PREFACE

The Good Society is a perennial concern. How ought we to build a life in common with each other? In the western world, Plato was the first philosopher to raise this question. The answer he devised in *The Republic,* often labeled a *utopia,* might be more accurately called a normative theory. Not an idle invention comprised of dreams, desires, and vague intentions, it is instead a work of fierce discipline and of commitment to the transcendent possibilities of being human.

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Normative theory: a vision of how social relations ought to be arranged, and how we should proceed to structure them.

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What leads us then to ask about the Good Society?

Our being open to the world, what Arnold Gehlen called *welt-offen.* Our ability to represent the world to ourselves through symbols. Mediated through symbols, the future rises up in our mind as a transcendent possibility, a challenge, and a hope.

Is it constrained, this Good Society, like The Republic, *by an explicit theory of values? How shall we know it is a* good *society?*

By its being rooted in a particular conception of humanity. But to keep this argument from becoming circular, the meaning of being human must be independently conceived.

Humanity out of the void? A purely arbitrary conception?

No, but grounded in that most basic of human activities, in symbol-forming speech, the faculty we have for entering into a dialogue with one another, each one a questioner and a responder alike.

Then we are "dyadic" beings, incomplete except as we are linked to others in a chain of dialogic encounters?

Yes. And the Good Society is that ordering of human relations that allows us to live more fully in the life of dialogue. But such a society is small in scale and must exist within a social medium that is constructed according to a different principle, the principle of hierarchy and power.

The world of social planning and the state?

That is how it is generally known. The Good Society is arrayed in opposition to this world, asserting itself in struggle to open up new territories for itself. It is a struggle that must continue without letup; it is a permanent struggle.

The Good Society then seeks to eliminate the state?

Neither to eliminate nor to replace it. The Good Society refuses hegemonic power; it does not wish to totalize itself. In attempting to do so, it would cease to be the Good Society and would transform itself according to the principle of hierarchy which is opposed to it.

So the Good Society and social planning form a "unity of opposites" in which each part is necessary to the other, and yet, at the same time, there is a fundamental contradiction holding them in conflict and apart.

Precisely. Without necessity there is no choice, and without choice no freedom. Contradictions and the struggle they imply are lodged at the very center of the Good Society: there is no final victory.

But then, what is the object of the Good Society? Does it search for anything beyond itself? What is the nature of the struggle?

It's object is to be itself, to extend itself in dialogue, creating conditions within the world of social planning that are

conducive to a life in dialogue and to becoming human. That struggle is its practice. Because it seeks the transformation of the world, it may be called a radical practice.

Must the Good Society then be defined by its practice? Does it only exist, so to speak, in its practice, and can it not be conceived apart from it?

It is defined but also constrained by its practice. Because it lives entirely in dialogue, it cannot exceed the limits of this dialogue *even in its struggle with the powers of planning.*

Then dialogue is a method of struggle . . .

No. Not a method so much as a relation within which struggle occurs. Dialogue and dialectical movement form yet another unity of opposites, a unity that cannot be divided, as each of its terms is both defined and limited by the other.

A nonviolent struggle . . .

For a world that is made smaller, more comprehensible, in which we can reclaim our rights as autonomous, dyadic beings, in the relations of women and men, and in the worlds of work, education, and governance. In short, a struggle for a more dialogic world.

Beyond itself, or internal to itself? Is it a place, a magical, bounded space that defines it? If I wanted to find the Good Society, where would I go?

To those who fail to be involved, it does not usually disclose itself. You will find it only in practice . . . now here, now there, wherever you are and whenever you are prepared to join in its work. It makes its appearance in the street, the factory, the neighborhood, the school . . . These are its physical settings. But they do not define nor limit the Good Society.

Meaning the Good Society exists in time . . .

In time only, and its space is the space of social relations.

And can we find it also at home, within the family? Or is the family excluded from it, a separate realm?

Strictly speaking, the family is neither excluded nor included. The bourgeois family is typically withdrawn from the world; it is explicitly a private realm. As such it cannot be the Good Society. But as a household economy, it is essential to the Good Society. We also have to eat. And the family—the household—must once again engage itself as a producing unit . . . producing its own life . . . not merely to consume commodities and services produced by others. But to serve the Good Society and serve it well, the family must cease to make a total claim on the women, men, and children who compose it. It must become deprivatized . . .

And so destroy the very essence of the family?

I mean it must extend itself into the world, it must break down the barriers between the private and the public realms, it must cease to be a place for the accumulation of possessions, for the practice of exclusiveness, for the mere reproduction of social relations. It must instead become a place for the transforming practice of dialogue among its members, each of whom is a dyadic being, free and independent, accepted as an equal and in his difference, or hers, from every other member and by each. In this way the household can be changed into the staging area of the Good Society, the rallying point of its practice, a base of support.

Are not dialogic relations the typical relations within the family as we now know it?

I don't believe so. To engage in dialogue, we must be able first to see the other person as estranged. Only then can we set him or her into a new relation to ourselves. Being

human implies a capacity for estrangement. But the family, with its close intimacies, is precisely the place where this seldom occurs. The space is too tight; we need more room!

To be less exclusive, more generous in the claims that it makes and more supportive both is a difficult task . . .

Difficult, yes, but not impossible. For the first time in history we may be witness to a fundamental change: the transformation of the family into a ground for dialogic encounter. There should be no break between the household and the Good Society, we should be able to pass from one to the other, scarcely aware of the transition. Our need for each other must first become less before the dialogue can be recovered.

These are some of the themes in this book. It is a book of many rooms, and only some of them have been explored. My outline of the Good Society is therefore incomplete, and the reader is invited to elaborate the sketch, or to construct another theory. To do so, three conditions must be met: a foundation in specific values must be made explicit; in the light of these values, a critical theory of reality must be devised; and a consistent set of action principles to bring about a changed reality has to be stated.

I like to think of the philosophical method followed here as dialectical humanism. The humanist label stems from the central role assigned to dialogue as the absolute measure to judge the fitness of actions, concepts, and institutions. The dialectical part will be found in the numerous oppositions that form the substance of the argument: the unity of dialogue and dialectics, of the Good Society and the world of social planning, of the power of the Tao and the coercive power of the state, of radical practice and social learning, of self and the other, of individual and collectivity. The social transformations from within to generate conditions for the Good Society and for the life of

dialogue take place in the tensions between these contradictory moments.

The way we communicate thoughts forms an integral part of the thought itself. Informed by this premise, I searched for a style that would accommodate the largest number of possible meanings, dramatically expanding the spectrum of communicable thought *within a given framework*. In writing about the Good Society and its practice, therefore, I decided on a format that will strike the reader as uncommon.

The basic elements of the argument are self-contained paragraphs. Of varying length, ranging from a single sentence to several pages, they are interspersed, at appropriate places, with poems, aphorisms, short selections from philosophical writings, and other "delights" that are intended to illustrate, contradict, confirm, and illuminate the paragraphs in their immediate vicinity, adding depth and concrete imagery to the more abstract portions of the text.

As in a musical composition the paragraphs are arranged thematically. The major movements are the parts which, in turn, are divided into sections. Here the reader will find preludia, statements of major and secondary themes, variations, repetitions, interludes, recapitulations, and codas. Key concepts, such as dialogue, are first introduced in a specific context, given a formal definition in another place, and are reserved for more elaborate, systematic treatment in yet a third. Occasionally, sentences are repeated for emphasis, either verbatim or in a slightly modified form, but always in a context that is different. In this way the reader may be led to discern new meanings or clarify an older meaning that has already become familiar.

According to custom the method of scholarly argumentation is to take a major theme and proceed to break it down into its components, each part serving to sustain the whole. The implicit idea in this procedure is to persuade

the skeptical reader of the author's point of view. Thinking is conceived as being linear. Here I have used a different procedure. Beginning with the elementary paragraphs, I composed them into complex patterns of meaning that were not, except in roughest outline, preconceived. Thinking *as it actually happens* is nonlinear. Therefore I also have no interest in persuading you, the reader. Instead I should like you to think from the trampoline of each paragraph into a pattern of your own.

The history of this book started many years ago. Teaching at UCLA's School of Urban Planning, I had become convinced of the need to include in our curriculum courses in "critical studies" that would examine the present conditions of our life from an explicit value perspective. Planners were not to be merely technicians, the loyal servants of the state. Above everything else the students I knew wanted to be effective on a more personal level. But it is difficult to be effective if you don't know what you want, or even what is wrong with your city, or why things are as they are. Unable to find the right person for the role of resident social critic, we decided to become self-reliant. It was the best decision we ever made. In 1973 Harvey Perloff, Barclay Hudson, and I organized what was to become the first in a regular series of seminars which we had the temerity to call the Good Society. In these seminars this book was born.

The first draft was finished, with the help of Susana Mendaro, in the summer and fall of 1975. The present version was completed three years later. I am especially indebted to Dolores Hayden for her support and even more for her critical comments on the earlier draft. But many others had a part in the writing of the Good Society, often unknown to themselves. I thank them all and at the same time beg their pardon for all my errors of omission and commission.

Kitty Bednar prepared the final manuscript with great care.