

Future Vietnams? "Extremely likely," says Robert L. Heilbroner (*Harper's*, September), and as long as present attitudes persist, the U.S. takes "the risk of becoming embroiled in Vietnam-like situations in many countries at once."

In indictment of the prevailing Government perspective on revolution, he writes: "It is true enough that communism has been a perpetrator of evil and it is all too likely that more evil will be committed in its name (or in whatever name is inscribed on the banners the revolutionists of development will carry). Yet if one cannot and should not seek to minimize the weight on that side of the scale of human suffering, one should also have the courage to pile up whatever weights belong on the other side."

"This is not an operation we have carried out honestly. We tend to count carefully each corpse attributable to the terrorists, guerrillas, or avowed soldiers of revolutionary action, but to ignore the bodies of those who perish because of the actions of our own side, military or not. To whom, for example, should be charged the permanent and irreversible mental and physical stunting of Latin America's children that follows from an inability to alter the established social order? To whom shall we debit the grisly corpses, living and dead, in the streets of Bombay? In what account shall we enter the hunger of those who live within sight of the expensive restaurants of New Delhi or Lima or Hong Kong?"

"One does not know which way the scales of history would tilt if all the evils attributable to both sides were piled on their respective balances. But there is the uncomfortable suspicion that ours might not necessarily be the lighter side of the scale. What exists in most of the world beyond our borders is a condition of human indignity and degradation that verges on the unspeakable. If we are to set ourselves against a movement, however violent or cruel, that has demonstrated its ability to lead such men out of their misery for at least the first critical stage of the journey, we must at least offer something as good in its place. At this juncture it is the shameful fact that we have nothing as good, and worse than that, have ranged ourselves against nearly every movement that might have led men toward a better life, on the grounds of our opposition to communism. Now the question is whether America will take its ultimate stand on the side of humanitarianism or moralism, self-reliance or fear, open-mindedness or dogma. The challenge goes to the very core of this nation—its structure of power and economic interest, its capacity for reasoned discussion, its ultimate inarticulate values. It is not alone the life and death of anonymous multitudes that is weighed in the balance, but that of American conscience, as well."

• "The frequently expressed idea that the United States is a conservative nation characterized by consensus politics has been sharply challenged by recent events," according to Seymour Martin Lipset (*Encounter*, August). There is, he thinks, "little doubt that reliance on extremist methods has played a major role in effecting change through much of American history. By now it is a truism to point out that the United States is 'a violent country.' What is not so clearly recognized is the extent to which many of the major changes in American society have been a product of violence, a result of the willingness of those who feel that they have a morally righteous cause to take the law into their own hands to advance it. By its extreme actions, the moralistic radical minority has often secured the support (or the acquiescence) of the moderate elements of the community, who come to accept the fact that change is necessary in order to gain a measure of peace and stability. . . ." *Vide* the Abolitionists, the Suffragettes, various agrarian movements, the labor, civil rights and anti-war movements, and, indeed, the early Klansmen and the Prohibitionists.

"Reliance on extremist tactics," Lipset believes, "may be related to two aspects of American culture: the emphasis on the attainment of ends, on one hand, and the strong hold of religious moralism, on the other."

"The strong emphasis of an 'open society,' on achievement, on 'getting ahead,' has been linked by many analysts of American society (especially the sociologist Robert Merton) with making it an 'ends-oriented' culture as distinct from a 'means-oriented' one. In the former type winning is what counts, not how one wins. . . . American extremism may be seen as another example of the propensity to seek to attain ends by any means, whether legitimate or not."

"Moralism is also a source of extremism. Americans tend to be a moralistic people, an orientation which they inherit from the Protestant sectarian past. This is the one country in the world dominated by the religious traditions of Protestant 'dissent,' Methodists, Baptists, and the other numerous sects. The teachings of these denominations have called on men to follow their conscience, in ways that the denominations that have evolved from state churches (Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, and Orthodox Christian) have not. The American Protestant religious ethos is basically Arminian. It assumes, in practice, if not in theology, the perfectibility of man, his obligation to avoid sin; while the churches accept the inherent weakness of man, his inability to escape sinning and error, the need for the church to be forgiving and protecting."

"The American, therefore, as political and religious
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man, has been a utopian moralist who presses hard to attain and institutionalize virtue, or to destroy evil men and wicked institutions and practices. Almost from the beginning of the Republic, one finds a plethora of 'do-good' reform organizations seeking to foster Peace, protect the Sabbath, reduce or eliminate the use of alcoholic beverages, wipe out the corrupt irreligious institution of Free Masonry, destroy the influence of the Papists, and Slavery, eliminate Corruption, extend the blessings of education, etc., etc."

The director of Ecumenical Associates at Yale, Arthur Brandenburg, has joined in "The Search for an Ethical Metaphor," and describes the quest in *Student World* (Second Quarter, 1968), publication of the World Student Christian Federation, with offices in Geneva.

"Beneath the surface of the responses and struggles of all of us," he says, "there lies a new ethical metaphor waiting to be born. Every age has probably operated out of one dominant and basic ethical metaphor or image. . . .

"We appear to be in a period of great re-casting of the underlying ethical metaphor. It is as though the student vanguard has been on an exploratory journey, and has returned to tell us that the standard right-wrong metaphor out of which men have forged moral acts for many years is inadequate for the world in which we shall have to live. . . .

"The new ethical metaphor struggling to be born is 'responsibility.' Good and evil have long since passed off the scene of ethical reflection. I am persuaded that new moral structures and acts will be forged only to the extent that the right-and-wrong metaphor which is the present hangup of our most sensitive students can be replaced by 'responsible' and 'irresponsible' as the key to forging the moral act. . . .

"... What this involves initially is the development by each person, in dialogue with his fellows, and through them with the entire social context, of a thoroughly comprehensive picture of the world in which he lives. The truly responsible act at any given moment, then, must be subjected to the total plan and located within the model in relationship to every conceivable claim. This is an agonizing process, and one which demands rigorous thinking and ruthless honesty. . . .

"The importance of the kind of rebellion and idealism which points towards the future now becomes more apparent. The task at hand is to enable those responses to be transformed into responsibility. This is an enormous undertaking for all of us. Here it becomes clear that we are in no sense speaking objectively about youth culture. It seems to me that this

is, let it be said again, the dilemma of every sensitive person at this moment in history."

Stefan T. Possony always gets a chuckle out of reports that some of his "political scientist colleagues are advocating 'rational solutions' to international problems" (*Orbis*, Spring 1968). He does, "of course, . . . favor rational solutions and would like to see the scope of rationality in politics grow."

Still, "the primary task of rationality in politics is to understand and handle irrationality," he says. And "this presupposes the basic insight that existential irrationality can only in small measure be influenced by rationality. Moreover, conflict situations usually are derived from irrational attitudes and virtually always from meta-rational objectives. We cannot in every case design a rational solution, even on paper, but if there were such a solution to a given problem or conflict, the rationality may apply only to a few of the life spheres—for example, to economics but not to power. In social reality the best rational solutions may not be practical because it takes too long before their meaning is understood by the relevant groups; and by this time the problem probably has changed. Those solutions which appear instantly plausible to the elite cannot always be implemented because of various time-lags and resource deficiencies. Finally, policies must be made in the absence of full information and often must be promulgated with great speed and without adequate time for research and reflection." And, it might be added—witness some of Possony's own historical case studies—even hindsight and "adequate time for research and reflection" are no assurance that an adequate assessment of the situation will be made.

His inquiry into "the facts as they are," to elaborate on his thesis, ranges over a broad spectrum, including "General Reasons for Irrationality," the problems of "Forecasting," "Research and Bureaucracy," "Intellectual Fashions," and "Multiple Rationalities."

From "The Theology of Revolution" (with particular emphasis on Latin America) in *Herder Correspondence* for August: "... as Christians we are called to do what appears to be impossible, inhuman even, to accept the entire weight of the suffering of the world rather than to add to it, in the faith (and this can only be a matter of Christian faith) that what appears impossible and even inhuman is in fact the only human solution. What we are called to do is to convert men, not to kill them; and we have to free them from their alienation not only the oppressed but the oppressors also. This is something that can only be achieved by the way of the Cross: it is ourselves we have to be prepared to sacrifice, not others."

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