

THE PERSISTENT LURE OF THE FANTASTIC

Men and women of many cultures across the span of recorded history have dreamed of a better world. By developing some fantasy realm where the imperfections of their ordinary lives did not exist, people often have tried to overcome their uncertainties, difficulties, hazards, and frustrations. In instances where mundane conditions tended to approach the psychologically intolerable, the imagined world sometimes was said to be even more "real" than the actual world in which people lived.

Members of some early hunting societies believed that a "happy hunting ground" existed where there were no scarcities of game, where the hunter's aim was always true, and where people never went hungry or starved. Desert-dwelling nomads conjured a world of deep streams, waterfalls, lush vegetation, abundant shade, and cool breezes. Enslaved peoples of many races and many times took solace from a belief that they eventually would be delivered from bondage into a "Beulahland" that flowed with milk and honey and promised not constant drudgery but a continuous "jubilee."

To those who experienced them, the difficulties that spawned these fantasies were the result of unalterable (or very difficult to alter) factors: geographical, climatic, biological, or other physical uncontrollables associated with floods, droughts, famines, pestilence and the like; or rigid social, economic, or political structures such as hereditary aristocracy, serfdom, or slavery.

But in the course of relatively recent time, many of these "unchangeable" factors either have disappeared or become alterable. As static hierarchies have broken down and as technologies have extended to permit human manipulation of the physical environment, it has followed that the "better world" associated with the supernatural or the metaphysical in earlier years has been viewed as something that might be tangibly realized in the here-and-now. Indeed, today many people seem to regard the attainment of a better life for everyone a reasonable expectation. They interpret what in the past would have been regarded as part of the normal situation of life as a "failure" of those in power to achieve reachable goals.

This yearning for the better society has been translated in the contemporary world into ostensibly nonsupernatural and nonmetaphysical forms. Today, it is described popularly by names such as "policy science" or "policy planning" and has adopted much of the language associated with scientific inquiry. And yet, the lure of the fantastic, which today is manifest in a reliance on a presumed — or hoped-for — discovery of something that remains constant in human behavior despite wide variations in time and in socioeconomic structure, appears often to be a basic ingredient in thinking that now serves as the basis for central policy

planning on regional, national, and international levels.

In plain terms, central planners today often are engaged in wishful thinking — no matter how erudite, emotionally appealing, or elegantly packaged it may be. When stripped of their complexity, the arguments of present-day world planners bear resemblance to those of their stone-age counterparts, since they often seem to depend on metaphysical assumptions that are contrary to observed experience and to procedures of inquiry from which warranted conclusions about human behavior might be derived. What is more, insofar as coercion has played a key role throughout history in sustaining all manner of visions of the better society (woe to the hunter who denied the existence of the happy hunting ground or the rituals prescribed by its shamans), the metaphysical aspects of central planning may be just as — or more — powerful an influence on human affairs as were any of the varieties of past metaphysical systems.*

"BETTER WORLDS" NEVER ARRIVE

Long-time readers of AIER publications will know that we have often stated our opposition to central planning in its many forms. In the past, we have cited its numerous failures — as well as the bundle of new problems it has created — as evidence of the futility of such planning. Indeed, the *consequences* of the planners' attempts to create a better world are in themselves testimony to the folly of such endeavors. Virtually without exception, policies of the past quarter century aimed at directing national or international developments toward some nebulous "new order" have made things worse than before.

Nevertheless, these failures so far have not been taken as evidence by the planners that central planning does not work. Rather, they assert that new and bigger plans are needed. Often they cite their lack of authority or backing as reason for a plan's failure: regulation of activity was not

* Readers who desire a comprehensive discussion of the procedures of inquiry that have been used in attempts to solve problems humans encounter are invited to purchase the Behavioral Research Council publication *Useful Procedures of Inquiry*, by Rollo Handy and E. C. Harwood (hardbound, 232 pp.). In this volume, an analysis is made of widely used, but outmoded, procedures of inquiry. More useful procedures, stemming from the revolution in inquiry associated with Galileo, and further developed by John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley, are described in detail.

In addition to the discussion of modern scientific inquiry and a critical analysis of several recent inquiries, the volume contains the full text of Dewey and Bentley's book, *Knowing and the Known*, and of Joseph Ratner's essay, "Introduction to John Dewey's Philosophy," publications that no longer are available from other sources. A companion volume, *A Current Appraisal of the Behavioral Sciences*, by Handy and Harwood, also is of interest to the present discussion and is available for purchase. Either or both volumes may be obtained for \$12.50 per copy from Behavioral Research Council, Great Barrington, MA 01230.

sufficiently encompassing to achieve the desired result; there were not enough agencies to “enforce the provisions” of the plan; the plan lacked “adequate funding,” and so on. Thus, problems generated by a policy of domestic *ad hoc* subsidies spawn plans for an all-encompassing “industrial policy”; problems caused by a plan designed to provide health care to one segment of the population generate demands to establish a health care policy for all segments of the population; failures of grandiose plans for “world development” result in the promotion of international agencies on a larger and more-costly scale — and so on. In short, the planners prosper despite their failures.

Perhaps because the lure of the “better world” remains so strong, merely to cite the observed consequences of central planning seems not enough to convince the “faithful” of its harmfulness. In this respect, an inquiry into the structure of thinking characteristic of central planning — and which seems to have been persuasive to many people as well as providing the politicians with allegedly “scientific” backing for their programs — may be a more useful approach.

A “HUMAN WORLD ORDER”

It would be impossible in a bulletin of this length to survey, let alone analyze fully, all of the pertinent literature. However, even a general discussion of two representative, though markedly different, examples may serve to illustrate the degree to which metaphysical assumptions continue to enter into the thinking of popular writers and scholars who advocate “world planning.”

Let us consider first a representative “popular” work, *Toward a Human World Order; Beyond the National Security Straightjacket*, by Gerald and Patricia Mische, which was first published in 1977. This book is of particular interest because it aimed at becoming a “handbook” for the “one-world” movement of the 1970’s and featured as a central strategy the development of a vast network of international agencies dedicated to promoting a “systems change through gradual evolution of transnational structures” — presumably into some form of world government. The book received praise from luminaries of world planning such as Dr. Rene Dubos, Institute for World Order President Saul Mendlovitz, Congress of World Unity Executive Director J. Guy Merveille, and Margaret Mead.

As with many other works that have tried to establish a plan for a better world, *Toward a Human World Order* enlists a “model” developed within one of the behavioral sciences in order to construct a “human development paradigm.” This paradigm in turn serves as the basis for making decisions as to the appropriate actions to be taken toward achieving the hoped-for better world.

In this case, the model is drawn from the field of psychology — to be specific, from the thinking of Abraham H. Maslow, who posited “that there was a growth process through which all healthy persons passed in a series of stages corresponding to human needs and potential.” According to his model, human needs are of two kinds: (1) *basic* needs such as food, water, air, shelter, safety — as well as “belonging, love, and esteem” and (2) *meta* needs that include “knowledge, understanding, beauty, truth, goodness, wholeness, justice, peace, universal love, harmony, order, etc.” The “self-actualization” of individuals, which is taken to be the highest order of personal development, consists “in the development of their uniqueness as persons” through the satisfaction of both *basic* and *meta* needs. These “self-actualized” persons are said then “by the very same process of deeper inwardness to share deeper unity and harmony with all other persons and the whole of life.” No adequate descriptions are given for what “knowledge,”

“understanding,” “beauty,” “truth,” “goodness,” “wholeness,” “justice,” “peace,” “universal love,” “harmony,” or such phrases as “uniqueness as persons,” “process of deeper inwardness,” “deeper unity,” or the “whole of life” name.

Undeterred by the obstacles such semantic deficiencies pose for any consensus regarding what constitutes personal fulfillment, the architects of a “human world order” assert on the basis of the Maslow paradigm that: (1) the “discovery and nurturing of a self-actualizing person’s own inner core is the discovery and nurturing of what is central and common to all humanity,” (2) the “natural human genetic propensity for bonding and unification, and inherent human needs and potentialities . . . are a given organic center around which shared global consciousness and world unities can be consciously and creatively nurtured for purposes of human survival and human fulfillment,” (3) because “the successful negotiation of the stages of human development are greatly affected by social institutions, we need a healthy social framework within which to *become* — individually and as a species — all that we can be,” and (4) “it is precisely the lack of such social structures on a global level that, in an interdependent world, straightjackets and presents the greatest obstacle to human development.” In brief, from a metaphysical psychological theory has come — in short strides of illogic and giant leaps of faith — an intellectual justification for world government.

SELF-ACTION AND THE QUEST FOR CERTAINTY

The line of thinking contained in *Toward a Human World Order* is almost a caricature of what John Dewey called “the quest for certainty.” As Dewey observed, this quest ignores the disproportions and uncertainties of the actual world in preference for some technical construction that postulates the existence of absolutes. These in turn are employed in pursuit of the desired better world. The posited “human world order” closely follows this pattern. For example, missing from the list of allegedly “fulfilling” human needs (either *basic* or *meta*) is any mention of, say, “power” — to cite a “need” that seems to have loomed large throughout human history. Moreover, ignoring the task of describing adequately what, if anything, “knowledge,” “understanding,” “truth,” “goodness,” “justice,” and “harmony” name will not facilitate agreement on related controversies. The plain fact is that such names, as they relate to human behavior, would be applied differently by, say, Konstantin Chernenko, Pope John Paul II, Ayatollah Khomeini, Yasser Arafat, Yitzhak Shamir, and Ferdinand Marcos — let alone Jesse Jackson, Ronald Reagan, Geraldine Ferraro, and Jerry Falwell.

This work is an extreme example of a genre of globalist-oriented literature that posits the attainment of “world order” through some self-actional mechanism (in this case named “self-actualization”) that it is presumed will find expression through “transnational structures.” In fact, this view insulates actors from their environment by dividing “self” into separate physical and “spiritual” entities (the self’s “inner core” is what counts). It also denies or evades entirely the question of what constitutes “environment” so far as actual attitudes and behavior toward “self-fulfillment” or transaction with physical surroundings or other human beings are concerned. Indeed, this vision of a “human world order” would demand of all people everywhere behavior according to “human-religious values” — on the erroneous assumption that all such values effect essentially similar behavior patterns. It also would require “de-emphasis both individually and nationally of such values as ‘individualism,’ ‘doing your own thing,’ and ‘competition.’”

Placed in historical perspective, this fantasy “transcends” even those of the hunter-warriors of past ages, whose imagined better worlds often acknowledged conflict with the environment. (Their better world usually was simply one where they always came out on top of the struggles that existed.)

The authors of the “human world order” acknowledge — and this is where their fantasy abruptly assumes an ominously tangible cast — that the values it holds paramount will remain unfulfilled “*so long as we fail to develop just and effective world order structures.*” No clear account is given as to what “just” or “effective” name. However, the authors assert that if such values and structures were “widely implemented as criteria for public policy, they would subvert the ability of individual nations to survive.”

A COMPOUND FANTASY

Our second example is a recent scholarly treatise that is far more intellectually sophisticated and has received considerable notice in academic and policy-planning circles.* Written by Professor Ernst B. Haas of the Department of Political Science at the University of California at Berkeley, this study (unlike the previous work) examines in some depth a range of divergent views and interests operating in the arena of world planning. Indeed, in view of the disruptions and failures of international planning in the recent past, it is not surprising that a number of academicians — as well as self-appointed “global managers” — have been induced to acknowledge that, despite their earlier celebration of bonds allegedly “common to all mankind,” great differences among peoples and nations *do* exist.

For example, spokesmen for organizations such as the Council on Foreign Relations and the “Trilateral Commission” recently have tended to abandon their rigid ideological bent toward an *a priori* belief in the inevitability of global conformity of thought and behavior or the creation of a single utopia — even as they continue to seek greater influence for international agencies of power. Inasmuch as Professor Haas’s essay inquires into the possibility of fashioning a “synthetic” intellectual framework for interpreting what are now being called “international regimes,” his scholarship is in concert with this recent direction in thought about world planning.

According to the description given in Haas’s essay, “international regime” is now being used by political scientists to name *any* set of rules of behavior — whether put in place, enforced, or *simply proposed*. That is, a “regime” may be only an idea, even a fantastic one. Nevertheless, Haas strongly implies that the study of regimes described this way may permit political scientists and policy planners to “predict regime change and prescribe the desired content of a future regime” — that is, to make up new plans.

For heuristic purposes, Professor Haas employs the Law of the Sea Treaty to “test” his procedure. He describes in considerable detail the elements of thinking (some reminiscent of those found in our previous example) involved in six “mind-sets” that he says can be identified with the Law of the Sea issue: “eco-evolutionism,” “eco-reformism,” “egalitarianism,” “liberalism,” “mercantilism,” and “mainstream.”

* “Words can hurt you; or, who said what to whom about regimes,” by Ernst B. Haas, in *International Regimes*, ed. Stephen D. Krasner (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 23-59. This essay was first presented as a paper to the American Political Science Association meeting in Washington, D.C., August 30, 1980. It was subsequently published in the scholarly journal *International Organization* (Spring 1982) and then reprinted in the volume first cited. Funding for *International Regimes* came from the Ford Foundation and the Center for International and Strategic Affairs.

It would be pointless to review each position in detail. For the purposes of this discussion it is enough to outline what he says are the principal differences separating them. In brief, his “mind-sets” embrace either one of two basic “metaphors”: (1) an “organic metaphor” whose devotees “show great concern for the future of mankind, but . . . make short shrift of the political arrangements necessary for assuring this future,” or (2) a “mechanical metaphor” whose followers “are sophisticated about politics and economics but . . . fail to show much interest in the substantive problematic to which politics and economics might be applied.”

Out of these two metaphorical constructs Haas attempts to fashion an “evolutionary synthesis.” If properly understood, however, this “synthesis” is but a compound fantasy. Instead of requiring that all human beings subscribe to the same fantasy as a prerequisite to the “better world” — as was implied in the rationale for a “human world order” — Haas ostensibly gives legitimacy to virtually any fantasy that might be thought of. He cheerfully asserts, for example: “I have no single value to maximize and no specific order to promote. . . . An evolutionary perspective leads to a range of conceivable future orders, not to a single utopia.” In short, he seems to be willing to entertain almost any caprice, however distant from the actual world it may be.

But this is not exactly the case. For when he describes the conditions under which the proposed “synthesis” of his “mind-sets” might occur, it becomes clear that his construct would demand acceptance of the same self-actional views that characterize other visions of the better world. As he states, his “evolutionary synthesis” could proceed only if the actors “alter their perceptions in line with new knowledge, including the kind of knowledge found in the organic mind-sets.” In short, his “synthesis” is no synthesis at all. His “evolution” presumes that everyone must adopt a like fantasy after all — and he admits that “such melding of views remains unlikely.”

FLAWED PROCEDURES OF INQUIRY

Despite its obfuscatory language, Haas’s essay reflects thinking that is less dogmatic than that in much of the literature of world planning. Insofar as it acknowledges the actual obstacles to enabling any single “regime,” it may be a sign that some social “scientists” in positions of influence are beginning to perceive the futility of central planning. This is all to the good.

Still, the procedures of inquiry it employs remain flawed. Most obvious, Haas uncritically treats opposing “mind-sets” as distinct, static, and equal entities — things-in-themselves — that are self-actional and interactional. That is, he tends to give the same weight to the most hare-brained scheme as to the most reasonable belief, and he tends to assume that they “interact” with each other as independent actors. His “evolutionary perspective” and “organic” bias (acknowledged explicitly in the essay) reflect continued reliance on the self-actional assumptions that characterize what Dewey called the “quest for certainty.”

Professor Haas’s summary of the elements of thought involved in the “organic metaphor” suggests a number of the metaphysical assumptions upon which the metaphor depends:

The hope held out by adepts of the *organic* metaphor is based on their conviction that the processes embedded in their system are essentially harmonious. The system is open, moving, dynamic. It incorporates growth and development. The tendency toward entropy can be overcome, and the concept of homeostasis incorporates this idea. In the short run, to

be sure, negative feedback processes foster temporary equilibria. But the fact that the system is programmed for movement implies that in the longer run various states of disequilibrium are to be expected. Because the system is open and dynamic, the exact number and value of the input variables cannot be known and the next equilibrium state of the system remains indeterminate. What should mankind do in such a setting? Disequilibrium, at any given point, means that we have not understood the structure of the system; we permitted the wrong processes to take over. But homeorhetic principles stipulate openness to learn: we are biologically equipped to evolve into better problem-solvers. Adaptation means learning to do better in a dynamic system, which is itself programmed — and we with it — to organize itself toward its own perfection.

In the first place, the above discussion relies heavily on the notion of “system.” Inasmuch as Haas also writes that “The world is conceptualized as a huge system of biological and physical interdependencies among life forms,” the organic metaphor would seem to embrace a use of the name system that falls within the rubric of general systems theory. Although he does not elaborate further as to the character of the “interdependencies” involved, his use of system is open to the same criticism that has often been made of other general systems work. Namely, system tends to be used too inclusively to be scientifically useful.

Theories that rely on the premise of some “huge system” tend also to rely on naive, metaphysical, and sometimes ridiculous analogies. Consider, as an extreme example, one systems theorist’s discovery of analogies between the behavior of slime mold and the way humans behave under the stress of enemy attack. Haas’s discussion includes a reference to “the analogy between Zen and nuclear physics” in relation to his inquiry into the “ultimate inspiration for the eco-environmental approach,” which is embraced by the organic metaphor.

In addition to the procedural deficiencies associated with general systems theories, Haas’s description of the organic metaphor shows that it relies also on unsupported assertions and self-contradictory propositions. For example, it is based on a “conviction” that its processes are essentially harmonious. In other words, proponents of the organic metaphor simply *believe* that its processes (which are not described) are essentially harmonious (also not described) —

no matter what the actuality may be. Moreover, the “concept of homeorthesis,” which Haas elsewhere says “refers to the continuation of a process that changes a system despite temporary setbacks and interruptions” suggests both contradiction and bias. Temporary setbacks and interruptions *are* changes. Thus, he might have stated that homeorthesis refers to a “continuation of a process that changes despite *changes*.” Clearly, his use of the preposition “despite” indicates bias toward some particular change.

The self-actional aspect of this line of thinking is perhaps most clearly contained in the assumption that the system supposed by the organic metaphor “is itself programmed . . . to organize itself toward its own perfection.”

In spite of this cheerful scenario, eco-environmental, eco-reformist, and egalitarian adherents of the organic view seem inclined not to leave the system alone to propel itself toward perfection. Rather, as Haas observes, they tend to believe that humans have “permitted the wrong processes to take over.” Thus, “They offer diagnoses of the crisis of mankind and suggestions of the appropriate therapy.” It would seem that either Haas has inaccurately described the assumptions upon which the organic metaphor depends — or else its adherents are bent on correcting the course of that which is supposed already to be on a course toward some unknown perfect state.

LOSING THE FAITH?

The contradictions inherent in this muddled fantasy do seem to trouble Haas. At a number of junctures, he acknowledges difficulties associated with metaphysical systems. Indeed, he states that he is “comfortable with cognitive evolutionism [the variant of the organic view to which he subscribes] because it makes fewer claims about basic directions, purposes, laws, and trends than do other lines of thought.”

As yet, however, he simply has not been able to resist entirely the lure of the absolute. As he describes his approach, it is “agnostic about the finality of social laws and about the links between scientific discovery and social behavior.” This skepticism is healthy. But until social scientists such as Professor Haas are willing to abandon completely modes of inquiry that depend upon some absolutes (ontological or epistemological) on which to base a better socioeconomic order, their results will continue to be just as “fantastic” as were those of believers in the better worlds of earlier ages.

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