

## POLITICS AND PASSION

*The Winter, 1963 issue of Judaism contains a very interesting commentary on the Jewish socio-religious scene. Two distinct sets of attitudes toward the momentous issues of war and peace are discerned within the Jewish community. "Establishment" Judaism, it is asserted, relies heavily on terms and categories of analyses notably similar to those of realpolitik analyses. The other attitude, the "Dissenter" position which challenges this, is the attitude of those who engage in various pacifist protest movements and affirmative actions. Which represents the moral mainstream of Judaism?*

*Everett E. Gendler, rabbi of the Jewish Center of Princeton, N. J., poses this question in a challenging introduction to his translation of Rabbi Aaron Samuel Tamaret's "Politics and Passion." The section here excerpted was written by Rabbi Tamaret in 1920.*

The opinions of mankind concerning war have differed from generation to generation. In early times, when mystery held sway, war too was judged in mysterious terms. The entire nation, from one extreme to the other, believed that "war was ordained by Heaven." Its appointment, its purpose, and its proclamation were all decreed on high, as was, too, the place of battle. The clashes of the armies in the world below—the rangings of the camps of the earthly kings, the savage assaults of fellow-men behaving like beasts of prey—these were no more than the echo of the battle being waged simultaneously among the hosts of the heavens, among the patron-angels of each earthly king. Upon the very face of the firmament, evident to the masses of men through comets and eclipses of the sun and moon, were written the signs and omens of defeat and victory.

This supernatural regard of war was a valuable refuge for the warmakers—the ruling classes and their attendants who officiated at the rites of human slaughter—for they could find shelter therein from the rage of those being led to the slaughter. It gave free reign to the vile intrigues of the destroyers of the world, and was, therefore, exceedingly dangerous to the world's peace.

In later generations, when reason grew stronger and men began soberly to investigate the events of the world the supernatural assessment lost many of its disciples among the mass of men. In its place came the naturalistic, realistic theories, which held that war is (1) psychologically speaking, the expres-

sion of hostility rooted in the hearts of separate nations and races, which erupts from time to time; (2) biologically speaking, the simple bursting forth of the beast in the heart of man; and (3) that in every war the blame rests solely upon the small class of the privileged who hold the reins of the people and ride upon its back. It is these masters who, with their political intrigues, kindle the fire of war.

Insofar as it affects the decay of the moral sense among men, I suspect that the naturalistic theory of the "enlightened" generation corrupts more than the supernaturalistic theory of the "savage" generation. For the minds of the latter, despite their primitiveness, could not accept the horrible vision of war as a natural happening and so sought fantastic explanations; while the former, the "intelligent" men, can comprehend the cruelty of war, with all its abominations, in a simple and natural way!

The mutual hatred between different peoples and nations (i.e., the "psychological" explanation of war) is in no way natural but indeed artificial. It is carefully nourished and manipulated by the warmongers. For if it were natural, which have you: either man is by nature evil, in which case he is malevolent toward all and will show no mercy even to his loved ones; or he is not evil, and thus incapable of harming even those remote from him. . . . At one moment the Englishman has no quarrel with the Austrian, nor the Austrian with the Englishman. Suddenly the order goes out from the rulers to hate and to attack; and "the subjects of the state," the lowliest of creatures, are at once "filled with hatred" and assault one another with great fury, each soldier trying to outdo the other in the intensity of his savagery, at the same time constantly glancing back to make sure that his commander is properly aware of his diligence.

The disgrace of this image, the image of bestiality, must surely be removed from mankind, so that mankind can at least assume its natural image, even if it is not yet able to attain to its Divine likeness.

As for the second reason, "the animal instinct in man," either this instinct is actively evil at all times or only occasionally, when its anger is aroused. But note, are not such impulses of the sort which erupt wildly and impulsively, with no means of controlling them? However, war is not like this, for war proceeds deliberately, under strict orders. One moment an officer gives the command: "Shoot!" The next

moment: "Cease fire!" Now: "Show fury!" Then: "Hold your fury!" . . . If indeed it seems man's destiny that evil instincts be his master for yet many days to come—until that day when from on high there shall pour forth the longed-for spirit of purity—then let this evil in him at least express itself in a direct, natural way: at the desire and initiative of each individual in accordance with his own needs, and not through that contemptible and humiliating process which turns men into wild dogs who both dance and hate at their master's bidding.

Regarding the third theory, this evaluation surely contains much truth, both in its analysis of the causes of war and in its proposals for war's extirpation. For it is true that the principal warmongers are to be found among the ruling classes, who incite the masses in their armies to assault the masses in the armies of other countries. . . . Therefore is it necessary to limit the power of these rulers over the people so that the latter be not delivered into their hands, like clay into the hands of the potter, for any folly or perversion the leaders seek to pursue. By this the possibility of the evil of *actual* war would be greatly limited.

It is not written, "*man* shall not lift up sword against man," but rather "*nation* shall not lift up sword against nation." For it is this sword, the collective sword forcibly placed in the hands of the individual against his will, which presents the greatest danger to the world today; and it surpasses by far all private misdeeds.

Nevertheless, anyone who suggests that by extending changes in the ordering of society or by altering this or that objective condition even the possibility of war will be completely eliminated, he is surely mistaken. For it is utter naiveté to believe that it lies within the power of a small group of "rulers" to rally myriads of people to strange and savage deeds (such as war) unless the masses themselves harbor a propensity toward such acts. Were these mobs wholly rejecting of war in their hearts, a small group of leaders could never swim against such a mighty tide.

It is true that, often throughout history, individuals have swum against the tide. But these few were men of great and pure soul intent on furthering great and pure ideals, the strength of which sustained them in their efforts; they swam against the powerful current of "things as they are," propelled by the force of that most sublime of urges, "how things ought to be." In contrast petty and frightened individuals like the ruling groups engage in tasks which have no rational support. How then shall they be emboldened to swim against the tide?

We cannot, therefore, share the opinion of the naturalistic school which holds that war is, in its entirety, nothing but the manipulation of a plotting few, the rulers; and it would seem that we must—wearily—revert to that earlier theory of war rejected because of its apparent obsolescence, which regards war as a mysterious phenomenon.

I insist that such is indeed the case! If we are to understand the nature of war we must return to the theory which views war through the lens of mystery. We must return not to vague and popular theories of mystery which have no rational support or basis in reality, but rather to an intelligent and rational sense of mystery (and reality contains such mystery). Mystery is so designated, not because it hides in remote regions never seen by the eyes of any living creature, with fantastic sights bearing no resemblance to truth; but, rather, because it is concealed from senseless eyes to which are revealed only the external appearances of natural phenomena. However, to those eyes which are able to penetrate the inner essence of phenomena mysteriousness is a perceptible reality.

The correct theory of war is, therefore, a synthesis of the mysterious and naturalistic points of view.

## **correspondence**

### **"JUDAISM AND CULTURE"**

Southfield, Michigan

Dear Sir: Arthur Cohen's essay on "Judaism and Culture" in your issue of January 1963 represents one view and does not by any means reflect the views of most Jews. However, it is not to take issue with the theological premises upon which the essay is based that I wish to enter a demurrer at this time. Rather do I wish to take exception to one statement which does violence to the intensity and magnitude of Judaism's concern in the area of man's social life. Mr. Cohen writes "The transformation of the world is not demonstrated by the rightings of wrongs; the justification of injustice; it is only partially this, for the transformation of the world consists in more than that the wolf and the lamb shall lie down together or that war shall cease from the world. This is the social image of salvation which is true enough as far as it goes."