

POLITICS AND UTOPIA

In a "Realist's" View, Power Has Its Own Morality

Thomas Molnar

The question of the Chinese off-shore islands is not, for the time being, a central issue. But this situation is not likely to last; the theatre of operations is quickly shifting from the Mediterranean to the Pacific and back, from Formosa to North Africa. Is this still the Cold War, is it the Third World War as James Burnham calls it, or a new era of permanent conflicts, taking place in One World where three billion people are just too many to coexist?

Whichever it is, the West must fight it on two fronts: on the wide world scene and, simultaneously, against those whose utopian frame of mind, and consequent blindness to the realities of power, block the way of elementary realism.

I know: "realism" has been denounced on many platforms and pulpits as an outdated Bismarckian instrument, infected with a Prussian spirit and—who would have imagined it?—with a mystique of its own; but realism, I maintain, is not by necessity the brute's way. It may be inspired by a noble idea as when—in Berlin, in Korea, in Lebanon, at Quemoy—it resists with clenched teeth and fists, calls the partner's bluff, and—why not say it?—fights for freedom.

Naturally, there are other names, too: the Yalu River, Indochina, Suez, Hungary, where a "higher" realism won out and the West chose not to fight. I do not say that these setbacks for the West are anomalies of history, that success and victory must always be on our side. I merely say that we should not leave the battlefield to the enemy, and evacuate the barricades before they are stormed.

Recently in these pages, Mr. Kenneth Thompson gave the name of "reformists" to those who denounce the realists as "foes of progress and men of little faith." Reformist or Liberal, Utopian or Millenarian, we may choose among these terms or avoid them altogether. But we cannot deny that a conflict exists in our midst, that there are among us those who would have yielded the off-shore islands to the Chinese Communists, who welcomed the retreat order

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at Suez as a moral victory for the West, and who now concentrate their impatience on North Africa, wishing well to the F.L.N. in their struggle against France, the bulwark of Western defense.

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Speaking from an unreconstructed "realist" position, I would say the following:

The Reformist or Utopian usually has contempt for the structure of life, its given situations and hard data, and impatiently presses for the social or international pattern his ideology dictates him to favor. This is not necessarily equivalent to a belief in heaven on earth, although Liberal imagination often goes to this extreme; usually, however, the envisaged—and blurred—picture of what would be the opposite of life's actual imperfect conditions has a great fascination for him, and he is apt to denounce as cynics those who call him back from Utopia to reality. Because he insists on the here-and-now materialization of his plan, he develops a habit, well known from Molière's satires of contemporary medical practice, that is, the stereotyped recommendation of the same cure for all diseases: in the case of Molière's physicians, bloodletting; in that of the Utopian-Reformist, majority rule.

Inspired by a sound theology, the Christian also stresses the obligation to strive for a constantly improved state of the world, but he knows that "good and evil grow together"; that history and Christ will never be reconciled; that the goal of the individual transcends history, and while he can be saved, history cannot aspire to salvation.

The Utopian does not make this distinction. For him the *ideal* is simply a chapter to be read later in the great book of history, but of which he may snatch entire passages for his present use. Not having the sense of time and believing that evil is constantly receding before good, the Utopian is scandalized by the stubbornness of facts which contradict him.

Does this mean that he is a bold seeker on the confines of possibilities? After all, *he* is not bound by the unpleasant facts which stare a realist in the face; *he*

does not have to take evil for granted as an inevitable ingredient in human affairs. Yet, what we see today is that the Utopian, always responsive to abstractions, is easily swayed by historical abstractions which transform his search into a very limited enterprise, monotonous to the point of orthodoxy. Indeed, the only difference between the present-day Utopian and his eighteenth-century brother is that the latter used *static* abstractions (liberty, equality, fraternity, universal happiness), while the former is seduced by *dynamic* ones, such as the march of history, the irreversible course of events, historical necessity, and the like.

This is so because the Utopian's utopia is, after all, a sketchy thing in itself, a matter of pious inspiration rather than of reflection. This is the reason why the Utopian, confronted with a system, becomes fascinated by its brutal affirmations. Particularly so when this system, while projecting itself forward and making prophetic statements about the future, also displays a logical approach and a certain consistency. In such a case, the Utopian is bound to be seduced by the doctrine which preaches *necessity* (the necessary coming of the Perfect Society), and although the means and stages by which this necessity proceeds may offend his more delicate feelings, he trusts that the end will justify them as short cuts.

The relative remoteness of the *end* is, of course, recognized by the Utopian deep in his heart. This is why he is willing, in his impatience, to give all his devotion to the means: in this way he may feel the agreeable sensation of immersion in the current of history. In the process the distinction between means and end may altogether disappear: what are but *instruments*, for example international negotiations or institutions, may be taken by him for realities possessing virtues (and less often, vices) on which actions, ideologies, and policies should be based.

The League of Nations, the United Nations, Summit Conferences, will be considered by him more than what they are, that is, highly complex *tools of diplomacy* in view of reaching certain goals, good or bad. They will rather be considered goals, good in themselves, torn-out passages from the last chapter of history, sacred texts not from the past but from the future. This is because in the Utopian's eyes these tools display the features which he believes will be the generalized and permanent features of Utopia.

Thus the Utopian mentality reveals its inability to deal with political matters, especially with international politics. While the Utopian elevates the tools of policy-making to the rank of a final good, he commits the fatal error of believing that power, interests, particularisms, and ideologies—that is, the basic facts

of human coexistence in this forever imperfect world—are evil, and not only evil, but downright anomalous, irreconcilable with the exalted notions he has formed of the goodness of man and the noble flow of history. In local affairs where the realities of a situation are so intertwined with his emotional response and point of view that they seem like branches of the same tree, he usually accepts the conflicts of life and understands the mixed nature of human affairs both in his own soul and in that of his neighbor. But with regard to remote transactions he is likely to believe that interests, traditions, loyalties, irrational drives, etc., foreign to his own milieu, are unreal, and that they could easily be reconciled if only both parties were willing to make concessions and indicate good will.

In the United States, Utopian thinking assumes specific forms, because here the population, steeped in the tradition of local autonomy and the town meeting, labors under the impression that contractual arrangements and ad hoc compromises ought to be a planet-wide rule. The American way of "talking things out" is, thus, easily identified with the par excellence instrument of the political order which, in the American mind, is the same as the moral order. It is forgotten, among other things, that the moral order can never completely displace the natural order, and that the political animal is necessarily the inhabitant of both.

Furthermore, it is also forgotten that the domestic aims of government and nation are not of the same nature as their external aims. The basic goal of the first is to insure *unity* in the diversity, through the instrumentality of elections, parliamentary representation, compromise between central authority and local autonomy. The goal of the second is *security* from attack—military, ideological, and economic. The instruments of unity are fair play, concessions, reconciliation of interests; the instruments of security range from diplomatic skill to the use of lethal weapons, because the stage for international rapports is, to a large extent, in the state of nature.

But can we not, asks the Utopian, modify the factors of international politics so as to bring them to resemble more closely the factors of national politics? In other words, can mankind not set up an international body—government, army—which would play the same coordinating, pacifying role as the government or police play in the lives of societies limited by geography and sovereignty? Or, in the same order of things, can we not promote universal disarmament among nations which trust each other?

The answer to these and similar questions seems unimaginative to the Utopian; politics is the art of the possible, and the domain of the possible is extremely limited because it is the restricted territory of conflicting interests. Such conflicting interests, as Professor Morgenthau points out, have made of the Security Council and the General Assembly of the United Nations a camp split into hostile groups instead of a nucleus of world government. This can surprise the Utopian only, for the realist would never ask either the United States or Soviet Russia to forget about their differences, or to allow a police force to patrol them.

Risks which may be freely taken by the individual who is accountable to himself alone are to be shunned by the leaders of nations who, while not wholly responsible for the conditions within which they must act, must yet make these conditions the basis of their actions. This does not mean that no contrary opinion should be voiced, or that in our concrete situation, for example, agitation for unilateral disarmament should be outlawed; but it would be good if those who so agitate would realize that they are only able to advocate such a course of action because the majority of the nation and its leaders protect them from the probable consequences of their advocacy.

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Let me now examine briefly a few cases to illustrate what I mean by the Utopian cast of mind in concrete situations. The case of nuclear war, for example. The issue, of course, is very real since man, in his freedom, may actually choose to blow up the earth, his dwelling-place. I personally do not believe that this will happen, although I admit that M. André Fontaine, in *Le Monde*, has a good point when he states that (1) neither camp, confronting each other at Geneva, wishes to agree even on a controlled abandonment of nuclear tests; and that (2) the repeated Geneva parleys are just another way of fighting the Cold War.

M. Fontaine may or may not be right; but let us ask ourselves if it is not rather risky, on this old planet where sovereign nations are still fighting over issues that, the Utopian notwithstanding, they considered real, to say: "All this distrust, this lack of agreement, mutual threatening, testing of weapons, etc., is the irresponsible game of immature minds, refusing to understand that the interest of all mankind is to stop nuclear tests, disarm, and abolish all wars." I humbly admit I do not know what "mankind's interest" is, and when I vote I vote for those men who—I assume—will protect *my* interests and those of *my* nation.

For the Utopian, however, whose impatience is so easily whipped up to a frenzy, a glimpse of what he calls "nuclear holocaust" suffices to make him urge an end to all war, an "objective" study of surrender, even a unilateral renunciation of nuclear testing. More than that: he does not hesitate to proclaim that, given the existence of nuclear weapons, the very issues over which the Cold War is fought are no longer valid, in fact, good and evil themselves have become meaningless, since only the preservation of life matters, at all costs.

Or let me take another case in point: since President Wilson has thrown the concept of the "self-determination of peoples" into the whirlpool of world politics, this slogan, although by now bedraggled and in shreds, has been used for all possible purposes, usually bad. Slogans, however, have a great appeal to a certain cast of mind. In the concrete situation to which I refer, this type of mind is pushing, in the Western press and political forums, toward independence for Algeria, just as it was heartily welcoming partition even before Dien Bien Phu. In fact, a correspondent to one of our national magazines wondered the other day how it can be that de Gaulle, a "Catholic general," should "support colonialism in Black Africa," and whether "our diplomacy [is] hostile to freedom if our diplomats do not interfere with de Gaulle's policy."

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Now it may be that in the ideal world to which the Utopian always refers, all peoples would live under the system they choose, and these regimes would be democratic. To believe, however, that upon choosing independence, the new nations of Africa actually decide to live democratically is an illusion. Or, to put it more accurately, *they* do not decide at all, their leaders decide for them. This is obvious in the case of Ghana where Prime Minister Nkrumah has just told Parliament to go home and forget about the British-inspired Constitution. It is even more obvious in Premier Sekou Touré's speech at Conakry: "We shall establish compulsory labor . . . not for the benefit of any individual, but for the benefit of the workers themselves. . . . A year hence there will be no idling promeneurs in our towns. . . . We shall not seek electoral approval of our policies. And when you see severe measures strike down on this or that person, do not ask questions, but know that he has betrayed the interest of the people." (October 26)

Far from condemning de Gaulle's African policy, one should find it justified from yet another point of view: that of Western defense. As M. Pierre Boutang

writes in *La Nation Française*, the position adopted by the French army and de Gaulle has been "the only successful reversal, in the past several years, of the abandonment tendency manifest in the Western world." One could add, to continue this thought, that the French army in Algeria, far from depriving NATO of an important segment of its forces, is now the only fighting unit experienced in the type of warfare that all of NATO might have to engage in one day.

And finally, let us turn to the problem of the off-shore islands for an illustration of the Liberal thinking in clichés. A few months ago when a showdown in the Formosan waters seemed to be imminent, I, as all of us, heard time and time again that our best policy would be to abandon Quemoy and Matsu since (1) we do not possess the weapons to defend a territory so near the mainland; (2) the islands have no military importance.

Concerning point one, the Utopian is inconsistent, to say the least. Blowing hot and cold, he suggests that we disarm and, at the same time, he suggests that we evacuate the islands since we are militarily unprepared to defend them. But if our weakness is the only obstacle in the way of defending the islands, we should *not* disarm. On the contrary.

Similarly for the second point. The military importance of the off-shore islands may be great or little. The prestige of the Western powers in general, and of the United States in particular—their ability to stand by their friends—is, on the other hand, enormously important, as may be read in the U. S. intelligence reports from Asia and Africa each time the policy of abandonment chalks up a new loss.

Unfortunately, however, the Utopian, in proportion to his belief in abstractions, tends to discount power. In his imaginary happy commonwealth of the earth (and possibly the moon), individuals and nations respect only kindness, helpfulness, togetherness; power is a nasty child which can be told to remain outside. Facts, again, are different; the Afro-Asian world in particular respects power, above all the power which promises and fulfills the promise. The main reproach in North Africa, for example, against the successive French governments is that they never seriously attempted to protect their native friends and collaborators against F.L.N. killing-squads or against the retroactive punishments meted out by Bourguiba's law courts.

The United States is the only nation today which can promise and fulfill in a large part of the globe. To maintain this position which is, next to power, the most important part of a nation's prestige, is the really crucial issue. After the Suez debacle, we simply could

not afford to retreat from Quemoy as well. Moreover, as it has been demonstrated, the Chinese or the Russians will, in all probability, never attack if we make it clear we will hit back. What if they do? In that case, of course, we must make our word good and help our friends in their predicament.

What is common to the Utopian viewpoint in all three cases is that it takes for granted the unanimity of mankind on these issues. Only this belief permits the Utopian to press for "final" solutions in particular instances, like the abolition of all war in the case of nuclear danger or, in another instance, for the immediate establishment of a United Europe when, for the time being, even economic cooperation among the European nations is an extremely hard thing to bring about.

In contrast, the realist's basic datum is the variety of people's positions. Why does the realist accept this variety? Because he knows that if the world is complex and problem-ridden, this is not the result of a sinister conspiracy by "reactionaries" and "warmongers," but because in practical life—on the level where the political animal moves—people have diverging opinions, interests, commitments, loyalties, and philosophies.

As I have said, the Utopian considers this situation intolerable and scandalous since it contradicts the view he has of the goal of history, identical for all, and because he is impatient about its materialization. The result is that he chooses either to enforce his own imperatives on his fellow men or, when this is manifestly impossible, to speak in generalities which can neither be refuted nor reasonably applied. (An example of this is Mr. Philip Toynbee's position: "In the interest of mankind the Western world should disarm and surrender if necessary.") By taking a "universal" point of view, the Utopian's statements are irrelevant to the international world of particular groups.

So far, the history of man has known only such a world: divided into groups, tribes, nations, empires, federations, blocs, alliances, etc. This is no accident: people's interests have always been local, and precisely for this reason the very large units end up by breaking into smaller pieces after a period of time. If it is found tomorrow that life exists on some other planet, the population of our globe may yet get together in a common solidarity and for a common enterprise of conquest. But until such time as this happens, conflicts are likely to be the order of history, causing anguish and fulfillment, and retarding indefinitely the coming of Utopia.