

invariably—from Marx to Marcuse and faculty members—adults. It is legitimate to speak of a counter-culture in our society, and large numbers of young people (mostly students) are part of it. But the ideas that sustain it do not come from youth nor, as a rule, are the organizations that give it expression led by them. The problems Reich depicts are in large measure political. It follows that their solution must be to that same extent political. A change in consciousness won't do the trick, even though this will help. A viable society is always the outcome of a dialectical relationship between the self and its world, between mind and structure.

On the other hand, it is clear that beneath the rhetoric of youth-mysticism Reich is calling for an enlargement and an enrichment of our experience.

As Sartre once remarked, a cloud of heavy boredom weighs over America; and Reich is certainly right in observing that "we have all known the loneliness, the emptiness, the plastic isolation of contemporary America." We all need to sing and dance more, to be more beautiful and compassionate and loving. We pant for a rebirth as a hart after the clear waters. But in life styles as in ideas, youth are followers rather than leaders. On the frontispiece of his book, Reich quotes Wallace Stevens to the effect that nothing endures or will endure like "April's green endures." But another poet has pointed out that April is the cruellest month, mixing memory with desire and displaying dry land and rotted roots as well as greenery. Consciousness III has not yet absorbed this insight.

## THE "BLACKENING AND BLUEING" OF AMERICA

James V. Schall

For a period of several months, myriad of my fellow middle-aged friends (all being "Consciousness I" and "Consciousness II" types) would ask breathlessly whether I had read Charles Reich's "The Greening of America," which appeared in *The New Yorker* last fall. Though assailed by vague feelings of guilt, I was content to go on reading John of Paris, Augustine, and J.R.R. Tolkien as before. But when one of my students reported that the article—which began on page 42 of the September 26th issue and ended on page 111!—had now become an even longer book, I chose the lesser of the two inescapable evils and gave the shorter, magazine piece a whirl. Certainly, no one likes to seem totally out of touch with "where it's at" (though, to be truthful, the notion of not being "where it's at" is not absolutely unattractive these days; there is a future for contemplative orders, I am convinced).

Thus, bleary-eyed, I read the now familiar clichés: (1) "The Constitution and Bill of Rights

have been steadily weakened"; (2) "America is one vast, terrifying anti-community"; (3) "We seem to be living in a society that no one created and that no one wants"; (4) "For the nineteen-fifties, the norm itself—the system itself—became degenerate"; (5) "The effects of the corporate state's autonomy are in themselves profoundly harmful"; (6) "The bitter truth is that despite our ideals of law and all the talk about law and order, we are today in the most literal sense of the word a lawless society . . ."; (7) "The Vietnam war represents a form of madness"; (8) "The machine has begun to destroy itself"; (9) "All features of the corporate state combine to cause the major symptom of our country's sickness and decay. . . ." And there are, by rough count, about twenty-three more such profound insights about your land and my land.

Well, how does one go about commenting on Mr. Reich's quaint thesis? Surely to list all the evident confusions and inconsistencies is useless, and most readers will be acquainted with the general criticism and comment that has already appeared. What I should like to note are Mr. Reich's silences and his political theory, for they are bound inextricably together.

The silences are, of course, horrendous—to use a word Reich himself would surely like—and the most glaring one is easy to miss because of its blinding brightness: It is difficult to discover from anything in the article itself that the rest of the world outside the United States even exists, or that it might just possibly have problems of its own that affect our social climate. Vietnam, to be sure, is frequently

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James V. Schall, S.J. teaches at the Instituto Sociale of the Gregorian University in Rome and at the University of San Francisco.

mentioned, but it is mentioned only as a function of American consciousness and not as a political reality. Problems of foreign affairs, other armies, navies, ideologies, powers—none of these seem worthy of consideration, even of note.

Why? According to Mr. Reich, there can be no sense of the realities of politics, no sense of the powers that be (this-worldly or other-worldly) because to allow for them or to control them is repression and reaction, an admission that they exist. "Consciousness of reality" has replaced reality itself. If a thing is not in our consciousness, it does not exist. This is highly questionable metaphysics—and disastrous politics. Moreover, Mr. Reich sees in adolescence and childhood the models upon which the adult world should be built. And he assumes that a goodly number of Americans "under twenty-five," and even more in the junior high and grammar schools, happily lack that "consciousness" which feels it must account for the grimmer realities. But did not Aristotle say that politics was not for children? Was St. Paul wrong? Are we no longer to set aside the images of childhood? Is it really such a virtue to retain the adolescent model of the public world ("A head band can produce an Indian, a black hat a cowboy badman."). But then, I forgot about how bad the world really is, with no hope, no beginning. . . .

The theory of history in "The Greening of America" leaves me somewhat confused. I am not sure whether it is deterministic or free. I am not sure if "what happens is right" or if "what is, becomes bad" in the dialectics of time. In Reich's view, there seem to have been three "consciousnesses" in American history—the first (I) revolved about the individualist, self-reliant, small-town ethic, neighborliness, honesty, hard work; the second (II) was corporate and exemplified by unions, organization, status, power; and the third (III), the new vanguard, is peaceful, loving, songful, participatory, pacifist, nature-loving, simple. Apparently, it is inevitable that "Consciousness III," because it is purer, will replace by a quiet, internal revolution all the hateful aspects of war, of corporate, bureaucratic, individualistic American society.

This new consciousness contradicts Marx' notion of revolution, of course, for its acts derive from within the soul, taking the heart out of war and exploitation and vice. Thus, by our music and clothes and sincerity we can bypass all the political forms and procedures previously known to man. The corporate state's selfishness will pass because no one

will buy its products or work its hours. War will cease to be a problem because no one will fight in one. The green, green grass of home is just down the pike.

the failure  
to grasp &  
understand  
MAN  
as he is.

So there is a damned and a saved, and these separate groups are easily identified (the dividing line seems to be at about age twenty-five). Thus, no ultimate moral or spiritual problem can be said to lie at the heart of every man and institution of whatever vintage; "We know what causes crime and social disorder and what can be done to eliminate those causes." "Like Consciousness I," says Reich, "Consciousness II sees life in terms of a fiercely competitive struggle for success. The difference is in the means of the struggle and the character of success, for with Consciousness II these are defined by organizational or institutional values. The difference lends an air of gentility or public-mindedness to the struggle carried on by Consciousness II. He can claim, and can convince himself, that his struggle is for something other than pure selfishness." But, of course, it is not. Now, as an avid reader of C. S. Lewis, I know that the genteel, public-minded embodiment of pure selfishness is none other than the devil. Consciousness III, on the other hand, is "the beginning of the development of new capacities in man." "Once a person reaches Consciousness III there is no returning to earlier consciousness."

So there is a sinlessness and a devilolatry. What was it Aristotle said at the very beginning of poli-

tical theory? That the perfect man was above the political state and the beast was wholly below it. In other words, what Mr. Reich's thesis does is to eliminate any practical necessity for politics as such which must confront the expected and real sins, evils, threats, aggressions, deficiencies of human reality. Thus he tells us, "the politics of controlling man become unimportant; the politics of controlling machines and organizations become a new concern for government." How long is the sad history of this simple concept?

Politics is rather about men first (and last), about their hopes, visions, realities, sins, failures, possibilities, power, and evils. When we fail to prepare our youth and the rest of us for such as man is, when others see us so failing in political insight, are we doing anything more than leading innocent sheep to slaughter? Surely this is not what politics is supposed to do. Mr. Reich's new citizen is characterized most vividly as one who is totally innocent—and therefore totally a-political. It is no wonder that Aristotle said of such a man that he was either a beast or a god. No wonder that Christian political thought places such a creature either before the Fall or after this life.

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There are, certainly, many other questions to be raised about Reich's thesis. Who, for example, is to do the work in his utopia, changed consciousness and all? What about the other powers still walking about with Consciousness I and II firmly implanted in their dark breasts? Do we let them trample over us as they must do, granted their primitive state of ethical development? Most intriguing, what is it all about anyway? Religion, in Consciousness II, was a kind of palliative, offering only "an ethical system devoted to minimize the harm of the competitive and functional basis of existence without actually challenging the basis." When man wanted "nothing to do with dread, awe, wonder, mystery, accidents, failure, helplessness, magic," this was bad. We can only presume that Mr. Reich wants these things in his new spiritual consciousness.

Mr. Reich's explicit statement of religious or philosophic ultimates turns out to be pretty dreary old stuff: "For human beings, the only truth must be found in their own humanity, in each other, in their relation to the living world. When the corporate state forces its 'public-interest' truth as a substitute for man's internal truth—the truth man creates—it cuts him off from the only reality he can live by." As for me, I'm afraid I know too much about the history of this theory to ever believe that it can

create the kind of world I believe in, let alone the one Mr. Reich believes in. So the truth that man creates must be the only truth that man lives by, is it? There is nothing, absolutely nothing intellectually, to prevent this theory from being the greatest tyranny man has known. When an appeal to internal truth, to the truth man creates, is the last line of defense against the dangers of human technology or politics or progress, then there is no hope. Only if man is not a creation of himself, only if the mystery and joy and wonder that is in him come ultimately not from himself can we begin to create a more human world.

A compassion for and an acknowledgement of the people who *do* exist—young and old, Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and Barbarians—is an absolute essential in human politics. A true politics and a sane theology see that there are evils and virtues in the worst of us—as in the best. There is no exclusive redemption in a nation or an age-group or a culture. John Courtney Murray wrote that, while there is change, growth and decline among men and nations, still "history does not alter the basic structures of human nature, nor affect the substance of the elementary human experiences, nor open before men wholly new destinies" (*We Hold These Truths*, 1964). It is the failure to grasp and to understand man as he is that strikes me as Reich's real weakness. He toys with the historical evolution of some kind of new man, he makes virtue and vice a thing of class and age, he seeks technical solutions to moral and spiritual problems, he is too unaware of what is in the heart of man, he does not know the world about him.

In short, "The Greening of America" is an exercise in optical illusion in which all the rich colors of reality turn out to be green to Mr. Reich; yet, seen even through his eyes, they appear as black and blue to the rest of us.

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Having said all this, I would still like to add that the most useful statement about "The Greening" can best be made in a *Mad* magazine parody. Only *Mad's* curious sanity could restore all the somberness and witlessness of this ponderous tract to its proper place. I have violated *Mad's* essential canon, that grim exaggerations and distortions should be treated with humor and lightness. It is true, as Belloc said, that "genuine laughter is the physical effect produced in the rational being by what suddenly strikes his immortal soul as being damned funny." "The Greening of America" does indeed strike me as being damned funny.