

THE ROAD IS BETTER THAN THE INN

We are now beginning to realize that these centuries, so self-satisfied, so perfectly rounded-off, are dead within. *Genuine vital integrity does not consist in satisfaction, in attainment, in arrival.* Cervantes said long since: "The road is always better than the inn." When a period has satisfied its desires, its ideal, this means that it desires nothing more; that the wells of desire have been dried up. That is to say, our famous plenitude is in reality coming to an end. There are centuries which die of self-satisfaction through not knowing how to renew their desires, just as the happy drone dies after nuptial flight.

ORTEGA Y GASSET, *Revolt of the Masses*

THE PASSAGE quoted by Ortega from Cervantes may be taken as a reply to the arguments of the utopians, whose energies are so much given to dreaming of the future that many of them do not know how to live in the present. To them, the present is contemptible, intolerable. You might say that in their thought they have socialized human longings, but colored them with a kind of collectivist avarice, making their struggle for power embody contradictory emotional components. They are lustful for the common good, angry at delays, and stridently self-righteous in their conten-

tions. Any implication that a man may live a good life in the present is met by sneering rejection.

The other side of the question, however, must have its statement. It is true enough that much of the present *is* contemptible. There is always a sense in which the utopians are right. There is the likelihood, if not the certainty, that people who show no interest in the sort of changes the utopians talk about are themselves quite content with the status quo and indifferent to the welfare of those whose lives are ill served by the present.

The chief difficulty in resolving this contradiction lies in the fact

that when men do find a balance between these two aspects of their lives — between work for the future, for better social or other arrangements, on the one hand, and a full expression of themselves as human beings, here and now, on the other — they find it intuitively, and not by any plan or program that can be incorporated in some progressive scheme. This sort of private resolution tends to be ignored or held to be worthless by the utopians, since their methods of arousing interest in what they believe ought to be done are not calculated to encourage people to make the best use of their present circumstances. Those circumstances must

be made to *change*, and to admit them to be a matrix of any sort of growth would be to compromise their utopian ardor.

What can be done about this? Nothing short of a complete redefinition of utopian ends can help, it would seem. Even the *methods* of change must somehow lend themselves to a fullness of human life. These, as we say, must be “organic” to the kind of lives we want to live, and not a series of preparatory steps. The goal, in short, is not an inn, but a proper road. The good life would then be recognized as a form of endless movement along the way, and never a static, final condition. ♦

IDEAS ON LIBERTY

Same Old Problem

AT THIS MOMENT society is very generally philanthropic, extremely desirous of improving the condition of the multitude; it is deeply affected by sufferings from disease and want, from close, small, and crowded dwellings, and seems resolved by legislation to get rid of dirt and discomfort. The object is excellent; the legislation, however, in the main is really directed against property; it is carried out, and can only be carried out, by some kind of restrictions and some kind of office-bearers to see them executed — an infallible means of dividing the existing amount of wealth in smaller portions, with no tendency to increase the whole, and certain, therefore, to sharpen and augment the poverty it really aspires to lessen.

The Economist (London), June 7, 1856

ON MINDING ONE'S



BUSINESS

WILLIAM GRAHAM SUMNER

THE PASSION for dealing with social questions is one of the marks of our time. Every man gets some experience of, and makes some observations on social affairs. Except matters of health, probably none have such general interest as matters of society. Except matters of health, none are so much afflicted by dogmatism and crude speculation as those which appertain to society. The amateurs in social science always ask: What shall we do? What shall we do with Neighbor A? What shall we do for Neighbor B? What shall we make Neighbor A do for Neighbor B?

It is a fine thing to be planning and discussing broad and general theories of wide application. The amateurs always plan to use the individual for some constructive and inferential social purpose, or to use the society for some con-

structive and inferential individual purpose. For A to sit down and think, What shall I do? is commonplace; but to think what B ought to do is interesting, romantic, moral, self-flattering, and public-spirited all at once. It satisfies a great number of human weaknesses at once. To go on and plan what a whole class of people ought to do is to feel one's self a power on earth, to win a public position, to clothe one's self in dignity. Hence we have an unlimited supply of reformers, philanthropists, humanitarians, and would-be managers-in-general of society.

The First Duty

Every man and woman in society has one big duty. That is, to take care of his or her own self. This is a social duty. For, fortunately, the matter stands so that the duty of making the best of one's self individually is not a separate thing from the duty of filling one's place in society, but the two are one, and the latter is

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