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Reprint Mailing 127

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October 1993

"Science and the liberal societies rooted in the scientific method are simply inadequate for coping with the soul of man."

Bryan Appleyard

"Amid the pillars of secularism, people go to synagogue, they go to church, they go to co-dependency groups and affirm the existence of a higher power for which liberal culture has no vocabulary."

Martin Marty

The university now offers only one serious major: upward mobility."

Wes Jackson

Progress of Faith, Retreat of Reason?

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BRYAN APPLEYARD, MARTIN MARTY

Far from a liberal end to history, science and secular liberalism are in retreat as the century winds down. In this section, we examine the progress of faith and the retreat of reason after 400 years of momentum in the opposite direction.

Post-Scientific Society

BRYAN APPLEYARD WRITES A COLUMN ON SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY FOR THE *Independent* IN LONDON. HIS CONTROVERSIAL NEW BOOK IS ENTITLED, *Understanding the Present: Science and the Soul of Modern Man* (DOUBLEDAY, 1993) FROM WHICH THE FOLLOWING PASSAGES ARE ADAPTED. AFTER THE EXCERPT, WE ASK HIM SEVERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THE IMPLICATION OF HIS VIEWS.

LONDON—Science is not an innocent commodity which can be employed as a convenience by people wishing to partake only of the West's material power. Rather it is spiritually corrosive, burning away ancient authority and traditions. Science, which pretends to all-knowing, cannot coexist with alternative belief systems. It insists upon a universally open-ended view of the world that rejects any absolute convictions and embraces only the permanent possibility of change and progress.

A spiritual mood of cool, flaccid neutrality thus characterizes science-based liberal societies. Unable to hold to any stable conviction or positive virtue, tolerance becomes apathy. Such a tolerant society can easily slide into decline because it cares nothing for its own sustenance and continuity.

Is it any wonder that pious Muslims on the upsurge find our liberal societies so incomprehensible in their moral laxity and tolerance of anything that comes along? Are they right in their suspicion that though the scientific West has triumphed economically and politically we may now be sinking beneath the weight of our own impiety?

A new and unprecedentedly effective form of knowledge and way of doing things appeared suddenly in Europe about 400 years ago. This is what we know as science. This science inspired a vision of the universe, of the world and of man that was utterly opposed to all preceding versions. Most importantly, it denied man the possibility of finding an ultimate meaning and purpose for his life within the facts of the world. If there were such things as meanings and purposes, they must exist outside the universe describable by science.

This precipitated a philosophical crisis, first defined by Descartes. This crisis was one of knowledge. In a cold, meaningless universe, how did man know anything, science included? More urgently the success of science also precipitated a religious crisis. As the physical evidence for religion was stripped away by successive generations of scientists, faith turned inward to find a safe refuge inside the self. But this could not halt the progressive decline in the power of religion in the face of science's overwhelming skepticism.

In our century, however, science has been subject to new doubts. Its more malign creations like the atom bomb have made people doubt its value and question its virtue. In environmentalism the progressive values of the society that science created have been rejected and replaced by a new code of benign coexistence with nature.

Science itself has also changed. New developments in quantum physics have overthrown past certainties. Many have come to argue that these developments show that science does not present a bleak, pessimistic vision but may indeed lead us to a new spirituality.

But science is mobile. Its very nature is constant flux and change. One generation's certainty is quite likely to be overthrown by the next. It may be true that quantum physics points to a deeper, spiritual realm—but the knowledge of that truth must come from outside and be independent of the quantum. Otherwise it remains dependent on the everchanging whims of science.

Nevertheless, the project of hard science continues and still dominates our culture. Progressively, science is becoming the culture of the entire world, now even taking upon itself the task of unraveling and altering the workings of life and death of the human self.

Whether such a development is morally good or bad cannot be decided within science. That is the

point. Science and the liberal societies rooted in the scientific method are simply inadequate for coping with the soul of man, which requires explanations and guides for living they cannot offer.

■

Scientific progress is so radical that, at every stage, it is able to throw away almost all the baggage of its own history.

This has profound and utterly negative spiritual implications for the inheritors of the scientific legacy. The late American academic Allan Bloom brilliantly and movingly anatomized these implications in his book *The Closing of the American Mind.* The college students he taught appeared to him to be progressively more lifeless and ignorant. Even worse, they were entirely unable to view their own culture as anything worth defending. A terrible cultural relativism had invaded their lives, denying them the possibility of choosing one point of view as more valuable than another.

Bloom had identified the way in which a key liberal attitude had penetrated and corrupted the student mind: People thought they were right in the past and did terrible things as a result; so we must never believe we are right.

Science and liberalism will not give us the means to defend what we, in particular, are because it will not acknowledge the possibility that we, in particular, are right. So the justifications of the parents, the teachers and the entire culture sound ever more hollow. Apparently there is nothing to teach since any new development may invalidate any old fragment of knowledge.

Certainly there is no cultural core, no body of virtue to be transmitted. Our souls become enfeebled. Knowing nothing and thinking nothing, we wander through life as through a bewildered, undifferentiated freak show. Why is this saint more important than this bearded lady? What does this philosopher know that this clown does not?

This fluidity, this refusal of all hierarchies, is now thoroughly institutionalized. On American campuses there is the concept of PC—political correctness—in which the slightest suggestion that the European-American way of life is superior to another is rooted out and forbidden.

Of course, this produces the perverse phenomenon of liberal authoritarianism. Precisely because liberalism finds itself with so little to say, it says what it can with ever more illiberal conviction.

■

Science is still dominant and our liberal societies are still scientific in their approach. But we are clearly in a decadent phase, and, I think, a terminal one. The decadence arises from the obvious failure of liberalism to transmit any value other than bland tolerance. It cannot defend itself and it cannot celebrate itself. Education is in permanent crisis because neither pupils nor teachers have any faith in what is to be taught. Teenagers have been taught to value only plurality and tolerance and, as a result, think it is a virtue not to make up their minds about anything. They are inhabitants of the flow because they conceive the flow as virtuous. The "road movie" is a sacred text.

The Aristotelian concept of the "good life" is antipluralist, antiegalitarian, indeed, antitolerant. It demands that choices be made between activities regarded as good in themselves and also that distinctions be made between people's behavior.

For these reasons all attempts at a liberal definition of values and virtue have failed. How could plurality and tolerance alone provide a basis for concepts like "justice" or "the good."

This failure has resulted in the search for a way to ground virtue, moving toward an Aristotelian concept of "the good" as the realization of specific excellence within a social context.

Such a concept is antipluralist, antiegalitarian, indeed, antitolerant attitude since it demands that choices be made between activities regarded as good in themselves and also that distinctions be made between people's behavior.

For ourselves we can begin to define our lives in the terms in which we do anyway when left to our own non-scientific devices. We can have irreducible affections, values and convictions. And the most fundamental of these need not be defended further because they will express only our kinship with our culture and that kinship will be beyond appeal.

"If I have exhausted the justifications," wrote Ludwig Wittgenstein, "I have reached bedrock and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: This is simply what I do."

At the other end of the history of the Enlightenment, there was a prefiguring echo of this insight in the mind of Pascal: "The strength of a man's virtue must not be measured by his efforts, but by his ordinary life."

Such an avowal means the end of the rule of science because it denies the infinite open-endedness and willingness to change that science needs for its continued invasion of our souls.

■

NPQ | The Japanese philosopher Takeshi Umehara has written that the collapse of Marxism, a side current of modernity, was only the precursor to the collapse of secular liberalism, the main current of modernity. Both excommunicated "the other world, the world of the spirit."

Do you agree? Is it also your view that the worldview of the modern West, founded in the scientific Enlightenment, is on the final wane?

BRYAN APPLEYARD | The collapse of Marxism had the most obvious effect of depriving the Western democracies of an external threat and therefore an internal justification. Being what we are felt better because we could contemplate what we were not.

Speaking of a "mainstream" and a "side current," as Umehara does, however evokes the dreadful determinism of a good deal of modernist aesthetic theory. How basically does he know where we are headed?

As for the collapse of secular liberalism—well, yes, this is the possibility I am, in the last analysis discussing. The waning of the West is probably simply from an economic point of view.

Umehara speaks of "the other world, the world of the spirit" being excommunicated by both Marxism and liberalism. This is obviously right, and, for me, it is alarming. Whether my alarms or Umehara's unease amounts to a symptom of the end is for others to say.

NPQ | You envision a "post-scientific" society in which science is humbled—put in its proper place on a metaphysical pecking order subordinate to meaning and faith. In that kind of society, science and religion will be seen as they really are—incommensurable modes of existence.

How will incommensurable civilizations live side by side? Not only Serbs and Bosnian Muslims, but also those who still believe fundamentally in science and those who believe in God?

And if the neutral state in the West continues to guarantee the diversity of incommensurable worldviews, of opinions and certitudes alike, how can virtue remain steadfast? Or, should the secular state also be junked in a post-scientific society? Why isn't that the inexorable logic?

APPLEYARD | I think there *has* to be a post-scientific society because I simply cannot imagine the alternative. I do not believe an entirely scientific society can work. Though full of rationality and discovery, it fails to shed any light on the distressing phrase, "reason to live."

What would people live for? Why would they behave well or badly? What would they take seriously?

A scientific society seems to me to be not so much a Huxleyan dystopia, but rather a kind of endless frivolity in which there could be no hierarchy of significance. This is, of course, happening already—in America most obviously. A post-scientific society would be one, I trust, in which science could not be the final court of appeal.

NPQ | Czeslaw Milosz, the poet, argues that the new developments in science—chaos theory and quantum physics—actually open the way for the reinvigoration of the religious imagination, of piety and virtue, because they reintroduce complexity and eliminate reductionism in science. Above all, for Milosz they promise to restore man to his pre-Copernican identity, rescuing him from the role to which he was assigned by 19th century science as a mere speck among others in the vast stretches of time and space.

Are those in Islam right in their suspicion that we are sinking under the weight of our own impiety?

Are we returning to an anthropocentric world view—with man in his ordinary life forming the moral core of civilization?

APPLEYARD | Certainly science is changing, but it can easily change back, or change into something else. Merely picking the current set of changes because you like them is silly. It is necessary to construct an extra-scientific framework of meaning before judging science, or indeed, anything else.

The anthropocentric issue is interesting and there are many reasons for deriving satisfaction from the development of what seem to me to be more mature attitudes in physics particularly.

But, I stress, something must come before science. It is no good sitting around and waiting for scientists to say what we want to hear.

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MARTIN MARTY One of American's leading theologians, Martin Marty is professor of theology at the School of Divinity at the University of Chicago and is senior editor of the *Christian Century*. He recently co-directed the Fundamentalism Project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Professor Marty spoke to *NPQ* Editor Nathan Gardels on a trip to California in late Spring.

NPQ | The Japanese philosopher Takeshi Umehara argues that the collapse of Marxism, "a side current of modernity," was the precursor to the collapse of secular liberalism, "modernity's main current." Both, he argues, excommunicated the "other world, the world of the spirit" through their materialist philosophy. Both, as a result, are now failing.

Even foreign policy intellectuals like Zbigniew Brzezinski are beginning to argue that unless America and the West regain their spiritual vigor, they will fade on the world scene.

Do you agree?

MARTIN MARTY | Of course, Marxism promised an inevitable future utopia that could be tested on this earth. The Marxist-economic model failed, and when the political systems of the Soviet bloc came under pressure to deliver, we discovered there was nothing inside. They imploded.

Liberal societies are not sufficiently integrated as a system to implode in the same way in the face of crisis. What is true is a growing acknowledgment that the three pillars of secular liberalism—rationality as a mode of thinking, the constitutional republic and individualism—are of themselves spiritually sterile, which does not mean they should, or can be torn down. It only means that they alone cannot prop up a civilization; they answer wonderfully to the practical side of life, but do nothing for the passional side of life.

I am a Christian, but I think in secular rational ways all the time. If I am ill, I don't want Mormon brain surgery, I don't want Baptist blood transfusions and I don't want Lutheran proctology. I just want the job done.

I am a Christian, but I think in secular rational ways all the time. If I am ill, I don't want Mormon brain surgery, I don't want Baptist blood transfusions and I don't want Lutheran proctology. I just want the job done. This mode or rationality isn't fortified too much by a heavy philosophy, but is likely to stay with us for many dimensions of life simply because it works too well.

The establishment of a constitutional republic—in effect the official privatizing of religion—has been able to keep the peace while unleashing in America a religious explosion, making this country the most religious of any advanced industrialized nation. Swirling all about this public/private division of religion are religious arguments affecting every major public debate, from the civil rights movement to abortion.

So, there is really a tremendous amount of this spiritual vitality going on, but it all has to follow the rules of the game using modes of reasoning not based upon one's particular revelation.

In the course of practical life we mix the religious and the rational in all that we do. If you are faced with the medial ethics question of "should we pull the plug on grandma?" what resources do you call upon?

You don't ask a philosopher to come in and lecture on Aristotle or Mills about the greatest good for the greatest number. You ask "what does my good doctor say, what does my rabbi say, what does my family say?" You ask a different range of questions that have to do with different dimensions. You employ intuition, tradition, community, memory, hope and affection. You ask "who is grandma, what does she mean to us, what are her thoughts and wishes?"

That mix of modes of experience—including the religious dimension—which are brought to bear in the challenges we face in life, is very vital, more than the culture knows. I don't think we want to try to impose on this realm a single metaphysic which presumes to have an answer for all things in all times and for all people.

When Zbigniew Brzezinski and others worry about the moral fabric of America and call for a social renewal, perhaps they tend a little too much toward the theocratic view of the need for a single spiritual system.

Our nation's spirituality is too particularized, so individualized, that you could almost say that the last 20 years of explosive spiritual revival in America has had almost no social consequences. Outside the anti-abortion activists, people are finding their own way. But as far as the fabric of the culture is concerned, it is about as decisive as whether you like Bartok or rock music. Individuals

are on their own quest.

So, amid the pillars of secularism, people go to synagogue, they go to church, they go to co-dependency groups and affirm the existence of a higher power for which liberal culture has no vocabulary. When we are replenished in our spirit, we go back into the liberal culture, changing it bit by bit. Already liberal culture has been transformed into something quite different than that envisioned by the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment.

A lot of foundations are threatened in Western civilization; a lot of walls are sagging. I know many roofs that can cave in. But there is a lot of remodeling, annexing and improvisation going on autonomously throughout the culture. I do not think it is possible in the pluralist West that the alternative to our sagging civilization can be some kind of spiritual recovery based on the voluntary acceptance of a single metaphysic, be it Christian republicanism or "secular enlightenment" or what have you.

As usual, the elites in the mass media, academia, entertainment and commerce are only now catching on to what has been happening in most of the culture for decades. Then they try to codify in a film or systematize it in a program.

If we do try to turn all that autonomous improvisation into a system, then we will surely shortcut this "organic" spiritual renovation and invite the kind of fate that put the Marxist system in the trashbin of history.

NPQ | But the concern of those whom you suspect of having theocratic, systematizing proclivities is not so much that they want a single metaphysic; they just object to a menu of metaphysics where there is no hierarchy of values, where everything that comes along is just as good as the next. It is only a matter of choice.

If liberal society needs a moral order, how can a relative, plural, decentralized array of spiritual choices provide it?

MARTY | Pluralism can be exaggerated so much that the overlappages are forgotten. I'm not saying that a Buddhist is going to become a Christian. But I am not an "utter pluralist" who believes we all must just exist out there because distinct philosophies legitimate our beliefs. In America, we are a society of spiritual as well as political coalitions.

I am thus a civic pluralist who believes that we can draw on Aristotle's aggregates or Madison's pluralities for what they bring to the larger pattern, all the while honoring those pluralities and giving people some measure of identity and trust.

Also, as an historian, I do not think that the kind of cohesive moral order so many now harken back to ever existed in the systemic way they wish to remember.

Moral orders hang together in a different way. People know there are things, as Katharine Hepburn used to put it, that "you shouldn't oughta do." You shouldn't oughta put graffitti on walls, or vandalize, or abuse drugs.

But the "shouldn't oughtas" don't arise from a formal metaphysic. They emerge from a common life that is informally nurtured.

First in this mesh of relations is a *common devotion to place.* When you settle on a plot of earth, you consecrate it. You are attached to those you live with. A *common time* is another link in the mesh. The earth belongs to the living, but when we think of our grandchildren, we import their future time into ours and adopt the generational ethic of being environmentally aware. A *common story* means we share the same myths and reference points. You can point to many mythical points of reference in our society today—for example, the recent launching of the space shuttle Challenger with men and women right out of central casting for a plural society (Protestant, Catholic, Jew, black, white, Buddhist) says it all about who we are.

Then there are *common propositions,* the closest to a metaphysic, and, in American society, *common constitutionalism.* We agree, for example, that certain truths are "self-evident," such as individual freedom, and we agree to abide by a common set of rules applied equally to all.

And finally there is *common affection* in the sense of affectivity or attachment. You may fight all the time at the family reunion about who will get grandma's sliver, but you are fighting with your own kin and wouldn't miss the reunion for anything.

All of these things are the locus of moral order, and they are infused with the values brought to them by religious faith.

My theology—the Augustinian-Calvin-Lutheran tradition—does not believe that everything good that happens in the world, and it is our mission to build the City of God, has to be done in the name of God. In *Christianity and the Encounter with World Religions*, Paul Tillich wrote that "in the depth of every living religion there is a point at which the religion itself loses its importance, a point at which it breaks through its particularity, elevating it to

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spiritual freedom and with it to a vision of the *spiritual presence in other expressions* as the ultimate meaning of man's existence."

It is through that spiritual presence that religious awakening in the West will influence and transform liberal culture.

NPQ | All these less-than-universal commonalities don't however seem to counterbalance the all-embracing assault of consumer society and the invasion of the media into the places and affections of which you speak.

The stories are different, but the message is coherent in the "permissive cornucopia," as Brzezinski calls it, of the mass culture.

All the private spiritualism and the particular commonalities would seem to add up, in Leo Strauss's phrase, to "retail sanity, but wholesale madness."

MARTY | I can match anybody in hyperbole about the terrible problems we face. But they have to be addressed piece-meal, not systematically. That is the way our culture works.

We are not innocent about these things any more. Whoever has written a book about how to solve the whole problem is today forgotten and unread. Arnold Toynbee towered over other historians with his power of synthesis. But today we read the pragmatists instead. Both political parties now appreciate Eisenhower.

NPQ | The British writer Bryan Appleyard calls for a "post-scientific" society in which science is put in its proper place in a pecking order beneath religion and faith. Science and the secular liberal society it has spawned with its rational principles, he says, has left us marooned on barren sands.

You have spoken of a "religio-secular" society where the two coexist. How does your view fit with Appleyard's?

MARTY | As I indicated earlier when talking about brain surgery, I think there are many domains of the scientific method that will survive any cultural shift, and for which there is no special reason to bring in issues of the transcendent, the spiritual, faith, the supernatural or the spooky.

I do think the sacral aura of science, and its priesthood of scientists, has faded as the ultimate authority in our lives. This is true from psychoanalysis to physics. There is no doubt the claims of science which appealed to the Promethean impulse in humans are more and more suspect.

I do think that sacral aura of science, and its priesthood of scientists, has faded as the ultimate authority in our lives. This is true from psychoanalysis to physics. There is no doubt the claims of science which appealed to the Promethean impulse in humans are more and more suspect.

Far from rendering man more divine, each pushing back of limits makes us aware of greater limits. Each conquest of distance reveals greater distance. Behind the light we have found a black hole.

As a result, the passional side of human nature is reclaiming its space.

I think "coexistence" is too cool a word to describe the relationship between science and religion in our age. The collapse of one in the face of the other, which seems to be Appleyard's approach, is too strong.

Perhaps Paul Tillich's idea of *correlation* would be better. In a religio-secular society there would be a certain symbiosis where the religious and the scientific *modes of experience* live off of each other, interacting.

The concept of *modes of experience* is critical to understanding the emergent religio-secular culture that I see. We all as individuals live many roles. A student may wear a *dashiki* to class, but he wears a cap and gown to graduation. We are citizen, father, cook, sufferer. When the minister says "dearly beloved" to his wife, to his children, to a couple getting married, to his congregation he means something different each time, though all these meanings come from a single core.

As a biblical scholar I analyze *Romans* Chapter 8 for its rhetoric, its grammar and for its location in the Greco-Roman discourse and the biography of Paul. The mode of experience I employ here is no different than that of an atheist scholar.

Then, I walk into a sanctuary where faith beckons to faith. In the midst of my own ambiguities and doubts, as a believer I am drawn to that text which says love is stronger than death, that you won't be overwhelmed. I can't prove it, but I believe it.

Then I could come home, as I did a dozen years ago, to learn that my wife had terminal cancer. Then that text spoke to me in a very different mode.

These modes of experience aren't contradictory. Though they come from separate universes of discourse, a person can hold them all in an integrated personality and not be schizophrenic. We possess all these modes in good faith and move about among them.

This is as true for civilizations as it is for individuals. Modes of experience do overlap, they cross boundaries and they can't be boxed off. Civilizations are not pure, thoroughly cogent and untouched by other modes of experience.

This comingling of modes of experience is unsettling to fundamentalists. For them, there can be only one mode and one meaning. For them, every-

one of good faith and moderate intelligence would have to agree to the same meaning of the Qur'an or the Bible because it can only be seen one way. If you don't agree it is because of the devil, bad faith, chosen ignorance or willful resistance.

Fundamentalists worldwide are "non-hermeneutical." They believe that the meaning of a text was sealed when God or Allah gave it verbatim to the apostles or Muhammed. There is no room for interpretation based upon the modes of experience you bring to the text.

NPQ | A thesis: The more modes of experience we come into contact with through global communications and the postmodern ubiquity of the consumerist media, the more fundamentalism will build as a backlash.

Do you see that dynamic?

MARTY | Yes, but we must stick close to the facts.

A good part of the militant Islamic reaction in a place like Algeria today is due to the failure of the secular, nominally Muslim military regime to deliver on the economic goods. They created a void for someone to say compellingly: "Allah did not intend for you to spend your life in poverty and listlessness. He intended a better life for you; join our movement and you will have that life."

The Iranian revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini against the modernizing Shah was a clear example of your thesis. Iranian parents saw their child being lured away from the righteous path by the Western media and technology. The parents, who know they can never realize the materialist aspirations promoted by Western advertising, tell her that modernity is evil and corrosive. They fear a blowing wind will take this tender, frail plant of their daughter's mentality away. So, they build a greenhouse out of Qur'anic passages to shelter their seedling.

The morally corrosive forms of modernity have had a similar effect in America, especially among those who have begun to rise in the economic system but then stalled out economically.

The signals on television undercut parental intentions for a four-year-old; the signals of pluralism which reduces overt religion in the classroom comes as an assault on what the parents want for the 14-year-old; the assault of relativism on solid values around us, the fact that nobody can come up with peer standards, confuses the 24-year-old parent.

In all three instances, the parents and the young adults hear something like what the Muslim hears from Allah: God didn't intend for you to be this bereft, this marooned, this beleaguered.

What they hear is what those Iranians susceptible to Khomeini's message heard: God intended you to be a special people, a holy nation. You are supposed to be exalted individuals, the redeemed ones. You are supposed to be chosen by the covenant. Yet, here you are, overwhelmed by public schools, Hollywood and the cultural elites, MTV promiscuity and the Supreme Court.

The difference between fundamentalism and mere traditionalism or orthodoxy is that the fundamentalist fights back. These are not the Amish who withdraw into the countryside and let the world pass by. The fundamentalist must engage that world at the devil's domain, the domain of the Great Satan.

NPQ | ...a figurative *jihad.*

MARTY | Yes, in the sense that the struggle against the devil is being turned over to God, the agent of apocalypse, who will settle all accounts in the end.

NPQ | Though the Enlightenment worldview has been humbled in the many ways we have discussed, its lasting legacy of the free individual, is codified in the notion of universal human rights.

Isn't even the concept of human rights in conflict not just with fundamentalist Islam but with the avowedly religious civilization built upon submission to Allah, not individual liberation; fusion of temporal and spiritual realms; sovereignty of God, not the people; and rule of the Word, not reason?

MARTY | Theocracy and the concept of human rights as outlined by the United Nations, the Geneva Accords and the Helsinki Accords cannot be reconciled. Islamic definitions of human rights have glorious things to say about the rights of believers, and precious little about the infidel and non-believer or minority.

In a religio-secular society there would be a certain symbiosis where the religious and the scientific modes of experience live off of each other, interacting.

Many orthodox Muslims, of course, are moderate about human rights. But Islam never formally separated church and state, to use Western lingo in their context. Even when they did so tactically, they never separated religion and regime *theologically.* As a result, it is much easier for fundamentalists to seize their cultures than it would be in the West.

The West, however, must be cautious in its claim to universalism. A Buddhist of good will says to us, "OK, if the West wants to be universal, then it must give up the dogmatism and monotheism of Judeo-Christianity...."

For myself, a good side of me, as a Christian believer, remains with the Enlightenment. Every time I see someone emerge from a sacred bath in the Ganges with dysentery, I am reminded of my secular commitments.

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Book Previews

Becoming Native to this Place

By Wes Jackson
University of Kentucky Press, Louisville, 1993

When one of my great grandfathers entered Kansas in 1854, the first day he could legally do so, the day the Kansas-Nebraska Act was ratified, our nation had fewer than 30 million people. Had national policy been directed toward us all trying to become natives to this place, the nature of that nativeness would have been different from what our "nativeness" is today. Now, too many people and the products of the technology explosion interacting with our desires and perceived, as well as *bona fide*, needs, dictate the terms.

The standard was always changing. By the time one of my grandfathers (the above-mentioned great grandfather's son-in-law) made it to Kansas from Shenandoah in 1877, the standard we might have employed for an 1854 nativeness was already rapidly disappearing. The great herd of bison would be nearly finished off. The Santa Fe Trail at age 56, as an *official* highway of commerce, would soon be totally irrelevant; and by the time that great grandfather died in 1925, 45 acres of pristine prairie would be broken by tractors and horses and planted with wheat. Eleven years later, I was born; it was the height of the Dust Bowl era, a consequence of that Great Plowing. It was an era in which the heart of the continent would send its finest soil particles for observation far overhead to Washington and even to ships at sea.

It has never been our national goal to become natives to this place. It has never seemed necessary to even begin such a journey. And now, almost too late, we perceive its necessity. Unfortunately, the nature of our nativeness toward which we must work is better characterized as severely compromised rather than merely altered. Part of the reason is that we have eight times as many people in our country now as when my grandfather was born. Perhaps even worse is the fact that the forces which have given us our modern problems — the ozone hole, Three Mile Island and Chernobyl, soil erosion and the loss of family farms, and so on—gain power by the decade. Destruction is occurring at an accelerating pace. It has all happened so fast (more than 80% of all the oil ever burned was burned in my lifetime) and it is going to get worse (half of Mexico's population is under fifteen years of age, ready for a major explosion). The world is slated to add 1 billion people in this decade alone; more people will be added in ten years than the total population of the earth at the time of Columbus!

This book is dedicated to the idea that the majority of solutions to both global and local problems must take place at the level of the expanded tribe, what civilization calls community. In effect, we will be *required* to become natives to our little *places* if we are to become native to this *place*, this continent. Even though we have told one another on bumper stickers and at environmental conferences that we must "think globally and act locally," we tend to drift towards mega solutions. Rather than get busy, we introduce new terms like "sustainable" to apply towards a perceived solution that catches our fancy. Instead of looking to community, we look to public policy. We even hold a global conference in Rio.

To a large extent, this book is a challenge to the university to stop and think what it is doing with the young who are supposed to be getting prepared for the future. The university now offers only one serious major: upward mobility. Little if any attention is paid to educating the young to return home or to go someplace and dig in. There is no such thing as a "homecoming" major. But what if the university were to seriously ask what it would mean to have as our national goal to become natives to this place, this continent? We are unlikely to achieve anything close to sustainability in any area unless we work for the broader idea of becoming a native in the modern world, and that means becoming native to our places *in* a coherent community, which in turn is embedded in the ecological realities of any surrounding landscape.

What the discussion is about is not just another way of talking about sustainability or bioregionalism, though that would be the result to some degree. The subject is broader than that, for it is largely cultural and ecological in scope.

The first natives here were not burdened with the exercise of technology assessment. They were the lucky ones in the sense that they did not have the technological array developed during the industrial revolution that now has to be inventoried and assessed for a world approaching the end of fossil fuel.[1] That won't be easy! We will soon discover how limited our imaginations are as we begin to anticipate what we can or should take with us into that sun-powered future. Quite frankly, one of my major worries is that we will become so discouraged that we'll seek to repeal Murphy's law and opt for nuclear power. There are bound to be numerous surprises once we get into the inventory and assessment stage. The global market has given us so many intersecting loops that we now have an

economic ecosystem so complex that the most fancy systems programs cannot accurately predict what we will be able to keep and what will be selected against. This alone is argument enough for that second major, the "homecoming major." We are not talking about mere nostalgia. To resettle the countryside is a practical necessity for everyone, including people in the cities. To gather dispersed sunlight in the form of chemical energy in a fossil-free world from across our broad landscape will require a sufficiency of people even though we may do it with some modern technological equipment. The area over which we would have to range to collect the sunlight can be so large that the economics that would follow the energy cost would make it prohibitive.

This resettlement will be no small matter. It will have to happen by those who see the necessity of such dispersal, by those intelligent enough and knowledgeable enough about the necessity that they will evidence staying power. What they are against is horrendously formidable; an affluent society with all of its temptations to embrace the extractive economy that the rich and powerful offer as a lure to keep our incomes and the global non-renewable resources flowing their way.

Think of what this would mean for our universities which now hold the majority of our young people hostage for four years with always the implicit and explicit promise of upward mobility. For tens of thousands of students, the universities have become little more than holding pens that keep them off the job market where millions of hours are devoted to turning out work too shoddy to be either useful or artistic. Think about what is likely to be the eternal judgment of the generation now in power. As a result of the excesses of that generation, it is likely to be the first, and for that matter the last, generation which, after it has died off, will be regarded at best as simply comical and pathetic and at worst hated. Isn't it time to begin the transition toward figuring out a way to earn a living and amuse ourselves while we live until we die. Cheaply, which is to say inexpensive to the life support system? The binge is just about over. It's time to find our way home and use what little time is left for partial redemption of this prodigal generation.

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1. We can imagine a future in which fossil fuels will be stretched out for a long time to come. At the end of oil, we move to natural gas, then liquid fuels from coal, and so on. Ironically because of global warming, we should probably be worrying more about the abundance of fossil fuels than the short supply.

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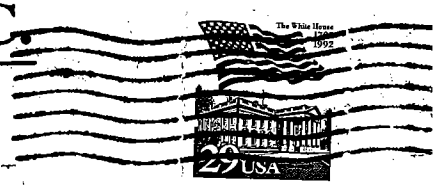

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