

A MODERN ARCADIA

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[Assignment: By living spaces we mean not only the structures that provide us with a space to live but also the environment or the location within which or at which such structures are built. Our world (present day America) offers us roughly three choices: living in a metropolis, in a small town, or in the country. Which would you choose to live in and why?]

(1) A pebble can live on the banks of a roaring river and think of himself as above his counterparts who live in small streams. He can boast that he is more experienced and well-traveled but may fail to see that he has no control over his life. It's the river that controls him and he is carried along with the current and, sometimes, he is even hurt by the turbulent waters that dash him brutally against the river bed. He can lose his individuality and can only go where he is taken and not where he wants to go. On the other hand, the pebble in the quiet stream is happier and more in control of his life. He takes his time and enjoys nature and his surroundings. He has less excitement but knows that he can eventually go to the larger river if he wants to. Meanwhile, he lives a healthy, safe, and more fulfilled life--physically, spiritually, and emotionally.

(2) I've often changed my mind on what kind of house I would like to live in, but it has always seemed obvious to me that I would live in a small town. Perhaps this is due to the fact that I have never lived in a large American metropolis and, knowing myself, I know that I would feel uncomfortable there. Or perhaps it's because of the many advantages I see to living in a small town such as greater openness, greater safety, and being close enough to the large cities and the countryside to appreciate the advantages of both, but far enough away to prevent their disadvantages from affecting my life.

(3) I have primarily grown up in the capitals of underdeveloped countries, and though these capitals were called cities, most of them were much smaller than the average American city. They were also structured differently, almost as if they were small towns in the middle of cities. I spent my life there and have learned to love them. They have grown to be part of me as though the spirit of the small town had seeped into my being and made me so addicted that I only feel comfortable in my habitual surroundings. I grew up in these 'small towns' and enjoyed it: however, since American cities are usually very different, I find myself not wanting to live in them. Buildings are close together and, instead of residential areas, tall apartment complexes huddle together as though in fear of their surroundings, and are crowded together as tightly as the residents themselves on the sidewalks during rush hour. When I think of large cities, I automatically picture the likes of "coke" town

in Dickens' novel Hard Times where hard, monotonous living prevails to such an extent that individuals lose their sense of identity and forget what they are living for.

(4) The countryside, on the other hand, symbolizes a secular paradise. When people in the cities think of the country, they envision a form of arcadia and feel a nostalgia for the 'simple' life of the farmer. This reflects the psychological need or desire that humans have to live close to nature and to the earth--or at least the need some of us have to live in constant view of nature so that we can see the sky, the trees, and the sunrise and sunset, which all work together as sources of revelation to remind us of the important goals in our lives such as achieving happiness.

(5) Large cities are run by the forces of competition so that people begin to think that the solution to life is money. In a small town, the focus is directed inward and you are constantly reminded of your true goals. This is not to say that all this can not be achieved in a big city. It can be but not so easily as in small towns which are closer to our romanticized view of a terrestrial paradise and which fulfill our need for an arcadia, without sacrificing the necessary facilities we have come to depend on in our modern world. Interestingly, the movement away from cities is a modern phenomenon. Earlier in history, the necessities needed to fulfill our financial and security needs could only be found in towns and people were eager to move into these towns from the countryside.

(6) This movement into the towns caused the towns to gradually develop and grow into large, self-sufficient cities providing an increased sense of economic security. However, once a basic need such as this is fulfilled, people can turn and take the time to analyze their higher needs, such as the need for aesthetic pleasure. In our world, we no longer need to live in cities in order to survive because survival has become much easier due to technological and medical advances. Therefore, we have the latest trend of movement out of cities towards the countryside where these higher needs can be met. This movement is ironically reinforced by the fact that today cities no longer offer much security and have instead developed into congested concrete jungles where it is difficult to survive. Small towns are now healthier because of the cleaner air, better sanitation, and lower crime rate. Thus, even from the point of view of health and security, the small town has definite advantages over the metropolis.

(7) As far as aesthetic appeal is concerned, the small town also has a clear advantage. Small towns offer a soothing environment, peace and quiet, and natural beauty that we all yearn for. This beauty is particularly

important to me because it strengthens my faith in God since I personally see Him reflected in nature. However, even those who do not believe in God must admit that traditional values typical of a small town, although sometimes stifling, can foster simple, stable, and relatively predictable communities. People who tend to be radical may not fit in, but I feel that I would be more comfortable here than in large cities where conflicting ideas and groups are always in a constant struggle.

(8) The small town also fulfills psychological needs which are not easily fulfilled in large cities. Small towns are less crowded and individuals there feel less stress and tension than their counterparts in cities who lead a hectic life. Towns also have friendlier people on the whole, making one feel accepted without the loss of individuality consequent in being another lost soul in a multitude of strangers so typical of a metropolis. When one enters a store in a small town, for example, one can expect personal attention and a greater amount of honesty and trust. When greeted by the cashier, one may be sure it's not merely a mechanically repeated conventional formula.

(9) Even in terms of economic considerations, I prefer the small town where one can live in a larger house or apartment for the same amount of money spent for a very small apartment in the city. However, I must admit that as far as social life and entertainment facilities are concerned, large cities have advantages over small towns. Cities undoubtedly offer a greater variety of people to meet and a greater variety of choices to make. But those are the only things I like better in cities. Anyhow, small towns today have such easy access to large cities through improved transportation that I feel I will not be sacrificing the social and cultural benefits of the city by living in a small town. The small town, in my view, can actually provide the best of both worlds.