

Constructing the Future: An Evolutionary Alternative to a Bureaucratic Way of Life

The coronavirus pandemic, for all of its horrors, indicates that there is something desperately wrong with our way of life. Here is a positive spin on what we are all experiencing: Given the existence of fundamental problems in society, we require a deep sense of purpose to solve them. As the sociologist Lawrence Busch has written, "The crisis is the catalyst that makes the new image of the future meaningful as an alternative" (1976: 35). In order to make full use of this "silver lining" of the coronavirus cloud, we require at least three things: (1) a description of the basic problem of contemporary society; (2) a vision of an alternative society that promises to make progress on that problem; and (3) actions that enable us to actually move toward those solutions. I follow an ancient Japanese proverb: "Vision without action is a daydream, action without vision is a nightmare." That proverb invokes the key elements of the scientific method. "Vision" includes awareness of a problem as well as a theory specifying how to make progress on solving it. "Action" encompasses procedures guided by theory which move us toward that vision.

Our Basic Problem: A Bureaucratic Way of Life

A simplified view of the general nature of bureaucracy without getting into all of its complexities, changes throughout history and different types includes three elements: patterns of (1) persisting hierarchy, (2) personal conformity to the rules laid down by that hierarchy, and (3) narrow specialization with limited integration of knowledge.

A fundamental problem within bureaucratic organizations is the limitations their pattern of organization imposes on our understanding of how to solve the problems that they address. It is not just their "narrow specialization with limited integration of knowledge" that stands in the way of solutions. It is also their emphasis on hierarchy, which limits communication up and down the organization's levels of authority. In addition, the emphasis on personal conformity to organizational rules disempowers organizational members from developing their own ideas about how to solve problems, based on personal experiences.

This pattern of organization fosters within members, and the public interacting with them, an outward orientation. The individual learns to pay attention to the rules governing one's behavior so as not to violate them. There is an attempt to satisfy those higher in the hierarchy rather than to improve the organization. The result is that one learns to neglect one's own potentials for creativity, losing any sense of self-worth.

American sociologists, with all of their understanding of the nature of bureaucracy, have illustrated these same problems within their own organization of the American Sociological Association. They have moved from less than a dozen Sections during the period of World War II to no less than fifty-two at the present time, each with its own chairperson and other officers.

If we assume that an understanding of human behavior requires the broad approach exhibited by the founders of sociology, then contemporary sociologists have developed patterns of bureaucracy that militate against such breadth.

There are a great many examples of the limitations of such organizations throughout society. Without going into detailed analysis, prior to the 9/11 tragedy at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the CIA, FBI, State Department and NSA—all part of the organization of the federal government—apparently failed to share their specialized knowledge about the potential for that disaster. Looking to the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger, the O-ring failure might well have been fixed if employees in different departments had pooled their knowledge.

These problems within bureaucratic organizations were illustrated by Karl Marx in his early work during the 1840s. He focused on the experiences of the individual worker, especially on assembly lines. His chief concern with the “alienation” of the worker is explained by this excerpt from an essay:

We have now considered the act of alienation of practical human activity, labour, from two aspects: (1) the relationship of the worker to the product of labour as an alien object which dominates him...[**physical alienation**]

(2) the relationship of labour to the act of production within labour. This is the relationship of the worker to his own activity as something alien and not belonging to him...This is self-alienation as against the above- mentioned alienation of the thing...[**personality alienation**]

Since alienated labour: (1) alienates nature from man; and (2) alienates man from himself, from his own active function, his life activity; so it alienates him from (3) the species...For labour, life activity, productive life, now appear to man only as means for the satisfaction of a need, the need to maintain his physical existence...free, conscious activity is the species-character of human beings. [**biological alienation**]

(4) A direct consequence of the alienation of man from the product of his labour, from his life activity and from his species-life, is that man is alienated from other men. [**social alienation**] (1844/1964: 125-127, 129; boldface added)

Sociological theorists like the early Karl Marx have succeeded in keeping alive a breadth of perspective that includes the individual no less than social structures. Marx takes into account in this essay the full range of structures encountered by the individual: physical, personality, biological and social. Theorists generally refuse to remain trapped within narrow social contexts or periods of history.

We see the same concern with the individual Marx exhibited in other founders of the discipline. We might recall the early Weber in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905/1958) concluding that the individual has become trapped within an “iron cage.” Durkheim’s *Suicide* (1897/1951), with its treatment of various social structures linked to patterns of suicide, did not lose sight of the situation of the individual influenced by industrialization: “greed is aroused without knowing where to find ultimate foothold” (255). As for Georg Simmel, he saw “the attempt of the individual to

maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society” as linked to “the deepest problems of modern life” (1903/1971: 324).

Although the discipline as a whole has focused on social structure and neglected the individual, we find key theorists who have not succumbed to that trend which is so closely linked to our bureaucratic way of life. We have C. Wright Mills’s *Character and Social Structure* (1953) with Hans H. Gerth and *The Sociological Imagination* (1959). There is Alvin W. Gouldner’s *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (1970), with its introduction of the idea of a “reflexive sociology.” Moving further toward modern times we have the work of Jurgen Habermas (1981), Anthony Giddens (1984), Thomas J. Scheff (1997), Jonathan H. Turner (2002, 2020), and Mohammad H. Tamdgidi (2020), all paying serious attention to the individual.

A fundamental way of understanding the ignoring of the individual within our bureaucratic way of life was advanced by George Gurdjieff, an Armenian philosopher who became well known as a teacher. P. D. Ouspensky, one of his students, explained Gurdjieff’s ideas about the invisibility of the individual in *The Fourth Way* (1971):

Generally you do not *remember yourself* . . . because you cannot remember yourself, you cannot concentrate, and . . . you have no will. If you could remember yourself, you would have will and could do what you liked You may sometimes have will for a short time, but it turns to something else and you forget about it we become too absorbed in things, too lost in things (1971: 3-4, 12).

Gurdjieff suggests the potential power of the individual—just as we might speak of individual emancipation or empowerment—when he states: “If you could remember yourself, you would have will and could do what you liked.” However, “we become too absorbed in things, too lost in things.” Our way of life has taught us an outward orientation rather than an inward-outward perspective. Following Marx, we have become isolated or divorced from our own activities and even our biological nature. We humans, who are the product of billions of years of evolution, have been reduced to nonentities by the way of life that we have constructed.

A Vision of an Evolutionary Way of Life

Dare we think of changing our entire way of life so that we can move away from our outward orientation, our alienation, our invisibility to ourselves? Mills had a motto that he himself practiced: “TAKE IT BIG!” Can we learn to follow Mills along with all of those theorists who refused to ignore the individual? Can we change the alienated belief, “What can I do?” into an emancipated conviction, “What can’t I do?” Can we TAKE IT BIG?

Fred Polak was a Dutch sociologist who surveyed the “images of the future” in the major movements, secular and sacred, throughout the entire

sweep of Western history. He centered on learning the nature of those images of the future which proved to be successful in yielding fundamental changes in society (1961, 1973).

The American sociologist Lawrence Busch, whose doctoral dissertation (1974) was based largely on Polak's work, summarized Polak's ideas in an article published in 1976. He found seven criteria for a successful image of the future, and one precondition:

1. An image of the future must be holistic if it is to achieve widespread acceptance
2. A successful image of the future must provide the promise of the resolution of the anomalies and contradictions of the existing order. . .
3. The future must be constructed in the present, not the future
4. A successful image of the future must provide an escape from the existing order, but it must find that escape within the existing order itself
5. A successful image of the future must provide an operationalizable methodology for the individual
6. All successful images of the future are structured
7. A meaningful image of the future must involve the mundane

One final point needs to be made . . . as a precondition of success. This is simply that *a crisis* must be widely perceived in the existing order. The crisis is the catalyst that makes the new image of the future meaningful as an alternative (Busch, 1976: 29-36).

There is no way that a single article can do more than suggest the nature of an image of the future for society and the individual. My purpose is not to prove that an evolutionary way of life—whatever that turns out to be—is superior to what I call our present bureaucratic way of life. Rather, I put forward in this paper no more than a hypothesis to be filled out and tested over time. Yet I do have faith in the potential of this hypothesis for pointing toward a way of life that can address effectively the highly threatening problems now facing the human race. It is the product of a lifetime of effort to build on the interdisciplinary vision of C. Wright Mills.

A just-completed book, *Creating Life Before Death: Discover Your Amazing Self* (2020a), includes life observations by a sociological scholar, a minister who later became a sheriff's lieutenant, a social psychologist, an economist, and a medical social scientist. Together, with our breadth of experience, we have attempted to address the fundamental problems of society with a proposed solution to the issues in our future.

Building on the seven criteria presented by Busch, my breadth or holism is illustrated by my emphasis on the importance of personality structures no less than social behavior, as presented in two recent publications (2019; 2020b). My focus is on major theorists, all of whom have broad perspectives. Throughout the history of sociology, the interdisciplinary approach of C.

1 Wright Mills, who mentored me at Columbia, influenced me to attend to
2 biological and physical patterns as well as social and personality structures.

3 Next, the invisibility of the individual within a bureaucratic way of life
4 opposes the egalitarian ideals of democracy. Our approach emphasizing
5 individual evolution carries further those ideals, following the view of Jane
6 Addams, originator of the discipline of Social Work: "The cure for the ills of
7 democracy is more democracy." I also follow the conclusion of the
8 psychologist George A. Kelly, namely, that every individual is a scientist in
9 everyday life without awareness of this fact (1963: 4). We all can learn to
10 access the full power of a scientific method that makes full use of integrated
11 knowledge of human behavior. Granting the depth and breadth of modern
12 problems, that method knows no limit in its ability to solve problems.

13 It is the existence of our huge present-day problems, illustrated by our
14 pandemic, economic crisis and atmospheric warming, that have created what
15 Busch indicated is "a precondition of success" of an image of the future. Here,
16 there is questioning of the adequacy of our existing way of life. It is this very
17 crisis that the vision of an evolutionary way of life is addressing in the here and
18 now.

19 My understanding of an evolutionary worldview does not reject the
20 existing order with its economic basis in capitalism. I follow Robert B. Reich's
21 argument in his *Saving Capitalism for the Many, Not the Few* (2016). It is the
22 wedding of capitalism with bureaucracy, just as it is the wedding of socialism
23 with bureaucracy, that is the problem, and not capitalism itself.

24 The methodology for the individual that I emphasize is a combination of
25 the scientific method and the full power of language's dichotomous,
26 gradational, and metaphorical attributes. Given that we already use the
27 scientific method in everyday life, we can all learn to continue to expand our
28 understanding of human behavior as the basis for solving personal and world
29 problems, based on an interdisciplinary approach. Linguistic dichotomy can
30 help us become motivated to achieving solutions by understanding
31 bureaucracy's threats to the very existence of the human race. Gradation can
32 help us take one step at a time in this process, avoiding discouragement and
33 guilt. Metaphor can keep our eyes on the prize, by seeing our mundane actions
34 in everyday life as metaphors for unlocking our own potential as well as the
35 possibilities of the human race.

36 An understanding of how our image of the future invokes both structures
37 and mundane behavior must await the final section of this paper. For it is the
38 actions to be described that will indicate just how this image of the future is
39 structured, as well as how mundane activities will come to be involved in
40 moving toward that vision. Finally, I want readers to learn how to actually
41 develop an evolutionary self-image.

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Actions Moving toward that Vision

Recalling that ancient Japanese proverb, both a vision and action require nothing less than a process pointing toward a re-socialization of the individual. Whatever we like to think about ourselves, our basic problem is our deep socialization into a bureaucratic personality and way of life.

That pattern of behavior involves the deep repression of our emotions, our worship of experts, and our view of ourselves as quite limited beings. All of this points us outward, rather than both inward and outward, just as Ouspensky claimed. Given that orientation, “love is the answer” for the problems of the human race. By contrast, the psychoanalyst Erich Fromm stressed the idea that we must love ourselves in order to be able to love others.

An experiment by Jack Levin, the basis for his doctoral dissertation under my direction at Boston University (1968), demonstrated that students comparing their grades with those of other students, when coupled with frustration or scarcity, is much of the basis for their patterns of aggression (Phillips, et al., 2020a: 114-116). That experiment equally demonstrated that students comparing their performance with their previous achievements point them away from aggression.

Can societies change so that individuals focus on their own development, following Fromm as well as the conclusions of the Levin experiment? By accomplishing that, it appears that we would move away from all the manifestations of aggression, such as bullying, family abuse, racism, sexism, ageism, ethnocentrism, and war.

The Levin experiment’s creation of frustration among his subjects also developed a microcosm of the frustration that presently exists in the macrocosm of our world’s bureaucratic way of life.

We may link widespread frustration throughout society to what the Buddha emphasized twenty-five hundred years ago as “*dukkha*.” This was his First Noble Truth: the negative feelings associated with people’s gap between what they want and are actually able to get. That gap is widened in modern times by advertising, which stimulates our wants, yet our ability to fulfill those wants generally is quite limited. This was the basis for a book I wrote with a co-author: *The Invisible Crisis of Contemporary Society* (2007).

Following Busch’s sixth criterion for a successful image of the future, his focus was on the necessity that such an image be “structured”. This term suggests persistence, just as a table is a structure because its molecules do not wander very far from one another, but rather persist in their present placement. For an individual, we might think of a structure as a habit rather than behavior that is no more than a sometime thing.

How, then, can the individual learn to change habitual behavior pointing outward, to continuing behavior pointing inward as well as outward? The problem we face is that our present habits throughout our everyday lives point us outside of ourselves, following Ouspensky’s analysis as well as the nature of our bureaucratic way of life.

1 We literates, with our focus on language, have learned to pay little
 2 attention to our patterns of perception—such as our sight and hearing—that
 3 point us outward from one moment to the next. To focus on those patterns, we
 4 must go back to the future, to our situation as animals having much in common
 5 with non-human animals without language who must rely on perception.

6 Our problem, then, is to learn to move away from our present pattern of
 7 perception. It is by so doing that we could develop a structure of perceiving
 8 where we interact with our environment, given that we perceive from one
 9 moment to the next.

10 It is this fact of continuing perception that is our present basis for the
 11 structure of our focus away from ourselves. That emphasis supports our
 12 bureaucratic patterns of persisting hierarchy, conformity, and weak a self-
 13 image.

14 To alter that focus, we can learn to develop a personality structure pointing
 15 us toward ourselves. That requires a change in our present patterns of
 16 perception, which occur on a continuing basis.

17 The key procedure for such a transformation is learning to perceive
 18 phenomena from a developmental perspective in more and more situations,
 19 namely, a pattern of *evolutionary perception* stimulating me to become aware
 20 of myself.

21 To accomplish this, the external phenomena that we see can be thought of
 22 as existing at a given stage of the evolution of the universe: rocks came before
 23 plants, which came before animals, which came before present-day human
 24 beings with all of the physical objects that they've produced (houses, cars,
 25 computers, etc.).

26 All those phenomena came before the kind of developmental being we are
 27 trying to become. Others have the same potential as you do, yet they lack
 28 integrated knowledge of human behavior—illustrated by what my co-authors
 29 and I have attempted to create--that points you toward moving from a
 30 bureaucratic toward an evolutionary personality.

31 It is in this way that one implicitly becomes aware of oneself as having
 32 gone further in an evolutionary direction, yielding the inward-outward
 33 perceptual orientation that Levin found leads away from aggression and toward
 34 personal development.

35 For example, I am presently sitting at my desk looking through a window
 36 at Sarasota bay, with that sight illustrating an evolutionary stage prior to the
 37 development of life. Yet implicitly I am aware of my own situation as much
 38 further along within the evolutionary process. As a result, my awareness points
 39 inward no less than outward.

40 I see trees surrounding the bay, an early occurrence within the evolution of
 41 life. Once again I am automatically aware of my own status as illustrating a
 42 stage occurring much later, pointing my awareness inward.

43 I see birds in those trees, a later development within the process of
 44 evolution, yet one occurring long before my own species appeared, again
 45 pointing my attention to myself.

1 Now I perceive a bridge connecting my island in Sarasota bay to the
 2 Sarasota mainland. I see that bridge as a product of a bureaucratic way of life,
 3 with its many highly threatening problems, that I am attempting to move
 4 beyond.

5 I see people walking across that bridge who are wedded to a way of life
 6 that I am trying to leave behind me.

7 The result, over time, is nothing less than a new self-image, where one
 8 becomes aware of oneself as having evolved further than anything that one
 9 perceives. Method actors have clearly demonstrated the possibility of changing
 10 the way one sees oneself in preparing for a role. We all can accomplish this
 11 change, following what those actors are able to do.

12 Method actors spend time with the people whom they wish to present.
 13 There are no such evolutionary people around. The best that we can do is read
 14 about evolutionary behavior.

15 Following the ancient Japanese proverb, our vision will fade unless we
 16 learn how to actually move toward it in our everyday lives. This is where
 17 Busch's seventh criterion for a successful image of the future becomes
 18 relevant: the importance of our mundane behavior in everyday life.

19 We can learn to see everyday behavior metaphorically, pointing in a
 20 developmental direction. Our new self-image can guide us to reach beyond our
 21 grasp in anything and everything that we do. In other words, unless our actions
 22 in more and more moments yield improvement in one way or another, that self-
 23 image will disappear.

24 We can "improve" in any number of ways, and not just in our ability to
 25 solve problems. For example, we can enjoy ourselves more fully, become more
 26 creative, be more empathic about other people's problems, achieve greater
 27 understanding, gain more meaning out of life, and learn to love ourselves and
 28 others more deeply.

29 But what about the rest of the world? What good is it if a few of us change,
 30 and that impacts almost no one else? Following new studies of intelligence
 31 (Nisbett, 2009; Shenk, 2010), we all have much the same potential for personal
 32 evolution. The time is long past due when the hierarchy between those with
 33 advanced degrees and those without them should be maintained.

34 This is exactly where an interactive website, illustrated by our
 35 own theamazingself.com, enters the picture. A website can become an internet
 36 school that teaches a widening audience to develop an evolutionary self-image,
 37 and then move on to solve personal and world problems ever more effectively.
 38 It can also link to the social media to increase its audience.

39 Here, then, is the action that can work to retain one's vision, which in turn
 40 can motivate further action. This is a radical departure from the present-day
 41 emphasis of professional social scientists, who generally refrain from
 42 communicating to the general public, let alone committing themselves to
 43 making progress on the problems of society.

44 Such progress could be foreshadowed by blogs on a website. Dialogues
 45 could be developed with visitors to the site who could yield further insights on
 46 how to improve one's effectiveness.

In these ways, one's everyday actions can work to reinforce one's vision, which in turn can reinforce one's actions. The idea of interaction permeates the entire process, just as the very nature of our universe is interactive, where no part of it can ever be completely isolated from the rest of the universe.

As for the nature of an evolutionary versus a bureaucratic way of life, in this short paper I might at least make use of a pair of metaphors to suggest the possibilities. Presently we might see ourselves as functioning on a see-saw. We look outward to the other end of our teeter-totter. And only one of us can rise up, given the limited possibilities of our situation. Yet we cannot rise very far.

By contrast, an evolutionary way of life suggests our location on a stairway with steps wide enough for the entire human race. Those steps do not narrow as we climb leaving room for all. Pushing others down does not occur, since that only gets in the way of our own climbing. And there is absolutely no limit to how far that stairway reaches out to the stars. That movement points toward the solution of world problems no less than personal problems

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