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BOOK REVIEW

THE GREENING OF AMERICA. By Charles A. Reich. New York: Random House. 1970. Pp. 399. \$7.95.

The Greening of America, by Charles A. Reich, can be divided into two parts: the first is devoted to a description of American culture—called the Corporate State, its failings, and the reasons why the failings necessarily follow; the second gives a tentative outline of the cultural changes required for salvation.

Our cultural failure, says Reich, is due to an intractable refusal to bring our beliefs about society into line with constantly changing realities.

Thus a true definition of the American crisis would say this: we no longer understand the system under which we live, hence the structure has become obsolete and we have become powerless; in turn the system has been permitted to assume unchallenged power to dominate our lives, and now rumbles along, unguided and therefore indifferent to human ends.¹

In place of the word “understand” the author substitutes the term “consciousness” which is used as a word of art to describe the “total configuration in any given individual, which makes up his whole perception of reality, his whole world view.”² He then classifies Americans depending on the type of consciousness they possess.

The first group, Consciousness I, sees society as an economic struggle between self-interested individuals competing in a world of scarcity for material wealth, and possibly power, but nothing more. I’s define progress in solely economic terms, *i.e.*, greater production of goods.

Consciousness II represents the view of the twentieth century sophisticate who knows that competition between individuals in the marketplace has been replaced by rivalry between large organizations. The way to get ahead is to join a large organization and dedicate oneself to the goals of the organization, whatever they may be. Like I’s, II’s think of progress in material terms.

Consciousness III is the reaction against the cultural viewpoints of I’s and II’s, especially the latter. A III is aware that the great organizations in society, both in the private and the public sectors, have themselves been organized into a virtually all-powerful monolithic structure which knows only one value, “the value of technology-organization-efficiency-growth-progress.”³ What is required to keep this machine going? A society

¹p. 14 (emphasis added).

²p. 14.

³p. 90.

composed of people who are willing to work in order to consume what the state produces. Of course, one is not born a model worker-consumer; he has to be carefully taught, and educating the young to accept these roles as their proper function in society is the essence of education. Thus a well educated man in the corporate state is one who accepts goals set by others, appreciates the need for rational hierarchial authority, and uncritically enjoys the rewards offered. He is an archetypal II. II's do pay a price, and it is this price that Consciousness III's find exorbitant: A II must give up his individuality. Furthermore, this hollow man loses his capacity to govern in any meaningful way. Since he has become accustomed to abiding by dictates from external sources with regard to his own life, he is not likely to dispute announced national objectives, no matter how inhuman. He is too well trained to question authority; and anyway, he is not responsible for the actions of the authority.

For anyone holding such a view of society, the necessity for change is obvious. But how? Reforms, even reforms as extensive as the New Deal, through existing procedures cannot go far enough: existing procedures provide for change only within an established framework, and it is the system itself which must be challenged. Nor are the revolutionary tactics of the New Left the answer. These can do no more than frighten and alienate the very people whom radicals need to win over in order to succeed. More to the point, neither of these methods can lead to the fundamental break with the old culture that is required to destroy the corporate state. There must be a re-examination of values, a fundamental change of outlook, a new consciousness. It is here that youth and Consciousness III have taken the lead. Their experiments with drugs, clothes, music, communes, etc., are simply attempts to create a new culture. The goal of the new culture is to allow man to regain his own uniqueness, his self, and to restore technology to its proper place as servant, not master. And the beautiful part of this revolution is that there are no losers, only winners.

There is a great discovery awaiting those who choose a new set of values—a discovery comparable to the revelation that the Wizard of Oz was just a humbug. This discovery is simply this: There is nobody whatever on the other side.⁴

In recent years any number of respectable writers from various fields have re-examined the basic tenets of America's national policy and have found them wanting. Unlike Professor Reich, their proposals would entail changes in the present system, but no basic cultural changes. For example, Dean Eugene V. Rostow⁵ seeks better resource allocation, both of human

⁴p. 348.

⁵E. ROSTOW, *PLANNING FOR FREEDOM* (1959).

and natural resources, through more extensive use of monetary controls and stricter enforcement of the antitrust laws; Judge David Bazelon⁶ favors giving government a controlling voice at the policy level in the private governments of large corporations in order to reorient production for the common good; and Professor John Kenneth Galbraith,⁷ who totally accepts the imperatives of organization and technology, would modify our current method of distributing goods by increasing the amount of public services and expanding our aesthetic dimension. These proposals do not speak to the human problem in industrial society,⁸ and for this reason seem inadequate.

The principal contribution of Professor Reich's book is twofold. First, he analyzes the evils of the corporate state in a vigorous, readable style. Every member of the middle class, for the book is clearly directed at them, will be able to identify with the wronged party in the everyday situations Reich presents. More importantly, each member will come to see the connection between the personal indignities he has suffered and the great problems of the time, such as Vietnam, and why both are to be anticipated in the Corporate State. Second, Reich challenges the one-sided viewpoint which has dominated American policy. Our society is founded on the traditional belief that life is essentially an economic problem, and the best solution to this problem is extensive organization for production. But how can increasing production aid us in finding answers to the crucial problems of race relations, environment and Vietnam? We discover new ways to make more things, and these crucial problems become worse. "If we can put a man on the moon, we can reach a proper end to the war in Vietnam" is a common refrain in the country, as if only a technological problem were involved. Furthermore, what about the effects of the system on the people who seem to prosper under it? They may live well, but don't they become parts of the machine they tend? Don't they look more and more like the people pictured by Huxley and Orwell?

The merit of the solution Reich offers, however, is another matter. It seems to be as one-sided as that offered by the Corporate State. He recommends dropping out of society, rejecting all established values, and using the rejection as a starting place to find new values.⁹ Such an extreme position is not surprising.

When one despairs of any form of life, the first solution which

⁶D. BAZELON, *THE PAPER ECONOMY* (1958).

⁷J. GALBRAITH, *THE NEW INDUSTRIAL STATE* (1967); *THE AFFLUENT SOCIETY* (1958).

⁸Andrew Hacker, in *THE DECLINE OF THE AMERICAN ERA* (1970), does examine this problem and concludes that America's days as a major power are numbered.

⁹Reich seems too willing to accept anything the young do so long as their action shows opposition to the Corporate State. It seems to this reader that such an uncritical attitude does a disservice to Consciousness III. Compare T. ROSZAK, *THE MAKING OF A COUNTER CULTURE* (1968).

always occurs, as though by mechanically dialectic impulse of the human mind, the most obvious, the simplest, is to turn all values inside out. If wealth does not give happiness, poverty will; if learning does not solve everything, then true wisdom will lie in ignorance.¹⁰

To this reader's mind Reich's answer presents such a "first solution." The desire "to roll in the grass and lie in the sun" is most attractive, but it will not feed, clothe, house, etc., an ever-expanding population. The overcrowding of the planet limits the life styles open to the majority of us; whether we like it or not, some regimentation is here to stay. The question is, how much?

It seems, however, that Reich's solution suffers from a more basic defect. How can one drop out of society and reject his culture? Is such a choice open to us? Culture is an interpretation, the one generally accepted by a society, which men give to the world that confronts them. It is a series of resolutions to the problems and needs that arise in the course of men's lives. These ever-evolving interpretations are passed on from one generation to the next in order that the young may orient themselves in their environment. Much like a map serves a traveller, indicating to him the various roads from one place to another, culture permits each of us to structure his own world and then to direct his life with due regard for the alternatives offered. How can a man make rational decisions about this most important subject, how he is to live his life, until he forms an ordered set of opinions about the world?

Culture, as a set of shared convictions, serves as a cohesive force in society. Individuals are inculcated from birth with these collective beliefs, most of which are accepted automatically. Due to the general acceptance of these beliefs, they attain validity (become part of the spirit of the age) regardless of individual acceptance. Even those who deny the received culture must take account of it, for it limits the possible direction life may take.

This limiting of possibilities is one of the irremediable inconveniences of received culture. Solutions to pressing problems are invented because they must be. The inventor adopts his answer only in view of his perceptions of the avenues open to him, the evidence imposed upon him by the situation. In those cases where a solution has worked well, subsequent generations do not have to recreate it, but only inherit and apply it. This is good when it liberates men to do other things, but it has the disadvantage of being an invitation to inertia. The heir to a cultural system may lose sight of the basic problems which gave rise to the cultural solution he now accepts. He lives and works, building on this base of a culture which he

¹⁰J. ORTEGA Y GASSETT, *MAN AND CRISIS* 132 (1961).

neither created nor fully understands. As his culture becomes more complicated, he necessarily comes to rely more and more on the collective opinions of society: opinions which exist not because they are valid, but because they are repeated. Bit by bit man's life is less his own and more the collective life. Moreover, there comes a time when culture becomes inflexible and begins to retard spontaneity. Such is the situation in the United States at the present.

Professor Reich proposes a new culture based on the technology of the Corporate State. The difference will be that in the new culture human values, rather than the demands of technology, will dominate. Technology can free us to expand human experience, rather than channelling our activities into its service.

This kind of total break doesn't seem possible. Much in the way one cannot transplant flowers without taking some of the roots from the old garden to the new, one cannot expect to pluck the central element of an established culture free of all the cultural aspects which accompany it. This would seem to be especially true with modern technology. Without extensive planning and organization, the benefits of technology are quite limited. Mass production of goods, the end product of technology, does not require technique or innovation, "but only a conscious, deliberate, and planned order of relations between man and man, and man and the mechanical process."¹¹ Exhortations not to let technology subvert human values just do not get to the issue.

In a highly industrialized society life is composed of many dimensions. The function of culture is to harmonize and integrate all of the realities which make up our existence. The inventors of the new culture should direct their efforts to reconciling the demands of the productive system with the human dimensions of life.

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¹¹P. Drucker, *THE CONCEPT OF THE CORPORATION* 34 (1964).

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