

The very love that created my family, the very love extolled by prophets and philosophers, is killing the wilderness. It isn't meanness, avarice, rapaciousness, or predatoriness on the part of human beings. The greatest enemy of wilderness is the love of humanity for its own kind.

HIKING TO TIMPANOGOS: HOW CHARITY, AFFECTION, AND SEX ARE KILLING THE WILDERNESS

By Levi S. Peterson

TIMPANOGOS IS UNDOUBTEDLY THE MOST spectacular mountain in the entire Wasatch Range, and it is within easy driving distance of both Utah Valley and Salt Lake City. It used to be the destination of a massive Fourth of July trek by hundreds of BYU students and residents of Utah Valley. It is now a designated wilderness area with all the attendant protections and additional enticements to visitation and abuse that official wilderness status accords. Small-party use of the mountain remains high.

My brother Leon said he wanted to hike to the top of Timpanogos. He and his wife, who live in Arizona, had come to Utah to visit their daughter. So we went to the summit—Leon and Gussie, their daughter Britt and son-in-law Joe, and Althea and I. It was a family affair. It was also, in a sense, a Christian affair because my family is compulsive about its religion and can't get away from it even on a wild mountain.

It was a Saturday morning and the Timpooneke trailhead was surcharged with vehicles and departing hikers. There must have been fifty cars and trucks in the small parking lot and along the roads that came in and went out. An ineffectual ranger stood in front of a hut asking the departing hikers whether they had enough water.

I said to Joe, "This isn't wilderness. It's an urban park. But we deserve this congestion. We love to make babies and we've bred ourselves into this predicament."

"Speak for yourself," Joe said. "I don't go out of my way to make babies. They just seem to happen." Joe is thirty and has a lot of dark hair and a bushy mustache. Britt, his wife and my niece, is blond and willowy and very conscientious. They have three children, the oldest of whom is seven.

The crowd at the parking lot set the theme of the hike for me. Certain ideas get into my head and stay there when my

body labors against a mountain trail. All day I thought about the fact that humanity's love for its own species has ravaged the wilderness. Love has long been esteemed as the greatest of human virtues. In all its major aspects—whether as charity, affection, or sexual passion—it draws people together and induces them to cooperate with and affirm one another. No one says anything bad about love. Songs by the tens of thousands extol it. To the religious it seems godly; to the secular it seems natural. Unfortunately, this paramount virtue of prophets and philosophers is the direst enemy wilderness has. That's because its net effect is an unbridled expansion of the human species.

There are too many people in the world, nearly 5.2 billion according to the latest estimate, and growing at an average annual increase of 1.8 percent, which means that this figure will double itself in about forty years. Human beings are depleting the resources on which they depend and trashing their own intimate living space at an accelerated rate. It's of little comfort to conjecture that the starvation, disease, and chronic war that are a consequence of overpopulation will chiefly afflict the less-developed nations of the world, where birth rates are skyrocketing at increases of between 2 and 4 percent a year. (Impoverished Honduras, for example, with a birth rate of 3.5 percent, will double its population in twenty years.)

Birth rates have leveled off in the more developed nations, but in the opinion of many, myself included, environmental disaster has already struck even these nations. The 1990 census showed the United States to have a population of 248,239,000, an increase of 9.7 percent over 1980; sober predictions are for 282,575,000 by 2010. Who wants or needs 34 million more Americans? Already roads are crowded, air is polluted, inner cities rot, farms are conglomerated, forests are clearcut, and beaches are trashed. The particular victim of population growth is any nearby wild area. Development is an accelerating trend even in the so-called developed nations, and

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those who believe in it greedily eye the unpreempted wealth of the residual wilderness. I like living in the American West because it still has some empty space. That space is filling in fast. What makes development so devastating is the numbers who practice it. It wouldn't be so bad if there weren't so many of us.

My family is a local example of runaway reproduction. My father and mother had thirteen children. One of my brothers has twelve, another ten. Three brothers, including Leon, have six each, and two sisters, seven each. Althea and I have only one, a daughter practicing law in the Northwest; we would have had more had we been able. Many of my nephews and nieces are producing large broods. A Peterson reunion is something to behold; little children swarm everywhere. I love every one of them, and that is the essence of the problem.

Timpanogos is a big mountain and once we were on the trail, the human congestion wasn't so apparent. The trail ascends a canyon composed of a series of terraces created by glaciation—moderately inclined bottoms suddenly confronted by cliffs that must be traversed by switchbacks. The axis of the mountain, unlike that of most other Wasatch summits, runs nearly east and west. For that reason snow remains late in its northern canyons, watering an extraordinarily lush vegetation. In a high, wide valley just below the final crest of the mountain the trail from Timpooneke meets a trail leading from Aspen Grove. In an arm of this valley a permanent snowfield feeds a small, beautiful body of water called Emerald Lake.

I had forgotten how steadily the trail climbs. However, our sweat was up and we felt good. The air was fresh and the sky was bright and for a while our trail traversed alternating patches of sun and shade. Aspen and fir covered the lower slopes, and the bottom was mantled by a great variety of shrubs, forbs, and grasses. Song birds flitted in the willows and choke cherries. Wildflowers abounded, sometimes whole acres of them. A snowshoe rabbit, its enormous hind feet still white with winter's fur, crossed our path. Later we came upon a speckled grouse and her chicks. Except for an occasional blink of her eyes, the unmoving mother bird might have been

a piece of curiously sculpted stone. A couple of the chicks scrambled from cover only to melt mysteriously from our view in another spot, taking that sanctuary which natural camouflage and an instinct for immobility offer. Who could help feeling cheerful amid such circumstances?

I walked immediately behind Leon and we did a lot of talking. Later Joe marveled over our ability to climb a steep trail and talk at the same time. Leon is sixty, and I'm going on fifty-eight. We are about six feet tall; we have fair Scandinavian skin and our hair, once blond, is dark and thin. We don't see each other more than once or twice a year. For the first ten or twelve years of our lives, we slept in the same bed and invented stories to put ourselves to sleep. During daylight hours we fought a lot, and he always won. However, I don't retain a shred of resentment over those fights, and I trust he doesn't either.

Leon and I caught up with Britt and Joe where a tiny cascade from a melting snowbank splashed across the rocky trail. Joe had already emptied his canteen, so I got out my

pump and filled his canteen and topped off those of the rest of us. My pump filters out giardia, a pernicious dysentery easily contracted from animal and human excrement in the clearest of mountain streams. By evening I had pumped close to four gallons of water for our party of six. That's how hot and sweaty this hike was. I love the taste of snow-melt water. You can't get anything like it in town.

Althea and Gussie soon arrived at the tiny cascade and began to talk to a forlorn young woman who sat on a nearby rock. The young woman said she had hurt her leg and the couple she had come with had left her behind. She was going back to the parking lot and wait. Althea said it would be a long, lonesome wait and gave her a sandwich. This is a phenomenon Althea and I often see skiing. Experienced skiers take novice friends along and soon become impatient and abandon them to their own awkward devices. A lot of them never try skiing again. Friendship is a fickle thing. Family is more reliable.

Loneliness is a pitiable condition. Human beings are not solitary animals by instinct; they need both intimacy and community for psychological health. Without affection, peo-



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ple languish and sometimes they die. The loneliness in which great masses of people exist is one of the major unresolved problems of civilized life. Yet for every person who fails of intimate relationships with other people, there are two or three or perhaps even a dozen others who do not fail of those relationships. The net effect of the affectionate, intimate bonding between human beings is overpopulation. This kind of love is a major contributor to a planet crowded beyond all reason by that upright species, *Homo sapiens*.

In its root affection is wild. For example, a vixen licks her cubs with contented, half-closed eyes, and female monkeys gently groom the infants of other females as if they were their own. So when I, a supposedly civilized and certainly much domesticated animal, feel a surge of affection for another human being, I know I do so with the blessing of the wild. Wild species are also capable of grief, the grim counterpart of affection. An antelope whose fawn has been killed by coyotes loiters for days in the area where she last saw her fawn. A wild goose bereft of its mate by hunters searches anxiously for its companion. Affection and grief are powerful and unremitting in the human species and have of course been greatly elaborated upon by cultural influences. In fact, their prominence makes them two of the most distinguishing characteristics of human kind.

Grief is a dark pearl. No person who lives any length of time escapes it. It has been domesticated by elaborate funerary practices and by the solemn celebration of tragedy through art and literature, yet it remains one of the major burdens of human existence.

Grief is freshly with me as I write this page because of the recent death of Althea's mother. At ninety-two Stella still lived in her own house just two doors from ours. Never a large woman, she had shrunk to an emaciated sixty-five pounds because of congestive heart failure and osteoporosis. She ate abstemiously, took an enormous number of pills, and shuffled painfully about her house or ours by means of a walker. Her vision having recently deteriorated, she could no longer read and sew. One evening she collapsed at home and we called the paramedics. At midnight we left her resting comfortably in a hospital bed. At 3:30 we were called back to the hospital, where she had lapsed into a coma. While we watched, her heart beat slowly dropped on the monitor to which she was attached, from 60 beats per minute to 58 and 56 and so on until, after a couple of fluctuations between 40 and 30, the number suddenly went to 0. Wilderness had reclaimed her. Death is invariably wild. Neither the domesticated accoutrements of a modern hospital nor the prettifications of an undertaker can nullify that fact.

This reminds me that nothing is more graceful than the large white petals and creamy yellow horns of a columbine. When I say *graceful*, I mean in the religious sense of the word. A wild columbine almost persuades me that an ineffable Providence underlies the tragedies of this world. As poets have long noted, nature heals human grief. The columbines seemed to be saying to us, Forget your grief, lay aside your burden, be consoled on this bright mountain morning in the happy wilderness. But where do we turn for consolation when there

aren't any wild columbines left?

The point to be made here regarding Althea's mother is not that, when further life would have been an utter misery to her, Althea countermanded certain drastic measures to revive her; but that for years Althea and I and many others labored strenuously to lengthen this woman's life far beyond her capacity to care for herself. Human beings will not readily surrender those with whom they have bonded in intimate affection. As I have said, affection is a major contributor to overpopulation. It undermines the impulse to preserve wilderness. If I must choose between using up wilderness or allowing a loved one to die, I will sacrifice wilderness every time.

MMORALITY is an equally strong contributor to the impulse to multiply the human species. Worldwide, the human conscience dictates a selfless devotion to other human beings, even those with whom one has no bond of intimate affection. Altruism is at the heart of both religious and secular ethics. By way of illustration, I will return to the Christian righteousness of my relatives.

The large majority of my parents' several hundred descendants are practicing Mormons. My brother Leon, with whom I hiked on Timpanogos, has been a bishop and is presently a counselor in a stake presidency. Leon is a very moral person in all respects. He's scrupulous about not breaking speed limits while driving. I'm astonished all over again every time I realize that, yes, honestly, here is a man who drives a little less than 55 miles per hour on a deserted highway.

For all his reserve and scrupulousness, Leon isn't passive. He's a real mountain climber, not just a Saturday hiker like me. Long ago he took up rock climbing and in 1981 made a successful assault on Mt. McKinley in Alaska, an expedition lasting three weeks and requiring years of careful planning and practice. He was almost fifty then. Seven years later, while scouting a route for a climbing class he was teaching, he fell about thirty feet into some rocks and broke his back, ankle, arm, and eleven ribs. He lay immobilized in bed for three months with a brace anchored to his skull by screws, and for three more months he had to wear an only slightly less uncomfortable strap-on brace. He is now slowly conditioning himself for a return to strenuous climbing. After our hike on Timpanogos he intended to go north to the Tetons to edge his way back into serious climbing there.

Our brother Roald, who is a stake president, is also very scrupulous. Every Tuesday morning Roald takes a ninety-eight-year-old brother from his stake to the temple since there is no one else to do it. Roald recently sent fifty dollars and an apology to a friend from whom he had stolen a hunting knife when they were boys. He says he can't ask people in temple interviews whether they are honest in their dealings with their fellow human beings if he himself hasn't repaired his old dishonesties. That's what the office of stake president or bishop does to a man. It makes him into something just a little unnatural.

I respect my brothers' Christian righteousness. I respect moral rectitude wherever I meet it, whether among the relig-

ious or the secular. Conscience is an admirable trait of the human species. The capacity for self-restraint that guilt gives the human animal is essential to civilization. Initially, guilt is wild, arising as it does within instinct, and *Homo sapiens* isn't the only species susceptible to at least a rudimentary guilt. Anyone who has lived with a dog knows the canines are very capable of slinking about, expecting punishment for soiling a floor. It's otherwise with the felines. House cats are basically sociopaths. No cat was ever repentant of leaping onto the kitchen counter and gnawing on a thawing roast.

But of course human beings excel in guilt. Their capacity to suffer guilt is a distinguishing trait of their species. Furthermore, in human beings guilt is one of those instincts whose exercise domesticates other instincts in a radical manner. Guilt is an internalized expectation of punishment, a symbolic self-punishment on the part of wrong-doer. It is a form of pain, and human beings will go to great lengths to avoid it. When you consider the vast load of inhibitions a person of conscience carries about, you realize there is no other domesticating agent to compare with guilt.

The particulars of conscience vary enormously among cultures and among individuals within cultures. One culture conditions a child to feel guilty over what is the most innocent of gestures in another culture. Ironically, one culture often justifies warfare against another on basis of violations of morality. Nonetheless, in the utterances of the prophets and philosophers whom civilized human beings have tended to respect most, the virtue of human solidarity is extended from the family, tribe, and nation to the species at large. In many moral systems, secular as well as religious, altruism is the essence of the moral and selfishness is the essence of the immoral. In a Christian context, this selfless devotion is called charity; in a secular context, it is called humanitarianism. Despite their inherent propensity for greed, cruelty, and indifference, human beings practice a sufficient collective altruism to contribute enormously to the environmental woes of their planet. The net effect of human conscience is overpopulation.

An incredible effort goes into the preservation and prolongation of human life for moral reasons. In the developed countries of the world, this effort extends to the peripheral and abnormal. Indigent parents are provided child support from welfare funds. Rescue missions give free meals and beds to the homeless. The comatose, senile, and hopelessly crippled are kept alive by strenuous medical treatment. Premature and retarded infants are meticulously nurtured. Organized charities raise hundreds of thousands of dollars to pay for a single life-saving liver or bone-marrow transplant.

Though such luxuries are not readily available in the underdeveloped countries of the world, simple improvements in hygiene, medicine, and agriculture have allowed for enormous increases in population there. Of special importance has been the dramatic reduction of infant mortality rates. Before the scientific and technological revolution of the past couple of centuries, famine and disease trimmed human population to the carrying capacity of the environment. Women bore many children, but most of those children died. Improvements as simple and inexpensive

as the practice of antiseptics during childbirth and vaccinating for smallpox now mean that the majority of children born survive and themselves become reproducers. Such improvements have spread rapidly because missionaries, traders, government officials, and professional workers conceive it as their duty to spread them. They represent an immense moral force, the collective human conscience, directed toward the preservation and enhancement of *the human species*. Given the additional force of human technology, the wild nonhuman world doesn't have a chance.

So much, then, for affection and altruism. As I have said, a third kind of love that contributes to overpopulation, sexual passion, was also on my mind while I hiked to Timpanogos. Sexuality is a primordial condition. It is wild. Billions of years ago a chance mutation among simple asexual organisms initiated an evolutionary process by which sexual reproduction



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emerged among living things. This new reproductive arrangement was so advantageous to living things that it became a fixed component of a vast phenotype comprising almost all advanced organisms, whether plant or animal. *Homo sapiens* is no exception to this rule. Hence, beneath the domesticating veneer of tuxedo and gown at a formal dinner repose a naked man with penis, testicles, and prostate gland, and a naked woman with breasts, vagina, uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries.

Among the things reminding me of gender while I hiked on Timpanogos was the dimorphism that distinguishes males and females in bodily size and strength among *Homo sapiens* as it does among so many other species. Unfortunately, the dimorphism of the human species has been a major obstacle to the ethical ideal of the equality of the sexes. Even in a modern, high-tech culture, men yield with great reluctance the advantages greater physical strength gives them over women.

As one might expect, Leon, Joe, and I are taller, heavier, and more brawny than Gussie, Britt, and Althea. I will hasten to add these women do not live in craven fear of their husbands. Truly, each of us, male or female, treats his or her spouse with respect and kindness. Nonetheless, we exist in a religious culture noted for its unabashed practice of patriarchy.

An inconsequential incident on our Timpanogos hike reminded me of patriarchy. At one moment we were passed on the trail by a couple of attractive women whom I took to be a mother of about forty and a daughter of about eighteen. As they went ahead, Leon said of the mother, "Her Mormonism is showing." Below her knee-length shorts peeked the legs of the sacred undergarment worn by Mormons who have been to the temple. Britt said women can now get temple undergarments with elastic leg openings so that they can be worn with shorts. Leon hadn't heard about this; he seemed doubtful. Britt insisted, saying a woman had shown her the elastic leg openings she was wearing. The decision to authorize convenient leg bottoms for women was of course made by the all-male Quorum of Twelve Apostles.

At this point I perversely brought up the question of giving the priesthood to Mormon women. Leon and Althea remained silent on the subject. Joe said it was a good idea; he likes to fish on Sunday and would happily let anyone whomsoever govern the Church. Gussie and Britt disavowed any interest in the priesthood. They said they are happy to let men assume the extra worries it entails. I respect their opinions. Most Mormon women would have answered as they did. However, a vocal minority feels otherwise. The liberal Mormon woman is likely to feel her abilities are wasted by the Church. So I also respected these two plucky women who had passed us on the trail to Timpanogos. They were, I fancied, testing themselves against a mountain, not being allowed to test themselves against the challenges of running a church. I will add that I think one of the best ways to empower and embolden your daughters is to take them into and teach them to love wilderness.

The fact of gender expressed itself among us while we hiked in another way. I speak of the delicate matter of relieving ourselves. After a couple of hours of climbing, we had emerged

into the final high valley. Southward, the precipitous crest of the mountain, miles long, loomed against the bright sky. The floor of the valley undulated between rounding ridges and shallow ravines. The latter, watered by melting snow, were carpeted by coarse grass and a fascinating array of wild flowers.

We came soon to an open-air toilet, a seat placed upon a concrete tank without benefit of walls. Though the toilet was sheltered from the trail by stunted trees, it was visible to hikers ascending the crest. This visibility provoked some debate among us, but at last necessity overcame modesty and the women took turns using this accommodation. As might be expected, the men had no need for it. Relying upon a prerogative of male physiology, they had at various moments already fallen behind the group and relieved themselves beside the trail.

The foregoing reminders of gender were of course trifling in comparison to the signs of procreation that abounded on every hand along the trail. The meadows through which we passed throbbed with a vast germinal power, their brilliant flowers and seeded grasses bespeaking sexual regeneration. At various moments I saw bees, and once a hummingbird, pollinating bright flowers while they busily gathered nectar. At another moment, I observed butterflies in copulation. The female clung to a stem of grass, her antennae flickering. The male clung to her back, his abdomen pulsing. Occasionally their wings made slight, languorous adjustments. I fancied them settled into a prolonged ecstasy, and I wished them a numerous progeny.

While we trudged upward, I alluded to an article I had read in a fashion magazine offering advice to single women as to the best procedures for coping with an impotent lover. My listeners responded with amusement, and I concluded impotence was not a serious matter with them. I apologize for conjecturing as to the sex lives of these my relatives and companions on the trail, who have all remained married to the bride or groom of their youth. I am reminded that sexual intercourse is a bonding agent of multiple virtues. It is an act to which men and women in stable relationships return with the regularity of taking breakfast every morning. Most other animals mate seasonally. A female animal in estrus makes her fertility known through scent pheromones or altered behavior. The male, normally as docile and uninterested in sexual expression as if he were a neutered creature, responds with vigorous amatory gestures. Human beings have lost their instinctive connection with estrus. A male can be amorous, a female receptive, at all moments. Among human beings sex has become a recreation and a pastime. You can, in fact, argue that the human animal is largely oversexed.

Instinct provides the animal world with a variety of courtship behaviors. A female squirrel or chipmunk flees the male, which gives chase up and down trunks and from limb to limb and across considerable stretches of open ground. Only the best conditioned of males is privileged to copulate. The female of many other species actively seeks a male when in estrus. A domesticated cow will run miles to find a bull. I know that because it was my duty to take our cows to the bull when I was

a boy. I recall an occasion when a cow refused to wait until I had opened the gate into the bull's pasture. She went half through a barbed wire fence and stopped. While the bull emitted soft, courtly lowings around her forequarters, I heaved and swore and sweated in an attempt to shove her hindquarters through the fence.

Among human beings, that grand, storied domestication called romance has replaced instinct as the impetus toward courtship. Romance involves rituals of pleasant, considerate, civilized sexuality. Human beings prepare for sex elaborately. They groom their hair and wash their bodies. They wear attractive clothes and apply perfumes and colognes. They speak complimentary words and nuzzle, kiss, and caress. There is much good to be said of all this in light of the not-altogether-harmonious sexual impulses that respectively characterize men and women. Romance helps a woman to overcome her sense of vulnerability and a man to delay his impetuosity.

Yet I like to think in the ultimate moment of passion, both a man and a woman have reverted to the wild. Nothing demonstrates better than sex that in the civilized soul the wild and the domesticated are inextricably mingled. In a transcendent moment of passion, a bedroom is a wilderness. Human beings would do well to remember this fact and honor the connection their sexuality gives them with the enduring wild. Especially they should not feel obliged to atone for sexual passion by a blind multiplication of offspring. The world desperately needs an inexpensive and reliable mode of human contraception. That the Catholic church, almost a billion strong in membership, officially proscribes effective contraception is an ecological scandal. Many lesser denominations, including the Mormons, maintain an unfortunate silence on the subject. Contraception is a domestication, a conscious intervention in a natural process on the part of human beings. Ironically, it is a mandatory intervention if any shred of the wild is to remain on the face of the earth.

THESE were my thoughts as our little party of hikers traversed an immense snowbank immediately under the crest of the mountain. I had taken off my light walking shoes and

put on the cleated boots I had carried in my pack for this very eventuality. The snow was what skiers call corn snow, slushy and amenable to an easy footing. Soon we came to a saddle on the crest and passed over onto the arid southern face of the mountain. Now Utah Valley and its sprawling towns and cities and its large, dormant, half-eutrophied lake lay before us. Lehi, a town at the north end of the valley, compelled my attention. Like most other Mormon settlements, Lehi is a grid of streets



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duly crossing one another in the cardinal directions. I pointed out to Leon the approximate location of the Lehi cemetery in relation to the Interstate, which we could easily see from our high view point. Our Swedish grandparents, who arrived in Lehi in 1862, are buried in that cemetery. For several summers during the 1880s our grandfather ran a herd of sheep on this very mountain. When I realize that my grandfather saw columbines, aspen forests, and mating butterflies just as I have seen them, I get the uncanny feeling he and I compose a single mystical individual. I think I in-

herit my sentiment for the wild genetically. I am fated by my ancestry to feel ill at ease in big cities and among conglomerations of people.

The trail, astonishingly rocky and steep, now turned toward the summit. The most prominent feature of the immediate landscape was rocks of many sizes, broken away by frost from the great stone bulk of the mountain. Among this rubble grew a sparse vegetation—hardy grass, ground-hugging Indian paintbrush, and stunted sagebrush.

Soon we clambered through what is called the Chimney, a narrow passage that seemed scarcely less precipitous than the cliff it pretended to breach. At this point I had begun to talk about the lesbian wedding Althea and I attended last October in the Unitarian church in Salt Lake City. It wasn't an official wedding, of course; it was called a ceremony of union. There were two brides, both in long white dresses with veils. There were candles on the altar, and the minister wore robes and preached quietly to the brides regarding Christ's expectation that those who truly love are to be faithful and loyal to one another. The young pair exchanged rings and a kiss, and we all went into the adjoining hall for a reception.

The high, clear air of Timpanogos reminded me that nature has its own sanctity whereby the love of two women or two men for one another is made holy. For centuries the disapproving have called homosexual love unnatural. In reality, it is as natural as heterosexual love. But the repugnance most heterosexual people feel toward it is also natural. That benign domestication called tolerance is called for in the relation between the homosexual and the heterosexual. The latter group especially, composing an overbearing majority, must learn to respect what perhaps they cannot learn to admire.

It's good to view the familiar world from high new perspectives. From our particular vantage upon the cities in the valley below, I could see the diminutiveness of human endeavor when cast against the cosmic wild. Human beings can't hurt the wilderness at large; there's a whole universe full of it. What they can destroy is that wilderness essential to their own survival, both physical and spiritual, and that is exactly the wilderness they are sturdily, steadily, blindly eliminating.

The holy wild was all the more emphatically on my mind for the fact that the Provo Temple lay concealed in the panorama before us. I pointed out prominent streets in Provo to Leon and Joe and said the temple lay at the northern terminus of Ninth East, which we could clearly see with the unaided eye. Through Joe's binoculars, we could see the temple itself, its golden steeple gleaming in the sun.

I am fascinated how the Mormons, like untold generations of other Christians, have *constructed* the sacred. Traditionally, Christians have revered the supernatural much more than the natural. They domesticate the universe by conceiving it as created and ruled by an omnipotent divine personality. For them, holiness is a domesticated quality, something rational beings produce by manipulating natural processes. The Mormons, for example, make temples as resplendent as the utilitarian standards of the American construction industry will allow and keep them conspicuously unspotted from human sin, and there they believe God makes his presence most completely known to human beings.

Utah Valley, constantly in our view on this side of the mountain, also reminded me of overpopulation. Utah Valley is noted for a number of things good and bad. It has a high density of Mormons, it is the site of BYU with its nationally competitive football team, it boasts a burgeoning computer-software industry, it has the only working steel mill and some of the foulest air west of the Mississippi, it spawns scams and pyramid schemes in unusual numbers, and it has one of the highest birth rates among areas of comparable population in the United States.

Among the states, Utah is second only to Alaska in birthrate. In 1987, with a total population of close to 1,650,000, Utah boasted 35,285 births. Whereas there were sixty-six births for every thousand persons in the United States generally, Utah marked ninety-two births for every thousand. Utah Valley makes a hearty contribution to this birth rate because of the presence of BYU and large numbers of recently married students whose prolific habits make veritable warrens out of married student housing. These idealistic young couples are

responding to the Mormon doctrine of the preexistence, according to which previously created human souls wait for the opportunity to be born into a mortal probation on this earth. A Mormon couple who limit their family are denying unborn spirits the privilege of coming to earth in favorable circumstances.

Althea and I once attended a fast and testimony meeting in a married student ward at BYU in order to observe the blessing of a nephew's first child. In the large classroom where we met, small children outnumbered adults two to one. Hoots and shrieks rent the Sabbath calm at a decibel level unusual even by Mormon standards. A child crawled unchecked along the continuously connected writing-counter in front of our row of seats. I suppose her parents were too demoralized to go after her, or perhaps they were merely demonstrating a wise confidence that their errant offspring would eventually reverse herself and return to them, as she did. A pregnant pianist, whose husband was elsewhere on an ecclesiastical assignment, tried in vain to control her two little children while she accompanied the hymns. One of these urchins kept disappearing behind the piano while the other, thumb in his mouth, circled the sacrament table. After the service, Althea and I met an English professor in the hall. He responded to our comments on the fertility of the worshippers with a twinkle in his eye. "Yes," he said, "these admirable young married people live the Gospel day and night."

In time my hiking companions and I arrived at the summit of Timpanogos, which at a little over 11,750 feet above sea level is among the highest of the Wasatch Range. The tip of this summit is a flat dais of rock on which three couples from the Wasatch Mountain Club once danced, as a photograph from the 1920s shows. Now this small flat space is occupied by a metal hut anchored by guy wires.

At our feet the north face of the crest plunged fifteen hundred feet to the valley where Emerald Lake reposes. This narrow valley is bounded on the opposite side by a lateral ridge as abrupt if not as high as the crest. At the base of both the crest and the lateral ridge, massive talus slopes have formed, fed by a constant shower of weathered rock. Every winter accumulating snow, moving like a slow-motion river, picks up a load of boulders from the talus slopes and transports them downhill, ultimately dropping them during the summer thaw on a gigantic moraine whose terminus looms over Emerald Lake. Some of these boulders are as large as a locomotive. As for the snow, an icy remnant makes an ascent through the head of the valley difficult even during the hottest summers.

We sat on the edge of the abyss and ate lunch. Before I unwrapped a sandwich, I washed down a couple of Anacin tablets with a long pull of water from my canteen. This reminded me of my first visit to the Uinta Mountains, whose faraway craggy peaks were clearly visible from the top of Timpanogos. It was there, during the summer of 1959, I suffered my first altitude headache and discovered it took something a little stronger than plain aspirin to relieve it. Since then Althea and I and our daughter Karrin have hiked and backpacked in the Uintas scores of times. I associate the Uintas

with beginnings. Althea and I found them when we were young and had the marvelous assurance of a lifetime of summers in which to wander a mountain range together. I fancy that two or three hundred years from now you'll find us somewhere on a sunlit Uinta trail. The only heaven I want is the Uintas in summertime.

While we ate, other hikers arrived and departed, and we chatted affably with them. Amidst the enormous spaces around us their presence wasn't distracting. You might say this is evidence that my worry about overpopulating the world is needless; here is evidence that wilderness can comfortably absorb human crowding.

It is unintelligent of people to assume overpopulation is not a problem merely because they happen to be at a given moment in a place that doesn't seem crowded. Overpopulation of the earth is a massive and worsening problem. All the poor countries of the world want to be rich. They want to consume resources at the rate resources are consumed by the United States

and Japan and France and Germany. There aren't resources enough for a highly developed world civilization composed of ten or twelve or twenty billion persons; there aren't resources enough for a highly developed world civilization composed of the present population of close to six billion. Even if technological advances turn hitherto unusable materials into resources, wilderness as an environment that human beings can enter, love, and seek solace in will disappear. At best, the part of the earth not immediately covered by human buildings and roadways will become a vast mine and refuse dump, and wilderness will be an unaffordable luxury. The national parks and designated wildernesses will be, relatively speaking, small, vulnerable, and off limits to the vast majority of people.

THE tragedy of the dying wilderness came to me all the more forcefully because of an amusing incident that occurred as we finished our sandwiches and began strapping on our packs and taking a final few photographs. Our attention was riveted when someone said, "Look there! Wild goats!"

On a steep slope of the opposite ridge were two long banks of snow. A herd of animals, so distant as to seem very small, raced down the upper bank, slipping and sliding and even

tumbling, but always recovering and scrambling on. They were indeed mountain goats, about twenty kids and adults. At the bottom of that snowbank they slowed in order to cross a boulder field to the next, where they again accelerated their pace and raced down the snow with a similar reckless abandon. To our utter delight, when they reached the bottom of the second snowbank, they reversed their direction, scrambled up the rocky slope to the top of the first, and repeated their

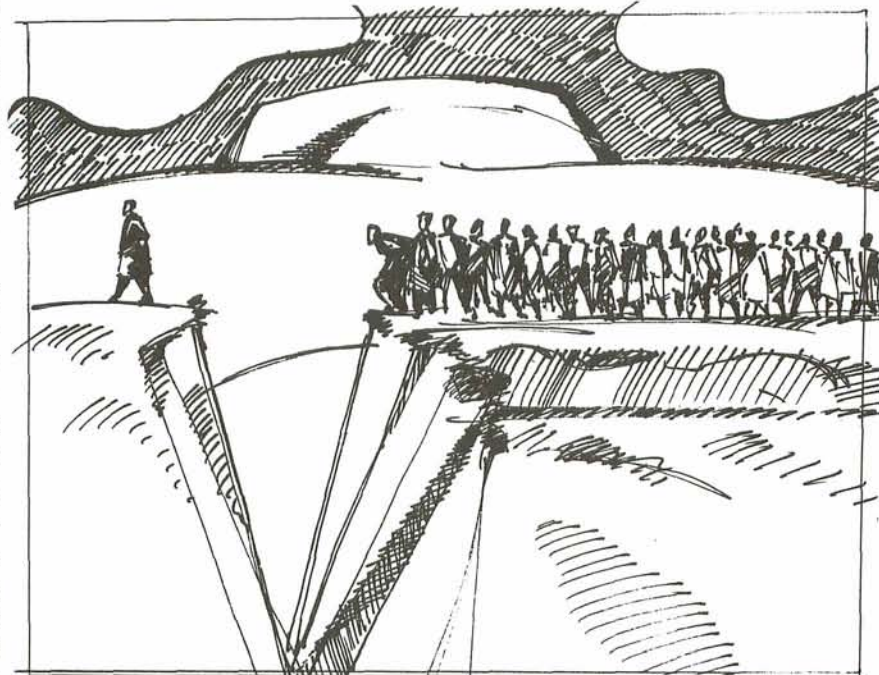
performance, racing, skidding, and tumbling their way to the bottom of both. With that, their energy seemed dissipated, and they slowly ambled away and soon were to be seen grazing on a grassy swell of the ridge.

Leon said, "They were playing! They were doing it for fun!" It was true. They had been having a frolic.

Mountain goats were transplanted to Timpanogos from the Olympic Mountains of Washington. Perhaps a hundred fifty of them flourish on these cliffs and terraces. They have few natural enemies here and seem generally

unperturbed by the hordes of hikers who invade this mountain in the summer. On an earlier hike to Timpanogos, Althea and I and friends came upon a mother goat stretched out in indolent repose upon a snowbank. She allowed us to pass within thirty feet of her. Her shaggy fur was white; her hooves, nose, eyes, and backcurved horns were jet black. She had a ludicrous beard and stared at us with amused yellow eyes. Later she rose, stretched, and ambled off to graze with her kid, which gamboled nearby. Ever since looking into her less-than-solemn eyes, I have known there is something whimsical in the soul of her species.

The high-spirited goats I witnessed while hiking with my relatives seemed a propitious sign. These frolicking animals were a reminder that wilderness is its own excuse for being and that human beings are obliged to respect and foster it for its own sake. Nothing is more important in the evolution of human ethics than the recognition that in order to be truly good, human beings must accord consideration and concern to wild plants and animals and even to the wild inanimate world of rock, soil, air, and water. The goats readily establish this fact because they possess such evident personality, and it is easy for human beings to empathize and identify with them.



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Actually, the tiniest wild flower or merest shred of lichen makes the same argument. Wild nature is worthy of both respect and preservation.

As we trudged along the downward trail, we compared the wild goats to human juveniles, and that soon got us into a conversation about Britt's and Joe's energetic, playful children. Sometimes Jacci mistakes me for Leon on the phone and calls me Grampa. At seven she is a capable, affectionate girl. She is internalizing the obedient role of the Mormon woman without a hitch. I admit I respect her ability to adapt without fuss and furor. It's marvelous to have her climb into my lap, and already I'm thinking of the sad day when she'll outgrow her relaxed confidence in me.

At five Jed is equally affectionate but less obedient. He affirms cowboy boots, jeans, and pearl-buttoned flannel shirts, wearing them seven days a week. If he's told not to do something, that's the reason he wants to do it. I admire his proclivity for exercising his freedom in church. During a sacrament meeting last year Jed made a dash for the other side of the chapel. With Casey in her arms, Britt went after him, Joe being out of town on a work assignment. When she got to the other side, Jed dashed back. Finally she collared him and dragged him back to her pew. She released him a moment while setting Casey down, and he bolted again.

Not long ago, when Britt and Joe had brought the children to our house for dinner, Jed worked out a novel entertainment with a swing in the nearby park. He repeatedly charged the swing from a distance, throwing his chest into the flexible rubber seat and riding the swing high into the air. Soon he overshot the swing, his body glancing off the seat and flying on through the air until it came to a full-length crash landing on the dusty ground. Jed was delighted rather than dismayed by this result and tried the antic over and over. His father stood by, scratching his head. "We don't raise 'em smart," Joe said, "but we sure raise 'em tough."

As for Casey, he's only a year and a half old. Althea and I were privileged to follow the progress of his gestation, taking note of Britt's swelling belly whenever we got together and offering the usual encouragements and felicitations. Pregnancy is grand, miraculous, and wild. Birth, too, is wild as I was reminded when, a day or two after Casey's birth, Althea and I went to Britt's room in the McKay-Dee hospital. Casey was in a bassinet, and Joe was there with Jacci and Jed, watching TV with Britt. Human beings deceive themselves with their artificial environments and think they've escaped the wild. As I have said, you could scarcely find a more domesticated place than a hospital, yet, looking upon the squinting, red-faced Casey in his bassinet, I knew I was in the presence of the ineradicable wild. I knew this room at this moment was as holy as any temple.

I find this a good place to end this essay, having alluded to wild goats on Timpanogos and to little children whom I love. I will let the goats represent the happy wilderness, the wilderness that human beings can preserve, enter, and revere. Transplanted by human beings from one wild place to another, these goats suggest that humanity can preserve and restore wilder-

ness if it wants to ardently enough. They suggest humanity may achieve a reconciliation of civilization and wilderness, may discover how to enjoy a decent standard of living in a world where significant portions of wilderness thrive. Obviously, this reconciliation can't occur with a human population that doubles itself every twenty to forty years.

I will let Jacci, Jed, and Casey represent one of the profoundest of human enjoyments, the bond of affection. They stand for the overwhelming importance of intimate associations with people to whom any of us may be related by blood, marriage, and friendship. Such associations are crucial to the emotional health of human kind. I for one would do almost anything to preserve those associations in my life. I have no higher priorities than loving and assisting my family and friends.

I allude to my own loved ones to make it clear that I do not fail to recognize the cost of controlling overpopulation. The very love that created my family, the very love extolled by prophets and philosophers, is killing the wilderness. It isn't meanness, avarice, rapaciousness, or predatoriness on the part of human beings that is principally responsible for polluting this planet and killing off wild species of plants and animals by the tens of thousands. The greatest enemy of wilderness is the love of humanity for its own kind, especially the love for little children, multiplied as it is by billions everywhere across the face of the earth.

It will be very hard for humanity to adjust itself to the limitations of its inescapable environment, the earth. We must put limits to our effort to preserve the premature, the elderly, the disabled, and the retarded. We must forego strenuous interventions in preserving those who otherwise are not viable. Every birth must be paid for by a death. To achieve a reduction in population, there should be more deaths than births for a while. The grim future we face is of drastically fewer children. What children we have will become even more precious; those who have them will have to share them even more generously with those who have none.

Some Christians believe they have an ace in the hole regarding overpopulation, which is the Second Coming. They believe a heroic Christ will stride majestically through the heavens to their rescue. They believe they don't have to be concerned with preserving the environment. All they have to do is practice a meticulous personal righteousness and God will amend their ecological blunders.

I for one believe God is wild and human beings had better adapt themselves to that fact. People had better not rely on the sudden rescue of the Second Coming. The price of having too many children is, sooner or later, a massive die-off. It is criminal to bring children into the world who have no prospect of a long and decent life. It is criminal to bring children into the world who have no prospect of knowing and loving wilderness. Even love must be subject to moderation. In this matter of replenishing humankind, reason tells us it's long past time to demonstrate restraint. ☞