The following "sermon," which I was invited to give at the First Unitarian Church of Berkeley, California on Sunday, July 24, 1966, uses some of the language and reflects some of the preoccupations of the 1960s' San Francisco Bay Area milieu. It reflects my own sense of self at that time, but it also addresses some recurring questions about the nature of the self in relation to its context and about the role of values. These insights can be applied to the historian's craft.

CHAPTER 5

Whither American Values?

My topic is, whither American values? Whither implies direction and direction implies the past (history) as well as the future. My thesis is that the fundaments of history are space and time; and as conceptions of space and time change, so do ideas about God, nature, truth, beauty, justice, liberty, the self—in short, values.

What is space? For the human infant, there is no such thing. As he lies in his crib, things move mysteriously in and out. Sir Herbert Read says that primitive man, like a child, was aware of space, but he could not conceive it.[1] It was a nothingness out of which all imaginable powers could emerge. Things sat next to one another higgledy-piggledy, as in some modern paintings. Space was only a congeries of things or a complex of places, like Winnie-the-Pooh's forest which runs from Piglet's house to Rabbit's cave to Eeyore's bog. In such a world, according to Marshall McLuhan, the senses were equally important and blended into one another, as the senses do during a psychedelic experience.[2] It was a world of total interdependence: multiple, simultaneous relationships in a configurational field. It was a world of terror, because everything affected everybody all the time. So people tried to live as much as possible in the sacred or in close proximity to sacred objects.

Then man began to conceive of space as something separate from himself, like a box in which he moved. Human ecologists say this happened when man began to develop regular and dependent relationships with communities other than his own. Disparate communities needed a common denominator, something neutral which would contain them and act as a common point of reference. McLuhan says man developed the illusion of the third dimension, the illusion of space as a kind of independent container, when he began to emphasize the sense of sight in deliberate isolation from the other senses, embodying that sense of sight in an external technology. Space became a thing in itself, an immaterial emptiness, something which was homogeneous and could be measured. This notion of space was a man-made construct, but since people all agreed about it and taught their children to assume it, they took it for reality.

Read says that it was not until this concept of space developed that man could conceive of transcendental religion—one God above all. Certainly men had to have this notion of space before they could conceive of the political state as an abstract container in which citizens could have abstract and equalized rights.

Both Read and McLuhan (the one working in the realm of art, the other in the realm of mass media) have suggested that this transcendent spatial concept is once more disappearing and that Western men are developing relationships and orientations which resemble those of the primitive tribes. It is no accident that 20th-century Picasso paints the faces of women to look like tribal masks, or that the beat of jazz is the beat of the jungle, and our young people dance the frug, the monkey, and the swim. In my own writing about social, political, and legal institutions, independently I have reached comparable conclusions.

However, the trends are not so simple as they say. There has not been one great cycle of development from the multisensual and non-spatial to the visual and spatial back to the multi-sensual and non-spatial. Rather, both kinds of orientations have co-existed simultaneously throughout history. In fact, in the individual lives of any of us in this room, these two kinds of orientations co-exist. Each serves a different function. Each is ascendant in different periods of social and personal development.

Although our Puritan ancestors *did* conceive of space and *did* live under the aegis of a transcendent God, their social lives had a tribal quality. The natural world around them seemed ad hoc and terrifying. And so, to sustain them, they needed a continual incantation of their contact with God, a continual reassurance that the sacred was immanent. There was no clean neutral friendly space between them and the hot breath of eternity.

One of the most charming and touching interludes of history came when 17th-century Englishmen began to comprehend with full impact the implications of the Copernican and Newtonian views of the universe. Before then, man had been the center of everything, with heaven in the attic and hell in the basement. Said the poet Herbert:

> For us the windes do blow;
> The earth doth rest, heav'n move, and fountains flow.[3]

Instructed by the new science, the poet Henry More wrote:

> Th'infinite I'll sing
> Of Time, of Space . . .
> Measuring th'unbounded Heavens and wastfull skie.[4]

And Cowley:

> How wide a space of air
> Extends new prospects to my eye![5]

And like the transcendentalist Margaret Fuller, More decided to accept the universe:

> Then all the works of God with close embrace
> I dearly hug in my enlarged arms.[6]

Americans, having a secular space of their own to fill, had less time to contemplate infinity. From the 18th century, American history is the story of a casting out of confident or hopeful nets into the waiting space of a blank continent, and then the gradual weaving of those nets, and a drawing of them together into today's complex heterogeneous community, an interdependent world in which the tribal drums once more resound.

While our ancestors were doing their brave and daring deeds, they needed a God to catch them if they fell, a different kind of God for each stage of national development: God the clockmaker, the worker through natural law in the century Newton mesmerized; God the Oversoul, continually at hand when you wanted to invoke him, or God the great breast for anguished sinners, in the early traumatic stages of the industrial revolution. Then when changes were coming so fast that men gasped to keep up with them, God and history intertwined. The thrust of the one was thought to be the thrust of the other. Until, with a jolt, we found ourselves in the 20th century.

What is significant about 20th-century America is the pluralistic but integrated co-existence of all the old social and conceptual ingredients. Where men are still purposively driving toward future goals, then variations of the mid-19th century orientations and values still serve. Where work has become rationalized and routinized, a kind of 18th-century individualism within orderliness prevails. In general social spheres where rapid change is taking place, we find ourselves behaving much as our early 19th-century ancestors behaved. Mobile, acquisitive men cast about for moorings.

One is reminded of two of Alexis de Tocqueville's most prescient remarks about the 19th century:

> In the United States a man builds a house in which to spend his old age, and he sells it before the roof is on; he plants a garden and lets it just as the trees are coming into bearing; he brings a field into tillage and leaves other men to gather the crops; he embraces a profession and gives it up; he settles in a place, which he soon afterwards leaves to carry his changeable longings elsewhere. If his private affairs leave him any leisure, he instantly plunges into the vortex of politics; and if at the end of a year of unremitting labor he finds he has a few days' vacation, his eager curiosity whirls him over the vast extent of the United States, and he will travel fifteen hundred miles in a few days to shake off his happiness. Death at length overtakes him, but it is before he is weary of his bootless chase of that complete felicity which forever escapes him.[7]

And again,

> Among democratic nations new families are constantly springing up, others are constantly falling away, and all that remain change their condition; the woof of time is every instant broken and the track of generations effaced . . . not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart.[8]

The differences between these 19th-century Americans and us have been one of context. Their context was nature (both beneficent and terrifying), the temporary embrace of the souped-up camp meeting, or the emotion-laden conception of nation and manifest destiny. Our context is a collective social order (also both beneficent and terrifying). In a thousand intimate but anonymous ways, we are linked together and to posterity: through credit, leasing, social security, insurance, Bankamericard, mass television, an interdependent technology, and President Johnson's hot telephone.

Which brings me back to my topic for today, whither American values? Three trends warrant special note.

The first trend is yet another stage of the industrial revolution. To build our industrial system, first the people were moved about, communities disintegrated and reaggregated. Then the shafts of mines were plunged into the earth, the mills made to grind, the furnaces built to weld hot steel. Then came the assembly lines, the mass production of consumer goods, the rise of a whole new class of white-collar men. More recently, surplus time and energy have been available for nonmaterial services, the pandering of advertising, the bland wiliness of new modes of packaging. The system is a great omnivorous machine which has to be continually fed or it will die. Its tastes are more subtle now. Minerals, raw products, and muscular brawn are taken for granted; now a steady diet of human innovation, of scientific creativity, is required. The men of the hour are the scientists and engineers in research and development. They are as central to the system today as J. P. Morgan used to be. And this means that their values, the kinds of values they require to perform their kind of function, will be given wide credence in American society, for good or for ill.

The second great emphasis is on demands for greater social and cultural integration, to bring the Negroes and the poor of this country more closely into the ever-enlarging middle class. The people who vocalize these claims are not always the people who are supposed to benefit. Others—sometimes not knowing what they do—capitalize on the situation for their own power purposes.

Both these trends—the rise of the research scientist and the pressure for material and cultural equalization—have a new international emphasis and

dimension. The brotherhood of research men crosses national boundaries. So do the institutions which are their context. When one sees the Bank of America and IBM in Hong Kong, Iran, and Denmark, where formerly only the flag of Coca Cola flew, one knows that the United States has become successor to the old British commercial imperialism. In addition, in exchange for the poor, the huddled masses Europe once sent us, we now send to Europe two million tourists a year, a far greater number per year than Europe ever sent immigrants to us. It was exactly this sort of thing which preceded for several decades the political unification of Germany under Bismarck. Americans abroad are paving the way toward an eventual dissolution of our national boundaries, or the subordination of our nation into some larger transnational formally organized political community.

Some of the marchers against the Vietnam War or the students who spent their summers in Alabama or Mississippi have wanted to topple in America what they call (using capital letters) The System. But when Americans are pitted against Americans, The System seems too strong to bring down. So I have heard some of my students say that they must give support and encouragement to revolutionary movements throughout the world, to bring combined underprivileged and non-Caucasian forces to bear against the dominant American social and economic groups. While the American businessman is busy restructuring commercial and research efforts across national boundaries, the American radical is lending his weight to achieve eventual greater social integration across those same boundaries.

In either case, the task is simply a new version of an old process. The language they use, the values they invoke, are reminiscent of the 19th century or even earlier. Whether they know it or not, they are simply agents for The System, helping to move it into its next stage of development—a stage which goes beyond the nation-state.

There is a third trend which is something different in degree—though it too invokes old language and old images. The first two trends are spatial— thrusts out into the world or beyond the atmosphere. The third condition (it really can't be called a trend) is non-spatial, a reversion to the ancient tribal mode, as Marshall McLuhan said. This is a condition of unprecedented plenitude—an abundant flow of goods, time released because of increased technological speed and capacity, the population explosion. A kind of totalness. And within that totalness instant everything: instant coffee, instant interest, drive-in movies, dial-a-prayer, instant intimacy. Some people have snatched goods and pleasures from this cornucopia with a greed born of former deprivation or present lack of imagination. They seem to think the horn of plenty will flow for only a while and then: catastrophe. In fact, one senses that they rather hope that catastrophe will come. Peace and prosperity forever? The burden and anxiety of such a

possibility is almost too much to bear. This would require a final showdown for many of the values which have been operative since America first began. We would have to stop escaping and avoiding. Instead of then and there, we would have to think of now and here. Instead of competing with or doing good to others, we might be forced to think—really think—about ourselves.

In this emerging world—no matter how blessedly short it may fall of a millennium of peace and plenty—the greatest frontier will be the frontier of the self. Western man has only just begun to think about the self. Descartes said, "I think. Therefore I am." Three and a half centuries later, Heidegger asked, "But what is the 'I' that thinks?"

The greatest challenge today is not for the social solution of social problems, however important and urgent they may be. Each of us must answer for himself the question, who am I?, and that is a task so demanding and so deep that we escape from it with relief to fight poverty wars or protest foreign wars, to chase dollars or girls or status—as the case may be. The answer to the question, who am I?, will have to be couched in something deeper and more meaningful than the language of social class, or ethnic group, economic function, or social role. How to find, create, express privacy, dignity, uniqueness, meaningfulness for the self—this is the task that will remain after all the other tasks are done. And to do this, I say we have to keep burnished the old values of asceticism and restraint. We will not be able to escape into the abstract space of public causes nor bury ourselves in LSD trips taken to the sound of tribal drums. Each of us as an individual will have to build his own little garden of space and time. If we lose our power to savor one flower or one sip of water or a sudden flight of birds or a delicate sound, we are in danger of losing our power to savor our own unique individuality and an equally respectable uniqueness in others. I am not advocating retreat or passivity but rather greater discipline. And the ability to say "no" to false lures. Be ye as the Japanese garden where all eternity lies in a little space.