

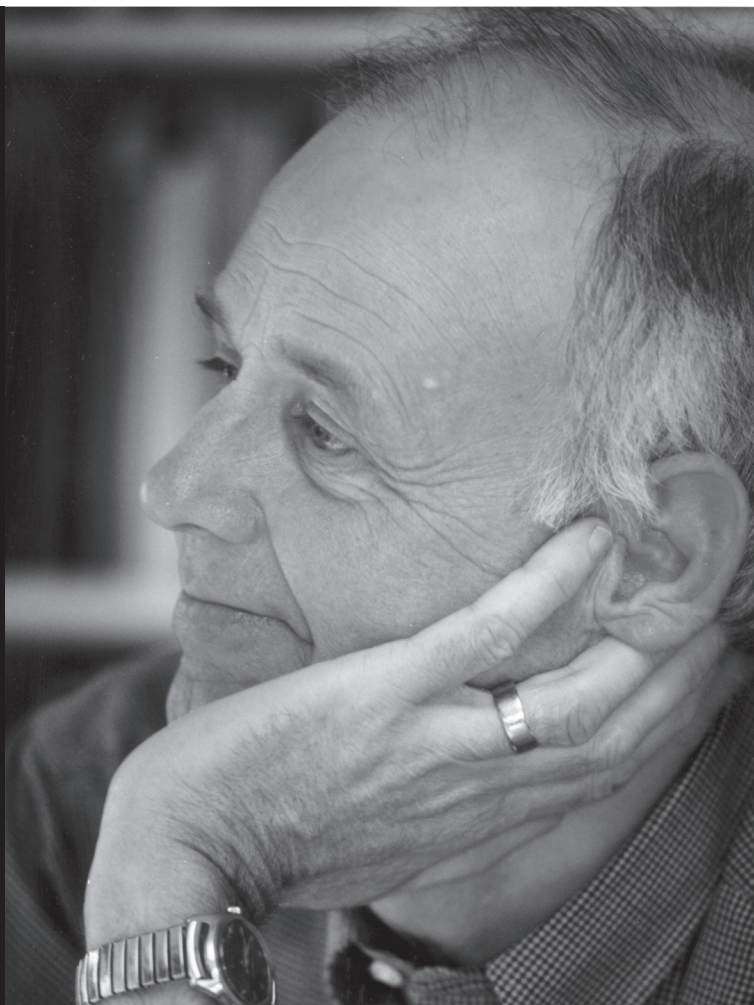
# Working Our Way Home

An evening with

## Wendell Berry & Friends

at the University  
of Indianapolis

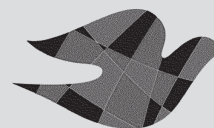
Monday November 7, 2005



## Spirit & Place

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**INDIANAPOLIS**



Indianapolis Peace House

**4 p.m.**      **Reading by Wendell Berry**—*Ransburg Auditorium*

**5:30 p.m.**      **Dialogue Sessions**—*Schwitzer Student Center*

*Space is limited, so participants must preregister for one of six dialogue sessions: Food, Higher Education, Local Economy, Technology, Vocation, War & Peace. To participate, call (317) 788-3365 or e-mail gpennell@indy.edu*

**5:40 p.m.**      **'Neighborhood at the Crossroads'**—*Wheeler Arts Center, 1035 E. Sanders St., will show a documentary about revitalization of the Fountain Square community. For details, call (317) 788-3365 or e-mail gpennell@indy.edu.*

**7 p.m.**      **Roundtable Discussion with Wendell Berry and Friends**—*Ransburg Auditorium*

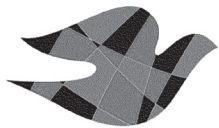
*This event is hosted by the University of Indianapolis and cosponsored by the Hoosier Environmental Council & the Indianapolis Peace House.*

# UNIVERSITY *of* INDIANAPOLIS®

The University of Indianapolis is a United Methodist-related comprehensive university. Founded in 1902 by the United Brethren in Christ Church and located on the south side of Indianapolis, the faculty, staff and students of “UIndy” believe that it’s important to give back to our community and make a difference in the world as they discover new ways to live out the University’s motto, “Education for Service.” For more information, visit [www.uindy.edu](http://www.uindy.edu).



Through education, advocacy, and citizen empowerment in Indiana, the Hoosier Environmental Council works to protect and restore the natural systems upon which life depends. Since 1983, HEC has worked for Clean Air, Safe Water, and Wild Places to improve our families’ health and quality of life. With 25,000 individual and 61 organization members, and a high-quality professional staff, HEC stands ready to tackle Indiana’s major environmental issues. For more information, visit [www.hecweb.org](http://www.hecweb.org).



## Indianapolis Peace House

The Plowshares project ([www.plowsharesproject.org](http://www.plowsharesproject.org)) and its city component, the Indianapolis Peace House ([www.indypeacehouse.org](http://www.indypeacehouse.org)), are a Lilly Endowment-funded collaborative among Earlham, Goshen, and Manchester colleges. Its aim is to strengthen peace studies as a field of endeavor in Indiana, across the United States, and around the world. It does so through a rigorous academic experience for students by working for justice, rather than demanding it. For more information, visit [www.indypeacehouse.org](http://www.indypeacehouse.org).

# How to Use this Booklet



The six sets of excerpts and annotated bibliographies in this booklet are primarily intended to be used by persons who will be participating in the “Evening with Wendell Berry and Friends” at the University of Indianapolis (1400 East Hanna Avenue) on Monday, November 7, 2006, as part of the 2005 Spirit & Place Festival.

At 4 p.m. that afternoon in the University’s Ransburg Auditorium, Wendell Berry will offer his reflections about what it means for contemporary city dwellers to begin “Working Our Way Home” by taking seriously the places where we live and work. Mr. Berry’s address will be followed by a short period of discussion (4:45–5:15 p.m.), after which those present will be dismissed to attend one of the various options that we have planned for that evening.

From 5:30 to 6:45 p.m. those persons who have preregistered for the Slow Food Dinner and Working Our Way Home Dialogues sequence will participate in one of six dialogue sessions that will be held on themes associated with Berry’s writings:

- Local Economy
- Food
- Vocation or “Right Livelihood”
- Higher Education
- Technology
- War and Peace

Each dialogue session will explore “how to move from concept to action” with respect to the particular focus of concern, but we also expect that the dialogues will overlap with one another in important ways given the interrelated character of Wendell Berry’s writing. Thanks to the folks at the Indianapolis Peace House, a slow food buffet meal will be provided free of charge to participants in the dialogue, but space is limited to 150 persons. To register to share in the meal and participate in one of these six dialogue sessions, call (317) 788-3365 or e-mail [gpennell@uindy.edu](mailto:gpennell@uindy.edu).

Those persons who are not able to participate in the dialogue sessions are invited to gather at the Wheeler Arts Center, 1035 East Sanders Street, where the Emmy-nominated documentary film *Neighborhood at the Crossroads*, about the revitalization of the Fountain Square community, will be shown at 5:40 p.m. The Community Programs Center at the University of Indianapolis is hosting a buffet dinner for those participants who elect to participate in this opportunity to learn how the University of Indianapolis is working with the south east Neighborhood Development in the Fountain Square neighborhood of Indianapolis. For more information about this event, please contact Greta Pennell at (317) 788-3365 or e-mail [gpennell@uindy.edu](mailto:gpennell@uindy.edu).

At 7 p.m. the facilitators from the six dialogues will participate in a roundtable discussion with Wendell Berry in Ransburg Auditorium. At that time, they will engage Mr. Berry and one another in conversation about questions and issues that were generated by participants in the dialogue sessions.

Join us for this special occasion, when persons committed to social transformation come together to do the intellectual work of moving from concept to action. The plenary gatherings at 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. are free and open to the public, but because of space limitations, you must preregister for the dialogue sessions.

## Wendell Berry on 'Food and Fuel'



Our system of agriculture, by modeling itself on economics rather than biology, thus removes food from the cycle of its production and puts it into a finite, linear process that in effect destroys it by transforming it into waste. That is, it transforms food into fuel, a form of energy that is usable only once, and in doing so it transforms the body into a consumptive machine.

It is strange, but only apparently so, that this system of agriculture is institutionalized, not in any form of rural life or culture, but in what we call our “urban civilization.” The cities subsist on competition with the country; they live upon a one-way movement of energies out of the countryside—food and fuel, manufacturing materials, human labor, intelligence, and talent. Very little of this energy is ever returned. Instead of gathering these energies up into coherence, a cultural consummation that would not only return to the countryside what belongs to it, but also give back generosities of learning and art, conviviality and order, the modern city dissipates and wastes them. Along with its glittering “consumer goods,” the modern city produces an equally characteristic outpouring of garbage and pollution—just as it produces and/or collects unemployed, unemployable, and otherwise wasted people.

Once again it must be asked, if competition is the appropriate relationship, then why, after generations of this inpouring of rural wealth, materials, and humanity into the cities, are the cities and the countryside in equal states of disintegration and disrepair? Why have the rural and urban communities both fallen to pieces?

Excerpts from *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry* edited by Norman Wirzba (Washington, D.C.: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2002), pp. 131.

WENDELL BERRY ON FOOD

“The Pleasures of Eating.” *What Are People For?* New York: North Point Press, 1990. pp. 145–152.

Eating, Berry argues in this classic essay, is an agricultural act, and as such, there is a politics of food; just as we cannot be free if others control our thoughts and speech, nor can we be free if others control our food. And yet, the industrial food industry does just this by divorcing us from the production of food. If there is a politics of eating, Berry suggests, then there is also an aesthetics and an ethics. Berry suggests that when it comes to eating, for example, red meat, the best of all worlds is to have known the animal personally, because it is only then you eat with “understanding and gratitude.” From hence derives the pleasures of eating: connection to the natural process of growing food. Berry offers, for city dwellers, some tips on how to eat better.

“Waste.” *What Are People For?* New York: North Point Press, 1990. pp. 126–28.

A quick and significant essay, “Waste” explores the relationship to our eating and our current production of massive amounts of waste materials. The copious amounts of throw-away containers that line the banks of rivers and sides of roadways are indicative of the ways in which we have become divorced from the production of food, which now is controlled by industrial methods that rely on waste-producing technologies.

“Farming and the Global Economy.” *Another Turn of the Screw*. Washington, DC: Counterpoint. pp. 1–7.

In this introductory essay, Berry demonstrates again how food and eating are political. Really a reflection on farming and economics, the essay concludes with Berry noting, “One thing at least should be obvious to us all: the whole human population of the world cannot live on imported food. Some people somewhere are going to have to grow the food. And wherever food is grown the growing of it will raise the same two questions: How do you preserve the land in use? And how do you preserve the people who use the land?” His suggestion is that an economy of imported food will never answer this for us; only a local economy of food production and consumption can, and this economy will also return to farmers and food consumers alike a wealth and power that the economy of importation cannot.

“The Problem of Tobacco.” *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community*. New York and San Francisco: Pantheon Books, 1993. pp. 54–68.

Based on a fictitious dialogue about tobacco, this essay is a look at the relationship between the morality of farming and the morality of consumption. While not directly about food and economy, Berry does demonstrate that the method of agriculture is of the utmost importance, citing as a model his support of tobacco farmers because of the methods and wisdom they employ in their farming.

*Selected excerpt & annotated bibliography prepared by the Office of Ecumenical & Interfaith Programs, University of Indianapolis, June 2005*

## Wendell Berry on Higher Education & Agriculture



It is the nature of the soil to be highly complex and variable, to conform very inexactly to human conclusions and rules. It is itself a pattern of inexhaustible intricacy, and so it is easily damaged by the imposition of alien patterns. Out of the random grammar and lexicon of possibilities—geological, topographical, climatological, biological—the soil of any one place makes its own peculiar and inevitable sense. It makes an order, a pattern of forms, kinds, and processes, that includes any number of offsets and variables. By its permeability and absorbency, for example, the healthy soil corrects the irregularities of rainfall; by the diversity of its vegetation it protects against both disease and erosion. Most farms, even most fields, are made up of different kinds of soil patterns or soil sense. Good farmers have always known this and have used the land accordingly; they have been careful students of the natural vegetation, soil depth and structure, slope and drainage. They are not appliers of generalizations, theoretical or methodological or mechanical. Nor are they the active agents of their own economic will, working their way upon an inert and passive mass. They are responsive partners in an intimate and mutual relationship.

The word agriculture, after all, does not mean “agriscience,” much less “agribusiness.” It means “cultivation of land.” And cultivation is at the root of the sense both of culture and of cult. The ideas of tillage and worship are thus joined in culture. And these words all come from an Indo-European root meaning both “to revolve” and “to dwell.” To live, to survive on the earth, to care for the soil, and to worship, all are bound at the root to the idea of a cycle. It is only by understanding the cultural complexity and largeness of the concept of agriculture that we can see the threatening diminishments implied by the term “agribusiness.”

That agriculture is in so complex a sense a cultural endeavor—and that food is therefore a cultural product—would be regarded as heresy by most of the agencies, institutions and publications of modern farming. The spokesmen of the official reckoning would doubtless respond that they are not cultural but scientific, that they are specialists of “agriscience.” If agriculture is acknowledged to have anything to do with culture, then its study has to include people. But the agriculture experts ruled people out when they made their discipline a specialty—or, rather, when they sorted it into a collection of specialties—and moved it into its own “college” in the university. This specialty collection is interested in soils (in the limited sense of soil chemistry), in plants and animals, and in machines and chemicals. It is not interested in people.

Excerpt taken from *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry* edited by Norman Wirzba, Washington, D.C.: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2002), pp. 131.

WENDELL BERRY ON HIGHER EDUCATION & AGRICULTURE

*Essays*

“Life is a Miracle: An Essay Against Modern Superstition.” Washington, DC: Counterpoint Press, 2000.

A significant essay in which Berry argues with the materialism of E. O. Wilson and his suggestion that science will one day answer all of our questions. Berry discusses the relationships between religion, science, and art in ways that would have radical effects on the way the modern research university goes about the process of education.

“The Loss of the University.” *Home Economics: Fourteen Essays*. San Francisco: North Point, 1987. pp. 76–99.

Berry attacks the specialization of the university, arguing that instead of forming people, universities form “workers” who are alienated from what they seek to know. Berry likens the better idea of the university as that of a tree: a trunk of core knowledge with branches of specialized knowledge. Instead, modern universities are factories. Specialization is not just problematic, but absurd, according to Berry; take for example that the study of the common language of Americans is given specialist status in English departments.

“Higher Education and Home Defense.” *Home Economics: Fourteen Essays*. San Francisco: North Point, 1987. pp. 76–99.

Berry has long argued that when done well, a university education should prepare one to make a proper homecoming; in other words, education should make you better at inhabiting the place you are originally from.

*Fiction*

*Remembering in Three Short Novels*. New York: Counterpoint, 2002, pp. 119–222.

Berry’s reflections on the role of memory, and what it takes to be “remembered” with respect to the land and community, are themes that are interwoven throughout many of his novels, but perhaps nowhere more incisively or poignantly than in *Remembering*, a novella that narrates the intellectual turning point in the life of a journalist with interests in agriculture. Partially set in the bicentennial year of 1976, this narrative is about the life of a man who is “working his way home” after having participated in the corrupt world of agribusiness journalism and having had his arm amputated. The novella also provides Berry’s satirical perspective about American higher education’s captivity to “agribusiness”; at a crucial point in the novel the main character, Andy Coulter, attends a conference at which he hears a member of the faculty of the Department of Agricultural Economics of a famous land-grant research university speak on “The Future of the American Food System” (127–130). Thereafter, Coulter realizes that what “the conference was about and intended to promote” was “the abstractions by which things and lives are transformed into money. . . . He is oppressed by all that has oppressed him for months, but also by the memory of his voice and of all the other voices at the conference, abstraction welling up into them, a black cloud of forgetfulness. Soon they would not remember who or where they were, their dear homeland drawn up into the Future of the American Food System to be seen no more, forever destroyed by schemes by numbers, by deadly means, all its springs poisoned.”

“Making it Home” in *Fidelity: Five Stories*. New York: Pantheon, 1992. pp. 83–105.

The short story from the collection also narrates the return of a “prodigal” to the land of his youth, after having been emotionally dismembered in the context of his participation in a foreign war.

## Wendell Berry on the Difference between a Good Human Economy and 'the Great Economy'



A good human economy, that is, defines and values human goods, and, like the Great Economy, it conserves and protects its goods. It proposes to endure. Like the Great Economy, a good human economy does not propose for itself a term to be set by humans. That termlessness, with all its implied human limits and restraints, is a human good.

The difference between the Great Economy and any human economy is pretty much the difference between the goose that laid the golden egg and the golden egg. For the goose to have value as a layer of golden eggs, she must be a live goose and therefore joined to the life cycle, which means that she is joined to all manner of things, patterns, and processes that sooner or later surpass human comprehension. The golden egg, on the other hand, can be fully valued by humans according to kind, weight, and measure—but it will not hatch, and it cannot be eaten. To make the value of the egg fully accountable, then, we must make it “golden,” must remove it from life. But if in our valuation of it we wish to consider its relation to the goose, we have to undertake a different kind of accounting, more exacting if less exact. That is, if we wish to value the egg in such a way as to preserve the goose that laid it, we find that we must behave, not scientifically, but humanely; we must understand ourselves as humans as fully as our traditional knowledge of ourselves permits. We participate in our little human economy to a considerable extent, that is, by factual knowledge, calculation, and manipulation; our participation in the Great Economy also requires those things, but requires as well humility, sympathy, forbearance, generosity, imagination.

Another critical difference, implicit in the foregoing, is that, though a human economy can evaluate, distribute, use, and preserve things of value, it cannot make value. Value can originate only in the Great Economy. It is true enough that humans can add value to natural things: we may transform trees into boards, and transform boards into chairs, adding value at each transformation. In a good human economy, these transformations would be made by good work, which would be properly valued and the workers properly rewarded. But a good human economy would recognize at the same time that it was dealing all along with materials and powers that it did not make. It did not make trees, and it did not make the intelligence and talents of the human workers. What the humans have added at every step is artificial, made by art, and though the value of art is critical to human life, it is a secondary value.

### On Conservation and Local Economy

In our relations to the land, we are ruled by a number of terms and limits set not by anyone's preference but by nature and by human nature:

- I. Land that is used will be ruined unless it is properly cared for.
- II. Land cannot be properly cared for by people who do not know it intimately, who do not know how to care for it, who are not strongly motivated to care for it, and who cannot afford to care for it.
- III. People cannot be adequately motivated to care for land by general principles or by incentives that are merely economic—that is, they won't care for it merely because they think they should or merely because somebody pays them.
- IV. People are motivated to care for land to the extent that their interest in it is direct, dependable, and permanent.
- V. They will be motivated to care for the land if they can reasonably expect to live on it as long as they live. They will be more strongly motivated if they can reasonably expect that their children and grandchildren will live on it as long as they live. In other words, there must be a mutuality of belonging: they must feel that the land belongs to them, that they belong to it, and that this belonging is a settled and unthreatened fact.
- VI. But such belonging must be appropriately limited. This is the indispensable qualification of the idea of land ownership. It is well understood that ownership is an incentive to care. But there is a limit to how much land can be owned before an owner is unable to take proper care of it. The need for attention increases with the intensity of use. But the quality of attention decreases as acreage increase.
- VII. A nation will destroy its land and therefore itself if it does not foster in every possible way the sort of thrifty, prosperous, permanent rural households and communities that have the desire, the skills, and the means to care properly for the land they are using.

Excerpts from *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry* edited by Norman Wirzba (Washington, D.C.: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2002), pp. 224 & 195–196



WENDELL BERRY ON LOCAL ECONOMY

*Essays*

“The Idea of a Local Economy.” *In the Presence of Fear: Three Essays for a Changed World*. Great Barrington, MA: The Orion Society. pp. 11–33.

An example of Berry’s writing for Orion, this essay is significantly reprinted in a book published in response to the attacks of September 11, 2001. Berry argues vehemently against a corporate and industrial economy, precisely because of the destruction to local economies, and thus the land, it creates. Berry brutally lists the assumptions of a globalized, free trade economy; among them is “the stable and preserving relationships among people, places and things do not matter and are of no worth.”

“Conservation and Local Economy.” *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*. Ed. Norman Wirzba. Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2002. pp. 195–204.

Berry challenges the prevailing notion that “the business of America is business.” Rather, he argues, the business of local communities is to preserve their own economies, which invariably means adopting practices of farming and land preservation that challenge and stand in the face of increasing globalization. Berry briefly discusses the demise of the local economy in his home community, Port Royal.

“A Bad Big Idea.” *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community*. New York and San Francisco: Pantheon Books, 1993. pp. 118–173.

Berry outlines the ways in which GATT helps promote free trade and globalization, and, thus, contributes to the demise of local economies and communities. Notable for the way in which Berry engages specific policy directly.

Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community.” *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community*. New York and San Francisco: Pantheon Books, 1993. pp. 118–173.

A long essay in which Berry discusses “industrial sex” as a general condition of a world in which local economies are shunned. Berry begins with the sexual harassment hearings of Clarence Thomas, and notes that issues such as this are impossible to solve either in “public” or “private,” because all things must be filtered through local communities. Furthermore, the demise of local communities is related to the demise of local economies. Issues of sexuality and freedom cannot be independent of local communities, which have to have their own economies to survive.

“The Joy of Sales Resistance.” *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community*. New York and San Francisco: Pantheon Books, 1993 (preface).

A delightful attack on American consumerism, and a handbook on devoting oneself to “sales resistance”—that is, building a sustainable and local economy.

*Fiction*

*Jayber Crow*. Counterpoint Press (September, 2001).

One of the novels about the “Port William membership,” this novel tells tales of Port William through the eyes of the town barber, Jayber Crow. Though fiction, Berry paints the picture of a local economy and its workings, as well as its threats. The same can be said about most of Berry’s fiction, which is all about Port William, but see also especially *Hannah Coulter* for a look at the ways in which suburban development threatens the local economy.

## Wendell Berry on Technology



The question of how to end or reduce dependence on some of the technological innovations already adopted is a baffling one. At least, it baffles me. I have not been able to see, for example, how people living in the country, where there is no public transportation, can give up their automobiles without becoming less useful to each other. And this is because, owing largely to the influence of the automobile, we live too far from each other, and from the things we need, to be able to get about by any other means. Of course, you could do without an automobile, but to do so you would have to disconnect yourself from many obligations. Nothing I have so far been able to think about this problem has satisfied me.

But if we have paid attention to the influence of the automobile on country communities, we know that the desirability of technological innovation is an issue that requires thinking about, and we should have acquired some ability to think about it. Thus if I am partly a writer, and I am offered an expensive machine to help me write, I ought to ask whether or not such a machine is desirable.

I should ask, in the first place, whether or not I wish to purchase a solution to a problem that I do not have. I acknowledge that, as a writer, I need a lot of help. And I have received an abundance of the best of help from my wife, from other members of my family, from friends, from teachers, from editors, and sometimes from readers. These people have helped me out of love or friendship, and perhaps in exchange for some help that I have given them. I suppose I should leave open the possibility that I need more help than I am getting, but I would certainly be ungrateful and greedy to think so.

But a computer, I am told, offers a kind of help that you can't get from other humans; a computer will help you to write faster, easier, and more. For a while, it seemed to me that every university professor I met told me this. Do I, then, want to write faster, easier, and more? No. My standards are not speed, ease, and quantity. I have already left behind too much evidence that, writing with a pencil, I have written too fast, too easily, and too much. I would like to be a better writer, and for that I need help from other humans, not a machine.

Excerpts from *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry* edited by Norman Wirzba (Washington, D.C.: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2002), pp. 131.

## WENDELL BERRY ON TECHNOLOGY

*Essays*

“Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer.” *What Are People For?* New York: North Point Press, 1990. pp. 170–77.

One of Berry’s most famous technology essays, this originally appeared in *Harper’s* and garnered Berry a number of responses, some of which follow the essay in this edition. Berry also includes a response to the printed letters. In the essay, Berry contends that the computer is a prime example of our misunderstanding and misuse of technology. As in the quote above, Berry notes that the computer is not capable making anyone’s work better, unless the definition of better is based on speed and efficiency alone. Berry argues that the first task of environmental consciousness is to reduce consumption of fossil fuels, which can be done by not using a computer.

“Feminism, the Body, and the Machine.” *What Are People For?* New York: North Point Press, 1990. pp. 178–96.

A continuation of thoughts started in Berry’s response to letters written about “Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer” (see above), this essay explores the relationship between feminism and technological progress. Berry argues that many feminisms fail both because they are subject to the mind-body split brought about by technological advance, whose goal is only increased money and ease, and also because they do not understand the value and role of the home economy. Some of Berry’s good wit and humor are present in the beginning of this essay.

“Discipline and Hope.” *A Continuous Harmony*. Shoemaker and Hoard, 1972. pp. 83–162.

A long and important essay, “Discipline and Hope” seeks to explore the cultural stress and disorder that is a result of the loss of both discipline(s) and hope(s) brought about by great technological change. Berry notes that technological progress is always concerned with progress, which usually means “quantity” and not “quality.” Key examples are the ways in which TV has reduced our public discourse to a shambles, and the absurdity of assertions that a society who can send a man to the moon can end hunger on earth. Berry argues that sending a man to the moon is prime example of the loss of discipline brought about by an obsession with progress; we have yet to prove that we can survive on earth, much less on the moon. This essay is also reprinted in *Recollected Essays: 1965–1980*. New York: North Point Press, 1981.

“Home of the Free.” *The Gift of Good Land: Further Essays Cultural and Agricultural*. San Francisco: North Point, 1981. pp. 183–88.

Berry here reflects on the ways in which technology—in the form of expensive farm machinery and housing developments that promise the absence of yard work—divorce us from the experience of cultivating the land, and thus, from truly living deeply.

*Selected excerpt & annotated bibliography prepared by the Office of Ecumenical & Interfaith Programs, University of Indianapolis, June 2005*

## Wendell Berry on the Vocation of 'Right Livelihood'



The issue of lifelong devotion and perseverance in unheroic tasks, and the issue of good workmanship or “right livelihood” [are issues that most people don’t like to think about, but Berry contends that we have to think more about these questions of vocation in light of what has been altered and/or destroyed by the industrial revolution and related changes in human society].

.....

The most necessary thing in agriculture . . . is not to invent new technologies or methods, not to achieve “breakthroughs,” but to determine what tools and methods are appropriate to specific people, places, and needs, and to apply them correctly . . . because no two farms or farmers are alike; no two fields are alike. Just the changing shape or topography of the land makes for differences of the most formidable kind. Abstractions never cross these boundaries without either ceasing to be abstractions or doing damage. And prefabricated industrial methods and technologies are abstractions. The bigger and more expensive, the more heroic, they are, the harder they are to apply considerately and conservingly.

Application is the most important work, but also the most modest, complex, difficult, and long—and so it goes against the grain of industrial heroism. It destroys forever the notions that the world can be thought of (by humans) as a whole and that humans can “save” it as a whole—notions we can well do without, for they prevent us from understanding our problems and from growing up.

To use knowledge and tools in a particular place with good long-term results is not heroic. It is not a grand action visible for a long distance or a long time. It is a small action, but more complex and difficult, more skillful and responsible, more whole and enduring, than most grand actions. It comes of a willingness to devote oneself to work that perhaps only the eye of Heaven will see in its full intricacy and excellence. Perhaps the real work, like real prayer and real charity, must be done in secret.

The great study of stewardship, then, is “to know/That which before us lies in daily life” and to be practiced and prepared “in things that most concern.” The angel is talking about good work, which is to talk about skill. In the loss of skill we lose stewardship; in losing stewardship we lose fellowship; we become outcasts from the great neighborhood of Creation. It is possible—as our experience in this good land shows—to exile ourselves from Creation, and to ally ourselves with the principle of destruction—which is, ultimately, the principle of nonentity. It is to be willing in general for beings to not-be. And once we have allied ourselves with that principle, we are foolish to think that we can control the results. The “regulation” of abominations is a modern governmental exercise that never succeeds. If we are willing to pollute the air—to harm the elegant creature known as the atmosphere—by that token we are willing to harm all creatures that breathe, ourselves and our children among them. There is no begging off or “trading off.” You cannot affirm the power plant and condemn the smokestack, or affirm the smoke and condemn the cough.

That is not to suggest that we can live harmlessly, or strictly at our own expense; we depend upon other creatures and survive by their deaths. To live, we must daily break the body and shed the blood of Creation. When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, it is a sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration. In such desecration we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness, and others to want.

Excerpt taken from *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry* edited by Norman Wirzba, Washington, D.C.: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2002), pp. 303-304.

WENDELL BERRY ON QUESTIONS OF VOCATION

*Essays*

“What are People For?” *What Are People For?* New York: North Point Press, 1990. pp. 123–125.

In the title essay, Berry deals with the demise of the small farm and the economic (and thus cultural) effects of migration from the country into the city. Berry criticizes the way in which unrestricted industrialism rests all too easily with a category of people who are “permanently unemployed,” and argues that if they are so, it is because of the way industrialism changes the way we value work.

“The Responsibility of the Poet.” *What Are People For?* New York: North Point Press, 1990. pp. 88–92.

In one of Berry’s shorter literary essays, Berry argues that the responsibility of the poet is to “affirm and collaborate in the formality of creation,” a thought that, according to Berry, is often overlooked and ignored. While this essay is not about work, per se, it is instructive because Berry argues that the work of the poet is dependent on the traditions that teach the poet his craft, and on the poet’s ability to work in concert with the wider world—something Berry would argue is the vocation of all people, regardless of craft.

“Conservation is Good Work.” *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community*. New York and San Francisco: Pantheon Books, 1993. pp. 27–43

Framed as a critique of modern conservation methods, and offering three rival versions of conservationism, Berry here argues that all human work must be concerned with conserving a healthy connection to the earth; Berry names the way our industrial society causes us to treat the earth as “bad work.” Good work is any which ties practices of labor to local community and buying power, thus grounding us to our places.

“The Problem of Tobacco.” *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community*. New York and San Francisco: Pantheon Books, 1993. pp. 27–43

Berry indicates that he sides with tobacco farmers not only because he grew up with them and around them, but because of the way in which they embody good work: by inhabiting practices of farming that are sustainable, necessary, and learned over time through shared wisdom of other farmers. Tobacco farmers then, despite the moral problems associated with tobacco, become exemplars for good work. This essay is also listed under “Wendell Berry on Food.”

“Economy and Pleasure.” *What Are People For?* New York: North Point Press, 1990. pp. 129–144.

Here Berry offers that pleasure, in the truest sense of the word, is required for good work, all the while arguing that industrial economies, because of the way in which they divorce people from the land, other people (especially children), and communities, are incapable of producing high-quality pleasure. While direct competition may at times be pleasurable, Berry argues that we begin to mature in our life when we sympathize with losers for a reason; that is, it is natural to understand the consequences of competition. About the dramatic increase in “pleasure” economies, Berry comments that it makes sense that we would seek to consume so much pleasure, since most of our work is so dreary.

*Selected excerpt & annotated bibliography prepared by the Office of Ecumenical & Interfaith Programs, University of Indianapolis, June 2005*

## Wendell Berry's Reflections on War and Peaceable Living



In spite of all the talk about the law of tooth and fang and the struggle for survival, there is in the lives of the animals and birds a great peacefulness. It is not all fear and flight, pursuit and killing. That is part of it, certainly; and there is cold and hunger; there is the likelihood that death, when it comes, will be violent. But there is peace, too, and I think that the intervals of peace are frequent and prolonged. These are the times when the creature rests, communes with himself or with his king, takes pleasure in being alive.

This morning while I wrote I was aware of a fox squirrel hunched in the sunlight on a high elm branch beyond my window. The night had been frosty, and now the warmth returned. He stayed there a long time, warming and grooming himself. Was he not at peace? Was his life not pleasant to him then?

I have seen the same peacefulness in a flock of wood ducks perched above the water in the branches of a fallen beech, preening and dozing in the sunlight of an autumn afternoon. Even while they dozed they had about them the exquisite alertness of wild things. If I had shown myself they would have been instantly in the air. But for the time there was no alarm among them, and no fear. The moment was whole in itself, satisfying to them and to me.

Or the sense of it may come with watching a flock of cedar waxwings eating wild grapes in the top of the woods on a November afternoon. Everything they do is leisurely. They pick the grapes with a curious deliberation, comb their feathers, converse in high windy whistles. Now and then one will fly out and back in a sort of dancing flight full of whimsical flutters and turns. They are like farmers loafing in their own fields on Sunday. Though they have no Sundays, their days are full of sabbaths.

. . . . .

But there is not only peacefulness, there is joy. And the joy, less deniable in its evidence than the peacefulness, is the confirmation of it. I sat one summer evening and watched a great blue heron make his descent from the top of the hill into the valley. He came down at a measured deliberate pace, stately as always, like a dignitary going down a stair. And then, at a point I judged to be midway over the river, without at all varying his wingbeat he did a backward turn in the air, a loop-the-loop. It could only have been a gesture of pure exuberance, of joy—a speaking of his sense of the evening, the day's fulfillment, his descent homeward. He made just the one slow turn, and then flew on out of sight in the direction of a slew farther down in the bottom. The movement was incredibly beautiful, at once exultant and stately, a benediction on the evening and on the river and on me. It seemed so perfectly to confirm the presence of a free nonhuman joy in the world—a joy I feel a great need to believe in—that I had the skeptic's impulse to doubt that I had seen it. If I had, I thought, it would be a sign of the presence of something heavenly in the earth. And then, one evening a year later, I saw it again.

Excerpts from *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry* edited by Norman Wirzba (Washington, D.C.: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2002), pp. 29–30.

## WENDELL BERRY ON WAR AND PEACE

*Essays*

“The Failure of War.” *Citizenship Papers*. Shoemaker & Hoard, 2003. pp. 23–32.

Perhaps Berry’s most clear and concise argument against state war-making, this essay exposes the various levels of hypocrisy inherent in a foreign policy based on war and violence. Berry argues that, as always has been the case, violence breeds violence, and that the state is incapable of distinguishing between that violence which is “just,” and violence that is in the state’s best interest—the definition of “just” propagated by the state to explain its violence will always be aligned with the state’s national interest. Furthermore, here is where the greatest absurdity of modern war is to be found: since modern American wars are fought on foreign soil (in the name of our own national interests), the costs to our home country are hidden to us, though always present and expensive. Characteristically, Berry sees a correlation between our warring and our domestic issues, especially the way in which we abuse our own land and people. Berry counters the absurdity of state war-making with the witness of peaceable people like Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., who worked for peace by being peaceable, and were in their times successful at doing so.

“A Citizen’s Response.” *Citizenship Papers*. Shoemaker & Hoard, 2003. pp. 1–16.

An example of Berry’s work with *Orion* magazine (see also *In the Presence of Fear*, below), this essay originally appeared in that magazine, and as a full-page ad in the *New York Times* in February 2003. In it, Berry criticizes the National Security Strategy of the United States of America, published in September 2002 by the White House. While the essay echoes many of the thoughts in “The Failure of War,” it follows the text of the Strategy and notes the inconsistencies present. Most notably, Berry criticizes the thought that any government can commit itself and its nation to “rid the world of evil,” since this puts in place, in the government’s thinking, a dichotomy of good and evil that mirrors that of the terrorists it seeks to destroy. The essay notes that “(t)he distinction between the intention to perpetrate violence against innocents, as in ‘terrorism,’ and the willingness to do so, as in ‘war,’ is not a source of comfort.” The essay also notes the lack of any agricultural policy in the Strategy, asserting that good agriculture is a nation’s best defense. In the end, Berry argues that a citizen’s duty is at all times to question a government that claims the right to rule without consent (as the Strategy indicates the American government is prepared to do), and that working for peace requires not passivity, but devotion equal to if not greater than our nation’s willingness to prepare for war.

“Thoughts In the Presence of Fear.” *In the Presence of Fear: Three Essays for a Changed World*. Great Barrington, MA: The Orion Society, 2001.

Another essay that originally appeared in *Orion*, these thoughts on peace and war were written shortly after the events of September 11, 2001. This one is presented in the form of loosely connected paragraphs numbered with roman numerals (a style not uncommon to Berry’s work). “Thoughts” articulates Berry’s thoughts on the absurdity of war (see above), and highlights the ways in which the events of September 11, 2001, call us to reevaluate what our nation values.

“Peaceableness Toward Enemies.” *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community*. New York and San Francisco: Pantheon Books, 1993. pp. 69–92.

Like “Thoughts in the Presence of Fear” (see above), this essay is a collection of numerated paragraphs relating to the first Gulf War. Berry again attacks the inconsistencies and absurdities of modern war, noting that wars are always fought for the same reasons, the technology of war being the only aspect that changes. The essay argues that longing for peace and trusting in war is absurd, and that peaceableness is a condition that is only worthwhile when it happens in the midst of conflict.

See also *The Ways of Ignorance*, Shoemaker and Ward (to be published November 2005); “Property, Patriotism and National Defense,” *Home Economics*. New York: North Point Press, 1987. pp. 98–111.

*Poems*

“The Peace of Wild Things”; “The Want of Peace”; “Against the War in Vietnam”; *Collected Poems*. New York: North Point Press, 1984.

See also *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979–97*. Washington, D.C.; *Counterpoint*, 1998, a collection in which his reflections about peaceable living converge with the practice of Sabbath observance in particular times and places.

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