

# Some Prescriptions for Social Neurosis

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WITH a general recognition that the world is in a mess, any effort to sort things out is welcome. One such effort is that of Frank Goble, founder and president of the Thomas Jefferson Research Society. In his latest book\* he reviews the maladies of our time and offers his prescriptions.

In a foreword, Henry Hazlitt says "Frank Goble has had the courage to try to view the problem as a whole." And Mr. Goble does cover much territory—political, sociological, psychological.

Noting that America has had great material success, Mr. Goble points out that it is also plagued by such problems as crime, violence, corruption and many other symptoms of social disintegration. In trying to ascertain what caused America's growth, he rejects the explanations of climate, resources and genetics, and focuses on education. Several generations were taught an "American ethic" derived from many sources. Its starting point is Natural Law and it includes respect for freedom and also responsibility.

It is in the weakening of this ethic that Mr. Goble finds an important cause of decay. Natural Law has been abandoned and traditional values have been discarded. A relativistic ethic is taught, one that rejects firm standards of right and wrong.

In the domain of psychology, Mr. Goble finds the dominant schools of thought deficient—the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and the behavioural psychology of B. F. Skinner. He finds more hope in "the third force"—a school of psychology emphasizing normal standards, responsibility and self-actualization. (This is outlined in an earlier book by Frank Goble, *The Third Force*, reviewed in *Land & Liberty*, September & October, 1974.)

Responsibility is "the ability to fulfill one's needs, and to do so in a way that does not deprive others of the ability to fulfill their needs."

Abraham Maslow and William Glasser are among the leading advocates of this approach, which has produced noteworthy results with psychiatric patients, drug addicts, alcoholics, criminals, etc. Mr. Goble also cites cases where "the third force" has been used in dealing with questions of management, morale, waste, labour problems, etc. Some impressive successes have been achieved in various organizations and agencies, public and private, by an earnest study of the problems with cooperation by all parties involved, and an effort to apply principles of responsibility and good performance.

Mr. Goble has a vision of applying this technique

on a vast scale. "What we propose now is a similar professionally-managed, coordinated crash programme to develop, test and merchandise programmes and techniques to solve human problems. What is urgently needed is a People Project—a national mobilization of resources to solve human problems using the same systematic approach that placed astronauts on the moon."

A great vision—but one quails at the prospect in view of current efforts to get various parties together—locally, nationally and internationally—to solve problems of varying magnitude, with usually amorphous results. Fine if everybody agrees to be objective, rational and judicious—but how do you get past conflicting interests?

One could also feel fatalistic about our social evolution in view of the sharp observation of eighteenth-century philosopher, Giambattista Vico: "Men first feel necessity, then look for utility, next attend to comfort, still later amuse themselves with pleasure, thence grow dissolute in luxury, and finally go mad and waste their substance." This could be a capsule history of America as well as of other civilizations. But Mr. Goble rejects fatalism. "Most people," he says, "are familiar with historic examples of social disintegration. Few seem aware of societies that were in serious trouble but managed to recover!" One example cited is the recovery and progress of British life after a decline in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

I have doubts about some implications in Mr. Goble's book. For instance, I question whether a return to the traditions and conventions that kept people "in line" in former days is the correct antidote to today's unruliness and permissiveness. I also miss in this book some solid attention to economic problems and solutions (although Mr. Goble is known to adhere to the philosophy of Henry George). But there is no question that his overview of today's social problems and his recommendations toward a solution constitute an approach that stirs the imagination.

I would only add that people are not as dumb and wicked as they may sometimes seem; that present-day behaviour is a not unnatural response to a social system that has failed in some very basic respects; that out of current chaos a better shape of things could come; and that wisdom and guidance are better offered as helpful hints rather than as a proposal to take over and remould the world. I have an idea that Frank Goble would basically agree with these things.

\**Beyond Failure: How to Cure a Neurotic Society*, by Frank Goble. Caroline House Books, Ottawa, Illinois, 1977. Hardback \$10.00. Paperback \$4.95.