Introduction: The Great Promise, Its Failure, and New Alternatives

The End of an Illusion

The Great Promise of Unlimited Progress—the promise of domination of nature, of material abundance, of the greatest happiness for the greatest number, and of unimpeded personal freedom—has sustained the hopes and faith of the generations since the beginning of the industrial age. To be sure, our civilization began when the human race started taking active control of nature; but that control remained limited until the advent of the industrial age. With industrial progress, from the substitution of mechanical and then nuclear energy for animal and human energy to the substitution of the computer for the human mind, we could feel that we were on our way to unlimited production and, hence, unlimited consumption; that technique made us omnipotent; that science made us omniscient. We were on our way to becoming gods, supreme beings who could create a second world, using the natural world only as building blocks for our new creation.

Men and, increasingly, women experienced a new sense of freedom; they became masters of their own lives: feudal chains had been broken and one could do what one wished, free of all shackles. Or so people felt. And even though this was true only for the upper and middle classes, their

achievement could lead others to the faith that eventually the new freedom could be extended to all members of society, provided industrialization kept up its pace. Socialism and communism quickly changed from a movement whose aim was a *new* society and a *new* man into one whose ideal was a bourgeois life for all, the *universalized bourgeois* as the men and women of the future. The achievement of wealth and comfort for all was supposed to result in unrestricted happiness for all. The trinity of unlimited production, absolute freedom, and unrestricted happiness formed the nucleus of a new religion, Progress, and a new Earthly City of Progress was to replace the City of God. It is not at all astonishing that this new religion provided its believers with energy, vitality, and hope.

The grandeur of the Great Promise, the marvelous material and intellectual achievements of the industrial age, must be visualized in order to understand the trauma that realization of its failure is producing today. For the industrial age has indeed failed to fulfill its Great Promise, and ever growing numbers of people are becoming aware that:

- Unrestricted satisfaction of all desires is not conducive to *well-being,* nor is it the way to happiness or even to maximum pleasure.
- The dream of being independent masters of our lives ended when we began awakening to the fact that we have all become cogs in the bureaucratic machine, with our thoughts, feelings, and tastes manipulated by government and industry and the mass communications that they control.
- Economic progress has remained restricted to the rich nations, and the gap between rich and poor nations has ever widened.
- Technical progress itself has created ecological dangers and the dangers of nuclear war, either or both of which may put an end to all civilization and possibly to all life.

When he came to Oslo to accept the Nobel Prize for Peace

(1952), Albert Schweitzer challenged the world "to dare to face the situation. . . . Man has become a superman. . . . But the superman with the superhuman power has not risen to the level of superhuman reason. To the degree to which his power grows he becomes more and more a poor man. . . . It must shake up our conscience that we become all the more inhuman the more we grow into supermen."

Why Did the Great Promise Fail?

The failure of the Great Promise, aside from industrialism's essential economic contradictions, was built into the industrial system by its two main psychological premises: (1) that the aim of life is happiness, that is, maximum pleasure, defined as the satisfaction of any desire or subjective need a person may feel *(radical hedonism);* (2) that egotism, selfishness, and greed, as the system needs to generate them in order to function, lead to harmony and peace.

It is well known that the rich throughout history practiced radical hedonism. Those of unlimited means, such as the elite of Rome, of Italian cities of the Renaissance, and of England and France in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, tried to find a meaning to life in unlimited pleasure. But while maximum pleasure in the sense of radical hedonism was the practice of certain groups at certain times, with but a single exception prior to the seventeenth century, it was never the *theory* of well-being expressed by the great Masters of Living in China, India, the Near East, and Europe.

The one exception is the Greek philosopher Aristippus, a pupil of Socrates (first half of the fourth century B.C.), who taught that to experience an optimum of bodily pleasure is the goal of life and that happiness is the sum total of pleasures enjoyed. The little we know of his philosophy we owe to Diogenes Laertius, but it is enough to reveal Aristippus as the only real hedonist, for whom the existence of a desire is the

basis for the right to satisfy it and thus to realize the goal of life: Pleasure.

Epicurus can hardly be regarded as representative of Aristippus' kind of hedonism. While for Epicurus "pure" pleasure is the highest goal, for him this pleasure meant "absence of pain" *(aponia)* and stillness of the soul *(ataraxia).* According to Epicurus, pleasure as satisfaction of a desire cannot be the aim of life, because such pleasure is necessarily followed by unpleasure and thus keeps humanity away from its real goal of absence of pain. (Epicurus' theory resembles Freud's in many ways.) Nevertheless, it seems that Epicurus represented a certain kind of subjectivism contrary to Aristotle's position, as far as the contradictory reports on Epicurus' statement permit a definite interpretation.

None of the other great Masters taught that the *factual existence of a desire constituted an ethical norm.* They were concerned with humankind's optimal well-being *(vivere bene).* The essential element in their thinking is the distinction between those needs (desires) that are only subjectively felt and whose satisfaction leads to momentary pleasure, and those needs that are rooted in human nature and whose realization is conducive to human growth and produces *eudaimonia,* i.e., "well-being." In other words, they were concerned with *the distinction between purely subjectively felt needs and objectively valid needs*—part of the former being harmful to human growth and the latter being in accordance with the requirements of human nature.

The theory that the aim of life is the fulfillment of every human desire was clearly voiced, for the first time since Aristippus, by philosophers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was a concept that would easily arise when "profit" ceased to mean "profit for the soul" (as it does in the Bible and, even later, in Spinoza), but came to mean material, monetary profit, in the period when the middle class threw away not only its political shackles but also all bonds of love and solidarity and believed that being *only* for oneself meant

being more rather than less oneself. For Hobbes happiness is the continuous progress from one greed *(cupiditas)* to another; La Mettrie even recommends drugs as giving at least the illusion of happiness; for de Sade the satisfaction of cruel impulses is legitimate, precisely because they exist and crave satisfaction. These were thinkers who lived in the age of the bourgeois class's final victory. What had been the unphilosophical practices of aristocrats became the practice and theory of the bourgeoisie.

Many ethical theories have been developed since the eighteenth century—some were more respectable forms of hedonism, such as Utilitarianism; others were strictly antihedonistic systems, such as those of Kant, Marx, Thoreau, and Schweitzer. Yet the present era, by and large since the end of the First World War, has returned to the practice and theory of radical hedonism. The concept of unlimited pleasure forms a strange contradiction to the ideal of disciplined work, similar to the contradiction between the acceptance of an obsessional work ethic and the ideal of complete laziness during the rest of the day and during vacations. The endless assembly line belt and the bureaucratic routine on the one hand, and television, the automobile, and sex on the other, make the contradictory combination possible. Obsessional work alone would drive people just as crazy as would complete laziness. With the combination, they can live. Besides, both contradictory attitudes correspond to an economic necessity: twentieth-century capitalism is based on maximal consumption of the goods and services produced as well as on routinized teamwork.

Theoretical considerations demonstrate that radical hedonism cannot lead to happiness as well as why it cannot do so, given human nature. But even without theoretical analysis the observable data show most clearly that our kind of "pursuit of happiness" does not produce well-being. We are a society of notoriously unhappy people: lonely, anxious, depressed, destructive, dependent—people who are glad when we have

killed the time we are trying so hard to save.

Ours is the greatest social experiment ever made to solve the question whether pleasure (as a passive affect in contrast to the active affect, well-being and joy) can be a satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence. For the first time in history the satisfaction of the pleasure drive is not only the privilege of a minority but is possible for more than half the population. In the industrialized countries the experiment has already answered the question in the negative.

The second psychological premise of the industrial age, that the pursuit of individual egoism leads to harmony and peace, growth in everyone's welfare, is equally erroneous on theoretical grounds, and again its fallacy is proven by the observable data. Why should this principle, which only one of the great classical economists, David Ricardo, rejected, be true? To be an egoist refers not only to my behavior but to my character. It means: that I want everything for myself; that possessing, not sharing, gives me pleasure; that I must become greedy because if my aim is having, I *am* more the more I *have;* that I must feel antagonistic toward all others: my customers whom I want to deceive, my competitors whom I want to destroy, my workers whom I want to exploit. I can never be satisfied, because there is no end to my wishes; I must be envious of those who have more and afraid of those who have less. But I have to repress all these feelings in order to represent myself (to others as well as to myself) as the smiling, rational, sincere, kind human being everybody pretends to be.

The passion for having must lead to never-ending class war. The pretense of the communists that their system will end class struggle by abolishing classes is fiction, for their system is based on the principle of unlimited consumption as the goal of living. As long as everybody wants to have more, there must be formations of classes, there must be class war, and in global terms, there must be international war. *Greed and peace preclude each other.*

Radical hedonism and unlimited egotism could not have

emerged as guiding principles of economic behavior had not a drastic change occurred in the eighteenth century. In medieval society, as in many other highly developed as well as primitive societies, economic behavior was determined by ethical principles. Thus, for the scholastic theologians, such economic categories as price and private property were part of moral theology. Granted that the theologians found formulations to adapt their moral code to the new economic demands (for instance Thomas Aquinas' qualification to the concept of "just price"); nevertheless, economic behavior remained *human* behavior and, hence, was subject to the values of humanistic ethics. Through a number of steps eighteenth-century capitalism underwent a radical change: economic behavior became separate from ethics and human values. Indeed, the economic machine was supposed to be an autonomous entity, independent of human needs and human will. It was a system that ran by itself and according to its own laws. The suffering of the workers as well as the destruction of an ever-increasing number of smaller enterprises for the sake of the growth of ever larger corporations was an economic necessity that one might regret, but that one had to accept as if it were the outcome of a natural law.

The development of this economic system was no longer determined by the question: *What is good for Man?* but by the question: *What is good for the growth of the system?* One tried to hide the sharpness of this conflict by making the assumption that what was good for the growth of the system (or even for a single big corporation) was also good for the people. This construction was bolstered by an auxiliary construction: that the very qualities that the system required of human beings —egotism, selfishness, and greed—were innate in human nature; hence, not only the system but human nature itself fostered them. Societies in which egotism, selfishness, and greed did not exist were supposed to be "primitive," their inhabitants "childlike." People refused to recognize that these traits were not natural drives that caused industrial society to exist,

but that they were the *products* of social circumstances.

Not least in importance is another factor: people's relation to nature became deeply hostile. Being "freaks of nature" who by the very conditions of our existence are within nature and by the gift of our reason transcend it, we have tried to solve our existential problem by giving up the Messianic vision of harmony between humankind and nature by conquering nature, by transforming it to our own purposes until the conquest has become more and more equivalent to destruction. Our spirit of conquest and hostility has blinded us to the facts that natural resources have their limits and can eventually be exhausted, and that nature will fight back against human rapaciousness.

Industrial society has contempt for nature—as well as for all things not machine-made and for all people who are not machine makers (the nonwhite races, with the recent exceptions of Japan and China). People are attracted today to the mechanical, the powerful machine, the lifeless, and ever increasingly to destruction.

The Economic Necessity for Human Change

Thus far the argument here has been that the character traits engendered by our socioeconomic system, i.e., by our way of living, are pathogenic and eventually produce a sick person and, thus, a sick society. There is, however, a second argument from an entirely different viewpoint in favor of profound psychological changes in Man as an alternative to economic and ecological catastrophe. It is raised in two reports commissioned by the Club of Rome, one by D. H. Meadows et al., the other by M. D. Mesarovic and E. Pestel. Both reports deal with the technological, economic, and population trends on a world scale. Mesarovic and Pestel conclude that only drastic economic and technological changes on a global level, according to a master plan, can "avoid major and ultimately global catastrophe," and the data they array as

proof of their thesis are based on the most global and systematic research that has been made so far. (Their book has certain methodological advantages over Meadows's report, but that earlier study considers even more drastic economic changes as an alternative to catastrophe.) Mesarovic and Pestel conclude, furthermore, that such economic changes are possible only *"if fundamental changes in the values and attitudes of man occur* [or as I would call it, in human character orientation], *such as a new ethic and a new attitude toward nature"* (emphasis added). What they are saying confirms only what others have said before and since their report was published, that a new society is possible *only if,* in the process of developing it, a new human being also develops, or in more modest terms, if a fundamental change occurs in contemporary Man's character structure.

Unfortunately, the two reports are written in the spirit of quantification, abstraction, and depersonalization so characteristic of our time, and besides that, they neglect completely all political and social factors, without which no realistic plan can possibly be made. Yet they present valuable data, and for the first time deal with the economic situation of the human race as a whole, its possibilities and its dangers. Their conclusion, that a new ethic and a new attitude toward nature are necessary, is all the more valuable because this demand is so contrary to their philosophical premises.

At the other end of the gamut stands E. F. Schumacher, who is also an economist, but at the same time a radical humanist. His demand for a radical human change is based on two arguments: that our present social order makes us sick, and that we are headed for an economic catastrophe unless we radically change our social system.

The need for profound human change emerges not only as an ethical or religious demand, not only as a psychological demand arising from the pathogenic nature of our present social character, but also as a condition for the sheer survival of the human race. Right living is no longer only the fulfill-

ment of an ethical or religious demand. For the first time in history the *physical survival of the human race depends on a radical change of the human heart.* However, a change of the human heart is possible only to the extent that drastic economic and social changes occur that give the human heart the chance for change and the courage and the vision to achieve it.

Is There an Alternative to Catastrophe?

All the data mentioned so far are published and well known. The almost unbelievable fact is that no serious effort is made to avert what looks like a final decree of fate. While in our private life nobody except a mad person would remain passive in view of a threat to his total existence, those who are in charge of public affairs do practically nothing, and those who have entrusted their fate to them let them continue to do nothing.

How is it possible that the strongest of all instincts, that for survival, seems to have ceased to motivate us? One of the most obvious explanations is that the leaders undertake many actions that make it possible for them to pretend they are doing something effective to avoid a catastrophe: endless conferences, resolutions, disarmament talks, all give the impression that the problems are recognized and something is being done to resolve them. Yet nothing of real importance happens; but both the leaders and the led anesthetize their consciences and their wish for survival by giving the appearance of knowing the road and marching in the right direction.

Another explanation is that the selfishness the system generates makes leaders value personal success more highly than social responsibility. It is no longer shocking when political leaders and business executives make decisions that seem to be to their personal advantage, but at the same time are harmful and dangerous to the community. Indeed, if selfishness is one of the pillars of contemporary practical ethics, why should they act otherwise? They do not seem to know that

greed (like submission) makes people stupid as far as the pursuit of even their own real interests is concerned, such as their interest in their own lives and in the lives of their spouses and their children (cf. J. Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child*). At the same time, the general public is also so selfishly concerned with their private affairs that they pay little attention to all that transcends the personal realm.

Yet another explanation for the deadening of our survival instinct is that the changes in living that would be required are so drastic that people prefer the future catastrophe to the sacrifice they would have to make now. Arthur Koestler's description of an experience he had during the Spanish Civil War is a telling example of this widespread attitude: Koestler sat in the comfortable villa of a friend while the advance of Franco's troops was reported; there was no doubt that they would arrive during the night, and very likely he would be shot; he could save his life by fleeing, but the night was cold and rainy, the house, warm and cozy; so he stayed, was taken prisoner, and only by almost a miracle was his life saved many weeks later by the efforts of friendly journalists. This is also the kind of behavior that occurs in people who will risk dying rather than undergo an examination that could lead to the diagnosis of a grave illness requiring major surgery.

Aside from these explanations for fatal human passivity in matters of life and death, there is another, which is one of my reasons for writing this book. I refer to the view that we have no alternatives to the models of corporate capitalism, social democratic or Soviet socialism, or technocratic "fascism with a smiling face." The popularity of this view is largely due to the fact that little effort has been made to study the feasibility of entirely new social models and to experiment with them. Indeed, as long as the problems of social reconstruction will not, even if only partly, take the place of the preoccupation of our best minds with science and technique, the imagination will be lacking to visualize new and realistic alternatives.

The main thrust of this book is the analysis of the two basic

modes of existence: the *mode of having* and the *mode of being.* In the opening chapter I present some "first glance" observations concerning the difference between the two modes. The second chapter demonstrates the difference, using a number of examples from daily experience that readers can easily relate to in their own personal experience. Chapter III presents the views on having and being in the Old and the New Testaments and in the writings of Master Eckhart. Subsequent chapters deal with the most difficult issue: the analysis of the difference between the having and the being modes of existence in which I attempt to build theoretical conclusions on the basis of the empirical data. While up to this point the book is mainly concerned with the individual aspects of the two basic modes of existence, the final chapters deal with the relevance of these modes in the formation of a New Man and a New Society and address themselves to the possibilities of alternatives to debilitating individual ill-being, and to catastrophic socioeconomic development of the whole world.