A Creative Adaptation
to a World of Rising Shortages

By AMITAI ETZIONI

ABSTRACT: Predictions for the future among intellectuals have swung in the recent past from an optimistic view of man's capabilities and a continuing abundance of material goods to a fatalistic pessimism regarding man's inability to respond adequately to current and imminent crises—the population explosion, limited food and resource supplies, and environmental pollution, to name a few. Among the various predictions, the only knowable aspect of the future is that it will be different from whatever is expected. The humanistic psychology of Abraham Maslow, while at odds with most current views, holds that man's immutable needs for love, dignity and self-actualization separate him from the rest of the animal world, though he shares many basic animal needs which must be satisfied first. A critical question is at what point man will shift his attention from "acquisitive" values to "post-bourgeois," or nonmaterialistic, values. What effect will the recent economic downturn and energy crisis, as well as future shortages, have on society—a rededication to materialism, or the evolution of new societal values which de-emphasize consumption in favor of Maslow's "higher" goals? 

Amitai Etzioni is a Professor of Sociology at Columbia University and Director of the Center for Policy Research. He has served on the Committee on Professional Ethics, American Sociological Association, and on the Executive Committee of the Eastern Sociological Society. He was a member of the editorial boards of Science, Social Policy, and Sociological Inquiry, and has contributed widely to professional journals, as well as to the New York Times and the Washington Post. He is author of Genetic Fix, The Active Society, Political Unification, and A Comparative Analysis of Complex Organizations.
A dark mood of fatalistic pessimism is spreading among America's intellectuals. The world and the nation are depicted as stricken with a multiplicity of debilitating, possibly fatal, maladies whose sources are beyond our capacity to diagnose and which, if we could uncover them, might well be beyond our power to control or defeat. That this is the direction of current intellectual winds is suggested by the recent turnabout of Robert Heilbroner, whose writing has served as a weather vane in the past.

In 1966, Robert L. Heilbroner predicted in his book, *The Limits of American Capitalism*, that the pursuit of scientific discovery would shortly come to replace economic productivity as the central purpose of modern societies, bringing an ever-increasing reliance on rational planning in efforts to overcome social problems. Heilbroner assumed a continuation, if not expansion, of the abundance of material goods—and provided a ready answer to the question raised a few years earlier by David Riesman and John Kenneth Galbraith, who worried over what we would do with all the abundance the industrial machinery was about to deluge us with—and a peaceful overcoming of the forces which sustained the status quo, leading to considerably more plentiful leisure time, a major expansion of the health, educational and other human services, and a lesser emphasis on material goals.

In 1974, Heilbroner again captured—and helped to foster—the spreading mood in *The Human Prospect*, in which he calls the outlook for man "painful, difficult, even desperate," and goes on to say, "the answer to whether we can conceive of the future other than as a continuation of the darkness and disorder of the past seems to me to be no; and to the question of whether worse impends, yes." The crux of the problem, according to Heilbroner, is our inability to respond adequately to the crises that face us—our sudden awareness that "rationality has its limits with regard to social change." The population explosion in the Third World is seen as likely to lead to widespread famine and death—or to the rise of "iron governments" which will seek a drastic reallocation of the world's wealth by blackmailing the richer nations with nuclear threats or by cutting off the supply of raw materials.

Since the citizens of the wealthy societies could not be expected to accept such a coerced drop in their standards of living gracefully, war would appear to be inevitable. Birth control is no solution because even with zero population growth by the year 2000, the population of the underdeveloped countries 50 years later would still have increased two and a half times.

Nor is stepped up industrial growth the answer, since the world is running out of resources and any attempted technological remedies would likely have side effects worse than the original problem—including global thermal pollution, a threat to the continued survival of life on earth. The "human prospect," ac-

cording to Heilbroner, is thus a "Hobbesian struggle" arising in an ever more economically straight-jacketed society.

The Club of Rome's neo-Malthusian computer prophecies preceded Heilbroner in near-doomsday forecasts. More recently, an M.I.T. group called for consideration of "lifeboat ethics," a proposal to ration dwindling amounts of available food to those with fertile crops rather than fertile bodies. Dr. Peter Wyllie, a prominent geochemist at the University of Chicago, has predicted a variety of "Doomsday-like experiences," from an earthquake's laying to waste a West coast city (a recent favorite among pessimists), widespread famine and drought, and an exhaustion of the earth's natural resources. He consoles his audience, however, by promising that all this will not amount to "the end of the world." Even gloomier is the author of Titanic Effect, who depicts the passengers on spaceship Earth as replicating the bizarre nonchalance in the face of imminent, certain disaster, of those other passengers on an ostensibly unsinkable ship.

Personally, I do not believe that the future is knowable. An examination of past predictions supports such skepticism. C. P. Snow predicted in 1960 that "within, at the most, ten years, some of these bombs are going to go off. I'm saying this as responsibly as I can. This is the certainty ... a certainty of disaster." As the nation prepared to face a baby avalanche when those born during the postwar baby boom reached marriageable age, the birth rate fell below replacement level. First ghetto dwellers, then students, were said to be about to pull America apart, but instead both groups are now less active in demonstrations as well as other modes of political participation.

The only "prediction" with which one can feel comfortable is that the world of the future is very likely to be rather different from whatever the prevailing mood expects it to be, if only because the world cannot change nearly so fast as public moods or intellectual fashions. It is possible, for instance (though not predictable), that after having passed so quickly from the unbounded expectations of the New Frontier and Great Society to the gloomy antithesis of Watergate, stagflation and multiple shortages, we may soon be ready for synthesis of cautious optimism (or moderated pessimism), advancing the thought that, instead of going after everything and ending up despairing of anything, we could, proceeding carefully and with dedication, succeed in accomplishing a few, well-chosen, collective goals.

The first straws flying in this particular direction are to be seen in a recent issue of the Public Interest, devoted to a post mortem of the Great Society programs. Rather than concluding, as previous pathologists had, that the entire slew of social reforms were largely quixotic exercises in rhetorical self-delusion and other deception, the judgment is that, given much more careful planning, judicious experimentation, meticulous administration and less scattershot deployment of resources, we would be able to

6. The M.I.T. group is under the direction of Jay Forrester at the Sloan School of Management. Its work is related to that of the Club of Rome which recently published Mankind at the Turning Point (E. P. Dutton/Reader's Digest Press, 1974).
accomplish at least some of our societal purposes.

**THE MASLOWIAN PERSPECTIVE**

Even more venturesome, though deeply optimistic and barely noticed by the prophets of the hour, is a quite different perspective on our time, our society, and its future transformation: the humanistic psychology of Abraham Maslow and others such as Carl Rogers and Kurt Goldstein. Once considered a maverick position, it has gradually gained attention and adherents, though it remains clearly a minority view in the social sciences, as well as in the society’s intellectual circles.

Since a Maslowian perspective leads to quite different, and more hopeful, conclusions about the meaning of our current crisis—both our economic difficulties and the more hard-to-pinpoint rise in moral and political self-doubt and decline in commitment to the so-called American way of life—at the very least the position and its implications for the possibilities open to “post-modern” society deserve to be more widely known.

The needs set forth are for security and provisions, love, dignity and self-actualization. Such a position is at odds with the views of human nature which currently dominate the social sciences. It conflicts with current views that deny the existence of human nature—whether they portray a person as wholly shaped by social, cultural, economic and historical conditions or see each individual as highly autonomous, capable of remaking himself completely according to any specifications he chooses—as well as with those which accept a common human psychology, but postulate either the evils in the instincts, or id, as being tamed by civilization or man’s inherent goodness being warped by it.

It is not our purpose here to trace the often quite scholastic labyrinths through which this debate has passed (“if one compares what Freud has written on page so-and-so to page so-and-so concerning sublimation, one cannot fail to see that my vision of repression is true . . .”11) nor to sift and weigh the extensive but inconclusive data as to which viewpoint on human nature has the most empirical support at the moment. We ask, rather, what distinctive implications Maslow has for the dynamics of our time and what evidence exists that current trends deserve to be understood from a Maslowian perspective?

As I see it (and interpretation is unavoidable since Maslow died in 1970 and was not a rigid thinker), if people have immutable needs for love, dignity and self-actualization,12 then no clever conditioning, behavior modification, thoroughgoing socialization processes or any other attempts at pigeonholing or regimentation can bring them to accept a world of hate, stigma and constraint. People may be led to withstand abusive totalitarianism or ghetto conditions because sheer survival (Maslow’s most basic need) takes precedence over the higher needs listed above. However, this does not mean that people can be made to disregard the claims of their higher selves and achieve satisfaction in a regimented world without dignity and freedom. When the objective situation allows it, their underlying yearning for satisfaction of their full range of needs will assert itself—not because they have been taught to view affection, self-

---

esteem, and autonomous creative action as projects one should follow, but despite and counter to society’s messages to substitute for these gratifications manufactured material wants.

The deeper ramifications of this view of human nature for our future will be suggested subsequently, but its implications for contemporary policies are quite evident: behavior modification and other conditioning techniques may well succeed in dealing with specific items of behavior, but they cannot be used to create different personalities incompatible with basic human needs (such as 1984 soldier-robots or workers who love their assembly lines).13

The Maslowian basic human needs perspective further suggests that while some of our inner drives are shared with other animals, we have, in addition, important needs which are distinctively human, shared by other animals only in rudimentary form, if at all. In effect, our needs to love and be loved, for dignity, and for self-actualization may well be used to characterize, indeed define, a human being. Children who have been long deprived of human contact and opportunity for satisfaction of their higher needs do not learn symbolic language or how to think abstractly; rather than walk erect, they crawl and bark. They remind us that it is not sufficient to be born of a human to be human. At least a measure of attention to the higher order needs is required to transform the animal each of us is at birth into a human person. Ethically, it is in these additional needs that our claim to be treated—and our imperative to treat others—as persons is rooted. It follows that attempts to base public policy on other grounds are bound to fail.

By the same token, the human essence cannot be reached via genetics any more than via animal psychology. No one has identified, or is likely to find, genes for love or chromosomes for self-actualization. Our biological inheritance may affect us through our animal nature, but it is powerfully channeled by our peculiarly human character to shape our desires and actions. Most significantly, in this context, Maslow and the other humanistic psychologists recognize only one set of basic human needs which all persons share, whatever their race, sex or ethnic heritage. Any other approach which sees subpopulations of different kinds as motivated by essentially different basic human needs, for genetic or other reasons, is but a short step from racism. All that has to be added to such an anti-Maslowian proposition—to the notion that there are inherent basic differences among peoples—for it to become racism is the almost unavoidable corollary suggestion that since different attributes have different normative standings (higher or lower values), the better-endowed groups are superior. A true libertarian position, therefore, must rest on a universality of basic human needs, on a Maslowian position.

This is not to suggest, however—Maslow is quite clear on this point—that all peoples seek to fulfill all their needs at once or the same particular subset of needs at the same time. Historical conditions determine which profile of needs is acted upon at a given time because basic human needs are arranged in a hierarchy. Under conditions of stringent scarcity, people will act first to fulfill their “lowest” need, that is,

to secure their continued existence. Poor people in affluent countries can be expected to concern themselves more with obtaining adequate food, housing and clothing than with meeting higher needs. Similarly, a conscientious objector, who took part in an experiment in which starvation was induced, gradually lost interest in his social work after a few weeks of very restricted diet.\(^{14}\) This does not mean that the nobler things in life mean nothing, only that circumstances force people to focus their energies on the first-order needs.

Once the minimal needs of existence have been secured, attention can be shifted to the higher ones. It is at this point that an interpretation of what is meant by satisfaction of the lower needs is of the greatest relevance to our status as an advanced industrial nation and our future, especially in a world of exhaustable natural resources. Maslow himself did not specify whether he expected the active quest for higher fulfillment to be triggered as soon as the lower needs were adequately met or only after these needs had been fully satiated, even gorged.

The point is crucial because many social scientists, and many more observers of the social scene, have pointed to the so-called American way of life as the ultimate proof that man is acquisitive by nature and has insatiable desires for material goods and services. It is often pointed out, for example, that workers and their unions have traditionally paid far more attention to the bread and butter issues of pay and improving fringe benefits than to doing something about the boredom, routinization, and lack of opportunities for autonomy and creativity characteristic of factory labor.

A comparison of job attitudes among workers on the assembly line in a car factory and in a chemical plant, where more advanced technology made the work pace less regimented and therefore supposedly less alienating, found the chemical workers substantially more dissatisfied with their jobs than the auto workers because of their lower pay.\(^{15}\) The study discovered, in fact, that the size of their wages was not only the central, but virtually the sole interest of both groups in their work.\(^{16}\)

However, these data do not necessarily contradict Maslow; they may indicate that people have a high level of materialistic desires and hence will delay their shift to active quest of higher needs, and not necessarily that they will pursue ever higher levels of materialistic well-being without increasing psychological investment in other human needs. But these data leave moot the questions of whether the shift will occur and whether it might be at such a high level of consumption that, in a world of rising shortages, it may indeed be far away.

A second look at these and similar findings, however, reveals considerable room for an interpretation more favorable to Maslow. The chemical plant which workers criticized was still a monotonous place to work—if somewhat less so than the assembly line—and unsuited to the pursuit of self-actualization, let alone love and human dignity. These needs the workers sought to satisfy "after

hours," in family life or in other leisure-time activities. Their lives were rigidly compartmentalized, with work stripped of meaning beyond its capacity to provide earnings. Moreover, interviews with workers revealed that substantial portions of the various groups studied—between 44 and 66 percent—had previously held less routinized, more intrinsically enjoyable, but poorly paying jobs which most said they liked more than their current ones and had reluctantly given up in favor of the higher pay. They remained highly conscious of the sacrifices they had made in making this choice and indeed viewed their high wages as compensation for the many physical and psychological stresses they had to put up with on the job.

Workers' awareness of deprivation also came out indirectly in their aspirations for their children. When asked what they hoped for their children's futures, the number of responses stressing economic rewards and intrinsic satisfaction were nearly equal, and the specific jobs mentioned most often—electronics engineer, industrial designer and draughtsman—were ones that were approved because they were rewarding on both grounds.

Eli Chinoy's classic study of assembly line workers supports this interpretation by showing that job dissatisfaction was very high among Detroit auto workers. This was reflected in complaints about the relentless pace and monotony of the work, high turnover on the assembly line, and the fact that 48 of 62 workers (and 25 of 29 on the production line) said they had thought of "getting out of the shop" and that "everybody" did. As in a more recent British study discussed above, most of the workers dreamed of going into business for themselves. Others thought about farming, sales jobs or semi-professional work—jobs characterized by a good deal of autonomy and variety. Only three mentioned some other kind of wage work.

More generally, the American way of life may well have been founded on the notion that obtaining products is a main route to obtaining greater affection (from spouse and children), higher prestige (respect from one's fellows), and even self-actualization (in the command of machines, the power of money, and the like). To state that for decades Americans have been exposed to such messages is to understate the case. It is well known that for most American households, watching television is a major leisure activity, with consumerism permeating advertisements and many programs and being further enforced by other mass media.

**CHANGING VALUES AND ALTERNATIVE LIFE STYLES**

The crucial question is how deeply did the idea that goods are the best way to satisfy all our needs take hold? It seems that for a transitional period, encompassing the shift from agriculture to industry until quite recently, both America as a nouveau riche nation and its arriviste classes elaborated this theme with every variation that money and credit could purchase. Yet the pursuit of conspicuous consumption had

17. Goldthorpe, Affluent Worker, pp. 55-56.
18. Goldthorpe, Affluent Worker, p. 133.
all the neurotic signs of frenzy, breathlessness, and nonpermanence characteristic of activities inherently unsatisfying.

More recently, precisely those subpopulations which had been most deeply involved in the pursuit of multiple satisfaction via material objects began experimenting with so-called alternative life styles. Alternatives to what, one may ask? To the disciplined life the worship of objects entails is one answer. What alternatives? Precisely those a Maslowian would expect: a quest for family, peer and community relations based more on affection and less on exchange; a search for a greater self-dignity that no objects can buy; and a drive for more autonomy, freedom and self-expression via artistic, personalistic and political projects, as well as "second careers."

It is now commonplace to suggest that these movements of the 1960s are currently faltering, and there is a grand return to "normalcy," or a renewed quest for materialistic advancement. As I see it, the developments we are witnessing are quite different in nature; what is happening now represents the maturing of the quest for more satisfying life styles. This is reflected in the fact that people tend to give up the extreme modes which prevail in the experimental stages of major social changes, replacing them with more moderate, but also much more lasting, adaptations. Thus, instead of fleeing modernity to live in communes, people are joining block associations and working together to create new urban communities. Instead of seeking the wandering quasi-monastic life of the adult "hippie," complete with vows of poverty if not of chastity, more and more people refuse to take work home and instead spend more time and energy on self-actualizing pursuits which are congruent with working enough to secure a comfortable existence.

As evidence, consider students, who still constitute a social avant-garde, being better off than average and, as young persons in education, less committed to the existing social structure and sets of values. A study by Daniel Yankelovich concluded that "campus-based political revolution is over for the foreseeable future, while the cultural revolution—the new naturalism—will continue to grow at an ever-increasing tempo."21 He found that student values had undergone a metamorphosis from competitive to cooperative life styles, and from an emphasis on extrinsic career rewards (money and prestige) to inherent satisfactions, and from "achievement via hard work to living in closer harmony with peers and with nature."

Thus, during the period studied (1968 to 1971) students' endorsement of the maxim "hard work pays off" fell from 69 percent to 39 percent.22 Furthermore, work failed to rank particularly high as an important value in the students' lives, falling far below the emphasis placed on love, friendship, education, self-expression, family and privacy.23 Thus, love was ranked as a very important value by 87 percent; being creative, 52 percent; work, 45 percent; comfort, 40 percent; and money, 18 percent. (That to some extent these answers are ideological goes without saying, but the direc-

tion ideology takes is of interest.) Only 12 percent felt the American way of life was superior to that of any other country.

It is particularly interesting to note, in view of the Maslowian theory, that the students Yankelovich studied, who went to college "to search for more intangible benefits—having to do with self-expression, self-fulfillment, self-actualization, and societal change" rather than "making it," by and large did not do so expecting poverty, but rather took affluence for granted.24 While a slight majority of the students continued to place great importance on affluence, as many as 44 percent in 1969 (projecting to more than 3.5 million) took affluence for granted and emphasized instead the new goals, with recent economic problems producing only a 5 percent rise in those committed to materialistic goals in 1971.

Professor Milton Rokeach of Washington State University developed a scale to study values and studied a random sample of Americans 21 years and older from 1968 to 1972. Twenty-five of the 36 values studied showed no change in terms of the relative importance attributed to them.25 However, the changes reported are in line with the Maslowian thesis: increasing in importance are world peace, beauty, equality and mature love; decreasing in importance are a comfortable life, a sense of accomplishment and family security. To what degree such findings will be affected by the prevailing economic uncertainty is as yet unclear.

A rather different test of the Maslow thesis was attempted by Professor Ronald Inglehart, a political scientist affiliated with the Universities of Michigan and Geneva. Inglehart asked people in six European nations what they saw as more significant: combating inflation and maintaining law and order (which he labeled "acquisitive" values) or increasing people’s say in political matters and protecting freedom of speech (which he referred to as "post-bourgeois" values).26 While one might wish that he had asked about a broader range of non-acquisitive values, the narrow scope of his questions does not render his data irrelevant.

In all six countries, Inglehart found a clear majority on the acquisitive side, but at the same time a sizable minority of the citizens-at-large (not just students or youth) expressed a preference for the post-bourgeois values. This group was largest in the Netherlands and Belgium, smaller in Italy and France, and smallest in Germany and Britain. In all six countries, the younger the person, the lower the commitment to acquisitive values. An even stronger correlation was established with affluence. The more wealth a person had, the less he or she was committed to acquisitive values and the higher his other allegiance to the post-bourgeois ideals. Thus, for instance, among the upper class in the Netherlands, 11 percent endorsed acquisitive values, while 52 percent favored post-bourgeois ones; among the lower classes, the relationship was reversed—40 percent acquisitive and 7 percent post-bourgeois.

Professor Nobutaka Ike reports

similar findings from Japan. While the “get rich” proportion of the people has not changed much over the years—15 percent in 1953 to 17 percent in 1968—those placing higher value on living to suit one’s taste have increased from 21 percent to 32 percent, and those who support the ideal of “living cheerfully,” from 11 percent to 20 percent.27

These and other such data have triggered a considerable technical debate among researchers over what meanings can be inferred legitimately, the details of which are of interest primarily to the specialist.28 The overall conclusion, however, seems to be that a sizable and growing group, albeit still a minority, is expressing a preference for satisfaction of their so-called higher needs—not replacing comfort, but building on top of it.

**FUTURE ECONOMICS AND WESTERN WAYS OF LIFE**

The recent economic downturn and energy crisis have put the Maslowian thesis to a new and more severe test. While I decline to join in the doomsday outcries, neither do I believe the crisis to be a transitory condition. Presenting it as a temporary phenomenon is the politician’s way of avoiding telling the Western world that several countries, most of which were heretofore economically weak, have now found a means to reallocate the wealth of nations. All the talk of convincing the oil producing countries to reduce their prices or “recycle” their monies into Western hands refuses to come to terms with the fact that, even if present prices were halved, a major reallocation of wealth would nevertheless still occur, because half is still twice the previous price.

Also, while recycling through investment in the West might delay the day of reckoning somewhat, it would increase the bill by adding interest to capital, with the interest alone quickly reaching levels akin to the original outlays. (For example, at 7 percent interest, within 10 years the amount owed on a $100 loan is virtually doubled).

The Western people (perhaps with the oil-rich, “blue-eyed Arabs” in Norway and Canada exempted) will have to lower their standard of living, or at least accept a halt in its rise. Inflation is only the primary way this is being brought about. Project Independence, if it ever gets off the ground, is meant to phase out this country’s dependence on foreign energy resources. However, whatever the political and psychic significance of such a drive, the capital outlays involved are so enormous that the result, oddly enough, would be the same: the United States would have to curb consumption in order to free resources for the new era of industrial development. According to a recent article in the *New Republic*, estimates of capital outlays range from $700 billion by a member of the Federal Reserve Board to $628 billion by the National Petroleum Council to the FEA’s $545 billion.
all of which leave out such costs as operating expenses, debt payments, building new steel mills to produce mining equipment, and the cost of houses, highways and cars to supply miners' families.)

We would, in a way, have to return to the 1890s—not that the standard of living would be that low, but top priority would be given to industrial-economic development and the concomitant demands on personality.

The Maslowian question is whether the West will respond by such a rededication to materialistic endeavors or evolve a new societal force under these challenges. The doomsday prophets are manifest or latent materialists. Their world is one of gross national product, income per capita, cash flow and commodity scarcities. Indeed, if the West continues to hinge its self-view—its definition of well-being, in effect—on a continued expansion of the amount of resources used annually, the future is likely to be experienced as constraining and conflict-laden. However, if the West were instead to lead the way to a new civilization based on satisfaction of Maslow's higher needs, toward a greater emphasis on collective projects low in resources required, and if materialistic escalation were put aside in deference to self-actualization, the West would experience neither shortages nor threats, nor live in poverty.

Significant numbers of Americans, and not only students, are now experimenting with a variety of projects which differ greatly from the current central societal one of creating material resources during the day and consuming them at night. One of these is hedonism, which replaces commitment to production and the work ethic with a "celebration of the body." In one of its main manifestations, commercial hedonism, it is quite close to the other materialist project, simply emphasizing consumerism at the expense of production by implying that one is entitled to play hard without having worked hard. This type of hedonism is, of course, highly dependent on continued affluence. Its second main manifestation is more relevant: pauper hedonism is a collective celebration of the senses not mediated by products and therefore less of a drain on the world's material resources. The senior citizen retirement idyll of continuous daily rounds of bridge and shuffleboard playing, taking part in social clubs and relaxing in the sun exemplifies this type of hedonism, and one could imagine both a greater proportion of the population and a greater proportion of each individual's life devoted to such an existence. Ultimately, however, either kind of hedonistic life style as a central project for society would seem to be difficult to stabilize and, consequently, likely to self-destruct for reasons which we cannot explain here.

A very different life style would entail finding meaning in creative self-expression, expansion of the mind, and advancement of knowledge through study. A surprisingly large number of people, non-working persons especially—housewives, the aged, youth, as well as so-called perpetual students—currently center their lives around pottery-making or painting or "going back to school," not for vocational but for intrinsic satisfaction.

Still another possible new life


focus is the empathetic project in which the most important pursuit would become greater understanding of ourselves and others and better communication and interaction. The burgeoning of sensitivity and encounter groups, the increasing numbers of people who see therapists of one sort or another, as well as the greatly increased sales of social-psychological books are indicative of a trend in this direction.

Finally, there could occur a shift toward an "active society"—one in which public affairs, particularly politics at the local level and participation in so-called private governments such as schools, hospitals and voluntary associations, would achieve primacy. While it may be difficult to imagine such a shift in focus from material production and consumption to artistic and literary pursuits, interpersonal relations, politics or some other non-material pursuits, it is wise to bear in mind that historically most societies have had nonmaterialistic central projects, even though most of the majority’s time was spent in subsistence production. The main difference between these past societies and an advanced industrial society such as ours is that, though we would have to maintain a base of production, we would be able to do so while freeing not only the elite, but a larger proportion of citizens and a larger portion of each individual’s time for devotion to nonmaterial pursuits.

Whether this comes about is not up to the intellectuals, however, be they doomsday prophets or Maslowians. No social scientist or societal engineer can make a people redefine what they value most and what they will make the core of their personal and societal projects. However, if more and more members of Western societies experience materialism and its inherent inability to satisfy the full range of human needs, then the shift to encompass and stress nonmaterialistic projects could well occur.

The outlook for internal social justice must also be gauged in this light. The politics of reallocation based on guilt toward the disadvantaged and the poor has more or less run its course. If materialism remains the prime project of the middle and upper classes, I see no basis on which to obtain their consent for granting a significant share of their now-threatened affluence to American have-nots, let alone to others. However, if the societal focus is shifted, the political prerequisite for greater social justice will have been created, so that all those Americans who are now excluded from a comfortable life style will be able to attend to this as their first need. The new nonmaterialistic projects are not meant to be given to the poor instead of housing, clothing and food. After having attained comfort in these areas, however, the poor will be as ready as the privileged classes to look for fulfillment of their higher needs.

*  

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: My name is Caroline Heller. I know Maslow and his idea of self-actualization. I would like to ask Mr. Etzioni how we in realistic and practical terms could reach that kind of self-actualization.
I ask the question especially in the context of these times of advanced technology.

A: I may as well be honest—I do not have an answer for the question. It has been with mankind as long as recorded history, from the Old Testament on, and people have aspired to an answer but I don’t think they have come up with one. The most I can do is offer one footnote: the world in which most or all people will be able to self-actualize will require the uniting on a purpose which is not tied to scarcity.

Scarcity by definition means conflict and competition; it is therefore one of the psychological roots of war. Dealing with things you can have and others will not lack is a psychological prerequisite for genuine, lasting peace. We must focus our lives on purposes which are not scarcity-bound. The move toward that solution is not automatically forthcoming, but I believe there are signs of that direction.