a combustion system which energizes computers with prodigious storage facilities for retaining encoded information."

Commenting on the insanity of reductionism, he quotes Viktor Frankl: "The present danger does not really lie in the loss of universality on the part of the scientists, but rather their pretense and claim of totality. What we have to deplore, therefore, is not so much that scientists are specializing, but rather, that specialists are generalizing." Schumacher sums up the problem thus: "After many centuries of theological imperialism, we have now had three centuries of an ever more aggressive 'scientific imperialism,' and the result is a degree of bewilderment and disorientation which can at any moment lead to a collapse of our civilization."

**It is said that Minerva's owl only flies at dusk, and that we can only see the age in which we have lived at its twilight. Then we see more clearly its underlying logic, its metaphysics and concepts, its intellectual paraphernalia and its emotional ambience. Schumacher and many others have pointed out that the past three hundred years in the West—the Age of Scientific Enlightenment—have been based on the logical positivism and instrumental rationality inherited from the French philosopher René Descartes. This Cartesian logic, which leads us to believe that we can understand wholes by examining their parts, has led to the Tower of Babel of reductionism now fractionating our knowledge and policymaking. It has given rise to today's welter of special-purpose agencies, institutions, and corporations, all trying to maximize narrow goals. They lack any meaningful coordination of a clearly enunciated set of values, goals, or principles other than the singleminded pursuit of "efficiency"—itself an ill-defined concept that has become reified as the key slogan of our utilitarian era. Rarely do we ask the larger questions that Fritz Schumacher urged: "Efficiency for whom, for example, and over what time span?"**

Thus learning to ask the right questions is the foundation of better enquiry and can lead to more

reliable mapping of our circumstances. And no matter how rigorous the method, one can never remedy the initial error of a superficial or false premise. As Kenneth Boulding pointed out, "Arithmetic is an *aid to*, not a substitution for thought." Fritz Schumacher put it this way: "If I limit myself to knowledge that I consider true beyond any doubt, I minimize the risk of error, but at the same time, I maximize the risk of missing out on what may be the subtlest, most important and most rewarding things in life. Saint Thomas Aquinas, following Aristotle, taught that 'the slenderest knowledge that may be obtained of the highest things is more desirable than the most certain knowledge obtained of lesser things.'" The first principle of our philosophical mapmakers seems to be: If in doubt, leave it out—or put it in a museum. But it is the question of *what constitutes proof*, as we now know, that is the difficulty. Fritz Schumacher suggested: "Would it not be wiser to turn the reductionists' principle into its opposite and say, If in Doubt, show it on the map *prominently*." After all, matters beyond doubt are, in a sense, dead; they constitute no challenge to the living. The gift of Fritz Schumacher's life to us all is that his ideas challenge the living and, indeed, inspire us to continue his search and his work in this world.

*Hazel Henderson is Co-Director of the Independent Princeton Center for Alternative Futures, Inc., a "deliberately small private think-tank and conference center for exploring alternative futures for industrial countries in a planetary context of human interdependence." Before his death E.F. Schumacher wrote the foreword to Dr. Henderson's new book, Creating Alternative Futures (G.P. Putnam's).*

## EXCURSUS V

### *Thanat Khoman on* **The U.S.: A View From Thailand**

The preoccupations of the United States seem to be SALT, the Middle East, and Africa—and so much so that important powers like the People's Republic of China and Japan receive only limited attention. With regard to China, and to the great annoyance of Peking's leaders, the U.S. does not appear ready to resolve the pending problem of normalization of relations. Taiwan, as one columnist put it, looks like the wishbone that has stuck in Washington's throat and may remain there for a considerable time. This may not be in the interests of the Asian Pacific, for a normal and effective working relationship between the two governments, with the indirect support of Japan, could be an asset for the peace and stability of the region, particularly in the face of growing Soviet ambitions and physical presence both on the Southeast Asia mainland and the surrounding oceans.

I am surprised to find Zbigniew Brzezinski holding the same opinion. He has written: "...No architecture for a more stable and just world order would be complete without taking into account the proper role of the People's Republic of China. We recognize not only that peace in East and Southeast Asia depends upon a constructive Sino-American relationship but that China can help immensely in maintaining a global equilibrium as well. Mutual interest, not sentiment, brought our two countries closer together. We must continue working to make our relationship closer still. Normalization in that relationship is necessary, but even short of it, both sides should find it useful to develop a closer consultative relationship, so that each side adequately understands and takes into account the legitimate global concerns of the other."

Meanwhile U.S. dealings with Japan are concerned almost exclusively with trade and economic matters, particularly the undiminishing flow of Japanese exports to the United States in spite of substantial revaluation of the Japanese yen. There may be some kind of retaliation, but in a rather narrow field of Japanese interests.

Domestically the United States appears to the rest of the world to be in the grips of monumental problems such as coping with the energy problem. President Carter proposes to offer oil and gas companies the fabulous amount of \$100 billion; he is being rejected by the giant companies, which demand, according to the president, no less than \$150 billion. The enormous and insatiable appetites of those supercompanies, reflected in these astronomical figures, fill us in the Third World with awe and amazement because they surpass by many times the national budgets of our countries.

Other domestic issues absorb the attention of the American people, issues like inflation and unemployment. But their magnitude and complexity are not understood and cannot be assessed intelligently in the less-developed countries. We would like the Americans to give us a better comprehension of the issues. This is particularly important to Thailand, for instance, because our currency is linked with the U.S. dollar; what happens to the U.S. economy will have far-reaching repercussions in our country.

Another recent preoccupation of the United States administration and Congress has been the question of human rights. So far the essence of this concern seems designed for export rather than for local application. In this connection, Thailand has received special attention recently from the U.S. Congress, which gave the impression of trying to improve its own image as the repository of many virtues—particularly puritanism, incorruptibility, and integrity. The Thai people should be very happy to assist them here.

*Thanat Khoman is a former Foreign Minister of Thailand, the Thai Ambassador to the United States, and Representative to the United Nations. This Excursus is based on remarks presented at the "Williamsburg" Conference held last fall.*

## EXCURSUS VI

### *Richard John Neuhaus on The Search for Disaster*

Disaster is presented to us as entertainment, as emotional therapy, and as a portent of hopeful social change. The first approach to disaster may be relatively harmless, and the second may have limited merit. The third, however, is disastrous.

As entertainment we have, for example, the new TV series "When Havoc Struck." Sponsored by Mobil Oil, the apparently popular series depicts some of history's great disasters on land, sea, and air, using a mix of documentary film and dramatization. Mobil may have struck a rich vein of entertainment, comparable to the more common forms of criminal violence and sexploitation that vie for the viewer's attention. History being as it is, the disaster well will likely not run dry very soon.

The popularity of disaster no doubt has many sources. One is a morbid streak in most people that the media have not hesitated to exploit. TV newscasts of fires, explosions, automobile smash-ups, and homicide scenes have about them a dismal sameness. But, assuming the stations know their markets, they must have a wide appeal or they could not claim so much air time. The choice moment is the interview with the victim who, after trying to tell what happened, breaks into tears. In such newscasts the "sob shot" is as mandatory as is—or so I am told—the "cum shot" the required climax in porno flicks. Frequently the nightly news comes close to being a pornography of emotions.

To be fair, the popularity of the genre should not be attributed to morbidity alone. There is an element of emotional therapy involved. For many, disaster is a welcome break from boredom with everyday existence. Those who find little drama in the quotidian are perhaps stirred by the reminder that somewhere the issues of life and death are confronted with highest urgency. At a more elevated level, disaster scenes are sometimes illumined by instances of nobility—the heroic fireman, the caring neighbors who reach out to the victims, and so forth. In defense of newscasters it might be argued that disaster reporting evokes the viewers' too latent capacity for compassion and fellow-feeling. Whether the momentary sensation is displaced by the next commercial's plug for hemorrhoid relief is quite another question.

Whatever the reasons for disaster's role in popular culture, there is a large body of opinion that subscribes to a third approach to disaster or crisis: disaster as the prelude to desired change. The Latin term for crisis, *discrimen*, catches the meaning: a turning point, a time of decision. *Discrimenphiliacs* remind us that in some Oriental language, I believe it is supposed to be Chinese, the character for crisis

*(Continued on p. 58)*