

THE ECONOMIC BASIS OF IDEALISM

[This article is a commencement address delivered by Arthur E. Morgan at Antioch College in 1931.]

AT a recent meeting on life purpose held at Antioch, this question was presented for discussion:

"Can one develop a philosophy of life which is independent of economic security?"

I am inclined to think this statement indicates a misunderstanding of the problem. I quote it because the misunderstanding is general and typical. Repeatedly men have tried to build a life philosophy by escaping from economic problems. The holy man of India may do that as he sits by the roadside receiving alms. The monk in his monastery may do the same, unless he is in some way a producer.

A practical philosophy of life should be, not a way to live independently of problems of economic security, but rather a way of meeting those problems, and of making harmony between them and one's ideals. So long as a person lives, he lives because of some degree of economic security.

Food supply is an economic matter. The south sea islander may find food so universally abundant that he never need plan for it, and he might forget to list it among his economic needs.

A water supply is an economic matter. The fisherman on the Great Lakes has it in such abundance that he never thinks of it as a need, but the city dweller, who has his water turned off because he cannot pay his monthly bill, sees water as an economic necessity.

A supply of air is an economic matter. In the black hole of Calcutta, English soldiers died by the hundred because there was not air to breathe.

Sunshine is an economic matter. The white, sallow faces one so often sees among the poor in our cities are witnesses that one cannot have well-being without sunshine.

Economics is not concerned primarily with money in the bank or in the pocket. Its chief concerns are sunlight, air, water, food, shelter, and the varied wants of men. One cannot build a philosophy of life independently of these. A man's philosophy of life is his way of handling these issues to the end that his life may reach its full stature and his ideals be unimpaired.

The idealist always holds his individual life as less than the general good, and will, if necessary, give the less for the greater. The perfect soldier will choose to die rather than to have the ideal, which he calls his country, suffer a great loss. Yet it is chiefly by living that the idealist approaches the realization of his ideals, and if there are ways by which he can maintain both his life and his ideals, it is his business to learn those ways. The more effective he is in maintaining both his life and his ideals, the more successful, in the best sense, will be his life.

In this effort to harmonize the economic and the ideal elements of life, the economic factors are not to be considered as mean or unworthy. One who unnecessarily lacks adequate food or drink or air becomes less effective in his life undertakings, no matter how fine his ideals may be.

The development of wisdom, skill, and power in harmonizing our economic needs with our ideals should be an important part of any life philosophy. A person with great effectiveness in making this harmony may live a satisfactory economic life and yet possess a vigorous and uncompromising idealism. A person who is very ineffective in achieving this harmony will find himself constantly confronted with crises in which

he is compelled either to throw away his ideals or to suffer economic disaster.

For a person to fail to organize his life and to fail to control events, with the result that such dilemmas constantly recur to him, often indicates lack of wisdom and character. Now, the organization of one's life and ability to control events are not matters to be achieved on the spur of the moment. They must be the result of forethought and design. Let me illustrate by a personal incident.

At a certain stage in my engineering career, when I was struggling to get a foothold, my chief income resulted from service to a certain board of public officials. Since there were definite standards I wished to maintain, I carefully studied the members of this board to determine in my own mind whether they were controlled by a desire to serve the public interest, and I became convinced that in the course of time they would demand moral concessions which I would not make. I therefore set to work vigorously to lay the grounds for other connections, and when the time came for me to refuse to make the compromises they demanded, and I was discharged, my arrangements were already made, and my economic welfare was but slightly reduced.

Very generally the management of our economic lives determines whether we shall be faced with crises which compel us to choose between moral compromise or economic disaster, or whether we shall be forehanded and in control of the situation. Let me illustrate again:

Two men worked as auditors for a corporation, each on a salary of \$5,000 a year. One of them lived in a manner which, according to popular opinion, was fitting to a person of his station. He owned a good car, he and his wife each belonged to a golf club and to a club in the city. They had a modest but pleasant apartment with one maid, and entertained as they liked to be entertained by their friends. They hoped sometime to have children, but had not yet saved any money, and could not yet afford any.

The other man lived on a two-acre tract out of town. He and his wife and children got most of their exercise in the garden. A three-year-old Ford furnished transportation. They found books and magazines to be cheaper than musical comedies, and they found considerable exploration necessary in order to build up a supply of friends with tastes similar to their own, but still economically within their reach. A quarter of their income went into savings.

The corporation for which they worked came into difficulties through dishonest management, and they were ordered to falsify their accounts. The country club auditor felt compelled to do so. Protesting the unwillingness of his associate, he said "I don't want to do this any more than you do. But a man must live, and what else is there to do? I have to pay for rent and food. Moreover, a man must maintain his social position, or he is lost in these days. It's the way the world is run." These reasons his more thrifty associate had met and answered years before in planning his life.

Such situations are constantly recurring in every part of the economic world. Whether we meet them with mastery, or whether we find ourselves repeatedly confronted with a choice between moral compromise or economic embarrassment, will depend largely on the degree to which we have exercised independence, foresight, control, and design in working out our lives.

If our ideals are distinctly above those which generally prevail, then we shall be subject to more frequent tests, and it is much more necessary that our standards of living be restrained and simplified, so that a margin of reserve may be available and we may be more nearly safe from sudden shock. I have hoped that Antiochians would be peculiarly restrained and simple in their standards, for I have hoped that their standards would be far beyond those current in modern life, and if such is the case they will more frequently need a margin of reserves to enable them to withstand pressure for compromise.

Economic income and economic margin do not necessarily increase together. In some of our large cities a man may live in reasonable comfort on \$4,000 a year. At that income he is not expected to maintain social status. He can have friends and books and children, and may even get away in the summer. But put him in the \$15,000 class and the situation may change. He may feel that he must live in a good suburb, in a \$30,000 home. He must belong to a country club and to a downtown club. He must have a country house. His children compete with the neighbors in the expensiveness of their cars and the elaborateness of entertainment. They must attend expensive private schools or they lose social caste. At \$4,000 a year he may be comfortable, and then at \$15,000 a year find himself in financial distress.

It is not income alone which determines our power to meet situations, but rather the relation between our needs and our resources. The person who would be an idealist and live greatly must rigorously discipline his wants. He must make difficult and far-reaching choices, and these choices must be worked out in the details of his everyday life. If one takes the attitude, "Other people of our income do this, and therefore we must do it," or "We must live this way in order not to be conspicuous among our friends," he is not making an unimportant decision. He is making the choice as to whether his ideals shall be a reality or only a dream.

Great ideals are achieved only at a great price. One cannot eat his cake and keep it, too. Conventional society presses constantly for increasing elaboration and for constant increase in the standard of living. It requires heroic action to maintain a simplicity of standards that is in contrast with our environment. Idealism is most effective when it has paid its price in advance—when the crisis finds it ready, tempered to hard and simple living, with its resources turned into reserves, and not consumed by current wants. The very discipline of restrained and simple living gives us power to meet adversity. The habit of

self-denial and self-restraint develops in us the power of self-denial and self-restraint. That power cannot be depended on to come to our rescue in time of need, without previous discipline.

Soft living cannot be great living, either for individuals, for a community, or for a nation. Unless one disciplines himself to be vigorous and hard in fibre he must give up the hope that his life will ever be significant in a large way. If fortune has not favored us with hardships to be endured, then we must discover or invent them for ourselves, not for themselves, but for building fibre of character.

I have hoped that we might maintain great simplicity in social and living standards at Antioch, that this might be a training ground for that kind of character which will be prepared to meet those crises that press for moral compromise. When I see expensive social habits growing up, when some of our young women feel that they must not wear a party dress more than once, when a dinner dance engagement requires one to own or rent an auto, when a late dinner in a nearby town is a necessary adjunct to a dance, we are tending to conform to the prevailing standards, rather than create and maintain our own. We are narrowing the margin of reserves available for meeting crises.

As compared with the atmosphere at most colleges that at Antioch is simplicity itself. Yet sometimes we seem to think of this simplicity as a necessary concession to poverty, and not as a desirable quality to be achieved regardless of our financial resources.

College years are not an intermission in life, a vacation from the world of reality. As we live here, so shall we probably live afterward. Here as elsewhere the true idealist is the person whose ideals are so real and ever-present that he appraises their cost and undertakes to pay for them in advance.

We are in an unstable age, in an age when stresses develop suddenly and unexpectedly. The

ideals which seemed so secure are suddenly put under severe test. Many a man, when the unexpected test comes, surrenders his ideals for the economic need and says, "What else could I do? I could not help myself." Very often if he had held his ideals so keenly as to guard them as his highest treasure, he would have been forehanded, he would have built up reserves and would have restrained his needs, so that the crisis would have found him with an adequate margin of safety. Unless his ideals have been to him the great reality, he will not have paid the price necessary to make this preparation.

We cannot foresee all emergencies, and if we could foresee, we would not have full power to control events. Regardless of the skill and power we may develop, situations will occur when one's ideals can be maintained only at great and unexpected sacrifice. Courage and conviction will face these situations when they come, but imagination, forethought, and self-discipline to a large degree will eliminate the stress of sudden crises, and will provide an economic basis for idealism.

ARTHUR E. MORGAN

REVIEW

NO REAL RESTRICTION

OF all the books from which one might choose a single volume to carry off to a desert isle to read for the rest of an isolated life, Thoreau's *Walden* is the most likely candidate. Here, of course, the prospect takes another form. One must ask what book, among all those published and available, would be the most fruitful—and bearable—for the reviewer, if he was obliged to focus on that alone, week after week, year after year?

Again, it might be the Thoreau. The book is seminal. It is only superficially—or ultimately—a "nature" book, as many have pointed out. One would have more confidence in making a classification if this matter of "nature" were not so obscure, but then, all such investigations swing between familiar but shallow certainties and the far-off truth which resides in a country where landmarks have unknown meanings and the mind no longer feels at home. In any event, *Walden* gives license to the reader to skip around. It does so itself. The book is about a man and the universe, and the writer, apparently from past explorations, does not get lost when he ranges distantly from familiar paths. He uses, moreover, an imagery that takes us with him, at least part of the way.

Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars.

These days, in the maturity of our disenchantment, Thoreau is still regarded as some sort of accidental genius. He did everything backward, claiming as his work what we regard as play. Yet there is a sense in which we are obliged to admit that he came out ahead. So we take him seriously, although in a somewhat playful way. We honor him by continually putting him in print. It is difficult not to make a dollar by publishing Thoreau. Would Thoreau as ghostly visitor, or born again, find this irritating? He might, but it

seems more probable that he would occupy his mind with more engrossing projects; that he would not even bother to say "I told you so."

Thoreau, one might maintain, ought not to be published except by Thoreau-lovers, and never for profit. But then Thoreau would not have the circulation he now enjoys. *Walden* "is the book that most literary historians would place among the five or six most influential written by an American." A penniless publisher has no way of getting books into stores and Thoreau's ideas into minds that need infection by his "lawlessness"—as Walt Whitman put it—"his dissent—his going his own absolute road let hell blaze all it chooses." The same applies to the spread of Gandhi's ideas. His books did not gain their vast circulation as publications issued by earnest Gandhians—the Satyagrahis in India and elsewhere—of our time. Those worthy individuals don't control the copyrights. Gandhi's books find readers through channels which are dependent for their existence on largely opposite views about man, nature, and human good.

Why do such people distribute admittedly "subversive" books? For three reasons, perhaps. First and foremost, they sell. Second, their subversive content—one cannot say their hostility—is mild-mannered and patient, however uncompromising and firm. Finally, there is something about them—the beauty, it may be, of their truth—that touches the suppressed longings in even the most tough-minded souls. It is as though these people say to themselves: "We know he is full of visionary foolishness, but he gives a fine performance and may be allowed his hour upon the stage." It is a calculated generosity affluence can well afford. They say these things, but another suspicion now and then occurs. "What if Thoreau is right and *we* are the fools?" The admission of this possibility, if allowed expression, is usually jocular, or given to spokesmen kept remote from any power. Yet it remains a way in which the targets of Thoreau's most searching criticisms hedge their bets.

A less charitable analysis would declare the whole program of publishing and admiring Thoreau a characteristic example of commercial hypocrisy. The publishers do *not* admire Thoreau. They would vote against him and all he stood for in any serious confrontation. The comment is accurate enough. They would indeed, and they do. They do it every day. But still they publish him. What, in addition, can we make of this?

We have, for example, a pleasant-faced edition of *Walden* gotten out in 1962 by Time Incorporated. Had Thoreau gone a-fishing in *that* stream . . . but of course he wouldn't have. "Don't read the times," he said; "read the Eternities." Yet the Time publication is a nice book, well made, with a fine introduction by William O. Douglas and a cover drawing that gives no offense. Does Time Inc. publish Thoreau for the same reason that the Grand Inquisitor let Jesus out of jail? A faint stirring of conscience cannot be denied the old man. He was touched by something more than prudence. He was not yet, at least in Jesus' estimation, a lost soul.

At the end of the Dialogue—which was not a dialogue but an interchange between worldly righteousness and pregnant silences—Jesus kisses the Inquisitor. It gives you the creeps. But Dostoevski's integrity required this alienating touch with the eternities, whatever the jar to sensibility. Happily, Thoreau didn't kiss anybody. He had only impersonal cosmic affections and his patience with the rest of mankind is leanly revealed by the fact that he thought it worth while to address his books to them. They are his tolerant and distant irenic gesture, but they will last as long as paper holds together and humans are able to read.

What shall we say about the "hypocrisy" of publishing Thoreau as a business proposition? What about the continual commercial exploitation of work that has a wondrously romantic flavor—woody and free—and remains properly harmless so long as its principles are never applied? Can we tolerate this? Apparently, we must, since

publication of such books goes on and on. What, really, is the objection to doing this? Well, it is a claim of the purists that the clear flow of a great and good man's ideas is muddied by those who use them without believing in them. The claim has much support from both reason and moral instinct. In the East, it was Lao tse who said that the paraders of virtue are the originators of vice, an application of the even more ancient idea that all things are produced by energizing their opposites. In the West, a closer parallel is found in an inscription by Aristotle on a little shrine dedicated to Plato. Plato, he said, was so sublime a man and thinker that no bad man should be permitted to praise him.

Least of all the hypocrites, the purist will add, thinking of the example set by Thoreau. But this means starving ourselves in many, many directions, until we are pure enough to sit down at the table with Thoreau, without fear and without reproach. Now we publish him only if he keeps a certain distance, the way, you might say, people pray to a God who is comfortably remote from themselves and can be expected to make no demands that impose on their time. But this purism, in the kind of world we have, would mean that our diluted and polluted thought would have no currents of truth in it at all. There is indeed a resemblance between a good book and an egg. You can't—not yet, at any rate—adulterate an egg. You can weaken it a bit, no doubt, and permit the shells an annoying fragility, or even brighten the orange of the yolk by what you feed the hens, but an egg is an egg and remains good for you. An egg, indeed, being unavoidably mortal, is safer from tampering than a book.

Books—the great ones—are eggs for the mind. Some of them, from the immeasurable past, we have only in fragments, but we hoard their wisdom in libraries and museums and, occasionally, they help to fertilize some great awakening or historic change. A boyhood friend and school-mate of Mazzini described the extreme censorship of the 1820s in Italy and the control

exercised by a government so nervous that the rulers made it illegal to wear a mustache. This blatant sign of a revolutionary mind was forcibly removed, by barbers supervised by carabinieri, from the face of any student who dared such radical deviation. Textbooks in those post-Napoleonic days were restricted to the classics of the ancient world, for who, after all, would pay attention to the issues of public concern of two thousand years before? Greek and Roman history, Mazzini's companion said, was "the only thing taught us with any care at school," adding that this, as the censors were not bright enough to notice, "was little else than a constant libel upon monarchy and a panegyric upon the democratic form of government." Thus it was from Cato and other ancient spokesmen for free institutions that Mazzini obtained the foundation of his political education.

So it is with other books, including Thoreau's. The leverage is there, in his pages, awaiting readers who for as yet uncatalogued reasons will be moved to action by his ideas.

Can there not be [he asked in *Civil Disobedience*] a government in which majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but conscience? . . . I think we should be men first, and subjects afterward. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume, is to do at any time what I think right. It is truly enough said, that a corporation has no conscience; but a corporation of conscientious men is a corporation *with* a conscience. Law never made men a whit more just; and, by means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made the agents of injustice. . . .

They who know of no purer sources of truth, who have traced up its stream no higher, stand, and wisely stand, by the Bible and the Constitution, and drink at it there with reverence and humility; but they who behold where it comes trickling into this lake or that pool, gird up their loins once more, and continue their pilgrimage toward its fountain-head.

Here are displayed both Thoreau's calm and his restive impatience. A human being, in his view, is one who has the capacity, if not now the inclination, to wonder about and look for the

source of purer drinking-water. He was patient with those who seemed to be doing as well as they knew, and toward those who seemed to know better, he was merely prickly. So, the *Time* editors call him "a magnificent common scold." A better characterization might be borrowed from William James, to the effect that Thoreau's sermons are filled with "those tiny, invisible, molecular moral forces that work from individual to individual, creeping through the crannies of the world like so many soft rootless, or like the capillary oozings of water, yet which, if you give them time, will rend the hardest monuments of man's pride."

COMMENTARY

IDEALISM AND SOCIAL HEALTH

ALL his long life Arthur Morgan kept on saying what is so well put in this week's lead article—that the ethical life requires the muscle of self-imposed discipline; that ostensibly virtuous intentions are no substitute for knowing how to do things well.

This has never been a popular doctrine, which may explain why Arthur Morgan attracted so little attention. While he took into account the pervading reality of social and moral evil, his view of life involved no scapegoats. For him, the natural target of reproach for moral or practical inadequacy is oneself.

He tended to address the people who feel themselves to be competent or intend to become competent. He seemed to feel that only a voluntary response to the appeal he made would be of value. He dreamed of a society not based upon compulsion but upon a vision generated by a nucleus of individuals strong enough to set the tone of their times. He tried, with considerable success, to make his own life an example of what he meant. He showed what one man can accomplish through the combination of an inward inspiration with personal discipline and practical efficiency.

It seems possible to say that Arthur Morgan was a prophet who many years ago recognized needs now gaining widespread recognition. His emphasis on the small community was certainly prophetic of present-day realization. He was obviously a determined advocate of voluntary simplicity. His book, *Industries for Small Communities* (Community Service, Inc., Yellow Springs, Ohio, 1953), can be regarded as a treatise on intermediate technology.

There is an underlying consistency between Morgan's contentions and what Ivan Illich and Valentina Borremans have been saying in recent years. In a current CIDOC paper the latter declared:

Commitment to equity without social austerity leads to an unhealthy distopia. . . . Whenever affluence, however well-distributed—passes a certain volume, the intensity of autonomous coping with the environment—which is health—must decline. . . . Where commodities and their consumption prevail, autonomous action will be low. Where industrial output is mainly limited to tools for autonomous action, health levels will be high—conceivably higher than in any pre-industrial or industrial society.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

THE NEED TO REACH THE LIMIT

GETTING at the meaning of the age in which we live—realizing its distinctive genius, but also recognizing its characteristic blind spots—is perhaps the highest achievement of education, regarded as both an informing and a critical process. There is *always* an element of illusion in an epoch of history, and to find this out, not as a means to cynical rejection, but in order to *use* the illusion, exhaust it while extracting all its benefits, is an essential part of growing up.

Ortega y Gasset is of great help to those wanting to understand how this oscillating progression to cultural maturity works. In various of his books he shows how the transitions of culture from generation to generation create problems and puzzles we simply do not understand. The generation gap is a popular name for this bewilderment. Ortega's idea is that a cultural theme first becomes a driving force in society, defining the conventional "good" of the age; but after what has been sought as the good is gained, its limitations become manifest and it loses its animating power. Then other themes, other "illusions," take its place. Only by understanding this process—seeing where people, writers, leaders and led, are located on the curve of change—can we make sense, not only of what others think and do, but of our own ideas.

Reading in Ortega's *The Modern Theme* (Harper paperback, 1961), a symmetrical development of his philosophy based on a lecture course he gave in 1921, we found an illuminating explanation of the present-day fascination of sports—not something that is easily accepted or understood. He begins this discussion by considering the dominant preoccupation of the nineteenth century—a concern which grew naturally out of the Enlightenment:

Cultural progressivity, which has been the religion of the last two centuries, could not assess the activities of mankind except with an eye to their results. The necessity and obligations of culture impose on humanity the execution of certain tasks. The effort that is made to

complete them is accordingly compulsory. This compulsory effort, imposed for the sake of predetermined ends, is work. The nineteenth century consequently deified work. It should be observed that such work consists in an unqualified effort, lacking any sort of prestige in its own nature, which derives its whole dignity from the necessity it served. For this reason it has a homogeneous and purely quantitative character, which allows of its measurement by hours and its remuneration on a mathematically fixed scale.

Here, quite plainly, Ortega is concerned, not with a "philosophy" of work, but with the way most people have thought about work for many years. It is a narrow way of thinking, blind to certain of life's essentials; for this reason, people try to find, instinctively or spontaneously, some balancing activity for their lives:

Work is balanced by another kind of effort which does not arise from any kind of imposition, but is a perfectly free and hearty impulse of vital potency: this is sport.

If the final aim of the task which gives sense and value to effort is to be found in work, the spontaneous effort which dignifies the result is to be found in sport. The effort is a lavish one, which expends itself prodigally, without hope of recompense, as though it were an overflow of internal energy. Hence the quality of an effort made in the interests of sport is always of the finest. It cannot be subjected to the single standard of weight and measurements that regulates the ordinary remuneration of work. Tasks that are valuable are only completed through the mediation of this anti-economic type of effort: scientific and artistic creation, political and moral heroism, religious sanctity, are the sublime results of "sporting" events.

A rather impressive confirmation of this view of the sporting spirit appears in a brief note on "courage" in *Quest/77* for September, in the section titled Potentials edited by Tony Jones. The passage quoted is from Bruce Ogilvie, a director of the Institute for the Study of Athletic Motivations at California State University, San Jose. After studying athletes who reached the highest levels of achievement in various sports, he said:

The cyclical need to extend oneself to the absolute physical, emotional, and even intellectual limits is the quest to escape from the bland, tensionless feelings associated with everyday living. In my interviews, I have found that these men and women experience little joy in life when their true ability remains uncontested. They much prefer to have the odds against them because they

find it impossible to invest their egos in pursuits that do not require the best they have to offer.

In a world of true believers in the religion of work— not work as a value in itself, but for its measurable rewards—the prowess of the athlete is an available form of transcendence. Also in *Quest/77* is an extract from *Dr. Sheehan on Running*:

"Your stomach feels as though it's going to fall out," writes Don Schollander. "Every kick hurts like hell—and suddenly you hear an internal scream. Then you have a choice. Most swimmers back away. If you push through the pain barrier into real agony, you're a champion.

Runners have told of the same tortures. The muscles gradually hardening up into painful leaden stumps. The breath shortened to convulsive gasps. The chest filled with dry fire. The stomach threatening to explode in agony.

And again the difference between athletes is the peculiar ability—Roger Bannister describes it as a capacity for mental excitement—which enables the runner to ignore or overcome discomfort and pain.

"It is this psychological factor—beyond the ken of physiology—which sets the razor's edge between victory and defeat," Bannister says, "and which determines how closely an athlete comes to the absolute limits of performance."

The truth in this seems evident enough, yet it makes you uncomfortable. The best kind of competition—the only competition that has the dignity-producing quality Ortega talks about—or has it in full measure—is competition with oneself.

Athletics, today—both amateur and professional—have been largely infected by the ruthless drives of the conqueror. From all reports, even the Little Leagues have succumbed to this tendency, encouraged, no doubt, by male parents who have been taught by their times to respect and honor only results, which means *winning*. Yet Ortega's point remains clear; it is the framework of distortion which seems to make what he says unacceptable, not the reality underneath. "Error," as he says, "does not destroy the general truth of thought any more than indigestion annuls the fact of normal assimilative process."

Back in 1966 Dell put out a paperback novel—*Drive, He Said*, by Jeremy Lamer—which covers

this controversial territory well. It seems to reveal both what sports *really* stand for, and what we have made of them—and made of our great young athletes as well, to say nothing of all the youngsters who are fumbling around in sports to find some balance for their lives:

There are only two styles of basketball in America, and of the two the white-boss grimly prevails over the Negro. The loose, lost Negro style, with its reckless beauty, is the more joyful to watch or play, if you can, but it is the white-boss basketball that wins. Even Negroes must play white-boss basketball to win, though fortunately the best ones can't, and end up with both, the Negro coming out despite themselves right on top of the other style. And it is these boss Negro players who are the best in the world, the artists of basketball, the ones every pro team needs two or three or six of if it is to stay beautiful and win.

The boys were *hustling* for all they were worth; that's the first essential of white-boss basketball. He who wants to relax and enjoy it is gonna be left behind, or knocked over and his ball ripped away from him. For white bosses play very rough. Unlike Negroes, they will not back off and let a man keep the rebound he has jumped for; they'll tackle him, lean on his back slap at his hands tie up his arms, hoping to wrestle away his prize. And even before the rebound, the grim jostling and bumping for position. A good white-boss basketball player is a good football player—deadly, brutal, and never satisfied. What keeps him going is the thought that he and no one else must win, every instant. Let him win twenty games and he will sulk and cry and kick down the referees' locker-room door because he did not win the twenty-first. So by definition there can be no enjoyment. Can't you hear those bloodcurdling screams from the stands where thousands are tied by their legs? They scream not for pleasure but revenge. Revenge for a crime that is committed as fast as it can be wiped away. Because for every winner there is a loser, and then it is the winner who must pay, sooner or later, and on and on, right up to heaven vs hell.

We have a long way to go, but we'll never get there if we are unable to recognize the splendid realities that have been covered up by all this mess. They're still there, still balancing human lives in a few youngsters who know something of what they are doing.

FRONTIERS

The Ills of Bigness

THE continuing drought in the American Southwest gives particular point to the concluding statement in an article by Carey McWilliams, in *Washington Spectator* for June 15. He says:

Californians and other Americans must make critical decisions soon—decisions that will shape the future of California and the rest of the West for the next half century. In brief, "the water problem" involves more than conservation; it confronts us with critical choices of immense long-term regional and national importance; inevitably we will hear a great deal more about "the politics of water" than we have heard in the past.

The Los Angeles basin, essentially desert country, is an urban area with more than seven million population. At present Los Angeles imports 80 per cent of its water from sources which are hundreds of miles beyond its legal boundaries. The "politics of water" began in earnest around 1900, when it became evident that the city could not grow without more water from distant watersheds. The real estate interests, eager to sell land, were naturally supporters of the drive to obtain more water. A two-part article by William Kahrl in the Spring and Summer 1976 issues of the *California Historical Quarterly* tells the story of what they did. A summarizing sentence: "And so, with money, guns, and a unity of purpose with what they identified as the public interest, the bankers and businessmen of Los Angeles determined to seize the water resources of the Owens Valley 240 miles to the northeast."

Under the supervision of William Mulholland, the superintendent of the city's municipal water system, an aqueduct was built far into the Sierra country of Inyo County, involving, besides surface conduits and pipes, 142 tunnels totalling 53 miles in length. It took six years to complete. The aqueduct doomed agriculture in the Owens Valley, since the water for irrigation was drawn off to serve the city and its environs. The Valley ranchers and farmers fought the project, but Los

Angeles had the money to buy the water rights in the Valley and eventually acquired 95 per cent of all the farmlands and 85 per cent of the town properties. "Today," as Edwin Marston remarks in *The Dynamic Environment*, "the city owns 300,000 acres in the Valley, which it maintains in a rural state so that Los Angeles may survive as a city."

The aqueduct opened in November, 1913. Since the city owned the water, new suburban areas could have a share of it only by being annexed to the city, and the first large region added was the San Fernando Valley, as part of the original plan of the promoters. Meanwhile, the Panama Canal opened in 1914, assuring Los Angeles greater activity as a port (in San Pedro), while the end of World War I "brought a flood of new immigrants to the city at the rate of 100,000 a year." Growing rapidly along with its water supply, the city more than doubled in size with the additions of San Fernando and Palms. Before the annexations began, Los Angeles occupied 108 square miles; today its boundaries include 464 square miles.

At first everyone was confident that the water problem had been solved, but with the plentiful flow from the north available, requirements began to increase. William Kahrl relates:

With regard to irrigation . . . the problem . . . centered almost entirely on the changes in agricultural production that had occurred in the San Fernando Valley since the introduction of aqueduct water. The city water engineers had originally prepared their plans for supplying water to the San Fernando Valley on the assumption that the valley's agricultural economy would continue to be based upon tree crops, which required only intermittent irrigation over a long season. When the first aqueduct water was delivered at the end of May, 1915, the valley had only 10,000 acres under irrigation, a total which increased to 18,000 acres in the next year. In 1917 and 1918, however, wartime demand brought a rapid expansion in agricultural production, and the irrigated area in the valley extended to cover 45,000 and then 75,000 acres. In addition, the crops changed; instead of trees, large sections of the valley were given over to the more

water-intensive production of beans, potatoes, and truck garden crops. As a result, during periods of peak irrigation demand, Los Angeles had to supply the valley with a third again as much water as the entire surplus from the aqueduct, an amount which exceeded at times the mean flow of the Owens River.

This is the sort of thing that practically always happens as the result of enormous projects, affecting unpredictably the economic life of a great many people. The Panama Canal and the war were certainly big projects, and so was the Aqueduct. In retrospect we see that sudden and uncontrolled growth has consequences which for practical reasons cannot be changed, but only adjusted to, whatever the cost. To bring water to Los Angeles, the city condemned to idle unproductivity a natural farming area in the Owens River Valley, and then in effect created an unnatural farming area in San Fernando Valley where tree crops made sense but vast, water-intensive farms did not. (Most of this land, today, has been turned into suburban residence areas.)

Mr. Kahrl makes this comment in his conclusion:

The decision to sacrifice the future of the Owens Valley for the sake of development in the San Fernando Valley was made unilaterally by the city, but it involved a choice between competing public interests. All of the efforts of the Owens Valley ranchers in the 1920's came too late to reverse this policy. The ranchers' fate had been sealed at the moment President Roosevelt determined in 1906 that the greater public interest would be served by a greater Los Angeles.

Speaking of such changes two years later in his last annual message to Congress, Theodore Roosevelt observed: "Every new social relation begets a new type of wrongdoing—of sin, to use an old fashioned word—and many years always elapse before society is able to turn sin into crime which can be effectively punished." Today we are able to see that the larger the scale of socio-economic undertakings, the greater the "sin" concealed by impressive expectations. Who among the enthusiasts for a bigger Los Angeles could have considered or cared about the result

noted by Ed Marston in *The Dynamic Environment*:

The irrigation of southern California by these huge water systems affects society in several ways. First, the California farms take the place of the local vegetable and truck farms that once surrounded all urban areas. These small local farms are gradually converted into subdivisions, shopping centers, and roads, while rail and truck transportation are used to distribute canned or frozen California produce around the nation. Irrigated, intensive, mechanized agriculture—using large amounts of energy, packaging materials, and transportation—takes the place of small, less efficient, dispersed farms. The abandoned farms then become a suburb or a city dweller's second home.

How do you define "sin," for yesterday as well as today? What sort of planning would have avoided the multiple disasters of building big cities in deserts? What sort of management can see far enough ahead? Reading Mr. Kahrl's study of the conquest of the Owens River Valley by the urban power of Los Angeles makes such questions insistent.

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