tion. Can there be any higher reason for existence than this?

If one orients himself in this manner, he must inevitably experience growth. Success, in some measure, is certain to attend such efforts. And will he not learn that the more he pursues this course, the more he will grow? Knowing this, how can he be other than optimistic? Is not his eye then centered on what he most desires and on what is demonstrably attainable? And all because of a correct orientation: the improvement of self! Growth!

Optimism and happiness are of a piece, and they are the by-products of growth. Let us, then, reflect on growth, for, in this context, it is the key reality.

Growth is implicit in the evolutive process, and how it might and should project itself in one's life span can be deduced from simple observations. The first observable event in the earthly life of a human being is the union of microscopic seeds. During gestation, with Creation or Nature in charge, growth – size, weight, cells – undergoes a multiplication measured in billions. Following birth, this physical growth slows down to the point where its multiplication is measured in tens; it comes to a halt at adulthood.

At birth, however, a supra-physical faculty, having growth potential, puts in an appearance: *consciousness*. With Nature in command at the outset, it shows first as simple consciousness, growing, rather quickly, into self-consciousness. But observe that Nature gradually withdraws her authority in favor of parental direction which, in turn, retires during adolescence, leaving the individual to his own resources and on his own responsibility. The adolescent does or does not take it from there; he does or does not heed the instructions which Creation has already given so clearly: the evolutive process is to take the form of a growth in consciousness, a growth of the *individual* mind – but self-managed growth! Indeed, evolution would seem senseless were its aim less than self-improved souls: men coming to think for themselves and to will their own actions, and so to share in Creation.

Evolution, as related to species, appears to have had no truck with failures. Many have ceased to exist. Nor is there any reason to believe that its stern ways are modified as pertaining to individual consciousness, evolution in its most advanced stage. Grow or face dismissal, seems to be its dictum. And, why not? Evolution, logically, cannot consist of anything less than perpetual development. In short, growth in individual consciousness appears to be harmonious with the Cosmic Design. And were we in need of any more persuasion than these simple observations, we have only to review some exemplary figures, men who have clearly pointed the way, individuals who managed their own growth after Nature and parental authority relaxed their powers, persons who caused themselves to grow in thinking and willing, to the very end of long lives.

Aristotle put it well: "Happiness is activity of soul." This is to say that happiness is activity in thinking and willing, such activity itself being growth. Growth and happiness are less cause and effect than concomitants, forming together a rationally structured optimism.

Why is the developing, happy, optimistic individual importantly related to sound principles? Only these individuals exert that power of attraction which causes others to seek such enlightenment as they may possess. The discouraged, distraught, angry, pessimistic person is in a disharmonious, nondeveloping state and repels seekers after truth, as daily experiences attest. Nor does the IQ or level of knowledge have any bearing on the matter – what counts is growth. Any person, even a baby, *when growing* in awareness, exercises attractive influence – excites the desire to embrace. While an angry or power-drunk man of intellectual attainments may gain converts, the followers are not seekers of light. Sound principles are revealed only in light.

A rationally structured optimism got under way in a small town some twenty-four centuries ago:

> . . . this full stature of greatness came to pass at a time when the mighty civilizations of the ancient world had perished and the shadow of "effortless barbarism" was dark upon the earth. In that black and fierce world a little centre of white-hot spiritual energy was at work. A new civilization had arisen in Athens, unlike all that had gone before.[1]

Suffice it to say, Socrates and his remarkable lot did not have the eye on "a little center of white-hot spiritual energy" or on "a new civilization." These things were not even seen by them; they were only recapitulations as seen by historians, evaluations in retrospect. Had these things been their conscious, overriding aim, these things would not have come to pass. Each eye, rather, was on the pursuit of truth, on individual growth. Cast the eye aright, so goes the promise, and "these things shall be added unto you." These things are but delayed, impersonal, inevitable responses to right individual activities.

I cannot reverse the decline of our civilization or retrieve a waning freedom. Nor can you, whoever you are. But each can, if each so decides, improve in thinking and willing, that is, increase "activity of soul." Herein lies happiness in its highest form, a rationally structured optimism. Give us enough optimists of this stripe and we may rest assured that freedom with its concomitant, a higher civilization, will follow, sooner or later, as a matter of course. That's the promise.

[1] See *The Greek Way to Western Civilization* by Edith Hamilton. (A Mentor Book, p. 7.)

And that's the lesson which history teaches so clearly: Waste no time or energy on repairing mere recapitulations – humanity, society, civilization, the masses – over which the individual is utterly powerless. Dismiss the impossible! Instead, fasten the eye on that enormously potential entity which falls within one's own control, namely, self. Concentrate on the possible!

And time? Instead of running out, it is now in more abundant supply than ever – but only for those who know how to take advantage of this precious resource.

In far too many instances, our thousands upon thousands of time-saving devices have only induced an unprecedented busy-ness. Most moderns fritter away time; they find less of it than their ancestors did for affairs of the mind, for growth in consciousness. In short, they are hypnotized and thus enslaved by the gadgets.

But these same creations serve to free, release, make available more and more time for thoughtful pursuits to those who can think for themselves and will their own actions. These individuals are, by definition, the rationally structured optimists, the happy libertarians – progenitors of the good society, this being but a recapitulation of growing individuals.

Happy New Year!

Leonard E. Read

PRESIDENT

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