*Issue 9*

*"Although many people think that the luxuries and conveniences of contemporary life are*

*entirely harmless, they in fact, prevent people from developing into truly strong and*

*independent individuals."*

Do modern luxuries serve to undermine our true strength and independence as individuals?

The speaker believes so, and I tend to agree. Consider the automobile, for example. Most

people consider the automobile a necessity rather than a luxury; yet it is for this very reason

that the automobile so aptly supports the speaker's point. To the extent that we depend on cars

as crutches, they prevent us from becoming truly independent and strong in character as

individuals.

Consider first the effect of the automobile on our independence as individuals. In some

respects the automobile serves to enhance such independence. For example, cars make it

possible for people in isolated and depressed areas without public transportation to become

more independent by pursing gainful employment outside their communities. And teenagers

discover that owning a car, or even borrowing one on occasion, affords them a needed sense

of independence from their parents.

However, cars have diminished our independence in a number of more significant respects.

We've grown dependent on our cars for commuting to work. We rely on them like crutches for

short trips to the corner store, and for carting our children to and from school. Moreover, the

car has become a means not only to our assorted physical destinations but also to the

attainment of our socioeconomic goals, insofar as the automobile has become a symbol of

status. In fact, in my observation many, if not most, working professionals willingly undermine

their financial security for the sake of being seen driving this year's new SUV or luxury sedan.

In short, we've become slaves to the automobile.

Consider next the overall impact of the automobile on our strength as individuals, by which I

mean strength of character, or mettle. I would be hard-pressed to list one way in which the

automobile enhances one's strength of character. Driving a powerful SUV might afford a

person a feeling and appearance of strength, or machismo. But this feeling has nothing to do

with a person's true character.

In contrast, there is a certain strength of character that comes with eschewing modern

conveniences such as cars, and with the knowledge that one is contributing to a cleaner and

quieter environment, a safer neighborhood, and arguably a more genteel society. Also,

alternative modes of transportation such as bicycling and walking are forms of exercise which

require and promote the virtue of self-discipline. Finally, in my observation people who have

forsaken the automobile spend more time at home, where they are more inclined to prepare

and even grow their own food, and to spend more time with their families. The former

enhances one's independence; the latter enhances the integrity of one's values and the

strength of one's family.

To sum up, the automobile helps illustrate that when a luxury becomes a necessity it can sap

our independence and strength as individuals. Perhaps our society is better off, on balance,

with such "luxuries"; after all, the automobile industry has created countless jobs, raised our

standard of living, and made the world more interesting. However, by becoming slaves to the

automobile we trade off a certain independence and inner strength.