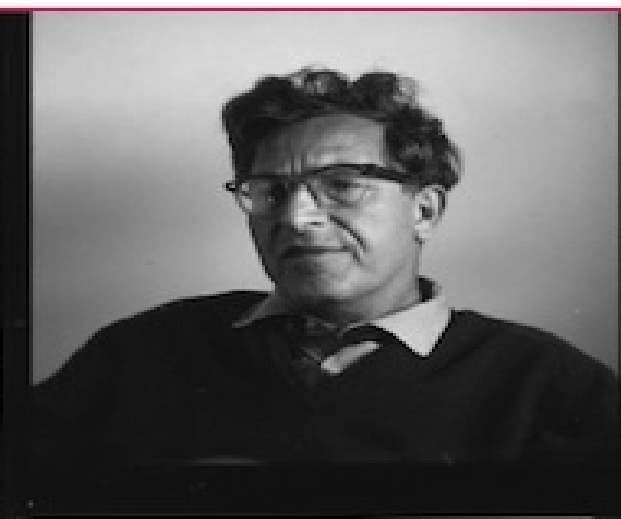




**GROWING UP  
ABSURD**  
**PAUL GOODMAN**

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WITH AN ESSAY BY  
**SUSAN SONTAG**



# **GROWING UP ABSURD**

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PROBLEMS OF YOUTH IN THE ORGANIZED SOCIETY

**PAUL GOODMAN**

*With an essay by*

**SUSAN SONTAG**

NEW YORK REVIEW BOOKS



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For

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# Preface

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1.

In every day's newspaper there are stories about the two subjects that I have brought together in this book, the disgrace of the Organized System of semimonopolies, government, advertisers, etc., and the disaffection of the growing generation. Both are newsworthily scandalous, and for several years now both kinds of stories have come thicker and faster. It is strange that the obvious connections between them are not played up in the newspapers; nor, in the rush of books on the follies, venality, and stifling conformity of the Organization, has there been a book on Youth Problems in the Organized System.

Those of the disaffected youth who are articulate, however—for instance, the Beat or Angry young men—are quite clear about the connection: their main topic is the “system” with which they refuse to co-operate. They will explain that the “good” jobs are frauds and sells, that it is intolerable to have one's style of life dictated by Personnel, that a man is a fool to work to pay installments on a useless refrigerator for his wife, that the movies, TV, and Book-of-the-Month Club are beneath contempt, but that the Luce publications make you sick to the stomach; and they will describe with accuracy the cynicism and one-upping of the “typical” junior executive. They consider it the part of reason and honor to wash their hands of all of it.

Naturally, grown-up citizens are concerned about the beatniks and delinquents. The school system has been subjected to criticism. And there is a lot of official talk about the need to conserve our human resources lest Russia get ahead of us. The question is why the grownups do not, more soberly, draw the same connections as the youth. Or, since no doubt many people *are* quite clear about the connection that the structure of society that has become increasingly dominant in our country is disastrous to the growth of excellence and manliness, why don't more people speak up and say so, and initiate a change? The question is an important one and the answer is, I think, a terrible one: the people are so bemused by the way business and politics are carried on at present, with all the intricate relationships, that they have ceased to be able to imagine alternatives. We seem to have lost our genius for inventing changes to satisfy crying needs.

But this stupor is inevitably the baleful influence of the very kind of organizational network that we have: the system pre-empts the available means and capital; it buys up as much of the intelligence as it can and muffles the voices of dissent; and then it irrefutably proclaims that itself is the only possibility of society, for nothing else is thinkable. Let me give a couple of examples of how this works. Suppose (as is the case) that a group of radio and TV broadcasters, competing in the Pickwickian fashion of semimonopolies, control all the stations and channels in an area, amassing the capital and variously bribing Communications Commissioners in order to get them; and that the broadcasters tailor their programs to meet the requirements of their advertisers, of the censorship, of their own slick and clique tastes, and of a broad common denominator of the audience, none of whom may be offended: they will then claim not only that the public wants the drivel that they give them, but indeed that nothing else is being created. Of course it is not! not for *these* media; why should a serious artist bother? Or suppose again (as is not quite the case) that in a group of universities only certain faculties are chosen that are “safe” to the businessmen trustees or the politically appointed regents, and these faculties give out all the degrees and licenses and union cards to the new generation of students, and only such universities can get Foundation or government money for research, and

research is incestuously staffed by the same sponsors and according to the same policy, and they allow no one but those they choose, to have access to either the classroom or expensive apparatus: it will then be claimed that there is no other learning or professional competence; that an inspired teacher is not “solid”; that the official projects are the direction of science; that progressive education is a failure; and finally, indeed—as in Dr. James Conant’s report on the high schools—that only 15 per cent of the youth are “academically talented” enough to be taught hard subjects. This pre-empting the means and the brains by the organization, and the shutting out of those who do not conform, can go so far as to cause delusions, as when recently the president of Merck and Company had the effrontery to warn the Congress that its investigation of profiteering in drugs might hinder the quest of scientific knowledge! as if the spirit of Vesalius and Pasteur depended on the financial arrangements of Merck and Company.

But it is in these circumstances that people put up with a system because “there are no alternatives.” And when one cannot think of anything to do, soon one ceases to think at all.

To my mind the worst feature of our present organized system of doing things is its indirectness, its blurring of the object. The idea of directly addressing crying objective public needs, like shelter, education, and using our immense and indeed *surplus* resources to satisfy them, is anathema. For in the great interlocking system of corporations people live not by attending to the job, but by status, role playing, and tenure, and they work to maximize profits, prestige, or votes regardless of utility or even public disutility—e.g., the plethora of cars has now become a public disutility, but automobile companies continue to manufacture them and persuade people to buy them. The indispensable premise of city planning, according to a vice president of Webb and Knapp, is to make a “modest long-term profit on the promoter’s investment.” (His exact sentence, to a meeting of young planners, was, “What we’re going to have built will be built only if some developer is going to make a profit from it.”) Obviously he is not directly interested in housing people or in city convenience and beauty; he is directly interested in being a good vice president of Webb and Knapp. That is his privilege, but it is not a useful goal, and an idealistic young fellow would not want to be such a man. Another example: Some earnest liberal Congressmen are baffled “how to give Federal aid to education and not interfere in the curriculum and teaching.” But when the teaching *function* is respected and assayed by the teacher’s peers-in-skill, no one *can* interfere, no one would dare (just as Harvard tossed out McCarthy). The sole function of administration is to smooth the way, but in this country we have the topsy-turvy situation that a teacher must devote himself to satisfying the administrator and financier rather than to doing his job, and a universally admired teacher is fired for disobeying an administrative order that would hinder teaching. (See Appendix A.) Let me give another example because I want to make this point very clear: These same Congressmen are concerned “how to discourage low-level programming in private TV stations without censorship.” Their question presupposes that in communication the prior thing is the existence of networks and channels, rather than something to communicate that needs diffusing. But the prior thing *is* the program, and the only grounds for the license to the station is its ability to transmit it. Nothing could be more stupid than for the communications commission to give to people who handle the means of broadcasting the task of inventing of what to broadcast, and then, disturbed at the poor quality, to worry about censorship.

We live increasingly, then, in a system in which little direct attention is paid to the object, the function, the program, the task, the need; but immense attention to the role, procedure, prestige, and profit. We don’t get the shelter and education because not enough mind is paid to *those* things. Naturally the system is inefficient; the overhead is high; the task is rarely done with love, style, and excitement, for such beauties emerge only from absorption in real objects; sometimes the task is not

done at all; and those who could do it best become either cynical or resigned.

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2.

In the light of this criticism, the recent scandalous exposures of the advertisers, the government, and the corporations are heartening rather than dismaying. (I am writing in the winter of 1959-60 and will have been hearing about TV, the FCC, Title I, and the Drug Industry; by the time this is published there will be a new series.) The conditions exposed are not new, but now the public skepticism and disgust are mounting; to my ear there is even a new ring; and the investigations are being pushed further, even further than intended by the investigators. The effect of this must be to destroy for many people the image of inviolability and indispensability of the kind of system I have been discussing, to show its phony workings and inevitable dangers. It is the collapse of "public relations."

When the existing state of things is suddenly measured by people against far higher standards than they have been used to, it is no longer the case that there are no alternatives. People are forced by their better judgment to ask very basic questions: Is it possible, *how* is it possible, to have more meaning and honor in work? to put wealth to some real use? to have a high standard of living of whose quality we are not ashamed? to get social justice for those who have been shamefully left out? to have a useful leisure that is not a dismaying waste of a hundred million adults? The large group of independent people who have been out of the swim, with their old-fashioned virtues, suddenly have something admirable about them; one is surprised that they still exist, and their existence is relevant. And from the members of the Organized System itself come acute books criticizing the shortcomings of the Organized System.

It is my belief that we are going to have a change. And once the Americans can recover from their mesmerized condition and its astounding political apathy, our country will be in a most fortunate situation. For the kinds of radical changes we need are those that are appropriate to a fairly general prosperity. They are practicable. They can be summed up as simply restoring, in J. K. Galbraith's phrase, the "social balance" that we have allowed to become lopsided and runaway in the present abuse of the country's wealth. For instance, since we have a vast surplus productivity, we can turn to finding jobs that will bring out a youth's capacity, and so really conserve human resources. We can find ways to restore to the worker a say in his production, and so really do something for man's independence. Since we have a problem of what to do with leisure, we can begin to think of necessary community enterprises that want doing, and that people can enthusiastically and spontaneously throw themselves into, and be proud of the results (e.g., beautifying our hideous small towns). And perhaps thereby create us a culture again. Since we have the technology, the capital, and the labor, why should we not have livable cities? Should it be hard to bring back into society the 30 per cent who are *still* fed and ill housed, and more outcast than ever? What is necessary is directly addressing definite objective needs and using available resources to satisfy them; doing things that are worth while just because they are worth while, since we can. Politically, what we need is government in which a man offers himself as a candidate because he has a new program that he wants to effectuate, and we choose him because we want that good, and judge that he is the best man to effectuate it. Is that outlandish?

3.

The present widespread concern about education is only superficially a part of the Cold War, the need to match the Russian scientists. For in the discussions, pretty soon it becomes clear that people are uneasy about, ashamed of, the world that they have given the children to grow up in. That world is not

manly enough, it is not earnest enough; a grownup may be cynical (or resigned) about his own convenient adjustments, but he is by no means willing to see his children robbed of a worth-while society. With regard to the next generation, everybody always has a higher standard than the one he used to. The standard is ceasing to be one of money and status and is becoming a standard of the worth of life. But worth, like happiness, comes from bona-fide activity and achievement.

My stratagem in this book is a simple one. I assume that the young *really* need a more worth-while world in order to grow up at all, and I confront this real need with the world that they have been getting. This is the source of their problems. *Our* problem is to remedy the disproportion. We can. Our inheritance, our immense productivity, has been pre-empted and parceled out in a kind of domain system; but this grandiose and seemingly impregnable feudalism is vulnerable to an earnest attack. One has the persistent thought that if ten thousand people in all walks of life will stand up on their two feet and talk out and insist, we shall get back our country.



# Introduction

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## *“Human Nature” and the Organized System*

1.

Growing up as a human being, a “human nature” assimilates a culture, just as other animals grow up in strength and habits in the environments that are for them, and that complete their natures. Present-day sociologists and anthropologists don’t talk much about this process, and not in this way. Among the most competent writers, there is not much mention of “human nature.” Their diffidence makes no scientific sense, for everything we observe, and even more important, our way of observing it, is already culture and a pattern of culture. What is the sense of mentioning “human nature” if we can never observe it? The old-fashioned naïve thought, that primitive races or children are more natural, is now discounted. And the classical anthropological question, What is Man?—“how like an angel, the quintessence of dust!”—is not now asked by anthropologists. Instead, they commence with a chapter on Physical Anthropology and then forget the whole topic and go on to Culture.

On this view, growing up is sometimes treated as if it were acculturation, the process of giving up one culture for another, the way a tribe of Indians takes on the culture of the whites: so the white babies give up their “individualistic” mores and ideology, e.g., selfishness or magic thinking and omnipotence, and join the tribe of Society; they are “socialized.” More frequently, however, the matter is left vague: we start with a *tabula rasa* and end up with “socialized” and cultured (“Becoming cultured” and “being adjusted to the social group” are taken almost as synonymous). Either way, it follows that you can teach people anything; you can adapt them to anything if you use the right techniques of “socializing” or “communicating.” The essence of “human nature” is to be pretty indefinitely malleable. “Man,” as C. Wright Mills suggests, is what suits a particular type of society in a particular historical stage.

This fateful idea, invented from time to time by philosophers, seems finally to be empirically evident in the most recent decades. For instance, in our highly organized system of machine production and its corresponding social relations, the practice is, by “vocational guidance,” to fit people wherever they are needed in the productive system; and whenever the products of the system need to be used up, the practice is, by advertising, to get people to consume them. This works. There is a man for every job and not many are left over, and the shelves are almost always cleared. Again, in the highly organized political industrial systems of Germany, Russia, and now China, it has been possible in a short time to condition great masses to perform as desired. Social scientists observe that these are the facts, and they also devise theories and techniques to produce more facts like them, for the social scientists too are part of the highly organized systems.

2.

Astonishingly different, however, is the opinion of experts who deal with human facts in a more raw and less highly processed, state. Those who have to cope with people in small groups rather than statistically, attending to *them* rather than to some systematic goal—parents and teachers, physicians and psychotherapists, policemen and wardens of jails, shop foremen and grievance committees—the

experts are likely to hold stubbornly that there is a “human nature.” You can’t teach people some things or change them in some ways, and if you persist, you’re in for trouble. Contrariwise, if you *don’t* provide them with certain things, they’ll fill the gaps with eccentric substitutes.

This is immediately evident when something goes wrong; for instance, when a child can’t learn to read because he has not yet developed the muscular accommodation of his eyes; if you persist, he withdraws or becomes tricky. Such a case is clear-cut (it is “physical”). But the more important cases have the following form: the child *does* take on the cultural habit, e.g., early toilet training, and indeed the whole corresponding pattern of culture, but there is a diminishing of force, grace, discrimination, intellect, feeling, in specific behaviors or even in his total behavior. He may become too obedient and lacking in initiative, or impractically careful and squeamish; he may develop “psychosomatic” ailments like constipation. Let me give an instance even earlier in life: an infant nurtured in an institution without a particular nurse attending him during the first six months, does not seem to develop abnormally; but if during the end of the first year and for some time thereafter he is not given personal care, he will later be in some ways emotionally cold and unreachable—either some function has failed to develop, or he has already blocked it out as too frustrated and painful. In such examples the loss of force, grace, and feeling seems to be evidence that somehow the acquired cultural habits do not draw on unimpeded outgoing energy, they are against the grain, they do not fit the child’s needs and appetites; *therefore* they have been ill adapted and not assimilated.

That is, on this view we do not need to be able to say what “human nature” *is* in order to be able to say that some training is “against human nature” and you persist in it at peril. Teachers and psychologists who deal practically with growing up and the blocks to growing up may never mention the word “human nature” (indeed, they are better off without too many a priori ideas), but they cling stubbornly to the presumption that at every stage there is a developing potentiality *not* yet cultured and yet not blank, and that makes possible the taking on of culture. We must draw “it” out, offer “it” opportunities, not violate “it” except for unavoidable reasons. What “it” is, is not definite. It is what when appealed to in the right circumstances, gives behavior that has force, grace, discrimination, intellect, feeling. This vagueness is of course quite sufficient for education, for education is an art. A good teacher feels his way, looking for response.

3.

The concept of “human nature” has had a varied political history in modern times. If we trace it, we can see the present disagreement developing.

In the eighteenth century, the Age of Reason and the early Romantic Movement, the emphasis was on “*human nature*,” referring to man’s naturally sympathetic sentiments, his communicative faculties, and unalienable dignity. (Immanuel Kant immortally thought up a philosophy to make these coherent.) Now this human nature was powerfully enlisted in revolutionary struggles against courts and classes, poverty and humiliation, and it began to invent progressive education. Human nature unmistakably demanded liberty, equality, and fraternity—and every man a philosopher and poet.

As an heir of the French Revolution, Karl Marx kept much of this concept. Sympathy recurred to solidarity. Dignity and intellect were perhaps still in the future. But he found an important new essential: man is a maker, he must use his productive nature or be miserable. This too involved a revolutionary program, to give back to man his tools.

During the course of the nineteenth century, however, “human nature” came to be associated with conservative and even reactionary politics. The later Romantics were historical minded and found man

naturally traditional and not to be uprooted. A few decades later, narrow interpretations of Darwin were being used to support capitalist enterprise; and racial and somatic theories were used to advance imperial and elite interests. (The emphasis was now on “*nature*”; the humanity became dubious.) It was during this later period that the social scientists began to be diffident about “human nature”; for politically, they wanted fundamental social changes, different from those indicated by the “natural” theory of the survival of the fittest; and, scientifically, it was evident that many anthropological facts were being called natural which were overwhelmingly cultural. Most of the social scientists began to lay all their stress on political organization, to bring about reform. Nevertheless, scientifically trained anarchists like Kropotkin insisted that “human nature”—which had now become mutual-aiding, knightly, and craftsman-like—was still on the side of revolution.

In our own century, especially since the Twenties and Thirties, the social scientists have found another reason for diffidence: it seems to them that “human nature” implies “not social” and refers to something prior to society, belonging to an isolated individual. They have felt that too much importance has been assigned to Individual Psychology (they were reacting to Freud) and this has stood in the way of organizing people for political reform. It is on this view, finally, that growing up is now interpreted as a process of socializing some rather indefinite kind of animal, and “socializing” is used as a synonym for teaching him the culture.

4.

Let us now proceed more carefully, for we are approaching our present plight. *Is “being socialized” no matter what the society, the same as growing up and assimilating human culture? The society in which one is socialized would have to be a remarkably finished product.*

There are here three distinct concepts, which sometimes seem the same but sometimes very different: (1) society as the relations of human social animals, (2) the human culture carried by a society, and (3) a particular society, like ours, formed by its pattern of culture and institutions, and in which its members are socialized or adjusted.

In ordinary, static circumstances, and especially when a dominant system in a society is riding high (as the organized system is with us), socializing to that society seems to provide all valuable culture. But *as soon as we think of a fundamental social change*, we begin to say that people are being adjusted, “socialized,” to a very limited kind of human society; and our notion of “human culture” once broadens out to include ancient, exotic, and even primitive models as superior to the conventional standards (as, e.g., our disaffected groups lay store by the Japanese or the Samoans and Trobriand Islanders). Then at once “human nature” is again invoked to prove the necessity of change for “human nature” has been thwarted or insulted by the dominant system. “Man” can no longer be defined as what suits the dominant system, when the dominant system apparently does not suit men.

*I think many social scientists have been making an error in logic. Certainly only society is the carrier of culture (it is not inborn). But it does not follow that socialized and cultured are synonymous. What follows, rather, is that, since culture is so overwhelmingly evident in observing mankind, social properties must be of the essence of original “human nature,” and indeed that the “isolated individual” is a product of culture.*

*This, of course, was just the line that Freud really took. Far from having an Individual Psychology, he tended to exaggerate the social nature of the baby by reading into it preformed*

*traits of his own society. From the earliest infancy, imitation and emulation, love, striving to communicate, rivalry, exclusiveness and jealousy, punishment, introjected authority, identification, growing up on a model, finding safety in conforming—these were among the conflicting elementary functions of the “human nature” that must grow into culture. And Freud, with magnificent originality, tried to show that by their very conflict they made it possible to assimilate culture; only such a social animal could become cultured. Every step of education was the resolution of a difficult social conflict. As might have been expected, from this hectic theory of human nature were drawn the most various political implications. Some, in the interests of community and sex reform, have wanted fundamental social changes, like Ferenczi and Reich. Others, to save religion, have been ultratraditionalist, like Jung or Laforgue. The run of orthodox psychoanalytic practice has been quietist, as the social scientists claimed. But the most surprising implication has been drawn by the social scientists themselves, when they finally got around to making use of modern psychology: they have found in it techniques for harmoniously belonging to the organized system of society!*

A curious thing has occurred. Unlike the majority of their predecessors for a century and a half most of our contemporary social scientists are not interested in fundamental social change. To them we have apparently reached the summit of institutional progress, and it only remains for the sociologists and applied-anthropologists to mop up the corners and iron out the kinks. Social scientists are not attracted to the conflictful core of Freud’s theory of human nature; a more optimistic theory like Reich’s, is paid no attention at all. But they have hit on the theory I mentioned at the beginning that you can adapt people to anything, if you use the right techniques. Our social scientists have become so accustomed to the highly organized and by-and-large smoothly running society that they have begun to think that “social animal” means “harmoniously belonging.” They do not like to think that fighting and dissenting are proper social functions, nor that rebelling or initiating fundamental change is a social function. Rather, if something does not run smoothly, they say it has been improperly socialized; there has been a failure in communication. The animal part is rarely mentioned at all; if it proves annoying, it too has been inadequately socialized.

5.

Nevertheless, we see groups of boys and young men disaffected from the dominant society. The young men are Angry and Beat. The boys are Juvenile Delinquents. These groups are not small, and they will grow larger. Certainly they are suffering. Demonstrably they are not getting enough out of our wealth and civilization. They are not growing up to full capacity. They are failing to assimilate much of the culture. As was predictable, most of the authorities and all of the public spokesmen explain it by saying there has been a failure of socialization. They say that background conditions have interrupted socialization and must be improved. And, not enough effort has been made to guarantee belonging there must be better bait or punishment.

But perhaps there has *not* been a failure of communication. Perhaps the social message has been communicated clearly to the young men and is unacceptable.

In this book I shall therefore take the opposite tack and ask, “Socialization to what? to which dominant society and available culture?” And if this question is asked, we must at once ask the other question, “Is the harmonious organization to which the young are inadequately socialized, perhaps against human nature, or not worthy of human nature, and *therefore* there is difficulty in growing up?”

If this is so, the disaffection of the young is profound and it will not be finally remediable by better techniques of socializing. ~~Instead, there will have to be changes in our society and its culture, so as to~~ meet the appetites and capacities of human nature, in order to grow up.

This brings me to another proposition about growing up, and perhaps the main theme of this book: *Growth, like any ongoing function, requires adequate objects in the environment* to meet the needs and capacities of the growing child, boy, youth, and young man, until he can better choose and make his own environment. It is not a “psychological” question of poor influences and bad attitudes, but an objective question of real opportunities for worthwhile experience. It makes no difference whether the growth is normal or distorted, only real objects will finish the experience. (Even in the psychotherapy of adults one finds that many a stubborn symptom vanishes if there is a real change in the vocation and sexual opportunities, so that the symptom is no longer needed.) It is here that the theory of belonging and socializing breaks down miserably. For it can be shown—I intend to show—that with all the harmonious belonging and all the tidying up of background conditions that you please, our abundant society is at present simply deficient in many of the most elementary objective opportunities and worth-while goals that could make growing up possible. It is lacking in enough man’s work. It is lacking in honest public speech, and people are not taken seriously. It is lacking in the opportunity to be useful. It thwarts aptitude and creates stupidity. It corrupts ingenuous patriotism. It corrupts the fine arts. It shackles science. It dampens animal ardor. It discourages the religious convictions of Justification and Vocation and it dims the sense that there is a Creation. It has no Honor. It has no Community.

Just look at that list. There is nothing in it that is surprising, in either the small letters or the capitals. I have nothing subtle or novel to say in this book; these are the things that *everybody* knows. And nevertheless the Governor of New York says, “We must give these young men a sense of belonging.”

Thwarted, or starved, in the important objects proper to young capacities, the boys and young men naturally find or invent deviant objects for themselves; this is the beautiful shaping power of our human nature. Their choices and inventions are rarely charming, usually stupid, and often disastrous; we cannot expect average kids to deviate with genius. But on the other hand, the young men who conform to the dominant society become for the most part apathetic, disappointed, cynical, and wasted.

(I say the “young men and boys” rather than the “young people” because the problems I want to discuss in this book belong primarily, in our society, to the boys: how to be useful and make something of oneself. A girl does not *have* to, she is not expected to, “make something” of herself. Her career does not have to be self-justifying, for she will have children, which is absolutely self-justifying, like any other natural or creative act. With this background, it is less important, for instance, what job an average young woman works at till she is married. The quest for the glamour job is given at least a little substance by its relation to a “better” marriage. Correspondingly, our “youth troubles” are boys’ troubles—female delinquency is sexual: “in corrigibility” and unmarried pregnancy. Yet as every woman knows, these problems are intensely interesting to women, for if the boys do not grow to be men, where shall the women find men? If the husband is running the rat race of the organized system, there is not much father for the children.)

6.

This essay is on “Youth Problems.” But the reader will find, perhaps to his surprise, that I shall make

little distinction in value between talking about middle-class youths being groomed for ten-thousand dollar “slots” in business and Madison Avenue, or underprivileged hoodlums fatalistically hurrying to a reformatory; or between hard-working young fathers and idle Beats with beards. For the salient thing is the sameness among them, the waste of humanity. In our society, bright lively children, with the potentiality for knowledge, noble ideals, honest effort, and some kind of worth-while achievement, are transformed into useless and cynical bipeds, or decent young men trapped or early resigned, whether in or out of the organized system. My purpose is a simple one: to show how it is desperately hard these days for an average child to grow up to be a man, for our present organized system of society does not want men. They are not safe. They do not suit.

Our public officials are now much concerned about the “waste of human resources.” Dr. Conant, the former president of Harvard, has surveyed the high schools. But our officials are not serious, and Dr. Conant’s report is superficial. For the big causes of stupidity, of lack of initiative and lack of honorable incentive, are glaring; yet they do not intend to notice or remedy these big causes. (The very avoidance of the real issues on the part of our public officials is, indeed, one of the big causes.) Our society cannot have it both ways: to maintain a conformist and ignoble system *and* to have skillful and spirited men to man that system with.

7.

It is not my purpose in this essay to outline a better world. But I think it requires no deep wisdom or astonishing imagination to know what we need, and in a later chapter of this book I shall even list some points of a rough program. The prevalent sentiment that it is infinitely impractical to follow the suggestions of common reason, is not sound. If it is impractical, it is because some people don’t want to, and the rest of us don’t want to enough.

For instance, there is a persistent presumption among our liberal statesmen that the old radical-liberal program has been importantly achieved, and that therefore there is no familiar major proposal practical to remedy admittedly crying ills. This is a false presumption. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the radical-liberal program was continually compromised, curtailed, sometimes realized in form without content, sometimes swept under the rug and heard of no more. I shall later list more than twenty fundamental liberal demands that have gone unfulfilled which would still be living and salutary issues today if anybody wanted to push them. This has occurred, and keeps occurring, by the mutual accommodation of both “liberals” and “conservatives” in the interests of creating or maintaining the present coalition of semimonopolies, trade unions, government, Madison Avenue, etc. (including a large bloc of outlaw gangsters); thriving on maximum profits and full employment; but without regard for utility, quality, rational productivity, personal freedom, independent enterprise, human scale, or manly vocation, or genuine culture. It is in this accommodation that our politicians survive, but it does not make for statesmanship. Even so mild a critic as Henry Steele Commager, in the *New York Times*, judges that we have had only three reputable statesmen in fifty years, the last of whom died fifty years ago. While one may not agree with his number and examples, there is no doubt that we have been living in a political limbo.

Naturally this unnatural system has generated its own troubles, whether we think of the unlivable communities, the collapse of public ethics, or the problems of youth. I shall try to show in this essay that these ills are by no means inherent in modern technological or ecological conditions, nor in the American Constitution as such. But they have followed precisely from the betrayal and neglect of the old radical-liberal program and other changes proposed to keep up with the advancing technology, the

growth of population, and the revolution in morals. Important reforms did not occur when they were ripe, and we have inherited the consequences: a wilderness of unfinished situations, unequal developments and inconsistent standards, as well as new business. And now, sometimes the remedy must be stoically to go back and carry *through* the old programs (as we are having to do with racial integration), e.g., finally to insist on stringent master-planning of cities and conserving of resources or on really limiting monopolies. Sometimes we must make changes to catch up—e.g., to make the laws more consistent with the sexual revolution, or to make the expenditure on public goods more commensurate with the geometrically increasing complications of a more crowded population. And sometimes, finally, we have to invent really new devices—e.g., how to make the industrial technology humanly important for its workmen, how to use leisure nobly, or even how, in a rich society, to be decently poor if one so chooses.

This book is not about these great subjects. But they hover in the background of the great subject that it is about. For it is impossible for the average boy to grow up and use the remarkable capacities that are in every boy, unless the world is for him and makes sense. And a society makes sense when it understands that its chief wealth *is* these capacities.

# I. Jobs

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1.

It's hard to grow up when there isn't enough man's work. There is "nearly full employment" (with highly significant exceptions), but there get to be fewer jobs that are necessary or unquestionably useful; that require energy and draw on some of one's best capacities; and that can be done keeping one's honor and dignity. In explaining the widespread troubles of adolescents and young men, the simple objective factor is not much mentioned. Let us here insist on it.

By "man's work" I mean a very simple idea, so simple that it is clearer to ingenuous boys than most adults. To produce necessary food and shelter is man's work. During most of economic history most men have done this drudging work, secure that it was justified and worthy of a man to do, though often feeling that the social conditions under which they did it were *not* worthy of a man. Thinking, "It's better to die than to live so hard"—but they worked on. When the environment is forbidding, as in the Swiss Alps or the Aran Islands, we regard such work with poetic awe. In emergencies it is heroic, as when the bakers of Paris maintained the supply of bread during the French Revolution, or the milkman did not miss a day's delivery when the bombs recently tore up London.

At present there is little such subsistence work. In *Communitas* my brother and I guess that one-tenth of our economy is devoted to it; it is more likely one-twentieth. Production of food is actively discouraged. Farmers are not wanted and the young men go elsewhere. (The farm population is now less than 15 per cent of the total population.) Building, on the contrary, is immensely needed. New York City needs 65,000 new units a year, and is getting, net, 16,000. One would think that ambitious boys would flock to this work. But here we find that building, too, is discouraged. In a great city, for the last twenty years hundreds of thousands have been ill housed, yet we do not see science, industry, and labor enthusiastically enlisted in finding the quick solution to a definite problem. The promoters are interested in long-term investments, the real estate men in speculation, the city planners in votes and graft. The building craftsmen cannily see to it that their own numbers remain few, their methods antiquated, and their rewards high. None of these people is much interested in providing shelter, and nobody is at all interested in providing new manly jobs.

Once we turn away from the absolutely necessary subsistence jobs, however, we find that an enormous proportion of our production is not even unquestionably useful. Everybody knows and almost everybody feels this, and there has recently been a flood of books about our surfeit of honey, our insolent chariots, the follies of exurban ranch houses, our hucksters and our synthetic demand. Many acute things are said about this useless production and advertising, but not much about the workmen producing it and their frame of mind; and nothing at all, so far as I have noticed, about the plight of the young fellow looking for a manly occupation. The eloquent critics of the American way of life have themselves been so seduced by it that they think only in terms of selling commodities and point out that the goods are valueless; but they fail to see that people are being wasted and their skills insulted. (To give an analogy, in the many gleeful onslaughts on the Popular Culture that have appeared in recent years, there has been little thought of the plight of the honest artist cut off from his audience and sometimes, in public arts such as theater and architecture, from his medium.)

What is strange about it? American society has tried so hard and so ably to defend the practice and theory of production for profit and not primarily for use that now it has succeeded in making its jobs



and products profitable and useless.

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2.

Consider a likely useful job. A youth who is alert and willing but not “verbally intelligent”—perhaps he has quit high school at the eleventh grade (the median), as soon as he legally could—chooses for an auto mechanic. That’s a good job, familiar to him, he often watched them as a kid. It’s careful and dirty at the same time. In a small garage it’s sociable; one can talk to the customers (girls). You please people in trouble by fixing their cars, and a man is proud to see rolling out on its own the car that limped in behind the tow truck. The pay is as good as the next fellow’s, who is respected.

So our young man takes this first-rate job. But what when he then learns that the cars have a built-in obsolescence, that the manufacturers do not want them to be repaired or repairable? They have lobbied for a law that requires them to provide spare parts for only five years (it used to be ten). Repairing the new cars is often a matter of cosmetics, not mechanics; and the repairs are pointlessly expensive—a tail fin might cost \$150. The insurance rates therefore double and treble on old and new cars both. Gone are the days of keeping the jalopies in good shape, the artist-work of a proud mechanic. But everybody is paying for foolishness, for in fact the new models are only trivially superior; the whole thing is a sell.

It is hard for the young man now to maintain his feelings of justification, sociability, serviceability. It is not surprising if he quickly becomes cynical and time-serving, interested in a fast buck. And so on the notorious *Reader’s Digest* test, the investigators (coming in with a disconnected coil wire) found that 63 per cent of mechanics charged for repairs they didn’t make, and lucky if they didn’t also take out the new fuel pump and replace it with a used one (65 per cent of radio repair shops, but only 49 per cent of watch repairmen “lied, overcharged, or gave false diagnoses”).

There is an hypothesis that an important predisposition to juvenile delinquency is the combination of low verbal intelligence with high manual intelligence, delinquency giving a way of self-expression where other avenues are blocked by lack of schooling. A lad so endowed might well apply himself to the useful trade of mechanic.

3.

Most manual jobs do not lend themselves so readily to knowing the facts and fraudulently taking advantage oneself. In factory jobs the workman is likely to be ignorant of what goes on, since he performs a small operation on a big machine that he does not understand. Even so, there is evidence that he has the same disbelief in the enterprise as a whole, with a resulting attitude of profound indifference.

Semiskilled factory operatives are the largest category of workmen. (I am leafing through the U.S. Department of Labor’s *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, 1957.) Big companies have tried the device of applied anthropology to enhance the loyalty of these men to the firm, but apparently the effort is hopeless, for it is found that a thumping majority of the men don’t care about the job or the firm; they couldn’t care less and you can’t make them care more. But this is *not* because of wages, hours, working conditions, or management. On the contrary, tests that show the men’s indifference to the company show also their (unaware) admiration for the way the company has designed and managed the plant; it is their very model of style, efficiency, and correct behavior. (Robert Dubin, for the U.S. Public Health Service.) Maybe if the men understood more, they would admire less. The union and the grievance committee take care of wages, hours, and conditions; these are the things the workmen

themselves fought for and won. (Something was missing in that victory, and we have inherited the failure as well as the success.) The conclusion must be that workmen are indifferent to the job because of its intrinsic nature: it does not enlist worth-while capacities, it is not “interesting”; it is not his, it is not “in” on it; the product is not really useful. And indeed, research directly on the subject, by Frederick Herzberg on Motivation to Work, shows that it is defects in the intrinsic aspects of the job that make workmen “unhappy.” A survey of the literature (in Herzberg’s *Job Attitudes*) shows that Interest is second in importance only to Security, whereas Wages, Conditions, Socializing, Hours, Ease, and Benefits are far less important. But foremen, significantly enough, think that the most important thing to the workman is his wages. (The investigators do not seem to inquire about the usefulness of the job—as if a primary purpose of *working* at a job were not that it is good for something! My guess is that a large factor in “Security” is the resigned reaction to not being able to take into account whether the work of one’s hands is useful for anything; for in a normal life situation if what we do is useful, we feel secure about being needed. The other largest factor in “Security” is, I think, the sense of being needed for one’s unique contribution, and this is measured in these tests by the primary importance the workers assign to being “in” on things and to “work done being appreciated.” (Table prepared by Labor Relations Institute of New York.)

Limited as they are, what a remarkable insight such studies give us, that men want to do valuable work and work that is somehow theirs! But they are thwarted.

Is not this the “waste of our human resources”?

The case is that by the “sole-prerogative” clause in union contracts the employer has the sole right to determine what is to be produced, how it is to be produced, what plants are to be built and where, what kinds of machinery are to be installed, when workers are to be hired and laid off, and how production operations are to be rationalized. (Frank Marquart.) There is *none* of this that is inevitable in running a machine economy; but *if* these are the circumstances, it is not surprising that the factory operatives’ actual code has absolutely nothing to do with useful service or increasing production, but is notoriously devoted to “interpersonal relations”; (1) don’t turn out too much work; (2) don’t turn out too little work; (3) don’t squeal on a fellow worker; (4) don’t act like a big-shot. This is how they belong.

4.

Let us go on to the Occupational Outlook of those who are verbally bright. Among this group, simply because they cannot help asking more general questions—e.g., about utility—the problem of finding man’s work is harder, and their disillusion is more poignant.

*He explained to her why it was hard to find a satisfactory job of work to do. He had liked working with the power drill, testing the rocky envelope of the shore, but then the employers asked him to take a great oath of loyalty.*

“What!” cried Rosalind. “Do you have scruples about telling a convenient fib?”

“No, I don’t. But I felt uneasy about the sanity of the director asking me to swear to opinions on such complicated questions when my job was digging with a power drill. I can’t work with a man who might suddenly have a wild fit.”

... “Why don’t you get a job driving one of the big trucks along here?”

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“I don’t like what’s in the boxes,” said Horatio sadly. “It could just as well drop in the river—and I’d make mistakes and drop it there.”

“Is it bad stuff?”

“No, just useless. It takes the heart out of me to work at something useless and I begin to make mistakes. I don’t mind putting profits in somebody’s pocket—but the job also has to be useful for something.”

... “Why don’t you go to the woods and be a lumberjack?”

“No! they chop down the trees just to print off the New York Times!”

(*The Empire City*, III, i, 3.)

The more intelligent worker’s “indifference” is likely to appear more nakedly as profound resignation, and his cynicism may sharpen to outright racketeering.

“Teaching,” says the *Handbook*, “is the largest of the professions.” So suppose our now verbal bright young man chooses for teacher, in the high school system or, by exception, in the elementary schools if he understands that the elementary grades are the vitally important ones and require the most ability to teach well (and of course they have less prestige). Teaching is necessary and useful work; it is real and creative, for it directly confronts an important subject matter, the children themselves; it is obviously self-justifying; and it is ennobled by the arts and sciences. Those who practice teaching do not for the most part succumb to cynicism or indifference—the children are too immediate and real for the teachers to become callous—but, most of the school systems being what they are, can teachers fail to come to suffer first despair and then deep resignation? Resignation occurs psychologically as follows: frustrated in essential action, they nevertheless cannot quit in anger, because the task is necessary; so the anger turns inward and is felt as resignation. (Naturally the resigned teacher may then put on a happy face and keep very busy.)

For the job is carried on under impossible conditions of overcrowding and saving public money. Not that there is not enough social wealth, but first things are not put first. Also, the school system has spurious aims. It soon becomes clear that the underlying aims are to relieve the home and keep the kids quiet; or, suddenly, the aim is to produce physicists. Timid supervisors, bigoted clerics, and ignorant school boards forbid real teaching. The emotional release and sexual expression of the children are taboo. A commercially debauched popular culture makes learning disesteemed. The academic curriculum is mangled by the demands of reactionaries, liberals, and demented warriors. Progressive methods are emasculated. Attention to each case is out of the question, and all the children—the bright, the average, and the dull—are systematically retarded one way or another, while the teacher’s hands are tied. Naturally the pay is low—for the work is hard, useful, and of public concern, all three of which qualities tend to bring lower pay. It is alleged that the low pay is why there is a shortage of teachers and why the best do not choose the profession. My guess is that the best avoid it because of the certainty of miseducating. Nor are the best wanted by the system, for they are not safe. Bertrand Russell was rejected by New York’s City College and would not have been accepted in a New York grade school.

Next, what happens to the verbally bright who have no zeal for a serviceable profession and who have no particular scientific or artistic bent? For the most part they make up the tribes of salesmanship, entertainment, business management, promotion, and advertising. Here of course there is no question of utility or honor to begin with, so an ingenuous boy will not look here for a manly career. Nevertheless, though we can pass by the sufferings of these well-paid callings, much publicized by their own writers, they are important to our theme because of the model they present to the growing boy.

Consider the men and women in TV advertisements, demonstrating the product and singing the jingle. They are clowns and mannequins, in grimace, speech, and action. And again, what I want to call attention to in this advertising is not the economic problem of synthetic demand, and not the cultural problem of Popular Culture, but the human problem that these are human beings working as clowns; that the writers and designers of it are human beings thinking like idiots; and the broadcasters and underwriters know and abet what goes on—

*Juicily glubbily  
Blubber is dubbily  
delicious and nutritious  
—eat it, Kitty, it's good.*

Alternately, they are liars, confidence men, smooth talkers, obsequious, insolent, etc., etc.

The popular-cultural content of the advertisements is somewhat neutralized by *Mad* magazine, the bible of the twelve-year-olds who can read. But far more influential and hard to counteract is the *fa* that the workmen and the patrons of this enterprise are human beings. (Highly approved, too.) They are not good models for a boy looking for a manly job that is useful and necessary, requiring human energy and capacity, and that can be done with honor and dignity. They are a good sign that not many such jobs will be available.

The popular estimation is rather different. Consider the following: “As one possible aid, I suggested to the Senate subcommittee that they alert celebrities and leaders in the fields of sports, movies, theater and television to the help they can offer by getting close to these [delinquent] kids. By giving them positive ‘heroes’ they know and can talk to, instead of the misguided image of trouble-making buddies, they could aid greatly in guiding these normal aspirations for fame and status into wholesome progressive channels.” (Jackie Robinson, who was formerly on the Connecticut Parole Board.) Or again: when a mass cross-section of Oklahoma high school juniors and seniors was asked which living person they would like to be, the boys named Pat Boone, Ricky Nelson, and President Eisenhower; the girls chose Debbie Reynolds, Elizabeth Taylor, and Natalie Wood.

The rigged Quiz shows, which created a scandal in 1959, were a remarkably pure distillate of our American cookery. We start with the brute facts that (a) in our abundant expanding economy it is necessary to give money away to increase spending, production, and profits; and (b) that this money must not be used for useful public goods in taxes, but must be plowed back as “business expenses” even though there is a shameful shortage of schools, housing, etc. Yet when the TV people at first tried simply to give the money away for nothing (for having heard of George Washington), there was a great Calvinistic outcry that this was demoralizing (we may gamble on the horses only to improve the breed). So they hit on the notion of a real contest with prizes. But then, of course, they could not resist making the show itself profitable, and competitive in the (also rigged) ratings with other shows, so that

experts in the entertainment-commodity manufactured phony contests. And to cap the climax of fraudulence, the hero of the phony contests proceeded to persuade himself, so he says, that his behavior was educational!

The behavior of the networks was correspondingly typical. These business organizations claim the loyalty of their employees, but at the first breath of trouble they were ruthless and disloyal to the employees. (Even McCarthy was loyal to his gang.) They want to maximize profits and yet be absolutely safe from any risk. Consider their claim that they knew nothing about the fraud. But if they watched the shows that they were broadcasting, they could not *possibly*, as professionals, not have known the facts, for there were obvious type-casting, acting, plot, etc. If they are not professionals they are incompetent. But if they don't watch what they broadcast, then they are utterly irresponsible and on what grounds do they have the franchises to the channels? We may offer them the choice: that they are liars or incompetent or irresponsible.

The later direction of the investigation seems to me more important, the inquiry into the bribery and disk-jockeying; for this deals directly with our crucial economic problem of synthesized demand made taste, debauching the public and preventing the emergence and formation of natural taste. In such circumstances there cannot possibly be an American culture; we are doomed to nausea and barbarism. And *then* these baboons have the effrontery to declare that they give the people what the people demand and that they are not responsible for the level of the movies, the music, the plays, the books!

Finally, in leafing through the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, we notice that the armed forces employ a large number. Here our young man can become involved in a world-wide demented enterprise, with personnel and activities corresponding.

6.

Thus, on the simple criteria of unquestioned utility, employing human capacities, and honor, there are not enough worthy jobs in our economy for average boys and adolescents to grow up toward. There are of course thousands of jobs that are worthy and self-justifying, and thousands that can be made so by stubborn integrity, especially if one can work as an independent. Extraordinary intelligence or special talent, also, can often carve out a place for itself—conversely, their usual corruption and waste are all the more sickening. But by and large our economic society is *not* geared for the cultivation of its young or the attainment of important goals that they can work toward.

This is evident from the usual kind of vocational guidance, which consists of measuring the boy and finding some place in the economy where he can be fitted; chopping him down to make him fit; neglecting him if they can't find his slot. Personnel directors do not much try to scrutinize the economy in order to find some activity that is a real opportunity for the boy, and then to create a opportunity if they can't find one. To do this would be an horrendous task; I am not sure it could be done if we wanted to do it. But the question is whether anything less makes sense if we mean to speak seriously about the troubles of the young men.

Surely by now, however, many readers are objecting that this entire argument is pointless because people in *fact* don't think of their jobs in this way at all. *Nobody* asks if a job is useful or honorable (within the limits of business ethics). A man gets a job that pays well, or well enough, that has prestige, and good conditions, or at least tolerable conditions. I agree with these objections as to the fact. (I hope we are wrong.) But *the question is what it means to grow up into such a fact as: "During my productive years I will spend eight hours a day doing what is no good."*

Yet, economically and vocationally, a very large population of the young people are in a plight more drastic than anything so far mentioned. In our society as it is, there are not enough worthy jobs. But if our society, being as it is, were run more efficiently and soberly, for a majority there would soon not be any jobs at all. There is at present nearly full employment and there may be for some years, yet a vast number of young people are rationally unemployable, useless. This paradox is essential to explain their present temper.

Our society, which is not geared to the cultivation of its young, is geared to a profitable expanding production, a so-called high standard of living of mediocre value, and the maintenance of nearly full employment. Politically, the chief of these is full employment. In a crisis, when profitable production is temporarily curtailed, government spending increases and jobs are manufactured. In “normalcy”—a condition of slow boom—the easy credit, installment buying, and artificially induced demand for useless goods create jobs for all and good profits for some.

Now, back in the Thirties, when the New Deal attempted by hook or crook to put people back to work and give them money to revive the shattered economy, there was an outcry of moral indignation from the conservatives that many of the jobs were “boondoggling,” useless made-work. It was insisted, and rightly, that such work was demoralizing to the workers themselves. It is a question of word, but a candid critic might certainly say that many of the jobs in our present “normal” production are useless made-work. The tail fins and built-in obsolescence might be called boondoggling. The \$64,000 Question and the busy hum of Madison Avenue might certainly be called boondoggling. Certain tax-dodge Foundations are boondoggling. What of business lunches and expense accounts? fringe benefits? the comic categories of occupation in the building trades? the extra stagehands and musicians of the theater crafts? These jolly devices to put money back to work no doubt have a demoralizing effect on somebody or other (certainly on me, they make me green with envy), but where is the moral indignation from Top Management?

Suppose we would cut out the boondoggling and gear our society to a more sensible abundance with efficient production of quality goods, distribution in a natural market, counterinflation and sober credit. At once the work week would be cut to, say, twenty hours instead of forty. (Important People have already mentioned the figure thirty.) Or alternately, half the labor force would be unemployed. Suppose too—and how can we not suppose it?—that the automatic machines are used generally, rather than just to get rid of badly organized unskilled labor. The unemployment will be still more drastic.

(To give the most striking example: in steel, the annual increase in productivity is 4 per cent, the plants work at 50 per cent of capacity, and the companies can break even and stop producing at *less than 30 per cent* of capacity. These are the conditions that forced the steel strike, as desperate self-protection. (Estes Kefauver, quoting Gardiner Means and Fred Gardner.)

Everybody knows this, nobody wants to talk about it much, for we don't know how to cope with it. The effect is that we are living a kind of lie. Long ago, labor leaders used to fight for the shorter work week, but now they don't, because they're pretty sure they don't want it. Indeed, when hours are reduced, the tendency is to get a second, part-time, job and raise the standard of living, *because* the job is meaningless and one must have something; but the standard of living is pretty meaningless, too. Nor is this strange atmosphere a new thing. For at least a generation the maximum sensible use of our productivity could have thrown a vast population out of work, or relieved everybody of a lot of useless work, depending on how you take it. (Consider with how little cutback of useful civilian production the economy produced the war goods and maintained an Army, economically unemployed.) The plan

truth is that at present very many of us are useless, not needed, rationally unemployable. It is in this paradoxical atmosphere that young persons grow up. It looks busy and expansive, but it is rationally a stalemate.

8.

These considerations apply to all ages and classes; but it is of course among poor youth (and the age that they show up first and worst. They are the most unemployable. For a long time our society has not been geared to the cultivation of the young. In our country 42 per cent have graduated from high school (predicted census, 1960); less than 8 per cent have graduated from college. The high school trend for at least the near future is not much different: there will be a high proportion of drop-outs before the twelfth grade; but *markedly more* of the rest will go on to college; that is, the stratification will harden. Now the schooling in neither the high schools nor the colleges is much good—if it were better more kids would stick to it; yet at present, if we made a list we should find that a large proportion of the dwindling number of unquestionably useful or self-justifying jobs, in the human professions and the arts and sciences, require education; and in the future, there is no doubt that the more educated will have the jobs, in running an efficient, highly technical economy and an administrative society placing a premium on verbal skills.

(Between 1947 and 1957, professional and technical workers increased 61 per cent, clerical workers 23 per cent, but factory operatives only 4½ per cent and laborers 4 per cent.—Census.)

For the uneducated there will be no jobs at all. This is humanly most unfortunate, for presumably those who have learned something in schools, and have the knack of surviving the boredom of those schools, could also make something of idleness; whereas the uneducated are useless at leisure too. It takes application, a fine sense of value, and a powerful community-spirit for a people to have serious leisure, and this has not been the genius of the Americans.

From this point of view we can sympathetically understand the pathos of our American school policy, which otherwise seems so inexplicable; at great expense compelling kids to go to school who do not want to and who will not profit by it. There are of course unpedagogic motives, like relieving the home, controlling delinquency, and keeping kids from competing for jobs. But there is also the desperately earnest pedagogic motive, of preparing the kids to take *some* part in a democratic society that does not need them. Otherwise, what will become of them, if they don't know anything?

Compulsory public education spread universally during the nineteenth century to provide the reading, writing, and arithmetic necessary to build a modern industrial economy. With the overmaturity of the economy, the teachers are struggling to preserve the elementary system when the economy no longer requires it and is stingy about paying for it. The demand is for scientists and technicians, the 15 per cent of the “academically talented.” “For a vast majority [in the high schools]” says Dr. Conant in *The Child, the Parent, and the State*, “the vocational courses are the vital core of the program. They represent something related directly to the ambitions of the boys and girls.” But somehow, far more than half of these quit. How is that?

9.

Let us sum up again. The majority of young people are faced with the following alternative: Either society is a benevolently frivolous racket in which they'll manage to boondoggle, though less profitably than the more privileged; or society is serious (and they hope still benevolent enough to support them), but they are useless and hopelessly out. Such thoughts do not encourage productivity.

life. Naturally young people are more sanguine and look for man's work, but few find it. Some settle for a "good job"; most settle for a lousy job; a few, but an increasing number, don't settle.

I often ask, "What do you want to work at? If you have the chance. When you get out of school, college, the service, etc."

Some answer right off and tell their definite plans and projects, highly approved by Papa. I'm pleased for them, but it's a bit boring, because they are such squares.

Quite a few will, with prompting, come out with astounding stereotyped, conceited fantasies, such as becoming a movie actor when they are "discovered"—"like Marlon Brando, but in my own way."

Very rarely somebody will, maybe defiantly and defensively, maybe diffidently but proudly, make you know that he knows very well what he is going to do; it is something great; and he is indeed already doing it, which is the real test.

The usual answer, perhaps the normal answer, is "I don't know," meaning, "I'm looking; I haven't found the right thing; it's discouraging but not hopeless."

But the terrible answer is, "Nothing." The young man doesn't want to do anything.

—I remember talking to half a dozen young fellows at Van Wagner's Beach outside of Hamilton, Ontario; and all of them had this one thing to say: "Nothing." They didn't believe that what to work for was the kind of thing one *wanted*. They rather expected that two or three of them would work for the electric company in town, but they couldn't care less. I turned away from the conversation abruptly because of the uncontrollable burning tears in my eyes and constriction in my chest. Not feeling sorry for them, but tears of frank dismay for the waste of our humanity (they were nice kids). And it is of that incident that many years later I am writing this book.



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