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THE LAUCKS FOUNDATION

from time to time calls attention to published material that might contribute toward clarification or understanding of issues affecting world peace. The accompanying reprints constitute Reprint Mailing No.103.

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(A few weeks ago, Michael Harrington, author of The Other America and The Accidental Century, died of cancer)

## A parable

In desert societies—including the American Southwest—water is so precious that it is money. People connive and fight and die over it; governments covet it; marriages are even made and broken because of it. If one were to talk to a person who has known only that desert and tell him that in the city there are public water fountains and that children are even sometimes allowed to turn on the fire hydrants in the summer and to frolic in the water, he would be sure one were crazy. For he knows, with an existential certitude, that it is human nature to fight over water.

Mankind has lived now for several millennia in the desert. Our minds and emotions are conditioned by that bitter experience; we do not dare to think that things could be otherwise. Yet there are signs that we are, without really having planned it that way, marching out of the desert. There are some who are loath to leave behind the consolation of familiar brutalities; there are others who in one way or another would like to impose the law of the desert upon the Promised Land. It may even be possible that mankind cannot bear too much happiness.

It is also possible that we will seize this opportunity and make of the earth a homeland rather than an exile. That is the social project. It does not promise, or even seek, to abolish the human condition, for that is impossible. It does propose to end that invidious competition and venality which, because scarcity allowed no other alternatives, we have come to think are inseparable from our humanity.

MICHAEL HARRINGTON
*Socialism* (1970)

MANAS

VOLUME XLI, No. 47 Thirty Cents NOVEMBER 23, 1988

# THE PUZZLE OF HUMAN NATURE

IN *Tomorrow Is Our Permanent Address,* the book that John and Nancy Todd produced a few years ago, John began his contribution by saying: "One of the ironies of human history is that most civilizations from the ancient hydraulic ones of the great river valleys through colonial cultures to modern industrial societies have based their support on practices antithetic to the course of nature." Why, one wonders, should this be? Aren't humans a part of nature? If we are, why do we ignore or defy natural laws? If we are not, what are we a part of? Is it even possible that there should be forms of life, like ourselves, able, at least for a time, to develop patterns of existence contrary to "the course of nature"? John Todd continues:

> All of them have violated principles that, although not yet fully understood, have proved extraordinarily successful for all other forms of life. Civilization has not yet considered devising a culture that emulates the processes of nature.

He writes here to propose that human beings ought to attempt to emulate nature, an endeavor through which our culture may be transformed. What then, he asks, is "the structure of the complex systems upon which societies depend"?

> We are learning that the structure of a system and not its coefficients determines its ultimate behavior. By structure we mean the fundamental mode of organization of a system structure is the morphology or basic design that creates the patterns of operation. Just as the skeleton shapes the morphology of the human, modern industrial societies have structural components around which they are organized. Roadways and their transport vehicles represent a major structural element.
>
> By coefficients we mean that which is not itself structural per se but which unites with a structural element to produce an effect. Coefficients are parameters or constants for given elements under a set of circumstances. In the above example, the roadways, vehicles, and the petroleum-energy dependency of the system are structural, whereas the size or efficiency of the internal-combustion engines and the amount of petroleum required to run them represent coefficients. Put in another way, the first set of underlying elements is intrinsic, whereas the second set affects the timetable of events. . . . The discovery that structure determines the behavior of a system, if true, will have an enormous impact on all levels of design. It implies that the behavior and fate of a system are determined by its organization and structure, and not by its rate of expression or its coefficients. . . .
>
> The structure of the contemporary world assumes a foundation of limitless supplies of cheap petroleum. This assumption underlies fossil-fuel-fired generating plants attached to central power networks, and industrial agriculture, which uses between five and twenty calories of petroleum-derived energy to put one calorie of food on the American table. . . . Structure determines fate. Coefficients vary rates and relative dominances within a system. The physicist Amory Lovins has suggested that if structure and not system coefficients determines behavior, as he believes, our present civilization is fated and will prove unsustainable.

How long will it take for the modern world to agree with John Todd and Amory Lovins? We know from experience how shaky such an agreement can be. After the first great increase in the price of oil back in the early seventies, the price went down again and as a result the effort to find alternative sources of energy lost its momentum. Today attention is almost exclusively given to the development of coefficients, with little recognition of the stark fact that, sooner or later, the intrinsic structure of industrial society must change. As Todd puts it:

> Unfortunately, at the same time that structure is beginning to be seen as pivotal, science and technology are addressing themselves almost exclusively to coefficients. For example, in the transport sector, automobile engines are being designed for greater efficiency. The goal is to double gas mileage over that of a few years ago. This is a coefficient-related activity on the part of technologists. At no point is the transport structure itself, including the highway system and the fuel base, being seriously questioned. Because we have built a society to which this structure is essential, and because, as we know, it will collapse without the automobile, the larger question of transport remains taboo for scientists and designers. . . .

All this tells us is that we are creatures of habit and that scientists and technologists submit to habit along with the rest of us because, if they want to practice their profession they have no choice. They have the intelligence to see the need for changes, but no one will hire them to design the changes and put them into effect. So they remain mere technicians, not becoming real inventors.

John Todd goes on:

> Architecture addresses itself to coefficients; structure is left intact. Combining the various functions through integrative design, which could lead to a vision of buildings as "ecologies," is not being considered. This is true in agriculture and in many other key areas of human endeavor. By focusing on the coefficients, science and technology are buying time for society. The ability of contemporary science

to improve technology but not alter the fundamental structural society helps explain the drive to develop nuclear power so that there will be enough power within this century to sustain a system that is unsustainable with its highly centralized, interconnected energy grids and its massive use of energy. Genuine alternatives are not readily conceivable. An alternative, which would require a radical restructuring, could lead to more humanly based techniques and environmentally restorative methods of providing for the needs of people. At the present we are trapped in an intellectual cage, created by our own science.

This being the case, what are we to do? Todd suggests:

> If it is assumed that coefficients are only buying time, the vital support elements of our society must be totally redesigned. For a transition to take place, the new processes being created must be allowed to coexist within the present structure. . . . It is perhaps the first time in human history that people are being asked to create the landscape of the future. . . . New kinds of structure imply unprecedented levels of synthesis, for part of the necessary reintegration of the human experience must be a heightened awareness of the natural order upon which we depend. People and process must become one.

Since John Todd wrote this clear and necessary analysis, the bioregionalists have begun to show the way. Within the fortunately loose matrix of the existing society, the bioregionalists are trying to live in accord with nature, insofar as they can. In a pamphlet published by the Planet Drum in San Francisco, Peter Berg has said:

> 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.
>
> 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.

Another activist, a Canadian, has said:

> 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.

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*The following is quoted from "The Unsettling of America" by Wendell Berry, p. 278. (Recollected Essays 1965-1980. North Point Press, Berkeley, CA. 1981):*

"Past the scale of the human, our works do not liberate us—they confine us. They cut off access to the wilderness of Creation where we must go to be reborn—to receive the awareness, at once humbling and exhilarating, grievous and joyful, that we are a part of Creation, one with all that we live from and all that, in turn, lives from us. They destroy the communal rites of passage that turn us toward the wilderness and bring us home again."

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*The following is a transcript of a MacNeil-LEHRER NEWS HOUR interview by JAMES LEHRER with Soviet politician Boris Yeltsin, Monday, September 11, 1989. Reprinted with permission.*

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NEWS MAKER

MR. LEHRER: Boris Yeltsin is next tonight. Yeltsin is the outspoken man of Russia, the 58 year old maverick supporter of the Gorbachev reforms who is also Mikhail Gorbachev's most public nuisance. Boris Yeltsin was brought to Moscow by Gorbachev in 1985 to become the city's Communist Party boss. His mission was to make Gorbachev's economic reforms work in the capital city. Yeltsin immediately took on the bureaucracy, firing hundreds of corrupt trade officials. His unorthodox style won him a wide following. He played the role of populist, using public transportation more often than the customary limousine. He played the role of consumer activist, visiting food stores to hear customer complaints. But he also played the role of Gorbachev critic and that got him into trouble. In November, 1987,
Soviet Television announced Yeltsin was fired from his Moscow job. He was removed from the politburo after complaining Gorbachev was moving fast enough with his economic reforms. But Yeltsin wasn't finished. He made his comeback this past March in elections for a new Soviet parliament. It was the first election ever in which the Soviet people had a choice between competing candidates. Yeltsin ran for the Moscow seat against a candidate favored by the party establishment and he won in a landslide. He picked up where he left off, criticizing the slow pace of Gorbachev reforms, but he took his criticism one step further. In a speech to the new parliament, Yeltsin warned that Gorbachev was accumulating extraordinary powers that could lead to a new dictatorship. Yeltsin's recommendation, submit Gorbachev to a plebiscite every year to decide whether to let him stay in power. All of this has led many to understandably wonder if Yeltsin is after Gorbachev's job. He is in the United States now on a 10 day visit and that was the first question I asked him in an interview we taped this afternoon in our New York studio. There was simultaneous translation.

MR. LEHRER: Mr. Yeltsin, welcome. Are you after Mikhail Gorbachev's job?

MR. YELTSIN: (Speaking through Interpreter) Immediately the point question. I think I can give you an answer, something I already stated, the Congress of the deputies when the chairman of the deputies was elected, when I rejected my candidacy.

MR. LEHRER: Would you like to be president of the Soviet Union some day?

MR. YELTSIN: It's a possibility, if I am not too old and I have strength.

MR. LEHRER: Do you think you could do a better job than Gorbachev is doing right now?

MR. YELTSIN: We have on the coincidence of strategic questions, we have different positions, tactical positions, as far as perestroika is concerned. That's why it's better to say worse or better, but I would decide many questions differently from the way Gorbachev does.

MR. LEHRER: You have said your country is in crisis, financial crisis, economic crisis, political crisis. How serious is that?

MR. YELTSIN: It's very serious. We are on the point of the abyss, on the edge of the abyss. And then later it will be extremely difficult to climb out of the abyss if not to say impossible, at least for a very long time.

MR. LEHRER: What went wrong with perestroika?

MR. YELTSIN: The tactics. A few very serious mistakes, grave mistakes in economics, the laws of cooperatives and some other questions connected with the living standards of the people. This is the main thing. The questions of glasnost and democracy and political questions are going very smoothly according to the task of perestroika, but the absence from the beginning of a complex conception of perestroika unfortunately is telling that right in the middle of the road we are confused where to go and what to do.

MR. LEHRER: And Gorbachev is not providing the leadership to decide which way to go?

MR. YELTSIN: Yes, he has some hesitations. He is a man of half measures. It's impossible to decide perestroika with half measures. We can't compromise. We can't achieve something positive by compromising. Compromises can be temporary but not steady all the time.

MR. LEHRER: Have you told him this?

MR. YELTSIN: Yes.

MR. LEHRER: To his face, personally, across the table?

MR. YELTSIN: Yes, personally, the last time about 10 days before the Congress. We had a very long talk, about an hour and a half, and we discussed the questions and problems which we view differently. But unfortunately, we haven't come to a united decision.

MR. LEHRER: Do you see him as a friend? Does he see you as a friend?

MR. YELTSIN: We have different notions of the word "friend". A friend is a very close person. A friend of the family is a friend. It's a very very close friend, very close person. No, I don't consider him a friend, but we have very good relations, except for the past time. We used to be friends. Last year, we have, well, some kind of cool-off period.

MR. LEHRER: Well, when he talks, as he does, about enemies within the Soviet Union who are getting in the way of the success of perestroika, do you think he's talking about you?

MR. YELTSIN: In some lines, you can guess my name.

MR. LEHRER: What message do you receive from him then? When you hear him say these things, what is your reaction to them?

BORIS YELTSIN, Soviet Politician: My reaction is negative. I don't like it. The more so I think he's wrong in this instance. He considers me to be too radical. We have to do everything very carefully and cautiously but people are very impatient. They've been waiting for four years and they cannot wait another year.

MR. LEHRER: They cannot wait another year? Something has to be done within a year.

MR. YELTSIN: Yes.

MR. LEHRER: If not, then what happens?

MR. YELTSIN: A revolution from below will begin.

MR. LEHRER: An armed revolution?

MR. YELTSIN: No. Of course, I prefer it to be bloodless, without a civil war, a peaceful revolution, but from below. The movement has already started in the form of strikes and when the strikers take over in the area where they are, the order will have been established. That's a process that has already started.

MR. LEHRER: What can be done to prevent that?

MR. YELTSIN: There are some offers, some suggestions I would like if I have a possibility to meet Pres. Bush, I would like to tell those offers to him.

MR. LEHRER: What kinds of things do you have in mind?

MR. YELTSIN: Different things, mainly economical.

MR. LEHRER: You mean you want help from the United States to solve the Soviet Union's economic problems?

MR. YELTSIN: Yes, but so that the American business does not suffer from it, but also gain from it.

MR. LEHRER: What would the United States have to gain by helping Gorbachev and perestroika succeed?

MR. YELTSIN: I think we have to start from the opposite. America and Americans will lose a lot if perestroika will flood. Then the whole world will be in a very bad shape.

MR. LEHRER: Why?

MR. YELTSIN: America included.

MR. LEHRER: Why?

MR. YELTSIN: Because it will involve all relations, economic, political, all spheres, everything.

MR. LEHRER: If perestroika fails and this revolution happens in the Soviet Union, will it be a revolution of the conservatives, or will it be a revolution of the radicals like you? Who will end up running the Soviet Union when it's over with?

MR. YELTSIN: People will rule the country.

MR. LEHRER: In a non-political, non-ideological way, what do they want, what would they want out of their government?

MR. YELTSIN: From the government, they would like a lot of things, but the government should not monopolize everything, decentralize politics, economics, social spheres and so. Decentralization and very seriously to give a lot of independence to industries, organizations, cities, and republics, to leave for the center, very small ray of strategic, the center should only define this with a small apparatus, then we could be able to remove a huge bureaucratic apparatus.

MR. LEHRER: Can this be done within the Communist Party, or must the Communist Party go as well?

MR. YELTSIN: The party should be renewed and very seriously; this is my opinion, considering that the party is in the crisis, itself, should be calling for extraordinary 28th party congress, change the conservative central committee and renew in great measure the politburo.

MR. LEHRER: But is it possible to accomplish what perestroika and you say the people want and still for the Soviet Union to remain a Communist state?

MR. YELTSIN: Communism should be understood as an idea, as a dream. But we can carry it, but not use it. We should build a new model of socialism which should be built bearing in mind the experience not only socialist countries but the experience of the United States of America which has more than 200 years experience of democracy; to the point of your democracy, we can learn a few things from you and this should be taken into consideration.

MR. LEHRER: So you can have communism and democracy together?

MR. YELTSIN: Communism, I reiterate, is in the head and in the dream, and socialism and democracy but renewed socialism, not barrack-like, new one, new model of socialism, this can be put together with democracy.

MR. LEHRER: Do you still consider yourself a Communist?

MR. YELTSIN: Yes. I wasn't expelled from the party.

MR. LEHRER: No, but I mean, the idea, the idea of Communism is still in your head?

MR. YELTSIN: It's such a, well, in the clouds. It's in the clouds. It's a dream.

MR. LEHRER: What do you think should be done about the desire of the Baltic states for independence?

MR. YELTSIN: They should be given independence and given economic sovereignty, economic independence, then they will decide themselves whether there should be a cessation or they should stay intact.

MR. LEHRER: Gorbachev and the politburo has said independence for the Baltic states would mean the death of perestroika. How do you explain the differences?

MR. YELTSIN: I think that independence of a national republic should be by all means on the contrary. If they don't have independence now national feelings, the dignity of an individual is so high, used to be trampled; today, if we don't give them independence, then really perestroika will be ended. Now it doesn't mean that these republics will stop being part when we satisfy their desires, that the number of people who would want to leave will be significantly smaller.

MR. LEHRER: Speaking of leaving, what is your reaction to the decision of Hungary to allow the East Germans, thousands of East Germans, to go to West Germany?

MR. YELTSIN: This is the right of every individual. We have a lot of, very very many international, it's a normal process, if more people come to the United States, although you now and they go to Israel and West Germany. Well, we look at this very quietly, not the way we used to look at it a few years ago.

MR. LEHRER: You said a moment ago that Gorbachev considers you a radical. Others consider you a populist. There have been a lot of descriptions of you and your own beliefs. How would you describe your own beliefs and what you are?

MR. YELTSIN: A lot of name droppings, a lot of -- I consider myself to be a member of the perestroika, but we have to more decisively solve problems of perestroika. How should I be called? It's difficult to say. I am for radical changes.

MR. LEHRER: Are the people ready for these radical changes that you want?

MR. YELTSIN: I think now they're tired of the absence of changes. There are no changes in the standard of their living.

MR. LEHRER: If they were to have free, open elections for president of the Soviet Union, would you run against Gorbachev?

MR. YELTSIN: The way people will decide, that's the way I will act.

MR. LEHRER: Do you feel when you speak that you are speaking for a great number of people in the Soviet Union, for a small number, only for yourself? Do you feel you have a constituency?

MR. YELTSIN: If you take the vote, once 6 million Muscovites, 90 percent voted for me, that means a lot of people.

MR. LEHRER: So if you were to run against Gorbachev, you'd take him, right, you'd beat him?

MR. YELTSIN: I cannot forecast this.

MR. LEHRER: Do you foresee a time when you and Mikhail Gorbachev will have a collision, a political collision of some type where one of you will have to step aside or one of you will have to give?

MR. YELTSIN: I wouldn't like such an encounter. I support Gorbachev in principle. He is an initiator of perestroika and for the first two years it developed normally. Though some mistakes have been made and he is to blame for some of them, I still support him. I would like a political confrontation with him.

MR. LEHRER: In this country, Gorbachev is seen by many in heroic terms as a man of history, a man who is turning around a huge ship of state in a very dramatic way. Is that the way we should see him? How should Americans view Mikhail Gorbachev?

MR. YELTSIN: You have some euphoria of the first two years of perestroika. You don't know the real state of affairs in the country. If you knew it, you would not be so euphoric now.

MR. LEHRER: What should we be, if not euphoric, what?

MR. YELTSIN: More realistic, more realistic.

MR. LEHRER: Was that the purpose of your coming to the United States, to deliver this message?

MR. YELTSIN: No. I came here because I've never been to America. This is my first time, not visited such a huge, such a wonderful country, great country, that was my dream for a long time. When I received a number of invitations, about 15, from political people, business people, many universities, Rockefeller Fund, Ford Foundation and many other organizations, I decided to combine them all and come to America.

MR. LEHRER: Are you surprised to find that so many people in the United States are interested in Boris Yeltsin?

MR. YELTSIN: Yes. It was somewhat sudden and unexpected for me when people greet me in the street. Only in Moscow did I feel like this.

MR. LEHRER: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Yeltsin, for being with us, and good luck to you, sir.

MR. YELTSIN: Thank you. All the best to you.

*The following is quoted from "The Talk of the Town", The New Yorker, December 26, 1988 (25 West 43rd St., New York, N.Y. 10036):*

"The idea of detaching sovereignty from the power to make war has seemed to some nationalists to compromise that sovereignty. To the contrary, the power to make war with nuclear weapons is today inimical to sovereignty, and the possibility of maintaining sovereignty resides precisely in limiting or avoiding war. Under such paradoxical circumstances, we have responded, on the one hand, by searching for a technical breakthrough that might somehow restore our ability to fight wars we could win and, on the other hand, by piling up arms as if redundancy might somehow substitute for the security that no military establishment can any longer guarantee. But even if some partial defensive shield should become possible, far down the road—and that is by no means assured—there will never be total protection from weapons so small, so destructive, and so easily concealed. The simple, incontrovertible fact is that we are naked to our enemies, now and for the remotely foreseeable future. So are the Soviets. The arms themselves—even the so-called defensive ones—only add to our peril, by enlarging the potential for accident, miscalculation, and destruction."

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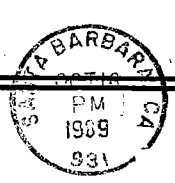


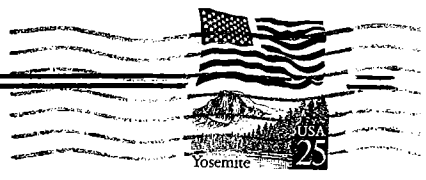


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