

"MORALITY AND FOREIGN POLICY"

In the May issue of *Worldview*, John Courtney Murray, S.J. delivered a strong attack on what he called the "ambiguist" point of view in discussions of the place of ethics in foreign policy. Father Murray's article was followed in the June issue by comments by Kenneth W. Thompson and Hans J. Morgenthau. In this issue *Worldview* presents further remarks on the "ambiguist" controversy by Will Herberg and Paul Deats, Jr. Mr. Herberg is Professor of Social Philosophy at Drew University and the author of *Judaism and Modern Man* and *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*. Mr. Deats is Associate Professor of Social Ethics and of Religion in Higher Education at the Boston University School of Theology.

"AMBIGUIST" STATESMANSHIP

Will Herberg

John Courtney Murray's writing cannot fail to be profound and instructive, and I have profited greatly from it in the course of the past decade. But I must confess that his article, "Morality and Foreign Policy" (*Worldview*, May), leaves me in a strange confusion of mixed feelings. On the one hand, I can sympathize with what I might call the historical intention of the natural law philosophy he espouses, which I take to be the effort to establish enduring structures of meaning and value to serve as fixed points of moral decision in the complexities of the actual situation. On the other hand, I am rather put off by the calm assurance he exhibits when he deals with these matters, as though everything were at bottom unequivocally rational and unequivocally accessible to the rational mind. And I am really distressed at what seems to me to be his woefully inadequate appreciation of the position of the "ambiguists," among whom I cannot deny I count myself.

These are questions of broad philosophical and theological bearing. I should very much like to discuss. But in this note I must limit myself to one point only, and that is Father Murray's assertion, toward the end of his article, that the "constitutional theory of the West" was somehow based on an ethic of natural law which stressed reason and rational principle rather than the ever-shifting balance of power and interest, with which the "ambiguists" seem so preoccupied. I might note that the "ambiguists" too, know that man is not

simply, or even primarily, a power-seeking, interest-pursuing animal; Niebuhr's emphasis on man's "grandeur" in tension with his "misery," on man's "capacity for justice" in tension with his "proneness to injustice," is evidence enough of that. But let that go; it is with the "constitutional theory of the West" that I am directly concerned.

I am at a loss to say just what this theory is. It has always been my impression, and Father Murray's writings have tended to strengthen my impression, that the constitutional theory underlying the Anglo-American kind of democracy is very different from the constitutional theory underlying what has been known as democracy on the continent. Indeed, I should say that it is impossible to understand either without bearing this distinction clearly in mind.

Now, as far as the constitutional theory underlying the American kind of democracy is concerned, it would be my contention that, while informed with the heritage of natural law, it reflects an understanding of man and society that can only be described as "ambiguist" in the sense in which Father Murray uses the term. A brief glance at the evidence might be of help, and for this purpose I will quote largely from the Federalist Papers and the writings of James Madison, the acknowledged "Father of the Constitution."

The very necessity of government, in the view of the Founding Fathers, arises out of man's ambiguous freedom, out of his proneness to use his freedom at one and the same time to advance reason and justice and to aggrandize the self and its interests. Government is needed primarily for self-protection. "It may be a reflection on human nature that such [check-and-balance] devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government," notes the author

of Federalist *LI*. "But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls would be necessary. In framing a constitution which is to be administered by men over men, the greatest difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed, and in the next place oblige it to control itself."

"We must not shut our eyes to the nature of man," Madison says elsewhere. "All power in human hands is liable to be abused. No form of government can be a perfect guard against the abuse of power. The recommendation of the republican [form] is that the danger of abuse is less than in any other . . ." Cannot we then rely upon reason to protect us against oppression and abuse of power? Of course; but is reason itself so pure in its operations? What about the ineradicable "connection between reason and self-love" (Federalist *X*)?

Frankly, now, what can be more "ambiguist," more "Niebuhrian," than this political philosophy upon which American constitutionalism is grounded? I am not contrasting this "ambiguist" philosophy with the belief in an abiding moral tradition of natural law to the point where one would exclude the other. I am merely trying to indicate that in our constitutional doctrine both are combined in a way that Father Murray's argument would seem altogether to obscure. And I am making another point: the "ambiguist" philosophy, which Father Murray presents as incapable of making discriminate judgments because it can "specify no ends toward which policy should be directed," can be, and has in fact been, the political philosophy of some of the greatest statesmen in our history, who have found in this philosophy unexhausted resources for political understanding and responsible action.

Perhaps no one exemplifies the "ambiguist" statesman better than Abraham Lincoln, and in no state document I am acquainted with is there a more poignant sense of the tragic ambiguity of all human affairs than the closing section of his Second Inaugural:

"Both [North and South] read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes his aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us not judge that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered, that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has

his own purposes . . . Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'

"With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on and finish the work we are in . . ."

Here we have the authentic note of the "ambiguist" statesman—an abiding sense of the relativity of all human causes in the face of a holy God and his absolute demand, a contrite recognition of the common guilt in which we are all involved, however righteous our cause, and yet the ability to make discriminate judgments, to act decisively, with resolution, to remain firm "in the right as God gives us to see the right," and "finish the work we are in . . ." It is a pity that Father Murray could not detect this note in the "ambiguist" philosophy he condemns.

"PUBLIC" ETHICS

Paul Deats, Jr.

Father John Courtney Murray, in the May issue of *Worldview*, defined the real issue of "Morality and Foreign Policy" as the nature of morality itself. He defined the debate between the "old" and "new" moralities as an intramural one within Protestantism, and Protestant moralists are by definition unable to use the resources of natural law. The Catholic community is the "living repository of the tradition of reason," but it fails to bring the tradition into vital relation with foreign policy problems. Father Murray's quest is thus not only for an adequate moral structure but also for a community which will be its living repository.

Kenneth Thompson's reply (*Worldview*, June) never quite comes to grips with the issues raised by Father Murray. Mr. Thompson insists that the Murray analysis lacks humility, that the moral dilemma belongs to Catholics and Jews as well as

to Protestants. He also sees the moral ambiguities as inherent in the situation rather than as verbal constructions of the ambiguists. Finally, he refuses to accept the definition of morality as the fundamental problem, criticizing Father Murray for failing to deal with concrete policy issues.

Hans J. Morgenthau's reply in the same issue stresses the necessity of prudence in political morality. However, his central theme is the "unbridgeable gulf" between the demands of Christian ethics and "the way man is compelled by his natural aspirations to act." Thus he rejects the basic assumptions of rationality and continuity in Father Murray's argument.

I would like to lift up four issues, two of them critically and two more constructively, as important in the debate. The issues are: (1) the unargued premises of ethical discourse; (2) the variety of ways of escape from the moral dilemma; (3) the redefinition of the problems posed by Father Murray and largely ignored by the critics; and (4) the nature of responsible political action informed by Christian norms.

Morgenthau does not argue his premises but he does state them clearly: "It is *a priori* impossible for political man to be at the same time a good politician . . . and to be a good Christian . . ." Later he assumes "the existential incompatibility between politics and Christian ethics" and the doctrine of the lesser evil as "the moral strategy of politics." Theologically, he assumes that "only divine grace can establish that harmony [between ethics and politics] in another world."

Thompson's assumptions are less explicit. For him great political leaders are those who accept the fact of evil, the need to adjust to it and cooperate with it to serve good ends. He poses the question of the U-2 incident, not in terms of the morals of war, but of the President's acknowledging responsibility.

Murray's assumptions are no less basic and no more subject to argument. I have noted his defining Protestantism as unable to accept the natural law theory. He argues from historical fact (the public life of the nation-state is not governed by patience, trust, and other Christian values) to the normative judgment (that it cannot be), assuming that pacifism may be a dictate of the individual conscience but cannot be public policy.

I for one am not prepared to accept these and similar unargued assumptions as immune to criticism. Serious ethical discourse is precluded when it is assumed at the outset that Christian norms are incompatible with politics, that one must accept

and even cooperate with evil, that we cannot debate questions of espionage but only of whether to lie about espionage. It is precisely such problems as the relevance of pacifism to public policy that deserve (and are getting in many circles) increasing attention as we face the full implications of life in the nuclear age. These are questions we need to argue, not premises we must assume.

All three authors illustrate that there is more than one way to escape the full force of the moral dilemmas of politics. Father Murray criticizes the ambiguists for not distinguishing between fact and moral category. For him the moral issue centers finally in the nature of man, not in policy. Thompson and Morgenthau tend, on the other hand, to underplay moral theory in favor of situational analysis. Thus: "Those who are finally called upon to press the button will be faced not with the need for a doctrine but with an overwhelmingly difficult choice that must be made . . . in the face of all the relevant circumstances." Thompson's assumptions of what will and must be done resolve the moral dilemma prematurely, and perhaps disastrously. Both moral theory and historical fact must be dealt with.

I should like to redefine the problems of private and public morality, self-interest, and power, as posed by Father Murray.

1) He sees private life as governed by such Christian values as patience, gentleness, sacrifice, forbearance, trust, compassion, humility, forgiveness, and love. Public life neither is nor can be governed by these values. The older morality tried vainly to apply these values to society. The ambiguists recognize with Murray that man's morals are not adequate for an immoral society. But the gulf between private and public morality presents no problem to a natural law tradition that understands the state to be a relatively autonomous institution, with its own given ends, predesigned in the nature of man. Murray's communitarian emphasis is a welcome corrective to much Protestant individualism. But he does not dispose of the problem.

Three things need to be said. First, both the *perceived* purposes and the tasks of the state and related institutions are subject to changing definition in human experience. The respective roles of government and of the churches have changed since medieval times and not all natural law theory takes account of such changes. Freedom is differently defined in East and West and in Catholic and Protestant countries. The second point follows in so far as the institutions are *relatively autonomous*. The role and task of each are defined in terms of

(1) its own nature, (2) the changing roles and tasks of other related institutions, and (3) the judgment of men concerning the contribution of the institution toward their growth and freedom.

It also seems to me that the Christian values assigned by Father Murray to private morality are not wholly irrelevant to the life of groups. It is usually the nation-state that is singled out as exempt from judgment by these values. Perhaps we reason too quickly from historical fact to normative principle, from is to ought. Look also at the values. Patience is affirmed to be a prime requisite of diplomatic procedure, not only for the Secretary-General of the United Nations but also for ambassadors of countries great and small. Trust is pre-eminently essential for any kind of life in groups—or in groups of groups. How can trust be defined as simply a private value? Sacrifice would seem to be impossible for some moralists only in the interest of peace; for certainly many of them assume it is necessary to risk sacrifice in preparing for war. To justify the risk one must at least in principle be willing to accept the fact. It may well be that instead of seeking a separate set of values for group life we need to reconsider the place of values in both private and corporate life.

2) The problem of interest arises at both the personal and the group level. Older and newer moralities agree in affirming pride of self-interest as the primal sin. Murray resolves the problem of interest by affirming that it is both legitimate and necessary. One feels bound to add "but not sufficient." An adequate personal morality or group ethic must deal with both the place of self-interest and the necessary limits upon it. These limits are set for the person by the fact that he can realize his own interest only in a community of persons realizing their own interests. Just so, the nation can achieve its own security (and other interests) only in a community of nations, each seeking security and other interests. Father Murray accepts this in fact in his placing national interest within the framework of the more ultimate international interest, but neither he nor his critics build such acceptance into their moral theory.

3) The third problem is that of power. Older moralists tried to ignore the exercise of power but one senses that the ambiguitist is preoccupied with power (albeit somewhat uneasily). Murray makes a helpful distinction between force as upholding order and violence as destructive of order. But the crucial issue is not justifying the possession of power but exercising it responsibly. Thompson

puts his finger correctly on the fear of *arbitrary* power, thus raising the key issue of consent.

Responsible political action necessarily involves the quest for, the possession of, and the exercise of, power. If power is thus inherent in political life, and if man is responsible for its exercise, then power in itself cannot be evil. Moral responsibility inheres in the possibility of free choice of good or evil. And no man, regardless of position, can assume the right to exercise responsibility on behalf of another. Nor can a nation morally assume the prerogative of deciding to hold nuclear tests in the Pacific, without regard for the wishes of other neighboring peoples.

Ambiguists stress the procedural aspects of political morality—the institutional measures such as the securing of consent. Father Murray stresses substance, the norms by which policy is guided. Both normative structure and consensus processes are necessary in a continuing interaction aimed toward the "giving of consent because it is reasonable to consent" (Murray). There is always a danger in political discourse of drawing too narrowly the limits of the community of consent. The norms of Christian moral action include the worth of persons, human freedom, and the inclusive community.

Responsible political action involves not only the capacity to repent indiscriminately for past errors but also discriminating guidance for present and future decisions. Thompson challenges the rationalist to define an unambiguous policy for the U.S. in the Hungarian Revolution or the U-2 incident. He is not willing to seek to evaluate the larger policy issues of the Cold War, espionage and disarmament in terms of moral values. All three writers seem to take nuclear weaponry, East-West antagonism, and other "historical facts" as given and even as "right."

May I be permitted just one postscript? None of the three writers seems aware of alternatives to the older morality, the newer morality, and the tradition of natural law. The Social Gospel movement within Protestantism was a vigorous attempt to bridge the chasm between individual and collective morality and to deal with institutionalized interest and power. One may recognize the movement's inadequacies and seek to correct its errors. But it is ignoring an instructive area of moral experience to act as if there were no lessons learned in the Social Gospel. Such ignorance is bad history and bad moral theory. The lessons learned might serve us well in the continuing debate over morality and foreign policy.