

THE  
COMMENTARY  
CLASSICS

Commentary

BOOK Nº 1

THE BEST  
OF THE

1940s

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**Commentary**

# The Best of the 1940s

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# Will Civilization Survive Technics?

First in the series 'The Crisis of the Individual.'

**Reinhold Niebuhr**

**T**HE DIAGNOSTICIANS of a historical crisis usually see one or the other dimension of the crisis. They see either the political-social maladjustments in the body of civilization, or the philosophical-religious weaknesses in the spirit of a culture; and attribute our difficulties solely to the one or to the other. This is analogous to a neurologist and a psychiatrist cooperating in the diagnosis of a patient and creating confusion because the one attributes his illness to purely physical, and the other to purely psychic causes.

There have, for instance, been many diagnoses of the collapse of France in which the defeat of France has been attributed to a variety of causes, spiritual and physical, running all the way from the effect of 18th-century philosophy upon French morale, through the disintegration of the French family, and ending with technical aspects of French military inadequacy. All of these diagnoses may have been true on their own level. But no one has sought to present a theory of breakdown which would bring all the diagnoses into a consistent whole.

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REINHOLD NIEBUHR *was an influential figure in American intellectual life who combined a disciplined theology with with a radical political philosophy. He was professor of applied Christianity at Union Theological Seminary for more than 30 years. This essay is first in the series "The Crisis of the Individual."*

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*Reinhold Neibuhr*

The present crisis in our culture and our civilization is certainly wide and deep enough to involve, and probably to have been caused by maladjustments on all levels of our existence.

On the political and economic level the situation is fairly clear. Our crisis is due to the fact that we have not been able to develop political and social instruments which are adequate for the kind of a society which a technical civilization makes possible and necessary. The atomic bomb is in a sense only the most recent and the most dramatic symbol of this deep inner contradiction which cleaves our whole society. The ever increasing introduction of technics into the fields of production and communications constantly enlarges the intensity and extent of social cohesion in modern man's common life; and also tends constantly to centralize effective economic power. The effect of technics upon communications is to create a potential world community, which we have not been able to actualize morally and politically. The effect of technics upon production is to create greater and greater disproportions of economic power and thus to make the achievement of justice difficult. The one represents the international aspect of our crisis and the other the domestic aspect. We might well consider each in turn.

**O**N THE level of international life Nazism was a form of tyranny which grew in the soil of international anarchy and sought to overcome that anarchy by the coerced unification of the world. Had not the several nations felt themselves irresponsible toward the duty of maintaining the liberties of each against the threat of aggression, Nazism could not have come within an ace of achieving success. Nations have not, of course, ever accepted a very high degree of responsibility for each other's welfare. But modern technics had created a world-community in embryo. It was by the use of modern technics that one nation could gain the military power to make world-domination a plausible military goal. It therefore became necessary to develop political instruments through which the nations of the world would express and implement a worldwide sense of common responsibility. Since it was not possible to take such a step quickly the tyrannical threat almost succeeded.

Indeed it is still far from certain even now that we will have adequate instruments, or a sufficiently universal moral sense, to solve the problems of community on a worldwide scale. The political instruments that have been constructed at the San Francisco Conference are obviously of only minimal efficacy for the purposes for which they are intended. They could not be made much better because of a lack in the moral imagination of the nations. Each of the great powers is still more interested in strategic security for the event of another conflict than it is in security against conflict.

The systems of unilateral security which have been more or less artfully combined with a general system of mutual security may very easily vitiate the power of the mutual system. We have, for this reason, no right to hope that we are at the end of the crisis of our age on the level of the international problem.

It is possible indeed that we may live in this crisis for centuries. The task of building

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a genuine world-community is greater than any generation can solve; and it may be too great for the resources of a century. The enormity of the task is usually underestimated. Our cultural presuppositions are such that we have not understood the tragic character of history or the difficulty of historic achievements.

The present-day world community is held together by economic interdependence created by modern technics; and is threatened by the technical elaboration of instruments of warfare. The forces which make for political and moral cohesion are minimal. They consist of a general though rather vague sense of universal moral obligation; and of the fear of the consequences of overt world-anarchy.

This fear of war is however not as potent a cement of cohesion as the fear of a concrete foe, which has frequently welded smaller communities together. Furthermore the international community lacks all the intermediate forms of cohesion that hold national and imperial communities together. It lacks a single center of power and authority, a common language or a common cultural, moral, or religious tradition. No geographical frontiers help it to arrive at a common consciousness and it has no sense of a common history, as nations have, except the minimal common experience of a war partnership through which a terrible foe was defeated. But the very defeat of the foe removes one factor of cohesion.

For this reason our civilization will probably require ages before it will master the problem of our common life on the world level. The inevitability of a considerable degree of frustration in achieving what we must achieve is one aspect of our existence for which our culture has not prepared us.

**I**F TECHNICS in modern communications I have created a potential world-community, which finds difficulty in becoming actual, technics in production have shattered old forms of justice and made the achievement of new ones difficult. The modern machine becomes larger and larger as it becomes more and more efficient. It long since has divorced the skill of the worker from his tool. It has to a certain degree divorced the worker from his skill, which is now increasingly in the machine. It has thus made the worker powerless, except insofar as common organized action has given him a degree of social and political power. It has on the other hand constantly increased the power of fewer and fewer centers of economic authority. It may be regarded as an axiom of political justice that disproportions of powers increase the hazard to justice; for to be armed with power means that the temptation to do what one wants increases. And what one wants immediately is usually not the common welfare.

The cultural inadequacies of our age have contributed to the difficulties we face in achieving economic justice. For our age began with the presupposition, derived from a naturalistic philosophy, that economic justice would be achieved by a natural equilibrium of social and economic forces. The 18th-century physiocrats, and Adam Smith after

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them, made the mistake of assuming that history, like nature, has limited potencies. Actually the very character of human history is to give the forces of nature unlimited scope. The “pre-established harmony of nature,” which 18th-century Enlightenment thought would guarantee justice, has actually never existed in history, though there were some evidences of it in an agrarian and in an early commercial age. But an industrial age disturbed all these harmonies and created monopolistic power in a realm where a harmony of powers was to reign. One of the most ironic facts of history is that Adam Smith elaborated his theory, upon which modern capitalism is based, at the precise moment when the steam engine was invented.

We in America suffer particularly from the legacy of the 18th-century naturalistic determinism. We have developed technics more fully than any nation. Yet every effort to achieve social justice within terms set by modern productive arrangements is dogged by nostalgic social and economic theories which have no relevance to our actual problems. The Marxist answer to this problem may be wrong; it is certainly not wholly correct. Yet it recognizes some aspects of the problem which liberalism does not.

Modern society has already proved that long before it will allow the process of centralization of economic power to work itself out to the catastrophic conclusion which Marxism predicted and expected, it will take political measures to arrest the tendency toward irresponsible and disproportionate economic power. Democracy is not quite as potent an instrument as the 18th century believed; but it is more potent than the Marxists imagined. The poor are armed with political power in a democracy. They use that political power to redress the balances in the economic sphere. Whether the power is sufficient to achieve a true balance is another question. It may not be. It may be that oligarchies of the economically powerful may possess sufficient strength to destroy the political instruments in the hands of their foes before those political instruments finally destroy their privileged position in society. This is the meaning of fascism in the field of domestic relations. It may be that the consequences of fascism, where it was tried, have been sufficiently horrible to prevent a drift toward that answer. But we cannot be sure.

At any rate the achievement of a decent minimum of economic security for the masses in our civilization is still an unsolved problem. It may not be as stubborn a problem as the international one, though there are some who regard it as more stubborn. There are nations like Britain and Sweden who have moved far enough toward its solution to encourage the hope that they will continue to approach the goal of economic justice without running the risk of social catastrophe. It is not certain that we are as safe against social catastrophe in this country. Our working people are less politically mature than some of the workers of other nations. And the possessors of economic power in America are on the whole remarkably stupid. Even now they would have us believe that the intricate task of shifting from a war to a peace economy can be accomplished merely by relaxing governmental restraints upon the economic and industrial process and allow-

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ing everything to find its own level. Catastrophe lies in that direction. We shall probably be too wise to follow the road to that catastrophe consistently; but we are hardly wise enough to avoid tentative efforts to restore an unmanaged unity and harmony of economic process.

Even if we avoid the most obvious mistakes we cannot find a simple solution to the problem of economic justice which confronts us. Russia has revealed that it is possible to pay too high a price in freedom for the economic security of the masses. The consistent socialization of all economic power is no more adequate a solution for our problem than a consistent disavowal of political authority upon economic process. The latter leads to anarchy as the former leads to tyranny. The wisest nations experiment in order to find a middle way which will insure a maximum of freedom and security. That middle way certainly involves the socialization of some forms of property that cannot otherwise be brought under social control. It means placing certain governmental checks upon other forms of economic activity and yet allowing freedom in the economic process wherever possible, which means wherever that freedom will not tend to destroy freedom.

**T**HE cultural weaknesses which have contributed to our crisis, and which make it difficult for us to fully understand the depth and breadth of it, are in some cases immediately related to the political and economic crisis and in other cases they have a more indirect relationship.

The most obvious cultural presupposition that is in immediate relation to the crisis is the excessive individualism of the culture of the 17th and 18th centuries. This individualism resulted from the breaking of the medieval organic forms of social life and from the natural illusions of the rising bourgeois class. Having new and dynamic forms of social power, they regarded the individual as much more self-sufficient than he really is. The bourgeois class emphasized the ideal of liberty to the point of imperiling the community and obscuring social responsibility. They elaborated social theories according to which human societies are created when atomic individuals come together by a “social contract”—that is, through a pure fiat of the human will. Actually, no decision in human society is ever taken that does not presuppose some form of community previous to the decision; for society is as primordial as the individual.

The excessive individualism of the bourgeois classes led to a collectivist reaction on the part of the working classes. This collectivism of Marxism is probably closer to the truth than bourgeois individualism; but it is also in error when it assumes that a frictionless harmony between the individual and the community can be established. In reality the individual has a form of constitutional spiritual freedom which makes it inevitable that even the best community will frustrate as well as fulfill the highest aspirations of the human spirit. Love is the law of life for the individual, in the sense that no human being can fulfill himself within himself. He is fulfilled only in the community. But the

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same individual rises in indeterminate degree beyond all communal and social relevancies. It is this transcendent freedom of the individual which is guarded and expressed in the historic religions of the West, Jewish and Christian. Modern culture disavowed these traditional religions. In consequence it emphasized freedom in society to the point of destroying society; and in reaction emphasized social solidarity to the point of imperiling the dignity of the individual.

The class warfare between the bourgeois and the working classes which contributed so much to the undoing of European nations was not merely a political and economic conflict. It was also a cultural and religious conflict, in the sense that two forms of secularized religion were embattled. The one religion made the individual self-sufficient to the point of making man the idolatrous end of his own existence. The other religion made society the idolatrous end of the existence of the individual. This is a conflict which cannot be resolved within the presuppositions of a culture that fails to measure the character of man's historic existence in its full depth. For a man is a historical creature, constantly fulfilling his life by realizing higher forms of communal life and yet always standing beyond even the widest social obligations and realizations in the highest reaches of his spiritual freedom.

**T**HE analysis of the excessive individualism and collectivism of a secular culture has thus already brought us to another aspect of our cultural crisis. The "naturalism" of our culture was celebrated as a great spiritual achievement in the heyday of our era. It was supposed to prevent men from being beguiled by false eternities. They would realize the highest historic possibilities the more certainly if they were no longer led astray by illusions of eternal salvation and redemption. Actually there have been many forms of religious "other-worldliness" which were merely compensations for frustrations, and expressions of social defeatism. It was good that men should be emancipated from them. There are also forms of religious "super-naturalism" which conceive the world as a kind of layer-cake affair, with two layers, the one natural and the other supernatural, the one physical and the other "spiritual." There is only one world; just as man in the unity of his physical and spiritual life is one. Religious dualism is an error. But so is a naturalistic monism that seeks to comprehend the full dimension of human existence from the standpoint of man's relation to nature.

Man is undoubtedly a creature of nature, subject to its necessities and limitations. But an excessive emphasis upon this aspect of man's existence obscures the full dimension of human personality. It is by man's freedom over natural process and limitation that he is able to make history. But the same freedom which lies at the basis of man's historic creativity is also the root of human evil. Thus man, whose nature it is to be realized beyond himself in the life of his fellows, is also able to corrupt the community and make it the tool of his interests. The possibilities of evil as well as of good are much greater than modern culture assumed.

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The naturalistic assumptions of modern culture prompted the belief that history was an extension of the evolutionary process of nature, that this evolutionary process guaranteed a higher and higher achievement of the good, however that good might be defined. It was frequently defined in contradictory terms.

But human freedom breaks the limits of nature, upsetting its limited harmonies and giving a demonic dimension to its conflicts. There is therefore progress in human history; but it is a progress of all human potencies, both for good and for evil. A culture which imagined that history was moving naturally to a wider and more inclusive community, toward the "parliament of mankind and the federation of the world," was naturally completely overtaken by the catastrophe of our era. It was not prepared for the tragic character of human history. It did not anticipate that a potential world-community would announce itself to history in global wars. After the First World War the natural attitude of modern culture was to regard the war as a capricious interruption of the stream of progress, occasioned by an evil nation. Even the second world catastrophe was sometimes interpreted in such terms.

The historical optimism of our culture was thus derived from a view of man and history that failed to measure the full dimension of the human spirit and of its historic achievements. Man is able by the technical elaboration of his powers to establish a wider and wider community. But the same skills also arm him with a mighty weapon of individual and collective egotism when he desires to set himself against the community.

**W**HILE it is quite possible that we will finally discover the right political instruments for ordering the communal life upon a world scale, certain aspects of this task are not fully comprehended in our culture. The difficulty, for one thing, is not fully understood. It is not understood that the same technics that integrate the world community also arm the individual nations and encourage them to follow their own respective courses and possibly to threaten the world-community with anarchy. Because the struggle between the universal and the particular, between egotism and the community, is a more stubborn struggle on every level, the whole of human history is more tragic than modern culture had assumed; and it will continue to be more tragic because the sources of conflict do not lie in the past. They reappear in every historical level.

Nor is it fully understood that there are no absolute securities and stabilities in human history; and there will be rather fewer in the future than in the past. Modern culture is inveterately utopian and is always looking for a security in the future that men did not have in the past. It believes, for instance, that the failure to master nature made man insecure in the past and that modern technics have overcome this insecurity. Actually the same technics by which we gain security in nature increase our insecurity in human history and in the ever larger communities in which we must live.

Smaller communities are always close to nature, held together by a natural force of con-

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sanguinity and supported by nature's abundance. Large communities are held together by the artifice of statesmen and supplied by intricate arrangements of commerce and communication. They depend upon the human will and imagination, which frequently fail.

There is thus a complete misinterpretation of the future. The future may be filled with glorious achievements, but not with greater securities than in the past. This means that a culture which failed to understand that human life cannot be completely fulfilled in human history will be inadequate for man in the future, as it becomes more fully recognized that human life is subject to historical frustration even on the highest level of historical achievement. This does not validate crude forms of "other-worldliness." But it will make relevant once more the real meaning of the transcendental reference in historical religions.

**F**INALLY it must become apparent that no matter how effective the social instruments for the protection of communal order are, they are never adequate without an inner moral and religious check. The older religions frequently made the mistake of placing all emphasis upon moral discipline and neglecting the various forms of social and political restraint by which justice is achieved. That is why democracy was frequently the fruit of a secular culture, though this is not altogether the case since the presuppositions of democracy are deeply imbedded in Hebraic prophetism and Christian faith. Today it is frequently assumed that the right kind of economic organization and the right kind of political order will guarantee the virtue of man and the welfare of society.

Marxism assumes that a wrong economic organization is the root of an human evil and that on the other side of a revolution men will be virtuous and human ambitions will be perfectly related to common welfare. Liberalism is not quite so naive but frequently looks upon democratic political forms as the guarantors of virtue. Actually, the freedom of man is such that no perfection of social instruments obviates the necessities of inner moral checks upon human ambitions. On the other hand, it must be observed, of course, that inner checks are also not sufficient if we do not achieve the best possible social instruments for checking self-will and egotism and for increasing the common and mutual concerns of men.

There is thus no reason to suggest that the regeneration of the world depends merely upon a religious and moral revival which will create the "good" men of old without whom no social system can function. Good men with social and political instruments inadequate to the new dimensions of a social problem are futile. But on the other hand, all purely social or political interpretations of the human problem are unavailing. Man is more social than bourgeois liberalism assumed. His final freedom reaches beyond all social responsibilities and communal fulfillments in a way that modern forms of collectivism do not understand. There are dimensions of his existence which are fully under-

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stood in the historic religions. They recognize that his moral freedom and responsibility have no limit or end except in God. But the historic religions were on the whole oblivious to the dynamic character of human history, particularly as it has unfolded since the introduction of technics. The Hebrew prophets did indeed have a conception of a dynamic history moving toward a great fulfillment. But neither the Jewish nor the Christian faith have ever done full justice to this aspect of prophetism.

It remained for modern culture to interpret the dynamic character of history; but it did so too optimistically and without a full awareness of the depth of evil and the height of creativity which might be unfolded in history. This blindness to the depth of good and evil was derived from the mistake of measuring the whole human enterprise in too shallow a dimension.

**T**HERE is, therefore, no possibility of fully understanding the tragic character of the history through which we are passing, or of living sanely in a period of great frustration as well as of great historical achievement, or of placing inner moral checks upon the dynamism of man, without the resources of an older religious culture. Our modern culture is too flat, too lacking in the tragic sense of life, and too blind to the total dimension of existence to be an adequate guide for our day.

Yet our problem is not solved by some simple "return to religion," as the traditional religionists would have it. An adequate culture must combine the modern sense of historical dynamism with historic religion's sense of the dimension of life that transcends history.

The last great cultural and political crisis of Western history involved the breakdown of a medieval culture and a feudal civilization. The one was destroyed by the dynamism of a scientific culture and the other by the power of a rising bourgeois civilization. Both this scientific culture and this bourgeois civilization have now reached the period of disintegration. The facts of life are too complex and too tragic to be comprehended within the limits of a secular culture; and the disharmonies, worldwide social maladjustments and worldwide communal issues are too stubborn to be solved by the social instruments, either individualistic or collectivistic, which our modern civilization uses today.

An adequate culture for our day must therefore combine the historical dynamism of our culture with the depth of the culture of previous ages. 

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# The Crisis in Human History

The danger of the retreat to individualism.

John Dewey

**N**O QUESTION is more urgent than that raised by the editor of COMMENTARY. Answers given in discussion are momentous in practice. For the attitude expressed and developed in public inquiry is inevitably a genuine part of the practical answer that will emerge. It is the initial stage of what appears later as more tangible and seemingly more overt activities. The preliminary phase in which belief-attitudes take shape is too commonly dismissed as if it were merely theoretical and contrasted with something else labelled practical. But nothing is of more practical importance than that the question constituting the issue to be dealt with be rightly put. If we get off on the wrong foot, our behavior in later phases is compromised in advance.

These considerations are pertinent because they are not made in empty air. There is already evidence of danger that the issue is wrongly put—and so may confuse, not direct, action. The danger consists in splitting “individual” and “social” from each other at the very start, and then ending with the discovery that they are in opposition to each other. This overlooks the obvious fact that the *debasement which is going on is of the human being in his entirety*, and not of the person in isolation or of society in abstraction.

At the very best, *individual* and *social* stand for traits of unitary human beings; traits,

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JOHN DEWEY *was an American philosopher who wrote extensively about education reform and founded the philosophical movement of pragmatism. This essay is fourth in the series “The Crisis of the Individual.”*

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moreover, which are so integral that they are but two aspects of man in his actual existence. Traits which are differential, singular, or individual, in the constitution of human beings have, undoubtedly, been degraded and violated. But the events forming this debasement are aspects of the degradation and violation of the associative ties that hold human beings together. These “social” ties do not inhere in “individuals,” they inhere integrally in human beings in their very humanity. Their connection with the traits that mark one human being off from the other is so pervasive and intimate that what happens to the latter cannot be either understood nor effectively dealt with save as the former are held in full view.

This substitution of “human being” for “individual” is in effect one-half of what I have to say about the question before us. “Individual” is as truly but an adjective as is “social.” Each word is a name for what is intrinsic in the constitution and development of human beings. That “social” is an adjectival word is commonly recognized, at least as a grammatical fact. But, “individual” is commonly treated as it were a noun, standing for an entity complete in itself. If one asks for proof of this statement one has only to note how often the phrase “the individual” occurs in current discussion, and then note what would happen if the word “human being” were put in its place. Its substitution would not of itself ensure the right way of putting of the issue. But it would at least permit recognition that traits which are “social,” in that they are due to the ways in which human beings are associated, have to be taken into the reckoning.

The difference between stating the issue as one concerning what is happening to human beings in their full human capacity, rather than to “individuals” (or to “the individual”) is not verbal. Think of any human being you please. If he is thought of in the concrete not in the abstract, there comes into view a creature born so helpless as to be dependent upon others for his very existence. One is almost ashamed to cite facts which are so obvious that it does not seem possible that they could be systematically neglected. I cite but one. Omit language and other means of inter-communication from the account, and no intellectual development of human beings, even in their differential or individual capacities, is conceivable. Think of any human adult in a concrete way, and at once you must place him in some “social” context and functional relationship—parent, citizen, employer, wage-earner, farmer, merchant, teacher, lawyer, good citizen, criminal—and so on indefinitely. Escape from dealing in empty verbal abstractions (of which *Individuality and Society*, spelled openly or covertly with capitals, are samples), cease converting them into entities, and it becomes glaringly evident that “social” stands for properties which are intrinsic to every human being. Extend reflection beyond what is immediately obvious, and it is clear that the variety and scope of the connections for which the word *social* is a shorthand expression, are the determining conditions of the kind of actuality achieved by capacities that are individual or differential.

Nothing that has been said indicates a doubt that there is a serious—an even tragic—crisis of human beings in their status as “individuals.” It asserts that there is *equally* a

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crisis in their status as caught up in a complicated meshwork of associations, and that one crisis cannot be viewed in separation from the other. And I would go further than this generality. The very habit of introducing a separation between them has been a powerful factor in justifying and intensifying the factors of which the present crisis is the overt public manifestation. Put in the language of common use, the movement that goes by the name of *Individualism* is very largely responsible for the chaos now found in human associations—the chaos which is at the root of the present debasement of human beings.

**T**HESSE remarks implicitly contain the other half of what I have to say. Separation and opposition of *individual* and *social* has its roots far back in history. It was initiated when man was linked to “the next world” instead of to his fellows in this world. But it would not have culminated in the crisis of our time had it not been reinforced by newer historical factors. The crisis is the overt manifestation of the conjunction of factors that have been working under cover. It is the cumulative expression of converging forces that had been operating piecemeal for a long time. We cannot grasp the significance of the crisis without a long look backward into the abyss of time. We cannot judge how to meet it without a long look ahead. My complementary point, in fine, is that we can understand the crisis only as we take it out of its narrow geographical and temporal setting and view it in long historical perspective.

Otherwise we shall deal only with symptoms. We shall allow what is immediately and urgently before our eyes to block vision of the world-wide and centuries-old scene that gives these only too-present events their significance. I have called the two points made here halves of the same whole. What has been called Individualism and Socialism, and then put in opposition to one another, must also be placed in *their* long historical perspective. The individualistic movement which preceded the socialistic and which provoked the latter by reaction is itself an illustration of the necessity of paying heed to a long course of events. This statement is true whether we take account of its earlier beneficent liberalizing aspect or its later bankruptcy.

Viewed in this way, individualism in its earlier phase appears as a movement of release. It freed conditions and factors of human life that arose with the insurgence of new forces from control by oppressive institutions—Church and State. The emerging state of human life was not seen, however, as a new system of *social* arrangements in which individual or differential proclivities and interests obtained a release. Old traditions and institutions, which had so largely been oppressive, instead of being supports of organized life, were identified with “social.” Freedom was regarded largely as the cutting loose of “the individual” from the “social.” This tendency was most marked at first in the development of the new physical science and in the efforts made by agencies of belief attitudes embodied in old institutions to suppress it by force. Subsequent events in politics and in the industrial and commercial aspects of life continued and intensified the belief that

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JOHN DEWEY

social organization was the enemy of human enlightenment and progress. Something called *the Individual* was made absolute.

For the time being the emancipating release that was taking place in many areas concealed the disintegration that was going on. In particular the executives and administrators of the new movements in production and distribution of goods assumed and effectively taught that they were the chief and indispensable agents of all that was liberating. They were aided and abetted by the restrictive consequences of the perpetuation of feudal customs in industry, politics, and religion. But in noting the historic course of the rise and bankruptcy of the individualistic movement, no mistake is greater than to overlook the substantial *moral* support given to Individualism in its laissez-faire Liberal career by the heritage bequeathed from certain religious traditions. These taught that men as inherently singular or individual souls have *intrinsic* connection only with a supernatural being, while they have connection *with one another* only through the extraneous medium of this supernatural relationship.

There took place a peculiar conjunction of conflict between the new conditions and the old tradition and an alliance between them. In this conjunction, the moral and religious features of the old tradition were so deployed as to give support to the more inhuman of the new conditions, especially in industry. The ambivalence of what is called "the individual" cannot be understood without taking into account the underlying alliance as well as the open conflict of old and new. The conflict was exhibited in gradual undermining of old institutional arrangements in religion, industry, and politics. But the translation of the antagonisms within a particular kind of "social" organization into inherent separation of "social" and "individual," and the assignment of superiority, authority and prestige in this opposition to "the individual," could not have taken place unless the latter had absorbed into itself the substance of the moral individualism contained in the accepted religious tradition.

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**T**HE upheavals in church and state, which were conditions and consequences of the breakdown of long established institutional forms of human association, would not have taken the form they did take apart from the events constituting the Industrial Revolution. An incidental, yet significant, illustration of this fact is found in the disruption of old ties that resulted from extensive migrations of peoples from old lands. The immediate occasion was a combination of religious and political factors, to which, later, desire for economic betterment was added. The net effect presented itself as a creative release of personal freedom. But the change, with its breaking off of old institutional ties, could not have taken place without new scientific developments and new technical agencies. In the fusion of scientific, religious, political and industrial motiva-

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tions and movements, the industrial finally gained the upper hand. It gained it, moreover, in a peculiar *economic* form in which the feudal pattern of superior and subordinate reappeared in the disguise of voluntary “individual” agreements between employer and employed, without the stabilizing features of feudalism. A century ago Carlyle gave this particular aspect of social arrangement the apt name of “cash nexus.” But at the same time his magnification of the hero and his contempt for the masses as literally a mass in the sense in which the mass is an inert lump, is a vivid illustration of union of the old repressive institutionalism with the new “individualism.” The ironic upshot was that the merely cash-nexus was to be brought into a state of enduring stability by means of the Captain of Industry in his capacity of conquering hero.

That the new individualism was marked by release of powers of discovery and invention (which are genuine traits of human beings in their severalty or “individuality”) is undoubted. But the thing needing explanation is the large part played by them in promoting the conflicts, uncertainties and fears that operated to create a “social” reaction in a totalitarian form. For it cannot be said too often in the present state of opinion that this seemingly sudden *outbreak* of totalitarian collectivism was in fact the breaking *through* the surface, into overt manifestation, of underlying phases of the previous individualism.

A volume, not a few paragraphs, would be needed to tell in adequate detail how the one-sided “individualistic” passed over into an equally one-sided “socialistic” movement. I have learned more on this matter from Polanyi’s *The Great Transformation* than from any other source. It shows in detail how policies that had been justified by the prevailing doctrines of “individualism” created, one by one, evils that demanded special legislative and administrative measures to ensure defense and protection of human interests threatened with destruction. The cumulative effect of these “social” measures was all the greater because they were undertaken piecemeal. Each one was regarded as if it stood alone as a mere specific remedy for some danger or evil also regarded as if it stood alone.

In this connection, it is important for even an elementary understanding of events to observe that not just Russia alone but all fascist countries have professed to be “socialistic,” and to be engaged in protecting the great mass of their members from the destructive consequences of those “individualistic” measures, baptized with the names of liberalism and democracy, which had brought the population to a state of miserable insecurity. Placing the socialistic in stark opposition to the individualistic was not the creation of Fascism and Totalitarianism. It was a direct inheritance from the *laissez-faire* “Liberalism” which arrogated to itself the protection of human “individuals” from oppression by organized society. So-called “free enterprise” in business and finance was taken to be identical with the very essence of freedom. When it became apparent as to such Freedom that its net result was recurrent industrial depressions, each one more severe than its predecessor, in which the mass of human beings were reduced to a state of insecurity and fear, it is hardly surprising that peoples who were already habituated

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to dependence upon superior political authority preferred “the road to serfdom” which promised them some stability of life. The fact that there were at hand the technical means for the establishment of a decent and secure standard of living immensely brightened the prospect—especially when it was viewed as an alternative.

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OUTWARDLY, superficially, the change was an abrupt one. It caught the world without preparation. It is this seeming abruptness that makes it the more necessary to pay heed to its deep roots in the past. The generally accepted religion of Western Europe played a part as already said, because of its teaching that each human being is “spiritually,” and hence fundamentally, an entity whose connections with other human beings exist, only in the medium of connection with a supreme over-natural Being, God. It followed that men in themselves are external and physical, rather than morally connected. Indeed, human beings in their “natural” estate were so earthly as to be in themselves standing sources of moral evil. In their natural and secular state they shared in the sinful fall of Mankind. As long as a single ecclesiastical institution dominated the life of western Europe, it could claim to possess and administer the means for filling this moral vacuum. The rise of Protestant dissent contributed to the release of its underlying and basic “individualism.”

This isolationism is far from being the only source of the moral phase of the contemporary crisis. A gulf had been established in philosophy in ancient Greece between things that are merely means and things that are exclusively ends; between the “material” and the “spiritual.” In early and medieval Christianity, the split ceased to be a matter of philosophy; it was enforced in the habitual attitudes that obtained. The split into mere means and mere ends was most marked in relegation of the economic aspects of human life to that which was base because merely “material.” But it affected also the political aspects of life, save as the latter were definitely under domination by the ecclesiastical institution which regarded itself as the sole agency for the higher intrinsic “spiritual” values that were ends in themselves, supreme and ultimate. There is probably no attitude more habitual than the one which regards everything economic as having the status of mere means, because concerned only with “material” things which must then be moralized, if at all, from *without*. The doctrine naturally became effective for harm in just the degree in which industrial, commercial and financial factors have come to hold an ever-increasing importance in actual human life.

The doctrine and its practice were conjoined in a peculiar way that reinforced the beliefs in isolated individualism. Kant taught, for example, that every human individual is an “end-in-himself.” The teaching was noble in purpose. It was meant as a protest against

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despotism in Germany. It was meant as a welcome to and support of the rising republican tendencies initiated in the American and French Revolutions. But as an “ideal” it was presented in the sense in which “ideal” means that which is totally separate from the actual. That it was named “noumenal” and contrasted sharply with what was “phenomenal” and “empirical” is a clear disclosure of its direct descent from the earlier separation of the supernatural and the human. It is one thing to protest against practices that reduce *some* beings to a state in which they are mere tools to serve the profit and power of some other human beings. But the doctrine that men are only ends-in-themselves and never means to serve others is equivalent to repudiation of all the cooperative ties which bind human beings together.\*

Practices which express, and are justified by, doctrines according to which there is a sharp division between things that are inherently but means and other things that are inherently but ends, and which teach that the former division covers the whole range of the economic aspects of life are an abiding part of the present crisis.

**T**HE intimate association of economic issues with political concerns is such a conspicuous fact of life-conditions that its presence does not need to be argued. Totalitarian socialism is without paradox a legitimate consequence of and reaction to the laissez-faire Liberalism that proclaimed the subordination of the political to the economic.

That economic activities in production, commerce and finance are carried on by “individuals” in their individual capacity is probably the most successful as well as the most harmful myth of modern life. It owes its capacity for evil largely to its alliance with this view that things which are means are set off from things which are ends—ends-in-themselves as the phrase goes. In fact means are the things and the only things that count in producing consequences. No doctrine could possibly be as effective in shielding the actual human consequences of actual economic conditions from judgment in humane or moral terms as the view that they are *merely* means, *merely* material. The economic aspect of human association decides the conditions under which human beings actually live. The decision includes their effective ability to share in the accumulated values of culture and to contribute to the latter’s further development. Separation of “ends-in-themselves” from the conditions that are the only active means of ends actually accomplished renders the former utopian and impotent, and the actual conditions brought about by the means in use inequitable and inhuman.

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\* Although the Kantian formulation forbids treating man merely as a means, the dualism between ends that are super—sensible and means that are natural, which pervades his whole philosophy, leads to a conception of men as constituting a community of isolated ends-in-themselves. On this approach, the nature of their actual empirical, communal ties out of which differential personalities develop, cannot be made intelligible.

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JOHN DEWEY

The resulting state of affairs went far to confer attraction upon any and all measures that promised relief. The separation of means and ends, material and spiritual, economic and moral, which sustain the cultural conditions producing this effect, goes so far back in human history, that any explanation which passes over this fact is sure to err radically in diagnosis of the present crisis. The attempt to moralize industry, commerce and finance (namely the conditions under which human beings actually live) by exhortations addressed to the conscience of "The Individual" is the application of a sentimental poultice. On the other hand, a "socialistic" governmental action which represents a sheer swing of the pendulum from the extreme "individualistic" position is bound to travel the old road of division between ends and means, the material and spiritual, at an accelerated rate.

Some reporters of the present scene have advanced far enough to hold that its ills should be remedied by calling in those who have at command both the "technics" of effective action *and* the "morals" for the spiritual adviser. This is on the par with the notion that those suffering from mental disturbance should be attended by one kind of healers for "bodily" disorders and by another for disorders of "mind" or "soul." What is needed in one case as in the other is a report and treatment from the standpoint which recognizes the unity of human beings. There is some slight advance in the idea that there is need for a kind of social therapy from both sources. But it consists only in an undercurrent that may lead forward to a continuous and cooperative observation of men in their unitary structure and function. Otherwise there is but a perpetuation of the old division that is at the root of the troubles. Adding one isolated factor to another one equally isolated does not heal inner division.

**A** FURTHER but closely allied illustration of the necessity of seeing the present crisis in extensive perspective is furnished by the case of Nationalism. Anyone who has read the literature of a century or so ago—Mazzini for example—will be aware that the words *Nation* and *Nationality* were once charged with fine humane aspiration. They were used to protest against both the narrowness of long established local and provincial units of association, and against the kind of levelling, obliterating unification attempted by a Napoleon. It was in effect a revolt against the footless cosmopolitanism of eighteenth century idealists, as well as against the nascent imperialism which would impose a Roman unity and peace. The words were taken to stand for vital communities of tradition and of aspiration: of all the factors that make up the shared culture that results from free inter-communication. These national communities were to cooperate with one another in behalf of the still wider international community—humanity—each putting its moral resources into a common human pool, diversity thus enriching unity.

Today Nationalism is largely a synonym for collective aggressive egoism. Peoples have measured their own national state by its power to expand, and "Great Powers" have

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been those which were alone secure as nations. This change from the ideal of measuring national unity by its contribution to the welfare and progress of humanity as an inclusive whole is vast and devastating.

The actual conditions of national life were taken over, captured, one by one by the union of new economic forces with old political and militaristic institutions. The latter acquired an effective power they had never known. The former were largely deflected from the human service they were capable of rendering into agencies of oppression. Periodically they were deflected into agencies of active destruction, each new cycle of war being more devastating than the preceding one. The capture of new forces by old institutions and customs immensely reinforced their power for evil. The ardent expectation that the development of commerce would create a state of interdependence that could and would compel a condition of widespread harmony of interests and of mutual trust was converted, in the course of events, into a condition in which human beings in their capacity of "nationals" lived in a state of chronic fear.

War is one of the oldest of human institutions. Its alliance with the organization of human beings into diverse political units is also old. The inviolability of human beings in their individual capacities has never been secure at any time or place when and where war prevailed. War and militaristic policies are intrinsically totalitarian in tendency.

Recent conditions have but given an overpowering overt demonstration, of this fact. But here again it is not new factors in isolation that are accountable. The "social" factors which have captured the new forces and which turn them to production of human debasement and violation are as old as history. The "technics" of invention and manipulative control of natural energies have conferred upon war and upon national energies organized for war an unparalleled power for suppression and destruction of human values. But the factors thus intensified are very old.

**D**ESPITE what I have said to safeguard against misunderstanding, it is likely that some readers will interpret my criticism of religious, moral, political and economic "individualism," as a plea for a swing over to "collectivistic," governmentally conducted "socialism." The criticism however is directed against the *separation* of individual and associative aspects of the unitary human being. As totalitarian events, in Fascist Italy, Bolshevist Russia, and Nazi Germany have demonstrated (to all who are able and willing to see) a swing from one pole to, the other is but an effective perpetuation of the old separation with a change in the kind of suppressions it inevitably entails. Nevertheless, there are many signs at present that revolt against the manifest tragic evils of totalitarian "socialism" is producing a swing back to magnification of something called *the individual*, although this time with an aversion to the "economic" individual and devotion to the ideal of making the "spiritual" individual supreme. Something called "personalism" is being advanced as the alternative to "totalitarianism, especially among

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JOHN DEWEY

and by frustrated former devotees of a one-sided socialistic creed. The outcome is a view which, in the actual words of one of them, ascribes “independent reality and ultimate value to the individual person alone”! Apparently, an absolutist once, an absolutist always. The clothing has changed but not the monistic cut and pattern.

We shall be in a position to understand and to frame policies intelligently only when we substitute observations which are necessarily pluralistic for pseudo-observations which proceed from wholesale points of view, enshrined in philosophy under the title of various monisms. There are all kinds of “individual” traits—in fact, if we take the word “individual” seriously there are as many as there are “individuals.” If we once recognize this fact we shall also recognize the absurdity of talking about “The Individual,” economic *or* spiritual. We shall be concerned with the specific and plural conditions of association under which traits that are so differential as to be individual obtain a desirable instead of stunted and perverted development. Meantime assertion that the individual is the ultimate reality and value is, if taken seriously, an invitation to an unrestrained egoism—which is not the more attractive for being labeled “spiritual.”

The habit of using “society” and “social” as wholesale monistic terms (whether by way of praise or condemnation) is equally harmful. There are all kinds of associations. The gangster is as highly “social” in one connection as he is anti-social in other connections. Observation and intelligence with respect to human life in its associated phases will not begin to approach the progress made, and still being made, in physical matters until we substitute recognition of *specific* forms and modes of connection of human beings for the conceptual abstractions still largely in control of sociological doctrines in all their aspects. A reading of a telephone directory to note the immense variety of human associations and their vast interrelations might well prove more enlightening than reading most lucubrations on the subject of the “individual” and the “social.”

What has been said will be completely misapprehended if it is taken to indicate a belief that a happy issue out of the present Crisis is certain or even highly probable. For its import is restricted to a special point—the disastrous logical, psychological, social and moral consequences of introducing separations where there are no separations. Nothing is implied as to the probable outcome of the present Crisis save under conditions of specific qualification. The purpose is to say that the events constituting the present Crisis will be dealt with in a way to produce a desirable outcome only in the degree in which they are viewed in their own concrete context. This context is one of a long historical spread and wide geographical scope. An artificially one-sided separation of “social” and “individual” is now the chief obstacle to seeing the Crisis in its right perspective. There are ominous signs of continuation of this distortion.

I close by adding that while there is no guarantee for optimism, there are resources within our grasp which, *if used*, will tend toward a favorable outcome. The undecided matter is how soon, if at all, we shall use them. The foregoing discussion has referred to

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individual, singular, differential aspects of human beings as the source of all inventions and discoveries that are not made by chance. They are the medium of all *deliberate* innovation and variation. But only the inventions and technical advances that spring from the intelligence that takes in a wide range of conditions and consequences determines the *direction* they take, and hence the issue they are likely to have.

Intelligence dealing with physical matters has learned this lesson. Physical discoveries and their application in, technological invention depend, as a matter of course, upon accumulation of factual conclusions in comprehensive systematic form. Such procedure is definitely *not* the case in the field of our specifically human and humane activities. Here the policies we initiate, the measures we employ to secure results, are decided by very different sorts of considerations. Stated in a summary matter we have no discoveries, inventions and technologies in human affairs comparable at all to those we command in physical matters. Our humane knowledges are relatively speaking in an infantile state.

One reason for this backward condition of humane knowledge and technics has been indicated. No surer way would have been devised to produce and maintain the present tragically one-sided development of knowledge and practice than division of life into material and spiritual, with the economic assigned to the baser and inherently meaner part. The technics of industry have come to monopolize virtually the entire impact of systematic observation and report. The other portion of life, thus torn asunder, is left under the control of a complex of institutions and traditions that took shape in a static period when changes in life were the work of chance, often of catastrophe. No answer can be given to the question whether “the contemporary crisis is due to technology and large scale planning” that does not place at the center of consideration the arbitrary limitation thereby created. To attribute to “science,” to technology, and to large scale planning the evils due to the one-sided and torn conditions of tragically divided human life is to work for perpetuation, yes towards intensification, of the Crisis.

Our present general attitude is one of impatience and haste. We are not inclined “to stop and think” to engage, that; is, in observation that reaches backward and forward. Emotional reactions restrict vision to what is close at hand in time, and space. The emotions are themselves as legitimate as they are inevitable in every rightly constituted human being. But they should be used to promote, not to block, wide observation and a planning that is large-scale: that is, large enough in scale to integrate the economic with the moral and humane, and, by striving to give that which has been debased as material its positive place in promoting secure and widely extended humane values, bring unity into our future life. Would there were prophets who are genuine seers who will warn against reactions to the past and who will show us how to take full advantage of the new resources now at our disposal! 

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# The Jewish Delicatessen

The evolution of an institution.

Ruth Glazer

**W**HEN I WAS sixteen my father became convinced he would never make his fortune as a milkman and decided to give the free enterprise system a chance to show what it could do for him. Armed with a capital of some \$2,000 scraped together from a meager bank account, loans on insurance policies, and advances from friends and relatives, he began to look about for a suitable business. Finally, after lengthy visits from the aforementioned friends and relatives bearing sound advice consisting mainly of shining examples from their own life stories, plus some complicated reasoning and intuitive thinking of his own, he decided to move out to a new community in Long Island and open “a real Jewish delicatessen.”

Now, “a real Jewish delicatessen” in New York, where it assumes its most specialized form, can mean at least three different things. In this respect, New York and a few other old Jewish communities on the Eastern seaboard are unique. Nowhere else in the country does the delicatessen exist in its pure, pungent form, an entity built around the sale of ten meats. (Excepting perhaps in Los Angeles, where recently two such institutions are rumored to have been established to meet the needs of the

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*For this portrait of an important Jewish cultural institution in the American scene, RUTH GLAZER, a lifelong New Yorker, drew on six years of weekends behind a delicatessen counter.*

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RUTH GLAZER

Broadway émigré group in Hollywood, tired of flying in delicatessen from the Gaiety.)

In Chicago, a metropolis with 300,000 Jews, you can get a hot pastrami or corned beef sandwich in eateries which call themselves delicatessens. But they are sad imitations. They even have a soda fountain in the front! In Washington, I have seen an attenuated delicatessen hidden away behind a grocery store. In interior New Jersey, you can get your franks and beans in stores whose main business is the sale of liquor. Reliable sources from the hinterland inform me that when the craving for salami becomes too strong to bear it is sometimes possible to have one imported via the kosher butcher in town. But there is cold joy in a salami sandwich eaten outside the steamy atmosphere of a New York kosher delicatessen.

**M**Y FATHER, then, had his choice of three types of delicatessen. The most primitive is the *shlacht* store, generally found in the market sections of the great old Jewish settlements in the lower East Side, in Brownsville, in the East Bronx. Now and then one will crop up like a poor relation on Upper Broadway or even the Grand Concourse.

Its essence is in its simplicity. Around the walls of what is generally a small square store are ranged open wooden counters. Suspended from hooks hang salamis, cold pastramis, rolled beefs, and bundles of frankfurters. On the walls are a few shallow shelves containing a meager supply of the traditional accessories—beans, ketchup, some crackers, sometimes soup. The proprietor stands in the midst of this dominion using now one counter, now another, depending upon the location of the particular meat called for. The main attraction of these stores—for there is little of the warmth and geniality of the other types in this form—lies in their cut rate prices, sometimes as much as one-half of the going rate. Generally the meat is “Jewish” but not kosher. A nice distinction, which has grown in popularity.

My father, though, had no taste for the rough and ready quality of the *shlacht* store. So he said the neighborhood was too “refined” for it. But another unspoken reason motivated him. Now that he was becoming a “businessman,” he wanted a new, shiny, “up-to-date” store, something which by its opulent exterior would reflect the wealth and economic position which he hoped to attain.

He passed on to consider the second, and major variant—the kosher delicatessen proper. In the last twenty years it has seen many changes. But outside of superficialities like fluorescent lighting, refrigeration, and curved glass storefronts, it has deviated little from the pattern set down by some unknown progenitor, and it has shrugged off most of the advances of modern science. The food is still bad for the digestion, vitaminless and delicious. In the window is a steaming grill, warming knishes and frankfurters to be eaten on the spot. Then comes a diminutive beer bar, generally crowded with various extraneous items—plates for the frankfurters or cigar boxes, producing a very unbar-like effect despite the brass rail. Past the bar is a high combination showcase and cutting counter. In your ordinary *goyish* delicatessen the meat lies coldly and palely behind the

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## *The Jewish Delicatessen*

frosted glass of a refrigerated case. The customer points to a spiritless and limp roll of yellowish-gray meat and says, "Give me a quarter of a pound of liverwurst."

Contrast the kosher delicatessen! Facing a clear glass (sometimes, it must be confessed, not so clear) lies a succulent variety of rosy and warm meats in a never-varying order. You may visit every delicatessen in New York and not one will fail to have *first* in line its battery of ten or fifteen salamis, on the little raised platform facing the glass, ranged in three or four rows, one on top of the other; followed by rolled beef, the tongues, a few cold pastramis (for decoration, since it is always served hot, sliced to order, from a steam box); the two trays of frankfurters—one of "specials," the short fat ones, one of the "regulars," the long thin ones; and finally a turkey. A smaller and rarer variety of frankfurter (extinct since the war) came in two sizes: the cocktail frankfurter, about as big as your thumb, and the "lilies," about half that size. "Lilies," research reveals, is short for "lilliputians." Sometimes the pans of coleslaw and potato salad are incorporated into this display. More often they are on the "back bar," the narrow counter behind the proprietor. Lying on the wooden cutting board is the inevitable corned beef which is always just about one-half gone. And invariably on the glass-topped counter is a plate with small chunks of salami. In the old days the plate always carried a sign, "A Nickel a Shtickel." (A most convenient—and profitable—way of disposing of the ends of the salami, too.) This immortal rhyme succumbed during the war to the free verse of "Have a Nosh—10c." The poetic spirit of the industry was not to be quenched by this loss, however. A substitute slogan appeared all over the city right after the outbreak of the war: "Send a Salami to Your Boy in the Army."

While the delicatessen is to be found in neighborhoods of every economic level, the meats that are sold are luxury products. Even during the depression they averaged about a dollar a pound.

**M**USTARD may be something you can take or leave, but in a work on the delicatessen store it requires some mention. To put it flatly, mustard is as necessary to delicatessen as—ham is to eggs, to revert to the American scene. Many is the customer who has come back mournfully to report, "The delicatessen was probably wonderful. But I couldn't even enjoy it. No mustard." Let me hasten to state here that the mustard which is given away free with every order is of a kind which is impossible to duplicate in any mere manufactured, bottled, commercial brand selling one million jars a year. And the storekeeper knows it. He can't say, "Oh, you must have had a jar around." There is no use evading the point. The corned beef, the pastrami, the tongue may have been the most succulent which ever left his store. But without mustard only the lightest whisper of its possibilities emerges. What is the secret of this mustard, its sharp, sour delicious tang? A little cold pickle brine. Stirred into the crock of thick prepared mustard, its original function was what our genteel Shopping News ladies would call, genteelly, a "stretcher." But the unwitting originator created that for which men will fight. Haven't we all seen letters from the

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RUTH GLAZER

South Pacific saying, “All I want is a corned beef sandwich, and don’t forget the mustard”?

Traditionally, mustard is distributed free with all purchases of delicatessen. The purchaser of a large quantity of meat will get a gill’s worth in a little white cardboard box mysteriously labeled “Ice Cream.” But even the customer who comes in for a quarter of a pound is not forgotten. He is given a “toot” of mustard. A “toot” is made of a square of waxed, mustard-color paper, which is twisted into a cone, filled with mustard, and then folded shut. Every delicatessen storekeeper makes his own with great speed and uniformity. I must point out that “toots” are made not only with an eye to mechanical perfection, but also with an eye to, shall we say, thrift. A little extra tug at the bottom of the cone before it is finished will reduce the volume by as much as 50 percent.

The counter, though, is only one half of a real delicatessen establishment. The other half is the “restaurant.” This is made up of a few tables and chairs, depending on the amount of room left after the counter has been installed. Originally marble-topped, the tables have attempted to improve along with fluorescent lighting and refrigeration. Now we see colored plastic tops, and some elaborate establishments even use tablecloths.

But the kosher type of delicatessen did not suit my father, either. He had long been anti-clerical and was even known to have eaten ham sandwiches in his youth; and “anyhow,” he said, “I don’t want to have any business with rabbis snooping around my store to inspect whether it’s kosher or not. I’d like to have a nickel for every kosher delicatessen that sells packages of bacon under the counter. Believe me, this’ll be more kosher than some of those stores run by those alte *yiddlich* with *yamelkes*.”

**M**Y FATHER’S third alternative, the non-kosher but Jewish delicatessen, is now probably the most numerous. This type differs, deliberately, in only the most subtle ways from the kosher delicatessen. It looks exactly the same, smells exactly the same, and the pastrami sandwiches lack neither juiciness nor flavor. But the neon kosher sign is missing from the window. For many years proprietors of this new type of delicatessen were in the habit of substituting the word *wurshtgesheft* in Hebrew characters. This formidable word strung across half the window would seem to leave no room for doubt in the minds of the uninitiated that this was a very kosher delicatessen indeed. But, a few years ago, in response to pressure by a group of rabbis, acting for the kosher delicatessen storekeepers, a city ordinance forbade this practice as misrepresentation. The new terminology which is rapidly gaining favor in the trade is “kosher-style.”

While the kosher delicatessens will serve only tea or soda pop in bottles as beverages, in the non-kosher delicatessen you can get coffee with cream, and butter on your bread if you insist on it. But the resistance by the proprietors has been fierce. In the six years that I spent behind a delicatessen store counter I rarely heard the cry, “Hot pastrami. Butter the bread.” When it happened, we would ask to have the individual pointed out. My father, whose respect for tradition was very strong, would refuse to engage in such

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obscene practices, and would generally tell the waiter—“Give her a pat of butter, and let her butter the bread herself.” Added to the display of meats in the *Wurshthgesheft* is also a roast beef (a non-kosher cut of meat). Most will not go so far as to include a ham, but I have seen even that in stores located in newer neighborhoods.

In earlier years the menu of the delicatessen was simplicity itself: franks and beans, any kind of delicatessen meat fried with eggs, sandwiches, and that aristocrat of dishes—a plate of cold cuts (consisting principally of hot meats). As time has gone by the number of dishes available from the kitchen now cover three or four pages of a printed bill-of-fare. “Delicious home cooked meals, kosher style, like mother used to make” is a sign featured in most delicatessens today.

**W**ITH the growth of the restaurant, various by-products of the counter which had formerly been sold at a discount found their way into the kitchen. Take tongue, for example. Tongue has always sold at a premium, averaging twenty-five cents more on a pound than the other meats. There is a very good reason. A beef tongue is perhaps three inches high for two-thirds of its length. It then tapers off to a thin point, perhaps a half-inch high. Whereas the meat in the wide section is light pink and fine grained, the tip is dark red and tough. Every customer who comes in for even a quarter of a pound demands with justice, “center-cut.” Isn’t she paying \$1.50 a pound? The problem was disposal of the tips of the tongues. It became customary to sell them to people who had dogs, at 10c a piece. But then some genius hit upon the omelette. Consider the difference between the frank “tongue and eggs, pancake style” and the ever so subtle omelette. In the former each slice of tongue gazes openly into the diner’s face, its origins clearly discernible. But hidden in the folds and fluff of the omelette, the ancestry of the bits of meat are hardly so evident.

Since dairy dishes are not forbidden to the kosher-style store, a full selection of salads, fruit with sour cream, cheese, and fish dishes are featured. All are served with bread and butter. But my mother could never get used to the idea of cutting a Swiss cheese on the machine where a salami had lain but a moment before. After a while we all decided that we absolutely had to have another slicing machine—for the corned beef. We finally got one which was admirably suited for the purpose, tilted at just the proper angle to maintain even pressure against the blade and with a little trough for escaping juice. The “corned beef machine” was used exclusively to slice cheese. “You can cut corned beef so much better by hand,” my mother would explain.

The three-decker sandwich is the newest addition to the ancient art of serving delicatessen. While the old kosher delicatessens scorned to gild the lily, their imitators seized upon it as another means of keeping in step with the times. It must here be understood that whereas your ordinary three-decker American sandwich of toasted white bread is considered a frivolity for leisured ladies at Schrafft’s, there is nothing

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RUTH GLAZER

more serious (or deadly) than a three-decker sandwich of three slices of good rye bread. Its sheer weight makes superfluous the delicate toothpick. The delicatessen three-decker is served, meaningfully, with knife and fork. Compare, too, the contents. While the toasted sandwich can rely heavily on vegetable matter like lettuce and tomato to expand it to a respectable height, the delicatessen three-decker, by custom, is all meat. Obvious combinations like corned beef and pastrami have been succeeded by complicated variations, culminating in four kinds of meats topped with lettuce, tomato, coleslaw, Russian dressing, and pickle, with an olive on top. Yet a rigid uniformity prevails even in this seemingly imaginative matter of combination sandwiches. Turkey, for example, is always combined with tongue. But these two aristocrats never mix with the heartier meats.

Trends indicate that despite the havoc a combination sandwich can wreak on the digestion (I have illustrated only the most delicate), it is on its way to supplanting the simple one-meat sandwich. The combination sandwich fits well with the elaborate modern interiors, which have eliminated the hot frankfurter and the knish. We have only to sit back and wait for the ultimate—"A Banquet Between Three Slices of Bread—50c."

**T**O DECIDE upon the type of delicatessen the neighborhood called for, my father took his own Gallup poll. He proceeded to visit the owners of most of the other stores to discuss business conditions in general and the possibilities for his own in particular. He then scouted out the shopping area for a radius of several blocks to see what competition he would have, measured the proportion of transient traffic to "home trade," investigated the national, religious, and financial composition of the neighborhood, consulted with local real-estate men and bank presidents, and finally made his decision. He became the proprietor of a "kosher-style delicatessen."

While the economic factors were important, the social composition of the neighborhood was the decisive factor pointing to the kosher-style form. Although the population of the area was about 50 percent Jewish, there was a significant percentage of mixed marriages, and an old established Christian community which had already begun to look askance at the growing Jewish group. It would be too blatant, there would be too great danger of antagonizing the non-Jewish section of the community, my father was advised by community leaders, if he used Hebrew characters in his window sign. And then the Jewish section of the community was "modern" and "emancipated." They didn't care about such things. My mother, who came from an orthodox family, was appalled by the driveways leading up to the main temple in the neighborhood to accommodate members of the congregation who arrived by car for Friday night services. Besides a temple, the Jewish community supported a large, modern, extensively equipped Community Center, where almost all the social activity, secular and religious, was carried on. Residents of the community were well organized, claiming branches of the Jewish War

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## *The Jewish Delicatessen*

Veterans, Hadassah, Young Israel, and various local Sisterhoods and Junior Leagues.

My parents were faced with the problem of handling that anachronism, the modern Jew. They were to satisfy his taste for traditional food in traditional surroundings without offending a newly acquired dignity and propriety. The metamorphosis of this particular *Wurshtgesheft* was a reflection of some of the painful minutiae of social adjustment.

We had come originally from a rough and tumble neighborhood. Shopping for daily necessities was a wild adventure where she who did not elbow was elbowed out; and a stentorian voice able to make itself heard above the shrill ruckus in the markets was the mark of an experienced housewife. The comparative silence and orderliness of the stores in the new community amazed my mother. "They say good-morning to you," she reported after one of her first shopping trips. My father, who applied every dribble of information to the operation of his store, decided that he had better be careful in his choice of waiters. It is well known that a delicatessen waiter's sole function is to frustrate the hungry, intimidate the cautious, and rule the diets of his daily patrons with an iron hand. Such a technique, felt my father, would not be quite *juste* for this neighborhood. So he proceeded to hand-pick a suitable staff. For his efforts there was little to be said, except that he got delicatessen waiters who, by definition, acted like delicatessen waiters. The one immutable institution.

**F**REQUENTLY the help in a delicatessen is augmented by members of the owner's family. A large business is generally run by two or three partners and their respective families are not called upon to help. But in a smaller, one-man store, everyone pitches in. As soon as the youngsters of the family are old enough to hold two "toots" in one hand and a ladle of mustard in the other, they are pressed into service. The next step, acting cashier during the dinner hour, is assigned to those sufficiently certain of their addition and subtraction. But being allowed to wait on trade is the real cachet of maturity. Learning to handle the meat knife with its fourteen-inch blade so that you can cut a slice of corned beef that is almost transparent requires months of practice. The trick of making sandwiches so that they look twice as thick as they really are calls for appreciable finesse. Carrying tubfuls of pickles or cases of beer from the cellar develops a respectable amount of muscle.

The values of coming from a storekeeping family cannot be denied. Besides, in this case, the obvious advantage of "all the delicatessen you can eat," there is a kind of education to be had from standing behind a counter learning to talk the language of all kinds of people. There is the discipline of the cheerful, friendly, public face. There comes first-hand appreciation for hard work, for the cutthroat realities of commercial life, and some understanding of the value of money. It produces, early, a maturity of demeanor. By and large, it is not at all a bad prep school to leaven the abstract tendencies of the incipient Jewish intellectual.

But the ennobling effects of part-time labor are not unmitigated. Businesses like the delicatessen are open seven days a week and sixteen hours a day, and working in the

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RUTH GLAZER

store sometimes becomes a substitute for home life. Frequently you will notice in delicatessens one table in the back, reserved for family activity. A few children may be doing their homework. One of the parents will be reading the paper or entertaining friends. But somebody is always behind the counter.

Until meat rationing forced delicatessens to close on Tuesdays, the one-man owner had two days off a year—Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (kosher delicatessens did close on Saturdays, but reopened Saturday evening). The children of the family may be well provided with clothing and food, but their home is a dark place where they go at bedtime. Their meals, their spare time, their source of parental affection are all bound up with the store. But all this is material for another kind of sociological work on a somewhat larger subject.

**T**HE variety of foods that made their way over the counter in my father's delicatessen store rapidly increased as word spread in the community that a Jewish delicatessen had been set up. The important word to the community was not "delicatessen," but "Jewish." Uncertain, in a precarious world, of the articles of their faith, the Jews of the neighborhood could make one affirmation unhesitatingly. Jewish food was good. Requests for lox, sturgeon, whitefish, for sour cream, bagels, cream cheese, for gefilte fish and potato latkes besieged us, and were heeded. The store, recognizedly a symbol of traditional Jewish living, became a center for the dispensation of knowledge on Jewish cookery, too. On Passover women would come in to ask how to make *matzoh brei*. "My husband had some here, and he insists I learn how to make it." We closed on Jewish holidays, served matzoh with meals on Passover, and gefilte fish on Friday.

But the pull was not all in one direction. The Gentiles of the neighborhood regarded my father's store as a curiosity at first. They would come in at the urging of a Jewish friend and order "pastrami," pronouncing it in a way that made my mother giggle. Some wandered in by accident, thought it strange that we didn't have some staple like boiled ham, but would generally settle for something else. Undeniably the food was good, satisfying, but different. After a while it even ceased to be different. Without a tremor of strangeness, they would order gefilte fish on "fish night."

But assimilation in reverse was only a small part of the picture. How to satisfy those who asked for ham-and-cheese sandwiches, or bacon and eggs? How about those who wanted Christmas dinners in a Christmas atmosphere? What to do about the request for pork chops and baked ham? Here my father could not be so yielding. It was all right to feature clam chowder on Friday night, to hang some holly on the door at Christmas, to serve bologna-and-cheese sandwiches, as a compromise. Yet beyond a mysteriously fixed point he could not pass. His sympathies, principles, and prejudices shaped the atmosphere of the store and left no room for *treyf* meat. Unkosher cuts of meat—roast beef, leg of lamb, yes. Meat from a pig, no. A lamentable rigidity of adjustment, perhaps. But he had gone as far as he could. The next generation could begin serving the hams. 🍷

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# The Solitary

We must be one family.

**Pearl Buck**

**N** O ONE SEES in its entirety the globe upon which we human beings live. To some, this home of ours swinging in space is primarily a globe, a conglomerate sphere of material composition upon which some small human insects stir. To others, the conglomerate sphere is as incidental, although as necessary, as a house is for a family. The family does not exist for the house, but the house for the family, and the better the house is for the health and comfort of the family, the better it fulfills its purpose, which is always secondary to the human life it contains and supports.

I am one of those who believe that human life is the most important thing upon our globe, and even in the universe. Until I know there is something better and higher in development and potentiality, for me the human being is the highest in creation. Therefore I ponder what it is that can make this human being his best and that means his happiest self. What are his primary needs? How can he reach his utmost satisfaction?

He is a strange composite, this human being. He is continually bogged down and hampered by his physical needs. He has to be fed every day, he has to have air to breathe, he cannot live in too high or too low a temperature, although he is increasingly clever in providing for himself the right climate. The possibilities for his creature comfort today are fantastic. In the tropics he can live in coolness, and in the Arctic he can live in summery warmth. Foods he can grow without soil, and he has found nourishment and vitality in chemicals. The diseases which threaten his flesh he is attacking, one by one, until

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PEARL BUCK *won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1938. Her bestselling novel The Good Earth won the Pulitzer Prize in 1932. This article is fifth in the series "The Crisis of the Individual."*

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PEARL BUCK

his life span, in the fortunate countries, has tripled. He knows that anything is within the range of his possible knowledge, even that most solemn and vast question of what happens to him after he dies at last. He sees the endless vista of his own development, and yet with all this, the human being today is more unhappy, more lost, than he has ever been in all history. Even while he sees his life span lengthen, he feels that life is increasingly threatened, and the miracles which he works only leave him more sad and more fearful for himself. It is no comfort to the human being that he has cracked the atom and uncovered the kernel of energy in the universe. He is only terrified by what he has done. In his soul he regrets his knowledge. He wishes that God, if there is a God, had kept these mighty secrets for His own.

What is the matter with the human being? Why is he unhappy and afraid? He hides himself behind cynicism, but when was cynicism anything except a cloak for fear and unhappiness?

**T**HE matter is this: The human being values above all else himself. Himself means his own individual being. If he gains everything else and loses himself, what use is that else to him? The human being today is frightened and unhappy because he does not feel his individual self is secure. The atmosphere of the world is increasingly threatening to him as an individual. He dreads movements and causes and policies and all large sweeping forces, lest his self be consumed. He clings to his own being. He tries to find some promise somewhere that what is himself can continue individual and his own. He finds no promise anywhere. He is lost. In his terror he tries to find a few whose interests and sufferings are like his own, at least to a degree enough to afford some communication and sympathy. He is desolate with loneliness, and he allies himself to a few others somehow.

But this little cluster of lonely individuals is still lost. Whether they number a dozen or a million or ten million they are still lost. They are only an enlargement of the lonely individual. The lonely individual today may be one veteran in his hometown, or the remnant of the Jews, desperately trying to salvage themselves.

This human being, whether he is one solitary or a group solitary, is frantically trying to discover where he can belong. The phenomenal increase in church membership, especially in the Catholic church, shows that he rushes to hide his head under religious sands. He is often happier in the Catholic church than in the Protestant, because he needs individual strength to be a Protestant. The Protestants believe that a man must make his own direct relationship with God. But it takes a certain amount of courage first to believe in God and then to face Him and make communication with Him. The Catholic church is more merciful. It provides an intermediary between the timid human being and God. The human being looks on the face of the priest, who is only a little lower than the angels, and finds not so much divinity there as can terrify him. Moreover, the priest speaks

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## *The Solitary*

his language, in words he can hear and understand, and God speaks in more mysterious ways. Still better, the responsibility for understanding God is on the priest, and not on the human being. If the priest makes mistakes, it is not the human being's fault. The sands of the Catholic church are warm and comforting to the shelterless human head.

In exactly the same way the human being, in his terror, may give himself up to a political creed. Or he may give himself up to nothing more than a labor union, which can take the place of religion. Within the group, whatever fold it be, the individual can get the illusion of shelter and safety. He avoids the knowledge that it is an illusion and he clings to temporary safety. He dreads knowing the truth, which is that no group today is more safe than the single individuals it contains. There is no possible safety for any group, whether racial, national, or political, so long as there is no safety in the world for the individual, because the individual group is only the enlargement of the individual being, and it is individuality itself which is in danger.

**W**HAT IS the danger? What makes the individual afraid? It is, quite literally, the fear and danger of physical death, and with it the end of the individual. Death was once a remote cessation of life. It came properly after years, when the desire for life had faded slowly, so that dying was simply dropping into sleep. Even then sleep was not eternal, or so religions have always taught. Whether religions are right or wrong is not to the point. The fact is that most of the people in the world have been influenced by religion, in one way or another. The probabilities are, they have thought, that there is something to the idea of God and Heaven. At least there was the chance. But death now has become something completely arbitrary. It can come at any moment, from any side. An enraged neighbor in another nation can drop a bomb which will put an end to thousands of us in a second. Yet bombs are not more awful than the power which a group of armed men can exercise. The human being is at the mercy of the very forces which he created for his own protection and comfort. Death is no longer remote or natural.

It is idle to say that individuals do not fear death. Anyone who has seen a battlefield, or watched a famine or been in a concentration camp knows that the average individual becomes a mere beast when he is faced daily with the possibility of death. Only the rare human being can maintain his dignity in such circumstances, and we call him a hero. The love of physical life is primary in the human being and this is necessary, else the dark circumstances of his life would drive him to seek his own death too easily for the preservation of the species.

With the hope of keeping himself alive as long as he can, he joins his group, or he makes a group about himself. It is purely for the protection of his individual being. If he helps others in his group, it is with the hope that they will help him. The group seeks to strengthen itself, to arm itself against any other groups who threaten. If it does not

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actually arm itself against others, it does the equivalent in trying to establish for itself priorities in food and shelter. Thus today in the same way, Communists and Capitalists fight for themselves, and Catholics and Protestants enlarge and strengthen their numbers. Labor unions are organized consciously for the welfare of labor-union members at any cost to other groups anywhere. Jews are organizing with new zeal for the relief of their own people, although other minorities are as badly off and are indeed suffering in far greater numbers. Nations are more nationalistic than ever.

All such groups—and there are many more than I have named—organizing for the purpose of making their own members more secure—are nevertheless making all human beings, including themselves, actually far less secure than ever before. There is no central morality in any of them which will reach beyond their own individuals, no morality which will grant the right of individuals other than their own to survive. If food is short, for example, there is no morality which will divide food fairly among all. Europe is to be fed at the expense of Asia. Jewish children are to be salvaged rather than the children of India. Yet Europe is not safe unless Asia is fed, and Jewish children are not safe unless Indian children are also safe.

**I**T IS the world we must make safe before any individual can be made safe. Group definitions must be broken down before any individual can be safe. A man cannot be safe today because he belongs to the capitalist class or a labor union, nor because he is white and not black. He can only be safe when he lives in a world where he is safe because he is a human being.

His difficulty is that there is no one to create such a world for him. He has to create it himself. God may have created the garden of Eden, but the man Adam and Eve, his wife, have been struggling ever since to create a world where they could live safely and not see their children killed by the wild beasts. Such a creation seems further off than ever today. The wild beasts now include monstrosities of a science devoted to destruction rather than the preservation of mankind. The modern devil is not a wily serpent but the militarist mentality, deceiving us with the inevitabilities of new wars.

Wars are inevitable so long as the individual human being tries to find his security in the group. With group against group, in the same unvarying pattern, wars will go on. Somehow or other the individual must be forced to realize that his own safety will begin only when he himself in the utmost reach of his own mind can think in terms of the human being wherever and whoever he is. In other words, the individual must think at once more and less of himself; more, because he needs to know that he represents the total value of the human race, and less, because he is only one among millions of others as valuable as he. He is the unit of the whole, impressive in his individuality, and yet no more impressive than any other.

What force can be devised which will so enlarge the mind of the individual that he

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## *The Solitary*

will perceive himself as a human being, one among others? Religion might have done it, had the power of religion not been seized by unscrupulous persons throughout history and so often that religion itself has been more divisive than any other force. The idea of the chosen people has not been peculiar, actually, to the Hebrew religion, but wherever it has been found, it has been catastrophic in its effect upon peace and morality.

There is no other force that could have so easily brought into actual life the practice of what is commonly called the brotherhood of man as that of the religions which have only professed it. All have professed it and none have practiced it. Communism has professed it too, but practices it only for those who adopt the political creed. Wherever these exclusions have been allowed—"Except ye believe, etc."—the result has been only the same narrow groups, one set against the other, all dangerous to the life of the individual human being, both within and without their folds.

No, there have been and perhaps there still are no forces strong enough to bring wisdom to the mind of the ordinary human individual. He is born without wisdom. Alas that a child cannot inherit wisdom as he does the color of his eyes! Then might we know that wisdom is increasing on the earth.

**B**UT I HAVE hope of one force, and it is the same old force, the instinct for self-preservation. The human being still clings to his own life. However hateful it is, it is the thing he loves best. Perhaps now in his ultimate danger, he will see that his own small group cannot save him. Perhaps now he is beginning to understand that if he wants to be safe himself he will have to see that others are safe, too, and that his group must be the whole of mankind, and not merely those of his own skin color or those who believe in the same God. When the weakest, feeblest human creature has shelter and food and care, then the strongest is safe, and the strongest is not safe until the weakest is safe. We are dependent upon one another in deep and unchanging ways.

How shall this safety be provided? First, I think, by making common the essentials of life. It is dangerous, for example, for each of us, that some of us starve. Food, like air, ought to be free for all. There may be luxuries of taste which can provide rewards for the industrious but plain and basic food should be free. Bread and butter and milk and meat and vegetables and fruit should never be paid for, neither bought nor sold, but free as water and air are free. Shelter, too, ought to be there for those who have none—not the luxuries of shelter and the rewards of refinement, but warmth and a roof for those who have not, until they can have. These two simplicities alone would remove the most fundamental causes for fear among human beings. How would they be paid for? In the way that anything is paid for in any country, by common labor and money.

For the human being to know that he and those he loves will never starve or die for lack of food or shelter would be to remove basic insecurity from most of the people in the world. And when insecurity is removed the necessity for group protection will be

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PEARL BUCK

removed. When the necessity for group protection is removed, wars will no longer be inevitable, and the last great threat to the individual will be gone. It is a circular process. The individual must think of all other individuals as equally deserving with him of life, and then he must move to make life possible for all. When life is possible for all then it is also possible for him.

**T**HE question now is who can be the leaders in this way of thinking. We seem always to need leaders, we human beings. Someone steps ahead, and the rest of us see and follow, or we see and do not follow. Our choice lies in whether we will or will not follow.

If I were to name the ones who should be the leaders today in this great necessary movement for a humanism as strong and as far-reaching as all mankind, I must name the Jews. The Jews have suffered more than any other group in humanity, with the sole exception of women, throughout history. I should say women ought to be the leaders, except that the Jews have recently suffered so acutely and in so spectacular a fashion that they have some advantage over all other groups as leaders. The plea of the Jew today ought not to be: "Help us for we have suffered so much." It ought to be something far greater and more powerful. It ought to be this: "We have suffered so much that we above all others have the right to help all who suffer." Did the Jews today come out as such leaders then there might be hope that in this world they too would be safe.

I am one of those who are not afraid of the simplicities. I never saw a complexity solved until the simplicity in it was found and faced and met. There is no problem in our world today which is too complex for solution, provided we are willing to face the simplicity of it. But those who profit from complexity must first be set aside. Luckily they are the few. The common man is usually not found among them. And it is the common man who stands to gain most from the brotherhood of man.

As a Chinese put it to me the other day, "It is not enough to be one world. We must be one family." 🍵

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# My Beginnings

A chapter from an autobiography.

Mark Chagall

**T**HE FIRST THING that met my eyes was a tub. Simple, square, with rounded corners, and shallow. A tub from the bazaar. Once inside it, I filled it up entirely.

I don't any longer remember—was it my mother who told me?—just at the moment of my birth, a great fire broke out in a little house on the outskirts of Vitebsk, close to the highway, behind a prison.

The town was on fire, the poorer part of the Jewish quarter. They carried us out, the bed and the mattress, my mother and the baby at her feet, and took us to a safe place at the other end of the town.

But, to begin with, I was stillborn.

I did not want to live. Imagine a white lump that didn't want to live. As if it were heavy with the paintings of Chagall.

They stuck needles into me, they plunged me into a bucket of water. At last I uttered a feeble whine.

But, essentially, I was stillborn. I might wish that psychologists would not draw any improper conclusions from that. I beg to be indulged!

However, this little house near the Peskovatik road has remained intact, I saw it only a little while ago.

My father, become a little better off, sold it. It reminds me of the knob on the head

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MARK CHAGALL *was the first painter to bring indigenously Jewish motifs and feeling into Modern art. An exhibition surveying his life's work to date was held at the Museum of Modern Art at the time this chapter, translated from the Russian by John McNeil, was published in COMMENTARY.*

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MARK CHAGALL

of the rabbi in green that I painted, or of a potato that had been thrown into a barrel of herring, steeping forlornly in the brine pickle. Contemplating this little house from the height of my recent “exaltation,” I shuddered and asked myself:

“Truthfully, how could I have been born here? There’s hardly room to breathe.”

But when my grandfather with the long black beard died honorably, my father bought another place for a few rubles.

In this neighborhood, no madhouses as at Peskovatik. A neighborhood of churches, precise enclosures, market stalls, synagogues, simple and eternal, like the fortifications in the frescoes of Giotto.

Around me coming and going, turning this way and that, or trotting sagely, all manner of Jews, young and old, the Yavitchs, the Beylines. A beggar runs to his house, a rich man enters his. The school child runs to his house. Papa goes home also.

At this time there was no moving picture theater.

People went home or to market. That’s what my tub brings back to my mind.

I say nothing of the sky, or of the stars of my childhood. They are my stars, my gentle ones; they go with me to school, and wait for me in the street until I come back. Poor darlings, forgive me. I left you alone and trembling on your great distances!

My town, sad and joyful! As a child I watched you in my simple way, from our doorstep. To the eyes of a child you appeared very clearly. When the partition hindered me, I got up on a little paving stone. If I still couldn’t see you, I went up to the roof. And why not? Grandfather had gone up there also.

And I contemplated you at my pleasure.

Here in the street called Pokrovskaya, I was born a second time.

**D** ID YOU ever see at some time or other, in the paintings of the Florentine masters, one of those men whose beards have never been trimmed, whose eyes are at once brown and ashen gray and whose skin is the color of baked ochre, covered with creases and wrinkles?

That is my father.

Or did you ever see one of the faces from the Aggadah, with its aspect devout and vacant? (Pardon, my little father!)

You remember I made a study of you. Your portrait ought to have produced the effect of a candle burning and putting itself out at the same time, its smell that of sleep.

A fly drones—the accursed thing—because of it I fall asleep.

Must I speak of my father?

What is a man worth if he has no value? If he is priceless?

And for that reason it is difficult for me to find the right words for him.

My grandfather, a religious teacher, could think of nothing better than to find my father, his eldest son, a job from childhood on as clerk in a herring warehouse and to place

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## *My Beginnings*

his youngest son with a hairdresser.

No, he wasn't even a clerk, but a simple worker for thirty-two years.

He used to lift heavy casks and my heart shriveled like a Turkish wafer, watching him raise the heavy things and shake the little herrings with his frozen hands; his big-bodied employer standing to one side like a stuffed animal.

Now and then my father's clothes would glisten with the herring brine. Beyond him fell reflections, from above, from the sides. Only his face, sometimes yellow, sometimes transparent, assumed from time to time a feeble smile. Such a smile! Where did it come from?

It blew in from the street where people walked darkly, reflecting the moonlight. Suddenly I saw his teeth gleam. I remembered the teeth of cats, of cows, any sort of teeth.

Everything in my father seemed enigma and sorrow. An inaccessible image.

Always tired, worried, his eyes alone yielded a soft reflection, of a grayish blue.

In clothes greasy and dirty from his work, with large pockets from which poked a dull-red handkerchief, he used to come home tall and thin, bringing the evening with him.

From his pockets he would draw a pile of cakes and frozen pears. With his wrinkled brown hand he would divide them between us children. They passed into our hands with more delight, more flavor and transparency than if they had come from a plate at table.

And any evening without cakes and pears from papa's pockets was a sad evening for us.

It was only to me that it was familiar, this heart of the people, poetic, and deadened with silence.

Right up to the last expensive years he earned a humble twenty rubles. Small tips from customers scarcely increased his income. Yet my father wasn't a poor young man.

Photographs from the time of his youth and my observations of the state of our wardrobe proved to me that when he married my mother he was provided with a certain physical and financial strength, since he offered his fiancée—a very small girl, growing bigger after marriage—a magnificent scarf.

Married, he stopped returning his salary to his father and set up his own home.

But first I would like to finish the outline of my bearded grandfather. I don't know if he went on teaching his pupils much longer. They say he was a respectable man.

Visiting his tomb in the cemetery with my grandmother ten years ago and observing his monument, I was convinced that he had been an honorable man, an inestimable man, a saint.

He sleeps quite near the river's edge, near the black fence where the troubled water flows. Beneath a gentle hill, close to many other "saints" long since dead.

Badly worn but still preserved, his tombstone bears the graven letters in Hebrew—"Here lies..." My grandmother pointed out to me with her finger.

"There is the tomb of your grandfather, father of your father, and my first husband."

She mumbled with her lips, not knowing how to weep, whispering some words, either words to herself, or prayers. I heard her lament as she leaned on the monument, as

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MARK CHAGALL

if that stone and that little hill were my grandfather, as if she were talking to the depths of the earth, or as if it were some kind of cupboard in which an object was resting, shut up forever.

“I beg you, David, pray for us. Here is your Bacheva. Pray for your sick son Chaty, for your feeble Zoussy, for their children. Pray that they be honest men before God and before the world.”

On the other hand, my grandmother was more familiar to me. That good woman consisted of no more than a scarf around her head, a little skirt, and a wrinkled face.

A tiny yard in height. In her heart, a love devoted to her favorite children and her book of prayers.

Widowed, she married, with the approval of the rabbi, my second grandfather, father of my mother, a widower himself. This first couple died in the same year that my parents married. My mother ascended to the throne.

**M**Y HEART is always oppressed, as if with sleep or with a sudden memory, at the anniversary of her death, when I visit her tomb, my mother's tomb.

It seems to me that I see you, mama. You come towards me gently. So slowly that I want to help you. You are smiling with my smile. Ah! that smile, mine.

My mother was born at Lyozno, where I had painted the vicar's house, before the house the fence, and before the fence the pigs.

*Pope* or no *pope*, he smiles in passing, his cross gleaming. He is going to make the sign of the cross over me. He caresses his hip with his hand. The pigs, like little dogs, run to meet him.

My mother was the eldest daughter of my grandfather, who during half his life reclined on the stove; a quarter of it he spent in the synagogue, and the rest in his butcher store.

He reclined so much that my grandmother couldn't endure it and died in the prime of life. It was then that my grandfather started moving, the same way that cows and calves move.

Is it true that my mother was too small? My father married her without looking at her.

To our eyes mother had an unusual expression, as far as that was possible in her suburban environment. But I don't want to speak well, too well, of my mother who is no more. Can I speak of her?

Sometimes I don't want to speak, only to sob.

At the gate of the cemetery I rush forward, lighter than flame, lighter than aerial shadow, I run to shed tears.

I see the river going into the distance, the bridge beyond, and near me the eternal fence, the earth, the tomb.

Here is my soul. Look for me here, here I am, here are my paintings, my birth. Sadness, sadness!

There is her portrait. What does it matter, am I not in it myself? Who am I?

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## *My Beginnings*

You will smile, you will be astonished, you are going to laugh, you who pass by.

A lake of suffering, hair prematurely gray, eyes—a city of tears, soul that barely exists, brain that exists no longer.

What is there then?

I see her ruling the entire household, guiding my father, endlessly building little houses, establishing a grocery and stocking it with quite a wagonload of merchandise, without money—on credit. By what words, by what means can I show her, smiling, before the door, or sitting at the table for a long time as she waits for some neighbor or other to help deliver her spirit from distress.

In the evening, when the store was closed and all the children home, papa dozing at the table, the lamp settled down, and the chairs standing wearily; outside one no longer knew where the sky was, where nature had taken refuge—not that it was quiet but simply that everything was inactive. Mama was seated before the high stove, one hand on the table, the other on her stomach.

Her head was pointed towards the top, where her hair was fastened with a pin.

She used to tap one finger on the table covered with oilcloth; she tapped several times, meaning to say:

“Everybody sleeps, what children I have! There is nobody to talk to.”

She loved to talk. She turned her words and tended them so well that the listener, embarrassed, would smile.

Without changing her position, hardly moving her lips or opening her mouth, her pointed hairdress in its place, she asked questions, remained silent or spoke like a queen. But there was nobody. In the background I alone followed her. She used to ask me: “My son, talk to me.”

I am a child and mama is a queen. What shall we talk about? She becomes annoyed and taps more often on the table with her finger. And the house is shrouded in a veil of sadness.

Fridays, after the Sabbath dinner, when my father invariably fell asleep, always at the same moment, with the prayer unfinished (on my knees before you, little father!), her eyes would become sad; she would say to her eight children:

“Children, let us sing the rabbi’s song, together with me.” The children sang and began to fall asleep. She would begin to weep and I would say: “You begin to cry already, then I won’t sing any more.”

I would like to explain that it was in some part of her that my talent was hidden, that it was through her that everything was transmitted to me, everything except her spirit.

There she is coming to my room (at the Yavitch’s, in the courtyard). She knocks and asks: “My son, are you there? What are you doing? Was Bella with you? Do you want to eat?”

She observes my painting with such eyes, God knows what eyes! I await the judgment. At last she pronounces slowly:

Yes, my son. I see you have talent. But my child, listen to me. Perhaps you ought rather

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MARK CHAGALL

to be a clerk. I pity you. With your shoulders. How does this thing come into our family?

She was not only our mother, but also the mother of her own sisters. If one of them was to be married, it was my mother who decided whether the fiancé was suitable. It was she who judged, inquired, questioned. If the fiancé lived in another town, she would go there, and after learning his address she would go to the store opposite his house, and while buying something, would start a conversation. And in the evening she would even try to look into the windows of the fiancé's house.

**S**O MANY years have passed since she died.

Where are you now, little mother? In heaven, on earth? I am here, far away from you. I would feel more at ease if I were closer to you; at least I could look at your monument, touch your gravestone. Ah, mama, I cannot pray any longer and I weep more and more rarely.

But my soul thinks of you and of myself, and my thought consumes itself in grief.

I don't ask you to pray for me. You yourself know how many troubles I have. Tell me, little mother: From the other world, from paradise, from the clouds, wherever you are, does my love console you?

Am I able with my words to weave a gentle and caressing sweetness for you? 🍷

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# The Jewish State: Fifty Years After

Where have Herzl's politics led?

Hannah Arendt

**R**EREADING Herzl's *The Jewish State* today is a peculiar experience. One becomes aware that those things in it that Herzl's own contemporaries would have called utopian now actually determine the ideology and policies of the Zionist movement; while those of Herzl's practical proposals for the building of a Jewish homeland which must have appeared quite realistic fifty years ago have had no influence whatsoever.

The last is all the more surprising because these practical proposals are far from antiquated even for our own age. Herzl proposed a "Jewish Company" that would build a state with "Relief by Labor"—that is, by paying a "good-for-nothing beggar" charity rates for forced full-time work—and by the "truck system" consisting of labor gangs "drafted from place to place like a body of troops" and paid in goods instead of wages. Herzl was also determined to suppress all "opposition" in case of lack of gratitude on the part of

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HANNAH ARENDT *was a political philosopher. She was the author of* Eichmann in Jerusalem, *among other books. This article coincides with the 50th anniversary of Herzl's* Judenstaat, *which fathered political Zionism.*

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people to whom the land would be given. All this sounds only too familiar. And it is altogether to the honor of the Jewish people that nobody—as far as I know—ever discussed these “realistic” proposals seriously, and that Palestinian reality has turned out to be almost the opposite of what Herzl dreamt.

The above features of Herzl’s program, though happily forgotten in the present political state of affairs in Palestine, are nevertheless significant. For all their innocence, they show to which category of politician in the framework of European history Herzl belonged. When he wrote *The Jewish State* Herzl was deeply convinced that he was under some sort of higher inspiration, yet at the same time he was earnestly afraid of making a fool of himself. This extreme self-esteem mixed with self-doubt is no rare phenomenon; it is usually the sign of the “crackpot.” And in a sense this Viennese whose style, manner, and ideals hardly differed from those of his more obscure fellow-journalists was indeed a crackpot.

But even in Herzl’s time—the time of the Dreyfus Affair, when the crackpots were just embarking on their political careers in many movements functioning outside the parliaments and the regular parties—even then they were already in closer touch with the subterranean currents of history and the deep desires of the folk than were all the sane leaders of affairs with their balanced outlooks and utterly uncomprehending mentalities. The crackpots were already beginning to be prominent everywhere—the anti-Semites Stoecker and Ahlwardt in Germany, Schoenerer and Lueger in Austria, and Drumont and Deroulède in France.

Herzl wrote *The Jewish State* under the direct and violent impact of these new political forces. And he was among the first to estimate correctly their chances of ultimate success. Even more important, however, than the correctness of his forecast was the fact that he was not altogether out of sympathy with the new movements. When he said, “I believe that I understand anti-Semitism,” he meant that he not only understood historical causes and political constellations, but also that he understood—and to a certain extent, correctly—the man who hated Jews. It is true, his frequent appeals to “honest anti-Semites” to “subscribe small amounts” to the national fund for the establishment of a Jewish state were not very realistic; and he was equally unrealistic when he invited them: “whilst preserving their independence [to] combine with our officials in controlling the transfer of our estates” from the Diaspora to the Jewish homeland; and he frequently asserted, in all innocence, that anti-Semites would be the Jews’ best friends and anti-Semitic governments their best allies. But this faith in anti-Semites expressed very eloquently and even touchingly how close his own state of mind was to that of his hostile environment and how intimately he did belong to the “alien” world.

With the demagogic politicians of his own and more recent times, Herzl shared both a contempt for the masses and a very real affinity with them. And like these same politicians, he was more an incarnation than a representative of the strata of society to which

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he belonged. He did more than “love” or simply speak for the new and ever increasing class of Jewish “intellects that we produce so super-abundantly and that are persecuted everywhere”; he did more than merely discern in these intellectuals the real *luftmenschen* of Western Jewry—that is, Jews who, though economically secure, had no place in either Jewish or Gentile society and whose personal problems could be solved only by a reorientation of the Jewish people as a whole. Herzl actually incarnated these Jewish intellectuals in himself in the sense that everything he said or did was exactly what they would have, had they shown an equal amount of moral courage in revealing their inmost secret thoughts.

Another trait Herzl shared with the leaders of the new anti-Semitic movements by whose hostility he was so deeply impressed was the furious will to action at any price—action, however, that was to be conducted according to certain supposedly immutable and inevitable laws and inspired and supported by invincible natural forces. Herzl’s conviction that he was in alliance with history and nature themselves saved him from the suspicion that he himself might have been insane. Anti-Semitism was an overwhelming force and the Jews would have either to make use of it or be swallowed up by it. In his own words, anti-Semitism was the “propelling force” responsible for all Jewish suffering since the destruction of the Temple and it would continue to make the Jews suffer until they learned how to use it for their own advantage. In expert hands this “propelling force” would prove the most salutary factor in Jewish life: it would be used the same way that boiling water is used to produce steam power.

This mere will to action was something so startlingly new, so utterly revolutionary in Jewish life, that it spread with the speed of wildfire. Herzl’s lasting greatness lay in his very desire to do something about the Jewish question, his desire to act and to solve the problem in political terms.

**D**URING the twenty centuries of their Diaspora the Jews have made only two attempts to change their condition by direct political action. The first was the Sabbatai Zevi movement, the mystic-political movement for the salvation of Jewry which terminated the Jewish Middle Ages and brought about a catastrophe whose consequences determined Jewish attitudes and basic convictions for over two centuries thereafter. In preparing as they did to follow Sabbatai Zevi, the self-appointed “Messiah,” back to Palestine in the mid-1600s, the Jews assumed that their ultimate hope of a Messianic millennium was about to be realized. Until Sabbatai Zevi’s time they had been able to conduct their communal affairs by means of a politics that existed in the realm of imagination alone—the memory of a far-off past and the hope of a far-off future. With the Sabbatai Zevi movement these centuries-old memories and hopes culminated in a single exalted moment. Its catastrophic aftermath brought to a close—probably forever—the period in which religion alone could provide the Jews with a firm framework within which to satisfy

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their political, spiritual, and everyday needs. The attendant disillusionment was lasting in so far as from then on their religion no longer afforded the Jews an adequate means of evaluating and dealing with contemporary events, political or otherwise. Whether a Jew was pious or not, whether he kept the Law or lived outside its fence, he was henceforth to judge secular events on a secular basis and make secular decisions in secular terms.

Jewish secularization culminated at last in a second attempt to dissolve the Diaspora. This was the rise of the Zionist movement.

The mere fact that a catastrophe had thrown the Jews from the two extremes of the past and the future into the middle ground of the present does not signify that they had now become “realistic.” To be confronted by reality does not automatically produce an understanding of reality or make one feel at home in it. On the contrary, the process of secularization made Jews even less “realistic”—that is, less capable than ever before of facing and understanding the real situation. In losing their faith in a divine beginning and ultimate culmination of history, the Jews lost their guide through the wilderness of bare facts; for when man is robbed of all means of interpreting events he is left with no sense whatsoever of reality. The present that confronted the Jews after the Sabbatai Zevi debacle was the turmoil of a world whose course no longer made sense and in which, as a result, the Jews could no longer find a place.

The need for a guide or key to history was felt by all Jews alike. But by the 19th century it was a need that was not at all specific to the Jews alone. In this context Zionism can be included among the many “isms” of that period, each of which claimed to explain reality and predict the future in terms of irresistible laws and forces. Yet the case of the Jews was and still remains different. What they needed was not only a guide to reality, but reality itself; not simply a key to history, but the experience itself of history.

As I have just indicated, this need of reality had existed since the collapse of the Sabbatai Zevi movement and the disappearance of Messianic hope as a lively factor in the consciousness of the Jewish masses. But it became an effective force only at the end of the 19th century, mainly because of two entirely separate factors whose coincidence produced Zionism and formed Herzl’s ideology.

The first of these factors had little to do, essentially, with Jewish history. It so happened that in the 80s of the last century anti-Semitism sprang up as a political force simultaneously in Russia, Germany, Austria, and France. The pogroms of 1881 in Russia set in motion that huge migratory movement from East to West which remained the most characteristic single feature of modern Jewish history until 1933. Moreover, the emergence of political anti-Semitism at exactly the same moment in both Central and Western Europe and the support, if not leadership, given it by sizable sections of the European intelligentsia refuted beyond doubt the traditional liberal contention that Jew-hatred was only a remnant of the so-called Dark Ages.

But even more important for the political history of the Jewish people was the fact

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that the Westward migration—despite the objections to the “*Ostjuden*” so loudly voiced by the emancipated Jews of the West—brought together the two main sections of Jewry, laid the foundation for a new feeling of solidarity—at least among the moral élite—and taught both Eastern and Western Jews to see their situation in identical terms. The Russian Jew who came to Germany in flight from persecution discovered that enlightenment had not extinguished violent Jew-hatred, and the German Jew who saw the homelessness of his Eastern brother began to view his own situation in a different light.

The second factor responsible for the rise of Zionism was entirely Jewish—it was the emergence of a class entirely new to Jewish society, the intellectuals, of whom Herzl became the main spokesman and whom he himself termed the class of “average (*durchschnittliche*) intellects.” These intellectuals resembled their brethren in the more traditional Jewish occupations in so far as they, too, were entirely de-Judaized in respect to culture and religion. What distinguished them was that they no longer lived in a cultural vacuum; they had actually become “assimilated”: they were not only de-Judaized, they were also Westernized. This, however, did not make for their social adjustment. Although Gentile society did not receive them on equal terms, they had no place in Jewish society either, because they did not fit into its atmosphere of business and family connections.

The psychological result of their situation was to make these Jewish intellectuals the first Jews in history capable of understanding anti-Semitism on its own political terms, and even to make them susceptible to the deeper and more basic political attitudes of which anti-Semitism was but one expression among others.

**T**HE TWO classic pamphlets of Zionist literature, Pinsker’s *Auto-emancipation* and Herzl’s *The Jewish State*, were written by members of this new Jewish class. For the first time Jews saw themselves as a people through the eyes of the nations: “To the living the Jew is a corpse, to the native a foreigner, to the homesteader a vagrant, to the proprietor a beggar, to the poor an exploiter and millionaire, to the patriot a man without a country, to all a hated rival”—this was the characteristically precise and sober way Pinsker put it. Both Herzl and Pinsker identified the Jewish question in all its aspects and connections with the fact of anti-Semitism, which both conceived of as the natural reaction of all peoples, always and everywhere, to the very existence of Jews. As Pinsker put it, and as both believed, the Jewish question could be solved only by “finding a means of reintegrating this exclusive element in the family of nations so that the basis of the Jewish question would be permanently removed.”

What still is Zionism’s advantage over assimilationism is that it placed the whole question on a political level from the very beginning and asked for this “readjustment” in political terms. The assimilationists sought readjustment no less desperately, but spent their energies in founding innumerable vocational-training societies for Jews without, however, having the least power to force Jews to change their occupations. The

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intellectual followers of assimilationism carefully avoided political issues and invented the “salt of the earth” theory, making it quite clear that they would prefer the crudest secularization of the Jewish religious concept of chosenness to any radical re-definition of the Jewish position in the world of nations.

In other words, the great advantage of the Zionists’ approach lay in the fact that their will to convert the Jews into a “nation like all other nations” saved them from falling into that Jewish brand of chauvinism automatically produced by secularization, which somehow persuades the average de-Judaized Jew that, although he no longer believes in a God who chooses or rejects, he is still a superior being simply because he happened to be born a Jew—the salt of the earth—or the motor of history.

The Zionist will to action, to come to grips with reality, embodied a second advantage—this time over the internationalist and revolutionary approach to the Jewish question. This approach, no less than assimilationist chauvinism, was the consequence of the secularization of religious attitudes. But it was not initiated by average Jews, rather by an élite. Having lost their hope of a Messianic millennium that would bring about the final reconciliation of all peoples, these Jews transferred their hopes to the progressive forces of history which would solve the Jewish question automatically, along with all other injustices. Revolutions in the social systems of other peoples would create a mankind without classes and nations; the Jews together with their problems would be dissolved in this new mankind—at the end of days somehow. What happened in the meantime did not count so much; Jews would have to suffer as a matter of course along with all other persecuted classes and peoples.

The Zionists’ fight against this spurious selflessness—which could only arouse suspicion as to the ultimate aims and motives of a policy that expected one’s own people to behave like saints and to make the chief sacrifices—has been of great importance because it tried to teach the Jews to solve their problems by their own efforts, not by those of others.

But this struggle hardly enters the picture of Herzl’s Zionism. He had a blind hatred of all revolutionary movements as such and an equally blind faith in the goodness and stability of the society of his times. The aspect of Zionism here in question received its best expression in the writings of the great French Jewish writer, Bernard Lazare. Lazare wanted to be a revolutionary among his own people, not among others, and could find no place in Herzl’s essentially reactionary movement.

Yet in considering Herzl’s movement as a whole and in assessing his definite merits within the given historical situation, it is necessary to say that Zionism opposed a comparatively sound nationalism to the hidden chauvinism of assimilationism and a relatively sound realism to the obvious utopianism of Jewish radicals.

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**H**OWEVER, the more ideological and utopian elements expressed in *The Jewish State* had greater influence in the long run on the formulations and practice of Zionism than did the undeniable assets set forth above. Herzl’s will to reality

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at any price rested on a view that held reality to be an unchanging and unchangeable structure, always identical with itself. In this reality he saw little else but eternally established nation-states arrayed compactly against the Jews on one side, and on the other side the Jews themselves, in dispersion and eternally persecuted. Nothing else mattered: Differences in class structure, differences between political parties or movements, between various countries or various periods of history did not exist for Herzl. All that did exist were unchanging bodies of people viewed as biological organisms mysteriously endowed with eternal life; these bodies breathed an unchanging hostility toward the Jews that was ready to take the form of pogroms or persecution at any moment. Any segment of reality that could not be defined by anti-Semitism was not taken into account and any group that could not be definitely classed as anti-Semitic was not taken seriously as a political force.

Jewish political action meant for Herzl finding a place within the unchanging structure of this reality, a place where Jews would be safe from hatred and eventual persecution. A people without a country would have to escape to a country without a people; there the Jews, unhampered by relations with other nations, would be able to develop their own isolated organism.

Herzl thought in terms of nationalism inspired from German sources—as opposed to the French variety, which could never quite repudiate its original relationship to the political ideas of the French Revolution. He did not realize that the country he dreamt of did not exist, that there was no place on earth where a people could live like the organic national body he had in mind and that the real historical development of a nation does not take place inside the closed walls of a biological entity. And even if there had been a country without a people and even if questions of foreign policy had not arisen in Palestine itself, Herzl's brand of political philosophy would still have given rise to serious difficulties in the relations of the new Jewish state with other nations.

**E**VEN more unrealistic but just as influential was Herzl's belief that the establishment of a Jewish state would automatically wipe out anti-Semitism. This belief was based on his assumption of the essential honesty and sincerity of the anti-Semites, in whom he saw nothing but nationalists pure and simple. This point of view may have been appropriate before the end of the 19th century, when anti-Semitism did actually derive more or less from the feeling that Jews were strangers within any given homogeneous society. But by Herzl's own time anti-Semitism had become transformed into a political weapon of a new kind and was supported by the new sect of racists whose loyalties and hatreds did not stop at national boundaries.

The fault in Herzl's approach to anti-Semitism lay in the fact that the anti-Semites he had in view were hardly extant any more—or if they were, they no longer determined anti-Semitic politics. The real anti-Semites had become dishonest and wanted to pre-

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serve the availability of the Jew as a scapegoat in case of domestic difficulties; or else, if they were “honest,” they wanted to exterminate the Jews wherever they happened to live. There was no escape from either variety of anti-Semite into a promised land “whose upbuilding”—in Weizmann’s words—“would be the answer to anti-Semitism.”

The upbuilding of Palestine is indeed a great accomplishment and could be made an important and even decisive argument for Jewish claims in Palestine—at least a better and more convincing one than the current pleas that argue our desperate situation in Europe and the justifiability, therefore, of the “lesser injustice” that would be done to the Arabs. But the upbuilding of Palestine has little to do with answering the anti-Semites; at most it has “answered” the secret self-hatred and lack of self-confidence on the part of those Jews who have themselves consciously or unconsciously succumbed to some parts of anti-Semitic propaganda.

The third thesis of Herzl’s political philosophy was the Jewish state. Though for Herzl himself this was certainly the most daring and attractive facet of the whole, the demand for a state seemed neither doctrinaire nor utopian at the time his book was first published. In Herzl’s view reality could hardly express itself in any other form than that of the nation-state. In his period, indeed, the claim for national self-determination of peoples was almost self-evident justice as far as the oppressed peoples of Europe were concerned, and so there was nothing absurd or wrong in a demand made by Jews for the same kind of emancipation and freedom. And that the whole structure of sovereign national states, great and small, would crumble within another fifty years under imperialist expansion and in the face of a new power situation, was more than Herzl could have foreseen. His demand for a state has been made utopian only by more recent Zionist policy—which did not ask for a state at a time when it might have been granted by everybody, but did ask for one only when the whole concept of national sovereignty had become a mockery.

Justified as Herzl’s demand for a Jewish state may have been in his own time, his way of advancing it showed the same unrealistic touch as elsewhere. The opportunism with which he carried on his negotiations to this end stemmed from a political concept that saw the destinies of the Jews as completely without connection with the destinies of other nations, and saw Jewish demands as unrelated to all other events and trends. Although the demand for a state could be understood in his period only in terms of national self-determination, Herzl was very careful not to tie the claims for Jewish liberation to the claims of other peoples. He was even ready to profit by the minority troubles of the Turkish empire and he offered the rulers of that empire Jewish aid in coping with them. In this instance Herzl’s was the classical example of a policy hard-boiled enough to seem “realistic,” but in reality completely utopian because it failed to take into account either one’s own or the other party’s relative strength.

The constant miscalculations that were to become so characteristic of Zionist policy

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are not accidental. The universality with which Herzl applied his concept of anti-Semitism to all non-Jewish peoples made it impossible from the very beginning for the Zionists to seek truly loyal allies. His notion of reality as an eternal, unchanging hostile structure—all *goyim* everlastingly against all Jews—made the identification of hard-boiledness with realism plausible because it rendered any empirical analysis of actual political factors seemingly superfluous. All one had to do was use the “propelling force of anti-Semitism,” which, like “the wave of the future,” would bring the Jews into the promised land.

**T**ODAY reality has become a nightmare. Looked at through the eyes of Herzl, who from the outside sought a place inside reality into which the Jews could fit and where at the same time they could isolate themselves from it—looked at in this way, reality is horrible beyond the scope of the human imagination and hopeless beyond the strength of human despair. Only when we come to feel ourselves part and parcel of a world in which we, like everybody else, are engaged in a struggle against great and sometimes overwhelming odds, and yet with a chance of victory, however small, and with allies, however few—only when we recognize the human background against which recent events have taken place, knowing that what was done was done by men and therefore can and must be prevented by men—only then will we be able to rid the world of its nightmarish quality. That quality taken in itself and viewed from the outside—by people who consider themselves as cut off from the nightmarish world in principle and who are thus ready to accept the course of that world “realistically”—can inhibit all action and exclude us altogether from the human community.

Herzl’s picture of the Jewish people as surrounded and forced together by a world of enemies has in our day conquered the Zionist movement and become the common sentiment of the Jewish masses. Our failure to be surprised at this development does not make Herzl’s picture any truer—it only makes it more dangerous. If we actually are faced with open or concealed enemies on every side, if the whole world is ultimately against us, then we are lost.

For Herzl’s way out has been closed—his hope in an escape from the world and his naive faith in appeasement through escape have been rendered illusory. *Altneuland* is no longer a dream. It has become a very real place where Jews live together with Arabs and it has also become a central junction of world communications. Whatever else it may be, Palestine is not a place where Jews can live in isolation, nor is it a promised land where they would be safe from anti-Semitism. The simple truth is that Jews will have to fight anti-Semitism everywhere or else be exterminated everywhere. Though Zionists no longer regard anti-Semitism as an ally, they do, however, seem to be more convinced than ever that to struggle against it is hopeless—if only because we would have to fight the whole world.

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HANNAH ARENDT

The danger of the present situation—in which Herzl's Zionism is accepted as a matter of course as the determinant of Zionist policy—lies in the semblance to commonsense that the recent experiences of the Jews in Europe have lent Herzl's philosophy. Beyond doubt, the center of Jewish politics today is constituted by the remnants of European Jewry now in the camps of Germany. Not only is all our political activity concentrated upon them—even more important is the fact that our whole political outlook springs of necessity from their experiences, from our solidarity with them.

Every one of these surviving Jews is the last survivor of a family, every one of them was saved only by a miracle, every one of them has had the basic experience of witnessing and feeling the complete breakdown of international solidarity. Among all those who were persecuted, only Jews were singled out for certain death. What the Nazis or the Germans did was not decisive in this connection; what was decisive was the experiences of the Jews with the majority of all the other nationalities and even with the political prisoners in the concentration camps. The question is not whether the non-Jewish anti-fascists could have done more than they actually did for their Jewish comrades—the essential point is that only the Jews were sent inevitably to the gas chambers; and this was enough to draw a line between them that, perhaps, no amount of good will could have erased. For the Jews who experienced this, all Gentiles became alike. This is what lies at the bottom of their present strong desire to go to Palestine. It is not that they imagine they will be safe there—it is only that they want to live among Jews alone, come what may.

Another experience—also of great importance to the future of Jewish politics—was gained from the realization, not that six million Jews had been killed, but that they had been driven to death helplessly, like cattle. There are stories telling how Jews tried to obviate the indignity of this death by their attitude and bearing as they were marched to the gas chambers—they sang or they made defiant gestures indicating that they did not accept their fate as the last word upon them.

What the survivors now want above all else is the right to die with dignity—in case of attack, with weapons in their hands. Gone, probably forever, is that chief concern of the Jewish people for centuries: survival at any price. Instead, we find something essentially new among Jews, the desire for dignity at any price.


As great an asset as this new development would be to an essentially sane Jewish political movement, it nevertheless constitutes something of a danger within the present framework of Zionist attitudes. Herzl's doctrine, deprived as it now is of its original confidence in the helpful nature of anti-Semitism, can only encourage suicidal gestures for whose ends the natural heroism of people who have become accustomed to death can be easily exploited. Some of the Zionist leaders pretend to believe that the Jews can maintain themselves in Palestine against the whole world and that they themselves can persevere in claiming everything or nothing against everybody and everything. However, behind this spurious optimism lurks a despair of everything and a genuine readiness

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for suicide that can become extremely dangerous should they grow to be the mood and atmosphere of Palestinian politics.

There is nothing in Herzlian Zionism that could act as a check on this; on the contrary, the utopian and ideological elements with which he injected the new Jewish will to political action are only too likely to lead the Jews out of reality once more—and out of the sphere of political action. I do not know—nor do I even want to know—what would happen to Jews all over the world and to Jewish history in the future should we meet with a catastrophe in Palestine. But the parallels with the Sabbatai Zevi episode have become terribly close. 

# The Dilemma of Our Times

Noble ends and ignoble means.

**Arthur Koestler**

**I** SHOULD LIKE to start with a story which is familiar. But it will lead us straight to the heart of our problem. On January 18, 1912, Captain Scott and his four companions reached the South Pole after a march of sixty-nine days. On the return journey Petty Officer Evans fell ill and became a burden to the party. So Captain Scott had to make a decision. Either he carried the sick man along, slowed down the march, and risked perdition for all; or he let Evans die alone in the wilderness and tried to save the rest. Scott took the first course: They dragged Evans along until he died. The delay proved fatal. The blizzards overtook them; Oates, too, fell ill and sacrificed himself; their rations were exhausted; and the frozen bodies of the four men were found six months later only ten miles, or one day's march, from the next depot which they had been unable to reach. Had they sacrificed Evans, they would probably have been saved.

This dilemma, which faced Scott under eighty degrees of latitude, symbolizes the eternal predicament of man, the tragic conflict inherent in his nature. It is the conflict between expediency and morality. I shall try to show that this conflict is at the root of our political and social crisis, that it contains in a nutshell the challenge of our time.

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ARTHUR KOESTLER, *a Hungarian-British writer, was the author of Darkness at Noon, among many other works of fiction and non-fiction. This article was originally given as a broadcast for the British Broadcasting Corporation.*

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ARTHUR KOESTLER

Scott had the choice between two roads. Let us follow each of them into their logical extensions. First, the road of expediency, where the traveler is guided by the principle that the end justifies the means. He starts with throwing Evans to the wolves, as the sacrifice of one comrade is justified by the hope of saving four. As the road extends into the field of politics, the dilemma of Captain Scott becomes the dilemma of Mr. Chamberlain. Evans is Czechoslovakia: The sacrifice of this small nation will buy the safety of bigger ones—or so it is hoped. We continue on the straight, logical, paved road which now leads us from Munich No. 1 to Munich No. 2: the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact of 1939, where the Poles go the way the Czechs have gone. By that time the number of individual Evanses is counted by the million: In the name of expediency the German government decides to kill all incurables and mental deficient. They are a drag on the nation's sledge and rations are running short. After the incurables come those with bad heredity—Gypsies and Jews: six million of them. Finally, in the name of expediency, the Western democracies let loose the first atomic bombs on the crowded towns of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and thus implicitly accept the principle of total and indiscriminate warfare which they hitherto condemned. We continue on our logical road, which has now become a steep slope, into the field of party politics. If I am convinced that a political opponent will lead my country into ruin and plunge the world into a new war, is it not preferable that I should forget my scruples and try to discredit him by revelations about his private life, frame him, blacken him, purge him, censor him, deport him, liquidate him? Unfortunately, my opponent will be equally convinced that *I* am harmful and use the same methods against me. So you see how the logic of expediency leads to the atomic disintegration of morality—a kind of radioactive decay of all values.

And now to the second alternative before Scott. This road leads into the opposite direction; its guiding principles are respect for the individual, the rejection of violence, and the belief that the means determine the end. Well, we have seen what happened to Scott's expedition because he did not sacrifice Evans. And we can imagine what would have happened to the people of India had Mr. Gandhi been allowed to have his saintly way of non-resistance to the Japanese invader. Or what would have been the fate of England had it accepted pacifism, and a Gestapo headquarters in Whitehall.

So you see both roads end as blind alleys. The dilemma is inseparable from man's condition; it is not an invention of the philosophers, but a conflict which we face at each step in our daily affairs. We all have sacrificed our Evans at one point or another of our past. And it is a fallacy to think that the conflict can always be healed by that admirable Anglo-Saxon household ointment called "the reasonable compromise." Compromise is a useful thing in minor dilemmas of daily routine, but each time we face major decisions the remedy lets us down. Neither Captain Scott nor Mr. Chamberlain could fall back on a reasonable compromise; the more responsible the position you hold, the sharper you feel the horns of the dilemma. When a decision involves the fate of a great number of

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## *The Dilemma of Our Times*

people, the conflict grows proportionately. Now the technical progress of our age has enormously increased the range and consequence of man's actions, and has thus amplified his inherent dilemma to gigantic proportions. This, I believe, is the reason for our acute awareness of a crisis. We are like a patient who for the first time hears amplified the irregular ticking of his heart.

**I** SAID that the dilemma admits of no final solution. But each period has to attempt a temporary solution adapted to its own condition. I believe that our attempt has to proceed in two steps. The first is to realize with open eyes that a certain admixture of ruthlessness is inseparable from human progress. Without the rebellion of the Barons there would be no Magna Carta; without the storming of the Bastille, no proclamation of the Rights of Man. So the more we have the moral values at heart, the more we should beware of crankishness. The trouble with some well-meaning ethical movements is that they have so many sectarians and quietists and cranks in their midst.

But the second and more important step is to realize that the end only justifies the means within very narrow limits. A surgeon is justified in inflicting pain because the results of the operation are reasonably predictable; but drastic large-scale operations on the social body involve many unknown factors, may lead to unpredictable results; and you never know at what point the surgeon's lancet turns into the butcher's hatchet. Or, to change the metaphor: Ruthlessness is like arsenic; injected in very small doses it is a stimulant to the social body; in large quantities it is deadly poison. And today we are all suffering from moral arsenic poisoning.

The symptoms of this disease are obvious in the political and social field; they are less obvious but no less dangerous in the field of science and philosophy. Let me quote as an example the opinions of one of our leading physicists, Professor J.D. Bernal. In an article called "Belief and Action," recently published by the *Modern Quarterly*, he says that the new social relations require "a radical change in morality" and that the virtues "based on excessive concern with individual rectitude" need readjustment by a "change from individual to collective morality. . . . Because collective action is the only effective action, it is the only virtuous action," says Professor Bernal. Now let us see what this rather abstract statement really means. The only practical way for Tom, Dick, or Harry to take "effective collective action" is to become a member of an army, political party, or movement. His choice will be determined (a) by his nationality, and (b) by his political opinions or prejudices. Once he has joined the "collective" of his choice, he has to subordinate his "individual rectitude" to the group or party.

Now this is precisely what, for instance, the accused in the Belsen trial did. Their excuse was that they had to service the gas chamber and push the victims into it out of loyalty to their party, because their individual responsibility was subordinated to collective responsibility. Counsel for the defense of Irma Grese could have quoted verbatim

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Professor Bernal's reflections on ethics—though politically Bernal is a staunch opponent of Nazism and supports, to quote his own words, “the theories of Marx and the practice of Lenin and Stalin.” His article actually contains some reservations to the effect that there should be no question of “blind and obedient carrying out of orders” which, he says, leads to the Fuehrer Prinzip. He does not seem to have noticed that blind obedience plus the Fuehrer Prinzip are nowhere more in evidence today than in the party to which Professor Bernal's sympathies belong. In short, I believe that much confusion could be avoided if some scientists would stick to their electrons and realize that human beings do not fit into mathematical equations. And this is not an abstract philosophical quarrel, but a burning and very concrete issue on which it depends whether our civilization shall live or die.

**L**ET ME return for the last time to my starting point, the dilemma between expediency and morality. In the course of our discussion the symbolic sledge of Scott's small party has grown into the express train of mankind's progress. On this train expediency is the engine, morality the brake. The action of the two is always antagonistic. We cannot make an abstract decision in favor of one or the other. But we can make temporary adjustments according to the train's progress. Two hundred years ago, during the train's laborious ascent from the stagnant marshes of feudal France towards the era of the Rights of Man, the decision would have been in favor of the engine and against the brake. Since about the second half of the 19th century our ethical brakes have been more and more neglected, until totalitarian dynamism made the engine run amuck. We must apply the brake or we shall crash.

I am not sure whether what the philosophers call “ethical absolutes” exist, but I am sure that we have to act as if they existed. Ethics must be freed from its utilitarian chains; words and deeds must again be judged by their own merits, and not as mere makeshifts to serve distant and nebulous aims. These worm-eaten ladders lead to no paradise. 🍷

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# America the Beautiful

The humanist in the bathtub.

Mary McCarthy

**A** VISITING EXISTENTIALIST wanted recently to be taken to dinner at a really American place. This proposal, natural enough in a tourist, disclosed a situation thoroughly unnatural. Unless the visiting lady's object was suffering, there was no way of satisfying her demand. Sukiyaki joints, chop suey joints, Italian table d'hôte places, French provincial restaurants with the menu written on a slate, Irish chophouses, and Jewish delicatessens came abundantly to mind, but these were not what the lady wanted. Schrafft's or the Automat would have answered, yet to take her there would have been to turn oneself into a tourist and to present America as a spectacle, a *New Yorker* cartoon, or a savage drawing in the *New Masses*. It was the beginning of an evening of humiliations. The visitor was lively and eager; her mind lay open and orderly, like a notebook ready for impressions. It was not long, however, before she shut it up with a snap. We had no recommendations to make to her. With movies, plays, current books, it was the same story as with the restaurants—*Open City*, *Les Enfants du Paradis*, Oscar Wilde, a reprint of Henry James were *paté de maison* to this lady who wanted the definitive flapjack. She did not believe us when we said that there were no good Hollywood movies, no good Broadway plays—only curios; she

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was merely confirmed in her impression that American intellectuals were “negative.”

Yet the irritating thing was that we did not feel negative. We admired and liked our country; we preferred it to that imaginary America, land of the *peaux rouges* of Caldwell and Steinbeck, dumb paradise of violence and the detective story, which had excited the sensibilities of our visitor and of the up-to-date French literary world. But to found our preference, to locate it materially in some admirable object or institution, such as Chartres, say, or French café life, was for us, that night at any rate, an impossible undertaking. We heard ourselves saying that the real America was elsewhere, in the white frame houses and church spires of New England; yet we knew that we talked foolishly—we were not Granville Hicks and we looked ludicrous in his opinions. The Elevated, half a block away, interrupting us every time a train passed, gave us the lie on schedule, every eight minutes. But if the elm-shaded village green was a false or at least an insufficient address for the *genius loci* we honored, where then was it to be found? Surveyed from the vantage point of Europe, this large continent seemed suddenly deficient in objects of virtue. The Grand Canyon, Yellowstone Park, Jim Hill’s mansion in St. Paul, Monticello, the blast furnaces of Pittsburgh, Mount Rainier, the yellow observatory at Amherst, the little-theater movement in Cleveland, Ohio, a Greek revival house glimpsed from a car window in a lost river-town in New Jersey—these things were too small for the size of the country. Each of them, when pointed to, diminished in interest with the lady’s perspective of distance. There was no sight that in itself seemed to justify her crossing of the Atlantic.

If she was interested in “conditions,” that was a different matter. There are conditions everywhere; it takes no special genius to produce them. Yet would it be an act of hospitality to invite a visitor to a lynching? Unfortunately, nearly all the “sights” in America fall under the head of conditions. Hollywood, Reno, the share-croppers’ homes in the South, the mining towns of Pennsylvania, Coney Island, the Chicago stockyards, Macy’s, the Dodgers, Harlem, even Congress, the forum of our liberties, are spectacles rather than sights, to use the term in the colloquial sense of “Didn’t he make a holy spectacle of himself?” An Englishman of almost any political opinion can show a visitor through the Houses of Parliament with a sense of pride or at least of indulgence toward his national foibles and traditions. The American, if he has a spark of national feeling, will be humiliated by the very prospect of a foreigner’s visit to Congress—these, for the most part, illiterate hacks whose fancy vests are spotted with gravy, and whose speeches, hypocritical, unctuous, and slovenly, are spotted also with the gravy of political patronage, these persons are a reflection on the democratic process rather than of it; they expose it in its underwear. In European legislation, we are told, a great deal of shady business goes on in private, behind the scenes. In America, it is just the opposite, anything good, presumably, is accomplished *in camera*, in the committee-rooms.

It is so with all our institutions. For the visiting European, a trip through the United States has, almost inevitably, the character of an exposé and the American, on his side, is

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tempted by love of his country to lock the inquiring tourist in his hotel room and throw away the key. His contention that the visible and material America is not the real or the only one is more difficult to sustain than was the presumption of the “other” Germany behind the Nazi steel.

**T**O SOME EXTENT a citizen of any country will feel that the tourist’s view of his homeland is a false one. The French will tell you that you have to go into their homes to see what the French people are really like. The intellectuals in the Left Bank cafés are not the real French intellectuals, etc. In Italy, they complain that the tourist must not judge by the *ristorantes*; there one sees only black-market types. But in neither of these cases is the native really disturbed by the tourist’s view of his country. If Versailles or Giotto’s bell-tower in Florence do not tell the whole story, they are still not incongruous with it; you do not hear a Frenchman or an Italian object when these things are noticed by a visitor. With the American, the contradiction is more serious. He must, if he is to defend his country, repudiate its visible aspect almost entirely. He must say that its parade of phenomenology, its billboards, super-highways, even its skyscrapers, not only fail to represent the inner essence of his country but in fact contravene it. He may point, if he wishes, to certain beautiful objects, but here too he is in difficulties, for nearly everything that is beautiful and has not been produced by nature belongs to the 18th century, to a past with which he has very little connection, and which his ancestors, in many or most cases, had no part in building. Beacon Street and the Boston Common are very charming in the 18th-century manner, so are the sea captains’ houses in the Massachusetts ports, and the ruined plantations of Louisiana, but an American from Brooklyn or the Middle West or the Pacific Coast finds the style of life embodied in them as foreign as Europe; indeed, the first sensation of a Westerner, coming upon Beacon Hill and the gold dome of the State House, is to feel that at last he has traveled “abroad.” The American, if he is to speak the highest truth about his country, must refrain from pointing at all. The virtue of American civilization is that it is unmaterialistic.

This statement may strike a critic as whimsical or perverse. Everybody knows, it will be said, that America has the most materialistic civilization in the world, that Americans care only about money, they have no time or talent for living; look at radio, look at advertising, look at life insurance, look at the tired business man, at the Frigidaires and the Fords. In answer, the reader is invited first to look into his own heart and inquire whether he personally feels himself to be represented by these things, or whether he does not, on the contrary, feel them to be irrelevant to him, a necessary evil, part of the conditions of life. Other people, he will assume, care about them very much: the man down the street, the entire population of Detroit or Scarsdale, the back-country farmer, the urban poor or the rich. But he accepts these objects as imposed on him by a collective “otherness” of desire, an otherness he has not met directly but whose existence he infers

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from the number of automobiles, Frigidaires, or television sets he sees around him. Stepping into his new Buick convertible, he knows that he would gladly do without it, but imagines that to his neighbor, who is just backing *his* out of the driveway, this car is the motor of life. More often, however, the otherness is projected farther afield, onto a different class or social group, remote and alien. Thus the rich, who would like nothing better, they think, than for life to be a perpetual fishing trip with the trout grilled by a native guide, look patronizingly upon the whole apparatus of American civilization as a cheap Christmas present to the poor, and city people see the radio and the washing-machine as the farm-wife's solace.

**I**T CAN be argued, of course, that the subjective view is prevaricating, possession of the Buick being nine-tenths of the social law. But who has ever met, outside of advertisements, a true parishioner of this church of Mammon? A man may take pride in a car, and a housewife in her new sink or wallpaper, but pleasure in new acquisitions is universal and eternal—an Italian man with a new gold tooth, a French bibliophile with a new edition, a woman with a new baby, a philosopher with a new thought, all these people are rejoicing in progress, in man's power to enlarge and improve. Before men showed off new cars, they showed off new horses; it is alleged against modern man that he did not make the car; but his grandfather did not make the horse either. What is imputed to Americans is something quite different, an abject dependence on material possessions, an image of happiness as packaged by a manufacturer, content in a can. This view of American life is strongly urged by advertising agencies. We know the "others," of course, because we meet them every week in full force in the *New Yorker* or the *Saturday Evening Post*, those brightly colored families of dedicated consumers, waiting in unison on the porch for the dealer to deliver the new car, gobbling the new cereal ("Gee, Mom, is it good for you too?"), lining up to bank their paychecks, or fearfully anticipating the industrial accident and the insurance-check that will "compensate" for it. We meet them also, more troll-like underground, in the subway placards, in the ferociously complacent One-A-Day family, and we hear their courtiers sing to them on the radio of Ivory or Supersuds. The thing, however, that repels us in these advertisements is their naive falsity to life. Who are these advertising men kidding, besides the European tourist? Between the tired, sad, gentle faces of the strangers around us and these grinning Holy Families, there exists no possibility of even a wishful identification. We take a vitamin pill with the hope of feeling (possibly) a little less tired, but the superstition of buoyant health emblazoned in the bright, ugly pictures has no more power to move us than the blood of St. Januarius.

Familiarity has perhaps bred contempt in us Americans: until you have had a washing machine, you cannot imagine how little difference it will make to you. Europeans still believe that money brings happiness, witness the bought journalist, the bought politician, the bought general, the whole venality of European literary life, inconceiv-

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## *America the Beautiful*

able in this country of the dollar. It is true that America produces and consumes more cars, soap, and bathtubs than any other nation, but we live among these objects rather than by them. Americans build skyscrapers; Le Corbusier worships them. Ehrenburg, our Soviet critic, fell in love with the Check-O-Mat in American railway stations, writing home paragraphs of song to this gadget—while deploring American materialism. When an American heiress wants to buy a man, she at once crosses the Atlantic. The only really materialistic people I have ever met have been Europeans.

The strongest argument for the un-materialistic character of American life is the fact that we tolerate conditions that are, from a materialistic point of view, intolerable. What the foreigner finds most objectionable in American life is its lack of basic comfort. No nation with any sense of material well-being would endure the food we eat, the cramped apartments we live in, the noise, the traffic, the crowded subways and buses. American life, in large cities, at any rate, is a perpetual assault on the senses and the nerves; it is out of asceticism, out of un-worldliness, precisely, that we bear it.

**T**HIS REPUBLIC was founded on an unworldly assumption, a denial of “the facts of life.” It is manifestly untrue that all men are created equal; interpreted in worldly terms, this doctrine has resulted in a pseudo-quality, that is, in standardization, in an equality of things rather than of persons. The inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness appear, in practice, to have become the inalienable right to a bathtub, a flush toilet, and a can of Spam. Left-wing critics of America attribute this result to the intrusion of capitalism; right-wing critics see it as the logical dead end of democracy. Capitalism has certainly played its part, mass production in itself demanding large-scale distribution of uniform goods, till the consumer today is the victim of the manufacturer who launches on him a regiment of products for which he must make house-room in his soul. The buying impulse, in its original force and purity, was not nearly so crass, however, or so meanly acquisitive as many radical critics suppose. The purchase of a bathtub was the exercise of a spiritual right. The immigrant or the poor native American bought a bathtub, not because he wanted to take a bath, but because he wanted to be in a *position* to do so. This remains true in many fields today; possessions, when they are desired, are not wanted for their own sakes but as tokens of an ideal state of freedom, fraternity, and franchise. “Keeping up with the Joneses” is a vulgarization of Jefferson’s concept, but it too is a declaration of the rights of man, and decidedly unfeasible and visionary. Where for a European, a fact is a fact, for us Americans, the real, if it is relevant at all, is simply symbolic appearance. We are a nation of twenty million bathrooms, with a humanist in every tub. One such humanist I used to hear of on Cape Cod had, on growing rich, installed two toilets side by side in his marble bathroom, on the model of the two-seater of his youth. He was a clear case of Americanism, hospitable, gregarious, and impractical, a theorist of perfection. Was his dream of the conquest of

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poverty a vulgar dream or a noble one, a material demand or a spiritual insistence? It is hard to think of him as a happy man, and in this too he is characteristically American, for the parity of the radio, the movies, and the washing machine has made Americans sad, reminding them of another parity of which these things were to be but emblems.

The American does not enjoy his possessions because sensory enjoyment was not his object, and he lives sparsely and thinly among them, in the monastic discipline of Scarsdale or the barracks of Stuyvesant Town. Only among certain groups where franchise, socially speaking, has not been achieved, do pleasure and material splendor constitute a life-object and an occupation. Among the outcasts—Jews, Negroes, Catholics, and homosexuals—excluded from the communion of ascetics, the love of fabrics, gaudy show, and rich possessions still anachronistically flaunts itself. Once a norm has been reached, differing in the different classes, financial ambition itself seems to fade away. The self-made man finds, to his anger, his son uninterested in money; you have shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves in three generations. The great financial empires are a thing of the past. Recent immigrants—movie magnates and gangsters particularly—retain their acquisitiveness, but how long is it since anyone in the general public has murmured, wonderingly, “as rich as Rockefeller”?

**I**F THE DREAM of American fraternity had ended simply in this, the value of humanistic and egalitarian strivings would be seriously called into question. Jefferson, the Adamses, Franklin, Madison, would be in the position of Dostoevsky’s Grand Inquisitor, who, desiring to make the Kingdom of God incarnate on earth, inaugurated the kingdom of the devil. If the nature of matter is such that the earthly paradise, once realized, becomes always the paradise of the earthly, and a spiritual conquest of matter becomes always an enslavement of spirit (conquered Gaul conquered Rome), then the atomic bomb is, as has been argued, the logical result of the Enlightenment, and the land of opportunity is, precisely, the land of death. This position, however, is a strictly materialist one, for it asserts the Fact of the bomb as the one tremendous truth: Subjective attitudes are irrelevant; it does not matter what we think or feel; possession again in this case is nine-tenths of the law.

It must be admitted that there is a great similarity between the nation with its new bomb and the consumer with his new Buick. In both cases, there is a disinclination to use the product, stronger naturally in the case of the bomb, but somebody has manufactured the thing, and there seems to be no way *not* to use it, especially when everybody else will be doing so. Here again the argument of the “others” is invoked to justify our own procedures—if we had not invented the bomb, the Germans would have; the Soviet Union will have it in a year, etc., etc. This is keeping up with the Joneses indeed, our national propagandists playing the role of the advertising men in persuading us of the “others” intentions.

It seems likely at this moment that we will find no way of not using the bomb, yet those

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who argue theoretically that this machine is the true expression of our society leave us, in practice, with no means of opposing it. We must differentiate ourselves from the bomb if we are to avoid using it, and in private thought we do, distinguishing the bomb sharply from our daily concerns and sentiments, feeling it as an otherness that waits outside to descend on us, an otherness already destructive of normal life, since it prevents us from planning or hoping by depriving us of a future. And this inner refusal of the bomb is also a legacy of our past; it is a denial of the given, of the power of circumstances to shape us in their mold. Unfortunately, the whole asceticism of our national character, our habit of living in but not through an environment, our alienation from objects, prepare us to endure the bomb but not to confront it.

Passivity and not aggressiveness is the dominant trait of the American character. The movies, the radio, the super-highway have softened us up for the atom bomb; we have lived with them without pleasure, feeling them as a coercion on our natures, a coercion coming seemingly from nowhere and expressing nobody's will. The new coercion finds us without the habit of protest; we are dissident but apart.

The very "negativeness," then, of American intellectuals is not a mark of their separation from our society, but a true expression of its separation from itself. We too are dissident but inactive. Intransigent on paper, in "real life" we conform; yet we do not feel ourselves to be dishonest, for to us the real life is rustling paper and the mental life is flesh. And even in our mental life we are critical and rather unproductive; we leave it to the "others," the best-sellers, to create.

**T**HE FLUCTUATING character of American life must, in part, have been responsible for this dissociated condition. Many an immigrant arrived in this country with the most materialistic expectations, hoping, not to escape from a world in which a man was the sum of his circumstances, but to become a new sum of circumstances himself. But this hope was self-defeating; the very ease with which new circumstances were acquired left insufficient time for a man to live into them: All along a great avenue in Minneapolis the huge chateaux were dark at night, save for a single light in each kitchen, where the family still sat, Swedish-style, about the stove. The pressure of democratic thought, moreover, forced a rising man often, unexpectedly, to recognize that he was *not* his position: A speeding ticket from a village constable could lay him low. Like the agitated United Nations delegates who got summonses on the Merritt Parkway, he might find the shock traumatic: A belief had been destroyed. The effect of these combined difficulties turned the new American into a nomad, who camped out in his circumstances, as it were, and was never assimilated to them. And, for the native American, the great waves of internal migration had the same result. The homelessness of the American, migrant in geography and on the map of finance, is the whole subject of the American realists of our period. European readers see in these writers only violence

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and brutality. They miss not only the pathos but the nomadic virtues associated with it, generosity, hospitality, equity, directness, politeness, simplicity of relations—traits which, together with a certain gentle timidity (as of *unpracticed* nomads), comprise the American character. Unobserved also is a peculiar nakedness, a look of being shorn of everything, that is very curiously American, corresponding to the spare wooden desolation of a frontier town and the bright thinness of the American light. The American character looks always as if it had just had a rather bad hair-cut, which gives it, in our eyes at any rate, a greater humanity than the European, which even among its beggars has an all too professional air.

The openness of the American situation creates the pity and the terror; status is no protection; life for the European is a career; for the American, it is a hazard. Slaves and women, said Aristotle, are not fit subjects for tragedy, but kings, rather, and noble men, men, that is, not defined by circumstance but outside it and seemingly impervious. In America we have, subjectively speaking, no slaves and no women; the efforts of PM and the Stalinized playwrights to introduce, like the first step to servitude, a national psychology of the “little man” have been, so far, unrewarding. The little man is one who is embedded in status; things can be done for and to him generically by a central directive; his happiness flows from statistics. This conception mistakes the national passivity for abjection. Americans will not eat this humble pie; we are still nature’s noblemen. Yet no tragedy results, though the protagonist is everywhere; dissociation takes the place of conflict, and the drama is mute.

This humanity, this plain and heroic accessibility, was what we would have liked to point out to the visiting Existentialist as our national glory. Modesty perhaps forbade and a lack of concrete examples—how could we point to ourselves? Had we done so, she would not have been interested. To a European, the humanity of an intellectual is of no particular moment; it is the barber pole that announces his profession and the hair oil dispensed inside. Europeans, moreover, have no curiosity about American intellectuals; we are insufficiently representative of the brute. Yet this anticipated and felt disparagement was not the whole cause of our reticence. We were silent for another reason: We were waiting to be discovered. Columbus, however, passed on, and this, very likely, was the true source of our humiliation. But this experience also was peculiarly American. We all expect to be found in the murk of otherness; it looks to us very easy since *we* know we are there. Time after time, the explorers have failed to see us. We have been patient, for the happy ending is our national belief. Now, however, that the future has been shut off from us, it is necessary for us to declare ourselves, at least for the record.

**W**HAT it amounts to, in verity, is that we are the poor. This humanity we would claim for ourselves is the legacy, not only of the Enlightenment, but of the thousands and thousands of European peasants and poor townspeople who came here bringing their humanity and their sufferings with them. It is the absence of

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a stable upper class that is responsible for much of the vulgarity of the American scene. Should we blush before the visitor for this deficiency? The ugliness of American decoration, American entertainment, American literature—is not this the visible expression of the impoverishment of the European masses, a manifestation of all the backwardness, deprivation, and want that arrived here in boatloads from Europe? The immense popularity of American movies abroad demonstrates that Europe is the unfinished negative of which America is the proof. The European traveler, viewing with distaste a movie palace or a motorola, is only looking into the terrible concavity of his continent of hunger inverted startlingly into the convex. Our civilization, deformed as it is outwardly, is still an accomplishment; all this had to come to light.

America is indeed a revelation, though not quite the one that was planned. Given a clean slate, man, it was hoped, would write the future. Instead, he has written his past. This past, inscribed on billboards, ball parks, dance halls, is not seemly, yet its objectification is a kind of disburdenment. The past is at length outside. It does not disturb as it does Europeans, for our relation with it is both more distant and more familiar. We cannot hate it, for to hate it would be to hate poverty, our eager ancestors, and ourselves.

If there were time, American civilization could be seen as a beginning, even a favorable one, for we have only to look around us to see what a lot of sensibility a little ease will accrue. The children surpass the fathers and Louis B. Mayer cannot be preserved intact in his descendants. . . . Unfortunately, as things seem now, posterity is not around the corner. 🍷

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# Nietzsche in the Light of Modern Experience

Part I.

Thomas Mann

**W**HEN AT THE BEGINNING of the year 1889 the news began to spread from Turin and Basel of Nietzsche's mental breakdown, many of those, scattered throughout Europe, who already possessed a measure of understanding of the fateful greatness of this man may have repeated to themselves Ophelia's lamentation: "O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!"

And of the characterizations contained in the verses following this, which mourn the terrible misfortune that so lofty an intellect, "blasted by ecstasy," should now ring dissonant like bells out of tune, many fit Nietzsche exactly—not least among them the words in which the grieving heroine epitomizes her praise: "The observ'd of all observers." We ourselves would use the word "fascinating" instead, and, indeed, in all world literature and the history of the human mind, we would seek in vain a personality more fascinating than that of the hermit of Sils Maria. Yet it is a fascination closely related to the one

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THOMAS MANN *was a German novelist who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1929. His books include Buddenbrooks, Death in Venice, and The Magic Mountain.*

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which radiates across the centuries from that great character created by Shakespeare, the melancholy prince of Denmark.

Nietzsche, the thinker and writer, “the mould of form,” as Ophelia would call him, was a personality of phenomenal cultural richness and complexity, summing up all that is essentially European, a personality that had absorbed much from the past, a past which—in more or less conscious imitation and continuation—it recalled, repeated, and made again present in a mythical way; and I have no doubt that the great lover of masquerade was well aware of the Hamlet-like trait in the tragic drama of life he presented—I am tempted to say: enacted.

As far as I, the emotionally absorbed reader and “observer” of the generation after, am concerned, I sensed this relationship early and at the same time I experienced a mixture of feelings that contained, especially for a youthful heart, something very novel, exciting, and engrossing: the mixture of veneration and pity. I have never ceased to experience it. It is tragic pity for an overloaded, overcharged soul that was only called to knowledge, not really born to it, and, like Hamlet, was destroyed by it; for a sensitive, fine, and good soul that needed love and inclined toward noble friendship, that was never meant for loneliness and yet was condemned to just that: the most profound, most frigid loneliness, the loneliness of the criminal; for a spirituality at first deeply pious, entirely destined for reverence and bound to religious tradition, which fate dragged, practically by the hair, into the wild and drunken role of a prophet of barbarically resplendent force, of a hardened conscience, of evil, a role devoid of all piety and raging against the prophet’s own very nature.

**I**T is necessary to take a look at the origins of this mind, to investigate the influences at work in the formation of this personality—influences that worked without the man’s nature having ever resented them as the least bit uncongenial—in order to realize the implausible adventurousness of his life’s course, its complete unpredictability.

Born amid the rusticity of Central Germany in 1844, four years before the attempt at a bourgeois German revolution, Nietzsche stemmed on both his mother’s and father’s side from respectable ministers’ families. Ironically enough, there is in existence a paper written by his grandfather on “The Eternal Duration of Christianity: a Reassurance During the Present Unrest.” His father was something like a courtier, tutor of Prussian princesses, and owed his parish to the patronage of Frederick William IV. Thus a taste for aristocratic forms, moral strictness, a sense of honor, and punctilious love of order were all native to his parents’ home.

After the early death of his father the boy lived in Naumburg, that piously churchgoing and royalist city of civil servants. He is described as “phenomenally well-behaved,” a confirmed prig, serious in a well-bred way and with a pious solemnity that got him the name of “the little pastor.” Well-known is a characteristic anecdote telling how, during

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a cloudburst, he walked home from school with measured and dignified steps—because school regulations made proper deportment in the street obligatory for children. He finished his high-school education brilliantly under the famous monastic discipline at Schulpforta. He was inclined toward theology, and also toward music, but then decided on classical philology and studied that subject in Leipzig under a strict methodologist named Ritschl. He succeeded so well that no sooner had he completed his compulsory military service as an artilleryman than he was called, still practically an adolescent, to an academic chair, and this in the serious and pious, patricianly governed city of Basel.

One gets the impression of a highly gifted and noble normality that assured him, apparently, an impeccable and eminent career. Instead of that, what a drifting into trackless wastes! How he went astray on mortal heights! The expression “to go astray” has now become a moral and spiritual judgment, but it originated in explorer’s language and was used to describe the situation of the traveler who has lost all sense of direction in an uncharted region. It sounds like philistinism to apply this expression to a man who was most certainly not only the greatest philosopher of the late 19th century, but also one of the most fearless of all heroes in the realm of thought. But Jakob Burckhardt, whom Nietzsche looked up to as to a father, was no philistine, and yet he early detected in the mental outlook of his younger friend an inclination—nay more, a determination—to strike out on dangerous paths and go mortally astray. Wisely, Burckhardt separated himself from him, dropped him with a certain indifference that was really self-preservation of the kind we see in Goethe, too....

**W**HAT was it that drove Nietzsche into uncharted heights, that whipped him upward under torments, and made him die a martyr’s death upon the cross of thought? It was his fate—and that fate was his genius. But this genius has still another name. That name is: sickness—which word is to be understood, not in the vague and general sense that makes it so easy to associate with the notion of genius, but in such a specific and clinical application that, once again, one has to risk being suspected of narrow-mindedness and reproached for attempting to depreciate the creative life-work of a spirit which, as verbal artist, thinker, and psychologist, changed the entire atmosphere of its time. But that suspicion would be a misunderstanding. It has been said often, and I say it again: Sickness is something purely schematic. What is important is that to which it is joined, that in which it fulfills itself. What is important is *who* is sick: an ordinary blockhead, in whose case the sickness would, of course, be without any spiritual or cultural meaning, or a Nietzsche, a Dostoevsky. The medical and pathological aspect is *one* aspect of the truth, its naturalistic one so to speak, and anyone devoted to the truth as a whole, and determined to honor it unconditionally, will never let intellectual prudery make him deny any point of view from which it can be seen.

Moebius, a physician, has been widely criticized for writing a book in which, from a specialist’s viewpoint, he presented the story of Nietzsche’s development as the story of

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a progressive paralysis. I have never been able to participate in the indignation over this. In his own way, this man tells nothing but the irrefutable truth.

In the year 1865, at the age of 21, Nietzsche told his friend and fellow student Paul Deussen, later a famous Sanskrit and Vedanta scholar, a curious story. The young man had gone alone on an excursion to Cologne and there hired a public porter to show him the sights of the city. They went around all afternoon, and finally, toward evening, Nietzsche asked his guide to show him a decent restaurant. This fellow—who has in my eyes taken on the guise of a very sinister emissary—conducted him, however, to a house of prostitution. The youth, pure as a maiden, all spirit, all learning, all pious diffidence, suddenly found himself, so he says, surrounded by half a dozen apparitions in spangles and gauze who looked at him expectantly. Straight through their midst, the young musician, philologist, and admirer of Schopenhauer walked, instinctively going to a piano he spied in the back of the fiendish salon and in which he saw (these are his words) “the only being in the company with a soul”; and he struck a few bars. This snapped the spell he was under, the petrification, and he regained the open, he was able to flee.

The next day he must surely have laughed when he told his friends of this experience. He was not conscious of the impression it had made on him. Yet it was nothing more and nothing less than what psychologists call a *trauma*, a shock whose increasing aftereffects, never thereafter abandoning his fantasy, testified to the susceptibility of the saint to sin. In the fourth part of *Zarathustra*, written twenty years later, an orientalizing poem is to be found, in the chapter “Among the Daughters of the Desert,” whose shocking facetiousness reveals, with excruciatingly bad taste, a mortified sensuality whose inhibitions were already crumbling. In this poem about “dearest little lady friends and girl-cats, Dudu and Zuleika,” an erotic daydream whose humor is painful, the “fluttering and spangled skirts” of those professional ladies of Cologne are again present—still present. The “apparitions in spangles and gauze” of those days evidently served as models for the delectable daughters of the desert; and it is not far from them—only four years—to the Basel clinic where the patient stated for the record that in previous years he had twice contracted a specific infection. The Jena case history gives the year 1866 for the first of these mishaps. Thus, one year after he fled from that house in Cologne, he had returned, this time without diabolic guidance, to a similar place and there contracted—some say deliberately, as self-punishment—that which was to sap, but also enormously to intensify, his life—even more, that which was to stimulate and irritate, in part for good, in part for evil, an entire epoch.

**W**HAT made him after a few years yearn to leave his academic position in Basel was a mixture of growing ill-health and a craving for liberty, both of which were fundamentally the same thing. The youthful admirer of Richard Wagner and Schopenhauer had at an early age proclaimed art and philosophy to be the true

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guides of life—in opposition to history, of which philology, his own special subject, was a part. He turned away from the latter, got himself pensioned off on the score of illness, and from then on lived without any ties in cosmopolitan spots in Italy, Southern France, and the Swiss Alps. There he wrote his books, dazzling in style, glittering with bold insults against his age, increasingly radical in psychology, and gleaming with an ever more intense white-hot light. In his correspondence he calls himself “a person who desires nothing more than to lose some comforting belief each day that passes, who seeks and finds his happiness in a liberation of the spirit that increases daily. It may be that I *want* to be even more of a free spirit than I am *able* to be!” This is a confession that was made very early, as early as 1876; it is an anticipation of his fate, of his breakdown; the pre-science of a man who was to be driven to take upon himself knowledge more cruel than his mind could stand and who was to offer the world the spectacle of a deeply moving self-crucifixion.

He might well have written under his life’s work, as did a famous painter: “*In doloribus pinxi.*” He would have been speaking the truth in more than one sense, in a spiritual as well as a physical one. In 1880 he confesses to a physician, Dr. Eiser: “My existence is a terrible burden: I would have thrown it off long ago, were it not that it is precisely in this state of suffering and of almost absolute abnegation that I make the most instructive of all investigations and experiments in the spiritual and ethical field.... Continuous pain, for several hours of the day a feeling closely akin to seasickness, a partial paralysis during which I have difficulty speaking, and, for a change, furious attacks (the last one forced me to vomit for three days and three nights—I longed for death).... If I could only describe to you the *continuousness* of this sensation, the constant pain and pressure in my head, on my eyes, and that total feeling as though I were paralyzed from head to foot!...”

It is hard to understand his seemingly complete ignorance—and that of his physicians on top of it!—of the nature and source of these sufferings. Gradually the fact that they came from his brain became a certainty, and he thought himself victim of a hereditary affliction: His father, he observes, perished from “softening of the brain”—which was certainly not true. Pastor Nietzsche died as the result of a mere accident, from a brain injury caused by a fall. Nietzsche’s total ignorance of the origin of his illness, or his dissimulation of its knowledge, can be explained only by the fact that the illness itself was entwined and connected with his genius, that the latter unfolded along with it—and that for a psychologist of genius *everything* can become the object of merciless knowledge—save only his own genius.

**H**IS own genius was the object, rather, of astounded admiration, exultant self-confidence, crass *hybris*. In all naivety Nietzsche glorified the ecstatic reverse side of his sufferings, those euphoric indemnifications and over-compensations that all belonged to the picture. He does this most magnificently in that almost completely unin-

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hibited late work *Ecce Homo*—there where he praises the fabulously uplifted physical and mental state in which, in such an incredibly short time, he created his Zarathustra poem. This particular page is a masterpiece of style, a genuine verbal *tour de force*, comparable only to passages like the magnificent analysis of the Meistersinger prelude in *Beyond Good and Evil* and the Dionysian picture of the cosmos at the end of *The Will to Power*. “Does anybody,” he asks in *Ecce Homo*, “at the end of the 19th century have any notion of what the poets of *strong* epochs called inspiration? If not I’ll describe it.” And then he launches into a description of revelations, ecstasies, elevations, whisperings, divine sensations of force and power, that he cannot but look upon as something atavistic, a demoniac throw-back belonging to other, “stronger” stages of human existence that were closer to God, beyond the psychic possibilities of our own weakling and rational age. And yet “in truth”—but what is truth: the experience itself, or medical science?—all he describes is the deleterious state of over-stimulation that mockingly precedes paralytic collapse.

Everybody will admit that it is a hysterical exaggeration of self-esteem, an exaggeration that reveals his slipping reason, when Nietzsche calls his *Zarathustra* an achievement compared to which all other human accomplishments seem poor and limited, when he claims that a Goethe, a Shakespeare, a Dante would never have been able to draw breath for even a moment on the heights of this book, and that the genius and the goodness of all great souls put together would never have been capable of producing one of Zarathustra’s orations. Of course it must be a great pleasure to write down things like this, but I find them impermissible.

And then again it may be that I am only confirming my own limitations when I go on to confess that for me Nietzsche’s relation to his Zarathustra work seems in any case to be one of blind overestimation. Because of its biblical flavor, it has become the most “popular” of his books, but it is not his best one by far. Nietzsche was above all a great critic and philosopher of civilization, a European prose writer and essayist of the highest rank, who came out of Schopenhauer’s school; his genius reached its peak at the time of *Beyond Good and Evil* and *The Genealogy of Morals*. Many a poet may amount to less than such a critic, but it was this very lesserness that Nietzsche lacked, except in certain admirable lyrical moments that never sufficed for an extensive work of creative imagination. This faceless and formless monster, this tall, stately Zarathustra, with a rose crown of laughter on his unrecognizable head, with his “Grow hard!” and his dancer’s legs, is no creation; he is rhetoric, agitated verbal wit, tortured voice, and dubious prophecy, a phantom of helpless *grandezza*, affecting at times but most often painful to watch—a monstrosity bordering on the ridiculous.

When I say this, I remember the desperate cruelty with which Nietzsche spoke about many, really about all the things he revered: about Wagner, about music in general, about morals, about Christianity—I nearly said: also about all things German—and how even in his most furiously critical outbreaks against these values and forces, which deep within

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his innermost self he respected, he never, obviously, had the feeling of really doing them harm, but seemed to feel rather that the most awful insults he hurled at them were a form of homage. He said such things about Wagner that we cannot believe our eyes when suddenly we find him talking in *Ecce Homo* about the “holy hour” in which Richard Wagner died in Venice. How is it, we ask with tears in our eyes, that this hour of death all of a sudden became “holy,” if Wagner was the appalling ham-actor, the debauched debaucher, Nietzsche a hundred times described him as?

He excused himself to his friend, the musician Peter Gaest, for his constant preoccupation with Christianity: Really it was, he claimed, the best piece of idealistic life he had ever known. After all, he said, he was descended from generations of Christian ministers and did not think that he had “ever in his heart vilified Christianity.” No, but in a hysterical voice he had called it “the one immortal stain of dishonor upon humanity”—not without making fun at the same time of the contention that the primitive German had in some way or other been pre-formed or predestined for Christianity: that lazy but warlike and rapacious bearskin-loafer, that sensuously cold lover of the hunt, that beer-drinker who had barely progressed as far as a halfway decent red Indian’s religion, and who no more than ten hundred years ago had slaughtered human beings on sacrificial stones—what affinity could he have had for the highest type of moral subtlety, sharpened as it was by rabbinical intellect, what affinity for the Oriental refinement of Christianity! His allocation of judgments is clear and amusing. To his autobiography, “Antichrist” gives the most Christian of all titles: *Ecce Homo*. And the last scribblings of insanity are signed “The Crucified.”

ONE can say that Nietzsche’s relation to his favorite objects of criticism was fundamentally that of passion: It was a passion basically without a definite denomination, since the negative constantly changed over into the positive. Shortly before the end of his intellectual life he wrote a page about *Tristan* that vibrated with enthusiasm. On the other hand, at the time when his devotion to Wagner was at its apparent peak, just before writing his festival address, *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, for the public, he had already made remarks about *Lohengrin* to intimate friends in Basel—remarks of such detached perspicacity that they anticipated by one and a half decades the *Case of Wagner*.

There is *no* sharp break in Nietzsche’s relation to Wagner, no matter what one may say. The world always likes to see such breaks in the works and lives of great men. It found such a break in Tolstoy, where everything is iron consistency, where everything that came later was already psychologically formed earlier. It found such a break in Wagner himself, in whose development there reigned the same uninterrupted continuity and logic. It was no different with Nietzsche. No matter that his works, largely aphoristic, glitter with a thousand colorful facets, no matter that many superficial contradictions can be shown in him—he was all there from the very beginning, was always the same; and the writings

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of the youthful professor, his *Thoughts Out of Season*, his *Birth of Tragedy*, his essay “The Philosopher” of 1873, not only contain the seeds of his later doctrine, but this doctrine itself, a *joyful* one in his opinion, is already contained in them, finished and complete. What changes is only the emphasis, which constantly grows more frenetic, the pitch of his voice, which constantly grows shriller, the gestures, which constantly grow more grotesque and terrible. What changes is the way of writing, which, very musical from the beginning, degenerates gradually from the dignified discipline and somewhat old-fashioned restraint of German humanistic tradition into a weirdly mundane and hysterically cheerful super-pamphleteering style that in the end adorns itself with the cap and bells of a cosmic jester.

The completely unified and compact character of Nietzsche’s *oeuvre* cannot be stressed enough. Like Schopenhauer, whose disciple he remained even after he had long denied this master, he really spent his whole life in varying, extending, and driving home one *single* omnipresent thought; this latter, altogether sound in the beginning and undeniably justified in its criticism of the age, fell prey in the course of time to such maenadic brutalization that Nietzsche’s story can be called the story of the decline of this thought.

**W**HAT is this thought?—In order to understand it, we must analyze it right down to its ingredients, right down to its conflicting parts. Listed haphazardly, they are: life, *culture*, consciousness or cognition, art, nobleness, morality, instinct. The concept of culture dominates this complex of ideas. It is posited as almost equal to life itself: culture, that is the nobility of life, and connected with culture as its sources and determining conditions are art and instinct, whilst consciousness and cognition, science, and finally morals, figure as the mortal enemies and destroyers of culture. Morality, as the preserver of truth, kills life, because life rests essentially on appearance, art, deception, perspective, and illusion, and because error is the father of all that lives.

From Schopenhauer he inherited the proposition that “life as image alone, beheld in its purity or reproduced by art, is a meaningful drama,” i.e. life can be justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon. Life is art and appearance, no more, and therefore *wisdom* (as the end of culture and life) stands higher than the *truth* (which is a matter of morality). It is a tragic, ironic kind of wisdom, which by artistic instinct sets limits to science for the sake of culture, and which defends life as the ultimate value in two directions: against the pessimism of those who slander life and uphold the hereafter or Nirvana—and against the optimism of the rationalizers and social reformers prattling about earthly happiness for all and about justice, and preparing the way for the socialist slave uprising. This tragic wisdom, which blesses life in all its falsity, hardness, and cruelty, Nietzsche baptized with the name of Dionysius.

The name of the drunken god first appears in that aesthetic-mystical book of his youth, *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, in which the Dionysian as an artistic state and mental attitude is opposed to the artistic principle of Apollonian detachment and objectivity, much in the same way that Schiller contrasted the “naive” to the “sentimental” in

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his famous essay. Here we hear for the first time about the “theoretical man,” and a hostile stand is taken against Socrates, the archetype of this theoretical man: against Socrates, the despiser of instinct, the glorifier of consciousness, who taught that only what is conscious can be good, the enemy of Dionysius and the assassin of tragedy. According to Nietzsche, Socrates was the source of a scientific Alexandrine civilization, pale, scholastic, alien to myth, alien to life, a civilization in which optimism and faith in reason reigned supreme; the source, likewise, of practical and theoretical utilitarianism, which, like democracy itself, is a symptom of declining powers and physiological fatigue. The human being of this Socratic, anti-tragical civilization, the theoretical man, pampered as he is by optimistic contemplation, no longer wants to take anything *entirely*, in all the natural cruelty that belongs to things. But, as the young Nietzsche convinced himself, the time of the Socratic man was over. A new generation, heroic, bold, contemptuous of sickly doctrine, was entering upon the stage; a gradual awakening of the Dionysian spirit was to be perceived in the contemporary world, the world of 1870; out of the Dionysian depths of the German spirit, of German music, of German philosophy, tragedy was being reborn.

LATER he despairingly made fun of his onetime faith in the German spirit, and of everything he had read into it—namely, himself. He himself, in fact, was already completely contained in this as yet mild and humane, still romantically colored prelude to his philosophy. And his world perspective, his glance at the total picture of Western civilization, was already there, too, even though he was then primarily concerned with the German culture in whose high mission he believed, but which he saw in the gravest danger of betraying this mission through Bismarck’s establishment of a power state, through politics, democratic leveling-down, and smug satiety with victory. His brilliant diatribe against the theologian David Strauss’ senile and cheerful book, *The Old and the New Faith*, is the most immediate example of this criticism of a philistinism of saturation, which was threatening to rob the German spirit of all its depth. And there is something deeply moving in the way the young thinker at this point already sends prophetic glances ahead to his own fate, which seems to lie before him like a tragic map. I refer to the passage in which he mocks at the ethical cowardice of Strauss, that vulgar enlightener who, he says, takes good care not to deduce any *moral precepts for life* from his own Darwinism, from the *bellum omnium contra omnes*, and from the superior rights of the strong, but instead contents himself with violent outbursts against preachers and miracles in which he always has the philistines on his side. He himself—he already knows this deep down inside himself—will do the ultimate, and not even shy away from madness, in order to turn the philistines *against* him.

IT IS in the second of the *Thoughts Out of Season*, entitled “On the Benefit and Harm of History to Life,” that that basic thought of his life which I mentioned above is most perfectly pre-formed, even though still clothed in a specific criticism. This

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admirable essay is fundamentally nothing but one great variation on that passage from *Hamlet* which mentions the “native hue of resolution” that “is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought.” The title is incorrect insofar as there is hardly any mention of the benefits of history—all the more does he talk, however, of its harm to life, dear, holy, aesthetically justified life.

The 19th century has been called the historical age, and indeed it was the first to create and develop that sense of history of which former civilizations, just *because* they were civilizations—artistically self-contained systems of life—knew little or nothing. Nietzsche goes so far as to speak of a “historical disease” that paralyzes life and its spontaneity. Education—today that means historical education. But the Greeks had known no historical education of any kind, and one would hesitate no doubt to call the Greeks uneducated. History for the sake of pure knowledge, carried on without life itself as its aim and without the counterweight of “plastic giftedness,” creative uninhibitedness, is murderous, is death. An historical phenomenon as an object of cognition—is dead.

A scientifically cognized religion, for example, is doomed, is finished. An historically critical treatment of Christianity, Nietzsche says with conservative solicitude, dissolves it into sheer knowledge of Christianity. In examining religion from the point of view of history, he says, “there come to light things that necessarily destroy the reverential mood of illusion in which alone all things that want to live can do so.” Only in love, shaded by the illusion of love, does man *create*. History must be treated as a work of art in order to make it contribute creatively to civilization—yet that would run contrary to the analytical and un-artistic trend of the times. History banishes our instincts. Educated, or miseducated, by it, man is no longer able to “loosen the reins” and act naively, trusting in the “divine animal.”

History always undervalues the becoming and paralyzes action, which must again and again do violence to objects of piety. What history teaches and creates is *justice*. But life does not need justice, it needs injustice, it is essentially unjust. “A great deal of strength is required,” Nietzsche says (and it is doubtful whether he credited himself with this strength), “to be able to live and forge: to what extent living and being unjust are one.” Yet everything depends on forgetting. He wants the unhistorical: the art and power of being able to *forget* and to confine oneself within a limited horizon—a demand more easily made than met, we might add. For we are born with a limited horizon, and to confine ourselves within it artificially is an aesthetic masquerade and a repudiation of destiny out of which it would be hard for anything genuine and worthwhile to come.

But, very beautifully and nobly, Nietzsche wants our gaze to turn away from becoming and direct itself toward that which gives to existence the character of the eternal and permanent, toward art and religion. The enemy is science, for all it sees and knows is history and becoming, nothing permanent, eternal; it hates forgetting as being the death of knowledge and seeks to erase all the limitations of our horizon. But everything that lives

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needs a protective atmosphere, a mysterious zone of mist, and an enveloping illusion. A life dominated by science is much less life than one dominated, not by knowledge, but by instinct and *mighty hallucinations*. . . .

Today “mighty hallucinations” makes us think of Sorel and his book *Sur la violence*, in which proletarian syndicalism and fascism are still one, and the mass myth, regardless of its truth or untruth, is declared to be the indispensable motor of history. We ask ourselves, however, whether it might not be better to preserve respect for reason and truth among the masses and at the same time honor their demand for justice, rather than plant mass myths and let loose upon humanity mobs dominated by “mighty hallucinations.” Who does that today and for what purpose? Certainly not for the sake of civilization.

But Nietzsche knows nothing of masses and wants to know nothing of them. “The devil with them,” he says, “and statistics too!” He desires and proclaims a time in which one will un-historically and super-historically wisely refrain from making any sort of interpretive constructions from world processes, or from human history either; in which one will pay no more heed to the masses, but only to great individuals, timeless contemporaries of each other, who carry on their spiritual discourse high above the bustle of history. The goal of humanity, he says, lies not at its end, but in its highest representatives. That is his individualism: an aesthetic cult of the genius and hero that he took from Schopenhauer, together with the insistence that happiness is impossible and a *heroic* life is the only thing worthy and possible for the individual. Transformed by Nietzsche, and taken together with his adulation of the powerful and beautiful life, this resulted in a heroic aestheticism whose protective deity he proclaimed to be Dionysius, the god of tragedy. It is just this Dionysian aestheticism that made the later Nietzsche the greatest critic and psychologist of morality known in the history of the human mind.

**H**E WAS born to be a psychologist; psychology is his original passion: Knowledge and psychology, these are for him fundamentally one and the same passion, and it characterized the entire inner contradictoriness of this great and suffering spirit that he, who valued life far above knowledge, was so completely and hopelessly caught in psychology. He was already a psychologist on the basis of Schopenhauer’s finding that the will does not issue from the intellect, but vice versa, that intellect is not primary and dominating, but the will, to which the intellect’s relation is purely one of servitude. The intellect as a servile tool of will: that is the fount of all psychology, a psychology of suspiciousness and exposure; and Nietzsche, as spokesman for life, abandoned himself to a psychology of morals, suspecting all “good” urges of originating in bad ones, and proclaiming the “evil” ones to be those that ennoble and exalt life. This is “the trans-valuation of all values.”

What used to be called Socratism, “the theoretical man,” consciousness, the historical sickness, Nietzsche simply called “morality,” and “Christian morality” in particular,

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which was revealed as something completely poisonous, rancorous, and hostile to life. But at this point it should not be forgotten that Nietzsche's criticism of morality was somewhat impersonal in part, something that belonged to his time in general.

The time itself was that around the turn of the century, the time of the first assault of the European intellectuals upon the hypocritical morality of the Victorian bourgeois era; Nietzsche's furious battle against morality fitted into this picture to a certain extent—often indeed with an astounding family resemblance. It is astonishing to note the close affinity of many of Nietzsche's aperçus with the contemporaneous and by no means merely frivolous attacks upon morality with which Oscar Wilde, the English aesthete, shocked his public and made it laugh. When Wilde declares: "For, try as we may, we cannot get behind the appearance of things to reality. And the terrible reason may be that there is no reality in things apart from their appearances"; when he speaks of the "truth of masks" and of the "decay of lies," when he exclaims: "To me beauty is the wonder of wonders. It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible"; when he calls truth something so personal that two spirits can never honor one and the same truth; when he says: "Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind, and poisons us.... The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it"; and: "Don't be led astray into the paths of virtue!"—all this might very well stand in Nietzsche's own writings. And one reads in the latter: "Seriousness, that unmistakable sign of a troublesome metabolism."—"The lie sanctifies itself and the will to deceive has a clear conscience on its side in art."—"We are basically inclined to maintain that the most incorrect judgments are the ones most indispensable to us."—"It is no more than a moral prejudice that truth is worth more than appearance." There is not a single one of these sentences that could not appear in one of Oscar's comedies "and get a laugh in St. James's Theatre." When people wanted to praise Wilde very highly, they compared his plays to Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*. Much of Nietzsche seems to stem from this same school.

**O**F COURSE to juxtapose Nietzsche to Wilde has something almost sacrilegious about it, for the latter was a dandy, while the German philosopher was something like a saint of immorality. And yet, with his more or less deliberate martyrdom in *Reading Gaol* at his life's end, Wilde's dandyism won a trace of sanctity that would have awakened Nietzsche's entire sympathy. What reconciled him with Socrates was the cup of hemlock, the end, the sacrificial death, and he believed that the impression this made on Greek youth and on Plato could not be overestimated. And his hatred of historical Christianity left the personality of Jesus of Nazareth untouched—again for the sake of the end, for the sake of the cross that he loved in his inmost heart and toward which he himself strode deliberately.

His life was intoxication and suffering—a highly artistic state, in mythological terms the union of Dionysius with the Crucified. Swinging the thyrsus, he ecstatically glorified

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the strong and beautiful, the amorally triumphant life, and defended it against atrophy at the hands of the intellect—and at the same time he paid homage to suffering as did none other. “The *order of rank* is determined,” he says, “by how deeply a man can suffer.” These are not the words of an anti-moralist. Nor is there any anti-moralism in it when he writes: “As far as pain and renunciation are concerned, the life of my last years can measure up to that of any ascetic of any age.” But he did not write this as a plea for sympathy—rather with pride: “I *want*,” he says, “to have it as hard as any man can possibly have it.” He made things hard for himself, hard to the point of sanctity; for Schopenhauer’s saint always remained ultimately the highest type for him, and the “heroic life” was the life of the saint.

What defines the saint? That he does not do a single one of all the things he would like to do, and does all the things he does not want to do. That is how Nietzsche lived: “Renouncing everything I revered, renouncing reverence itself. . . . Thou must become master over thyself, master also over thine own virtues.” This is the “act of vaulting over oneself” that Novalis mentions somewhere and which, he thinks, is the supreme deed under any circumstances. Now this “act” (a stage-performer’s and acrobat’s expression) has for Nietzsche nothing at all of exuberant or terpsichorean *expertise*. Anything “terpsichorean” in his attitude is vacillation and disagreeable to an extreme. It is much rather a bloody kind of self-mutilation, self-mortification, moralism. His very concept of truth is ascetic: For to him truth is what hurts, and he would be suspicious of any truth that was pleasant. “Among the powers,” he says, “raised up by our morality was truthfulness: which, turning itself against morality in the end, discovers its own teleology, its own *prejudiced* mode of observation. . . .” His “immoralism” is thus the self-cancellation of morality for the sake of truthfulness. But he hints that this is itself a kind of exaggeration and luxuriance of morality by speaking of an inherited wealth of morality that could well afford to squander and throw away a great deal without becoming noticeably impoverished thereby.

**A**LL this lies behind those atrocities and drunken messages of power, violence, cruelty, and political trickery into which his idea of life as a work of art and his idea of culture as something unreflective and dominated by instinct, so brilliantly degenerate in his later writings. When a Swiss critic, on the Bund in Bern, wrote once that Nietzsche was making a plea for the abolition of all decent feelings, the philosopher was completely flabbergasted at being so utterly misunderstood. “Much obliged!” he said scornfully. For he had meant it all very nobly and humanitarily, in the sense of a higher, deeper, prouder, *more beautiful* humanity, and he had not, so to speak, “meant any harm”—at any rate nothing evil, even if a lot of wickednesses. For everything that has depth is wicked; life itself is profoundly wicked—it is not contrived by morality, it knows nothing of “truth,” but rests on appearances and artistic lies, it mocks virtue, for its essence is iniquity and exploitation. And, says Nietzsche, there is a pessimism of strength,


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an intellectual predilection for the hard, horrible, wicked, and problematical in our existence that arises from well-being, from the fullness of existence. This “well-being,” this “fullness of existence,” the euphoric sick man ascribes to himself and he takes it upon himself to proclaim as most worthy of affirmation those aspects of life which have until now been denied, especially by Christianity. Life above all!—why? He never said.

**H**E NEVER gave any reason why life should be something worthy of unconditional adoration and of preservation above all else, but declared only that life goes beyond knowledge, *for* with life knowledge destroys itself. Knowledge presupposes life and therefore is interested in it for the sake of self-preservation. It would seem therefore that there must be life in order for there to be something to know. But this logic does not strike us as sufficient to justify his enthusiastic championship of life. If he saw life as the creation of a God, then we would have to respect his piety, even though personally we might find little inducement to fall flat on our faces before the exploded cosmos of modern physics. But instead he sees life as a massive and senseless offspring of the will to power, and it is just its senselessness and colossal immorality that should throw us into raptures. His cry of adoration is not “Hosanna!” but “Evoe!”—though the voice sounds unusually broken and tortured. The cry is supposed to deny that there is anything in man that transcends the biological, anything that does not expend itself completely in its investment in life; to deny also the possibility of detachment from this investment, a critical detachment—which is perhaps what Nietzsche calls “morality” and which will never indeed seriously do harm to dear life (life is much too incorrigible for that) but might nevertheless serve as a gentle corrective and sharpener of the conscience, which is all that Christianity ever did.

“There is no fixed point outside life,” says Nietzsche, “from which one may reflect on existence, no superior authority before whom life could be *ashamed* of itself.” Really not? One has the feeling that such an authority is present, and if it is not morality, then it is simply the spirit of man, humanity itself as criticism, irony, and liberty, united to the judging word. “Life is subordinate to no judge”? Yet somehow nature and life rise above themselves in man, in him they lose their innocence, they take on *spirit*—and spirit is the self-criticism of life. This humane something within us looks with doubtful sympathy on a “doctrine of the healthy life” which, though in sober days directed only against the sickness of historicity, later degenerated into bacchantic rage against truth, morality, religion, humaneness, and everything else that might serve passably to domesticate ferocious life. 

*(Continued in part two on the following pages.)*

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# Part II

FEBRUARY 1948

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**A**S FAR as I can see, there are two mistakes that warp Nietzsche's thinking and become fatal to it. The first error is a complete and, we must assume, a willful misconception of the relationship of power between instinct and intellect on earth, as if the latter were dangerously in the dominance and it were high time to save instinct from it. If one considers how completely will, impulse, and self-interest dominate and suppress intellect, reason, and the sense of justice in the great majority of people, the opinion that intellect must be overcome by instinct becomes absurd. This opinion can be explained only historically, by a momentary philosophical situation needing a corrective to saturation with rationalism, and it immediately demands a counter-correction.

As though it were necessary to defend life against spirit! As though there were the slightest danger that things on earth would ever become too spiritual! The simplest generosity should be enough to make us shield and protect the weak little flame of reason, of spirit, of justice, instead of aligning ourselves with power and instinctual life and indulging in a corybantic overestimation of life's "negated" side, crime—the idiocy of which we contemporaries have just experienced. Nietzsche behaved—and in doing so he has caused a great deal of harm—as though it were moral consciousness that, like Mephistopheles, threatened life with its cold, Satanic fist. For my part, I can see nothing particularly Satanic in the idea (an old idea of mystics) that life might one day be eliminated by the human spirit—something still a long, an interminably long, way off. The danger that life of itself will eliminate itself from this planet by perfecting the atomic bomb is considerably greater. But even that is improbable. Life is a cat with nine lives, and so is humanity.

**T**HE second of Nietzsche's errors is the utterly false opposition he sets up between life and morality. The truth is that they belong together. Ethics support life, and a moral man is a real citizen of life—perhaps a little boring but extremely useful. The real opposition is between ethics and *aesthetics*. Not morality, but beauty is bound up with death, as many poets have said and sung—and how should Nietzsche have not known that "When Socrates and Plato started talking about truth and justice," he says somewhere, "they were Greeks no longer, but Jews—or I don't know what." Well, thanks to their morality, the Jews have proven themselves to be good and tenacious children of life. They, together with their religion, their faith in a just God, have survived thousands

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of years, whereas that dissolute little nation of aesthetes and artists, the Greeks, very quickly disappeared from the scene of history.

But Nietzsche, though far from any kind of racial anti-Semitism, does indeed see in Judaism the cradle of Christianity and in the latter, justly but with revulsion, the germ of democracy, of the French Revolution, and of those hateful “modern ideas” that his resounding prose brands as the morality of herd-animals. “Shopkeepers, Christians, cows, women, Englishmen, and other democrats,” he says, for he sees the origins of “modern ideas” in England (the French, he claims, were only their soldiers); and what he despises and curses in these ideas is their utilitarianism and their eudaemonism, their elevation of peace and earthly happiness to the highest objects of desire—whereas it is just these base and effeminate values that the noble, tragic, heroic man kicks under his feet.

This latter is inevitably a warrior, hard with himself and with others, ready to sacrifice himself and others. The primary reproach he makes against Christianity is that it has raised the individual to such importance that one could no longer *sacrifice* him. The race, he declares, survives only by human sacrifice and Christianity is a principle that goes counter to natural selection. It has actually lowered and weakened the power, the responsibility, the high obligation to sacrifice human beings; and for thousands of years, until the arrival of Nietzsche, Christianity prevented the development of that energy of greatness which “by breeding—and on the other hand by destroying millions of misfits—shapes the man of the future and does not go to ruin amid the unprecedented misery created by it.”

Who was it that recently had the power to assume this responsibility, who impudently thought themselves capable of such greatness, and unfalteringly fulfilled the high obligation to sacrifice millions of human beings? A horde of megalomaniacal petty bourgeois, at the sight of whom Nietzsche would immediately have succumbed to an extreme case of migraine with all its accompanying symptoms.

**H**E DID not live to see it. Nor did he see another war later than the old-fashioned one of 1870 with its chassepots and needle rifles. He could therefore, out of sheer hatred for the Christian and democratic philanthropic promotion of happiness, luxuriate in a glorification of war that sounds to us today like the babble of an over-excited boy. That a good cause justifies war is much too moralistic for him: It is a good war that justifies any *cause*. “The scale of values by which the various forms of society are judged today,” he writes, “is completely identical with the one that assigns a higher value to *peace* than to war: but this judgment is anti-biological, is itself a spawn of life’s decadence. . . . Life is a consequence of war, society itself a means for war.”

Never a thought that perhaps it might not be a bad idea to try and make something else of society than a means for war. For Nietzsche society is a product of nature that, like life itself, rests on amoral premises; to attack these premises is equivalent to a treacher-

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ous attack on life itself. "One has renounced the great life," he exclaims, "when one has renounced war." And one has also renounced civilization; for, in order to be reinvigorated, the latter must relapse into thorough barbarism and it is vain sentimentality to expect anything more in the way of civilization and greatness from humanity once it has forgotten how to make war.

Nietzsche despised all nationalist narrowness. But this contempt was apparently the esoteric prerogative of a few individuals. For he describes outbreaks of self-sacrificial nationalist power-delirium with a kind of rapture that leaves no doubt that for the nations, the masses, he wants to preserve the "mighty hallucination" of nationalism.

A parenthetical remark is necessary here. We have had the experience that, under certain circumstances, unconditional pacifism can be a more than doubtful thing, that it can be base and deceitful. For years, all over Europe and the world, it was the mask of fascist sympathies; true friends of peace recognized that the Munich pact, which the democracies concluded with fascism in 1938, ostensibly to save all countries from war, was the lowest point of European history. The war against Hitler, or rather the mere readiness for it that would have been enough for their purposes, was ardently desired by the true friends of peace. But if we picture to ourselves—and the picture rises inexorably before our eyes!—how much ruin, in every sense of that word, is caused even by a war fought for the sake of humanity, how much demoralization, and what an unchaining it permits of greedy, egotistical, and anti-social impulses; if, taught by what has already been experienced, we roughly picture to ourselves what the world would look like—will look like—after the next, the third world war—then Nietzsche's rodomontades on the selective function of war as the preserver of civilization appear to us like the fantasies of an inexperienced novice, the child of a long period of peace and security protected by "gilt-edged investments," a period that begins to be bored with itself.

Besides, since he was at the same time predicting with astonishing prophetic foresight a succession of monstrous wars and explosions, yea the age of war *par excellence* ("to which those who come later will look back with envy and awe"), the humanitarian degeneration and castration of humanity apparently did not yet seem to be so dangerously advanced that mankind had to be philosophically incited to selective massacre. Did this philosophy want to eliminate the moral scruples that would stand in the way of the atrocities of the future? Did it want to make sure that humanity would be "in form" for this magnificent future? But all is done with such voluptuousness that, far from calling forth the moral protest it anticipates, it makes us, instead, sick and sorry for the noble spirit here raging wantonly against itself.

When medieval forms of torture are enumerated, described, and recommended with a titillation that has left its traces in contemporary German literature, it is no longer a question of mere education for manliness. It borders on vulgarity when, as a consideration "to console mollicoddles," he speaks of the lesser susceptibility to physical pain of

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lower races—the Negroes for instance. And then, when the song of the “blond beast” is intoned, of “the exulting monster,” the type of man that “returns home, exuberant as after a student’s prank, from the horrid performance of murder, arson, rape, torture,” then the picture of infantile sadism becomes complete and our soul squirms in pain.

It was the romantic Novalis, a spirit kindred to Nietzsche’s, who made the most striking criticism of this attitude. “The ideal of ethics,” he says, “has no more dangerous competitor than the ideal of the strongest power, of the mightiest life, which has also been called (fundamentally very correctly, but very incorrectly interpreted) the ideal of aesthetic greatness. It is the maximum ideal of the barbarian and, unfortunately, in this age of declining civilization it has found very many adherents precisely among the greatest weaklings. This ideal converts man into an animal-spirit, a mixture whose brutal humor is just the thing that has a brutal attraction for weaklings.”

This could not be better said. Did Nietzsche know this passage? We cannot doubt that he did. But he did not let it hinder him in the intoxicated, consciously intoxicated, and therefore not seriously meant, provocations he offered to the “ideal of morality.”

What Novalis calls the ideal of aesthetic greatness, the maximum ideal of the barbarian, man as an animal-spirit, is indeed Nietzsche’s superman. He describes him as the “emanation of a luxuriant excess on the part of humanity, in which a more powerful strain, a higher type of human being makes its appearance, engendered and maintained under different conditions than the average man.”

These are the future masters of the earth, this is the shining type of the tyrant, for whose production democracy is just right, and who, accordingly, must use democracy as his tool and introduce his new morality by linking it in a Machiavellian way with existing ethical law, by masking it under the very words of this law. For this terror-utopia of greatness, power, and beauty would much rather lie than speak the truth—lying requires more intelligence and will-power. The superman is the man “in whom the specific qualities of life—injustice, lies, exploitation—are strongest.”

**I**T WOULD be the greatest inhumanity to meet all these shrill and agonized challenges with contempt and mockery—and it would be sheer stupidity to answer them with moral indignation. We are face to face here with the fate of a Hamlet, a tragic destiny involving a knowledge unbearably deep, a destiny that inspires awe and compassion. “I believe,” Nietzsche says somewhere, “I have correctly divined a few elements in the soul of the supreme man—*it may be that everyone* who divines him correctly *is destroyed.*” He was destroyed by it, and the horrors of his doctrine are too variously pervaded by an infinitely moving, lyrical sorrow, by deeply loving glances, by the notes of a most melancholy yearning that the arid, rainless land of his solitude should feel the dew of love—for scorn or revulsion to dare manifest itself before such an *ecce homo* picture.

Yet our respect for him does indeed find itself somewhat hard-pressed when that

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“socialism of the subjugated castes,” which Nietzsche mocked a hundred times and branded as a poisonous foe of the higher life, in the end demonstrates to us that his superman was nothing but an idealization of the fascist Führer, and that he himself, in all his philosophizing, was pacemaker, co-creator, and idea-prompter of European—of world fascism. Incidentally, I am inclined here to reverse cause and effect and instead of believing that Nietzsche created fascism, to hold that fascism created him—that is to say: Remote at bottom from politics, and being all spirit, he functioned as an infinitely sensitive instrument of expression and registration; his philosophy of power was a presentiment of the rise of imperialism, and like a quivering needle he announced the fascist era of the West in which we now live and shall continue to live for a long time to come, despite our military victory over fascism.

As a thinker who from the very beginning seceded with his entire being from the bourgeois world, he seems to have affirmed the fascist component of the post-bourgeois age and denied the socialist one: because the latter was the moral one and because he confused morality in general with bourgeois morality. But, with all his sensitivity, he was never able to shut out the influence of the socialist element on the future, and it is this fact that is not understood by the socialists who denounce him as a fascist *pur sang*. It is not quite that simple—despite all that can be said for this simplification. One thing is true: His heroic contempt of happiness, which was something very personal and of little political application, misled him into seeing a contemptible desire for the “happiness of herd-animals in a green pasture” in every aspiration to do away with the more ignoble social and economic evils, to do away with avoidable misery on earth. It is no accident that his phrase, “the dangerous life,” was translated into Italian and became a part of Fascist slang. Everything he said in his extreme over-irritation with morality, humaneness, compassion, Christianity, as well as what he said in favor of the beauty of wickedness and in behalf of war and iniquity, was unfortunately well suited for a place in the shoddy ideology of fascism. Aberrations like his “Morality for Physicians,” with its recommendation that the sick be killed and the inferior castrated, his insistence on the necessity of slavery, and in addition to this many of his eugenic recommendations for selection, breeding, and marriage, actually entered into the theory and practice of National Socialism—even though, perhaps, without conscious reference to him.

If the words: “By the fruits of their deeds ye shall know them!” are true, then Nietzsche is in a bad way. In Spengler, his clever ape, the master-man of Nietzsche’s dream becomes the modern “realistic man in grand style,” the piratical and profit-greedy man making his way over dead bodies, the financial magnate, the armament industrialist, the German industrial general director who finances fascism—in short, in Spengler, Nietzsche is taken with stupid literalness and made the philosophical patron of imperialism, of which in reality he understood nothing at all. Otherwise how could he have made plain at every point his contempt for the peddler’s and shopkeeper’s spirit, which he considered pacifistic, and in opposition to it have glorified the heroic spirit of the soldier? The alliance between in-

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dustrialism and militarism, that political unity which is the essence of imperialism, and the fact that it is the profit-making spirit which creates wars—these things his “aristocratic radicalism” never saw.

**W**E SHOULD not let ourselves be deceived: Fascism as a trick to capture the masses, as the ultimate vulgarity and the most miserable cultural hoax that ever made history, is foreign to the very depths of the spirit of that man for whom everything centered around the question: “What is noble?” Fascism lies completely beyond his powers of imagination, and that the German middle class should have confused the Nazi assault with Nietzsche’s dreams of culture renewing barbarism was the grossest of misunderstandings. I am not speaking of Nietzsche’s contemptuous disregard of all nationalism, of his hatred of the “Reich” and the stultifications of German power-politics, or of his qualities as a European, his scorn of anti-Semitism and of the entire racial swindle. What I wish to repeat is that the socialist flavor in his vision of post-bourgeois life is just as strong as the flavor we might call fascist.

What does it mean after all when Zarathustra exclaims: “I beseech you, my brethren, remain true to earth! No longer bury your heads in the sand of heavenly things, but carry it free, an earthly head that gives meaning to the earth!... Lead our vanished virtues back to earth, even as I do—yea, back to life and love: that they may give meaning to the earth, human meaning!”? This means the will to pervade the material with the human, it means materialism of the spirit, it is—in the widest sense of the word—socialism.

Here and there Nietzsche’s concept of civilization shows a strongly socialist coloring, certainly a coloring that is no longer bourgeois. He stands against the cleavage between educated and uneducated, and his youthful loyalty to Wagner signifies this above all: the end of Renaissance civilization, that great bourgeois age; it also means an art for high and low, an end to delights that could not be common to the hearts of all.

It does not testify to enmity toward the workers, it testifies to the contrary, when he says: “Workingmen should learn to feel like soldiers: a compensation, a salary, but not payment. They shall live one day as the middle class does now, but *above* it, distinguishing themselves by their lack of needs, as the *higher* caste, i.e. poorer and simpler, but possessed of power.” And he gave odd instructions on how to make the ownership of private property more moral: “Let all ways of accumulating *small* competences by work be kept open,” he says, “but prevent effortless, sudden enrichment, withdraw from the hands of private individuals and companies all branches of transport and commerce favorable to the amassing of *large* fortunes, and particularly finance—and consider public enemies those who possess too much as well as those who possess nothing.” The man who possesses nothing is a dangerous beast in the eyes of the philosophical small capitalist: that stems from Schopenhauer. How dangerous the man is who possesses too much, is something Nietzsche learned and added himself.

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Around 1875, that is, more than seventy years ago, he prophesied, not exactly with enthusiasm, but simply as the result of victorious democracy, a European league of nations “in which each individual people, its frontiers drawn according to geographical suitability, has the position of a Swiss canton and its separate rights.” At that time the perspective was as yet purely European. In the course of the following decade it expanded into the global and the universal. He spoke of the unified economic administration of the earth as unavoidably imminent. He called for as many international powers as possible—“to get used to a world perspective.” His faith in Europe wavered. “Down at bottom the Europeans imagine that they now represent a higher type of human being on earth. Asiatic men are a hundred times nobler than the Europeans.”

On the other hand he does believe it possible that in the world of the future spiritual influence might rest in the hands of the typical European, who would be a synthesis of the European past in the person of the highest, most spiritual type. “Mastery over the earth—Anglo-Saxon. The German element a good leaven, it does not know how to rule.” Then again he foresees the intermingling of the German and Slavic races, and Germany as a pre-Slavic station in history, preparing the way for a Pan-Slavic Europe. The rise of Russia as a world power is entirely clear to him: “The power shared between Slavs and Anglo-Saxons, with Europe in the role of Greece under the domination of Rome.”

These are striking results for an excursion into world politics made by a mind essentially concerned only with the task laid upon civilization of producing the philosopher, the artist, and the saint. At a distance of almost a century he saw just about what we see today. For the world, the newly forming concept of the world, was a unity, and wherever, in whatever direction this enormous sensibility turned and groped, it sensed the new, the coming, and registered it. Purely intuitively, Nietzsche anticipated the results of modern physics by combatting the mechanistic interpretation of the world, by denying a causally determined world, the classical “laws of nature,” “natural laws,” and the repetition of identical cases. “There is no second time.” Nor is there any calculation according to which a determined cause must be followed by a determined effect. The interpretation of events according to cause and effect is false. What is involved is a struggle between two elements of unequal power, a new distribution of forces whereby the new situation becomes something fundamentally different from the old, and by no means its effect. Dynamics therefore, instead of logic and mechanics.

Nietzsche’s “scientific intuitions,” to paraphrase Helmholtz’s remark about Goethe, have a spiritual tendency, they strain toward something, they fit into his philosophy of power, his anti-rationalism, and serve him in raising life above law—because law as such already has something “moral” in it. Whatever the present fate of this tendency, Nietzsche has been proven right as far as the natural sciences go; for these, “law” has in the meantime been weakened to mere probability, and they have lost a great deal of their faith in the concept of causality.

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**A**S IS the case with every other idea he had, his ideas on physics took Nietzsche right out of the bourgeois world of classical rationality into a new one where he himself became the most alien guest of all because of his ancestry. Any socialism that refuses to give him credit for this arouses one's suspicion that that socialism is far more bourgeois than it is aware of being. The notion of Nietzsche as an aphorist without a central core must be abandoned: his philosophy is just as completely an organized system as Schopenhauer's, developed from one single fundamental, all-pervading thought. But this fundamental and initial idea is, of course, radically aesthetic in nature—which is alone enough to put his insight and thought into inevitable and irreconcilable opposition to any kind of socialism.

In the last analysis there are but two mental and inner attitudes: an aesthetic and a moral one, and socialism is a strictly moral way of looking at the world. Nietzsche, on the other hand, was the most complete and unredeemable aesthete known to the history of the human mind, and his premise, which contains his Dionysian pessimism—i.e. that life can be justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon—applies most exactly to himself, to his life, and to his work as a thinker and poet. Only as an aesthetic phenomenon can this life be justified, understood, honored; consciously, down to the self-mythologization of his last moment and even in insanity, it was an artistic spectacle, not only in its wonderful expression, but also in its innermost essence—a lyrical-tragical drama of the utmost fascination.

It is remarkable enough, though quite comprehensible, that the first form in which the European spirit rebelled against the collective morality of the bourgeois era was aestheticism. It was not without reason that I spoke of Nietzsche and Wilde in one breath—they belong together as rebels, particularly as rebels in the name of beauty, even though the revolt of the German breaker of the law-tablets went incalculably deeper and cost him immensely more in suffering, renunciation, and self-conquest.

**I**HAVE read in the writings of socialist critics, especially Russian ones, that Nietzsche's aesthetic aperçus and judgments were often of an admirable subtlety, but that in matters of political morality he was a barbarian. This distinction is naive, for Nietzsche's glorification of the barbaric is nothing more than an excess of his aesthetic intoxication, and reveals indeed a proximity that we have every reason to ponder well: the proximity of aestheticism and barbarism. Toward the end of the 19th century, their sinister closeness was not yet seen, felt, or feared—otherwise Georg Brandes, a Jew and a liberal writer, could not have come upon the “aristocratic radicalism” of the German philosopher as a new nuance and delivered lectures propagandizing for it: which is evidence of the sense of security still reigning at that time, of the carefreeness of the bourgeois era as it declined toward its close. But it is also evidence that the skilled Danish critic did not take Nietzsche's barbarism seriously, at its face value, and that he understood it *cum grano salis*—in which he was very right.

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Nietzsche's aestheticism, which is a furious denial of the spirit in favor of a beautiful, strong, and wicked life—the self-denial, that is, of a man who suffered deeply from life—infused his philosophical outpourings with something far-fetched, irresponsible, undependable, and passionately playful, an element of deepest irony that foils the understanding of the simpler reader. Not only is that which he offers art—there is an art also in reading him, and no clumsy or straightforward approach is admissible; all sorts of subtlety, irony, and reserve are required in reading him. Anyone who takes Nietzsche at “face value,” literally, anyone who believes him, is lost. His case is, in truth, like Seneca's—Seneca, to whom, he says, one should give ear but never “trust and faith.”

Are examples necessary here? The reader of the *Case of Wagner*, for instance, will find it hard to believe his eyes when, in a letter addressed to the musician Carl Fuchs in 1888, he reads: “You must not take what I say about Bizet seriously; the way I am, Bizet is not even remotely worth consideration. But he is extremely effective as an ironical antithesis to Wagner. . . .” This is all that is left, speaking “confidentially,” of the rapturous eulogy of *Car-men* in the *Case of Wagner*. This is startling, but only the least of it. In another letter to the same correspondent he gives advice on how he could be best written about as a psychologist, an author, and an immoralist: not judging him with “yes” and “no,” but characterizing him with intellectual impartiality. “It is *not* at all necessary, not even *desirable*, to take my side in doing so: on the contrary, a dose of curiosity, as before a strange flower, with a bit of ironical disagreement, would seem to me to be an incomparably *more intelligent* attitude toward me.—Excuse me! I have just written some naive things—a little recipe on how to extricate oneself successfully from something *impossible*. . . .”

Has any author ever *warned* us against himself in a stranger manner? “Anti-liberal to the point of spite,” he called himself. Anti-liberal *because* of spite, because of an urge to provoke, would be more correct. When the hundred days' emperor, Frederick III—the liberal who married an English princess—died in 1888, Nietzsche was affected and depressed, like all German liberals. “He was after all a small glimmer of *free* thought, Germany's last hope. Now begins the regime Stoecker:—I draw the consequences and already *know* that now my *Will to Power* will be confiscated in Germany. . . .”

Well, nothing was confiscated. The spirit of the liberal era was still too strong, everything could still be said in Germany. However, there crops up unexpectedly in Nietzsche's mourning for Frederick something quite plain, simple, unparadoxical—one might say: the truth: the natural love of the spiritual human being, of the writer, for the *freedom* that is the very breath of his life—and all of a sudden the entire aesthetic phantasmagoria of slavery, war, brute force, and lordly cruelty stands somewhere far off as irresponsible play and colorful theory.

All his life he execrates the “theoretical man,” but he himself is the theoretical man *par excellence* and in his purest form; his thinking is an absolute manifestation of his genius, unpragmatical to an extreme, devoid of any pedagogical responsibility, profoundly

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unpolitical. It is, to be honest, *without* relation to life, that dearly beloved life which he defended and raised above every other value. Nietzsche never worried in the least about how his teachings would look in practical, political reality.

The ten thousand doctrinaires of the irrational who, under his shadow, sprouted from the ground like mushrooms all over Germany, worried just as little. Small wonder! For nothing could have been essentially better suited to the German nature than Nietzsche's aesthetical theorizing. True, he flung his sulphurous bolts of criticism against the Germans, too, those "corrupters of European history," and in the end gave them credit for nothing good whatsoever. But who, finally, was more German than he, who so beautifully demonstrated to the Germans once again all those things that have made them a scourge and terror to the world and by which they themselves have been ruined: romantic passion, the urge to let the ego forever expand into the limitless without setting it a fixed object, the will that is free because it has no aim and strays into the infinite? Drunkenness and the suicidal inclination are what Nietzsche called the characteristic vices of the Germans, whose danger lay in everything that fettered the powers of reason and released the passions; "for the German's emotion is directed against his own welfare and is self-destructive like that of the drunkard. Enthusiasm as such is of less value in Germany than elsewhere, for there it is sterile." What does Zarathustra call himself? "Knower of the self—hangman of the self."

**N**IETZSCHE has become historical in more than one sense. He has made history, frightful history, and he did not exaggerate when he called himself "something fatal." For aesthetic effect, though, he did exaggerate his loneliness. He belongs, in an extremely German way, it is true, to a movement general throughout the West—a movement that includes names like Kierkegaard, Bergson, and many others among its adherents, and which is a spiritual and historical rebellion against the faith of the 18th and 19th centuries in classical rationalism. This movement has achieved its object—or has failed to do so only to the degree that its necessary continuation is the reconstitution of human reason on a new basis, the winning of a new notion of humanitarianism that would have more depth to it than the smug, shallow one of the bourgeois age.

The defense of instinct against reason and consciousness was a passing correction. The permanent correction, the eternally necessary one, remains the one exercised on life by the spirit, or, if one so wants, by morality. How time-bound, how theoretical, how inexperienced Nietzsche's romanticizing about wickedness appears to us today! We have learned to know it in all its miserableness and are no longer aesthetic enough to fear professing our faith in the good, or to be ashamed of ideas and guides so banal as truth, liberty, and justice.

The aestheticism under whose banner free spirits revolted against bourgeois morality belongs in the end to the bourgeois age itself. To leave that age behind means going from an aesthetic era to a moral and social one.

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## *Nietzsche in the Light of Modern Experience*

Although Nietzsche's genius has contributed much to the creation of our new atmosphere, an aesthetic philosophy of life is fundamentally incapable of mastering the problems we are now called upon to solve. At one time Nietzsche supposed that *religious* forces might still be strong enough in the future world of his vision to produce an atheistic religion à la Buddha that would glide over denominational differences—and that science itself would have nothing against a new ideal. "But," he adds as a precaution, "this will not be the general love of man!"

**A**ND YET what if it were to be just that? It would not have to be that optimistic and idyllic love of "humankind" to which the 18th century vowed gentle tears—and to which, by the way, civilization owes an enormous progress. When Nietzsche proclaimed: "God is dead"—a decree that meant to him the hardest of all sacrifices—in whose honor, for the sake of whose enhancement did he do this, if not man's? If he was an atheist, then he contrived to be one—no matter how sentimentally pastoral this may sound—because of his love for humankind. He must put up with being called a humanist, just as he must endure having his criticism of morality understood as a last stage of the Enlightenment. The extra-denominational religiousness he mentions I cannot conceive of as other than bound to the idea of man, as a religiously founded and accented humanism that, because of its richness of knowledge and experience, would include everything known about the infernal and demoniac in the esteem it paid to the human mystery.

Religion is reverence, reverence first of all for the mystery that is man. When a new order, new ties, and the adaptation of human society to the requirements of a fateful moment in world history are at stake, then indeed the decisions of conferences, technical measures, and juridical institutions become of little avail, and world government remains a rational utopia. What is necessary first of all is a change in the spiritual climate, a sense of the difficulty and nobility of human existence, an all-pervading, fundamental conviction from which no one will be exempted and which everyone deep inside himself will recognize as his judge. The poet and artist, imperceptibly working down from above and affecting ever wider areas as they go, can contribute something to the creation of this. Yet these things are not taught and made; they are experienced and suffered.

That philosophy is no cold abstraction, but is experience, suffering, and sacrifice for the sake of humanity—this was Nietzsche's knowledge and example. He was driven far afield into grotesque fallacies, but the future was in truth the land of his love, and for posterity, as for us whose youth is incalculably indebted to him, he will stand as a figure, tender, tragic, and venerable, enveloped by the flashing summer lightning that heralds the dawn of a new time. 🍷

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# The Harlem Ghetto: Winter 1948

The vicious cycle of frustration and prejudice.

**James Baldwin**

**H**ARLEM, physically at least, has changed very little in my parents' lifetime or in mine. Now as then the buildings are old and in desperate need of repair, the streets are crowded and dirty, there are too many human beings per square block. Rents are 10 to 58 percent higher than anywhere else in the city; food, expensive everywhere, is more expensive here and of an inferior quality; and now that the war is over and money is dwindling, clothes are carefully shopped for and seldom bought. Negroes, traditionally the last to be hired and the first to be fired, are finding jobs harder to get, and, while prices are rising implacably, wages are going down. All over Harlem now there is felt the same bitter expectancy with which, in my childhood, we awaited winter: It is coming and it will be hard, there is nothing anyone can do about it.

All of Harlem is pervaded by a sense of congestion, rather like the insistent, maddening, claustrophobic pounding in the skull that comes from trying to breathe in a very small room with all the windows shut. Yet the white man walking through Harlem is not at all likely to find it sinister and no more wretched than any other slum.

Harlem wears to the casual observer a casual face; no one remarks that—considering

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JAMES BALDWIN *was the author of the collection of essays* Notes of a Native Son (1955), *among other books.*

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the history of black men and women and the legends that have sprung up about them, to say nothing of the ever-present policemen, wary on the street corners—the face is, indeed, somewhat excessively casual and may not be as open or as careless as it seems. If an outbreak of more than usual violence occurs, as in 1935 or in 1943, it is met with sorrow and surprise and rage; the social hostility of the rest of the city feeds on this as proof that they were right all along, and the hostility increases; speeches are made, committees are set up, investigations ensue. Steps are taken to right the wrong, without, however, expanding or demolishing the ghetto. The idea is to make it less of a social liability, a process about as helpful as make-up on a leper. Thus, we have the Boys' Club on West 134th Street, the playground at West 131st and Fifth Avenue; and, since Negroes will not be allowed to live in Stuyvesant Town, Metropolitan Life is thoughtfully erecting a housing project in the center of Harlem called Riverton; however, it is not likely that any but the professional class of Negroes—and not all of them—will be able to pay the rent.

**M**OST of these projects have been stimulated by perpetually embattled Negro leaders and by the Negro press. Concerning Negro leaders, the best that one can say is that they are in an impossible position and that the handful motivated by genuine concern maintain this position with heartbreaking dignity. It is unlikely that anyone acquainted with Harlem seriously assumes that the presence of one playground more or less has any profound effect upon the psychology of the citizens there. And yet it is better to have the playground; it is better than nothing; and it will, at least, make life somewhat easier for parents who will then know that their children are not in as much danger of being run down in the streets. Similarly, even though the American cult of literacy has chiefly operated to provide only a market for the *Readers' Digest* and the *Daily News*, literacy is still better than illiteracy; so Negro leaders must demand more and better schools for Negroes, though any Negro who takes this schooling at face value will find himself virtually incapacitated for life in this democracy. Possibly the most salutary effect of all this activity is that it assures the Negro that he is not altogether forgotten, people *are* working in his behalf, however hopeless or misguided they may be; and as long as the water is troubled it cannot become stagnant.

The terrible thing about being a Negro leader lies in the term itself. I do not merely mean the somewhat condescending differentiation the term implies, but the nicely refined torture a man can experience from having been created and defeated by the same circumstances. That is, Negro leaders have been created by the American scene, which thereafter works against them at every point; and the best that they can hope for is ultimately to work themselves out of their jobs, to nag contemporary American leaders and the members of their own group until a bad situation becomes so complicated and so bad that it cannot be endured any longer. It is like needling a blister until it bursts. On the other hand, one cannot help observing that some Negro leaders and politicians are

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far more concerned with their careers than with the welfare of Negroes, and their dramatic and publicized battles are battles with the wind. Again, this phenomenon cannot be changed without a change in the American scene. In a land where, it is said, any citizen can grow up and become president, Negroes can be pardoned for desiring to enter Congress.

THE Negro press, which supports any man, provided he is sufficiently dark and well-known—with the exception of certain Negro novelists accused of drawing portraits unflattering to the race—has for years received vastly confusing criticism based on the fact that it is helplessly and always exactly what it calls itself, that is, a press devoted entirely to happenings in or about the Negro world. This preoccupation can probably be forgiven in view of the great indifference and frequent hostility of the American white press. The Negro press has been accused of not helping matters much—as, indeed, it has not, nor do I see how it could have. And it has been accused of being sensational, which it is, but this is a criticism difficult to take seriously in a country so devoted to the sensational as ours.

The best-selling Negro newspaper, I believe, is the *Amsterdam Star-News*, which is also the worst, being gleefully devoted to murders, rapes, raids on love-nests, interracial wars, any item, however meaningless, concerning prominent Negroes, and whatever racial gains can be reported for the week—all in just about that order. Apparently, this policy works well; it sells papers—which is, after all, the aim; in my childhood we never missed an edition. The day the paper came out we could hear, far down the street, the news vendor screaming the latest scandal and people rushing to read about it.

The *Amsterdam* has been rivalled, in recent years, by the *People's Voice*, a journal, modeled on *PM* and referred to as *PV*. *PV* is not so wildly sensational a paper as the *Amsterdam*, though its coverage is much the same (the news coverage of the Negro press is naturally pretty limited). *PV*'s politics are less murky, to the left of center (the *Amsterdam* is Republican, a political affiliation that has led it into some strange doubletalk), and its tone, since its inception, has been ever more hopelessly militant, full of warnings, appeals, and open letters to the government—which, to no one's surprise, are not answered—and the same rather pathetic preoccupation with prominent Negroes and what they are doing. Columns signed by Lena Horne and Paul Robeson appeared in *PV* until several weeks ago, when both severed their connections with the paper. Miss Horne's column made her sound like an embittered Eleanor Roosevelt, and the only column of Robeson's I have read was concerned, pertinently enough, with the current witch-hunt in Hollywood, discussing the kind of movies under attack and Hollywood's traditional treatment of Negroes. The implication, with which I agree, was that the House Un-American Activities Committee might find concepts more dangerous to America in a picture like *Gone with the Wind* than in the far less successful *Watch on the Rhine*.

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JAMES BALDWIN

THE ONLY other newspapers in the field with any significant sale in Harlem are the *Pittsburgh Courier*, which has the reputation of being the best of the lot, and the *Afro-American*, which resembles the New York *Journal-American* in layout and type and seems to make a consistent if unsuccessful effort to be at once readable, intelligent, and fiery. The *Courier* is a high-class paper, reaching its peak in the handling of its society news and in the columns of George S. Schuyler, whose Olympian serenity infuriates me, but who, as a matter of fact, reflects with great accuracy the state of mind and the ambitions of the professional, well-to-do Negro who has managed to find a place to stand. Mr. Schuyler, who is remembered still for a satirical novel I have not read, called *Black No More*, is aided enormously in this position by a genteel white wife and a child-prodigy daughter—who is seriously regarded in some circles as proof of the incomprehensible contention that the mating of white and black is more likely to produce genius than any other combination. (The *Afro-American* recently ran a series of articles on this subject, “The Education of a Genius,” by Mrs. Amarintha Work, who recorded in detail the development of her mulatto son, Craig.)

*Ebony* and *Our World* are the two big magazines in the field, *Ebony* looking and sounding very much like *Life*, and *Our World* being the black man’s *Look*. *Our World* is a very strange, disorganized magazine indeed, sounding sometimes like a college newspaper and sometimes like a call to arms, but principally, like its more skillful brothers, devoted to the proposition that anything a white man can do a Negro can probably do better. *Ebony* digs feature articles out of such things as the “real” Lena Horne and Negro FBI agents, and it travels into the far corners of the earth for any news, however trivial, concerning any Negro or group of Negroes who are in any way unusual and/or newsworthy. The tone of both *Ebony* and *Our World* is affirmative; they cater to the “better class of Negro.” *Ebony*’s November issue carried an editorial entitled “Time To Count Our Blessings,” which began by accusing Chester Himes (author of the recent novel *Lonely Crusade*) of having a color psychosis, and went on to explain that there are Negro racists also who are just as blind and dangerous as Bilbo, which is incontestably true, and that, compared to the millions of starving Europeans, Negroes are sitting pretty, which is, to say the least, a rather desperate comparison. The editorial concluded that Negroes had come a long way and that “as patriotic Americans” it was time “we” stopped singing the blues and realized just how bright the future was. These cheering sentiments were flanked—or underscored, if you will—by a photograph on the opposite page of an aging Negro farm woman carrying home a bumper crop of onions. It apparently escaped the editors of *Ebony* that the very existence of their magazine, and its table of contents for any month, gave the lie to this effort to make the best of a bad bargain.

The true *raison d’être* of the Negro press can be found in the letters-to-the-editor sections, where the truth about life among the rejected can be seen in print. It is the terrible dilemma of the Negro press that, having no other model, it models itself on the white

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press, attempting to emulate the same effortless, sophisticated tone—a tone its subject matter renders utterly unconvincing. It is simply impossible not to sing the blues, audibly or not, when the lives lived by Negroes are so inescapably harsh and stunted. It is not the Negro press that is at fault: Whatever contradictions, inanities, and political infantilism can be charged to it can be charged equally to the American press at large. It is a black man's newspaper straining for recognition and a foothold in the white man's world. Matters are not helped in the least by the fact that the white man's world, intellectually, morally, and spiritually, has the meaningless ring of a hollow drum and the odor of slow death. Within the body of the Negro press all the wars and falsehoods, all the decay and dislocation and struggle of our society is seen in relief.

The Negro press, like the Negro, becomes the scapegoat for our ills. There is no difference, after all, between the *Amsterdam's* handling of a murder on Lenox Avenue and the *Daily News's* coverage of a murder on Beekman Hill; nor is there any difference between the chauvinism of the two papers, except that the *News* is smug and the *Amsterdam* is desperate. Negroes live violent lives, unavoidably; a Negro press without violence is therefore not possible; and, further, in every act of violence, particularly violence against white men, Negroes feel a certain thrill of identification, a wish to have done it themselves, a feeling that old scores are being settled at last. It is no accident that Joe Louis is the most idolized man in Harlem. He has succeeded on a level that white America indicates is the only level for which it has any respect. We (Americans in general, that is) like to point to Negroes and to most of their activities with a kind of tolerant scorn; but it is ourselves we are watching, ourselves we are damning, or—condescendingly—bending to save.

I have written at perhaps excessive length about the Negro press, principally because its many critics have always seemed to me to make the irrational demand that the nation's most oppressed minority behave itself at all times with a skill and foresight no one ever expected of the late Joseph Patterson or expects now of the invincible Hearst; and I have tried to give some idea of its tone because it seems to me that it is here that the innate desperation is betrayed. As for the question of Negro advertising, which has caused so much comment, it seems to me quite logical that any minority identified by the color of its skin and the texture of its hair would eventually grow self-conscious about these attributes and avoid advertising lotions that made the hair kinkier and soaps that darkened the skin. The American ideal, after all, is that everyone should be as much alike as possible.

**I**T IS axiomatic that the Negro is religious, which is to say that he stands in fear of the God our ancestors gave us and before whom we all tremble yet. There are probably more churches in Harlem than in any other ghetto in this city and they are going full blast every night and some of them are filled with praying people every day. This, supposedly, exemplifies the Negro's essential simplicity and good-will; but it is actually a fairly desperate emotional business.

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These churches range from the august and publicized Abyssinian Baptist Church on West 138th Street to resolutely unclassifiable lofts, basements, store-fronts, and even private dwellings. Nightly, holy-roller ministers, spiritualists, self-appointed prophets, and Messiahs gather their flocks together for worship and for strength through joy. And this is not, as *Cabin in the Sky* would have us believe, merely a childlike emotional release. The faith may be described as childlike, but the end it serves is often sinister. It may, indeed, “keep them happy”—a phrase carrying the inescapable inference that the way of life imposed on Negroes makes them quite actively unhappy—but also, and much more significantly, religion operates here as a complete and exquisite fantasy revenge: White people own the earth and commit all manner of abomination and injustice on it; the bad will be punished and the good rewarded, for God is not sleeping, the judgment is not far off. It does not require a spectacular degree of perception to realize that bitterness is here neither dead nor sleeping, and that the white man, believing what he wishes to believe, has misread the symbols. Quite often the Negro preacher descends to levels less abstract and leaves no doubt as to what is on his mind: the pressure of life in Harlem, the conduct of the Italian-Ethiopian war, racial injustice during the recent war, and the terrible possibility of yet another very soon. All these topics provide excellent springboards for sermons thinly coated with spirituality but designed mainly to illustrate the injustice of the white American and anticipate his certain and long overdue punishment.

**H**ERE, too, can be seen one aspect of the Negro’s ambivalent relation to the Jew. To begin with, though the traditional Christian accusation that the Jews killed Christ is neither questioned nor doubted, the term “Jew” actually operates in this initial context to include all infidels of white skin who have failed to accept the Savior. No real distinction is made: The preacher begins by accusing the Jews of having refused the light and proceeds from there to a catalog of their subsequent sins and the sufferings visited on them by a wrathful God. Though the notion of the suffering is based on the image of the wandering, exiled Jew, the context changes imperceptibly, to become a fairly obvious reminder of the trials of the Negro, while the sins recounted are the sins of the American republic.

At this point, the Negro identifies himself almost wholly with the Jew. The more devout Negro considers that he is a Jew, in bondage to a hard taskmaster and waiting for a Moses to lead him out of Egypt. The hymns, the texts, and the most favored legends of the devout Negro are all Old Testament and therefore Jewish in origin: the flight from Egypt, the Hebrew children in the fiery furnace, the terrible jubilee songs of deliverance: *Lord, wasn’t that hard trials, great tribulations, I’m bound to leave this land!* The covenant God made in the beginning with Abraham and which was to extend to his children and to his children’s children forever is a covenant made with these latter-day exiles also: As Israel was chosen, so are they. The birth and death of Jesus, which adds a non-Judaic element, also

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implements this identification. It is the covenant made with Abraham again, renewed, signed with his blood. ("Before Abraham was, I am.") Here the figure of Jesus operates as the intercessor, the bridge from earth to heaven; it was Jesus who made it possible, who made salvation free to all, "to the Jew first and afterwards the Gentile." The images of the suffering Christ and the suffering Jew are wedded with the image of the suffering slave, and they are one: The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.

But if the Negro has bought his salvation with pain and the New Testament is used to prove, as it were, the validity of the transformation, it is the Old Testament that is clung to and most frequently preached from, which provides the emotional fire and anatomizes the pain of bondage; and which promises vengeance and assures the chosen of their place in Zion. The favorite text of my father, among the most earnest of ministers, was not "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," but "How can I sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

But this same identification, which Negroes, since slavery, have accepted with their mothers' milk, serves, in contemporary actuality, to implement an involved and specific bitterness. Jews in Harlem are small tradesmen, rent collectors, real-estate agents, and pawnbrokers; they operate in accordance with the American business tradition of exploiting Negroes, and they are therefore identified with oppression and are hated for it. I remember meeting no Negro in the years of my growing up, in my family or out of it, who would really ever trust a Jew, and few who did not, indeed, exhibit for them the blackest contempt. On the other hand, this did not prevent their working for Jews, being utterly civil and pleasant to them, and, in most cases, contriving to delude their employers into believing that, far from harboring any dislike for Jews, they would rather work for a Jew than for anyone else. It is part of the price the Negro pays for his position in this society that, as Richard Wright points out, he is almost always acting. A Negro learns to gauge precisely what reaction the alien person facing him desires, and he produces it with disarming artlessness. The friends I had, growing up and going to work, grew more bitter every day; and, conversely, they learned to hide this bitterness and to fit into the pattern Gentile and Jew alike had fixed for them.

**T**HE TENSION between Negroes and Jews contains an element not characteristic of Negro-Gentile tension, an element which accounts in some measure for the Negro's tendency to castigate the Jew verbally more often than the Gentile, and which might lead one to the conclusion that, of all white people on the face of the earth, it is the Jew whom the Negro hates most. When the Negro hates the Jew *as a Jew* he does so partly because the nation does and in much the same painful fashion that he hates himself. It is an aspect of his humiliation whittled down to a manageable size and then transferred; it is the best form the Negro has for tabulating vocally his long record of grievances against his native land.

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At the same time, there is a subterranean assumption that the Jew should “know better,” that he has suffered enough himself to know what suffering means. An understanding is expected of the Jew such as none but the most naive and visionary Negro has ever expected of the American Gentile. The Jew, by the nature of his own precarious position, has failed to vindicate this faith. Jews, like Negroes, must use every possible weapon in order to be accepted, and must try to cover their vulnerability by a frenzied adoption of the customs of the country; and the nation’s treatment of Negroes is unquestionably a custom. The Jew has been taught—and, too often, accepts—the legend of Negro inferiority; and the Negro, on the other hand, has found nothing in his experience with Jews to counteract the legend of Semitic greed. Here the American white Gentile has two legends serving him at once: he has divided these minorities and he rules.

It seems unlikely that within this complicated structure any real and systematic cooperation can be achieved between Negroes and Jews. (This is in terms of the over-all social problem and is not meant to imply that individual friendships are impossible or that they are valueless when they occur.) The structure of the American commonwealth has trapped both these minorities into attitudes of perpetual hostility. They do not dare trust each other—the Jew because he feels he must climb higher on the American social ladder and has, so far as he is concerned, nothing to gain from identification with any minority even more unloved than he; while the Negro is in the even less tenable position of not really daring to trust anyone.

This applies, with qualifications and yet with almost no exceptions, even to those Negroes called progressive and “unusual.” Negroes of the professional class (as distinct from professional Negroes) compete actively with the Jew in daily contact; and they wear anti-Semitism as a defiant proof of their citizenship; their positions are too shaky to allow them any real ease or any faith in anyone. They do not trust whites or each other or themselves; and, particularly and vocally, they do not trust Jews. During my brief days as a Socialist I spent more than one meeting arguing against anti-Semitism with a Negro college student, who was trying to get into civil service and was supporting herself meanwhile as a domestic. She was by no means a stupid girl, nor even a particularly narrow-minded one: She was all in favor of the millennium, even to working with Jews to achieve it; but she was not prepared ever to accept a Jew as a friend. It did no good to point out, as I did, that the exploitation of which she accused the Jews was American, not Jewish, that in fact, behind the Jewish face stood the American reality. And *my* Jewish friends in high school were not like that, I said, they had no intention of exploiting *me*, we did not hate each other. (I remember, as I spoke, being aware of doubt crawling like fog in the back of my mind.) This might all be very well, she told me, we were children now, with no need to earn a living. Wait until later, when your friends go into business and you try to get a job. You’ll see!


It is this bitterness—felt alike by the inarticulate, hungry population of Harlem, by the wealthy on Sugar Hill, and by the brilliant exceptions ensconced in universities—which

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has defeated and promises to continue to defeat all efforts at interracial understanding. Oppression—the social and political optimists to the contrary—does not imbue a people with wisdom or insight or sweet charity: It breeds in them instead a constant, blinding rage. Just as a mountain of sociological investigations, committee reports, and plans for recreational centers have failed to change the face of Harlem or prevent Negro boys and girls from growing up and facing, individually and alone, the unendurable frustration of being always, everywhere, inferior—until finally the cancer attacks the mind and warps it—so there seems no hope for better Negro-Jewish relations without a change in the American pattern.

Both the Negro and the Jew are helpless; the pressure of living is too immediate and incessant to allow time for understanding. I can conceive of no Negro native to this country who has not, by the age of puberty, been irreparably scarred by the conditions of his life. All over Harlem, Negro boys and girls are growing into stunted maturity, trying desperately to find a place to stand; and the wonder is not that so many are ruined but that so many survive. The Negro's outlets are desperately constricted. In his dilemma he turns first upon himself and then upon whatever most represents to him his own emasculation. Here the Jew is caught in the American crossfire. The Negro, facing a Jew, hates, at bottom, not his Jewishness but the color of his skin. It is not the Jewish tradition by which he has been betrayed but the tradition of his native land. But just as a society must have a scapegoat, so hatred must have a symbol. Georgia has the Negro and Harlem has the Jew. 

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# The Two Great Traditions

The Sephardim and the Ashkenazim.

Abraham Joshua Heschel

**I**N OUR ENDEAVOR to shape a cultural pattern for American Jewish life, we might do well to look for some orientation that will help us determine our position in the stream of Jewish history. How should we regard the major trends of the past? To what period can we feel most closely related?

In the past thousand years two major traditions flowered in Jewish life, corresponding to the two groups that have successively held the spiritual hegemony: first the Spanish Sephardic; in the later period, the Ashkenazic.

The Sephardic group is composed of the descendants of Jews who settled in the Iberian peninsula during the Mohammedan period; Spain is called in Hebrew *Sephard* and these Jews are therefore known as *Sephardim*. Emigrated or expelled from Spain and Portugal in the 15th century, these Jews settled largely along the Mediterranean coast and in Holland, England, and their dependencies.

The Ashkenazic community includes the descendants of Jews who came from Babylon and Palestine to the Balkans and Central and Eastern Europe, and who since the later Middle Ages have spoken German or Yiddish. They are called

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ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL

*Ashkenazic* Jews, from the Hebrew word *Ashkenaz*, which means Germany.

Up to the 19th century, all Ashkenazic Jews who lived in the area bounded by the Rhine and the Dnieper and by the Baltic and the Black Seas, and in some neighboring regions as well, presented a culturally uniform group. At the center of this cultural period stood Rashi, the greatest commentator on the Bible and the Talmud, as well as Rabbi Jehuda the Pious and his circle. The spiritual development of the Ashkenazic period reached its climax in Eastern Europe, particularly with the spread of the Hasidic movement. Today the Ashkenazim form the preponderant majority of our people.

**T**HE Jews of the Iberian peninsula were responsible for the earlier brilliant epoch in Jewish history, distinguished not only by monumental scientific achievements but also by a universality of spirit. Their accomplishment was in some respects a symbiosis of Jewish tradition and Muslim civilization.

The intellectual life of the Jews in Spain was deeply influenced by the surrounding world. Literary forms, scientific methods, philosophical categories, and even theological principles were often adopted from the Arabs. Influenced and enriched in their writing and thinking by foreign patterns, Jewish authors were inclined to stress basic agreements between the doctrines of their faith and the theories of great non-Jewish thinkers. Indeed, they often seemed to emphasize the elements Judaism had in common with classical philosophy to the neglect of its own specific features. They were under constant challenge and attack by members of other creeds, and felt compelled to debate and to defend the principles of their faith.

In the Ashkenazic period the spiritual life of the Jews was lived in isolation. Accordingly, it grew out of its own ancient roots, and developed in an indigenous environment, independent of the trends and conventions of the surrounding world. Intellectually more advanced than the average man of their Germanic or Slavic neighbors, the Jews unfolded unique cultural patterns in thinking and writing, in their communal and individual ways of life. Tenaciously adhering to their own traditions, they concentrated upon the cultivation of what was most their own, what was most specific and personal. They borrowed from other cultures neither substance nor form. What they wrote was literature created by Jews, about Jews, and for Jews. They apologized to no one, neither to philosophers nor theologians, nor did they ask the commendation of either prince or penman. They felt no need to compare themselves with anyone else, and they wasted no energy in refuting hostile opinions.

There, in Eastern Europe, the Jewish people came into its own. It did not live like a guest in somebody else's house who must constantly keep in mind the ways and customs of the host. There Jews lived without reservation and without disguise, outside their homes no less than within them. When they used the phrase "the world asks" in their commentaries on the Talmud, they did not refer to a problem raised by Aristotle or a medieval philosopher. Their fellow students of Torah were to them the "world."

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## *Two Great Traditions*

**T**HE culture of Spanish-Sephardic Jews was shaped by an elite; it was derived from above and was hardly touched by the archaic simplicity, imaginative naivety, and unaffected naturalness of the humble mass.

In Spain, Jewish men of learning drew inspiration from classical philosophy and science. Frequently they took Arabic poetry and Greek ethics as prototypes. Jewish scholars absorbed themselves in research, designing their books frequently for limited groups, or even for single individuals. Their point of view was aristocratic. Their poems were often written in a Hebrew so complicated and involved that only the erudite could enjoy them. Under the influence of Arabic metric and rhetoric, the innate genius of Hebrew, with its chasteness, severity, and limpid strength, gave way to an arabesque manner. Writers reveled in fanciful, ornamental tropes that delight the fancy of the connoisseur rather than capture feeling. Employed to grace the facade of a sentence, words were grouped in fantastic combinations. And in books translated from the Arabic, the Hebrew was usually made to conform to the modes of the Arabic original.

On the lips of Ashkenazic Jews, Hebrew was freed from the golden chains of a complex rhetoric, and it came to be as easy and natural as the Hebrew of the authors of the Midrash in the early centuries of the modern era. This Hebrew was not like a festive Oriental carpet that is trod with measured step, but like a soft *talit*, like a prayer scarf, at the same time sacred and common, in which you can wrap yourself and be alone with your God. The Ashkenazim did not write *piyutim*, the elaborate and often complicated liturgical poems favored by Sephardic authors; they wrote mostly *selihot*, simple penitential prayers and elegies. They drew their style from the homespun prose of Talmudic sayings rather than from the lofty rhetoric of the Prophets. The thunder of the Book of Job is absent from their writings. Other rhythms and other tones prevail. The Hebrew of the Ashkenazic books on morality or piety is saturated with the sadness, yearning, and contrition of the Book of Psalms.

Further, the East European Jews created their own language, Yiddish, which was born out of a will to make intelligible, to explain, and simplify the tremendous complexities of the sacred tongue. Thus there arose, as though spontaneously, a mother tongue, a direct expression of feeling, a mode of speech without ceremony or artifice, a language that speaks itself without taking devious paths, a tongue that has a maternal simplicity and warmth. In this language you say “beauty” and mean “spirituality”; you say “kindness” and mean “holiness.” Few languages can be spoken so simply and so directly; there are but few languages that lend themselves with such difficulty to falseness. No wonder that Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav would sometimes choose Yiddish to pour his heart out and present his grievances to God.

**I**N THE Sephardic period every book or manuscript was a rare treasure. Few communities were fortunate enough to possess copies of all six sections of the Talmud. In the Ashkenazic period, Jews had all the texts; books were printed continually. The

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gates to the Torah were opened. Every community had the Talmud and the Code of Law, the *Shulhan Aruch*, the legal system of Maimonides, and the classical work of Jewish mysticism, *The Book of Splendor*.

Numerous Spanish Jews had possessed high secular learning. Their achievements in medicine, mathematics, and astronomy contributed greatly to the development of European civilization as a whole. And their translations of scientific and philosophical works from Arabic into Latin served as cultural mediators, making available to the European nations the treasures of literature and science then in Arab custody.

On the other hand, knowledge of Jewish lore does not seem to have been widespread among Spanish Jews. Young people were not accustomed to putting their minds exclusively to the study of the Torah. The educational programs drawn up for Jewish schools had but modest objectives. The celebrated poet and metaphysician, Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol, complains that the people do not understand the sacred tongue. Rabbi Solomon Parhon, a grammarian who was a disciple of Rabbi Jehuda Halevi, wrote: "In our country (Spain) people are not well versed in the Hebrew language," but the Ashkenazic Jews "are accustomed to think and speak in Hebrew." Many Sephardic authors wrote largely in Arabic; even works dealing with questions of Jewish ritual, homilies on the Bible, commentaries on the Talmud, were written in Arabic. But to an Ashkenazic author it would have seemed inconceivable to write his works in a foreign tongue.

Because the ideals of the Ashkenazic Jews were shared by all, the relations between the various parts of the community—between the scholarly and the ignorant, the yeshiva student and the trader—had an intimate, organic character. The earthiness of the villagers, the warmth of plain people, and the spiritual simplicity of the *maggidim* or lay preachers penetrated into the *bet midrash*, the house of prayer that was also a house of study and learning. Laborers, peasants, porters, artisans, storekeepers, all were partners in the Torah. The *maggidim*—the term presumably originated in Eastern Europe—did not apply for diplomas to anyone. They felt authorized by God to be preachers of morals.

Here, in the Ashkenazic realm, the amalgamation of Torah and Israel was accomplished. Ideals became folkways, divine imperatives a human concern; the people itself became a source of Judaism, a source of spirit. The most distant became very intimate, very near. Spontaneously, without external cause, the people improvised customs of celestial solemnity. The dictates of feeling were heeded as commandments of highest authority. Jews began to know what it means: "From within my flesh do I see the Lord."

Sephardic books are distinguished by their strict logical arrangement. They are composed according to a clear plan; every detail has its assigned place, and the transitions from one subject to another are clear and simple. Ashkenazic writers forego clarity for the sake of depth. The contours of their thoughts are irregular, vague, and often perplexingly entangled; their content is restless, animated by inner wrestling and a kind of baroque emotion.

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Sephardic books are like Raphaellesque paintings, Ashkenazic books like the works of Rembrandt, profound, allusive, and full of hidden meanings. The former favor the harmony of a system, the latter the tension of dialectic; the former are sustained by a balanced solemnity, the latter by impulsive inspiration. The strength of the Sephardic scholars lies in their mastery of expression, that of the Ashkenazim in the unexpressed overtones of their words. A spasm of feeling, a passionate movement of thought, an explosive enthusiasm, will break through the form.

Sephardic books are like neatly trimmed and cultivated parks, Ashkenazic writings like enchanted ancient forests; the former are like a story with a beginning and an end, the latter have a beginning but frequently turn into a story without an end.

The renowned, painstaking grammarians of the Hebrew tongue came from among the Sephardim; the Ashkenazim are more interested in the dynamics of keen *gematria*—the art of finding implications believed to be contained in the numerical values of letters in Scripture—than in transparent, sober grammatical forms. In later times critical, literal exegesis of Scripture almost disappeared.

Eminently concerned with preserving the Jewish spiritual heritage, the Sephardim were unsurpassed masters at systematizing, collating, and codifying the scattered multiplex wealth of Jewish lore accumulated in the course of previous ages. The Ashkenazim were less eager to collect than to disclose, to probe for deeper meanings; for them, the prime motive was not to know and remember, but to discover and understand; it was not the final decision that was important, but the steps of the syllogism whereby it was arrived at.

In the code of law, *Mishneh Torah*, composed by that foremost Sephardic master, Maimonides, the matter is arranged according to logical concepts; the stream of laws and precepts is converted into an abstract system. In the *Arba Turim*, compiled by the Ashkenazic Rabenu Jacob, son of the Rosh (14th century), which forms the basis of the *Shulhan Aruch*, the laws are arranged according to the daily routine of every Jew, beginning with his rising in the morning and ending with the night-prayer, the *Shema*. Maimonides's system is logical, but the *Arba Turim* is a mirror reflecting life as it is.

Classical books were not written in Eastern Europe. The Talmud, the *Mishneh Torah*, the *Book of Splendor*, the *Guide to the Perplexed*, and *Tree of Life* were produced in other countries. East European Jews did not cherish the ambition to create consummate, definitive expressions. And because their books are indigenous to their time and place and rooted in a self-contained world, they are less accessible to moderns than those of Sephardic authors. The Ashkenazic Jews were not interested in writing literature; their works read like brief lecture-notes. They are products, not of pure research, but of discussions with pupils. The Ashkenazim rarely composed books that stand like separate buildings with foundations of their own, books that do not lean upon older works; they wrote commentaries or notes on the classical works of olden times, books that modestly hug the monumental walls of older citadels.

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THE Sephardim aspired to personal perfection and attempted to express their ideals rationally. They strove for tranquility of soul, for inner peace and contentment. Their ethics was at times bourgeois, full of prudence and practical wisdom. To follow the golden rule, to take a middle course and avoid extremes, was one of their most popular maxims. The Cabala remained a pursuit of the few; in contrast to the situation in Eastern Europe, the life of the people in the Sephardic community was hardly touched by the bold mystic doctrines of some of its rabbis.

But Ashkenazic ethics knows no perfection that is definable; its vision aimed at the infinite. Never compromising, never satisfied, always striving: "Seek higher than that." The Ashkenazic moralist or Hasid was exalted; he yearned for the transcendental, the preternatural. He somehow felt that not only space, but also the soul was endless. Not for him the tranquil contemplation, the gradual ascent. What he sought was boundless fervor, praying and learning without limit or end. For though the seeker is engaged in a persistent struggle with the material and finite and cannot escape himself permanently, he can at least aspire to divest himself, in short moments of ecstasy, of all earthly concerns.

What distinguishes Sephardic from Ashkenazic culture is, however, primarily a difference of form rather than a divergence of content. It is a difference that cannot be characterized by the categories of rationalism versus mysticism or of the speculative versus the intuitive mentality. The difference goes beyond this and might be more accurately expressed as a distinction between a *static* form in which the spontaneous is subjected to strictness and abstract order and a *dynamic* form that does not compel the content to conform to what is already established. The dynamic form is attained by subtler and more directed means. Room is left for the outburst, for the surprise, for the instantaneous. The inward counts infinitely more than the outward.

THE dualism of Sephardic and Ashkenazic did not disappear with the tragic expulsion from Spain in 1492. The Sephardic strain, striving after measure, order, and harmony, and the Ashkenazic strain, with its preference for the spontaneous and dynamic, can both be traced down to the modern period. The Sephardim retained their independent ways in custom and thought and refused to amalgamate. In their seclusion, a severe loyalty to their heritage was combined with a feeling of pride in the splendor of their past. Their synagogue services were like silent mirrors of the ancient rite. The spontaneous was tamed, the unbecoming eliminated. But the continual trimming of the offshoots tended to suppress any aesthetic drive in the roots.

The Ashkenazic Jew, on the other hand, remained averse to constraining the fluent into stiff forms. Kept spiritually alive by a sense of the immense rather than by a sense of balance, he would not yield to the admonitions of the few systematically minded scholars in his midst. The passion for the unlimited could not be conditioned by a regard for proportion and measure.

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Much of what the Sephardim created was adopted by the Ashkenazim and transformed. Under the spell of the Hasidim, the rich and ponderous speculations of the Sephardic mystics were stripped of their tense and stem features without any loss of profundity or earnestness. The lofty and elaborate doctrines of the Cabala were melted into thoughts understandable by the heart.

In modern times the Sephardic mentality was perhaps best exemplified by Spinoza. Indeed he owes many elements of his system to medieval Sephardic philosophy; and though he rejected its predominant aspirations, his thought pushed certain tendencies inherent in that tradition to extremes. His aristocratic intellectualism, for instance, led him to divide sharply between the piety and morality of the people and the speculative knowledge of the few. God is conceived of as a principle of mathematical necessity, a sort of logical shell in which all things exist; logical thinking alone can bring men into a relation with God. Personalism of any kind is excluded. It is remarkable how limited was the influence of Spinoza's philosophy even upon those Jewish thinkers who departed from religious tradition.

**T**HE stream of Sephardic Jewish culture was not confined, however, within the so-called Spanish-Portuguese communities. In the modern period, its influence permeated other Jewish groups, especially in Germany. It was the admiration of 19th-century German Jewish scholars for the Sephardic Middle Ages that determined the mood of the modern "Science of Judaism" (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*).

The scholars of emancipated German Jewry saw in the Spanish period the "Golden Age" of Jewish history, and celebrated it as a happy blend of progress and traditionalism upon which they desired to model their own course. In their research they went to the point of applying the cultural standards of the "Golden Age" to the literature of later centuries. For some Jewish scholars, any Jewish literature dating after 1492, the year in which Jewish life in Spain ceased, was not considered worthy of scholarly investigation. Their example was followed in forming the curricula of the higher schools of Jewish learning, which gave no place to works written after 1492 and before the beginning of modern Hebrew literature.

This desire for inner identification with the Spanish Jewish period reflected itself in the synagogue architecture of the 19th century. Liberal Jewish synagogues in Central Europe were built in the Moorish style as if the stucco arabesque, horseshoe arches, and dados of glazed and painted tiles were the aptest possible expressions of the liberal Jew's religious mood.

Hand in hand with the romantic admiration of the Sephardim that became one of the motifs of Reform Judaism in Germany went social aspirations, too. The social standing of the few Sephardim in Germany was superior to that of the Ashkenazim, and the leaders of the new Reform movement, anxious to develop a new and more advanced

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way of Jewish life that would abandon the traditional forms still adhered to by the Jewish masses, often blatantly imitated the manners of the Sephardim. In the Portuguese synagogues they found that solemnity and decorum which they missed in the old *shul*. It was hardly for scientific reasons that the Sephardic pronunciation of Hebrew was introduced in the early “temples.”

In consequence, the modern Ashkenazic Jew, particularly in Central Europe, often came to lose his appreciation of the value of his own original way of life. He developed an embarrassed aversion for the dramatic, for the moving and vivid style, whether in the synagogue or in human relations. For him dignity grew to mean something to be achieved by strict adherence to an established, well-balanced, mannerly form undisturbed by any eruption of the sudden and spontaneous. Thus Hermann Cohen wrote in 1916 that the elimination of the dramatic manner from the worship of East European Jews would turn the synagogues into “seats of true culture.”

This lack of understanding for and alienation from the values of the Ashkenazic traditions became complete. Describing the way in which the Hasidim prayed, a prominent Jewish historian, in a work first published in 1913 and reprinted in 1931, could write:

The [Hasidic] movement did not signify a gain for religious life; the asset that lay in its striving for inwardness was more than cancelled out by the preposterousness of its superstitious notions and of its unruly behavior. . . . According to its principles, Hasidism meant a total revolt against the divine service (sic!); nothing could have made the untenability of the latter more striking than the fact that great numbers of people should turn away from it, not out of skepticism or doubt, but out of a most intense yearning for piety. . . . Hasidism contributed to the deterioration rather than to the improvement of the divine service. . . . its noise and wild, restless movements brought new factors of disturbance. . . . It is no wonder that at such a time complaints were made about the lack of devoutness and attention, about the disorder and interruptions. The divine service stood in need of a thorough renovation and restoration if it was to survive. The modern age [read: the Reform movement—A.J.H.] supplied both.

**I**N LOOKING for an orientation for American Jewry, it seems clear that neo-Sephardic modes do not represent the spirit of our own generation. Often they only conceal, or even eradicate, precious elements deeply rooted in the inner life of our people. We cannot afford to dispense with the *niggun*, the spontaneous note that rises from within, simply for the sake of acquiring solemnity and artificial decorum, qualities that hardly express the essential mood of the modern Jew.

Our generation can hardly think of Jewish religious life as an objectivized, ceremonious cult, repeating what is derived from whatever philosophy happens to be in vogue at the moment, and strictly congruous with contemporary tendencies. Though the analytical study of Jewish literature and history carried out by the neo-Sephardic movement

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has greatly enriched and widened our knowledge, its pedantic and abstract knowledge must be supplemented by inwardness and spontaneity, by the common experiences and expressions of the people, by the powers won in struggle with immediate problems, by grief and joy.

We still carry deeply rooted prejudices against the Ashkenazic heritage, particularly as it was developed in Eastern Europe. That prejudice has divided us and distorted our sense of values—it has also had tragic results. In our zeal to expand the scope of our intellectual endeavors we should beware lest we lose the sense of that which is our very essence. Hardly a better mirror exists in which to recognize the unique features of our own origins than the cultural life of East European Jewry. This must not be measured by Sephardic standards—to do so would be equivalent to weighing the beauties of Gothic architecture on the scales of classical Greek. On the other hand, if the right categories are applied, unique values will be revealed.

Magnificent synagogues are not enough if they mean a petrified Judaism. Nor will the stirrings of creative life in Palestine find any echo if brilliance is held more important than warmth.

In the elementary textbooks of Hebrew in use a quarter of a century ago, there was a story of a schoolboy with a poor memory who had a hard time finding his clothes and books in the morning. One evening he hit upon an answer to his troubles. He wrote on a slip of paper: “The suit is on the chair, the hat is in the closet, the books on the desk, the shoes under the chair, and I am in bed.”

Next morning he began to collect his things together. They were all in their places. When he came to the last item on the list he went to look for himself in the bed—but his search was in vain. 

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# Britain's Struggle for Survival

The Labor government after three years.

George Orwell

**I**T IS CHARACTERISTIC of our age that at the time of the 1945 General Election one could see fairly clearly what problems the Labor government was facing, and that it is just as difficult today as it was then to predict either success or failure. This is the age of the unresolved dilemma, of the struggle which never slows down and never leads to a decision. It is as though the world were suffering from a disease which is simultaneously acute, chronic, and not fatal.

In Britain we have lived for three years in a state of almost continuous crisis, like one of those radio serials in which the hero falls over a precipice at the end of each installment. The supreme calamity is, of course, always averted, but the end of the story never seems to be any nearer. Bankruptcy has been put off and put off by American loans, by "austerity," and by the spending of reserves, and when those expedients cease to work it may be put off still further, possibly for decades, by a successful drive for exports: But the fundamental problem of making Britain genuinely solvent without sinking the standard of living to an unbearably low level remains untouched.

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GEORGE ORWELL *was a British journalist, essayist, and novelist among whose books are Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four.*

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It is, I think, important to realize that in Britain the struggle between collectivism and laissez-faire is secondary. The main objective is national survival. Looking on from the outside and reading the British press, one might easily get the idea that the country is groaning beneath bureaucratic misrule and would be only too glad to return to the good old days of free enterprise; but this merely appears to be so because the big capitalists and the middling entrepreneur class are disproportionately vocal.

Britain is in many ways a conservative country, but it is also a country without a peasantry, one in which the desire for economic liberty is not strong or widespread. Property, in Britain, means a house, furniture, and a few hundred pounds' worth of savings; freedom means freedom of thought and speech, or the power to do what you choose in your spare time. The great majority of people take it for granted that they will live on wages or salaries rather than profits, welcome the idea of birth-to-death social insurance, and do not feel strongly one way or the other about the nationalization of industry. Rationing and controls generally are, of course, in a sense unpopular, but this is only important in that it increases the exhaustion and boredom resulting from eight years of overwork.

We are handicapped, in fact, not by any positive desire to return to capitalism but by the habits of mind acquired during prosperity (including the ideology of the socialist movement itself).

**E**VEN TODAY, and even in left-wing circles, it is not fully grasped that Britain's economic position is an inherently bad one. A small overpopulated country, importing its food and paying for it with exports, can only keep going so long as the rest of the world is not industrialized. If the present worldwide development of industry continues, there will in the long run be no reason for international trade, except in raw materials, a few tropical products, and possibly a few luxury goods. All the advantage will lie—does already lie—with large autarchic countries like Russia or the United States. Britain, therefore, can only survive as an “advanced” and populous country if it is integrated into a much larger area.

At present, this may happen in one of four ways. One is by the formation of a union of Western Europe plus Africa; another is by tightening the links of the Commonwealth and transferring perhaps half the population of Britain to the English speaking dominions; a third is by allowing Britain, with the rest of Europe, to become part of the Russian system; and the final possibility is by the accession of Britain to the United States. The objection in every case is obvious.

The first alternative, the most canvassed at present and perhaps the most hopeful, faces enormous difficulties and dangers, of which Russian hostility is only the most immediate. The second, even supposing the dominions to be prepared for it, could probably not be carried out except by a despotic government which was accustomed to transporting human beings like shiploads of cattle. The third, though it may happen as a result of

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defeat in war, can be ruled out as a possibility, since no one except a handful of Communists desires it. The fourth is quite likely to happen, but it is unacceptable from a British point of view, since it would mean becoming very definitely a junior partner and being tied to a country which everyone except a few Tories regards as politically backward.

Even if any of these possibilities, or some combination of them, comes to pass, it will only do so after a long delay, whereas the need for solvency is immediate. The leaders of the Labor government, therefore, can only make their plans on the assumption that Britain has got to be self-sufficient in the near future. They are endeavoring to bring a European union into being, they hope and believe that when it exists the dominions will adhere to it, and they are determined—indeed, they are obliged—to remain on goods terms with the United States; but their immediate aim must be to make Britain's exports balance her imports. And they have to do this with worn-out industrial equipment, with foreign preoccupations which demand large armed forces and are therefore a heavy drain on man-power, and with a working class which is tired and not too well fed, and which fought the war and voted at the General Election in the expectation of something quite different.

**I**N 1945, approximately half the electorate voted Labor. I believe it would be an exaggeration to say that the majority of these people voted for Socialism. They voted for full employment, bigger old-age pensions, the raising of the school-leaving age, more social and economic equality, and more democracy all round; and for nationalization of industry as a way of bringing these things about. The government, even if it wants to, cannot afford to disappoint its supporters altogether, and therefore has to combine basic reconstruction with immediate reforms that make the reconstruction more difficult. It would have been almost impossible, for instance, for a Labor government not to give rehousing first priority; but, necessary though the houses are, this means reducing the labor and materials that can be allotted to industrial building. The change-over to national ownership is not in itself an inspiring process, and in the popular regard the Labor party is the party that stands for shorter working hours, a free health service, day nurseries, free milk for school children, and the like, rather than the party that stands for Socialism.

Unfortunately, given the desperate shortage of nearly everything, it is not easy to improve the lives of the people in any material way. Physically, the average British citizen is probably somewhat worse off than he was three years ago. The housing situation is extremely bad; food, though not actually insufficient, is unbearably dull. The prices of cigarettes, beer, and unrationed food such as vegetables are fantastic. And clothes rationing is an increasing hardship since its effects are cumulative. We are in the transition period which awaits all left-wing parties when they attain to power, and which always comes as a painful surprise because so little has been said about it beforehand. In general, left-wing parties gain their following by promising better material conditions, but when the test comes it always turns out that those conditions are not attainable immediately, but

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only after a long, self-denying struggle during which the average man is actually worse off than he was before he started. And precisely because he is worse off he refuses, or is unable, to make the effort demanded of him. One sees a perfect illustration of this in the struggle over the British coal mines.

The coal mines had to be nationalized, because in no other way was it possible to re-capitalize them to the extent needed to bring them up to date. At the same time nationalization makes no immediate difference. The basic fact about the British mines is that they are old and neglected, and working conditions in them are so intolerable that without direct coercion, or the threat of unemployment, it is almost impossible to recruit sufficient labor to keep them going. Ever since the war ended we have had about fifty thousand less miners than we need, with the result that we can only with the greatest difficulty produce enough coal for our own needs, while an extra fifteen million tons for export seems an almost impossible objective. Of course the mines can be and probably will be modernized, but the process will take several years, and in the meantime, in order to make or buy the necessary machinery, our need of coal will be all the greater.

The same situation reproduces itself in less acute forms throughout the whole of industry. Nor is it easy, when people are tired already, to get them to work harder by direct economic inducements. If wages are evened out, labor drifts away from the more disagreeable jobs: If especially high rates are paid for those jobs, absenteeism increases, because it is then possible to earn enough to live on by working only three or four shifts a week. Not only individual absenteeism, but the innumerable stoppages and unofficial strikes of the past few years have probably been due to sheer exhaustion quite as much as to any economic grievance. It is true that the amount of time lost by industrial disputes has been small compared with what it was in the years immediately following the 1914–18 war, but there is the important difference that the strikes of that period, when successful, brought concrete benefits to the working class. Today, when the main problem is how to produce a bare sufficiency of goods, a strike is in effect a blow against the community as a whole, including the strikers themselves, and its net effect is inflationary.

**U**NDERNEATH our present difficulties there lie two facts which the Socialist movement has always tended to ignore. One is that certain jobs which are vitally necessary are never done except under some kind of compulsion. As soon as you have full employment, therefore, you have to make use of forced labor for the dirtier kinds of work. (You can call it by some more soothing name, of course.) The other fact I have already alluded to: the radical impoverishment of Britain—the impossibility, at this stage, of raising the working-class standard of living, or even, probably, of maintaining it at its present level.

I do not profess to know whether our immediate economic problem will be solved. Putting aside the danger of war with the Soviet Union, it depends in the short run on the success of the Marshall Plan, and in the somewhat longer run on the formation of a

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Western Union or on the ability of Britain to keep ahead in the scramble for markets. But what is certain is that we can never return to the favored position that we held in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Until they found themselves in power and therefore up against hard facts, British Socialists would not readily admit that our national income, which they wanted to divide more equitably, was in part the product of colonial exploitation. Over a long period we not only produced less than we consumed (our exports have not balanced our imports since 1913), but we had the benefit of cheap raw materials and assured markets in countries which we held as colonies or could overawe by military force.

There were many reasons why this state of affairs could not last forever, and one reason was the decay of imperialist sentiment in the British people themselves. One sees here the still unsolved contradiction that dwells at the heart of the Socialist movement. Socialism, a creed which grew up in the industrialized Western countries, means better material conditions for the white proletariat; it also means liberation for the exploited colored peoples. But the two aims, at least temporarily, are incompatible. The leaders of the Socialist movement have never said this, or never said it loudly enough, and they are now paying for their timidity. Because the basic economic situation is not understood, hardships which are in fact unavoidable have the appearance of being due to the persistence of social inequality. The country houses and the smart hotels are still full of rich people, and it is tempting to imagine that if only they were wiped out there would be enough of everything for everybody. The fact that we are poorer than we were, that for a long time we shall go on being poorer, and that no redistribution of income can substantially alter this, is not clearly grasped, and morale suffers accordingly.

**I**T IS a commonplace that the Labor government has failed badly in its publicity. There has been a good deal of exhortation, especially in the last few months, but the day-to-day process of telling the public what is happening, and why, has not been systematically undertaken, nor had the need for it been realized beforehand. It was typical of the government's way of doing things to let people imagine for a year or more that things were going fairly well, and then suddenly to plaster the walls with posters bearing the almost threatening slogan "Work or Want." The housing shortage, the fuel shortage, bread rationing, and Polish immigration have all caused more resentment than they need have done if the underlying facts had been properly explained. Nor has the government been very successful in "selling" Britain abroad, as one can see from the fact that we are execrated all over the world, to a great extent unjustly, for our actions in Palestine, while the enormously more important settlement with India passes almost unnoticed.

So far as publicity inside Britain is concerned, the government has two great difficulties to contend with. One is its lack of vehicles of expression. With the exception of a single daily paper, the *Herald*, all that matters of the British press is controlled either by Tories, or, in a very few cases, by left-wing factions not reliably sympathetic to a Labor

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government. The BBC on the other hand is a semi-autonomous corporation which is neutral in home politics and can only be used to a limited extent for official announcements. The other difficulty the government suffers from is that almost up to the moment of the general election it was in coalition with its opponents and therefore had no chance to make its own position clear.

Before the war, years of steady propaganda had won over to the Labor party the bulk of the manual workers and part of the middle class: but this was old-fashioned Socialist propaganda, largely irrelevant to a postwar world in which Britain is weakened and impoverished, Germany and Japan prostrate, Russia in effect an enemy, and the United States an active world power. During the more desperate period of the war the Labor party was not in a position to declare an independent policy, though in my opinion it made a serious mistake in not getting out of the coalition as soon as it became clear that the war was won. Then came the general election, at extremely short notice. The Labor party went to the country, as it was bound to do in the circumstances, promising peace abroad and prosperity at home.

If it had been truthful it would have explained that there were very hard times ahead, all the harder because the first steps towards socialism now had to be taken, and that the ending of the hot war with the Axis merely meant the beginning of a cold war with the Soviet Union. To say, as every Labor candidate did, "A Labor government will get along better with Russia" was about equivalent to saying "A Protestant government will get along better with the Vatican." But the average voter did not grasp the fact, obvious since 1943, that Russia was hostile, nor the fact that Communism and Social Democracy are irreconcilable enemies; and meanwhile the election had to be won. The Labor party won it partly by irredeemable promises. It could hardly be blamed for doing this, but the confusion in the public mind between a Left policy and a pro-Russian policy had ugly possibilities, and it is owing to good luck rather than good management that they have not been realized. If the pro-Russian enthusiasm that grew up during the war had persisted, the spectacle of Britain engaging in a seemingly meaningless quarrel with the USSR, and keeping up large and expensive armed forces in consequence, might have split the Labor movement from top to bottom. For it could then have been plausibly said that our hardships were due to an anti-Communist policy forced upon us by America. This, of course, is what the Communists and crypto-Communists do say, but with less success than they might legitimately have expected, because of the cooling-off of Russophile feeling. This cooling-off has not been due to Labor party propaganda but to the behavior of the Russian government itself. Of course there is always the possibility of a sudden revulsion in popular feeling if, for example, we appeared to be on the verge of war for some frivolous reason.

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**W**ITH ALL the difficulties that I have enumerated—the threatening and perhaps desperate economic situation, the tug-of-war between pre-election promises and essential reconstruction, the exhaustion and disappointment which express

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## *Britain's Struggle for Survival*

themselves in absenteeism and unjustified strikes, the resentment of small businessmen and middleclass people generally who are more and more fed up with controls and heavy taxation—in spite of all this, the government is still in a very strong position. The next general election is two years away, and before then something calamitous may happen, but given anything like a continuance of present conditions, I do not believe that the Labor party can be turned out of office. At present, although it has enemies, it has no ideological rival. There is only the Conservative party, which is bankrupt of ideas and can only squeal about grievances which are essentially middle-class or upper-class, and the opposition on the Left, the Communists and “cryptos” and the disgruntled Labor supporters who might follow them. These people have failed to bring about the split they were trying for, because they have identified themselves with a threatening foreign power, while in home affairs they have no program radically different from that of the Labor party itself.

One must remember that between them the Labor party and the Conservative party adequately represent the bulk of the population, and unless they disintegrate it is difficult for any other mass party to arise. The Communists are able to exert considerable influence by using “infiltration” methods, but in any open contest their position is hopeless, and that of the Fascist groups is even more so. Mosley is again active, and anti-Semitism has increased over the past year or two, but the growth of a serious Fascist movement is not to be feared at present, because without the break-up of the old parties the potential membership for it does not exist. Electorally, it is only the Conservatives that the Labor party has to fear, and there is no sign that they are making much headway. It is true that they made large gains in the local-government elections, probably because people who do not as a rule bother to vote, especially women, wanted to register their exasperation with unpopular controls such as potato rationing. But in parliamentary by-elections the Labor party has not lost a single seat that it won in 1945; this is quite unprecedented for a party that has been in power for three years. The Conservatives could only win the next general election by swinging over both the “floating vote” (middle-class and white-collar workers), and, in addition, the two million votes which were cast for the Liberals in 1945. The mass of the manual workers are not likely ever again to vote for the Conservative party, which is identified in their minds with class privilege and, above all, with unemployment.

**I**F THE Conservatives returned to power it would be a disaster, because they would have to follow much the same policy as a Labor government, but without possessing the confidence of the people who matter most. With Labor securely in power, perhaps for several successive terms, we have at least the chance of effecting the necessary changes peacefully. No doubt Britain will survive, at some level or another, in the sense that there will not actually be mass starvation; the question is whether we can survive as a democratic country with a certain decency of social atmosphere and political behavior. For a long time to come, unless there is breakdown and mass unemployment,

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GEORGE ORWELL

the main problem will be to induce people to work harder; can we do it without forced labor, terrorism, and a secret police force? So far, in spite of the cries of agony from the Beaverbrook press, the government has encroached very little upon individual liberty. It has barely used its powers, and has not indulged in anything that could reasonably be called political persecution. But then the decisive moment has not yet come.

Other countries, notably France, are in a position essentially similar to that of Britain, and perhaps the same problem faces all countries sooner or later. Left-wing governments only come to power in periods of calamity, and their first task is always to get more work out of exhausted and disappointed people. So far as Britain is concerned, all one can say is that the British people are very patient, very disciplined, and will put up with almost anything so long as they see a reason for it. The most urgent need is for the government to enter, more intelligently than it has done hitherto, upon the job of basic explanation, so that the average man, who endured the war in the vague hope that it would lead to something better, may understand *why* he has got to endure overwork and discomfort for years more, with no immediate recompense except an increase in social equality.

As yet, the advent of a Labor government has made no marked difference in the intellectual atmosphere of Britain, and it has affected the position of people in the liberal professions (other than doctors) less than it has affected business men and manual workers. The habitually discontented and mistrustful attitude of the left-wing intelligentsia has hardly been modified at all. The outlook of these people is adequately represented by the *New Statesman*, and perhaps also by *Tribune*, and by such publicists as Laski, Cole, and Crossman. All of them, of course, support the Labor party—some of them, indeed, are organizationally connected with it—but they always regard it with impatience, and they are usually in disagreement with its foreign policy. The fashionable attitude has always been to look on the Labor party as a machine which will not move faster than it is pushed, and to suspect its leaders of wanting, not actually to sell out to the enemy, but to slow down the rate of change and keep the social structure as nearly intact as possible. It is noticeable that people still habitually talk about “British imperialism” and “the British ruling class” as though nothing had happened, and with the apparent implication that Churchill and Company are still in some way ruling the country. A symptom of the Labor party’s low prestige is the fact that there is not a weekly or monthly paper of standing which is a reliable supporter of the government.

To account for this attitude, and its failure to change when Labor came to power, one has to remember several things. One is the sell-out of Macdonald and his group in 1931, which left behind it a sort of traumatic shock and a half-conscious feeling that a Labor government is of its nature weak and potentially treacherous. Another is the fact that the Labor party is essentially a working-class party, the organ of the unionized industrial workers, while the theoreticians of Socialism are mostly middle-class. The Labor party has a policy, but has no clear-cut ideology which can compete with Marxism. It exists

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primarily to win better conditions for the wage-earners, and at the same time it has an ethical, quasi-religious tradition, deriving ultimately from evangelical Protestantism and not acceptable to middle-class intellectuals who have been subjected to Continental influences. The difference of outlook is generally sharpest over things happening outside Britain. In the years before the war it was, with few exceptions, only the middle-class supporters of the Labor party who were interested in the struggle against fascism abroad, and there is a similar division over Palestine now. The workers, in so far as they bother about the matter at all, are not anti-Bevin on the Palestine issue, whereas nearly all left-wing intellectuals are violently so. This is less a difference of policy than of subjective feeling. Few people could tell you what our Palestine policy is or was (assuming that we ever had one), and fewer still could tell you what it ought to be. But the reaction to the plight of the Jewish DP's, to the achievements of the Zionist settlers, and perhaps also to the spectacle of British soldiers being blown up by terrorists, varies according to class background.

**D**URING and since the war there has appeared a new generation of intellectuals whose more vocal members are anti-Socialist in outlook—or, at any rate, are opposed to centralism, planning, direction of labor, and compulsory military service, and, in general, to the interference of the state with the individual. This outlook expresses itself in movements variously called anarchism, pacifism, and personalism; there are also the minor nationalist movements (Welsh and Scottish), which have gained ground in recent years and which have the same anticentralist tendency. Most younger writers seem to have hostility to the government, which they accuse almost in the same breath of being reactionary and *dirigiste*.

There has been considerable outcry about the waning of intellectual liberty and the tendency of writers, artists, and scientists to degenerate into official hacks. This is partly justified, but the blame does not lie with the Labor party. What has happened is that for about a dozen years past the economic status of writers, if not of all artists, has been deteriorating, and they have had to look more and more to the state and to semi-official bodies such as the BBC to give them a livelihood. The war accelerated the process, and the present government has merely carried on a tradition which it inherited from its predecessor. The Labor party does not, as such, have any literary or artistic policy. It is headed by practical men who are not much inclined either to befriend the artist or to “coordinate” him in the totalitarian fashion. The recent tightening-up of employment regulations does contain a potential threat to all intellectuals, because it makes it possible, in theory, to classify any unsuccessful writer or artist as a non-worker and direct him into “gainful employment.” However, this does not happen in practice. The right to starve, so important to those who genuinely care about literature or the arts, seems to be almost as well guaranteed as it was under pure capitalism. 🍷

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# Can Western Civilization Save Itself?

Our present anxiety in the light of history.

**Arnold J. Toynbee**

**I**FANCY it is a rather new idea to think of looking at current affairs in the light of history, at all events remote history. This point of view has not, I think, been common in England at any rate. Take people of about my own age—fifty-nine. When I was a child growing up in London, I had the impression that history, so far as England was concerned, had really ended with the Battle of Waterloo. We had won the Battle of Waterloo, and getting out of history had been one of the rewards of our victory.

One thought of history as something rather unpleasant that happened to other people. As one grew up and became conscious of other countries, one became aware that the United States, for example, had been in history in the 1860s and that France had been in history in 1870. One knew that the Balkans were still in history, but then the Balkans were so backward: They would be still in history. But the English were manifestly out of it. True, in the 1890s and the first years of the present century, the French and the Southerners of the old South in the United States felt themselves still in history, because

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they were conscious of unpleasant things that had happened to them in the recent past. But, on the whole, these two recently defeated peoples were exceptions in the Western world. The attitude we in England then had towards history was the prevailing one. It was the attitude of most of continental Europe and North America.

Our expectation about our own future in the West was very accurately put by Gibbon, in a passage which he wrote, as far as I can make out, in 1781. It is at the end of his general observations on the fall of the Roman Empire in the West, about half way through *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Here Gibbon pauses to consider whether a catastrophe of this kind could overtake the modern Western world; and of course he concludes that this could not conceivably happen. Gibbon was writing at a time when England was at war with France and Spain and Holland, as well as with the Thirteen Colonies, and when the Northern powers, in their “armed neutrality,” were what nowadays would be called “non-belligerents,” unfriendly towards us. This might have seemed to be rather a critical time for England; yet at this juncture Gibbon could write:

In war, the European forces are exercised by temperate and undecisive contests. The balance of power will continue to fluctuate, and the prosperity of our own or the neighbouring kingdoms may be alternately exalted or depressed; but these partial events cannot essentially injure our general state of happiness, the system of arts and laws and manners, which so advantageously distinguish, above the rest of mankind, the Europeans and their colonists.

Already, in 1781, Gibbon is quite sure that Western Christendom is safely out of history.

**I**F ONE looks back now to that complacent view of Western prospects which we can trace back into the 18th century and which maintained itself right through the 19th century till within living memory, it is extraordinary to consider the change that has come over our outlook—the outlook of England and the Western world as a whole, and not least the outlook of the Americans. The Americans seem today to stand on a pinnacle of power and riches and prosperity; yet the American middle class is perhaps more apprehensive and more anxious at this moment than any other.

We know the outstanding events which during the last thirty-five years have caused this great revolution in our point of view. I need only indicate the high lights: two world wars in one lifetime; at the end of the second war the discovery of atomic warfare; Communism; and the revolutionary transfer of power of all kinds into new hands.

The shock caused by Communism is not, of course, something entirely unprecedented in the history of Christendom. You have to go back rather a long way, but if you do go back to the sudden emergence of Islam and the seizure of great provinces of the early Christian world by the primitive Moslem conquerors, and if you recall the general challenge of Islam, not only to Christendom’s possession of certain territories but to the

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whole Christian belief and way of life, you do get back to something comparable to the shock which Communism has given to the Western world since 1917.

**T**HERE ARE, I think, closer likenesses. Islam might be described as a heretical version of Christianity, a version which seized upon certain elements of Christianity, took them out of their context, exaggerated them, and made something out of them which was a criticism of Christianity as it was practiced at the time.

Similarly in Communism certain social precepts of Christianity have been taken from their context, exaggerated and turned into a potent criticism of the Christian world in our time. In one sense, I suppose Communism is more formidable as a missionary religion than Islam. The Moslem missionary never had much success in still unconquered Christian countries. Islam gradually converted those Christians who were conquered by the Moslems, and, in the Ottoman Empire, down to the 17th century of our era, Christian converts were mostly found among Western Christian deserters or prisoners, and subject Eastern Christians who had been conscripted in childhood as public slaves and had been brought up by the Turks. What most horrifies people in the West in facing Communism today is that this is a missionary religion which, unlike Islam, has “cells” in our own world. If you could imagine, in medieval and early modern Europe, there being centers of Moslem propaganda in France, in England, in Christian Spain, and so on, that would be more comparable to the present fear that we have of the missionary penetration of Communism.

**P**ERHAPS most important of the factors that have changed our point of view is the last mentioned—the revolutionary transfer of power.

As between countries, the power has been transferred from Europe to the outer ring of the Western world. Down to 1914, out of eight great powers then existing in the world, the metropolitan territories of no less than four—France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy—were on the continent of Europe; the British Empire and the Russian Empire were partly in Europe and partly out of Europe; only two great powers—the United States and Japan—were wholly out of Europe. Today there are only two great powers of the highest caliber, and they are both out of Europe; for Russia is much more out of Europe today than she was before the War of 1914–18 and the Revolution of 1917. And all round the little countries in Europe there is a new great ring of giants rising; for the United States and Russia are merely the two giants who have already grown to full stature; there are other countries in the outer circle—countries like Canada, and perhaps Brazil and the Argentine, and perhaps India and China too in time—that are already all on a much bigger scale than the average country in Europe and are going, in time, quite to overshadow us.

Then there has been a transfer of power between classes—a transfer of power from the middle class to the industrial working class. I can remember Sidney Webb saying to

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me some time late in the 1920s that, looking back at his life from that point, he was astonished at the extent of the transfer of purchasing power in England that he had lived to see. He meant, of course, transfer through taxing well-to-do people in order to provide social services for the poorer people. And this has gone very much further in England and in other Western European countries, and even in the United States, since then. Before 1914, the West European middle class really ran the world. When one thinks of that, one sees that in terms of political power the situation has indeed changed.

So I am inclined to think that, if we are now interested in seeing current events in the light of history, it is because we are now wondering whether, as a result of what has been happening in the last thirty-five years, we may not, after all, now be back in history, in the sense that the unpleasant things that have happened to other civilizations in the past may be going to happen to our civilization in its turn. It is this, I think, that is the root cause of the present anxiety in the Western world—an anxiety which, as I have said, seems to be even more intense among middle-class people in the United States at this moment than among corresponding people on the European side of the Atlantic.

It is a curious phenomenon: one would expect Communism to seem less menacing on the other side of the Atlantic than in Europe. It is not so; it is rather the other way round. It may be that the American middle class still has more to lose than the West European middle class, and that they are not yet broken in to the idea of losing what they have. The present attitude of the American middle class towards current changes is not unlike the attitude of the corresponding people in England in the 1890s or the early 1900s—the attitude prevalent at Oxford at the time when I was an undergraduate. If one goes from England to America now, one has a sensation of traveling back about the length of one generation in time and recapturing what was the middle-class attitude in the England of 1910 or 1912 towards the working-class movement.

But perhaps the deepest reason for the strength of present American apprehensiveness is that, even more than the English after the Battle of Waterloo, the Americans after the War of Independence were convinced that they were now “out of history.” They imagined that they had somehow contracted themselves out of the troubles and ills and misfortunes and weaknesses of the Old World. They had got out of history in order to lead a new life in their own American way. One can estimate *fortiori* what a shock it is to the Americans today to find that, in spite of having plucked up their roots in Europe and crossed the Atlantic to start a new life overseas, they have now been caught up by an Old World which has put out its tentacles and dragged them back into history. I think it is their disappointed expectations that make Americans so upset at the present time.

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**W**HEN one talks about the unpleasant things that have happened to other civilizations, perhaps one should define more clearly what one has in mind in using those words. Primarily, I suppose, one refers to what is the subject

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of Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which perhaps might be better described as the decline and fall of the Greco-Roman civilization, because the decline began long before the Roman Empire was dreamed of.

In February 1947, when I was on a visit to the United States, I had the good fortune to hear Mr. Marshall make, at the University of Princeton, the first of his big public speeches after being appointed Secretary of State. One of the striking things he said to his audience that afternoon was that he wanted them to be intelligent citizens, and he advised them to educate themselves by studying the history of Greece in the generation before the Peloponnesian War. What he meant was that they should study the crucial moment in ancient Greek history that foreshadowed the disintegration to come. Obviously he dated the catastrophe that led to the decline and fall of Greco-Roman society as far back as the 5th century BC though the decline did not work itself out to a final collapse until the 5th century of our era in the West, and not till the 7th century in the heart of the Greco-Roman world.

What we fear is the possibility that what has happened to other civilizations may happen to ours. We fear that, as a sequel to the catastrophes that we have witnessed in our own time, there may be a long drawn-out decline, culminating in some such revolution as that which occurred at the breakup of the Roman Empire. The final collapse in that case could perhaps be analyzed into several different aspects. There was a catastrophic fall in the material standard of living—and comfort means a great deal to us nowadays. There was a fall in intellectual cultivation—a return to ignorance. There was a setback in social manners and customs. Above all, there was a great deterioration in law and order.

The drop in the material standard of living was probably the least serious of these experiences, though, for the people affected, it must have been very unpleasant. From about the 5th century of our era onwards, in the Western part of the Greco-Roman world, people lost their possessions. But they also got rid of their income-tax inspectors and collectors. In any case there were a great number of well-to-do people who, before the system collapsed, gave away their goods and became hermits without possessions.

I do not mean that they had not deep religious reasons for doing that; but I sometimes wonder whether the burden, on property-owners, of filling in forms and being assessed by the income-tax authorities may not have also had a bit to do with these withdrawals from the world.

A still more striking symptom is that there were people—cultivated people—who welcomed the barbarians because they found the simpler and cruder form of government more tolerable than the extremely complicated government of the later Roman Empire. The later Roman Empire does, then, present some facets that are familiar to us—for instance, the spectacle of people being “directed” forcibly into prescribed occupations. The system had some good sides—it was highly equalitarian by contrast with the aristocratic government of the early Roman Empire and of classical Greece. But the price of

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this was an oppressive governmental regimentation and control of people's daily lives; and perhaps getting rid of that was not an unmixed misfortune. For myself, the really dreadful thing to face—if we contemplate that it might happen again—is the drop in the intellectual level, and the deterioration in social habits and in law and order, that were also features of the decline and fall of the Greco-Roman civilization.

**S**TILL, if the decline and fall of the Greco-Roman civilization were the only case we knew of, we might feel that we need not think much about it. It might then be no more than an exceptional disaster, like a railway accident or like a house being burned down by fire. Such disasters are great misfortunes for the people to whom they happen, but they are so rare that, when we read of them, we do not feel that there is any great likelihood of their happening to ourselves. But if we look further afield, we shall soon find other examples of the same historical phenomenon.

Behind the Greco-Roman civilization was one that a great English archaeologist has discovered in our own lifetime: the Minoan civilization of ancient Crete. We can say, with the knowledge we have now recovered by excavation, that, just as our modern Western civilization came out of a dark age following the breakdown of the Greco-Roman civilization, so, at the beginning of Greek history, the Greek civilization arose out of a dark age that followed the collapse of that Minoan civilization which Sir Arthur Evans has disinterred.

If one looks round—not just backwards in time, but round the globe, in other quarters of the world—there can be found in the Far East a series of civilizations with a history of their own which, till lately, has been independent of ours in the West; yet in this other stream of history there are similar phenomena. There was a great decline and fall of the ancient Chinese civilization which came to a head about 200 A.D., when the Chinese equivalent of the Roman Empire broke up. There is no need to list all the other cases; but there are more of them to collect, if we choose. To be more exact, there are about twenty examples. And, when we have surveyed them, our own situation does begin to look rather more serious, because the breakdown of a civilization that happens to be the predecessor of ours does not then seem to be just a curiosity of history.

If one tries to total up all the civilizations that have existed up to date, including both those that have come and gone and are now dead and buried, and those which are still living, the conclusion is probable that all of them have either already declined and fallen or are at present in decline. The symptoms that can be identified as those of decline and fall in cases where the process has worked itself out to the end and the civilization has disappeared, are also to be found in most of our living contemporaries: in the present Far Eastern civilization and the civilization of India among others. Perhaps the only civilization about which it is not certain that it is in decline already is our own; but, if we look at it like that, it puts us in rather an uncanny position. Our living Western civiliza-

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tion is like someone standing in a room where there are a lot of dead people lying about and a lot of very sick people. We can detect the symptoms of the disease the dead people have died of, whatever that may be, and the sick people are exhibiting the same symptoms and are probably going to die. Do the same symptoms show in us? Is this swelling a mark of the bubonic plague? We are like a group of people trying to diagnose whether they are plague-stricken or not. That being our position, little wonder that people in the Western world, and particularly in the United States, are so anxious today.

**W**HAT bearing may these precedents from past history have on our prospects? But at this point I would like to say that I myself am most emphatically not a determinist. There are people, like the famous German philosopher of history, Spengler, who take a very pessimistic view. They believe that a civilization, like an individual living organism, has a specific life span which, even in cases of extreme longevity, can never exceed a certain maximum. They think that, after evolving through a regular series of phases, most civilizations die after, say, one thousand years. They may live as long as twelve hundred years, but about one thousand years is the average span. I believe this thesis is non-proven, and I am equally sure it would be a great misfortune if we were to allow ourselves to be terrorized by a belief that we are doomed. There are many reasons for not believing that.

One reason is that, so far, we have very few examples of the history of a civilization—twenty or thirty cases at the most; and any statistician will tell you that when you are dealing with such small quantities as twenty or thirty the margin of error in your inferences from the statistics is bound to be very high. If the world were a million or two years older and we had hundreds of thousands of civilizations to work on instead of a mere twenty or thirty within a very short period of five or six thousand years, we might then command the statistical evidence for working out our own civilization's expectation of life in the insurance sense.

**L**ET US consider for a moment the contrasted case of the insurance business, where experts can make statistical inferences with a very high degree of accuracy. They can make very close estimates of the percentage of the total number of houses, standing in a given city or country, that are going to be burnt down in the next twelve months, or of the percentage of the total number of people, of a certain age or in a certain state of health, who are going to live or die. But, of course, they have hundreds of thousands of cases to strike the average from,

Further, while the expert can predict approximately what percentage of the existing houses will be burnt down in the coming twelve months, he could never predict that this particular house will be burnt down in this particular year. This particular house may be burnt down tomorrow and may be built up again and then burnt down again a week

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later, or it may stand for three or four hundred years without ever catching fire. You just cannot tell about a particular house. There is no procedure, mathematical or magical, for forecasting that. No expert is able to tell about individual cases. What he can work out is an average: a certain percentage of the houses in existence will be burnt down in a certain time. But even that average only holds *rebus sic stantibus*: so long, that is, as the conditions for building houses and for living in them remain invariable.

If, for instance, one could imagine a house being built entirely of asbestos, with asbestos furniture and curtains and cloths and with no open fires inside, then the whole situation would be changed; the average would change with it; and the insurance expert would have to work out quite a new set of tables in order to be able to continue to quote premiums.

My point is that all these averages, wonderfully though they are worked out, depend on the provisional stability of certain circumstances which may suddenly change if some new factor comes into the picture.

Let us apply this to the question of the “goodness” or “badness” of the “life” (in the insurance sense of the words) of civilizations in general and of our own civilization in particular. It is evident, I think, that, if twenty or thirty civilizations have come and gone in five or six thousand years, our own risk is fairly high. But it is also clear, from the life or fire insurance analogy, that we are not doomed. We are not fated to perish. And it is also possible that, under the stress of a danger to which we are now so keenly alive, we might take the opposite line. We might be stimulated to invent something quite new in the field of international politics or of social affairs in general—to rise to some quite new standard of good behavior that would transform the situation to such an extent that these precedents would cease to be relevant to our case.

**I**F YOU look at the deaths of civilizations—speaking very roughly and crudely—you can see that they have mostly died of one or other or both of two things: war between local states and another kind of warfare—war between classes.

It is notable that before dying they seem almost always to have solved these two problems in some sort of way by managing to establish a universal peace. The Roman Empire or the Chinese Empire may serve as an example. However, in these and also in most of the other known cases, the establishment of a universal peace has only postponed the fall and has not averted it permanently. It has only postponed it and not averted it because the universal peace has been achieved too late, after the devastation has gone too far. I am not thinking so much about the material devastation of war and class war as about what I might call the psychological devastation—the upsetting of people, which is much more difficult to put right than it is to rebuild buildings knocked down by bombs or shells.

Another adverse point is that, in most cases in which a universal peace has been established, it has been imposed by force as a result of a knockout blow which one great

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## *Can Western Civilization Save Itself?*

power has delivered to all other powers in its world. For example, in 220 B.C. there were five great powers in the Greco-Roman world. In 168 B.C. only one was left—Rome. In 230 B.C. there were, I think, seven in the ancient Chinese world, and, less than ten years later, in 221 B.C., only one. That one had taken less than ten years to knock out the other six. These historical precedents are unpleasantly pertinent, because, within our lifetime, as the result of two world wars, the number of great powers in our world has been reduced from eight to two. I am using the term “great power” to mean a completely independent power. I suppose you might say that the United States and Russia are completely independent of each other, while, in differing degrees, all the other states in the world today are in some measure dependent—most of them on the United States and a few of them on Russia, but none completely independent of one or other of these two powers. In that situation the line of least resistance would be for our world to be unified politically by force, in the old-fashioned way, through a third war in which one of the two surviving powers would knock out the other and impose peace on the world.

Looking back a bit into our Western history in the light of the wars and social upheavals which we have had in our lifetime, we can see further disturbing parallels. We can see now that the relative peace and prosperity of the Western world in the 18th and 19th centuries, which we took for granted in our childhood, and which our predecessors likewise took for granted, was not a stable or normal condition but only a lull between two bouts of trouble. Gibbon, looking back to the Wars of Religion, felt that, in his day, the Western world had got out of the “enthusiasm,” as he called the spirit that had caused the religious wars. Yet since Gibbon’s time, we have drifted into ideological and nationalistic wars fanned by enthusiasms of their own.

But is it absolutely necessary that the world be united politically in the near future? Cannot it go on living politically as our Western world has been living for the last three or four hundred years, as a collection of more or less independent states, going to war with each other from time to time in a barbarous and unpleasant way, but not in a way that has meant destruction for our society as a whole? My own guess would be that in this respect the situation has now entirely changed. There are factors like our immensely greater economic and cultural interdependence, our greater power of exhausting ourselves in war by the more effective mobilization of our resources, and our invention of much more deadly weapons than our predecessors had. For these reasons political unification of some kind would seem inevitable for our world in the rather near future—though here, of course, I am verging dangerously on prophecy.

But if one goes on from that point to ask oneself the obvious next question—the question whether, if political unification is inevitable, it is bound to come about by the traditional method of the knockout blow-by wars going on increasing in intensity and frequency until only one great power alone is left—I would answer emphatically: No! For, even if unification is inevitable, we might achieve it in a new way—the way, not of

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force, but of consent taking institutional shape in some kind of voluntary cooperative form of union. If we should accomplish that, it would be a new achievement by means of which we might win all the benefits of the unity that was *imposed* by the Roman and by the Chinese Empires, without the prohibitive price that the Greeks and Romans and the Chinese were forced to pay for arriving at their universal peace at a stage when it was already, in a sense, too late. This is the question that now faces us.

**T**HERE are really two questions. Can we find a middle way in international affairs between the old anarchy of independent states jostling against each other—an anarchy which, I believe, cannot go on much longer in its old form—and the extreme opposite regime of a world peace imposed by some single power on all the rest? And can we find some middle course not only in the arena of international politics, but also in the social field, between the old inequality of classes, leading to subterranean class warfare, and a social revolution leading to the forcible abolition of class, which is the program for which Communism stands? Can we find a middle way between these two social extremes? I believe that, in both these fields of endeavor, which are such very important fields in the world at this stage, my own country—England—may have a great part to play.

We English are conscious that we have lost our wealth and, with it, other forms of material power to a large extent, but we have not lost our gift for steering the middle course, for finding ways out of difficult situations that are not drastic, extreme ways. Such a middle course can play a fine part in saving the world from a possibility of disaster that obviously might overtake us, yet also, as I see it, is not bound to be our destiny—if only we have the spirit to defy the bogey of Fate and to recognize that, with God's help, we can still be the makers of our own future. 📖➡️

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# The Intellectuals and the Jewish Community

The hope for our heritage in America.

Elliot E. Cohen

**T**HE WORD 'CULTURE' is again being heard in the American Jewish community—after a decade's absence. To be sure, it is a bit early to announce a renaissance. But it indicates something when a thousand community delegates turn up to overcrowd a convention hall (when only one hundred and fifty were expected), to hear an informal discussion on the future of American Jewish culture by five "intellectuals," none of them a celebrity: This happened at that soberest and most practical of Jewish assemblies, that of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds in Philadelphia early this year. Indeed, during the past winter and spring there have been few national conferences, of whatever organization or tendency, that have not featured a "cultural discussion"; and the air is full of schemes and proposals reflecting the reawakened cultural interest.

Admittedly, most of this is smoke generated under forced draft from the same old rusty publicity stoves. But there is fire beneath; and nothing better attests the genuineness of this new impulse than the community's excited interest in the younger Jewish intellectuals, and in their rumored revived concern with "things Jewish."

This is something new, this focus on the culture-maker and culture-bearer himself, rather than on institutions or ideologies, or even “cultural products.” The custom has been to think solely of what we, the community elders and our institutions, need and demand of the intellectuals. It has seldom occurred to us to consider what they might need and demand of us—and of life. Actually, this topsy-turvy approach is mere common sense. For obviously, if we are interested in the future of the Jewish heritage in America, that future depends primarily on them, and only secondarily on us. No bees, no honey.

And, of course, there is another reason why (if we are wise) we need to keep close to our intellectuals. Though it has been said a thousand times, it is still true: They are the vanguard of the generations ahead; in their feelings and their thinking they barometrically register the needs and demands of our own children and grandchildren. And they can be more immediately useful, too: Some of us remember that in the late 20s and early 30s the young writers seethed with anxious concern over the menace of Hitler, while the statesmen and the community leaders remained calmly unaware.

From the precarious vantage point of an editor’s chair, I shall try here to sketch a rough portrait of the Jewish “culture-maker” of today, what he is like, what he is thinking about himself as an artist and intellectual, and what, perhaps, he is thinking about himself as a Jew and in relation to Judaism and the Jewish community.

## II

**P**ERSONALLY, I find it most fruitful to approach the Jewish intellectual of the late 1940s by comparing him with his older brother (or, in some cases, older self) of the 20s. The 20s was a time, as many of us remember, that called itself the age of disillusionment—the fashionable stereotype was that the sensitive young American had had his ideals irretrievably shattered by the realities of the First World War, and lived in a state of acute disintegration of mind and will and confidence. Of course, just the opposite was true. This was an era, in the mind and the arts, of almost fantastic exuberance, self-assertiveness, and wildly luxuriant energy—it was a time when the intellectuals came surging in, full of ambition, from all the provinces of America to Chicago, New York, Paris, and Europe generally. It was the time of H.L. Mencken, Eugene O’Neill, Sinclair Lewis, Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, Paul Rosenfeld, and Ernest Hemingway. It was a period of exploration and discovery, in which young people tried voraciously to put themselves in contact with all possibilities of experience and all regions of America. There was overwhelming enthusiasm, a sense of the sheer value of experience as experience, and of art as art, and along with it the ambition not merely to participate in every gratification and sorrow the world had to offer, but to reshape the world, too. There was literature and there was social reform; there was a sense of America coming of age.

The Jewish intellectual of that time felt himself in the forefront of this whole move-

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ment. I was managing editor of a Jewish magazine in those days, and as I think back to the personalities of the 20s I realize how high their ambitions were and how confident they were of their achievement. Humorously, they said of each other—and those days were full of satire and irony and a sense of the ridiculous—that they suffered from the Leonardo da Vinci complex, and certainly each lieutenant-intellectual quite literally believed that he carried in his knapsack the baton of a cultural Napoleon. At the same time, for all the airs they gave themselves as cultural leaders, they felt themselves very close to and very responsible to people—all the various classes and occupations and breeds of Americans. It was a bumptious generation, but at the same time it felt itself warmly and intimately involved with the experience and the aspirations of other human beings in all their specific variety.

Parenthetically, this creative surge did not stop with 1929 and the onset of the depression. Indeed, with the depression, one could almost say it went into higher gear. Many of the men and women of that generation became the banner-bearers of radical reform and social regeneration. They threw themselves heart and soul into building a new society overnight; and their revolutionary aspirations, expressed both in New Deal and radical politics, had their parallel in the literary, artistic, and critical fields. With economic and social determinism as the key to the whole field of culture, the thinkers and critics of the time set out to rewrite all the books of the ages, so that they would more clearly reflect social “truth” and advance social change and reconstruction.

**N**OW, how did the Jewish intellectual of that generation think of himself as a Jew? That same surge of curiosity, of desire for experience, flooded into this area, too. The problem of returning to Jewishness or rejecting it was very much on the order of the day. There was an effort to come closer to the Jewish heritage and to the Jewish people. Zionism in those days had strong cultural interests and was a lively intellectual leaven. Though few became Zionists, many found much cultural nourishment there. As I remember them, Jewish intellectuals of that time had very little interest in the religious side of the Jewish heritage; it was a rationalist, or rather naturalist generation, to which religious issues seemed passé. They sought rather to come closer to the lives and interests of other Jews, and to enjoy a common cultural heritage. I remember an informal circle of almost fifty Jewish intellectuals and artists, which called itself the Samson Gideon Memorial Association, and which came together in the meeting rooms over a German beer garden on Irving Place or in various Italian restaurants. One evening we gave a Yiddish puppet show in Meyers Hotel in Hoboken. One recalls also a debate on Jewish nationalism between the late Shemarya Levin and a younger Sidney Hook, which was both as violent and as amicable as anything could be. I remember also that at least two editors of the *Menorah Journal* grew beards.

What were the relations between this generation and the organized Jewish commu-

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nity? Not particularly close or fruitful, one would have to say. The fact is, perhaps, that this generation was iconoclastic, over-weening, impatient, and demanding. They were not tender or tactful with sacred cows, and maybe irreverent to genuinely sacred vessels. By and large, the Jewish community showed itself nervous and offended. If it did not reject this generation wholesale, it certainly found little place for it. Years later one can see that very few of the talented of that generation remained in any intimate contact with the Jewish community and its work. On a personal basis, between one scholar and another or one intellectual and another, ties endured—but little more than that.

Perhaps it was because the community did not yet feel the need for the intellectuals' work. Certainly the means and institutional facilities for making use of their energies did not exist, except perhaps in one field—that of social welfare; here the intellectuals made some impress, though not too much. As for the rest, a few books were written, some fragmentary pieces of *belles lettres* and of scholarship produced, and a few personalities cast up on Jewish institutional shores. But the balance sheet, I think, would show that much high potential went to waste, and that, since some of us think this was a golden generation, a great opportunity was missed.

Perhaps a little more vision on the part of the communal elders, a little more understanding of the genuine interest and enthusiasm that lay under the surface of the sheer youthful contrariness and *chutzpah*—perhaps that might have made a difference. But it might be not only more tactful but truer to place the chief responsibility for the failure on those giant social and political forces that swept everything under in the 30s.

### III

**N**OW—rushing in again with rash generalizations—what of the Jewish intellectual of the late 1940s? He is, I think, what you would expect to find him if you remember that he is a cultural child of the Great Depression, of the defeat of the dreams of social reconstruction that followed it, of the great human cataclysm of World War II, and of the present period of that peace which is not peace. Culturally, he feels himself the survivor of a long series of routs and massacres. Insecurity is his portion, and doom and death are to him familiar neighbors. Read his descriptions of himself in literature or criticism or poetry—or see him in the flesh—and it is clear he thinks of himself as wary, unhopeful, isolated, and alienated. There is very little in him of that lust for life and experience, of the joy of living for its own sake, of a sense of wide horizons or worlds to conquer, or much of that early curiosity that drove his older brother expansively over the realms of knowledge. He seems to have little creative energy as such, and that little he hoards. He is not lavish with his emotions or his sympathies or his interest in people. Rather than ranging the whole country or the many continents, he is thrown back on himself. Sceptical of the large claims of political ideologies, he is neither a joiner nor a

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devotee. He has almost no humor, little wit, and a kind of self-absorbed solemnity. In his writing, he has little feeling or interest for grace, fine effects, or perhaps even for communication at all. In contrast to his prototype of the 20s, he is not likely to be a novelist, short-story writer, or, least of all, a dramatist. His turn of mind seems to be reflective and analytical, and, as you would expect, his talents are directed toward philosophy, psychology, literary criticism, the social sciences, and religion.

He still thinks of himself as a leader, but wryly, as without followers or even an audience. Yet one can see that he is addressing himself to one or another phase of a larger task—the retesting and revaluation of the intellectual and spiritual values of his own life and of the culture and society of which he is a part. You can picture the intellectual of this generation as picking up one by one the slogans, the words, the concepts that have represented the coinage of our cultural tradition, and biting each one sharply with his teeth. So many have proved to be counterfeit.

And in his new concern with religion, one should point out, the interest is not in emotional conversion or a search for solace, but in recapturing the deep intellectual values that represent man's honorable sense of himself as an individual human being, in a universe that has again become mysterious and in a society that has revealed itself as by no means automatically progressive, but infinitely capable of backsliding and threat. And, in this moral and spiritual research, he does not exempt himself: whether he turns to the traditional religious thinkers, or to the newer religious and ethical myth-makers of psychoanalysis, the core of his concern is to find the springs of his own decent, effective humanity.

**C**ALL it trauma or insight, as pleases you, the core of the intellectual's concern seems to be the facts neither of depression nor war but his fright at something else—the menace of totalitarianism. And here too, it is not so much the massiveness and savagery of the totalitarian attack that obsesses him, but the revelation of the vulnerability and treasonableness of our own inner defenses, of so many of our own ideas, codes, and credos. He finds it impossible to think of fascism as a simple aberration of the German people, a sudden fever in the mind which raged epidemically and then passed away; nor can he be sure that the Soviet system today constitutes the sole totalitarian threat. He believes that the menace of both Nazism and Communism lies in their building of dehumanized collectivities. But, at the same time, he sees that we of the West spent prior decades building our own kinds of vast industrialized collectivities, in which sheer hugeness, and power, and abstract organizational needs were paramount; in which mechanisms came first and human objectives second; in which, at the behest of what Karl Polanyi has called “the market mentality,” the human being was increasingly a statistic, an object, a thing.

Did we not ourselves—we of the West—cut man down to a size where he might fit more easily into the grand design of Nazism and Stalinism? We know what we think of their morals and their values—they are a human horror! But we cannot escape the

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question: What of our own? What pride can we take in only being “the lesser evil”? How deeply have we allowed ourselves to be infected by this century’s accelerating acquiescence in the dehumanization of man? After all, did we not build concentration camps for American citizens in free America—equipped, to be sure, with hot and cold running water, and slow-burning social psychologists? Have we not adopted, almost without noticing it, in our acceptance of the very term “DP,” the thoroughly un-Western idea that a human being can be thought of as completely devoid of legal rights—with literally less status than any criminal?

To the intellectual, economic reconstruction and military might can do no more than contain the new totalitarian assault—the core of the menace is the insidious cultural corruption which it promotes; and his greatest concern is with the cultural confusion and lowering of standards through which we of the West seem to him to be opening the door to the East’s debasement of man. So you find the intellectual today focusing much of his interest on our society’s contempt for intelligence and ideas, its misuse of culture and of science as mere tools, and the irresponsible and manipulative role to which industrial organization and the communications industries have diverted the social scientist’s techniques and the artist’s crafts. Mass culture makes mass man—and mass-production culture is today not only one of America’s great interlocking industrial enclaves, it claims to be American culture itself.

**I**N THE tidal wave represented by the million-circulation popular magazines, Hollywood films, radio, the book clubs, the comic books, television, the juke boxes—all geared to the lowest-common-denominator mass mind—the specific regional and minority intellectual and religious cultures are flooded out by the uniform culture. But the intellectual has grown fearful of uniformity. Uniform human beings are essentially faceless human beings; if he has learned to be suspicious of the faceless party stalwart and the faceless Nazi and Soviet “common man,” he is almost equally suspicious of the faceless corporation vice-president and the faceless scientific expert. He wonders whether the faceless administrator and the faceless citizen are not reverse sides of the same coin—an administrative society in which fitness consists solely in “fitting in,” and the one is lost in the all.

This is the specter that haunts the mind of the intellectual today. He maintains his interest in social betterment, but, for the most part, he approaches society on the cultural and social, rather than political, level. In his politics, if he has any, he is no Utopian, but is inclined, rather, to weigh promises for regeneration through wholesale “social engineering” against their possible cost in sacrifice of human values and liberties. Security, yes, but along with it vigilance for the protection of the individual and the small group and the specific interest.

He begins to see the American process as something more than the simple adjust-

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ment of the single individual to the state and the national culture; he has become aware that what is involved is an evolving adjustment (with the guidance and aid of government) of relationships between many groups—economic, social, “ethnic,” cultural, religious—to gain the ends that the individual citizen desires for himself and for those to whom he feels bound.

Of late, too, one detects a new note in his sense of personal isolation and alienation, which formerly he wore as a badge of distinction. There is a hunger for some group attachment. It is not good for man to be alone; for his spirit’s sake he finds he needs something to interpose between himself and Leviathan industrial society, with its all-pervasive belt line culture. He has a growing hankering for a smaller community of his own—for shelter and security, appreciation and support. What is lacking is any confidence that such communities, if they exist, will welcome him, and give him and his talents a chance to make themselves count.

### IV

**W**HAT, now, are the relations of this Jewish intellectual of the late 40s to himself as a Jew and to the Jewish community?

First of all, there is no longer the emotion and the struggle over the problem of Jewish identification which gave so much of the color and drive to the Jewish intellectuals’ mentality of the 20s, both for good and for bad. The problem of assimilation or escape on the one hand or of participation and identification on the other, is no longer posed—at least not in the same terms. “Jewishness” is accepted. But a corollary of this is that Jewish identification may mean less. One is a Jew because, after Hitler and the six million exterminated, how can one repudiate the bond?

And in some senses the bond is easier, too. For the climate has changed in the broader American world. To one’s non-Jewish associates, “Jewishness” is no longer an oddity or a reactionary fact, as it was in an earlier liberal world with its easy (and demanding) universalism; some of the lessons of Nazi anti-Semitism have been learned, and Israel, too, has made a difference; and, also, the bars are increasingly down to the acceptance of the Jew in university faculties, government departments, and various fields of American cultural life. But, as I said, such acceptance can mean little. One is Jewish—so what?

Similarly with participation in Jewish organizations or interest in Jewish political movements: one more likely contributes to Federation or the United Jewish Appeal than one did twenty years ago, and one may have a genuine interest in the fortunes of Israel. But neither involves in any deep way the thinking and inner emotions of this hypothetical Jewish intellectual, since they have little relation to his primary cultural preoccupations and interests. He can be ardently pro-Israel without in any way having the Jewish cultural interests that the Zionist—or even the non-Zionist—intellectual of the 20s had:

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It must be remembered that in the period of the young intellectual's reawakened Jewish interest the Zionist movement, by felt necessity and plan, abdicated its inspiring role in Jewish culture; for this generation Zionist thought on the place of the Jew and Judaism had become whittled down to a set of political slogans, for Madison Square Garden and newspaper consumption.

At the same time, however, certain aspects of the intellectual's Jewishness may have the highest importance, since they happen to key-in most suggestively with his major concerns. It is his special experience as a Jew, in which the concentration camp is the culmination and the symbol, that is a chief factor in his present central preoccupation with totalitarianism; and it is because of his Jewish position in society that he continues to find himself in a kind of strategic center of this whole question. Inevitably, too, the Jewish intellectual finds himself—in his search for the causes and cure of totalitarian patterns and the hate-breeding and exterminative forces that feed them (and which in turn they breed)—in the company of other Jews intensely concerned, as he is, with civil liberties and human rights, and in one phase or another of social, economic, psychological, and even psychoanalytical study which bears on this central problem. And, to the extent that the problem of anti-Semitism and anti-democratic tendencies remains a continuing interest of Jewish organizations, he is likely to find himself involved in Jewish institutional life. Here is the first link.

**S**IMILARLY, in his quest for basic moral and spiritual values, he is quite likely to knock on Jewish doors. A striking phenomenon of our times is the reappearance on the shelves of the Jewish intellectual of books on religion; and these books are not only the same books of the Christian tradition that are read by his fellow intellectuals in the current revival—Kierkegaard, Niebuhr, Tillich, Eliot, Maritain, and the rest—but the religious works of his own tradition, both the old books and the new books. One hears of at least four circles of Jewish intellectuals at or near universities that meet regularly for the study of theological works. In COMMENTARY there is a department of reprints of classics of Jewish thought ranging from early rabbinic times to the day before yesterday, and we find that no part of the magazine is more carefully read by New York's intellectuals. Similarly, with the fine reprints of the Jewish classics and the excellent works on Judaism published during the past three years by Schocken Books—these find a receptive audience among modern Jewish intellectuals, and not only Jewish intellectuals. The writings of Martin Buber and Leo S. Baeck are increasingly read, and the present vogue for Kafka can be at least partly explained by a combination of the interests in moral and religious problems and in totalitarian trends in our modern society. Best of all, these new interests are already bearing fruit in fresh commentary and original work on ethical and religious themes which, in much of their inspiration and content, may reach back through the centuries, but which, in form and relevance, are altogether modern.

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Similarly, in the Jewish intellectual's interest in social betterment—which, we have said, in these days he is likely to approach on a “bits-and-pieces” basis. Today Jews provide much of the dynamism of the present democratic liberal-labor movement; and as the intellectual concerns himself with social thought he also finds that the problems of Jews and other so-called “minorities” and the problems of American society as a whole intertwine and illuminate each other. To understand either, he must understand both. And he discovers too that his kind of cause finds much of its substantial support from American Jews, not only as individuals but through their community organizations. This is especially true of psychological and sociological study in group relations, and in the development of social democratic thinking and procedures in the labor-management field. As for the creative artist—whether he be painter, musician, or poet—he has been finding his situation and experience as a Jew profoundly suggestive; and it can hardly escape his notice that, whether he deals with Jewish or general themes, the most appreciative audience for his best work (and indeed for American culture generally) will somehow turn out to be in large part Jewish. One of COMMENTARY'S writers, a member of the avant-garde in very good standing, reported the other day, with the sense of an important personal discovery, that whenever an article of his appeared it seemed to be read and argued about “by the most amazing variety of people in all kinds of circles,” and that for the first time as a practicing intellectual he had a sense of being a part of some kind of community in which his ideas counted for something. Similar testimony has been voiced by others, non-Jewish as well as Jewish, on more than one occasion; and warily some have begun to live with the idea that maybe one could find some closer relation with that community. (And since intellectuals have children, too, they are affected by the new awareness of present-day Jewish children's need of community, so evident at this time among both “emancipated” Jewish parents *and* children.)

A few have even gone further, venturing with some trepidation the possibility that from the questioning and ferment within the American Jewish group there might develop a kind of thinking which, integrating Jewish and American need, experience, and wisdom, might have a particular contribution to make, not only for the Jew, but for contemporary man generally in his peculiar dilemmas.

**I**T WAS put this way, perhaps too simply and hopefully, by another of COMMENTARY'S writers in a recent university address:

“It is Jewish—although it is also Yankee Vermont and Middle Atlantic and Mid-Western, as exemplified in John Dewey, Walt Whitman, and Abraham Lincoln—to think of human life and human personality as uniquely precious; to think of body and soul, the profane and the sacred, the divine and the secular, as being inseparably intertwined. It is Jewish—but it is also a mode of thought most congenial to the American climate—to accept no permanent separation of the theoretical and the practical, of the dream and

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of the reality. And it is Jewish—though not alone Jewish—to think of society as made for man, and the abundance of earth for his use, and even the injunctions of the Divine as made but for man’s guidance and needs. And it is Jewish also—but at the heart of the American democratic vision, too—to think of the congregation and the society as not being divided into the elite and the masses, the priest and the laity, the cadre and the rank-and-file, the master and the man; but to think of each person as being his own master and his own man. And it is Jewish—and very American, in the best sense—to have very strong and intense commitments to one’s self and one’s own kin, and at the same time to have the deepest ties and bonds with man universal and humanity at large.”

Such, in sketchy outline, are some of the considerations and aspirations that seem to have made Jewish problems and Jewish thought a relevant and strategic area of concern for the Jewish intellectual, and his association with Jewishness and his fellow Jews easier and more secure. In turn, his Jewish and his general cultural interests no longer seem to stand in an either-or, conflicting relationship. At their best, they seem to flow together naturally, both necessary parts of one equation.

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**W**E WOULD, however, be ignoring the plain facts if we pretended that the relationship between this Jewish intellectual\* generation and the official Jewish community and its institutions was close and intimate. The bridge has not been built. There is still a vast amount of strangeness, standoffishness, mutual suspicion, and, occasionally, recrimination. Recently a very important rabbinical leader told me that the Jewish intellectuals were not really Jewish and, anyway, were undependable and irresponsible. And only the other day one of our outstanding creative writers said that there was no reason to speculate too deeply on the rift between Jewish intellectuals and the Jewish community. The reason was simple: Jewish community life was just too devoid of intellectual and cultural substance of any quality—just too damned boring.

Shrugging off these two extreme viewpoints, perhaps it would be useful to canvass some of the impediments that apparently exist to the marriage of true minds, that match between Jewish institutional life and the Jewish intellectual that so many self-appointed *shadchans* are anxiously seeking to bring about.

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\* Judah L. Magnes, who saw an earlier manuscript of this essay, suggested that it might be well, in view of the varying and often derogatory use of the term, to define what we mean here by the term “the intellectuals.” By the intellectuals we mean—and we believe this represents a quite general use of the term even today, especially among Jews—those individuals who demonstrate a serious, devoted concern for ideas and art, and the human values they represent, and some imaginative creative capacity for their continuance and renewal.

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Here, for what it is worth, is a little anthology of these impediments as intellectuals complain of them to this writer.

*First:* We community people, they say, are parochial, interested solely in our own narrow concerns, chewing over the same old words, without reference to ideas and events in the American scene outside us or in the world at large. Jewish interests are pushed forward with self-absorbed indifference to any relation they might have to other interests. Jewish intellectual and religious problems are discussed in the concepts of twenty years ago or forty years ago, with little awareness of the more contemporary inner struggles or insights of other traditions, or for that matter of Western culture as a whole; nor does such discussion reflect the deep moral and spiritual questions posed for Jewish political thinking and Judaism itself, both by Jewish fate and mankind's crisis in the past decade. In the meantime, according to at least one critic, in Reform Judaism little is left of the strenuous ideal of Isaac M. Wise but a genteel Jewish-flavored 19th-century progressivism, while the movement which calls itself Conservative (or normative) Judaism (and is really the Reform Judaism of the East European immigrant generation) offers its constituency a "practical" mixture of nationalist sociology, fundamentalist doctrinal orthodoxy, and ritual revisionism, without benefit of any strong theological vision or social impulse. Similarly, Jewish history is written as if it happened in a vacuum. For example, a distinguished historian recently wrote a lengthy account of the liberation of the Jews of Rome in World War II; but at no place did he find room for much mention of anyone else in Italy except Nazis and Jews; and when liberation came, there were only American soldiers and liberated Jews. The fact that there were other inhabitants of the peninsula, who were also liberated, was all but ignored.

*Second:* Jewish institutional life shows little sign of being interested in intellectual or cultural values at all. Often its leaders are contemptuous of ideas or culture. Indeed, many are frankly anti-intellectual; and, in marked contrast to the traditional Jewish respect for ideas and learning, there is a whole vocabulary of sneer words among institutional people (including religious functionaries) to characterize intellectual concerns and their practitioners. If the community finds any use for intellectuals, it is only as technicians for short-range, bread-and-butter needs, in connection with philanthropic and fund-raising endeavors, i.e., as publicity writers, advertising copywriters, ghost writers, or similar auxiliaries. Inverting the old phrase, we insist on sending men on boys' errands. Almost nowhere is there any continuous activity that would involve the long-term, long-time use of the intellectuals' best capacities.

Jewish cultural indifferentism—the lack of any real concern with meanings and values—is ascribed to two sources, which seem to interact and reinforce each other. First, the dominance of the immediate and the "practical," the furious concentration on orga-

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nization, fundraising, philanthropic needs, and “social action,” perhaps understandable in a community so young, faced with so many emergency tasks. Second, there is among many—it is asserted—the timorousness and embarrassment at facing up to themselves as Jews, and turning their minds on the meanings of the American Jewish experience and where it is leading, or should be leading. One example: Social work represents possibly the broadest, richest, and most cultivated field of Jewish activity in America. But one can sit for hours at a national federation assembly or professional social work conference without noting any serious awareness, much less discussion, of the relation of the professional problems and techniques under consideration to the peculiar status, needs, or experience of the vastly changed and changing Jewish group in America, not to speak of any serious attempt at genuine study or rethinking of the aims and goals which should begin to guide us in the decades ahead. Admittedly, it is hardly likely that intellectuals have much to contribute to the revamping of organizational structure or to institutional administration; but how long, it is asked, can one hope to steer such large communal ships in the turbulent waters ahead without giving more thought to the kind of intelligent direction-finding that only informed analysis and creative thinking can provide?

*Third:* In such cultural endeavors as are planned, there is a misguided notion afloat that creativity can be provided by, or under, administrative or other personalities who have little cultural background, experience, or interest. It is a rare sector in Jewish communal life where the task of encouraging thinking, writing, art, or music is put in the hands of men and women who have demonstrated any talent, capacity, or flair for these fields. Encouragement of culture, moreover, has all too often meant completely ignoring the key necessity—the encouragement of the individual writer or artist: Forgotten is the simple fact that it is the creative individual that produces culture, not organizational factories.

As a matter of fact, Jewish community energies are turned, for the most part, to organizing campaigns and perfecting techniques for promoting, publicizing, and mass-distributing a yet almost nonexistent American Jewish culture. Imitating Prune Week, we concentrate on a Jewish Book Month, making this annual little publicity splurge the community’s total official activity on behalf of books.

Similarly, there is the delusion that we can solve basic cultural problems by organizational short cuts. We have been witnessing efforts of national organizations to capture the jurisdiction over the whole field of American Jewish culture on the community wall chart, on behalf of one or another ideological interest; and there is no end of schemes (some sincere, some merely exploitative) to create culture through “scientific” sociological surveys, congresses, conferences, and organizational resolutions.

*Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth:* We take them quickly together because we have heard them so often. *Institutional caution*—the restraint on the free and lively exchange of ideas, so

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indispensable to cultural activity, imposed by fear lest the prestige and omniscience of very important people or very important institutions be questioned or impugned—or fund-raising possibilities in any way prejudiced. The protective interest—the self-imposed censorship on honest recording of Jewish experience and decent self-criticism, lest the *goyim* hear and “use it against us.” This means writing about Jews with one’s eyes eternally looking over the shoulder in nervous watchfulness. Ever striving to put our best face forward, the face inevitably has the spuriousness—and dullness—of official portraits. Apologetics is the great blight of Jewish culture. Leaving aside the sheer spiritual shoddiness of substituting the plastic surgeon for the historian, we fool nobody. There is warrant for the assertion that in the field of culture, the best public relations is no public relations. *Low cultural standards*—the willingness to accept (and to canonize) achievements in religious thought, novels and short stories, history, and music that, by general standards, are not even third-rate. Hence, the odd paradox—that the same Jewish group that would feel itself personally and communally disgraced if its Mt. Sinai and Beth Israel hospitals were not Class A and better, decade after decade tolerates an official Jewish culture that is by and large Class D, more fitting for some backwater denominational sect than for one of the major religio-cultural traditions of the world. After all, what Jewish religious work was it that was most fervently acclaimed by the Jewish community in the last five years?

*Seventh:* Here, perhaps, intellectuals feel, is the deepest malady—the current prevalence of a kind of atmosphere of zealotry which breeds separatism with reference to the outside world and inner factionalism within the Jewish group. Baneful enough in the field of politics, this atmosphere is devastation itself in the field of thinking, culture, and religion. It substitutes sloganeering and name-calling for discussion. In its extreme forms in Jewish life, it polarizes legitimate and diverse views into a struggle between “treason” and “the only true truth.” It puts loyalty to certain labels and banners in the center of the cultural stage, and it tries to enforce unity by verbal terrorism rather than by intellectual accord. It seeks to enshrine the word “Jewishness” as a shibboleth, a substitute for the larger task, which is to search out, reshape, and renew Judaism as a way of thinking and living. It is so busy hunting out heretics who will not bend the knee to the phrase “Jewish content” that it has little energy left for giving “Jewish content” any content.

I, too, think this mood is dangerous. One detects a note of desperation about such current phrases as “positive Judaism” and “affirmative Jewishness” and “survivalism” which is neither conducive to civilized Jewish life nor, for that matter, justified by the facts. I have come to think that there is too much fright in American Jewish life today. We are all properly contemptuous of those Jews who are frightened *of* Jewishness. We should begin to be a little nervous about the Jews who are frightened *for* Jewishness, who seem to have a desperate sense of the imminent disappearance of Jews in America

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and of the decay and disintegration of every Jewish institution and every Jewish value.

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**I**T IS THIS sense of fright, this lack of confidence in the staying power of Jewish life that—so, at least it seems to me—lies at the root of so many of our cultural ills.

Paradoxically, we seem to be frightened of the climate of liberty—as if Judaism were a plant that the sunlight of freedom could only serve to wither. Recently, I had a sudden sense of how deep this nervousness went on reading three essays by a noted Jewish academician. These essays pointed out that for the first time in our long history there were few places on the globe where the Jew was not legally emancipated. But he reported this news with such overtones of anxiety and wringing of hands, of nostalgia and despair, as if this emancipation were the worst possible calamity. And, similarly, though there is no American Jewish thinker of any group who does not write of integration into American life as a challenge and an opportunity, there is always along with it, when Jewish values are talked about, such a sense of shrinking, withdrawal, and haste to put up the shutters and erect barriers.

After the fair, honorific words about integration into America in the opening paragraphs, somehow as we go along in the text, the words “America” and “Western culture” disappear and, instead, we hear talk about the “environment,” that is, America, that has much the same overtones of fear and hostility that marked the ancient Greeks when they talked about the wind, the sea, the rocks, and the storms. It becomes clear that of “the environment” most Jewish institutional people expect only one thing: the attrition and erosion of every Jewish value they hold dear.

If I write about this at some length, it is because to my mind it is this attitude—and the separatist ideologies and programs it breeds in religious thinking, Jewish education, political and “protective” activity, and other Jewish areas—that seems to be the most formidable barrier between the creative Jewish intellectual and institutional Jewish life today. We cannot expect the fraternal working together of true minds on tasks of mutual concern unless there is more adventurousness and less timidity. We have everything to gain and nothing to fear. Above all, I think we are strong enough to risk it.

We are strong enough in numbers—five million of us in America, two million of us in New York; most of us, to one degree or another, still under the influence of “that old rabbinic conditioning,” in the happy phrase of Erwin R. Goodenough. Materially, we are by no means the poorest section of the population, and in the last two decades we have erected an amazingly strong and articulated communal framework which, with all its faults, has little to learn in organizational ingenuity, effectiveness, and, incidentally, democracy, from any Jewish pattern of recent centuries. And only the other day the sociologist Leo Srole was telling us that he sensed a social stability in the group that indicated

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that the process of assimilation was slowing down and a kind of equilibrium was making itself apparent. Above all, Jews today accept themselves as Jews. Survival is no longer the problem. Jewry will survive in Israel. Jewry will survive in America also.

It is not existence that should trouble us now, but the quality of our living.

**T**ODAY, if it is wise, the community will throw the doors wide open to the most diverse kinds of personalities and influences. Let us have confidence enough in the strength and validity of our traditional Jewish ideas and cultural patterns to expose them to the free competition of other ideas, without the protection of artificial tariff barriers, which they do not need. They can stand up; and perhaps not only for us, but for all human beings. Let us not make conformance to slogans or creeds or dogmas the test. Let us rather make relevance and quality the tests, and leave ourselves receptive to wisdom and insight from whatever quarter they come; and not least of all from the great variety of cultural strains *within the Jewish group itself*. We have talked of and hoped for a cultural pluralism in American life. Is it too much to ask for a cultural pluralism in Jewish thinking and culture too?

It will not be easy. The American social system and the American cultural milieu in its present stage have all kinds of pitfalls and dangers for us, as they have for every group, including the New England native white Protestant group, whose ancestors came over on the Mayflower. Undoubtedly the tides of mass uniformity and mass vulgarization threaten every decent Jewish value; and indeed they threaten us today not alone from the outside, but from within our own community. Much of the mediocrity, vulgarity, and low standards that intellectuals complain of within the official Jewish culture represent the corruption of Jewish values via the imitation and wholesale adoption of the values of mass communication, advertising, and propaganda culture. If the Philistines are upon us, some of the most savage among them are Jewish Philistines, assimilationists to Western nationalism and power and success values at their crassest level. (And this is equally true whether such assimilationists are of the vigilante type, watchful of the 100 per cent American loyalty of their fellow Jews, or the Jewish chauvinist type, bent on terrorizing their fellow Jews into their own anti-Gentile whirling-dervish brand of "militant Jewishness.")

However, to reiterate, if present-day commercialized ersatz culture threatens our best values, both from without the community and within, it threatens the best values of others also. What is that but another way of saying that American society and American culture are still in process? And that has its positive side, too. For it means that we are not mere outsiders trying to break into an already achieved perfection, but partners in a still half-finished enterprise that needs us, too.

One does not have to be a constitutional optimist not to feel desperate about the prospects for American Jewish culture. Quite soberly, I believe that even on these shores, yes, in this 20th century, we may well see the Jewish intellectual-religious tradition flower in

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ways that will stand comparison with Spain, Germany, Eastern Europe, and elsewhere. Not that one is unaware of the frightful casualties Jews have suffered in recent years in scholarship, learning, art, and, in particular, in irreplaceable creative personalities. But one is also gratefully conscious of the personalities that, by good fortune or destiny, have found refuge on our shores, and have already contributed so greatly to our cultural wealth and enlightenment.

Also, there are signs and omens and stirrings. One notes the increasing use (part-time or full-time) of fresh intellectual talent—both from the universities and the various fields of art—in the programs of some of the key institutions in Jewish life; and a new respect and scope granted to genuinely creative personalities already associated with Jewish life. And, perhaps most important of all, the fact with which we began: that in the midst of all of their absorption in programs of philanthropy, relief, rescue, and for the safeguarding of Israel's hard-won victory, the same communal-minded American Jews, who as a group demonstrated such a remarkably unhysterical and seasoned capacity for meeting the vast emergency problems of the last decade, are today showing a heightened concern with the long-range, deeper problems of Jewish living in America.

**P**ERHAPS it is only a straw in the wind, but we at COMMENTARY think we have noted that your so-called “typical Jewish community leader” as often as not is most excited by the kind of article that Jewish intellectuals are most excited by—those that represent a genuine effort to grapple, in a fresh way, with the problems of Jewish being—even when the reasoning is subtle and the language difficult. And one senses a new dignity and maturity in his approach to cultural activity generally; for example, a desire for Jewish history that is “real history,” and for study, investigation, and writing that will enable us to see ourselves as we really are—and let the neighbors look, too. What have we to hide?

It is in this conjuncture between the present genuine interest of the congregation and the intellectual's own work that the great hope for cultural creativity lies. Both have found themselves too sharply confronted with the dilemmas of the world to be satisfied any longer with glib slogans, easy catchwords, and hackneyed and mediocre images, philosophies, and ideals.

One needs only to listen and everywhere one hears American Jews saying that now that Israel is established, really we must take time for thought as to what ideals and goals we must live by as American Jews. Significantly—and this is true of Zionist as well as non-Zionist—few are seriously suggesting any more that we can live by a culture imported wholesale from another country—even if that country is Israel; or by some fixed authoritative Jewish pattern of belief or behavior, however sanctioned by honorable use in Frankfort on the Main, Volozhin, or latter-day Jerusalem. There is a growing realization that out of all the various heritages we have to hand, in all their rich and living di-

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versity—and drawing also on fraternal cultural interchange with Israel and Europe—we must create our own culture, for our own needs and our own times, just as our ancestors did for their own.

The whole point of this report is to indicate that if the community truly means what it is saying today, the human resources are present and available for the first time in two decades. The intellectuals are there. If the marriage is to be made it is only for Jewish communal-minded people to show *by their actions* that their intentions are honorable—and serious. And not only in relation to the intellectuals, but to their own high resolutions to find a civilized, integrated pattern of living for themselves as American Jews in this hopeful country's unfolding society. 📌

# The Vindictive and the Merciful

God of wrath and God of love.

Milton Himmelfarb

**I** USED TO THINK I was fooling my father, but now I suspect that he knew all along and did not want to make an issue of it. When I was about sixteen or seventeen, I no longer went to synagogue every Sabbath, as I had done when I was a child. Left to myself I would probably not have gone at all; but I was not left to myself, and I went with my father on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and occasionally on other holy days as well. I still go. When the time came and I could have stayed away, I discovered I did not want to.

My father prays from his prayer book, but I read from mine. If you read more than you pray, you are left with a good deal of time. Skipping repeated matter, for example, represents a very considerable saving. In addition, experience and temperament lead to the establishment of some fruitful principles of exclusion; thus, it has been many years since I last read liturgical poetry in which the verses are set down according to an acrostic or alphabetic pattern. (Sometimes I am astonished by the number of pages this eliminates.) It did not take me long to realize that I could carefully read everything in the prayer book that appealed to me in about half the time a respectable person is expected to remain in the synagogue. This meant that the prayer book had to be supplemented.

When it first became clear that the *Mahzor* was not enough to see me through, I recognized that I would not have a wide range of choice for additional reading.

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The language would have to be Hebrew—out of an obscure sense of the fitness of things, and the ignoble calculation that only Hebrew might not arrest my father’s casual glance. The same sense of the fitness of things dictated that the reading should have a certain loftiness of spirit, and even of form. In the course of the years since then my personal canon has come to include the Bible and post-Biblical poetry. Two years ago I added a new volume, a collection by the Israeli writer and scholar S.J. Agnon, entitled *The Days of Awe: A Book of Usages, Homilies and Parables for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and the Intervening Days*. It is a fascinating book. (The publishers, Schocken Books, have lately issued an abridged edition of this book in an English translation by Jacob Sloan.)

Last Yom Kippur I came upon this selection, entitled “The Reckoning,” and taken by Agnon from a Hasidic work, *Marvelous Tales of the Great Men of Israel*: “Once, on the eve of Yom Kippur, the holy Rabbi Elimelech of Lisinsk, of blessed memory, said to his disciples: ‘Is it your desire to know how one should act on the eve of Yom Kippur? Go to the tailor who lives on the outskirts of the city.’

“They went to him and stood before the window of his house. They saw him and his sons praying with simplicity, like all tailors. After the prayer they put on Sabbath raiment and lit candles and prepared a table full of good things and sat down to the table in great joy. The tailor took out of a chest a book in which were written all the transgressions that he had committed during the year, from one Yom Kippur to the next, and said: ‘Lord of the world, today the time has come to make a reckoning between us of all the transgressions that we have committed, for it is a time of atonement for all Israel.’ At once he began to reckon and enumerate all the transgressions that he had committed in the course of the year, for they were all written down in this account book. After he had finished the reckoning of transgressions, he took out a book larger and heavier than the first and said: ‘Having counted the transgressions I have committed, now I shall count the transgressions Thou hast committed.’

“Then he reckoned the sorrow and afflictions, the troubles and anguish and sickness and loss of money that during the course of the year had befallen him and the members of his family. When he had finished the reckoning he said: ‘Lord of the world, if we are indeed to reckon with equity, Thou owest me more than I owe Thee; but I do not wish to be exact with Thee in an exact reckoning, for behold, today is the eve of the Day of Atonement and we must all be reconciled with our fellows; we therefore forgive Thee all the transgressions that Thou hast committed against us, and do Thou likewise forgive us all the transgressions wherewith we have transgressed against Thee.’ He poured brandy into his glass and said the blessing ‘by Whose word all things have their being,’ and said in a loud voice: ‘*Lehayim*, Lord of the world! We hereby mutually forgive all our transgressions against each other; and all of them, whether ours or Thine, are null and void, as though they had never been.’ Afterwards they ate and drank with great joy.

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“The disciples returned to their master and told him everything they had seen and heard. And they said that the words of the tailor were harsh words and excessive effrontery against heaven. But their master said to them: ‘Know that the Holy One, blessed be He, in His glory and essence, and the whole host of heaven come to listen to the tailor’s words, which are spoken in great simplicity; and from his words are created grace and joy in all the worlds.’”

**A**SI READ this story, I was reminded of something I had read recently in *Medieval Panorama*, by the late G.G. Coulton, the eminent British medievalist. Coulton is examining the effects on Christian theology of a literal reliance on the Old Testament, and he does not find them good: “[St. Thomas Aquinas] decides definitely that the joy of the Blessed in Heaven will be increased by the sight of the Damned wallowing beneath, in a Hell which he describes . . . at greater length and in cruder terms than Calvin in his *Institutes*. The Blessed will not, of course, rejoice in all these infernal torments *per se*, but incidentally, ‘considering in them the order of God’s justice, and their own liberation, whereat they will rejoice.’ How can he thus decide, it may be asked, after he himself has pointed out that to rejoice in another’s pains may be ordinarily classed as hatred, and that God does not delight in men’s pains? These apparently invincible natural considerations are brushed aside by one plain Bible text [Psalms 58:11]: ‘The just shall rejoice when he shall see the revenge.’ That vindictive verse of a Hebrew poet, to St. Thomas, outweighs everything else.”

For Coulton it was all the vindictive Hebrew poet’s fault. This follows from the postulate that the God of the Jews is a God of wrath and the God of the Christians a God of love. It also follows from this principle that Aquinas, like Calvin, was an imperfect Christian—i.e. insufficiently merciful—because he had allowed himself to be too much influenced by the Old Testament spirit.

I am not sure why I so resented this passage. It was not the first or perhaps even the hundredth time I had met a reference to the universal acceptance and unquestionable truth of the contrast between Christian love and Jewish wrath. Few doctrines can lay equal claim to Christian antiquity, as we can see when we view it in its most extreme form, the Gnostic identification of Jehovah with Satan.

I suppose the cause of my resentment is to be found precisely in the fact that Coulton did not have any deep-seated bias against Jews or Judaism. His two great passions were opposition to pacifism and opposition to the Catholic Church, especially the latter; he saw himself as a kind of latter-day Lorenzo Valla, whose mission it was to expose the fraudulent Donations of Constantine of his own time. So far was Coulton from being an anti-Semite that he says many generous and handsome things about medieval Jewry in his book: the treatment of women, for instance, and the almost universal literacy. (Respecting literacy and education, he insists that it would be misleading to compare the

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average medieval Jew with his Christian contemporary; the only reasonable comparison would be with the Christian priest, and at that Coulton is convinced that the Jew would carry off the laurels. We read in Exodus [19:6]: “And ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.” There has been some groping for an understanding of Judaism as the religion of a priesthood without a laity; Coulton’s assertion, in an entirely different context, that medieval Jewry as a whole was in a very significant respect to be considered in the same category with the Christian clergy is highly suggestive. But all this leads far afield; let us come back to our muttons.)

**C**LEARLY Coulton was not the kind of scholar who unthinkingly accepts any religious prejudice, however hallowed by time. The theme of vindictive Judaism and merciful Christianity must have run very deep indeed in his culture for him not to question it. Yet Elimelech of Lisinsk knew the Psalms better than Aquinas or Calvin; and though he had read and pondered the same verse by the same vindictive poet, his God and the God of his tailor does not seem very harsh or unforgiving at all. And since we are on the subject of forgiveness and Yom Kippur, neither does the God of the great Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev, in Buber’s account: “He used to say: ‘Like a woman who suffers overwhelming pain in childbirth, and swears she will never lie with her husband again, and yet forgets her oath, so on every Day of Atonement we confess our faults and promise to turn, and yet we go on sinning, and You go on forgiving us.’”

I return to Aquinas and Calvin. A few pages after Coulton has told us that if they are cruel it is chiefly because an ancient Hebrew poet was vindictive, we come to a passage about the elect and the damned: “A minority of human beings were ‘elect’: the majority were not indeed ‘predestined’ to hell, but their damnation was ‘foreknown’: God knew that this was their final destination. The difference here between St. Thomas Aquinas and Calvin is far smaller than men commonly imagine . . . . At least as far down as St. Alfonso Liguori (1750 [not many years earlier than Elimelech of Lisinsk and Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev]) it had been almost universally taught by writers in the Roman Church that the greater part of mankind would miss salvation. Some even foretold hell for an overwhelming majority; and others, like St. Alfonso, held that ‘the more general opinion is that the greater part even of the Faithful are damned.’ . . . Medieval preachers sometimes estimated the disproportion as one in a thousand, or ten thousand, or even more . . . *Paucitas salvandorum* [the fewness of those to be saved] . . . comes very near to a *de fide* doctrine, in virtue of this universal patristic consent until recent times.”

If the faithful have little chance of future bliss, infidels have none: “Tertullian painted the future vengeance of God upon pagan persecutors in language which still enjoys, after all these centuries, a melancholy notoriety . . . . St. Augustine even taught that unbaptized infants suffered in hell not only the penalty of losing the Beatific Vision but bodily torture also . . . . The only Ecumenical Council of the West which dealt with this question

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was that of Florence, which decreed: “The Holy Roman Church professes and preaches that none who is not within the Catholic Church (not only pagans, but neither Jews nor heretics nor schismatics) can partake of eternal life, but shall go into everlasting fire . . . unless they have joined her before death.” (The dogma here goes back to St. Cyprian, in the 3rd century: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*—outside the Church, no salvation. Coulton shows that it was not until Cardinal de Lugo, in the middle of the 17th century, when the Church felt that a policy of suppleness was required in the face of a vigorous Protestantism and a nascent freethought, that the plain meaning of the Latin words began to be interpreted more liberally.)

The religion of the cruel and vindictive Jews knows nothing about the doom of the majority of the faithful to eternal torment. As for those who are not Jews, the standard doctrine is the Talmudic dictum: “The righteous of the nations of the world have a share in the world to come.”

**I**T HAS occurred to me that all this may be only *Dogmengeschichte*, intellectual history with an appeal primarily to theologians and amateurs of theological scholarship. Between the eloquence or silence of learned texts on the subject of damnation or salvation and the actual conduct and emotions of ordinary people there need not exist any direct relation at all. But that relation does exist, or at least it did. Think of the magnificent third chapter of James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in which Stephen makes a retreat with the Jesuits and hears a number of sermons, in particular a sermon on hell. I have read that sermon again, and its sadism disturbs me as deeply as it did the first time I read it.

The entire passage is too long to quote, and excerpts would give only an attenuated impression of its total horror. It includes such elements as these: St. Anselm’s vision of the damned so closely packed that they are unable to remove gnawing worms from their eyes; a pestilential stench sufficient, in St. Bonaventure’s words, to infect the whole world; corpses putrefying into a jellylike mass of liquid corruption and giving off dense choking fumes of nauseous loathsome decomposition; brains boiling in the skull, bowels a red-hot mass of burning pulp, and eyes flaming like molten balls; nameless suffocating filth; fire kindled in the abyss by the offended majesty of the Omnipotent God and fanned into everlasting and ever increasing fury by the breath of the anger of the Godhead; the damned turning on one another, blaspheming God (!) and execrating and howling at each other, helpless and hopeless; and the devils, who once were beautiful angels and now are as ugly as once they were beautiful (so ugly that after seeing one, St. Catherine said she would choose to walk on live coals for the rest of her life rather than see him again for an instant), mocking and deriding the souls they have seduced. “Now the time for repentance has gone by. Time is, time was, but time shall be no more!”

The words are Joyce’s, but the contents are precise doctrine, and the *Catholic Ency-*

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*clopedia* differs only verbally from the apostate artist. This is the hell to which Christian theology, Catholic and Protestant, assigned the large majority of the faithful, let alone the heretics, infidels, and pagans. Knowledge of this hell was not the esoteric possession of the learned but was insistently preached to all Christians, and was common to all Christians' vision of the life to come. In Joyce the memory of the terror inspired by this vision is reproduced as art. Traces of the same memory are found in folk humor: there is, for example, the story of the Scottish Calvinist divine who preached on the wailing and gnashing of teeth at the Last Judgment; when asked about those who had died without teeth, he answered: "Teeth will be provided."

What centuries of inventive ingenuity must have gone into the perfection of such a vision of hell; what fertile imagination and depraved inspiration! And all is attributed to a merciful God. (During the Lenten season of 1949 Pope Pius called for greater homiletic emphasis on hell. "Desire for heaven," he said, "is a more perfect motive than fear of eternal punishment, but from this it does not follow that it is the most effective motive to hold them [the people] far from sin and to convert them to God.")

Rabbinic literature knows of hell too, but it is a very rudimentary kind of hell as compared with the Christian one. And the folk was not ridden by the fear of hell. When I was a boy my pious and learned grandfather, *alav hashalom*, used to speak to me often about righteousness and sin, reward and punishment; but I remember his telling me in detail about hell only once, and then it was incidental to a proof of the blessedness of the Sabbath. On the Sabbath the damned have respite from their suffering and even the River Sambatyon, which twists around the precincts of hell, ceases to roar and to hurl up its rocks, as it does on the profane days of the week.

There is an extensive literature, mostly in Yiddish and Hebrew, that began more than a hundred and fifty years ago and consists in an unrelenting attack on the degenerate life and thought of the ghetto. This literature is essentially autobiographical. The writers recall with bitterness the wretched squalor of the *cheder* school, the obscurantism of the religion taught and practiced, the mean behavior that was considered the norm of right living. Nearly every one of them says in so many words that he cannot forgive the ghetto and Orthodoxy—which in their emotions go hand in hand—for a childhood poisoned by many things, and each draws up a detailed bill of particulars. Yet I cannot think of one who speaks of a childhood made unhappy by the fear of hell.

When the Jew thought of the world to come, he thought of Paradise. The learned and those with a taste for learning hoped, with a fair degree of confidence, for the enjoyment of the splendor of the Divine Presence and the study of Torah in the circle of Abraham and Moses. The simple anticipated the simpler joys: sitting on a golden throne, eating the flesh of Leviathan and the Ox of the Pit drinking of the Preserved Wine. It did not cross their minds that a merciful God could send the majority of them to hell.

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*The Vindictive and the Merciful*

I HAVE no quarrel with the contemporary preference for difficult religion over the soft liberal religion that prevailed a generation and two generations ago. We have seen so much human evil in our day that even if we cannot quite accept orthodox theology's God, we can accept its man. Man no longer seems the naturally good and indefinitely perfectible being of the *philosophes* and of liberal religion; he more closely resembles the finished portrait drawn of him by classical theology with the indications provided in the Bible—indications like these: “The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth” (Genesis 8:24); “The heart is deceitful above all things, /And it is exceeding weak [or ‘desperately wicked’ ]—who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). What lends additional prestige to this theological portrait is that it is complex. Hobbes could speak in his *Leviathan* of “the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”; but the Bible knows that not even man's fate is so simple: “What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?/And the son of man, that Thou thinkest of him?/Yet Thou hast made him but little lower than the angels, /And hast crowned him with glory and honour” (Psalms 8:5,6).

Consider the new respect for Puritanism as an intellectual and moral system. A generation ago the teachings of Freud and Tawney, vulgarized *à la portée de tout le monde*, had made everybody understand that Puritanism meant sexual inhibition and economic exploitation. G. K. Chesterton was thought to be only up to his usual tricks when he said, in his *Heretics*: “Many modern Englishmen talk of themselves as the sturdy descendants of their sturdy Puritan fathers. As a fact, they would run away from a cow. If you had asked one of their Puritan fathers, if you had asked Bunyan, for instance, whether he was sturdy, he would have answered, with tears, that he was as weak as water. And because of this he would have borne tortures.” In our days Professor Perry Miller, neither a Puritan himself nor a fantasm like Chesterton, takes Puritanism very seriously indeed in *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*. Correspondingly, with all respect for the memory of the late Dr. Liebman, it is hard to take his *Peace of Mind* seriously; easy and consoling answers are no longer to our taste.

Nor is Puritanism foreign to the Jewish tradition. Hasidism, which dared to suggest a kind of camaraderie with God on Yom Kippur, is also responsible for the *T'filah zakkah* (prayer for purity), a silent meditation to be read before the communal Yom Kippur devotions. The *T'filah zakkah* is a passionate declaration of unworthiness and dependence on God's grace—a typical Puritan document.

ALL THIS having been said, I persist in thinking that the Jewish backwardness in the matter of hell is better than the Christian accomplishment. On the evidence of hell, the ancient Christian formula of a merciful Christianity confronting a vindictive Judaism is wrong.

A final quotation is in order. It is from an article entitled “On Transgressions and Their Punishment,” by Professor Saul Lieberman of the Jewish Theological Seminary,

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MILTON HIMMELFARB

published in the Hebrew part of the two-volume *Festschrift* presented to Professor Louis Ginzberg on his seventieth birthday: “Research into visions of hell is not merely a matter for amateurs of mysteries and folklore alone; it has a much wider import. In these visions we sometimes detect men’s ideas on justice and on transgression and its punishment. What is more, many of the cruel tortures of the Roman rule were incorporated into the idea of hell from actual practice, and the authors of these visions were really talking about contemporary phenomena.

“We can recognize the influence of the hell in this life on the hell in the life to come. Crushing the limbs, cutting out the tongue, burning out the eyes, chopping off hands and feet—all of which are mentioned in the lives of the saints, in the works of the Greek and Roman writers and in the Talmudic literature—were carried out in practice by the executioners. Rabbinic literature is accustomed to showing the similarities and differences between the kingdom of earth and the kingdom of heaven. It is right that evildoers who offended the honor of heaven should be punished with no less severity than those who offended the honor of the king of flesh and blood. One is forced to the conclusion that our sages, of pious memory, did not refrain from applying the laws of this world to the other world . . . .

“We conclude that the hell of this world certainly influenced the hell of the next world; we must now inquire whether there was not a reciprocal influence, of the next world on this. The Christian rulers were very well acquainted with the visions of hell, either from books or from the sermons of priests. Is there any wonder that these visions made an impression on them? Did not the Spanish Inquisition find a finished and detailed program of cruel tortures ready at hand in their literature of visions of hell? We should not be astonished by the customary medieval punishment of hanging offenders by their feet, with their heads dangling, since this punishment is mentioned in almost every Christian work on hell. What is more, even the punishment of hanging by the feet over a bonfire . . . was carried out in medieval practice. Similarly, hanging amidst dogs biting the hanging man is not alien to the Christian visions. Likewise, the authorities did not disdain the obscene torture [of hanging by the virile member] mentioned earlier.

“In sum, a large number of the cruel tortures practiced by the wicked authorities passed to the hell of the other world, were refined and perfected there, and returned to this world of falsehood; and they still prevail in this world.”

It is not the Psalmist that we should blame for the hells of St. Thomas and Calvin. 📖➡️

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