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OBSTACLES TO EVOLUTION

THERE are certain ideas having to do with the meaning of human life in which the promise of the future lies. These ideas are not really new, but they are emphatically different from the conceptions which animated the historical changes which began in the seventeenth century and which shaped the social formations of the present—ideas concerning the human capacity to develop our powers and devise means to get what we want. The modern nation-state and the scientifically armed industrial enterprise were the result. Getting and spending make the pattern of life that these forms brought into being, the only affirmed goal being more getting and spending. More is good, we have been told, and often have come to believe and act on, as a kind of reflex which is the broad conditioning influence of the age.

This motive recognizes no limiting principle, and the confusions and malfunctions of our times are slowly instructing us that the drive toward unlimited material growth, so heartily believed in for centuries, has reached a point where its energies are turned against the decencies, hopes, and expectations of a good human life. Yet the motive of acquisition, made self-justifying by long and now habitual practice, continues to power the institutions of our society, to pervade the educational influences on the young, and often distort the self-evaluations of ordinary people. Scores of good books and articles have given us a detailed account of this situation, but they seem to have little effect on either our socio-political managers or the population at large.

What can be done? One common answer is "planning," but its advocates seldom give consideration to the context of a society habituated to acquisition. For practical examples, we might look at the programs for urban renovation over the past thirty years, as recorded by Charles Abrams in *The City Is the Frontier* (Harper Colophon, 1967). Abrams tells, for example, what happened to the Roosevelt program for home building with federal financial backing through the Federal Housing Administration. The claim was that propping up the home-building and mortgage-lending enterprises would encourage free enterprise, the catch being that urban renewal is not a "sound investment" from the acquisitive point of view. Summing up, Abrams said:

> In short, the government now not only makes it possible for builders to embark on risky ventures with little or no cash but it underwrites risks in the mortgage business and provides liquidity to the lending institutions when they no longer want the paper. The thin thread of equity (if any) provides the dubious margin which "justifies" the adventures. Social purpose, the rationale for most subsidized operations, has become the palliative for the removal of the gamble from private building speculations and mortgage investments and for passing it to the government.
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> Unless these mechanisms are reshaped to benefit low-income groups or fulfill similar social purposes, the emerging trend of the system would seem to be toward a "socialism for the rich and private enterprise for the poor."

The law was changed during the Johnson administration in 1965, resulting in "more government guarantees of speculative mortgage loans for higher income families . . . while those who need housing most would be left to their own devices." Abrams comments (in 1967):

> The overriding issue is whether we are aiming to feather the nests of entrepreneurs or to build homes for the forgotten families, 9 million of whom have yearly incomes below $3,000 a year, 5 million of whom have incomes below $2,000 a year, and the 5 million single people with incomes below $1,500. As the situation stood in 1965, nest-feathering was in the ascendant, while social purpose was being moved into the background.

Abrams' book is in large part a gloomy recital of the failure of even the best-intentioned planning during the middle years of this century. Today, as we know, hardly anyone except millionaires has enough money to pay for a new home.

Well, there is another kind of planning. It goes back to the natural elements of community and takes instruction from nature. Government has nothing to do with the plans of those who think in this way. What is it like? The following is from Peter Berg's Planet Drum pamphlet, *Figures of Regulation:*

> The rough shape of a post-industrial society is already somewhat visible in the activities and movements that have sprung up within the last few decades to slow down or undo some of the negative effects of the Late Industrial period. Development of renewable energy, using sustainable methods to grow nutritious food, preserving and restoring endangered species and ecosystems, cooperating in networks to distribute locally produced food and goods, opposing further encroachment on natural areas by strip-mining or water diversion projects, and regaining local control over development and land use decisions are hopeful signs that human needs are being reconsidered in terms of the requirements of other life on this planet. Even though these activities relate to a wide range of society's functions, they aren't all going on in the same place. They provide only a vague outline, as vague as the term "post-industrial" itself. Despite the urgent need to reformulate what society as a whole and individuals in it should reasonably aim to attain, and the methods through which those things should be sought, proposals for a sustainable society are still treated as though they belong in the fantasizing world of utopian science fiction.
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> One of the major reasons for this dilemma is the money-dominated sense of reality that prevails in Late Industrial society, the productivism that relentlessly favors short-term economic gain over long-term sustainability.

That seems an accurate account of our present situation, the question then being, how do we replace the "money-dominated sense of reality" with an outlook consistent with an ordered and fruitful human life? The spread of better ideas is one way, although it takes a long time. Today, however, we are getting some cooperation from history. Our money-dominated lives are becoming more unpleasant, uncomfortable, and even painful, year by year and day by day. Having better ideas in place will have its effect, but unfortunately only a few people do serious reading. Yet those who do have much more than ordinary influence on others. The Founding Fathers of our country were great readers and, while only a few, were able to introduce a new epoch of history as a result. Meanwhile, the power of example is probably the most effective influence of all. As a Canadian community builder said this spring in MANAS, May 18):

> Our strategy is to carry on what many are doing already. Quietly get together with relatives and friends, work out a blueprint and try to implement it, one little step at a time. This is effective, not because it accomplishes much, but because what it does accomplish is immediately in place and visible for others to see. Even while still building you are already a community, a community of builders. You are already the end-product. Also, you reach other people. Few people read. Most people do not respond well to words, but all respond to deeds. From the moment you roll up your sleeves to start working on the blueprint, from that day on you will be reaching others. Not, perhaps, the way you had anticipated. You may lose some friends, but that means they noticed. It gives them something to think about.

Those who begin to think may in turn read some books—and if epoch-making books like *Small Is Beautiful* are available, they may alter the direction of their lives. From this and related reading they learn not to take the current illusions of their money-dominated society so seriously. They begin to see that very nearly all the popular media of the time—print and electronic—are both consciously and unconsciously in the service of the acquisitive society and not only may be ignored but need to be exposed. They find themselves in thorough agreement with the warning given by Robert S. Lynd in 1939, to the effect that "no culture can be realistically and effectively analyzed by those who elect to leave its central idols untouched; and, if fundamental

change is required, it does no good simply to landscape the ground on which these idols stand." (*Knowledge for What?*) And they see that politicians are nearly all distinguished by the fact that they deliberately ignore the social insight and historical intelligence that show the direction of necessary change.

Why do they ignore this unmistakable light? Because of numbers. The politician is the most obvious victim of the quantitative fallacy. He needs a majority to be elected and to remain in office, while intelligent change always ensues from the vision and activity of small minorities. The real change agents don't waste their time on politicians but seek out ways to create authentic public opinion. Schumacher and his colleagues are people of this quality, and in this country we have individuals and small groups organized by men and women such as John and Nancy Todd, Wes and Dana Jackson, John Jeavons, and some others such as Peter Berg, quoted earlier.

Then, fortunately, we have had pioneers, the very few who start saying things that need to be said long before anyone else, and sometimes say them so well that we should keep the authors current by repeated reading. Since our subject is partly cities, we turn to Lewis Mumford and his *The City in History*, brought out by Harcourt, Brace & World in 1961. In the closing section of the book he writes of the Removal of Limits and of the rapid "conurbation" of entire regions.

> If no human purposes supervene to halt the blotting out of the countryside and to establish limits for the growth and colonization of cities, the whole coastal strip from Maine to Florida might coalesce into an almost undifferentiated conurbation. But to call this mass a "regional city" or to hold that it represents the new scale of settlement to which modern man must adapt his institutions and his personal needs is to mask the realities of the human situation and allow seemingly automatic forces to become a substitute for human purposes.
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> These vast urban masses are comparable to a routed and disorganized army, which has lost its leaders, scattered its battalions and companies, torn off its insignia, and is fleeing in every direction. The first step toward handling this situation, besides establishment of an over-all command, is to regroup in units that can be effectively handled. Until we understand the function of the smaller units and can bring them under discipline we cannot command and deploy the army as a whole over a larger area. The scale of distances has changed, and the "regional city" is a potential reality, indeed a vital necessity. But the condition for success in these endeavors lies in our abilities to recognize and to impose organic limitations. This means the replacement of the machine-oriented metropolitan economy by one directed toward the goods and goals of life.
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> Though the removal of limits is one of the chief features of the metropolitan economy, this does not imply any abdication of power on the part of the chiefs in charge: for there is one countervailing condition to this removal, and that is the processing of all operations through the metropolis and its increasingly complicated mechanisms. The metropolis is in fact a processing center in which a vast variety of goods, material and spiritual, is mechanically sorted and reduced to a limited number of standardized articles, uniformly packaged, and distributed through controlled channels to their destination, bearing the approved metropolitan label. . . .
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> The giantism of the metropolis is not the result of technological progress alone. Contrary to popular belief, the growth of great cities preceded the decisive technical advances of the last two centuries. But the metropolitan phase became universal only when the technical means of congestion had become adequate—and their use profitable to those who manufactured or employed them. The modern metropolis is, rather, an outstanding example of a peculiar cultural lag within the realm of technics itself: namely, the continuation by highly advanced technical means of the obsolete forms and ends of a socially retarded civilization. The machines and utilities that would lend themselves to decentralization in a life-centered order, here become either a means to increase congestion or afford some slight temporary palliation—at a price. . . .
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> When both the evil and the remedy are indistinguishable, one may be sure that a deep-seated process is at work. An expanding economy, dedicated to profit, not to the satisfaction of life needs, necessarily creates a new image of the city, that of a perpetual and ever-widening maw, consuming the output of expanding industrial and agricultural production, in response to the pressures

> of continued indoctrination and advertising. . . . unfortunately, once an economy is geared to expansion, the means rapidly turn into an end, and "the going becomes the goal." Even more unfortunately, the industries that are favored by such expansion must, to maintain their output, be devoted to goods that are readily consumable, either by their nature, or because they are so shoddily fabricated that they must soon be replaced. By fashion and built-in obsolescence the economics of machine production, instead of producing leisure and durable wealth are duly cancelled out by mandatory consumption on an ever larger scale.
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> By the same token, the city itself becomes consumable, indeed expendable: the container must change as rapidly as its contents. This latter imperative undermines a main function of the city as an agent of human continuity. The living memory of the city, which once bound together generations and centuries, disappears: its inhabitants live in a self-annihilating moment-to-moment continuum. The poorest Stone Age savage never lived in such a destitute and demoralized community.

In the conclusion of this section, "Sprawling Giantism,'"Mumford says:

> By a thousand cunning attachments and controls, visible and subliminal, the workers in an expanding economy are tied to a consumption mechanism: they are assured of a livelihood provided they devour without undue selectivity all that is offered by the machine—and demand nothing that is not produced by the machine. The whole organization of the metropolitan community is designed to kill spontaneity and self-direction. . . . In such a "free" society Henry Thoreau must rank as a greater public enemy than Karl Marx.
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> The metropolis, in its final stage of development, becomes a collective contrivance for making this irrational system work, and for giving those who are in reality its victims the illusion of power, wealth, and felicity, of standing at the very pinnacle of human achievement. But in actual fact their lives are constantly in peril, their wealth is tasteless and ephemeral, their leisure is sensationally monotonous, and their pathetic felicity is tainted by constant, well-justified anticipations of violence and sudden death. Increasingly they find themselves "strangers and afraid," in a world they never made: a world ever less responsive to direct human command, ever more empty of human meaning.

Why, we must ask, don't human beings begin to order their lives in keeping with such expressions of social intelligence? Why don't the Mumfords, and a hundred years earlier the Carlyles, command the respect they deserve? Superficial explanations are no help; the fact is that mature minds are rare and what they say seems unable to get through to very many people. Rulers, whether political or economic, have little interest in actual human good, while the great mass seems to believe that even a system such as Mumford here describes is an inevitable expression of the way things are, and must be, and they choose to believe and follow demagogues instead of thinking for themselves. Leaders of integrity can be of some help. Eugene Debs said the last word on the limits of leadership early in this century:

> I am not a labor leader. I don't want you to follow me or anyone else. If you are looking for a Moses to lead you out of the capitalist wilderness you will stay right where you are. I would not lead you into this promised land if I could, because if I could lead you in, someone else could lead you out.

In his closing chapter, Mumford reminds us of the function of ancient cities as centers of culture, art, religion, and education. Our cities could, he says, if reconceived in terms of genuine human purpose, serve the best of ends.

> The city's active role in future is to bring to the highest pitch of development the variety and individuality of regions, cultures, personalities. These are complementary processes: their alternative is the current mechanical grinding down of both the landscape and the human personality. Without the city modern man would have no effective defenses against those mechanical collectives that, even now, are ready to make all veritably human life superfluous, except to perform a few subservient functions that the machine has not yet mastered.
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> Ours is an age in which the increasingly automatic processes of production and urban expansion have displaced the human goals they are supposed to serve. . . . As these activities increase in volume and in tempo, they move further and further away from any humanly desirable objectives. As a result, mankind is threatened with far more

> formidable inundations than ancient man learned to cope with. . . . Like the rulers of the Bronze Age, we still regard power as the chief manifestation of divinity, or if not that, the main agent of human development. But "absolute power," like "absolute weapons," belongs to the same magic-religious scheme as ritual human sacrifice. Such power destroys the symbolic cooperation of man with all other aspects of nature, and of men with other men. Living organisms can use only limited amounts of energy. "Too much" or "too little" is equally fatal to organic existence. Organisms, societies, human persons, not least, cities, are delicate devices for regulating energy and putting it to the service of life. . . .
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> In order to defeat the insensate forces that now threaten civilization from within, we must transcend the original frustrations and negations that have dogged the city throughout its history.

Those who believe in human evolution keep working at this project.

It is worth remembering, here, especially now when cities are known to be such horrible places, that Socrates preferred them to the countryside. Cities were once places where distinguished minds congregated and gave instruction to others. Can we make them so again? Now they are mainly places devoted to ruthless acquisition. Starting nuclei with other purposes would make a beginning.

REVIEW
AN HONEST MAN

JAMES BALDWIN is an American writer with a sure grasp of the relativities of human existence; he does not understand the absolutes, but this is no criticism, since no one understands them. Few writers of our time have the power to grip the attention of their readers. Baldwin has this power, perhaps because there is never any padding in what he says, but mostly because he is able to speak for all humans without giving up his stance as a black man. For all his strength, feeling, and demand for justice, Baldwin is not a partisan. Recognition of this comes as you read him, generating respect.

He writes about what it is like to be black, since that is the most familiar fact of his life. His vision, however, comes from the fact that he is human; he knows that there is no salvation except for us all. Such discoveries, Baldwin feels, are the responsibility of the writer, who, by reason of his ability, is obligated to find out about both the world and himself, and then to write it down.

In *Nobody Knows my Name* (Dell, 1963), a collection of essays, he tells of his life in Paris, what it meant to him, and how he finally became able to leave Europe to come back to America. In Europe—in Paris—the American writer, he says, begins "to feel—almost certainly for the first time in his life—that he can reach out to everyone, that he is accessible to everyone and open to everything. This is an extraordinary feeling. He feels, so to speak, his own value." A little later he says:

> This freedom, like all freedom, has its dangers and its responsibilities One day it begins to be borne in on the writer, and with great force, that he is living in Europe as an American. If he were living there as a European, he would be living on a different and far less attractive continent. . . . In short, the freedom that the American writer finds in Europe brings him, full circle, back to himself, with the responsibility for his development where it always was: in his own hands.
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> Even the most incorrigible maverick has to be born somewhere. He may leave the group that produced him—he may be forced to—but nothing will efface his origins, the marks of which he carries with him everywhere. I think it is important to know this and even find it a matter for rejoicing, as the strongest people do, regardless of their station. On this acceptance, literally, the life of a writer depends.

He speaks of the flux of life in America, to which he returned.

> The charge has often been made against American writers that they do not describe society, and have no interest in it. They only describe individuals in opposition to it, or isolated in it. Of course, what the American writer is describing is his own situation. And what is *Anna Karenina* describing if not the tragic fate of the isolated individual, at odds with her time and place?
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> The real difference is that Tolstoy was describing an old and dense society in which everything seemed—to the people in it, though not to Tolstoy—to be fixed forever. And the book is a masterpiece because Tolstoy was able to fathom, and make us see, the hidden laws which really governed this society and made Anna's doom inevitable.
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> American writers do not have a fixed society to describe. The only society they know is one in which nothing is fixed and in which the individual must fight for his identity. This is a rich confusion, indeed, and it creates for the American writer unprecedented opportunities.
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> That the tensions of American life, as well as the possibilities, are tremendous is certainly not even a question. But these are dealt with in contemporary literature mainly compulsively; that is, the book is more likely to be a symptom of our tension than an examination of it. The time has come, God knows, to examine ourselves, but we can only do this if we are willing to free ourselves of the myth of America and try to find out what is really happening here.

That was the assignment that Baldwin accepted, and carried out, getting into the grain of American life—he was, of course, already there—and writing about it with a wonderful economy of words, and with reflective asides in almost every other sentence.

Here is an aside which follows a blow-by-blow account of life in Harlem:

> Now I am perfectly aware that there are other slums in which white men are fighting for their lives, and mainly losing. I know that blood is also flowing through those streets and that the human damage there is incalculable. People are continually pointing out to me the wretchedness of white people in order to console me for the wretchedness of blacks. But an itemized account of the American failure does not console me and it should not console anyone else. That hundreds of thousands of white people are living, in effect, no better than the "niggers" is not a fact to be regarded with complacency. The social and moral bankruptcy suggested by this fact is of the bitterest, most terrifying kind.
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> The people, however, who believe that this democratic anguish has some consoling value are always pointing out that So-and-So, white, and So-and-So, black, rose from the slums into the big time. The existence—the public existence—of, say, Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis, Jr. proves to them that America is still the land of opportunity and that inequalities vanish before the determined will. If proves nothing of the sort. The determined will is rare—at the moment, in this country, it is unspeakably rare—and the inequalities suffered by the many are in no way justified by the rise of a few. A few have always risen—in every country, every era, and in the teeth of regimes which can by no stretch of the imagination be thought of as free. Not all these people, it is worth remembering, left the world better than they found it. The determined will is rare, but it is not invariably benevolent. Furthermore, the American equation of success with the big time reveals an awful disrespect for human life and human achievement. This equation has placed our cities among the most dangerous in the world and has placed our youth among the most empty and most bewildered.

After explaining why the blacks do not like the "projects" put up for them in Harlem, soon converting them into slums as bad or worse than the quarters that were there before, Baldwin remarks that the white police have no chance of being "appreciated" for their efforts.

> Their very presence is an insult, and it would be, even if they spent their entire time feeding gumdrops to children. They represent the force of the white world, and that world's real intentions are, simply, for that world's criminal profit and ease, to keep the black man corralled up here, in his place.

What about the men on the beat?

> It is hard, on the other hand, to blame the policeman, blank, good-natured, thoughtless, and insuperably innocent, for being such a perfect representative of the people he serves. He, too, believes in good intentions and is astounded and offended when they are not taken for the deed. He has never, himself, done anything for which to be hated—which of us has?—and yet he is facing, daily and nightly, people who would gladly see him dead, and he knows it. . . . He can retreat from his uneasiness in only one direction: into a callousness which very shortly becomes second nature. He becomes more callous, the population becomes more hostile, the situation grows more tense, and the police force is increased. One day, to everyone's astonishment, someone drops a match in the powder keg and everything blows up. Before the dust has settled or the blood congealed, editorials, speeches, and civil-rights commissions are loud in the land, demanding to know what happened. What happened is that Negroes want to be treated like men.

It is a simple conclusion, however reached, but Baldwin's way of reaching it, even in the reflections of only one man, adds strength to simplicity. Various other things could have been said along the way, with nibbling qualifications or exceptions taken, but his presentation stands acceptable to common sense and what we all know of human nature. So is what he then says acceptable:

> *Negroes want to be treated like men:* a perfectly straightforward statement, containing only seven words. People who have mastered Kant, Hegel, Shakespeare, Marx, Freud, and the Bible find this statement utterly impenetrable. The idea seems to threaten profound, barely conscious assumptions. A kind of panic paralyzes their features, as though they found themselves trapped on the edge of a steep place. I once tried to explain to a very well-known American intellectual the conditions among Negroes in the South. My recital disturbed him and made him indignant, and he asked me in perfect innocence, "Why don't all the Negroes in the South move North?" I tried to explain what *has* happened, unfailingly, whenever a significant body of Negroes move North. They do not escape Jim Crow: they merely encounter another, not-less-deadly variety. . . .
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> Northerners indulge in an extremely dangerous luxury. They seem to feel that because they fought on

> the right side in the Civil War and won, they have earned the right merely to deplore what is going on in the South, without taking any responsibility for it. . . . I know Negroes who prefer the South and white Southerners, because, "At least there, you haven't got to play any guessing games!" The guessing games referred to have driven more than one Negro into the narcotics ward, the madhouse, or the river. I know another Negro, a man very dear to me, who says, "The spirit of the South is the spirit of America." . . . the South is not merely an embarrassingly backward region, but a part of this country, and what happens there concerns every one of us.

In an earlier volume, *Notes of A Native Son* (Beacon, 1955), Baldwin ends his introductory words by saying, "I want to be an honest man and good writer." He is both.

COMMENTARY
BASIC DIAGNOSIS

IN this week's lead article, Lewis Mumford (page 2) is quoted as saying that the modern metropolis is "the continuation by highly advanced technical means of the obsolete forms and ends of a socially retarded civilization." This seems a diagnosis worthy of wide application.

In how many ways does our involvement in highly technical means seem to demand that we go on doing what we suspect is wrong? In big business, those "technical means" include the jobs of many thousands of people, from industry to industry. Expertly developed processes in which many millions of dollars have been invested, and on which hundreds of thousands of people now depend for their livelihood, can hardly be abandoned by executives who only now are beginning to read the "handwriting on the wall." They too are prisoners of the "system." We might regard the big banks which have over-extended loans to various third world countries in the same way: they have to refund the loans, whatever the obvious folly of doing so, in order to avoid—for a while, at least—a collapse of the economy, here as well as abroad.

"Obsolete forms and ends" applies also to the goals of past radical politics. The "workers" state of the present is no better off than the "free-enterprise" economies. The goal of "more production" has trapped them all in the same rat race of rising costs and diminishing returns.

When undertakings were smaller, less complicated, and involved fewer people, they could be closed down when they began to fail. Mistakes were tolerable; they were expensive and painful, but not fatal. Now we seem under the necessity of preserving and continuing our mistakes because we can't afford not to. That this is rationalized insanity is obvious enough, but only to those who are not in the grip of the contemporary madness.

A designer's approach to all such problems—as distinguished from a moralist's, who would demand a sudden spurt in moral perception on the part of masses of people—would be basically the same as that proposed by E. F. Schumacher: the smaller and less complicated the relationships, the easier and more natural change becomes, when the need for change is increasingly evident. The large organizations and enterprises—up to and including the national state—are so much in the hands of bureaucratic system and habit that change has a devastating effect on morale, largely because it is not understood except in personal terms. Almost nobody favors unpleasant changes, and especially when they result from decisions made far over the heads of the rank and file.

But Schumacher, we may recall, while recommending a design solution, argued that when undertakings have the right size, the people involved are still able to respond to their moral impulses. Because the undertaking is small, the moral issues which come up are not concealed from view by the formidable size and technical necessities of the operation.

How can we apply the Schumacher remedy to a society like ours? In the same way that all good things are made to come about: by use of the imagination. It was failure of the imagination, in both the moral and the practical dimensions, that made our civilization "retarded." The first step toward renewal means getting out of our heads "the obsolete forms and ends." For that, after all, is where they came from.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE COUNSELS OF HISTORIANS

THE scandals in and of the conduct of our national government go on and on, judging from the articles and books which have come out during the past year. A section of a future book by T. D. Allman on the Central American policy of our government (appearing in the September *Harper's*) begins by recalling a warning, by the State Department in 1981, that the whole of Central America was threatened by a conspiratorial outside power. The report, Mr. Allman says, was titled "Communist Influence in El Salvador." He now says in his article, two and a half years later: "Had the word 'American' been substituted for 'Communist,' the report would in fact have provided a penetrating analysis of what has happened since."

How does one explain such goings-on to a fourteen-year-old? Perhaps more pertinently, could a high school teacher who suggested Allman's article for "outside reading" for a class in civics or current history hold his job, if he taught in a public school?

We hardly know, but since such material keeps coming out in the public prints, the question of its introduction to the young has obvious importance. Ortega, a Spanish observer of governments and societies in general, would probably counsel, as he does in *Man and People*, that any thinking along these lines needs to start out by recognizing that—

> So-called "society" is never what the name promises. It is always at the same time, to one or another degree *dis-society*, repulsion between individuals. Since on the other hand it claims to be the opposite, we must radically open ourselves to the conviction that society is a reality that is *constitutively* sick, defective—strictly, it is a never-ending struggle between its genuinely social elements and behaviors and its dissociative or anti-social elements and behaviors.

Well, that seems both candid and accurate. It would certainly help us to explain national indecencies like the Watergate affair and also the "dollar diplomacy" Scott Nearing wrote about earlier in this century. Then, to get down to cases, one might turn to an analysis of what the textbooks used in American schools have to say about our adventures in Vietnam. In *Teaching the Vietnam War* (1979), William Griffen and John Marciano sum up their findings:

> Twenty-eight textbooks examined the most bitter conflict in recent American history without calling into question a single fundamental premise surrounding the conflict. The limited margin of debate and dissent was maintained, safe from attacks upon the honor and integrity of our leaders or upon the nation itself. American high school students, teachers, and parents could read these textbooks without *considering* the possibility that they lived in a nation that had committed the most blatant act of aggression since the Nazi invasions of World War II.

For local color we might add the experience of a girl of eight or nine who some years ago attended a public school in the Los Angeles area. Her class was studying the Spanish missions and the life of the California Indians in those days. The instruction was along the lines of the romance of Ramona, based on Helen Hunt Jackson's story, which had been translated into all known languages, becoming the foundation of a thriving tourist trade. A copy of *Southern California Country* by Carey McWilliams was given to the girl to hand to her teacher, for the chapter on what really happened to the Indians under Mission and then American rule. McWilliams began the section on Missionization by saying: "With the best theological intentions in the world, the Franciscan padres eliminated the Indians with the effectiveness of Nazis operating concentration camps." No Indian tribe that had contact with the Franciscans has survived. Then, of the effect on the remaining Indians of American rule, a government historian wrote in 1877: "Never before in history has a people been swept away with such terrible swiftness." The girl's teacher read McWilliams, handed back the book, and said, "It's true but I can't use it." She blushed, according to the girl.

Well, we could take note of still worse matters in American history, not all in the distant past, but the goal is not continuous shock, rather a basis for understanding. We began by seeking help from a Spaniard, and now we turn to a Frenchman, Alexis de Tocqueville, who set down his impressions of life in America starting in 1835. His work may still be

the best beginning for a study of American life and history. No subsequent work has displaced his *Democracy in America.* But the passage we have for quotation, from his introduction, is on France rather than the U.S. The question is, how much of his counsel and warning to his countrymen of a hundred and fifty years ago has application to ourselves today?

He wrote:

> In no country in Europe has the great social revolution that I have just described made such rapid progress as in France; but it has always advanced without guidance. The heads of the state have made no preparation for it, and it has advanced without their consent or without their knowledge. The most powerful, the most intelligent, and the most moral classes of the nation have never attempted to control it in order to guide it. Democracy has consequently been abandoned to its wild instincts, and it has grown up like those children who have no parental guidance, who receive their education in the public streets, and who are acquainted only with the vices and wretchedness of society. Its existence was seemingly unknown when suddenly it acquired supreme power. All then servilely submitted to its caprices; it was worshipped as the idol of strength; and when afterwards it was enfeebled by its own excesses, the legislators conceived the rash project of destroying it, instead of instructing it and correcting its vices. No attempt was made to fit it to govern, but all were bent on excluding it from the government.
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> The result has been that the democratic revolution has taken place in the body of society without that concomitant change in the laws, ideas, customs, and morals which was necessary to render such a revolution beneficial. Thus we have a democracy without anything to lessen its vices and bring out its natural advantages; and although we already perceive the evils it brings, we are ignorant of the benefits it may confer.

Turning to the reason he wrote his book, Tocqueville said:

> There is one country in the world where the great social revolution that I am speaking of seems to have nearly reached its natural limits. It has been effected with ease and simplicity; say rather that this country is reaping the fruits of the democratic revolution which we are undergoing without having had the revolution itself.
>
> The emigrants who colonized the shores of America in the beginning of the seventeenth century somehow separated the democratic principle from all the principles that it had to contend with in the old communities of Europe, and transplanted it alone to the New World. It has there been able to spread in perfect freedom and peaceably to determine the character of the laws by influencing the manners of the country. . . .
>
> It is not, then, merely to satisfy a curiosity, however legitimate, that I have examined America, my wish has been to find there instruction by which we may ourselves profit.

Here de Tocqueville seems to be saying that we had a far better start in democracy after our war for independence than the French did after their revolution. What went wrong? Did we neglect to prepare ourselves for the continued practice of democracy? How do you do that? Hold classes in "democracy"? We doubt if the American people would put up with it, and they would probably be right.

The best advice we know of on this subject was put together by Hannah Arendt in *On Revolution.* She suggests that we lost the opportunity to learn democracy when we set up the national government:

> And since the state and federal governments, the proudest results of revolution, through sheer weight of their proper business were bound to overshadow in political importance the townships and their meeting halls—until what Emerson still considered to be "the unit of the Republic" and "the school of the people" in political matters had withered away—one might come to the conclusion that there was less opportunity for the exercise of public freedom and the enjoyment of public happenings in the republic of the United States than there had existed in the colonies of British America.

High school—or high-school age—is not too soon to consider this analysis of our socio-political condition.

FRONTIERS

What Is a Bioregion?

WHILE the term "Bioregion" is comparatively new (owed, according to Kirkpatrick Sale, to Raymond Dassman), its meaning has roots which go back to the practice of the American Indians, to John Calhoun's idea of states' rights, to Frederick Jackson Turner's studies of American history, to the book, *I'll Take my Stand* (1930) by twelve Southerners, and *American Regionalism* (1938) by Howard W. Odum and Harry Estill Moore. A current assemblage of meanings is provided by Jim Dodge in the *Fourth World News Supplement* for April, 1983 (4 Brattle Street, 306, Cambridge, Mass. 02138), in "Decolonizing the USA—The Way of Bioregionalism." Dodge, whose article first appeared in *CoEvolution Quarterly*, begins with the idea of "biotic shift," meaning that when the plant and animal species of an area change by 15 to 25 per cent, you are in another bioregion. Boundaries, of course, are fuzzy, but this need not affect intelligent planning. Another defining consideration is by watershed, meaning an area of common river drainage. This leads to overlapping, also manageable for planners. A third identification is land form, which usually corresponds to watershed conditions. Finally, the human sense of region, the people's sense of place and home, contributes to the meaning, and this may need some correction. But as Dodge points out, a "quick definition" may do more harm than good.

David Haenke, also writing in the *Fourth World News Supplement*, describes "the Ozarks Bioregion, which is located close to the center of the North American continent, predominantly in Missouri and Arkansas."

> The Ozarks is an area of hills and small mountains roughly the size of Missouri. It is clearly defined as a region by rivers that bound it on all sides, and by the unique flora and fauna, land forms, and human culture within those natural boundaries: thus, it's a BIOREGION, a naturally defined region.
>
> The Ozarks as a natural region were carved up arbitrarily by the US Government and now lie under the jurisdiction of five different states. The states don't really know what the Ozarks is. Only the Ozarks know what it is, and one of the things the Ozarks is that it is money and resource poor after generations of exploitation.

In 1977 David Haenke was instrumental in organizing the Ozark Area Community Congress which now meets regularly once a year, with some 300 people and "around 150 organizations" participating in discussion of health, communities (land trusts), water, energy, agriculture, forestry, communications, education, peace and women's rights. Haenke says:

> We never made a serious attempt to become a "political party" in the usual sense. Rather, we are simultaneously an unofficial ecopolitical organization, and biocongressional body for the Ozarks. We have, again, no official standing in the eyes of any government, and we seek none. OACC, as an ad hoc organization, only indirectly supports candidates in electoral politics or influences legislation, though an indirect effect on official governmental and political processes has been significant, through the actions of individual OACC representatives and their participation in influential organizations which do work in established political arenas of the electoral system.
>
> Instead (and I believe this is our greatest gift to share), we are engaged in a long term, non-adversarial, "by-pass operation" with regard to the deleterious elements of the present established systems. In one sense, it is "Taoist Politics." There was no existing representative "government" body to coordinate many hopeful sustainability-oriented initiatives arising in the Ozarks. So we created one.

This group publishes *Ozarkia*—"for people who live consciously in a place." Send a dollar for a sample copy to the Ecocenter, 730 W. Maple, Fayetteville, Ark. 72701.

In *Green Revolution* (R.D. 7, York, Pa. 17402) for the Summer of 1983, Kirkpatric Sale, author of *Human Scale* (1980), says:

> The human scale vision is, in short, based on the idea of *bioregional self-sufficiency*—a North America, a world, made up of autonomous and empowered regions, whose boundaries and activities

> are determined not arbitrarily by governments but organically by Nature. . . . An environmentally conscious bioregional economy would be what is now fashionable to call a steady-state economy—in other words, like nature, one which would seek a climax, a balance, a stability, not seeking growth and change and "Progress", one which would minimize resource use, emphasize conservation and recycling, avoid pollution and waste; one which would adapt its systems to the natural givens—energy based on wind, for example, where nature called for that, or wood where that was appropriate. . . .

He spends some time on what nature does *not* call for:

> Does it make sense, I ask you, for New York City to import 29,000 tons of broccoli a year from California when it could just as easily get that amount of broccoli from its own region provided it were developed sensibly? Does it make any sense for my Manhattan to be totally dependent on the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys for almost all its vegetables and much of its fruit? Among the consequences: it means higher prices, obviously, for transportation, storage and distribution; it means the expenditure of immense amounts of fossil fuels—all the stuff comes by truck—and a heavy toll on the already crumbling highways; it means increased pollution right straight across the country, but particularly in New York, and increased congestion too, it means a decline in nutritional quality, inevitably, and oftentimes the addition of chemicals put in just so that the stuff can travel so far so long; it means that the farmers in New York and New Jersey are squeezed out of business, their lands sold and turned into shopping malls and condominiums, and more people moving into the already crowded metropolitan areas; and in California it means ripping up the countryside for the demands of agribusiness, the death of the family farmer, the depletion of topsoil and water resources, the over-use of pesticides and fertilizers, with a great risk to both grower and consumer, and the creation of fragile monocultures and risk to pest and disease attack. Does that—by any measure—make sense?

For informative reading on bioregionalism and plans and activities moving in that direction, write to the Planet Drum Foundation, P.O. Box 31251, San Francisco, Calif. 94131.