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QUESTIONS ABOUT EXTREMES

THAT there is no intellectual clarity, no moral certainty, no decisive commitment to the good save in going to extremes is a conclusion often reached by people who feel the weight of mediocrity pressing from all sides, and the mushy terrain of compromise beneath their feet. "Extremes" are of various sorts, of course, providing different ways of overcoming the blurrings of the ordinary. One kind of limit is achieved with isolating abstractions conceived and developed by the mind. Ordering definitions result, and these are sometimes indispensable to intelligent action. Other limits are given by radical differentiations of social structure during the hastenings of historical change. Orienting extremes, in short, vary all the way from the defining principles of philosophy and science, which depend upon the exercise and inclination of subjective powers and their application to the welter of experience, to chasms which open up in the objective conditions of life, compelling a vast migration, a historic rebellion, or making occasion for a great declaration of meaning that alters the focus of men's thinking forever after.

It might be said, then, that for us the sources of limiting and ordering extremes are about equally divided between subjective and objective origins. A man has to have limits in order to live, he needs rules or principles to go by and an idea of possibilities to exhaust, and whether he will "create" them as a masterwork of theory or accept them at the hands of a relentless destiny is seldom a clean-cut choice. If you read *Black Boy* by Richard Wright, or almost anything by James Baldwin or Eldridge Cleaver, you experience at second hand the impact of limits known intimately and uniquely by some ten or twelve per cent of the population of the United States. Any encounter with an authentic limit is a moment of truth for a human being, and we cannot help but feel the touch with human reality that comes with finding out what a man *does* when he reaches some final extreme. So with the story of Faust. What will he do when he wears out all he has purchased with his share of infinity, when he comes to his self-created end? And Madame Bovary—what whimpering, self-pitying finish will *she* achieve?

Evidently there are some few interludes in history when considerable portions of mankind seem to have a great deal of latitude in deciding upon desirable or hypothetical extremes. These are times of a comfortable eclecticism, you could say, epochs of think-what-you-please. Great or heroic literature then figures in education mainly as a source of high-toned entertainment. The mythic meanings of the past are seen as little more than passive pageantry. A vast complacency infects the common attitudes of home, market place, and convention hall. People play a bit at the idea of "knowing truth," while the luxury of not really needing it gives academic orthodoxy its Olympian manners. The naive intensities of pilgrims and the passions of crusaders, it is assumed, will never be known again. The language of commitment is felt to be gauche and embarrassing in polite assemblies, since these are times when a sense of having "arrived" is allowed by certain curious delays in the feed-back from over-confident behavior.

There are also times when helmeted, booted, grim-faced automata—bearing some resemblance to men—march through history. They *are* men, of course, but men obsessed by some dark, commanding doctrine of extremes. The truncating inversions of truth which control their reflexes have come to determine the social organization and uses of power by processes that remain obscure. Basic, however, to their success has been a defaulting indifference on the part of the people who are the victims; some long-drawn-out

abdication made them think there was no need of an inwardly determined order. They left their limits to chance and satiety, a merely random affair like the brute forces of the physics that had made them at first powerful in mechanics and then powerless as men. Resistance to external authority in such periods might seem to have no more coherence than the gestures of particles in a state of nerveless, entropic disorder.

Such sudden collapses or recessions in what we had thought to be the tide of human progress are devastating to theories of history made too quickly, perhaps from data gathered in the adolescence of an age. Yet these breakdowns may accomplish a lot more than simply to drive social optimism underground. For example, they may arouse recognition of the subjective potentialities of human beings. Disasters of history have a tendency to lead men to a consideration of what they know about themselves in spite of history. For history, after all, as we tend to write it, is mainly a collectivist scheme. Deviants do not matter. Success measures all. Having seen this, better men might long ago have abandoned such smothering group conceits. Has, in other words, *biography* an independent significance? In the face of extreme historical debacle, can we dare to say, "A man's a man, for a' that"? When there is little else left to say, we may indeed dare.

For at least a century, now, history has been studied in order to isolate its master pattern and determining laws. This was sound enough "species" thinking, but it left without meaning the idea that mankind is a species of *individuals.* The time has come for another approach. There are, it seems, certain primitive realities or being-needs of mankind which inevitably declare themselves under conditions of their extreme violation. This, surely, is a "lesson of history." What we seem not to have learned is that those "primitive" realities suffer suppression and mutilation by the elaborate social systems created in their name and extrapolated from what we suppose to be their meaning. What if we were now to study history only for specific grasp of where and how these systems fail, and find out what we *must not do!* Insight into what must never be done might give the *real* equation for measuring human progress. It seems obvious that the equation will involve great subtlety. So we must also argue that this lesson from history, like all other authentic learnings, *cannot be hastened* by hurry-up programs or declared a "fact" because of national or international emergency. Having this insight and the rule of what not to do about it could result in what might be called the "patience-with-system-builders" theory of history. For the melancholy fact is that the true believers in elaborate system-building cannot be persuaded to leave us with no system at all. What they insist upon doing has to be leavened, tempered, diluted, or even just weakened, by the men who have learned better. Gradually, by guarding as well as we can against what must *never* be done, we may be able to evolve a social order with flexible limits.

That is one difference between the physical sciences and the social sciences, with the life sciences perhaps somewhere in the middle. Limits in the physical sciences are fixed and invariable—at least in the Newtonian cosmos. The dynamics of human affairs have no such immutable roots. They grow out of men's *ideas* of what is real. All human affairs quite plainly arise out of the pursuit of meaning; and since conceptions of meaning vary, being subject to cyclic change (and doubtless puzzling epicycles, too), an unknown coefficient which represents actual human progress in the realization of meaning must be added to all formulations concerning the homeostatic necessities of the general human enterprise. So long as this coefficient remains unknown, the practical substitute for it in all the equations made by legislators and social managers must be an open declaration of Ignorance. Or its equivalent in Humility.

This is not to suggest that there is no "order" of relative determinisms in both Nature and

History. After all, we stand on solid earth and proceed from limit to limit. Doubtless the order is there, some day, perhaps, to be understood. But we do *not* understand it today. So, before any more attempts to compress human behavior into some presumptuous scheme of historical determinism, let us get to know ourselves better. And when we go to history, let us look for evidences of what has been *unmistakably* good, humane, wise, and true, in spite of everything ambitious rulers and arrogant translators of the dictates of History could do to prevent the flowering of human development. Let us look, for example, at Socrates, at what he said and thought, and not imagine that it had no meaning because of what the Athenians, making some very bad history, did to him. Historical survival may be the least of our interests if what survives is what such "enlightened" public opinion decides is worth while.

This brings us to a work of current history, a novel by a man living under the conditions produced by men resolutely determined to *change* history by the light of a theory. The book is *The First Circle,* by Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn. It makes the reader ask himself: Is the best human life one lived *underground,* outside the pale, in exile from organized, conventional existence? Many reviewers have been driven to ask this question, so that the impact of the book is no secret. Why, indeed, does so much of the sunlight of human life seem to come from men who wrote in prison? What does this single historical truth tell us about our system-builders? After all, they were not always bad or evil men—not, at least, at the beginning. But *what did they leave out of their calculations?* The point of Solzhenitsyn's story cries out for development. Harrison Salisbury sets the question simply: "It is not in the end the prisoners who are destroyed, even though they may lose their lives. It is the jailers. . . ."

These terrible denouements are forgotten throughout comfortable periods of history. Who is able to remind us, when sitting before the fire of a winter's evening, or playing happily with our children or our grandchildren, of the illimitable freedom of men in prison cells, of the radically humane culture practiced by the condemned? Who can persuade us that these nobilities actually *count* before the bar of history? What *is* the stuff of martyrs? The whole subject is embarrassing.

Following is a sequence of dialogue from Solzhenitsyn's book, in which the chief speaker is a young engineer who, years earlier as a boy in the ninth grade, saw in the newspaper that Kirov had been killed: "And suddenly it became clear to him that Stalin and no one else had killed Kirov. Because he was the only one who would profit by his death!" So, in time, the engineer spoke out; he couldn't help it. Now he is imprisoned in a secret prison laboratory in Moscow where he works fourteen hours a day, seven days a week, with other men of special talent and the ineradicable guilt of their moral intelligence:

> Nerzhin was speaking fervently, like a man imparting long-matured thoughts:
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> "When I was free and used to read books in whick wise men pondered the meaning of life or the nature of happiness, I understood very little of those passages. I gave them their due: wise men are supposed to think. It's their profession. But the meaning of life? We live—that's the meaning. Happiness? When things are going very well, that's happiness, everyone knows that. Thank God for prison! It gave me the chance to think. In order to understand the nature of happiness we have first to analyze satiety. Remember the Lubyanka and counterintelligence? Remember that thin, watery barley or the oatmeal porridge without a single drop of fat? Can you say that you eat it? No. You commune with it, you take it like a sacrament! Like the prana of the yogis. You eat it slowly; you eat it from the tip of the wooden spoon, you eat it absorbed entirely in the process of eating, in thinking about eating—and it spreads through your body like nectar. You tremble at the sweetness released from those overcooked little grains and the murky liquid they float in. And then—with hardly any nourishment—you go on living six months, twelve months. Can you really compare the crude devouring of a steak with this? . . .

"So in our own poor hides and from our miserable comrades we learn the nature of satiety. Satiety depends not at all on *how much* we eat, but on *how* we eat. It's the same way with happiness, the very same. Lev, friend, happiness doesn't depend on how many external blessings we have snatched from life. It depends only on our attitude toward them. There's a saying about it in the Taoist ethic: 'Whoever is capable of contentment will always be satisfied'."

Rubin grinned ironically. "You're an eclectic. You pluck bright feathers from everywhere."

Nerzhin shook his head. His hair hung down over his forehead. The discussion interested him, and at that moment he looked like an eighteen-year-old.

"Don't try to mix things up, Lev. That's not how it is at all. I draw my conclusions not from the philosophy I've read but from stories about real people that I've heard in prison. And afterward, when I have to formulate my own conclusions, why should I discover America all over again? On the planet of philosophy all lands have long been discovered. I leaf through the ancient philosophers and find my newest discoveries there. Don't interrupt! I was about to give an example. If in camp—and even more so in sharashka [slang for the present work-project in the prison]—there should be a miracle like a free nonworking Sunday, then in the course of that day the soul unfreezes. . . . I tremble with the utter joy of existence! I fall asleep in perfect bliss. No president, no prime minister can fall asleep so satisfied with his Sunday. . . .

"Listen! The happiness of incessant victory, the happiness of fulfilled desire, the happiness of success and total satiety—*that* is suffering! That is spiritual death, a sort of unending moral pain. It isn't the philosophers of the Vedanta or the Sankhya, but I personally, Gleb Nerzhin, a prisoner in harness for the fifth year, who has risen to that stage of development where the bad begins to appear good. And I personally hold the view that people don't know what they are striving for. They waste themselves in senseless thrashing around for the sake of a handful of goods and die without realizing their spiritual wealth. When Lev Tolstoy dreamed of being imprisoned, he was reasoning like a truly perceptive person with a healthy spiritual life."

One could call this only sophisticated rationalizing of a bitter limit, with self-mocking irony as sauce, yet it is reason with enough truth in it to persuade system-builders to invent social orders like the Spartan State. And as for prison—the institution of the *penitentiary* was actually devised by good-hearted souls who sought similar consequences in reflective value-judgment for all the inmates. Neither theory worked to any lasting advantage—a *conditioning* formula for human excellence has, on the whole, exactly opposite results.

Yet, often enough, the men in this story calmly accept or invite another ten years in prison because they won't curry favor, tell a little lie, or overlook a private commitment. What theory could accommodate such behavior? Solzhenitsyn knew about these men—he was one of them for eleven years. Few of them really expected to get out, yet hope of freedom could hardly be thrown away, so that it remained a vaguely torturing, utopian emotion which they were able to laugh at in themselves, some of the time.

The camps and prisons for political prisoners were supposed to "rehabilitate" men whose offense had often been their inability to hide some humanistic conviction. The suspicion of administrators that they would never "change" was justified. This was a thing impossible for them to do. But what an odd and accidental combination of determinisms enables us to find this out! The heroes of these tales are not mythical but actual—just as Viktor Frankl is actual—and their privations seem to have been at least a framing or limiting factor, since their options for "ordinary conduct" had been almost entirely removed. Perhaps the only explanation we can have, just now, is that of another Russian writer, Dostoevski, who wrote in *Notes from Underground:*

> You Gentlemen have taken your whole register of human advantages from the averages of statistical figures and politico-economic formulas. . . . Shower upon man every earthly blessing, drown him in a sea of happiness, so that nothing but bubbles of bliss can be seen on the surface, give him *economic prosperity* such that he should have nothing else to do but sleep, eat cakes, and busy himself with the continuation of his species; and even then, out of sheer ingratitude, sheer spite, man would play you some nasty trick. He

> would even risk his cakes and would desire the most fatal rubbish, the most *uneconomical* absurdity, simply to introduce into all this positive good sense his final fantastic element . . . simply to prove to himself—as though that were necessary—that men are still men and not the keys of a piano. . . . The whole work of man really seems to consist in nothing but proving to himself every minute that he is a man and not a piano key.

A touch of genius inspired Solzhenitsyn's portrait of the aging Stalin, who sits, solitary in his study, musing on the ingratitude of all those whom he has had to punish or erase in order to preserve his great social creation, to say nothing of betrayers still undetected by the secret police. *No one could be trusted,* he found; so now the camps and prisons were filled to bursting, and execution had become a monotonous routine. Yet in the crowded prisons this other extreme was emerging—the self-discovery of men who could not be bullied because they had nothing more to lose, and who chose living death as preferable to "freedom" because of a mysterious personal integrity. The one extreme precipitated—we cannot say "produced"—the other.

These are hardly matters one likes to think about when wondering and hoping about what can be done for the next generation. There must be a better way to shape options for the heroic life! Has history any instruction in this? Not much, it seems; or not much to which we have given attention.

The things we can be really sure of seem sorely limited. We agree on the splendid qualities of heroes, but also on the likelihood that they will not have enough friends and supporters. There is also the "folk" sort of recognition of the common decencies in all men, yet these seem to flower only in the powerless of the world, so that a melancholy sadness is the most familiar folk emotion. Again, we see and cherish the longings written in the faces of the young wherever they are, yet these are longings which, when capitalized and implemented by eager theorists, lead most frequently either to brutal contradiction or finally disheartening statistical insufficiency.

Could a man decide to live *as if* he were in prison, in order to discover the regulating principles of happiness Nerzhin elaborated there? Is it possible to do as Kant said—to conduct one's life *as if* the conditions of universal and perpetual peace already prevailed? Might a person somehow convince himself that he *already is* what he longs to become, as followers of Buddha have declared to be the case? Would this, conceivably, prove to be, according to Ruth Benedict's idea, a synergistic way of life?

REVIEW
THREE OUT OF ELEVEN

IT may be natural to turn from inspiriting reports of Moratoria and Peace Marches—and from, as a whole, the rising tumult of popular rejection of war—with expectations of let-down to a scholarly study from the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace. It may be natural, but in the case of Sondra R. Herman's *Eleven Against War* (Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1969, paper-bound, $2.95), it would be a great mistake. Mrs. Herman's book doesn't of course "settle" the great questions of how to end war and make peace. Its excellence lies in the author's search for what *can* be known about the efforts of certain past peace-makers who figured "in American Internationalist Thought, 1898-1921." Considered are "President Woodrow Wilson, Elihu Root, and Nicholas Murray Butler; Hamilton Holt, Theodore Marburg, A. Lawrence Lowell, John Bates Clark, and Franklin Henry Giddings, leaders of the League to Enforce Peace; and three representatives of a different kind of internationalism—community internationalism—Josiah Royce, Jane Addams, and Thorstein Veblen." Mrs. Herman's sympathies are quietly on the side of these three.

The analysis divides the eleven subjects into two camps: eight who think that peace will be an achievement of international law—a world polity gradually established through rational persuasion supported by judiciously applied coercions—and three who share at root a communitarian view of world society. These polarities of outlook are often indistinct, yet they are fundamental, decisive, and the guides to action for each of those involved. A great deal of history, of effort, of failure, of longing and frustration is compacted in these generalizing paragraphs:

> Men who led the movements for a world court or a league of nations envisioned an international polity united by formal contracts and by a common allegiance to the rule of law. This was not very different from their ideal of the American polity as an organization of competing individuals and business corporations with differing degrees of merit and power. In international society the more or less powerful components of the system were the separate sovereign states. Wilson and Butler, Root and the leaders of the League to Enforce Peace, espoused this viewpoint. They tended to believe that the competition of individuals or of businesses or of nations, and the emergence of the strongest in that competition, while sometimes dangerous, served the interests of the whole society. They placed a high value on stabilizing this competition and on pacifying it. Often they considered wars the work of greedy national leaders or of jingoistic populations.
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> The community internationalists, Royce, Addams, and Veblen, considered international life potentially organic, and focussed their attention upon social and economic changes which they believed would increase the sense of human unity. They combined a dynamic interpretation of human nature with a rejection of conservative Darwinism and competitive individualism. The community internationalists often regarded wars as the products of profoundly faulty social organization and of the limited mentality that accompanied it. Their criticisms of traditional patriotism were both broader and harsher than those of the political internationalists. Indeed, questions of loyalty, of relationships across national boundaries, and of rootlessness were extremely important to community internationalists.
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> The social position of the two groups was also somewhat different. The men of polity led large organizations, including peace societies and universities. The communalists identified themselves with small cosmopolitan groups of scholars and reformers, or with the disinherited. The world of the polity was much more the world of decision making, as we term it today, than was that of the community.
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> During the war years these views clashed, and the viewpoint of the polity won public attention, only to be undermined by its own compromises with nationalism and by the revolutionary age. Neither the community internationalists nor the political internationalists attracted to their respective causes any lasting loyalty from the American people.

Well, what is the relevance of this analysis, today? One could perhaps run off a series of parallels between positions among present peacemakers and those of Mrs. Herman's subjects. For example, the hope of the legalists to bring

international peace by extending the "American Way" around the world is now reduced to justifications of a foreign policy entirely dominated by military minds. Respectable legalist hopes, if they are preserved at all, are formulated at an extremely utopian level of abstraction. On the other hand, the communitarian argument tends increasingly to be the philosophy of drop-outs from all conventional approaches, since the rigidities of an advanced technological society seem to allow no other way of attempting what persons of this persuasion believe must be done. So the polarities remain, but have grown more distinct, perhaps by maturing under stress.

So the question becomes more insistently—what it also was in the first twenty years of this century: Since we are imperfect men and can't do everything, what, in our peacemaking efforts, can we best afford to neglect, and what, again, must we do even if we are unable to do anything else?

The issues dividing the legalists from the community-minded people of fifty years ago were issues concerning the nature of man and the nature of human society—the same issues on which fundamental decisions turn, today. Those Mrs. Herman calls "men of the polity" were basically managers rather than educators. Such men become "conservative" in outlook through their preoccupation with statistical expressions of human nature. They find their constants for human behavior at the mass level, and, being managers, regard these constants as the primary reality. Having little or no experience of the subtle workings of inner reform, and uncomprehending of the potentiality of heart-changing ideas, they may concede a certain minor importance to "communitarian" thinking, but they cannot take it seriously. They tend to lump all such efforts under the heading of "education," which, when practical pressures arise, becomes an epithet for the faith of "idealists" who ignore hard facts.

So, on the battlefield of life, as distinguished from the armchair of theory, the argument turns into a contest between the preservation of Righteousness and attention to Growth, as though the two were in hopeless opposition. And from the resulting polemics emerges another polarity of opinion—on the one hand, a conception of human nature as completely static, that has reality only through submission to ordering and controlling law; and on the other, a wonderful, and sometimes wild, anarchist optimism which gains little-opportunity for being tested in practice. So the legalists say in effect that education is not possible—not for practical purposes, anyhow; and the anarchists—some of them, at any rate—seem to claim that it is not needed, that a sudden and unqualified freedom will take care of everything

As it works out, the individual truly interested in human growth, who puts its needs before all else, and who refuses to be impatient for the reason that growth does not and probably cannot respond to impatience, draws a very small audience. It is only in times of extreme failure of everything else that he gets a hearing, and when the extraordinary value of his integrities—such as are illustrated, for example, in Jane Addams in this book—begin to get the recognition they deserve.

Have we, today, any advantage over the persons with which this book is concerned? Are there any new tools that might be applied to the problems of human growth? We have a few, although the peace movement makes little use of them—the insights into the growth processes of individuals as found, for example, in the writings of A. H. Maslow. And we also have at least a beginning of the application of these ideas to the problems of community.

Such ideas may afford fresh means of attempting what Plato attempted more than two thousand years ago—to render the social community "ethical through and through." Socrates labored with individuals in behalf of a society that would one day come into being through the *first-hand* vision of its members. It is no accident that men devoted to understanding mental life and growth almost invariably reach this

position as the only one worth holding. "I am done," wrote William James, "with great things and big things, great institutions and big success, and I am for those tiny, invisible, molecular moral forces that work from individual to individual, creeping through the crannies of the world like so many soft rootless, or like the capillary oozing of water, yet which, if you give them time, will rend the hardest monuments of men's pride." Of Jane Addams, Mrs. Herman writes:

> It became clear that she and other communalists lived in a world of personal contacts, cherishing ideas and what sociologist Charles Cooley called "primary groups" with continuous, undifferentiated, face-to-face relations. The political world, where great decisions influencing large numbers of people the decision-maker never saw, was not their milieu.

What then of law and social organization? Have they no virtue? They are a vastly important shaping influence on the habits and tendencies of men, but only so long as men grow something *good to shape.* Too much law, too much organization, too much control make human growth almost impossible. Law does not create, it only orders the qualities that already exist.

COMMENTARY
WHAT HAPPENED IN FIFTY YEARS?

THE melancholy insight of two discussions in the November *Atlantic*—one a vindication of the integrity of John Carter Vincent, the State Department's man in charge of Far Eastern Affairs in 1948, when China was "lost" to Communism; the other, Isaac Asimov's review of Philip Stern's *The Oppenheimer Case,* in which the author finds American liberties suffering more harm than even the eminent physicist who was mercilessly clawed down by what Asimov calls "pygmy patriotism"—makes clear how deep and far-reaching must be the change in the conduct of this nation's affairs before anything deserving the name of "vision" can be said to exist.

The contributors to the *Atlantic,* on the whole intelligent, widely informed, and perceptive, nearly all write, today, of the folly and wrong of the part played by the United States in Vietnam as though the objectivity of a long-past event had put their judgments beyond question. But this event is *not* long-past and a peculiarly penetrating atmosphere of horror and shame rises from all such analyses—so precise, so sure, so calmly correct, yet wholly without the self-forgiveness allowed by the passage of time.

This is not, of course, an effect restricted to the pages of the *Atlantic*. A review by William R. Corson in the *Saturday Review* for Nov. 1 says in its first paragraph:

> The blunders and perfidy surrounding America's entry into the Vietnam War are devastatingly bared by Joseph Goulden in *Truth Is the First Casualty.* By meticulous attention to detail the author has reconstructed the actual events surrounding the Gulf of Tonkin affair, related these events to the general situation of which they were but a part, and shown how they bear on our future ability or inability to avoid national catastrophes like Vietnam.

Mr. Nixon's predecessor in office is the leading culprit in these revelations, with "America's hydra-headed worldwide electronic and scientific espionage *apparat,"* creating "the very conditions that make war by accident more likely than not," a close second.

Again, the sense of horror grows from the very currency of all this high-level, accurate reporting. Only a little less current is the material examined on the next page—a new edition of I. F. Stone's 1952 volume, *The Hidden History of the Korean War.* The reviewer, Bernhardt T. Hurwood, concludes:

> *Hidden History* is disquieting on many levels, not the least of which is its Dorian Gray portrait of United States leadership at the time it was written. But what makes the book especially significant is its present timeliness. Certainly the work offers a clear retrospective view of how we went wrong in the murky atmosphere of McCarthyism, when fanatics like John Foster Dulles were actually permitted to formulate policy (by supposedly cooler heads). In addition the book alerts us to how easily we can be duped by lies, omissions, half-truths, and syllogisms. "Tokyo Headquarters," Stone writes, "had a gift for making the war sound as if it were being run by men temporarily on leave from the more juicy advertising agencies."

It seems important, here, to follow the example of Philip Stern, author of *The Oppenheimer Case,* who, Mr. Asimov says, "does not bother to pillory individuals as villains." Those intent upon exposing villainy have an endless task. Moreover, it is *too easy* to find scapegoats. And the hunting out of men who were wrong or bad is a policy too easily popularized, anyway. It leads to a universal and systematic distrust which no democracy can survive.

What shall we say about ourselves, in view of the fact that not one of the "men of the polity" described by Sondra Herman (see Review), whatever their illusions or faults, could even have imagined policies which are now put into practice almost as a matter of course? Or should we ask what omissions in their thinking, what flaws in their conceptions of the "national interest," could in a scant fifty years alter the smiling benevolence of American power as they conceived it to the countenance the rest of the world sees today?

Is it any wonder that "fissions" of various sorts are afflicting tomorrow's body politic? Meanwhile, the notably intelligent writers and readers of the *Atlantic* and the *Saturday Review* exert but little influence through the illuminations of reason. There seems a sense in which coherent intelligence is not now heard in the centers of power except as nuisance and pressure. Expressions of the mind are not measured by their quality, but by their *volume,* as though intelligence itself had no application or did not exist. If power has no longer an ear except for noise, to what seats of decision, then, should intelligence address itself?

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
MEDICAL STUDENTS SPEAK

IN an article published in MANAS more than four years ago, "Science and Self-Actualization," A. H. Maslow spoke critically of medical education that becomes "a tool in the service of a distorted, narrowed and de-emotionalized Weltanschauung." The desacralization of the human body, he said, "can be used as a defense against being flooded by emotion, especially the emotions of humility, wonder and awe." Dr. Maslow wrote of his own experiences in medical school thirty years before. It is of interest that last February, in a measured confrontation with their teachers at an AMA conference on medical education, spokesmen for today's medical students made the same charge. In the statements by four student panelists (three of them members of the Commission on Medical Education of the Student AMA) reported in the *Journal* of the AMA (*IAMA*) for Sept. 1, this dehumanizing effect of medical school was a major charge. One of them, Arthur W. Douville, said:

> Let me elucidate this assertion by calling to mind, as a point of meditation, your first experience with a cadaver. "What a piece of work is man," says Shakespeare's Hamlet,
>
> > how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god; the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals!
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> Pah! A rotten bit of carrion stewing languorously in its pot of phenol and formaldehyde solution. Perhaps I need not point out that should we have done what we did to our cadaver outside the walls of medical school we should have been arrested and tried as the vilest sort of criminal who would take such fascination in so brutal a mutilation of the human body. Most of us handle the shock with jokes and a casual familiarity with this dessicated horror, which commonly is invested with a kind of personality by its dissectors, who soon are taking care not to slobber crumbs from their lunch-time sandwiches into the day's dissection.
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> This first shock is followed quickly by others—the confrontation with death itself, then the heart-breaking variations of its theme: the degradation and dependency of illness, the deaths of children, the helplessness of the physician and his student colleagues in the face of metastatic disease in a young person. All of these realities are productive of psychic shocks with which all of us must deal. And in the process of this acclimatization to these hard realities, the student begins to realize that he is no longer sensitive to sights and sounds which earlier would have shocked him. He begins to ask himself "Am I really human? Am I still feeling and thinking the things I should be feeling and thinking as a human being?"

After telling how students attempt to deal with personal crises brought by this succession of experiences, the panelist defined medical student activism as embodying "resistance to models of behavior which include coldness and indifference to patients, inadequate or outdated scientific skills, and irresponsible principles of self-interest in dealing with the legitimate demands of the community for a reasonable level of care."

It is obvious that the shock and woe incident to disease and death are not the doing of medical educators; the students know this, but are deeply troubled by the lack of respect, the absence of awe in relation to these existential realities, encountering, instead, an apparently deliberate effort to coarsen their sensibilities. What sort of criticism, one wonders, is this, and how could it be met, short of a cultural and even a philosophical revolution?

Another panelist, Casey Truett, spoke of the extreme isolation of the medical student throughout his long period of intensive schooling and internship—seven years at a minimum. As a human being, he leads a distorted life, yet a human being is what he must remain, in order to be a healer. The environmental odds are against him: "Humanism—compassion—consideration for others—these are often passed over in the rush of learning medicine, of teaching medicine, and of treating disease, instead of *caring*—caring for patients with disease."

An editorial introduction to the statements of these students observes that "few medical students are apathetic or unconcerned" and that the goals of the vast majority "are generally the same as those of the 'radical minority'," adding that members of the medical faculties are also oppressed by the "dehumanizing nature of the present curriculum that students are concerned about and reacting to." There is a sense in which these young men have clarity on what they want, with the admirable result that there is no demagoguery in their statements. In the same issue of *JAMA* a medical educator, Edmund D. Pellegrino, of the Health Sciences Center, State University of New York, responds to what they say, and if his discussion of "Human Values and the Medical Curriculum" is at all representative of present-day teachers of medicine, the intelligence of the students is not without contributing cause. After repeating their charges, Dr. Pellegrino says:

> How shall we respond? The temptation is to polarize our reactions into denial and righteous indignation on the one hand or penitential acquiescence on the other. Both positions are morally feeble. The former will terminate the dialogue but submerge the questions only to have them reappear later in more violent form or action. The latter is irresponsible for it does not confront the issue; it does not gain the student's respect and it admits too much.

We shall not repeat Dr. Pellegrino's endorsements of the students' views, but note his differentiations of emphasis:

> I am worried about the paucity of discussion of competence and proficiency in current student demands. This very important professional value is also an important human value without which the physician's whole being is compromised. We must guard as carefully against the romanticism of service without knowledge as against proficiency without compassion.
>
> Compassion, too, is not enough as we are learning in our ghetto experiences today. We must *understand* our patient's responses, as well as feel for them, or else we will not know how to make our well-intentioned efforts effective for a culturally different group of humans.

Turning to the general human concern which lies behind all protest movements today, he says:

> Racism, poverty, environmental contamination, housing welfare, the rights of workers, the wholeness of family life—all of this can obviously affect health and induce disease. . . . The physician sensitive to human beings as persons must, of course, concern himself with these matters. But to the extent that they become an overwhelming concern, as student or practitioner, he becomes more a sociologist, economist, or political scientist—and an untrained one at that! Our curricula must discriminate between those things which enhance our primary functions and those which constitute the primary function itself. Much of the rhetoric generated about medical education and human values is an expression of deficits elsewhere in society or in individuals.

Dr. Pellegrino adds:

> The deep concern expressed by our students for a closer attention to human values in medical education is commendable, but it will suffer the attenuation characteristic of all intuitive movements if it is not given rational underpinnings. The activist student specializes in intuitive assertions about values and emphasizes the sampling of human experiences to teach them. Experience is assuredly an excellent teacher of what human beings feel. We need, in addition, a critical and cogitative analysis of those experiences.

In general, this report of dialogue between medical students and educators makes refreshing and encouraging reading, especially in the pages of the AMA *Journal*, where the ads alone are usually enough to chill a mere layman's blood.

FRONTIERS

Farewell Address

PEACE NEWS for Oct. 24 transcribes from a tape the last speech of David Harris before going to prison to serve a sentence of three years for draft refusal. One of the founders of Resistance, Harris spent much of the past two years touring American college campuses with his wife, Joan Baez, the folk singer, speaking against war. The speech in *Peace News* has an originality and uncluttered appeal that deserves reading in full, but the *Peace News* editors require encouragement before they will issue reprints (the address is 5 Caledonian Road, Kings Cross, London N1). A paragraph from the beginning suggests the theme to be developed at length:

> The fact is that I'll spend three years of time in jail. The fact is that's very small. The fact is that you and I live in the midst of a society that does very much more than send people to jail. We live in a society that's become synonymous, not simply with sending people to jail, and not simply with starving people all round the world, not simply with the most devastating tools of destruction that mankind has ever known, not simply with the pillaging and rape of an entire landscape. We live in a society that beyond all those things has become synonymous with death itself.

The remarkable thing about the speech is that, feeling this way, and making this beginning, David Harris is able to go on, trying to reach into the hearts of his hearers with a spirit of affirmation. It is a difficult thing, these days, to refuse to equivocate about the hideous things men are doing in the name of God and country, and at the same time to preserve human wholeness in expression and intent. Since so little is known about what, actually, to do, beyond resisting evil, in a long speech like this the vision tends to wear thin—as would happen with almost anyone striving for moral consistency—but its integrity is maintained. Harris seems quite clear on the fact that moral consistency must be preserved while the vision is getting filled in by the labors of a great many people, all working together. That seems the main point of his speech on the night before he went to jail.

The first report in MANAS about David Harris was in the issue of June 22, 1966, which told how in April this "honors student in social thought," then twenty years old, had been elected president of the student body of Stanford University in a vote termed "the largest turnout in Stanford history." He was identified as an admirer of Staughton Lynd, Robert Moses (formerly of SNCC), and Norman Thomas, and as a campus militant who advocated student strikes, abolition of required courses, grades, and of fraternities. All this at Stanford! At that time Harris announced his intention to apply for conscientious-objector status and told reporters: "I do believe American society is sick. Individuals in the society have stopped looking at themselves and the rest of humanity and considering themselves in relation to that."

There will no doubt be those who, having read Harris's speech, will find reason to say that he "exaggerates." By some measures, they may be right. He practices a rhetoric disdainful of nibbling qualifications. But how much time, one wonders, should a passenger on a driverless Car of Juggernaut, having seen where it is going, give to counting the useful and perhaps constructive activities of its other occupants who seem content to jolt along in the back seats?

There is a sense in which authentic reformers *must* deal in absolutes. The reference points of all idealists are absolutes. Just as the reference-points of all "realists" eventually *become* compulsive absolutes, when all the ugly facts they are attentive to exert sufficient pressure. The realistic people in charge of the foreign policies of the great powers of our time come closer to relying on the absolute of mindless, military force with every failure of the "moderate" doses they used to say would certainly be enough.

So, one can hardly communicate at all on the subject of good and evil without some use of the rhetoric of exaggeration. The problem is to use it

responsibly—in ways that enable people to know and feel what you mean. All art in human expression involves this responsibility, and all other expression remains at a level of technical tables, a calculus of the finite, measurable, and more or less "dead" facts. The incommensurable values of human life are completely beyond the reach of this sort of accuracy or precision, and faithfulness to these values means faithfulness to vision and commitment. Balance is obtained by quite other means.

When a man speaks to the incommensurable in other human beings, he uses the language of high and heroic longing. He declares for this reality in us all, which must somehow find means of expression against regiments of opposing institutions and the apathy of the times. Nothing is really abolished by the rhetoric of his vision; all the pedestrian tasks remain to be performed, while stubborn custom and the careless indifference of the well-fed lose little of their apparent immutability because one more young man has gone to jail for three years. But if the light of a vision can be amplified by its birth in enough other men, it then begins to become a *cultural* illumination, and the hard, resisting surfaces of all these obstacles begin to change.

In the meantime, we may be thankful that there are those who understand the humanizing uses of exaggeration. The best text for instruction on this subject is from Thoreau. Defending Carlyle's devotion to the hero, he said:

> Exaggeration! was ever any virtue attributed to a man without exaggeration? was ever any vice, without infinite exaggeration? Do we not exaggerate ourselves, or do we recognize ourselves for the actual men that we are? Are we not all great men? Yet what are we actually to speak of? We live by exaggeration. What else is it to anticipate more than we enjoy? The lightning is an exaggeration of the light. Exaggerated history is poetry, and truth referred to a new standard. To a small man every greater is an exaggeration. He who cannot exaggerate is not qualified to utter truth. No truth, we think, was ever expressed but with this sort of emphasis, so that for the time there seemed to be no other. Moreover, you must speak loud to those who are hard of hearing.