

## Ethics and World Politics

### edited by Ernest W. Lefever

(Johns Hopkins; 99 pp.; \$2.50 [paper])

#### Kevin J. Cassidy

The art of theorizing on international relations has been dominated in this country by Hans Morgenthau and the late Reinhold Niebuhr. This dominance is reflected in *Ethics and World Politics*, pervading the "Four Perspectives" provided by Ernest Lefever, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Paul Ramsey and Senator Mark Hatfield. All four respond in various ways to the "realism" of Morgenthau and Niebuhr, although only Ramsey seems to understand the metaphysics that is the basis of this approach.

Ramsey takes his concept of man from Genesis, finding in the stories of the Fall, the Tower of Babel, the Flood and Noah "the evil propensities of men's hearts" and "one of the best commentaries on government." The chaos in our "moral and political criteria" comes from the decline of the power of these stories, which provide *wisdom* for practical conduct. "Statecraft is not primarily a matter of social engineering, of building institutions; it is rather a system of interactive *doings*. For this reason, ethics and politics belong together, while the dream of a completely rationalized systems analysis would remove both."

Ramsey thus adopts the Aristotelian distinction between "doing" and "making" which Hannah Arendt has revived as a political philosophy in *The Human Condition*. Moral values are "purposes to be done" rather than "things to be made into policy." They are "behind the eyeballs of the statesman; they precede the exercise of calculating reason" because they are part of the *ius gentium* which animates the political community and forms the consciences of all of its citizens.

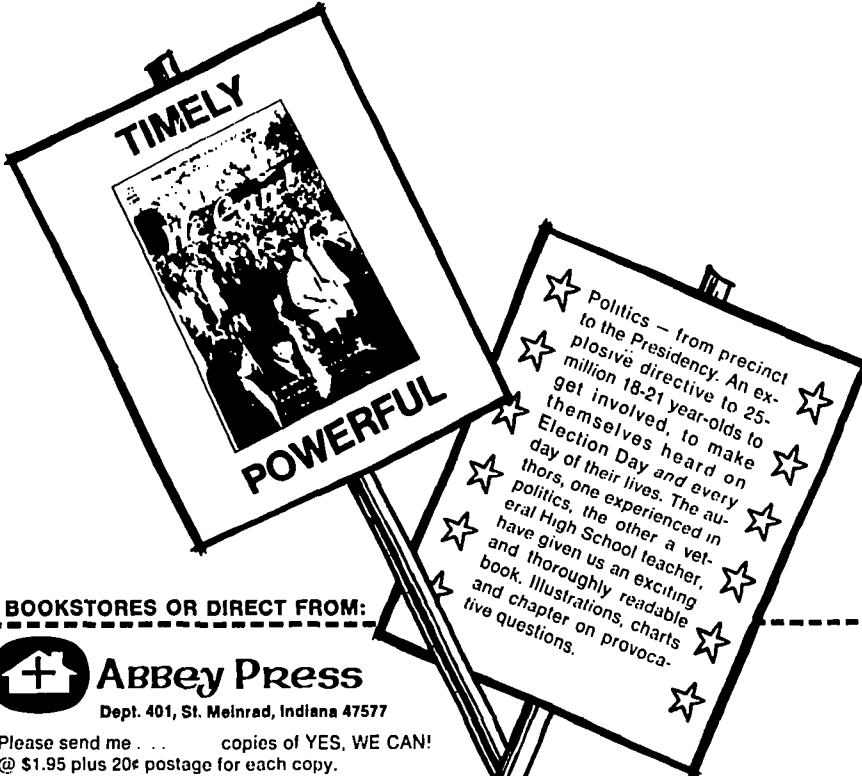
Moral values also determine the application of force by the polity. Lt. William Calley represents, in

Ramsey's view, the community's failure to educate on the use of force. Calley's ignorance is due not only to those on the Right who approve all wartime killing but also to those on the Left who condemn all war as immoral. Both fail to draw a line between legitimate and illegitimate killing, a fundamental distinction for civilized society. If the State's reason for being is, as Genesis (9:6) says, to thwart man's violent nature by creating a monopoly on killing, then the representatives of the State must be wise enough to understand the moral and immoral forms of kill-


ing. The question of Lt. Calley is really the larger question of man himself and the political wisdom needed to govern him.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. appears in this volume as another realist, although his essay gives no indication that he understands the concept of man essential to that perspective. His article is a concise restatement of the primacy of national interest and the inappropriateness of personal moral standards in international politics—though he hastens to add that "there are certain problems in foreign policy, often the most important problems, with so clear-cut a moral character that moral judgment must control political judgment."

One page later, however, he adds that he "cannot think of any recent problem in our foreign policy that could not have been adequately and intelligently disposed of on grounds of national interest." The continua-



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tion of the Vietnam war has been really a failure to read the national interest accurately, essentially an intellectual problem. In other words, the only obstacle to successful policy is our incorrect ideas. If we would only *think* straight. . . .

This exaggerated faith in the intellect and the ignorance of the irrational that it betrays reveals Schlesinger as a "rational idealist" rather

than as an "historical realist," to use Niebuhr's categories. In the realism of Hans Morgenthau man cannot foresee the ultimate results of his policies because he is burdened with a "bio-psychological" drive for power which is stronger than his reason and which is responsible for the "unbridgeable chasm" between the rational norms man sets for himself and the irrational drives that control

him. Schlesinger ignores what Morgenthau and many others call the "tragic sense" of life described so well by St. Paul in Romans: "I do not understand what I do, for it is not what I wish that I do but what I hate that I do. . . . For I do not the good that I wish, but the evil that I do not wish, that I perform."

Schlesinger seems to see statecraft as essentially a "making" that can be planned and from which exact results can be anticipated rather than as a "doing," an encounter with other humans in which the future cannot be determined. The result, as Ramsey points out, is the tendency common to those thinkers who do not share the realist concept of human nature to believe that if enough rigorously calculated decisions "are laid end to end we will finally exit from the divisions which have been characteristic of the entire political life of mankind." The logical consequence is a self-righteous inflexibility as detrimental to good policy-making as the moral absolutism that Schlesinger rightly condemns. This excessive self-confidence, so common to "rational idealists," was also a characteristic of President Kennedy's foreign policy, which Schlesinger excuses by referring to a "new precision and restraint" that he believes Kennedy was developing just before he was assassinated.

Ernest Lefever is another realist whose essay, "Morality vs. Moralism in Foreign Policy," is an attempt to create moralistic strawmen to contrast with his favorite realist statesmen who are held up as paragons of political wisdom. The moralistic thinkers—Lefever never mentions any by name—are those who "advocate interventionist foreign policies" while downgrading "the primary security role of foreign policy," are "preoccupied with the present" while ignoring the future, have an inadequate grasp of the limits of foreign policy and, finally, are given to the "devil theory of politics," the single factor analysis which attributes all problems to one evil enemy.

Although admitting that the above are "corruptions" of the idealist ap-

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proach, Lefever ignores the efforts made to set out a positive role for moral values by such thinkers as Arnold Wolfers and E. H. Carr (as well as Reinhold Niebuhr in his analysis of the role of love in politics). The reader is left with the impression that moral values can only create muddled thinking.

Conveniently ignored by Lefever is the fact that his realist heroes, among whom are Churchill and Truman, fell into some of the same errors he associates with the moralists. The most effective devil-theory of the postwar era has been anticommunism, so effectively propagated by realists like Acheson and Truman that it is still causing the "interventionist foreign policies" which Lefever condemns. This is typical of Lefever's uncritical treatment of realist statesmen which fails to include any analysis of Vietnam while dismissing the "easy" criticism of those who "condemn from the sidelines . . . and are unwilling to become committed." Lefever's failure to analyze realist *practice* leaves the impression that he shares Schlesinger's metaphysics and especially the idea that we need only *think* in the right terms to conduct foreign policy successfully.

Senator Mark Hatfield's "Vietnam and American Values," the last essay in this volume, serves as an antidote to the uncritical realism of Lefever and Schlesinger. The Senator from Oregon correctly argues that political realists must account for the results of our Vietnam policy and particularly for the "moral travesty" that has occurred there. He describes the failure of other recent policies, especially those of a military nature, to produce the results expected and criticizes the counter-revolutionary character of American policies in economically underdeveloped countries. None of this is particularly new, although it is cogently and concisely put here.

Unfortunately, Senator Hatfield also lapses into a fuzzy idealism which sees the balance of power as an interim solution when compared to the "attempt to build trust in

relations between nations." He thinks that "the bonds of mankind are transcending the barriers of ideology" and creating a "new global awareness." Hence, the use of force beyond our borders can be justified only by a "multilateral mandate from a wide consensus of nations," and the unilateral use of our military

power is acceptable only when there is a threat to the "survival and identity of the nation" and a "consensus of the people . . . recognizes it as such." This sort of approach ignores the complexity and change of international events, not to mention the limited capacities of "the people" to analyze them.



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