

What is there left? There is, of course, the pseudo-morality of secular liberalism, especially of the academic variety. Its basic premise is a curious version of the Socratic paradox, that knowledge is virtue; it asserts that, if only we really could get to understand everybody, our foreign policy would inevitably be good. The trouble is that the past failures of the political intelligence of secular liberalism, and its demonstrated capacities for misunderstanding, have already pretty much discredited it.

Finally, there is the ubiquitous pragmatist, whose concern is only with what will work. But he too wins no confidence, since most of us have already learned from the pragmatist source of truth, which is history, that whatever is not true will fail to work. We want to know the political truth that will base workable policies.

It would seem, therefore, that the moral footing has been eroded from beneath the political principle of consent, which has now come to designate nothing more than the technique of majority opinion as the guide of public action—a technique as apt to produce fatuity in policy and tyranny of rule as to produce wisdom and justice. It was not always so. In the constitutional theory of the West the prin-

ciple of consent found its moral basis in the belief, which was presumed sufficiently to be the fact, that the people are the living repository of a moral tradition, possessed at least as a heritage of wisdom, that enables them to know what is reasonable in the action of the state—its laws, its public policies, its uses of force. The people consent because it is reasonable to consent to what, with some evidence, appears as reasonable. Today no such moral tradition lives among the American people—certainly not, as Professor Hartt suggests, the tradition of reason, which is known as the ethic of natural law. Those who seek the ironies of history should find one here, in the fact that the ethic which launched Western constitutionalism and endured long enough as a popular heritage to give essential form to the American system of government has now ceased to sustain the structure and direct the action of this constitutional commonwealth.

The situation is not such as to gladden the heart. But at least one knows the right question in the present matter. It is not how foreign policy is to be guided by the norms of morality. It is, rather, what is the morality by whose norms foreign policy is to be guided?

In the magazines

Sidney Hook and Bertrand Russell have reopened their debate on the basic issues of peace and freedom in the Cold War. In the April 11 issue of *The New Leader*, Dr. Hook returns to the theme of disarmament and attacks recent statements made by Russell which seemed to imply not only that “we must be prepared to sacrifice freedom if that is the price of peace,” but that the differences between East and West on the matter of an inspection system are not such as to put the West wholly in the right and the East wholly in the wrong.

“Is it necessary,” asks Dr. Hook, “to remind Bertrand Russell of what he once knew so very well? If the West signs an agreement to cease testing or to destroy nuclear weapons, the Soviet Union can rely upon the provisions being fulfilled. The converse, alas, is not equally true . . . If for any reason Great Britain and the United States were tempted to violate their agreement on nuclear disarmament, the slightest infraction would be broadcast to the entire world by a press, a radio, a television system which the government does not control . . . Where is the free public opinion which can make it possible for one of [the USSR’s] citizens who detects a violation to expose it to the world?”

It is exactly this contention, which he terms “Western self-righteousness,” that Lord Russell crit-

icizes in his turn (*The New Leader*, May 9): “One of the things which I find most regrettable in Hook and the controversialists of the Kremlin is the assumption that one’s own side is wholly virtuous and the other side wholly base . . . Western Europe, which according to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is to be defended by the U.S. if necessary, has lately learned, with understandable dismay, that there is considerable doubt as to whether the U.S. would, in fact, fulfill its treaty obligations.”

As to the matter of freedom, “I hope that Hook will note that I have not said either that the Communists are more trustworthy or have more freedom than the West, or even that they are as trustworthy or have as much freedom as the West. Nor have I said that the West has less freedom than it had. I say only that it has less freedom than it boasts and that it is not as impeccably trustworthy as it sometimes thinks it is. I believe, however, that the Communists have much more freedom than they had a few years ago . . . The calm assumption that of course the other side would cheat, but of course our side would not, is made by both sides. But to hear some champions of the West speaking, one would never guess that the other side can be equally sincere in its suspicions.”

PAMPHILUS