

# The Rise and Fall of Empires

Republished with friendly permission by the author from:  
The Human Mirror - The Narcissistic Imperative in Human Behaviour  
by James Cumes, Online Originals, London, England, Jan 1, 2000

"As a prince must be able to act just like a beast, he should learn from the fox and the lion; because the lion does not defend himself against traps and the fox does not defend himself against wolves. So one has to be a fox in order to recognise traps, and a lion to frighten off wolves." - Niccolo Machiavelli, THE PRINCE, XVIII

## Homogeneity and Heterogeneity

So far, for example, in looking at Pitcairn, we have reflected on how a small, isolated and necessarily narcissistic group might be genetically disabled. Associated with this are other questions: how are communities affected by intruders, their genetic makeup strengthened or debilitated, their capacity to cope with affairs domestically or in competition with others enhanced or reduced? The Pitcairners might be seen as a small field "experiment". But how does a similar process operate on a much grander scale? What effects does it have on societies of millions? Does an attenuation of narcissism in societies affect the rise and fall of empires? Does a reinforcement have an equal and opposite effect? Can such an attenuation/reinforcement be controlled? What is the record of history?

The Japanese society was undoubtedly affected - deeply affected - by the intrusion of Americans and Europeans in the nineteenth century. But Japan was, in many ways, a special case. A very large community, it was capable of receiving and absorbing many intruders without noticeable effect on its fundamental homogeneity. But, in addition, the Japanese approach was - and its continuing experience has been - to deal with and learn from, but not integrate intruders into their society. Whoever they were, they remained intruders and, at the end of the twentieth century, are still not fully-paid-up members of the Japanese club. (Mercenary though the Japanese have become, even such American tycoons as Carl Icahn have discovered that they can't buy themselves into the club. Company takeover manoeuvres entitle marauders to a big slice of company shares; but, unlike the situation in the West, the slice in terms of influence and control is much more modest.)

Inter-breeding has hardly affected the essentially homogenous character of Japanese society, much as that society has been affected by a variety of other contacts. Acceptance of contact has been a conscious and considered response by the Japanese to the intruders, who have been welcomed, even embraced, as sources of ideas and knowledge - "know-how", as the Americans once called it. At the same time, the intruders have been kept at arm's length in case their foreignness might dilute Japanese "purity." So the intruders have not, in any fundamental way, affected the image individual Japanese have of themselves or, with some qualifications, the image the society's institutions have for individual Japanese or the society as a whole. The Diet might look like a Western Parliament, elections like Western democratic polls, limited-liability companies like their peers in the West. So they are in many ways; but, in the end, they are uniquely Japanese and draw their strength from their appeal to the Japanese narcissistic imperative.

In this respect, the broad sweep of the Japanese experience differs from that of the United States and, for example, Australia. The Japanese experience has been a product of social narcissism, a condition far from unique to the Japanese but with a unique intensity in their society. This is partly because the Japanese are an island people who went through a long period of self-imposed isolation before emerging abruptly, about one hundred and forty years ago, to participate in a wide range of activities in the world community. The intensity of this social narcissism has special importance because of Japan's size and its role in the international community.

Two elements have contributed to Japan's intense social narcissism: the Japanese have traditionally had a society based on strict social disciplines and hierarchies, and a religion founded on ancestor worship. Together, these elements have had a dramatic effect on Japanese history and continue to dominate the Japanese character, both for individuals and institutions. Individual narcissism tends to be less than in many other societies, particularly in the liberal West; and narcissistic transference tends to be much more powerful than in almost any other society. Historically, perhaps only extreme militaristic societies, such as those of Sparta and the Zulus, can be compared, in terms of narcissistic transference from the individual to the society, with what we find in Japan.

The disciplines are characteristic of a society that has persisted fundamentally unchanged over several centuries. It has survived through the ancient emperors, the Samurai period, the Shoguns, the opening of the Japanese frontiers in the nineteenth century, the formidable power of the industrial and commercial Zaibatsu, the evolution of Japan - within a couple of generations - to the status of a world power, the period of overseas expansion and dominion before and after the First World War and the devastation and defeat of the Second World War. In all these periods, despite variations in the ways in and purposes to which the disciplines of the society have been applied, the essential nature of the disciplines has remained intact. Perhaps indeed there has been only one objective throughout: the narcissistic achievement for the Japanese society of a dominant position in the world community. Once it was sought through military conquest and imperial expansion; more recently, through investment, productivity and production enabling the Japanese to dominate, not territory or subject peoples, but the international industrial, commercial and financial community. (We may reflect that diminution of economic excellence in the 1990s could become as devastating for the Japanese, in their image of self, as the comprehensive defeat they suffered in the Second World War.)

A persistent feature of Japanese society has been the maintenance of a high degree of homogeneity or "purity." The original inhabitants of the islands - the Ainus, a tall, strong, Caucasoid people, with a good deal of body hair, as well as language, customs, a belief in a Supreme Creator and immortality of the soul distinct from their conquerors - were segregated from the main body of the population and are now a small, dying community mainly in Hokkaido and Sakhalin. Koreans who came to Japan in large numbers to provide labour after the conquest of their country in 1910, were never accorded citizenship nor "integrated" into the society. Homogeneity remains solid.

Narcissistic homogeneity was assisted by the original Japanese religion which later became entangled with Buddhism. Based on nature- and ancestor-worship, Shinto was a narcissistic religion, its adherents believed to be descended from the gods. Ancestral forms and character were to be safeguarded. The emperor represented the apex of narcissistic preservation. Not only did he personify his people but he was a godlike figure; indeed, to his people, he was a god and revered as such. He symbolised the Japanese people, provided an image of what the people should seek to reproduce and was

a source of narcissistic disciplines for the whole community. He was an image, a model, he commanded and the people obeyed. No god could have had more direct and daily authority over his disciples and flock.

Therein lay and still lies the secret of Japanese power: the narcissistic disciplines operating through the whole community at all levels and implemented through the god-like authority of the emperor or those who act subordinately in his name. This was a splendid arrangement for the conduct of war, especially for discipline in the armed forces, including the conscripts who reinforced the traditional and professional Samurai-élite. The discipline of the professionals could quickly be assumed by the conscripts because of their intense social conditioning in all aspects of their civilian lives and the god-like authority of the emperor. Those narcissistic disciplines made the individual more afraid of being shamed in the eyes of his fellows than of being killed or maimed in war or, more generally, suffering in any way personally in the service of his emperor. In the event, the disciplines and fanatic loyalties to the god-emperor weren't enough to save the Japanese from defeat in the Second World War; but the same disciplines were carried into the postwar period.

Here the disciplines continued to be vital to Japan's rapid postwar economic reconstruction and development. The disciplines of the armed forces now had a place in schools, universities, trade and industry, in preparing individuals for participation in the economy and in the pursuit of careers in the economy itself, whether on the factory floor, in executive roles or public administration. The singing of the company song and, in general, identification of workers with company interests were a part of this narcissistic discipline carried through now to modern productivity and production. The behaviour of a martial society was sublimated to serve a peaceful, modern economy; but the narcissistic disciplines throughout the hierarchy from family to company work unit, to the disciplines belonging to the state and community remained intact. Only the objectives changed.

Former Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew has claimed that the Japanese have adopted an electoral system and civil liberties, seemingly indistinguishable from those in the West. But, he maintains, this is only in their "forms. Their loyalties, their motivations, their norms, are different. The faction leaders in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party are like samurai chiefs. Each has his samurais; he provides them with their needs. He's got to find \$1.5m a year for each of his Dietmen, and at elections he has to find \$3m each. So they're in a bind. This sprang from Japan's Meiji Restoration system. Elections were made deliberately expensive from the start; the court did it to keep Dietmen in check. After the war, it slipped back to the old system. Even if there had not been the brutal interruption of militarism in the 1930s, Japan would not have become like Westminster or the Assemblée Nationale in Paris. It's a different culture. What other parliament would have 150 out of 600 Dietmen as sons of Dietmen? [Japan's Prime Minister Toshiki] Kaifu has just been in Singapore. Before dinner, the wife introduced her son to me. Young Kaifu, 30, 31, is his father's secretary. I've also been introduced to young Fukuda, young Nakasone, several other Japanese Prime Ministers' sons. It's an inheritance, like their golf-club memberships." <sup>10</sup>

Much of the consequent loyalty, not only to family, but in terms of identification of the individual with the political party, the party faction, the company and other institutions, up to the apex of the state and the emperor, was largely unknown in other societies - at least in European and such European-type communities as the United States and Australia. But the differences were really in intensity and manifestation. Some of the manifestations had some counterpart in the fanatical loyalty Hitler

demanded (and received) from the German people. The *Heil Hitler* greeting was ludicrous except in the context of the individual's narcissistic, cult-like transference to a Germanic image that Hitler had caused himself to personify. This transference was reinforced by a battery of behaviour requirements and such institutions as the Brown- and Blackshirts, the Hitler Youth and Strength through Joy. Something of the same kind took place in Italy under Mussolini, though with much less disciplined intensity and, perhaps because of that, much less success.

But otherwise, social disciplines in Western countries have been of a contrary kind. Generally, they have been the disciplines of a liberal democracy. The emphasis has been not on identification with the State but identity of the individual. The result has been an individualism allowing maximum freedom, each person ideally being able to enjoy the unimpeded pursuit of *individual* narcissistic objectives rather than being led or forced in the direction of narcissistic transference to the State. In fact, some narcissistic transference does take place, those individuals who lack assurance seeking refuge in comfortably enveloping movements and institutions - ranging from gangs to football clubs and religious sects - rather than confidently pursuing expression of their own narcissistic identity. But that is a "free" choice for the individual, not something imposed by the State, the society or the community.

The picture is not entirely black and white. Writing in 1971, Charles Reich said: "Of all the forms of impoverishment that can be seen or felt in America, loss of self, or death in life, is surely the most devastating. It is, even more than the draft and the Vietnam War, the source of discontent and rage in the new generation. Beginning with school, if not before, an individual is systematically stripped of his imagination, his creativity, his heritage, his dreams and his personal uniqueness, in order to style him into a productive unit for a mass technological society. Instinct, feeling and spontaneity are repressed by overwhelming forces. As the individual is drawn into the meritocracy, his working life is split from his home life, and both suffer from a lack of wholeness. Eventually, people virtually become their professions, roles or occupations, and are thenceforth strangers to themselves. Blacks long ago felt their deprivation of identity and potential for life. But white 'soul' and blues are just beginning. Only a segment of youth is articulately aware that they too suffer an enforced loss of self - they too are losing the lives that could be theirs."<sup>11</sup>

The feeling with which Reich rejected this corruption of the American dream was a token of how foreign it was - or should be. A generation later, the contrast between the United States and Japan is still not entire. In Japan, all the lines are disciplined - determined by the society and social pressures - so that a man's private life is his job life. In America, many people continue to claim, "Your job is just your job; it's not your life." But they know it's not true. Though perhaps too stark, the Reich thesis contains a nucleus of truth. And, in more explicit ways, the Americans might be jumping on the Japanese bandwagon. Some companies have been reported to be setting up "Joy Committees" on the job. A sense of humour is a required quality for management; and the workplace is "so happy a place that you just want to come to work - and you don't stop thinking when you do come".

However, the "Joy Committees" and the like might be, so far at least, no more than amusing aberrations. Set in the American or Australian ethic, "Joy Committees" seem hilarious; the "workplace...so happy ...you just want to come to work" an absurd joke. Generally, Japan and the West have moved - or believe themselves to have moved - in different directions. Not surprisingly, fifty years ago, the two collided, Japan attacking the United States at Pearl Harbour and the United States dropping atomic bombs on

Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In that war, the United States prevailed. We can postulate that it did so because, at that stage of development, its community *id* and the political, social and economic institutions that had grown up and been preserved under individual narcissistic pressures were superior to those produced by the social narcissism of the Japanese.

### America: The Norman Rockwell Image

What were the dominant characteristics of "the American *id*"? If the Japanese is the society of discipline, the American is the society of incentives. A free-enterprise system brought it great energy, initiative and inventiveness. The Declaration of Independence said that: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Thus, at the outset, the American stage was set to satisfy the *individual* narcissistic self. A continent was open for free men to use. Markets were there to create and exploit. The search for and exploitation of raw materials - impeded by the monarch's ownership of precious and other minerals in most societies - no longer applied in free-wheeling America. Investment, productivity, production and secular though uneven economic growth could and did reach higher levels than in any other country at any other time in human history. The conquest of the West and the gold rushes were only among the more dramatic phenomena. Many less dramatic but continuing bonuses flowed from the free expression of individual economic ambitions. And the community wasn't homogeneous - except, arguably, in its ruling élite.

So Japan was a homogeneous and narcissistic society and the United States a heterogeneous community that, superficially at least, stimulated individual rather than societal narcissism. Between 1775 and 1945, the United States grew into the most powerful country in the world, not only militarily but more importantly in the varied strengths inherent in its free society and economy. That seemed to suggest that a heterogeneous community, formed by integrating many different elements into the population, was the right way for a society to go. In previous centuries, the inability of Europeans to unite or be united under a single political leader had led to continual conflict among European tribes and to a failure of "Europe" to realise its "power" potential, despite its enormous scientific, technological and cultural achievement. Except for Napoleonic and Hitlerite instants, Europe never had anything like the great Ming, Mogul or Ottoman Empires. Now North America had achieved what had always eluded the tribes scattered and divided by European geography.

But there was much more to it than that. While, as part of an unassailable American ethic, the individual had an open door to indulge his narcissistic imperative, there was also an American socio/political image, unlike the Japanese but with an imperative for the citizen nevertheless. That image was of "America," in so far as a territory can have an identity, and, more convincingly, an image of the "American." This was the image that the descendants of Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln, devotees of a variety of characters from Davey Crockett to Huckleberry Finn and a multitude of other heroes of fact and fantasy saw in their *collective* mirror and that inspired and motivated them as members of a single community, however individualistic and narcissistic each of them personally might be. The migrant grasped and clung even more fiercely than the native-born to that image, an image that embodied freedom for him - perhaps even a little more freedom for her - and the pursuit of their own personal happiness. Or did it?

The image did embody that ethic, complacently for many and starkly for immigrants from oppressed groups; but the image was far more complex than that.

For many, the American image was Norman Rockwell and The Saturday Evening Post. The flip side - many years ago - was John Dos Passos, Upton Sinclair and John Steinbeck. But even the flip side had its more appealing aspects: the Huey Long politicians and political system could be reformed; not by socialism, that word was always anathema, but through a caring, charitable-democratic ethic that could smooth the sharp edges of the capitalist robber-baron; and even Steinbeck's Okies, sadly battered by a merciless fate, showed courage, pride and moral sensitivity.

"Was it while we were...?" the couple wondered the morning after Granma died. As she'd breathed her last, they'd been making love, almost beside her, in their crowded truck on the way from the dustbowl of Oklahoma to the green pastures of California. The Grapes of Wrath was only one of the Steinbeck classics that imaged the American soul. Others painted other qualities into the image. For the wife who couldn't have curtains because her home was a drain-pipe and pipes don't have windows, the hope was always there that some day she would have a home that did have windows and then she could drape them with curtains. And the simple-minded Lennie did have tenderness, did know what it was to love lovely things, even though his strength was alarmingly beyond his mental control.

So in a way, Dos Passos, Sinclair and Steinbeck did fit the Rockwell, "anything-is-possible-in-this-wonderful-country" image. They belonged - could only belong - in a community of freedom, honesty, noble simplicity and heart-warming generosity. Ignore the robber-barons, the murderous criminality of the big cities, the wage-slavery, the dishonesty, the racial complexity, the relentless greed. The narcissistic image of the Americans was there to cling to - and when your eyes lifted to Old Glory, the Walt Disney/Reader's Digest vision clouded with patriotic tears.

The American image prevailed in the grueling torment of the Second World War. More than other Allies, it was, above all, the American image that prevailed - for Americans and much of the rest of the world - in a war that drew in so many peoples from all the continents. That was a "good war". The narcissistic image approved, indeed required, that the Americans fight the multiple evils the other side represented; and the Americans tried, often admirably, to build a "good" world afterwards. Something of the "good-guy" image - the simple, honest, generous Norman-Rockwell "good-guy" - persisted. The ugly American was around too but mostly in the background, until such things as Vietnam and race riots thrust it centre-stage.

Then Norman Rockwell and the squeaky-clean family and police images of such television series as The Brady Bunch and The Untouchables gave way to the vision of such as Joyce Carol Oates. Gone was any looking-glass factor and the innocence of childhood. Everything was a crushing, black, adult reality. What you have is what, in the cold light of Wordsworth's common day, you see and feel. The sheriff doesn't come, wearing his white hat, to round up the bad guys; the cops, wearing fake white hats, beat up innocent "Uncle Toms" in the street. And it has all the appearance of truth. The Kennedys' Camelot which never did seem real, becomes a mean, deceitful fairy-tale. Now the nasty truth is being told; and they aren't America's enemies telling it: they're Americans, decent, straight-shooting, "Mom and apple-pie" Americans telling it like it is. It had to be the truth, hadn't it? It had to be the true image, shorn of all the tinsel trimmings, free of Norman-Rockwell "good-guy" confidence-tricks. And what was left was racism, sleaze, inequality, hopelessness, murder, corruption - even corrupted love -

crippling debt, the tragic powerlessness of the poor and downtrodden, junk-bond greed, humbug salvationists, gambling, drugs. Muck heaped on muck and its name was "realism." The slit-open garbage bag soiled and stank up the whole American way of life. Vision lay dead with the dodo.

But isn't it part of the image of the American to see himself as or worse than he is, to identify and denounce sin, to be even more honest with himself than he'd ever be with others? Isn't that the image of the free, simple, decent man? So perhaps even the Joyce Carol Oateses are as much a part of a coherent narcissistic image of the American society as Steinbeck was - or Sinclair or Dos Passos or, further back, Mark Twain or, nearer our time, Richard Wright - as much a contributor to the American image as The Saturday Evening Post. In a strange sort of way, it all hangs together and the result is a narcissistic image of the most adaptable, realistic yet most visionary society humankind has ever known.

### America versus Japan: Whose Image Will Prevail?

Perhaps that's a bit too kind; but, however defined and however complex, the American image has prevailed over others in the last several decades and, recently, has seemed to be confirmed in its authority by the collapse of communist societies. The society that offers the individual freedom - that stimulates him with incentives to express himself, better himself, enrich himself - lives robustly on, while the myth of the communist alternative has self-destructed. But will it continue to prevail? If so, in what sense? The Americans scourge themselves with orgies of self-doubt. The Japanese don't scourge themselves at all, except in ways the Americans taught them, almost as articles of the peace settlement. Off the presentational stage, they're as confident as ever of their own superiority - their own destiny - and arguably as contemptuous of their "teachers" as they were when dawn broke over Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941. The 1990s collapse of economic excellence is eroding this confidence but, just as they "amnesiaed" themselves into denying guilt for Pearl Harbour and the nuclear devastation that befell them, so they might yet succeed in blaming others for whatever the fallout is from their economic collapse.

One question is whether the Japanese have, even now, accepted the lessons of their World War II experience. All history, as it is recorded, necessarily reflects a certain narcissistic image. It mirrors the historian who writes it. And the record must necessarily be selective: it is impossible and may be undesirable to note all events, of whatever kind and importance. In selecting - in deciding what is "important" - the historian makes subjective judgements, reflecting his own narcissistic imperatives. History consequently becomes, in greater or lesser degree, an instrument of narcissistic purpose.

So it has been with the Japanese. Their own accounts of the Rape of Nanking, the Burma-Thailand railway and other atrocities during their aggressions of the 1930s and 1940s have "selected out" less creditable events that harmonise poorly with the image the Japanese have of themselves. As late as 1994, a Minister in the newly-formed Hata Government was forced to resign because he claimed that the Rape of Nanking and other atrocities had never happened; and he was a former soldier who had been directly involved in the campaigns in China. The pressure for him to resign originated not from within the Japanese society but from overseas, especially from China and Korea.

The outcome of the war itself has been interpreted not as a defeat of the Japanese - neither the emperor nor his forces - but a victory frustrated by the inhuman use of

nuclear weapons. A brilliant Japanese film at the 1991 Cannes Festival omitted any hint of the infamy of Pearl Harbour and portrayed the Americans as monsters for having dropped atomic bombs on the blameless Japanese. Apart from any moral aspects, those bombs did not, in fact, cause, but only hastened the Japanese defeat. From the time the Americans won the naval battle at Midway and the Australians turned the Japanese southern land-thrust into a retreat in New Guinea in 1942, their defeat was inevitable; it was only a question of how long it would take and how much blood would be spilt before the retreat from the Owen Stanleys wound up in the streets of Tokyo, whether nuclear weapons were used or not.

But the Japanese never accepted that. Nietzsche contended that, allowing for some time lapse, man's pride subdues man's memory. So the Japanese memory shifted: an incontestable knowledge that, "We did that" gradually became, "We could not possibly have done that." It applied to the Rape of Nanking, the brutalities of their armies, the scandal of the "comfort women." The Japanese are not unique in allowing memory to fail for the sake of national self-regard. The French conveniently forgot their collaboration with the Nazis and their part in the Holocaust. The British conveniently forget much that is less than noble in their colonial past. So the Japanese are like others in that, memory having been allowed to fail, their national self-regard dominates their teaching and "understanding" of history.

Japanese and other national amnesia has its counterpart in that of the individual who tends to toss the shame of his actions, experience or humiliation into the abyss of non-recall. The mother who has killed - murdered - her own child cannot bring herself to acknowledge her act. She "forgets" or contends, especially to herself, that she was in the grip of some force she could not at that moment control. She can't believe and refuses to believe she could have done such a thing. Perhaps some trauma in her own childhood made her mind snap. Whatever her rationalisation, she cannot bear the shame of what she has done. Her image of self rejects it. So she sets her monstrous act aside: it didn't happen; she didn't cause it to happen. This narcissistic retreat from reality into a fantasy of self-exculpation is true for the individual as it is for the society. Japan is not alone in retreating into a narcissistic cocoon of tacit or explicit disavowal. Acting rather like her famous son Giscard when monstrous and as he sincerely believed false accusations were made against him, France too refused to look in the national mirror and acknowledge what seems to have been the extent of her guilt in Nazi collaboration and anti-semitic atrocities.

The narcissistic interpretation of history, though it persists for all societies, becomes more difficult as the ease, magnitude and comprehensiveness of the spread of information increase. Satellite communications, which make radio and television reports instantaneously available all around the world, offer at the breakfast table of Everyman in his Everyday, contrary or congruent views on almost every issue significant to humankind. Some, perhaps much, of that information will be wrong or misleading; and the instant narcissistic translator or decoder in each individual and group mind will, quite rightly, continue to make its own assessments of accounts of today's or yesterday's events. A single, "objective" view of history will still not easily emerge, despite the flood of information, from all sides, pouring over the same people at much the same time. But the flat-earthers will find it ever more challenging to deny that the earth is round.

Even so, does their narcissistic whitewash give the Japanese the edge over others - over their rivals, opponents, competitors; or do what Winston Churchill called his "black-dog moods" give societies like the American a capacity to rise to ever greater

heights on the back of their self-criticism, occasionally their self-abhorrence? What is the evolutionary model most likely to prevail?

America is, on the one hand, the country of "I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy," "God Bless America," and "Rambo." Brash, self-confident, often a self-proclaimed model for the rest of the world, it seems to be the perfect candidate for the Nemesis that inevitably follows Hubris. Through its narcissistic excesses - and its self-satisfaction with excellence achieved and in prospect - it looks dangerously like "a civilisation of much high achievement...on the verge of making shipwreck." But is it?

The United States has made more impact on the rest of the world than any other country. More than the Greeks and the Romans, more than the Chinese, Spaniards or British. This has been largely due to modern technology, including the intrusion of television and now computers with the internet, into living-rooms - and shanty towns - around the world. The achievement of the Greeks and Romans was even more wondrous because theirs was without the marvels of modern communications and their impact has lasted more than two millenia; but the sheer volume of the American impact has been overwhelming.

It is more too than just a function of technology. McDonalds and Coca Cola, jeans and tee-shirts, Bing Crosby and Elvis Presley, the whole range of the American way of life - its "culture" - spreads around the globe from Rwanda to Vladivostock. (The détritius of that culture too clutters every community.) "American", rather than English, is the universal language.

All of this has been largely without benefit of empire. The United States eschewed gathering under its control anything like the vast colonial domains of the British, Spanish, Portuguese or Russians. Opportunities for such acquisitions were there, especially through the two World Wars. But the Americans preferred to restore their territories to independence (the Philippines first prematurely, then permanently in 1946); and to campaign to end the colonialism of others. They'd been a colony themselves; and they thought they hadn't liked it.

Although the American record hasn't been perfect, it has had enough success to tempt the Americans to see in their national mirror an image of their society to be preserved in perpetuity as it is. But that temptation has been and continues to be stoutly rejected by the society; so that any assessment that the American image - the narcissistic reflection that Americans see in their national mirror - is set in concrete, is invalid.

On the contrary, there are few societies where self-criticism is so intense, where the image in the national mirror is so constantly seen to require treatment, including painful surgery. Some of the surgery might be cosmetic and might be seen by some critics inside and outside the United States to change nothing fundamental in the American society. But most changes have substance and are a persistent feature of American life. Many of the changes have then served as a model, at least in broad terms, for similar changes in other societies. In the last fifty, even the last thirty years, changes in the American society have been enormous: racial non-discrimination, liberation of women, extension of human rights, attitudes to war and peace, issues of abortion and reproduction. The list, already long, lengthens every year. In the American society, Future Shock is an experience of everyday.

Is this then a society without faith in itself, without fixed points or moral principles? The answer would seem to be no, quite the contrary. It is governed, and its

more private ways of living are ruled, by a range of strongly-held beliefs that would do credit to any of man's great societies, past or present. Freedom, democracy, equality, private enterprise - the list is long. And it is not all secular: more than eighty years ago, Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed - "We stand at Armageddon and we battle for the Lord."<sup>12</sup>

On the 31st of January 1991, in the midst of the Gulf War, President Bush declared that "America is a nation founded under God." Denying Saddam Hussein any monopoly of Divine attachment, he later repeated that "we are a single nation under God" that gives its blessing to religious diversity: anyone can practise any religion he or she chooses. The average American is said to believe that religion is an important part of a person's identity. True, some American principles and beliefs are honoured by some Americans more in the breach; but most Americans try to be faithful to their moral positions, and abide by their principles as constantly as members of other, even well-disciplined societies. The prospect is that this will continue. The capacity of the American society to handle political, economic, scientific and technological change, and to do so through incentive strategies, must therefore be rated high or, at least, higher than for most other societies.

Can we say the same of Japan? In like measure, no. An insufficient adaptability might be the main barrier to Japanese dominance. Ricardo Semler, a management innovator, believes that a company environment must be informal enough not to be tied to traditional ways of doing things. So it is with societies. If behaviour patterns are rigidly formal, with ceremonial entrenchment of traditional behaviour, the society risks setting old ways in concrete in a manner devastating to the society as it struggles to cope with new social, political and technological shocks. We have seen something of this trauma as economic and social problems have accumulated for Japan in the course of the 1990s. No leaders have emerged who seem to have the capacity for fundamental adaptation. There has been no equivalent of a Franklin Delano Roosevelt to deal with the problems of Japan in the 1990s as FDR dealt with the problems of the United States in the 1930s. In the 1930s, Japan dealt with its difficulties by adopting policies - congenial to its traditions - which led to Pearl Harbour and Hiroshima. There is no sign yet that Japan in the 1990s is about to travel a similar road; but the prospect can not be entirely ruled out, at least until we can see in what ways they can and intend to adapt positively and purposefully.

Against that background, how long will present political, social and economic structures in Japan continue to be consistent with or achieve a satisfactory adaptation to current shifts in economic power? We don't know. Shifts in world political, economic and social conditions and structures will certainly persist, with the present Japanese decline accompanied almost certainly by dramatic changes in, for example, Asian, including especially Chinese, and Russian circumstances, as well as some periodic or persistent incapacity of Japan's competitors in the United States and Europe to adapt to their own problems in intelligent ways. We must bear in mind too that, instead of pressures coming from outside, it may be that other pressures, within the Japanese society itself, will force changes in present arrangements. Much Japanese political life is corrupt and productive effort is insufficiently reflected in a "better life," as defined in the West, for most of the people. Too much attention has been given to accretion of economic power and future benefits, and too little to satisfying people now - who are slowly, but only slowly, becoming more demanding about what they want. Too little comfort has been given to the individual, narcissistic self and too much squandered on the societal or national self. In a personal hymn of hate, Paul Theroux alleges that Japan "is a one-race, one-language, one-family island of desperate overachievers who have a

fascist belief in their own racial superiority. These little people have a palpitating need to dominate the world".<sup>13</sup>

If the image, instead of slowly adapting, breaks down, what will then be the future of the Japanese society? Will it have the resilience of the American and other Western societies to enable it to take an orderly political, economic and social path? Already, dissatisfaction remains deep with the Liberal Democratic Party which ruled Japan from the end of the Second World War until 1993. The electoral system, satisfactory enough as enshrined in the Constitution, in practice gave power not so much to a democratic majority as to those who had the resources to buy the support of a majority of voters. So long as the results of this process were good in terms of economic growth and rising living standards, all was well. But as the banking system collapsed, causing prolonged and widespread economic difficulties, dissatisfaction with the political situation intensified and so did the need for reform. The nature of a reformed system is difficult to predict but a period of perhaps increasing turbulence is likely.

In particular the corporate state is likely to undergo great change. The close relationship between government, business and unions has given great strength. As Theroux alleged, it has been a sort of fascist strength, suited to the Japanese personality, within a nominally democratic framework. Something of the same corporate state has been a success also in postwar Germany and Austria. Several features in those countries differ from Japan, although the collection and disbursement of illegal party funds and the consequent fall from grace of former Chancellor Helmut Kohl, suggest some common elements in terms of political structures and political corruption.

If continuing improvements in individual living levels in Japan cause a switch from narcissistic transference to insistence on more self-indulgence, the system will undergo great strain. Individual narcissism could force the disciplines of the narcissistic society to break down. Then the Japanese society, lacking the cohesion within a traditionally free, pluralistic state characteristic, for example, of the American society, might face tumult and anarchy. An overtly authoritarian regime might then be needed to restore stability. In other words, the breakdown of the system based on social disciplines might lead, through a period of disruption, not to a system of personal incentives on the American model, but to a régime restoring the old hierarchical social values along with their nationalistic and perhaps militaristic disciplines.

Would such a process, if it culminated in an authoritarian regime, place Japan in a stronger position than the United States and other plural democracies? In some ways it might, especially if a situation of military confrontation emerged. In terms of human rights and the strengths of the various elements to be utilised in the society, it would be a giant step backwards in the evolution of the Japanese society. The United States position as the single, undisputed superpower - and the standard bearer of the human destiny - would, in principle, be reinforced. But, if differences between the incentives and the disciplines models were to lead to armed conflict, the result could be devastation or destruction of both models, as well as other societies drawn into or devastated by the conflict.

## The Arab Nation

In modern times, the West has usually undervalued the Arab nation - that diverse grouping of peoples stretching from the Atlantic coast of north Africa to the Arabian Sea.<sup>14</sup> Many elements in Western civilisation - some peripheral, some crucial - came to Europe via Arab cultures. Much of the Egyptian, Sumerian, Persian, Chinese, Indian and

even Greek and Roman achievement poured through Baghdad to Europe. About 763 A.D., Baghdad was built on the site of Kish, the Sumerian capital of what was perhaps man's earliest civilisation. In the days of Hammurabi, the Sumerians wrote on clay tablets; but, at the time Baghdad was built, the Arabs were using, not clay, papyrus, parchment or palm leaves, but paper made from flax. Their writings endured, the Arabs spread knowledge throughout the known world, revolutionised Western scholarship and changed much of the fabric of Western life.

For five centuries before Christ, the nomadic peoples of what we now call Saudi Arabia were middlemen in the rich east-west spice trade. Then, in 622 A.D., the Prophet Mohammed, fleeing from Mecca to Medina, began preaching a visionary composite of Arab, Jewish and Christian beliefs that we know as Islam, meaning surrender or submission to the Faith. By this surrender, believers in Islam entered into an act of narcissistic transference from the self to the Faith; and the Prophet unified the Arab people and was instrumental in founding a great empire.

Within a century of Mohammed's death, Syria, Mesopotamia, all the Persian dominions to the east, the entire Mediterranean coastline of Africa and most of Spain capitulated to an Islam seemingly invincible through the cohesion it acquired from narcissistic transference to the Faith. But there was another important source of strength: the Prophet had preached a constant quest for learning, so Moslem conquests drew to Islam men learned in science, philosophy, the skilled crafts and the arts. The Arabs became heir to the advanced culture of Persia and to Greek scientific ideas, through scholarly heretics who fled from Byzantium to the main centre of learning in western Asia at Jundishapur. To the east, the Muslim conquerors reached outward-looking T'ang China, and to the south the Hindu and Buddhist cultures of India.

Between the eighth and twelfth centuries, Islam was a repository of learning that included Greek medicine, forgotten in the medieval West; Hindu numerals (which we call Arabic, the nine digits and a zero that, in replacing the Roman system, transformed mathematics, science and everyday life); Chinese papermaking, that changed the face of scholarship; and the crossbow that did the same for war. The Arabs also passed to Europe a long catalogue of luxurious adjuncts to gracious living: silks and canopied beds, stained glass, glass mirrors and damascened metals, carpets, dyes, the cusped arch of architecture, public baths, secular hospitals, the lute, the kettledrum, and exotic and escapist tales that were to inspire Boccaccio and Chaucer, von Eschenbach and La Fontaine. The West was a barbarian at the feet of the cultivated, Islamic East.

But both Church and State in the West feared contamination by Islam. So they accepted practical ideas and inventions, useful discoveries that were free of any taint of Islam. "Arabic" numerals had nothing to do with theology and such armorial devices as the double-headed eagle, impudently adopted by the Holy Roman Emperors, were no more than a convenient way of distinguishing one animated suit of armor from another.

Even so, some thought processes and attitudes slipped through to affect the sentiments of Christendom as material acquisitions changed its face. Paradoxically, the product of a society that is still a bastion of female subservience, the Arab love song, helped transform the West's image of woman; and, in a rather contrary direction, the monogamous Christian male learned the delights of polygamy and the harem, and evolved his own system along less fettered lines. The middle ages brought the "Lady" of knightly chivalry and the extramarital convenience of the mistress. It is even alleged that the prevalence of eunuchs in the Near East and in the Byzantine church made the

"voluntary" celibacy of priests of the Church of Rome seem no more than a modest sacrifice.

The power of Islam remains. So does narcissistic transference by its adherents. But the mantle of political, economic, scientific and technological leadership long ago slipped from Arab shoulders. Will it ever be resumed? What if the Americans stumble and Japanese, Russians, Germans, Chinese and others are too flawed to assume the leader's mantle? Will the Arab way prevail? Through the influence and uniting force of Islam, the Arabs can be a disciplined society with clear moral guidelines. Though imperfect in other ways, their homogeneity in faith gives them strength. But, while narcissistic transference gives the Arabs cohesion, is the character of the institutional narcissism represented by Islam and Arab history well adapted to the role of world leadership in the twenty-first century?

The odds seem to be against it. At the moment, Arab narcissism tends to be reactionary - to belong to the past without the adjustments or stimuli needed to enable them to handle modern issues. Fundamentalism, however moral and admirable in some terms, tends to reject scientific, technological and other modern developments as the way of the Great Satan, the United States. There are exceptions: Islamic fundamentalist régimes are ready to adopt the weapons systems of the Great Satan in order to confront and, sometimes, terrorise him. But there are extremist positions too, such as the exclusion of women from education and economic and political activity, which deny much potential to Islamic societies.

Nevertheless, the power of the narcissistic image - of Islam and the Arab nation - can be compelling and the future might produce more effective leaders than, for example, Saddam Hussein. Any tendency on the part of other societies to diminish and disregard the Arab and Islamic achievement - their contribution to human culture and civilisation - and to deny a proper status of honour and dignity to Arab peoples is likely to provoke an understandably hostile reaction.

This is all the more dangerous when advanced modern weapons are available - and resources, for example, in the form of oil, are at hand to finance their acquisition. So long as the Arabs depend on others for advanced weapons, they will always tend to a position of military inferiority to those on whom they depend. Their weapons will always lag behind state-of-the-art war technology. So the Arab nation, even united, is unlikely to challenge a superpower successfully in the foreseeable future, unless its societal and institutional narcissism is radically transformed.

But, along with their narcissistic disciplines, the Arab people are conditioned to religious and political forms that make it easier for authoritarian leaders to emerge. Acquisition of advanced weapons to be used in an Arab or Holy War, within the region or beyond, is always possible. Saddam Hussein is only one, more dramatic example of what can happen. Some Arab writers and intellectuals see the union of church and state in the fundamentalist regimes as an aberration: traditionally, they claim, the church has kept itself apart from secular concerns. Some trends are discernible to re-establish this separation. If that happens, the spiritual values of the Fundamentalists might still be preserved and safeguarded but within a secular, modernising state.

Whatever happens, the West needs to show more understanding of Arab attitudes, spiritual and other. After being a conqueror, the Arab nation suffered conquest itself and a long period of colonial rule, foreign oppression and exploitation. Its narcissistic image has been hurt. The formation of the State of Israel, the misery of the Palestinians and the

military defeats inflicted by the comparatively small power of Israel, have shaken Arab self-esteem and bred hatreds and resentments. Despite the participation of some Arab states, the swift and devastating defeat of what appeared to be the formidable forces of Saddam Hussein was a further humiliation, demonstrating the overwhelming power of the West.

The smouldering mix of a humiliated image, a disciplined, highly-motivated society and a potential for emergence of extremist leaders could fuel ever greater violence in what has already been an area of violent confrontation. The undisciplined use of nuclear, chemical and bacteriological weapons with destructive potential extending far beyond the immediate battlefield could bring widespread devastation and gravely damage the world environment. Societies whose narcissistic image has been hurt and whose ambitions have been frustrated can be a threat to everyone. An objective of the international community should therefore be to heal the narcissistic wounds of those societies and offer them the quota of acknowledgement and respect we would like for our own.

#### Britain: "A Tribe Who Feel They Are The World"

Western countries don't share the fierce narcissistic-transference imperatives of Arab or Moslem countries. They are also better adapted to rapid and constant political, social and economic change. Nevertheless, adherence to a narcissistic image and institutional narcissism is strong and persistence of the tried and ancient widespread.

Britain exemplifies this persistence. Despite some disclaimers, the British have determinedly preserved the narcissistic image of their glorious past: "...the English are a tribe who feel they are the world. All inhabitants of dreamtime think something like this. They believe - instinctively, tenaciously, against all evidence - that their name for themselves really means 'human being'...[No] other tribe managed actually to become the world to the same extent. To become it - and then to give it up, and retire without too evident defeat to the homeland reservation...[left] a land deeply unmodernized, customs 'proudly' intact, its nativism conserved against revolution and reason alike. The success of this rearguard action has had many costs. One was Thatcher. Another is melancholy: the English have remained so much themselves only by decaying within themselves. Modernization has assumed scabby, throwaway shapes. Trendiness is all because, underneath, no deeper currents alter the foundations much: here, change is soon revealed as recurrence. All Thatcher's phoney counter-revolution did was increase the stench, and put off the day of democratic reckoning."<sup>15</sup>

A rather depressing picture. If it is only half true, the stubborn adherence to an old narcissistic image would seem to rule out a comeback by Britain to any position of world leadership. But we can't be sure. The Thatcher era might turn out to have been no more than an ill-advised detour into nostalgia country. But what is true is that the narcissistic image to which the British conform will be a decisive factor in the place they will occupy in the world of the 21st century.

#### Russia and Eastern Europe

For most of the past half century, the narcissistic image of the Soviet Union was thought, by many, to be consistent with world leadership. Many believed that the Soviet Union would "inevitably" replace the United States as the leading superpower. Communism would, as Khrushchev put it, "bury" capitalism. Then it all fell apart. What now is the future for Russia and its former eastern European empire?

The narcissistic image of Britain might change but it won't shatter. In Russia and the other former components of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European satellites, the process has not been so well regulated as to promise a gradual evolution to new images. The abrupt transformation of the Soviet/Russian Empire since 1985 has encompassed two massive changes:

1/ The dissolution of the one remaining empire of the old imperialist period, a dissolution of empire in many ways not unlike that of Britain, Spain, France and Portugal but more devastating because the components of empire were geographically contiguous to the Russian heartland.

2/ The shattering of the narcissistic image of the communist society and the communist state, an image held in place partly by ideology, by success in war, by achievement of superpower military status and by narrowly-focussed scientific achievement. Together with these elements, however, the image owed its persistence largely to tyranny, force and intimidation.

These two massive changes occurring simultaneously caused tumult in the Soviet Union itself and, mostly to a lesser extent, in the countries of Eastern Europe. Each of the latter, with differing backgrounds, responded differently. Each has its own narcissistic image belonging to some period before the communist tyranny and persisting in the collective memory. Though each may have resumed its own image, that image is like a rusted and neglected coat of arms that has had to be taken out of storage and smartened up for renewed use. More than that, the image must be modernised to conform with present-day imperatives. That difficult task cannot be achieved quickly; nor can the character of the re-born narcissistic image be precisely predicted.

A particular Russian difficulty is that the Russian society has little positive idea of the new political and economic images it must create. It is afflicted with negative images of free-society politico/economic arrangements as they were for so long reflected in the communist mirror. That mirror portrayed Western parliamentary democracy and capitalist economic practice as evil; and, inevitably, the old repulsive and misleading images will, to some extent, endure. But now they must be seen to be essential to Russian good health. That conflict of image with imperative could provoke a long period of turmoil and uncertainty. This would be the case especially if extreme right-wing/nationalist/imperialist forces, currently in eclipse, were to emerge strongly enough to confront the still fragile democratic impulse and gather such appeal as to win a relatively easy political victory. If there is persistent economic instability, the threat from undemocratic forces and of a relapse into a new tyranny will continue and intensify.

Debate in the reformed Russian political institutions has so far been mostly ineffectual; in simulating Western debate, it has tended to indecisiveness and incapacity to carry out coherent policies. On the economic side, the society has few positive images of the Russian citizen as businessman, financier, stockbroker or entrepreneur. The mirror reflects a blank or, much worse, a fanciful, evil image of the wheeler-dealer capitalist of communist creation: the communists' "narcissistic image" of the criminal, capitalist enemy. The wheeler-dealer at the street corner, profiting from scarcity, feeding on hardship, dealing in blackmarket goods and foreign currencies, evading taxation, indulging in Mafia-like violence, confirms an image of capitalism that is of little help in creating an image of the market economy - or of the much more appropriate mixed economy - that a reformed, post-communist, post-imperial Russia so badly needs.

The transition from the badly flawed Yeltsin régime, with its image of sick, drunken, corrupt governance to more conventional rule under Putin offers promise of a more orderly transition to democracy and a smoothly operating market economy. But we have no means of knowing yet what President Putin's true images are and whether the democratic and free-enterprise promise will be fulfilled.

### Rise and Fall: A Summary Analysis

The narcissistic impulse is a conservative force. It conserves success but can also conserve - and initiate - failure. Though narcissistically conservative, most human societies are subject to constant change and competition with each other. Change exemplifies the essence of the human character, the source of its strength. If the terms of competition move in favour of one society, the strength of competing societies - their political, economic, military power - will undergo relative change. This may be so even though the absolute strength, including the gross economic product, of all the relevant societies increases dramatically over long, identical periods. Relative changes are enough to effect - and are the significant pointer to - shifts in the power balance.

These shifts can take place for a variety of reasons. Scientific or technological leaps; major natural-resource discoveries; and, perhaps above all, decay within rival societies. That decay - relative or absolute - can be due to a conservative persistence of a narcissistic image long past the stage at which it contributes to the strength of the society. That "strength" might be subject to various definitions. Adherence or reversion to a traditional image - seen by a group within the society to have social virtue - might be justified on moral or religious grounds, even though it entails conscious surrender of material and power benefits. The reversion of the Ayatollah Khomeini to fundamental Islamic images after the corrupt modernisation of the Shah's régime, falls into this category. On the other hand, Prime Minister Thatcher's worship of Victorian images was not consciously intended to sacrifice material and power benefits but to use narcissistic imagery from the past to restore Britain to the greatness that had been the accompaniment to the Victorian model. A narcissistic image of nineteenth-century Britain at the apex of its imperial power was conceived as giving thrust to a renaissance of the British spirit and restoration of British economic strength, as well as the wider "power" that would go with it.

It didn't work. The secret as to why it didn't might be contained in the following assessment of shifts in relative power, written before the collapse of the Soviet Union: "...the international system is subject to constant changes, not only those caused by day-to-day actions of statesmen and the ebb and flow of political and military events, but also those caused by the deeper transformations in the foundations of world power... [In] the international system..., [since] wealth and power, or economic strength and military strength, are always relative...and since all societies are subject to the inexorable tendency to change, then the international balances can never be still, and it is a folly of statesmanship to assume that they ever would be. Given the anarchic and competitive nature of rivalries between nations, the history of international affairs over the past five centuries has all too frequently been a history of warfare, or at least of preparation for warfare - both of which consume resources which societies might use for other 'goods,' whether public or private. Whatever the stage of economic and scientific development reached, each century has therefore witnessed a debate about the extent to which national wealth ought to be used for military purposes. It has also recorded a debate about how best to enhance national prosperity, not only because of the individual benefits which increased wealth brings, but also because of the recognition that economic growth, productivity, flourishing finances, will all affect a Great Power's

relative prospects if another international conflict occurs. Indeed, the outcome of all of the major, lengthy wars among the Great Powers...repeatedly points to the crucial influences of productive economic forces - both during the struggle itself, and during those periods between wars when differentiated growth rates cause the various Powers to become relatively stronger or weaker...Whether the existence of 'rising' and 'falling' Powers in an anarchical world order must always lead to war is not certain...Mackinder, one of the founding fathers of neomercantilist and geopolitical thought, held that 'the great wars of history...are the outcome, direct or indirect, of the unequal growth of nations.' ... [T]he advent of nuclear weapons, with their built-in threat to turn any exchange of fire into mutual devastation, [might have] finally checked the habit of resorting to armed conflict in response to secular shifts in the Great Power balances, leaving only indirect, small-scale 'surrogate' wars... [Or] the mutual apprehensions of nuclear weapons [might] merely ensure that future conflicts, if they occur between the Great Powers, [will] remain conventional - although even they would be dreadfully bloody affairs, given modern battlefield weaponry...Whatever the likelihood of nuclear or conventional clashes between the major states...important transformations in the balances are occurring, and will continue, probably at a faster pace than before. What is more, they are occurring at the two separate but interacting levels of economic production and strategic power...The present large Powers in the international system are thus compelled to grapple with the twin challenges which have confronted all their predecessors: first, with the uneven pattern of economic growth, which causes some of them to become wealthier (and, usually, stronger), relative to others; and second, with the competitive and occasionally dangerous scene abroad, which forces them to choose between a more immediate military security and a longer-term economic security...Each of today's large Powers - the United States, the USSR, China, Japan, and (putatively) the EEC - is therefore left grappling with the age-old dilemmas of rise and fall, with the shifting pace of productive growth, with technological innovation, with changes in the international scene, with the spiraling cost of weapons, with alterations in the power balances...all of these Powers are travelling on 'the stream of Time,' which they can 'neither create nor direct,' but upon which they can 'steer with more or less skill and experience.' How they emerge from that voyage depends, to a large degree, upon the wisdom of the governments in Washington, Moscow, Tokyo, Peking, and the various European capitals...upon the 'skill and experience' with which they manage to sail on 'the stream of Time.'"<sup>16</sup>

The choice is between the lion and the fox - or how much lion and how much fox. One of the more subtle traps for the fox lurks in the narcissistic image of the society: he'll have to be clever to devise defences against narcissistic degeneration or rigidity. Even to achieve an effective awareness of prospective degeneration or rigidity will test the alertness of all but the most cunning among his kind.

So what will constitute the foundations of "wisdom"? One foundation assuredly will be that each of the Powers maintain a hard-headed and continuing assessment of the narcissistic image it has of itself and the extent to which it is adapting its policies to conform with or diverge from the image, depending on what its objectives are and how the image assists or frustrates their accomplishment. The image of a progressive society, dedicated to change - to "advances" - on a wide variety of fronts, should be such that it will enable constant and rapid adaptation to scientific and technological developments and to rivalries emanating from outside, in an increasingly competitive international system.

But will the institutions of the society act with sufficient speed and decisiveness to implement the society's in-principle acceptance of progress? Is there sufficient

agreement on what constitutes "progress"? Does a plural society have difficulty in reaching a consensus on the nature of "progress", because of the differing narcissistic images that the plural groups, within the de Tocqueville model of the society, attach themselves to? Is a homogeneous, tightly incorporated society more effective in handling issues related to change, while retaining or reconstructing the narcissistic image that moves and holds them together as a community?

There are other issues, especially of a policy kind. Uneven economic growth among the large Powers has been due largely to ineffectiveness of the economic policies of some Powers compared with others. The Soviet economic system broke down completely, partly because of the massive burdens of military funding. For far too long, the Soviet Union tried to play the part of the lion. For far too long, it showed insufficient capacity to play the part of the fox. The result was the achievement of a superpower status that it did not have the economic capacity to support. But, even more than its excessive military funding, the Soviet Union's centrally-planned economic system was intrinsically unsound.

On the other hand, postwar Keynesian policies in the West created systems among the most successful of all time. They were devised to preserve capitalism against the agonies of the Great Depression of the 1930s. The narcissistic image that Keynes and those who supported him had of their society and its economy, was intrinsically capitalist but with the destructive features of free-enterprise capitalism modified and regulated to serve social purposes. That image served the West well for a quarter of a century.

But Keynesianism was no more "the end of history" than the demise of communism is. Economic policies are part of the human equation. They're much more than a complex of mathematical formulae or computer programs. They must be constantly adapted to human circumstances. The fox must be constantly watching with cunning percipience. If not, those who stubbornly stick to the past - who cling to outmoded policies, however effective they might once have been - will find themselves discarded by history as thoroughly as the Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Brezhnev menagerie has been.

However splendidly the Keynesian system worked, it could serve only for a time. Eventually its success delivered its own obsolescence. Then changes had to be made. Unfortunately, in many countries, those changes were not timely or well-founded. Adaptation was poorly conceived and directed. Successful adaptation rarely means nostalgic reversion to old-fashioned narcissistic images. But the capitalist image that has emerged in recent years - with deregulation, reliance on market forces, privatisation, all hail the adventurers, marauders and buccaneers of the 1980s, followed by the frenetic speculators of the 1990s - has been, in many ways, a throwback to a failed past, entailing much more danger for the world's peoples than even the failed past as represented by the Great Depression of the 1930s.

To resurrect a narcissistic image can be as devastating to future capitalism as the dead hand of centralised bureaucracy was to communism. Capitalist fundamentalism must be approached with even more scepticism than fundamentalism in religion: however moral and well-meaning and however much either might once have incorporated what was seen as ennobling for man's eternal spirit, time has either passed those ancient tenets by or placed them in a new context. Capitalism - like religion - will best be safeguarded, not by abandoning eternal and fundamental principles, but by

bringing them into harmony with the spirit and practices - and with the risks and temptations - of the present day.

### A Narcissistic Image Befouled

Thirty years ago, many people's hopes were high. Charles Reich wrote of a visionary American consciousness of the late 1960s and early 1970s: "The extraordinary thing about this new consciousness is that it has emerged out of the wasteland of the Corporate State, like flowers pushing up through the concrete pavement. Whatever it touches it beautifies and renews: a freeway entrance is festooned with happy hitch-hikers, the sidewalk is decorated with street people, the humourless steps of an official building are given warmth by a group of musicians. And every barrier falls before it. We have been dulled and blinded to the injustice and ugliness of slums, but it sees them as just that - injustice and ugliness - as if they had been there to see all along. We have all been persuaded that giant organisations are necessary, but it sees that they are absurd, as if the absurdity had always been obvious and apparent. We have all been induced to give up our dreams of adventure and romance in favour of the escalator of success, but it says that the escalator is a sham and the dream is real. And these things, buried, hidden and disowned in so many of us, are shouted out loud, believed in, affirmed by a growing multitude of young people who seem too healthy, intelligent and alive to be wholly insane, who appear, in their collective strength, capable of making it happen. For one almost convinced that it was necessary to accept ugliness and evil, that it was necessary to be a miser of dreams, it is an invitation to cry or laugh. For one who thought the world was irretrievably encased in metal and plastic and sterile stone, it seems a veritable greening of America."<sup>17</sup> (17)

Three decades later, after the fading of the caring and visionary society, the rise and fall of the junk-bond buccaneers, the slapstick politicians in the Reagan/Thatcher mould, the vision splendid has blurred. The happy hitch-hikers have gone, the greening become a browning. The escalator of success is no less a sham than thirty years ago; but the young no longer believe that the dreams of adventure and romance can be real. No longer are the flowers pushing up through the concrete pavements; the sidewalks are no longer decorated with street people but cracked and crowded with homeless beggars; injustice and ugliness are again accepted as part of the inevitable human destiny. Communism is dead but, for most, victorious capitalism is only slightly less gruesome than its defeated rival. Now we need a new vision, a new image, a new consciousness of self. We will get it. Our looking-glass fantasy refuses to accept that we won't. But it had better come quickly - before catastrophe, from the demise of dreams, beats it to the finish line.

---

<sup>10</sup> Interview in *The Economist*, London, 29 June 1991, pp. 18-9.

<sup>11</sup> Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, England, 1971, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> Speech at the Progressive Party Convention, Chicago, 17 June 1912.

<sup>13</sup> *The Happy Isles of Oceania*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1992

<sup>14</sup> The various people in this large area are said to want to give a credible impression of an Arab "nation" but each wants that Arab nation to be their nation.

<sup>15</sup> *The Literary Review*, review by Tom Nairn of *So Very English*, Marsha Rowe (Ed.), pp. 26-7.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, Random House, New York, 1987, pp. 536-40.

<sup>17</sup> Reich, *op. cit.*, pp. 328-9