

In this paper, Baker Brownell's neglected naturalistic philosophy is interpreted as a pioneering ecological naturalism which formulates naturalism's traditional concern with Nature and social concerns in explicitly ecological terms, thus providing a normative framework for the treatment of both social and educational problems that includes man's relationship to the natural world as well as his fellow man.

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## Baker Brownell's Ecological Naturalism and Its Educational Significance

The name of Baker Brownell is all but forgotten in philosophy of education today. Professor of Philosophy at Northwestern until retirement in 1953, Brownell was not primarily a philosopher of education but a social philosopher who wrote extensively on educational topics. Brownell developed an original conception of social experience based upon ecological notions which he applied to the consideration of problems in education. The result was a new social framework for the philosophy of education: by enlarging the meaning of social life to include ecological variables, Brownell sets new problems and new directions for philosophizing about education.

### I

Brownell based his social philosophy upon a naturalistic interpretation of man's relationship to Nature: man is an integral part of Nature, his activities a functionally continuous biological expression of the larger natural world. But Brownell's naturalism was distinctive in emphasizing an implicit though neglected aspect of the naturalistic tradition: the non-human physical environment and its effect on man.

Most naturalists have largely taken it for granted that man is a product of his natural as well as his social environment. Nevertheless, attention has quite understandably focussed on social reality, construing knowledge and behavior in a social context. While this emphasis on the social has enabled naturalists to contribute to our understanding of social experience in important ways, it has neglected the role physical environment plays in the generation of knowledge and the administration of conduct. As a result, the naturalists' acknowledgement of the agency of natural environment was usually a mere backdrop for examining issues of social concern. Many naturalists have forgotten Dewey's stress on the intimate connection between physical and social environments, and in responding to the social problems posed by technological society, for example, have tended to conceive of social change as alteration of the social environment only. The physical environment into which social change is introduced—typically the urban or metropolitan region—often remains unchanged (or changed only to the degree it can accommodate the intended social implementation), as though the physical conditions of social life were somehow not part of a social problem. Consequently, much social reform has tended to take for granted the massive physical arrangements of urban industrial concentrations, and emphasized instead changes in attitude and meaning, the improvement of human relations, and the design of social policies which order institutional life within the *de facto* physical setting.

Yet implicit in this exclusively social determinism is the very dualism between man and Nature that naturalism has sought to avoid: social life is set over against

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the physical world and is made the seat of the value determinations which regulate man's dealings with his environment. Man's relationship to Nature thus becomes a matter of controlling the physical environment in terms of social values whose origin and worth is essentially independent of the very physical environment which is the object of control. But when the sources of human value are thought to reside solely within social experience, a naturalistic theory of value becomes untenable. Nature, seen only as an object of control, ceases to be an object of cooperation; a resource that participates in the very nature of social existence. A naturalism that follows the path of social determinism becomes a truncated naturalism, forced to defend but one part of the natural world—human experience—as the only legitimate ground of value; it is cut off from the sources of value resident in the larger natural world. The only escape from the problems of subjectivity which are entailed in this position is either to deny the possibility of a naturalistic, empirical solution to the value problem, or to explore the possibility that human knowledge and value have their ultimate ground beyond social experience in the vastness and complexity of the system we call "Nature".

Baker Brownell chose the latter of these two courses. His naturalism became an ecological naturalism, which, above all else, is marked by its recognition of the dependency of human life on the larger life of Nature. In place of social determinism, Brownell proposed ecological determinism: since human society is a part of the natural world, questions of the nature and ground of social forms are settled not by reference to still other social forms, but by a determination of the nature of human life from the standpoint of the whole of Nature.

The foundation of ecological naturalism is therefore the traditional naturalistic inclusion of man within Nature, but with the stress on the dependency of man on other life forms and the reciprocating effects which each have on the other. Man is not simply *in* a passive Nature; its profusion is *in him*, acting upon him to make him what he is and forever conditioning what he does. Brownell brings this out eloquently when he remarks that man's life:

has been laid out through millions of years in association with living animals and plants and the vast music and movement of the natural world. The form of human life and the structure of its activities are involved in these natural forms and structures. The values that men have, the accents, the appreciations, the criteria of morals, even the insistence on living survival itself, were derived initially in this milieu, and now evolve . . . as part of that great order.

The beasts and the plants participate primevally in our communities. They enter our philosophies; mold our natures; help make us fully human. They are among our greatest teachers. Through the mutually and interlocking functions of man and plants and animals we and they domesticate each other . . . For animals and plants bind us functionally to the sun and the seasons. Our life and work among them indenture us to wordless patterns of the four winds and the summer solstice. We are continuous with Nature and the world. This sense of functional unity with the natural world is a basic condition, we may assume, of what is called a meaningful and stable life.<sup>1</sup>

If man is a part of the great unification which is Nature, it follows that his values and the forms of his social organization can never be determined solely by his own aspirations. In Brownell's ecological view, the locus of knowing and valuing is shifted from man himself to a field of conjoint codetermination in which human artifice is a product of cooperation with the systematic conditions of the non-human natural world. Thus, men, Brownell says, should be:

treated less as the sole creators of the values and normalities of life in nature than as coordinator in a great pattern of organic relationships among plants, animals, men and the less animate forces of the world. Here human beings are not the sole standards of value and the normal way

<sup>1</sup>Baker Brownell, *The Human Community* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), pp. 7 - 8.

of living; they are parts of a larger system of interactive and mutually cooperative factors called the world of nature. This functional . . . conception of . . . life . . . establishes normality on the broad basis of man's associations with his fellow plants and animals as well as with his own kind . . . It is a life profoundly coordinated in nature and with nature, not mainly as a predator, but as an associate in natural values and a participant in the living world.<sup>2</sup>

By making value determination a function of an environmental field in which human interests are only one of a number of contending considerations, Brownell hopes to avoid the subjectivity inherent in social determinism. The process of deciding what is good for man would have to be framed in the context of what is good for components of the natural world other than man. Value judgments, while made by men, could no longer be made only for men.

But how is Nature to be known such that we may not only learn its own requirements for sustained existence, but that human values may be articulated within its purview? What method of knowing is appropriate to value judgment that is construed ecologically rather than socially? And how do we find in this method a place for human individuality and uniqueness? How, in short, is man's relationship to Nature to be understood if we are to derive a scheme of social practice from it?

Most naturalistic philosophers, and undoubtedly most contemporary ecologists would be quick to answer that scientific method is the best if not the only method capable of yielding the kinds of knowledge and value determinations required by ecological naturalism. But Brownell, surprisingly perhaps, rejects science as a basic method for his naturalism. The scientific worker, Brownell claims:

is forced to abandon his assumptions of unique description and resort to statistical averages and probabilities. He must give up his quest for an ultimate, atomized, uniquely describable phenomenon. He must resort, rather, to a kind of field theory of knowledge. He must turn to a pattern of behavior in which a single specific thing or event . . . may be considered in statistical groups and tendencies but no longer may be assigned a unique spot in the universe as a specific individual. The single instance, in short, is secondary in reality and presumably in origin to the group.<sup>3</sup>

Scientific method is a linear method; it is concerned with a series or pattern of proximate relationships between things in which the integrity of any one thing is lost. The serial relationships of science "do not have the nuance and that concreteness . . . and the plurality and concomitance, of variables of things perceived and lived. They are not appropriate to fully human situations. Linear thinking cannot fully represent the changing colors of the integral situation."<sup>4</sup>

Brownell fears that science would subsume the concrete under the relational, thus negating its unique contribution to life and understanding. The concrete thing is the ultimate datum in existence and it is indispensable to any ecological theory of knowledge because it is the bearer of those aspects of natural life which can never be grasped by the symbolic procedures of science. Thus the natural knowledge which ecological naturalism requires must be sought by means of a method capable of retaining concreteness within the very scheme of ecological relationships.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 246. Similar criticisms of science's inability to account for the individuality of particular things may be found in three quite different works: (1) George W. Morgan, *The Human Predicament: Dissolution and Wholeness* (Providence, R.I.: Brown University Press, 1968)—reprinted by Delta, 1971; (2) Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1969); (3) Henry B. Veatch, *Two Logics* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1969). Both Morgan's and Veatch's works have been badly neglected, and Veatch's especially is a powerful and rewarding critique.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 234.

Brownell hints at what such a method might be in the following passage:

Linear thinking . . . is confined to itself, like a man imprisoned in a room made all of mirrors . . . Beyond its reach, particularly in communal experience, there seems to be a residuum that is not easily subject to symbolic representation. We get intimations of this through a kind of implicit thinking, a stub of thinking, a hunch or blind directive that does not develop into full and explicit symbols. Of things in our communal life that are not easily represented we have perhaps a direct experience that is present in some primitive way in all of us.<sup>5</sup>

But what sort of method could be based on direct experience while avoiding science and the gross subjectivity of the senses? Brownell's answer is: mysticism. For Brownell, mystical experience is a special awareness of the unity present in concrete situations of living. Unlike traditional otherworldly mysticisms, Brownell's is a mysticism of the here and now, a secular mysticism. It involves an awareness of the unsaid, tacit, and Brownell believes, incommunicable character of environmental situations, a perception in a more than visual way of the wholeness of situations, the very pervasiveness which gives them their concreteness.

Whereas the traditional mystic sought to render intelligible the ineffability of absolute and transcendent experience, Brownell's purpose is to account for the ineffability of "the concrete, living experience of this day and hour." Mysticism enables man to comprehend the unity of direct experience which is denied to science, and in so doing he is in touch with the influence of environmental forces and relationships contextually rather than through the inadequate symbolic formulations of scientific method. In Brownell's mysticism, man is more fully aware of the sanctions and limits of the natural world because he is sensitive to their direct intervention in his daily life, and so is better able to overcome his anthropocentrism and shape his social life in accordance with ecological norms.

Mysticism, for Brownell, is not a privileged access to truth, and hence is not a way of transcending subjectivity. As a method, it has its inception in the subjective being, and to some extent is never wholly free from that subjectivity; but because it is a secular mysticism it has existential conditions as its object, and it is these existential conditions which qualify the mystical intuition. That is, the environmental object plays a role in shaping the intuition by virtue of its inherent character. The subject's awareness of these objects is never free of subjective coloration, nor can it always avoid judgmental error. But in the same way that otherworldly mystical intuition is conditioned by the nature of the transcendent objects it apprehends, so too the secular mystical intuition is conditioned by the nature of the environmental objects before it. There is nothing in naturalistic mystical awareness *per se* which guarantees the verity of its perceptions. Rather, the naturalistic mystic achieves objectivity only to the degree that the environmental objects he intuits do embody an ideal order of ecological relationships which will act upon the knower's subjectivity. That is, the structure of the physical and social environment in which mystic intuition takes place must be so constituted that its component parts are ecologically harmonious with the system of Nature; to the degree that they are, subjectivity necessarily participates in a normative sphere larger than that defined by its own inclination. In this exposure to an ideal environment, subjectivity is transformed and judgment begins to be conditioned by respect for the normativeness of ecosystemic relationships and sanctions. Thus, the ground of objectivity, for Brownell's mysticism, is in the world, in an environment ordered on the basis of ecologically sound principles.

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<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 233.

Whatever we might conclude about the strengths and weaknesses of Brownell's naturalistic mysticism, it is clear that he plants his social philosophy squarely on the necessity for social reconstruction, a social reconstruction that is of course ecologically oriented. For only a changed social order that is based upon the principles of systematic behaviour of the natural world can provide the conditions of the mystic grasp of concreteness.

## II

Brownell's ecological social thought is based primarily on one ecological variable: size. He may therefore be thought of as a quantitative structuralist: the quality of social structural forms is based primarily (though not exclusively) on their quantitative arrangements. It is this emphasis on size and quantity that takes Brownell to the physical basis of social structure, and hence to its ultimate connection with and to the natural world.

Brownell claims that the great sin of modern industrial societies is the excess all have exhibited. Modern man is overcome by the gargantuan scale of his surroundings. He is caught up in an extraordinary complexity of agencies and institutions called mass society. The age-old principle of the separation of production from consumption—sound in itself—has become, in the manifold intricacies of large scale organizations, the basis of man's alienation from himself and from Nature, and the chief cause of his diminishing concrete experience. The complexity of organizational life in mass society overwhelms man, reducing at every advance in complexity his opportunities for direct, concrete experience. Brownell states:

In large-scale organization there is a powerful tendency to substitute other values for human ones. Symbols, administrative abstractions, and other negotiable currencies tend to replace non-negotiable human contexts. In urban regions, in the political structures of great states, the opportunities for living initiative and control are ever reduced or are centered in fewer and fewer people . . . Human life is broken down into various bits, colors, and strands and then rewoven into a nameless fabric.<sup>6</sup>

Industrial man, fragmented by the divisive specialization he is forced to engage in, vainly compensates for his lack of direct experience by the vicarious cultivation of still other specializations, either as spectator, participant in extroverted pursuit of pleasure and material goods, or as lone practitioner of highly wrought technical and professional skills. For Brownell, our culture is a culture of escape and substitutive behavior. We are a culture of wanderers, of lost souls. We have lost the integrity of the present moment, the concrete human hour. Substitutive behavior forces us to separate emotion from direct action; and this separation, Brownell thought, is the essence of decadence.

Of the many ways in which the forces of mass society are organized and express themselves, Brownell devoted special attention to urbanism. He viewed urbanism as a vast concatenation of procedures, assumption and structural motifs which defined the way of life, the modes of association, production and settlement of all members of mass society. Urbanism was simply the way man lived in a society where uncontrolled centralization of specialized functions in large-scale organizations constituted the basic mode of social organization. The great city merely contained and expressed in concentrated form what was everywhere urban, mass society. The greater aggressiveness and violence of city life stemmed from an excessive concentration of the specialized functions and organizations. But because

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<sup>6</sup>Brownell, *The Human Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

the activities of corporate organizations increasingly reached out to include the remotest of rural areas, they too became affiliated with the extensive urban culture. All industrial life is lived in the urban context. The great city is the archetype, the paradigmatic embodiment of a way of life that is pervasive.

Urbanism reduces the opportunities for concrete experience. "Urban life," says Brownell.

... has no abiding presentness. It is designed always to subordinate this moment to the next one. Its structure is based logically and functionally on the moment that is not here. It roars on toward endless futures which it never finds. It tips and staggers endlessly into postponed values that never are realized. It is a pattern of specialism in which instruments of production have no final or consummatory value. Or they make way briefly for corrupted consummations and pleasure seeking that have no element of production. This segregation of instrument from end is the secret both of the city's power and its human failure.<sup>7</sup>

Caught up in the whirl of substitutive acquisitiveness, urban man grows restless with the "now", whose potentialities for consummatory satisfaction are seldom realized, since his attention is forever on the next "now." Where production and consumption stand so far apart in the technological scheme of things, or indeed where the individual has little to do with production at all, his appreciation of the moment is superficial at the least and shifts too quickly to the next moment, and to the next, and the next. Urban men, Brownell believes:

have learned to value false gods. They have been seduced by bright, divisive cultures, specialized perfections and privileges, glittering fragments, gadgets, ready-made arts, and importations bought promiscuously without relevance to the basic making-using rhythm that is central in any good life. They live on the loot of a world, on trinkets and odds and ends, the only value of which is often the thrill of acquisition. When action is solely instrumental and enjoyment solely receptive, the values of life will lie in acquisition.<sup>8</sup>

In limiting concrete experience and reinforcing acquisitiveness, the goal of urban culture becomes the perpetual expansion of the scope of acquisitive experience and the occasions for its satisfaction. The institutions of business, government, and education, even the social betterment of the disadvantaged and impoverished, are linked to this goal, legitimized under the slogan "the pursuit of happiness." The trouble with acquisitiveness is its exclusivity. When it becomes the dominating thrust of a culture, the opportunities for man to learn from his experiences are lessened, for his experience is made a reflection of his own desires for further acquisition—a reflection of the competing desires of others in the vast scheme of Nature. An acquisitive culture is a man-centered culture. It may serve to satisfy man's acquisitive needs remarkably well—up to a point. But, ultimately, it is morally narrow in its outlook and suicidal in its course: it fails to realize that the destiny of man, his well-being and happiness, must be framed in accordance with the welfare of the life of the whole of Nature and not just his own immediate desires.

Urban mass society is ecologically unsound. Its controlling principles of organization and structure create an environment that corrupts the human spirit and confounds man's ability to find his true place in Nature. Since his life is primarily a function of his membership in corporate superstructures, urban man defines himself and his community life largely in terms of the aggressive, impersonal specializing affiliations. However many individuals he may know as friends or associates, the locus of his community is shifted away from the local community to the greater

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

magnitude of the larger world in any of its corporate forms: "downtown," "the office," "the plant," or "the job," "the ball-game," "the stock market," or "the news." These are the "real world," they are "where the action is." But such a reality becomes an abstract reality: man's identification with it is lacking in the deeply felt satisfaction that is possible, Brownell believes, only when institutional life, the social structures which define activities are the expression of a small community of men in which the possibility of face to face relationships are maximized.

The true human community is incompatible with corporate mass society. Genuine human community is based upon an ecological rather than a social criterion. Community must be limited in the size of its constituents. It may possess an industrial component, and may participate in and benefit from certain centralized industrial functions and services, but these must be made subordinate to the localized and necessarily decentralized industrial activities. While cities would have to be drastically thinned out and scaled down in size, Brownell envisages a rural-urban relationship of balance in place of present-day urban dominance. The overarching consideration in deciding all questions of optimal size, distribution of population, and implementation of industrial-technological goods and services, could be put in the form of an ecological imperative: "Does the intended size or utilization contribute to and maximize a social environment in which face-to-face relationships between men are possible?" Only a positive answer to this question will assure the conditions of concrete experience for a community. Only where all institutional life is structured on a small scale is it possible for men to experience the intimate contact with both other men and things which is the essence of concreteness. Only then will there be a sense of the unity, the wholeness of the life of the community, and presumably of the entire society. Brownell's communities of concreteness were microcosms, not only of the larger society, but, most importantly, of the whole of Nature: the small community puts man more closely in touch with the natural environment. In the small community, to a degree not possible in the mass, urban community, the life of man and the life of the community as a whole would be in daily contact with natural surroundings, and so would be conditioned by the pervasive regularity of the natural world. Only in this way could the individual's essentially mystical awareness of concreteness convey a more than subjective normative force, since it would be an awareness of an environment already in harmony with the natural world. The ground of objectivity, for Brownell, lay in a social structure that reflected the structure of Nature itself. Such an environmental determinism does not guarantee *ipso facto* the adequacy of special acts of judgment or moral apprehension, but it provides an objective framework for thrashing out the claims of subjectivity. Thus the appeal to size as an ecological approach to a theory of society provides only a necessary but not a sufficient condition of social organization. And while it remains an incomplete social theory, its virtue lies in bringing to the fore what has for so long been neglected.

### III

In a decentralized society where the structural motif is the small community, the institution of education, like all other institutional activities, revolves around the life of the community. The educational process is rooted in its familiar and necessary functions. While it ultimately reaches beyond them for understanding and significance, it must begin with what is unique to each particular community. The school becomes a community school, whose curriculum is based on the initially limited area of experience shared by its members. Yet the goal of the school is to promote the self-realization of each community member, and this leads to an

appreciation of the broad world beyond the culture itself. Man is a part of Nature, his full humanity is realized when he has defined his own particularity in relation to Nature's totality.

The small community is an educational setting, a necessary means to an end never fully realizable within the confines of the small community itself. Too often, Brownell believes, education seeks to impose upon the young alien forms and abstractions taken from contexts basically unfamiliar to them. This, of course, is all too typical of an abstractive, specialized and centralized mass-society wherein the primary, concrete experience of daily life is relegated to the unimportant and trivial. Impersonal, fragmented and corporate things and events early shape the content and structure of learning. The question is not whether these have a place in an educational program, but whether they take the place of, and dominate the more familiar and homely experiences of the local community, are crucial in providing an experience of the concrete, the particular and familiar which is important in conveying to the learner the sense of how particulars are related to a tangible whole that is the essence of concrete experience. Without meaningful concrete experience, education, like so much else in mass-society merely hastens the individual's alienation from himself and the world, encouraging substitutive behavior and cynical detachment from real possibilities of change.

Brownell has surprisingly little to say about the specific methods and techniques appropriate to the kind of community centred education he advocates. The focus of many of today's educational critics and reformers—the improvement of the quality of instruction—is, to Brownell, of relatively minor importance because his approach to education hinges on the supremacy of the broader context in which the instructional apparatus of schools operates. It is the community that sets men in their ways long before they enter the schoolhouse; it is the community that either does or does not offer the precious opportunities for concrete experience, the indispensable condition for their self-realization as whole men. The community is the supreme educational environment, and however much educators may try to institute instructional reform in the schools designed to enhance self-realization and overcome alienation, their efforts will fail as long as the community is organized on the principles of mass-society.

Education must therefore become an agency of social reconstruction to make the small community the primary environment for educational activity. It must start in existing small communities where it can hopefully set an example for the larger society. Here a genuinely community-centered education will focus on the social and individual problems of small community life. The school would become a community centre, a resource which community members of all ages could use to facilitate their continuing life development within the community and the larger world by means of a critical application of the materials and resources of the school to the solution of their common problems. "When the context of educational work is really identified with the lives of the participants it becomes in every instance both practical and cultural, and the distinction is no longer meaningful."<sup>9</sup>

Brownell's conception of the community school was one variant of the much neglected Community School Movement in Progressive Education, which gained

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<sup>9</sup> Baker Brownell, *The College and the Community* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), p. 228.

considerable popularity in the 30's and 40's.<sup>10</sup> Brownell was not a central figure in the movement, perhaps because his own interests lay more with higher education than with the lower schools. Nevertheless, his educational writings contain important statements of the community school idea and reveal his deep commitment to it, a commitment which found practical expression when he served as director of the Montana Study in rural reconstruction in 1948.<sup>11</sup> Brownell recognized the fundamental problem which beset the Community School Movement: most rural communities, deeply conservative in outlook, had no desire to be reconstructed. But while many in the Movement gradually turned from an emphasis on the community to an emphasis on the individual child (and hence became part of the child-centered approach), Brownell staunchly retained his faith in the community school and urged that educators resist the onset of increased mass urbanism by renewing their efforts to revive rural society:

If our educational leaders believe that the community is indispensable in a good society, they should direct their efforts more definitely toward its preservation and enrichment. They should not accept and work out a smooth administrative organization on the graveyard of our rural culture. They should seek ways to revive rural culture itself. Essential to this problem is the recognition of little places, the friendly communities, the crossroads cooperation, the groups of human beings who know one another well, as central in the survival of American democracy.<sup>12</sup>

Yet Brownell had no illusions about the relentless expansion of the urban community and the continued decline of the small community. The institutions of the small community, and no less its educational institutions, were increasingly moving toward affiliation with large scale institutions and away from identification with, let alone reconstruction of their small community locales. One such institution, the community college, which Brownell thought held promise as a true community school, early became part of the organizational framework of the larger state systems, functionally severed from the concerns and problems of locale and region. In the end, Brownell admitted that educational reconstruction through the small community school was hardly the sufficient condition of the redirection of American culture.

The community school, important as it is, is only one aspect of the many-sided effort needed to stabilize and enrich the human community. Not education alone, but educational reconstruction along with administrative, economic, social, and technological reconstruction, are necessary.<sup>13</sup>

Thus educational change, educational reconstruction, depends on social reconstruction. But social reconstruction would do more than help the school nurture the small community way of life; it would, in transforming the social conditions of mass society into the social conditions of decentralized society, provide a broad

<sup>10</sup>Cf. the various contributions to *The Community School*, ed. Nelson B. Henry, Fifty-second NSSE Yearbook (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953); Milosh Muntyan's essay in this volume, "Community-School Concepts: A Critical Analysis," is particularly insightful. Cf. also, Robert A. Naslund, "Origin and Development of the Community School Concept." Unpublished Doctor's Dissertation School of Education, Stanford University, 1951; Samuel Everett, *The Community School* (New York: D. Appleton Century Co., 1938); Edward G. Olsen, ed., *The School and Community Reader* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1963).

<sup>11</sup>The definitive account of the Montana Study, which contains numerous references to Brownell's participation in it, is by Richard Waverely Poston, *Small Town Renaissance* (New York: Harper and Row, Inc., 1950). Brownell's own comments and observations on the Montana Study may be found in *The Human Community*, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26, 45-49, 69-72, 84-86, 112-113, 122-124, 151-153, 186-187, 212-214; and in *The College and the Community*, *op. cit.*, pp. 52, 201, 222-223, 231, 236-240.

<sup>12</sup>Brownell, *The Human Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 169.

social environment which was educative in its own right. Society, as is commonly recognized, is an informal educator of great power and persuasion. And for just that reason Brownell felt that if education is to succeed in helping men realize the possibilities of their humanity in an age of mass technological society, the enormous gap which separates schooling and the "real world" can no longer be tolerated: the society-as-educator must actively contain and manifest the goals for which the school is working. Put simply, we cannot have the good school without the good society. To continue to conceive of educational reform solely in terms of the improvement of the internal environment of the schools—restructuring of the classroom and the employment of would-be progressive instructional techniques in the manner of so many contemporary radical school reformers—in the absence of significant reform of society, is to subscribe to the myth that the school can in and of itself provide for the redirection of culture. Educational reform, for Brownell, becomes the task of environmental reform broadly conceived to include both the physical and social environments of school and society. The fundamental questions of the meaning and nature of education are then tied to the search for those conditions of cultures which enable men to achieve a kind of life that is in harmony with the rest of Nature, a life ". . . profoundly coordinated in nature and with nature, not mainly as predator, but as an associate in natural values . . ." But if man is to learn to cooperate with Nature instead of destroying her and himself, it is hard to see how he can do so in modern technological societies where environmental destruction is virtually built into the social fabric. No, the society must be an exemplar of that which is to be learned; its institutional life must stand on principles of social organization which are the counterparts for human society of the ecological norms observed by the rest of Nature. Only then will the work of the schools possess the kind of articulation with social life which can make their efforts truly successful.

In so heavily emphasizing the dependency of educational reform on social reconstruction, Brownell has made the possibility of educational reform hinge on what amounts to utopian social innovation. For it is clear that the kind of social change Brownell has in mind is hardly to be counted as realistic social planning. Brownell is very much a radical social utopian, for what he proposes is nothing short of the redirection of industrial civilization away from its massive scale and decadence toward a simplified society more in touch with the rhythm and balance of the natural world. For many it will be easy to dismiss his proposals. In a world weary with the repeated failures of idealistic hopes, it is easy to reject Brownell as but another foolish dreamer whose plans are laughingly impractical, and return to whatever security realism offers. Brownell offers nothing that will tangibly help improve either the schools or society here and now. In place of theories and clarifications which offer the educator an improved theoretical perspective which directly facilitates his practice, Brownell simply recommends a broad and hopeful vision which stimulates the imagination but lacks the means of attaching itself to specific strategies of change.

But for a number of reasons it would be tragic to fail to give utopianism a serious hearing. In the first place, utopianism is not necessarily unrealistic. As Paul Sears notes:

It would be a grave injustice to dismiss utopian thought as mere fantasy, visionary and impractical. To consider it restricted to literary forms that bear its label is to underestimate its wide prevalence at many levels and in all cultures. However expressed, it is essentially a critique of defects and limitations of society and an expression for something better.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Paul Sears, "Utopia and the Living Landscape," *Daedalus*, Vol. 94, No. 2 (Spring, 1965), p. 474.

In projecting the utopian vision the philosopher performs a vital cultural function by opening to critical view many assumptions covered over by customary and normal views of life, and enlarges the range of possibilities for social science and may even become, as Robert Nisbet has suggested “. . . the over all context of social science”<sup>15</sup> by stimulating the broad imaginative frameworks within which social planning most successfully takes place.

While utopians may therefore perform a valuable social function, it is true historically that some utopian positions also have a degree of practical merit. For one thing, “practicality” and “realism” are relative terms, and especially in periods of rapid social change, one day’s impracticality may be the next day’s realism. Thus, much that has happened in America since Brownell wrote has tended to confirm his suspicions of bigness and overdevelopment—especially in corporate industry and government.<sup>16</sup> New voices decry the excessive concentration and alienation urban living is producing.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, there are signs of movement away from urban centres by both individuals and institutions who seek release from the suffocation of the urban way of life, striving for realization of the amenities of life on the human scale Brownell had championed. But more fundamentally, today’s environmental movement against continued pursuit of the goal of perpetual growth in industry and population,<sup>18</sup> suggests a strong measure of support for Brownell’s underlying criticism of modern society—that it is an excessive development of the potentiality of modern science and technology.<sup>19</sup> Should the idea of zero growth or even growth reduction become a reality—and many ecologists are urging that it must if we are to survive—then urban decentralization would cease to be the sop it now is for an overflowing and continually expanding industrial population and become an eminently sensible way of deploying populations and industrial capacities on a more manageable and humanly satisfying scale. In this context Brownell’s belief in the small community as the essential ingredient of the good life, and the community school as the means by which society critically maintains and continually reconstructs itself, would have lost its romantic and utopian overtones and stand within the realm of the practical and realistic.

When Brownell is considered in the perspectives of today’s environmental crisis, it is not too much to suggest that, far from his lacking relevance to present concerns, he was in fact a philosopher ahead of his time, a leading edge of the environmental revolution. There have been many theories of social reconstruction among educational philosophers, and some have made it the key to educational reform. But

<sup>15</sup>Robert A. Nisbet, *Community and Power* (formerly *The Quest for Community*) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), Preface p. xvii.

<sup>16</sup>*Cf.*, e.g., Morton Mintz, Jerry Cohen, *America, Inc.* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1971).

<sup>17</sup>*Cf.*, Norma Flem, “Stress and Overpopulation: Psychological Aspects of Overcrowding,” in Donald R. Scoby, ed., *Environmental Ethics* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Burgess Publishing Co., 1971), pp. 90-100; Lawrence Falk, “Cultural Specialization Versus Living Space,” *Ibid.*, pp. 82-89; Paul Leyhausen, “The Sane Community—A Density Problem?” in Paul Shepard, Daniel McKinley, ed., *Environ/Mental* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1971), pp. 99-110; High H. Iltis, “The Optimum Human Environment and Its Relation to Modern Agricultural Preoccupation,” in Robert M. Chuts, ed., *Environmental Insight* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1941), pp. 206-216; Serge Chernayeff, Alexander Tzonis, *Shapes of Community: Realization of Human Potential* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1971).

<sup>18</sup>The two most popular works critical of endless growth are: (1) Donella N. Meadows, *et. al.*, *The Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe Books, 1972); and (2) *A Blueprint for Survival* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972). *Cf.* also, E. J. Mishan, *Technology and Growth* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), and H. V. Hodson, *The Diseconomics of Growth* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972).

<sup>19</sup>*Cf.* in particular, Eugene S. Schwartz, *Overskill: The Decline of Technology in Modern Civilization* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971).

Brownell's theory is distinctive in its ecological orientation. His great contribution to educational thought is the perception that educational questions, questions of the conduct and improvement of educational activity, are more than merely social questions about determining educational means in accordance with social variables alone. Educational questions are ultimately ecological. They require us to go beyond the social order to consider critically the way human existence is involved in and sustained by the larger natural world. Dewey put it in a way that went to the heart of Brownell's point of view: "Any theory of education which contemplates a more unified scheme of education than now exists is under the necessity of facing the question of the relation of man to nature."<sup>20</sup> When an ecological approach to education is taken, when the framework within which educational questions are considered is the field of man's relationship to Nature, and not just man's relationship to society, education becomes an exploration of environments, a search for those conditions of environment which promote human development as an integral part of natural development. Nature, the human community and the school are related environments, and to consider the school environment one must consider not merely the school as related to society, but the school as related to society as related to Nature. Education must be based upon Nature because all life must be.<sup>21</sup> But precisely because education is a social function, education cannot maintain its dependency upon Nature except in a social medium that has itself achieved a satisfactory harmony with Nature.

While Brownell's environmentalism should underscore the importance of social reconstruction as an inseparable dimension of school reform and the proper setting for the treatment of philosophical problems of education, it must be pointed out again that his very environmentalism sets his theory of social reconstruction apart from the classic social theories wherein change is effected by the imposition of innovative *social* forms. Brownell's theory, as we have seen, makes it imperative that social forms be grounded in and derived from ecological relationships. Thus Brownell's reconstructionism cannot be taken as a sanction of *any* and every social theory of reconstruction. It is rather a call to thought in the recommendation of a perspective, a framework—the ecological framework of man's relationship to Nature—within which philosophers may join in the extraordinarily difficult challenge to rethink how we can redesign the human community to secure a stable and fruitful life for all life forms.

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<sup>20</sup>John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), p. 324.

<sup>21</sup>Discussions by philosophers of education on the issue of "education according to Nature" have ignored an ecological framework. The issue needs to be reexamined with the ecological dimension in mind.