

## THE DEPERSONALIZATION OF VIOLENCE: REFLECTIONS ON THE FUTURE OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

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"In the realm of Moloch," Martin Buber once remarked, "honest men lie and compassionate men torture. And they really and truly believe that brother-murder will prepare the way for brotherhood! There appears to be no escape from the most evil of all idolatry." I Religious connotations aside, it would, of course, be naive to suppose that the attainment of brotherhood is often a management-level motive for what Buber calls "brother-murder." Yet, insofar as there are still many people all over the world who have been taught to justify their killing by an appeal to some higher morality, transcendent cause or futurist vision, Buber's concern is of great interest from the viewpoint of a sociology of knowledge. On the other hand, as human societies — and especially their wars — become ever more centrally and even automatically controlled, the private and public examinations of conscience of the world's countless dutiful warriors appear to have remarkably little to offer towards the development of a world-oriented theory of value. For, while Buber assumes, the modern world denies — or, as far as possible, deems it irrelevant — that the individual is responsible for anything more challenging than a willingness to play the game whenever called "from above" to do so. And even if our systematization of life and death has not yet entirely silenced the so-called voice of conscience, will that voice really make any historically perceptible difference in the long run? Is there, in short, any reason to expect that anything like a sense of personal responsibility can survive in a world that includes among its parameters such complex phenomena as bureaucracy, automation, nationalism and limited resources'?

On the side of optimism, some such existential commitment to personal responsibility is represented in the thinking of a growing number of people, especially among the educated young, in most quarters of the planet earth. In particular, it is the kind of thinking to which the United States Supreme Court recently gave some national legitimacy when it decided, in effect, that, whether motivated by religious conviction or not, the pacifist conscience should have other socially accepted options besides prison or exile. This can hardly be thought of as marking the end of the age of militarism, but it may well be recognized in history as a slight but significant bend in the road.

On the side of pessimism, however, few men really believe that a world in which all are at peace with one another is even remotely possible; nor, given their sense of boredom, impotence, anomie, existential vacuum or

whatever, would they really want it to be brought about. (And if they read their Bible, they might prophesy darkly about "wars and rumors of wars.") So in the name of a pseudo-peace they resort to the very violence that they and others will then appeal to as still more proof against the possibility of any "true and lasting peace." And thus is the cause of peace made the harlot of the violent: men kill and maim for peace, they are violent for the sake of non-violence. This lived contradiction, this pathological polarity whereby men refuse to live in the present what they proclaim to be true, good and beautiful for all time I call the paradox of virtuous violence.<sup>2</sup>

Not linguistic but lived, this paradox, once become manifest to a social agent, may well encourage him to go beyond even cultural relativity to a radically personalist approach to interhuman and perhaps somehow even to intersocietal action. In the hope beyond hope, then, that the learning of a paradox might somehow function as the beginning of wisdom, I propose to touch upon: (1) the political myth of prophetic righteousness; (2) the ethical myth of a common good; and (3) finite systems and the myth of the infinite. As these headings suggest, I assume here that myth is a meaningful though inadequate way of knowing, that a myth can be falsified, that violence has falsified Technocracy's myth of peace, and that accordingly men are now seeking post-technocratic myths to give meaning to the future.

### I. The Political Myth of Prophetic Righteousness

It is perhaps trivial to observe that every man awaits an encounter with his own death, even though that encounter is seldom viewed by the individual himself as trivial. Given, then, the inevitability of death for every man, the living usually take note of another man's death only to the extent that they have in some way died with him. Thus the group of survivors who are concerned about a particular death is ordinarily restricted to a small number of intimates. But when the death of another appears to have been the direct result of human intervention, society in the larger sense considers itself threatened and thus makes of that death an object of concern. On the assumption that the freedom of a killer means a freedom to kill, the living do not leave the dead to bury their dead without having assured themselves that the death in question is a happenstance like any other. Investigative and legal machinery is set in motion and allowed to run its course until such time as the thought of enduring danger has been nullified by the futility of

<sup>2</sup> My usage of "paradox" in this context is derived in part from classical philosophy and in part from current analyses of psychotherapy in terms of game theory. For the former see Andre Lalande (ed.), *Vocabulaire Technique et Critique de la Philosophie*, 7th rev. ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1956), pp. 734-5. For the latter see Jay Haley, *Strategies of Psychotherapy* (New York: Grune & Stratton, 1963), especially pp. 7-8, 17; Thomas Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), especially pp. 115-21 and ff.

further search, by sufficient evidence of inculpability or by the conviction of someone deemed culpable.

In the latter of the three cases, the conviction of the violent, society has usually accorded to itself the option of killing the killer. This option, in turn, has usually been looked upon as in a class apart from ordinary killing; for, here it is precisely a violent one that is being violated, a *killer* that is being killed. This special form of killing is, then, not deemed subject to ordinary prohibitions against the killing of another man; and thus it is not seen to be murder.

We see, then, that even deliberate killing is sometimes condoned — namely when it is viewed as righting a wrong. This is verified in one way in the basic case of a killer's own attitude towards his act at least during and sometimes both before and after the killing. It is verified in a somewhat different way in the case of a third party's evaluation of a given killing. If we then go on to think of all parties as corporate, that is, as groups of people, we can begin to speak about the evaluation of a nation's corporate acts by people of that nation, of other nations, of later times in history. On this broad scale, the notion of righting a wrong can transform organized murder into a "just war," a "police action," a "fight for freedom" and so on. Viewpoint, in short, is of crucial importance for moral evaluation of killing. Acts, including in particular acts of violence, are judged as they appear; and, for better or worse, they cannot be judged otherwise. Thus must a killer's exoneration from murder derive from a legitimating point of view with regard to his killing. This point of view may, in turn, be considered on three levels: that of the killer, that of the killer's judges, that of the ideology to which either or both appeal for exoneration.

With regard to the killer's own point of view, it can be argued that *no man ever willfully kills another man without exonerating himself from some point of view*. This exonerating viewpoint, whatever its psychic underpinnings, can take any number of phenomenological forms. In many ways and on many levels, killings are viewed as destroying an enemy, removing a threat or danger, overcoming an obstacle, avoiding still more bloodshed, bringing an end to misery, or whatever. Over and over again in many times and places some have killed "colonialists" while those qualifying for that epithet have killed sub-human "rebels" or "insurgents." Yet more recently, one man killed (society says "assassinated") not Martin Luther King, Jr., but the disrupter of domestic colonialism; and another killed (again, read "assassinated") not Robert Kennedy, but, it would seem, a presumed threat to Arab interests. In short, man kills not a fellow man but one who deserves or needs to die.

In the second place, *a killer will be exonerated only by those* (not excluding the killer himself) *who share his or some equivalent point of view*. Thus if a killer's point of view is not shared by others or is judged by them to be inappropriate or unfounded, his killing remains in their eyes murder and he a murderer. If, however, a killer's point of view is approved by others they will exonerate him of murder.

Thirdly, however, a point of view is only a necessary and not a sufficient condition for exoneration from murder. The sufficient condition is *that this point of view be expanded into a kind of overview of the scene of the killing that makes possible a fundamentally amoral disregard for the victim or victims concretely present in time and space*. But to be effective in the sense indicated the overview must perform two functions for the killer and/or for those who approve of his killing: (1) a static or descriptive function that may be suitably characterized as *platonic schizophrenia*; (2) a dynamic or normative function that calls forth a title such as *prophetic or even eschatological manicheism*. Though in reality these two functions are hardly distinguishable, it is possible through the artifice of writing to separate them for purposes of exposition. This I shall here do only by way of illustration, referring first to the Nazi's Final Solution for an example of platonic schizophrenia and then to the history of atomic weapons for an example of prophetic manicheism. Then I shall suggest how these two functions intermingle, for example, in American attitudes toward the war in Southeast Asia.

The importance of platonic schizophrenia for the perpetration of non-murder is illustrated all too well by the infamous history of the Final Solution. Many men were involved with the Jews at various stages of their journey from home to gas chamber to incinerator. But — whatever the decisions at Nuremberg after the war (not to mention the more recent arguments based on those decisions) — at the time the men thus involved were officially spared the thought of being personally responsible for the death of other human beings.<sup>3</sup> Acting as they were for the State, they were encouraged to view themselves as instruments of the State involved only with "public enemies," a concept sufficiently heinous to blot out sentimental concern for the tears of Rachel.

The foregoing, though by no means free of prophetic manicheism, emphasizes primarily the descriptive function of the overview, what I have called platonic schizophrenia. To bring out the normative or prophetic function I turn to the memorable success of nuclear explosives with regard to the populace of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Though no one seems to have known beforehand the precise effects, if any, that could be expected of these new weapons, it was clear to those responsible for the decision to bomb that no ordinary destruction of life was here at stake. Accordingly, no ordinary good end would suffice for their exoneration. Nothing less than the rapid conclusion of the war and the consequent saving of many more lives could turn manifest evil into contextual good. This very result was in fact anticipated, and thus that fateful unleashing of destructive forces was put in the perspective of a commendatory overview. From this point on, the mere carrying out of the act in the concrete was able to be viewed not

<sup>3</sup> See Richard A. Wasserstrom (ed.), *War and Morality* (Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth

as mass murder but as an unfortunately necessary means to the saving of many lives.

Now, as the power politics of the past quarter century has made clear, however much the decision to use nuclear weapons seemed "morally" justified at the time, those responsible for that historical decision had not considered all the ramifications of such a course of action. The immediate importance of winning the war, it can now be seen, was not necessarily as important as the long-range task of establishing peace. For, by introducing the possibility of global destruction to human consciousness and by demonstrating man's willingness to risk that possibility for the sake of a short-range goal, the use of nuclear weapons forced upon others the need to offset the threat with a comparable threat of their own. The resulting arms race has, of course, been justified on all sides in terms of "peace"; but this peace, such as it is, has continually rested upon the need for each side to evaluate both the power and the prudence of the others by recourse to espionage and nuclear muscle-flexing. The latter, of course, has been somewhat diverted into economic and technological competition, thereby establishing some basis for belief that the classical cold war has ended in a stalemate. But the stalemate is precarious at best, due at least in part to the fact that others, and in particular the Chinese, have learned well the lesson of their predecessors with regard to the efficacy of nuclear argumentation. In short, it is barely more than a truism to say that the decision which reduced Hiroshima and Nagasaki to radioactive ashes was hardly based upon an accurate and adequate estimation of consequences for the future.

If these illustrations of the descriptive and normative functions of the overview have in fact served their purpose, then I should now be in a position to point out how they are intermingled in concrete commitments to violence. To do this adequately would be a task of some proportions. In what follows I merely suggest what I have in mind by means of a few observations about the war in southeast Asia. Leaving aside the equally thorough and equally effective recourse to an overview on the part of the Viet Cong and their allies, I restrict my attention to the point of view of the American and the South Vietnamese government forces.

Broken down to "brute facts," it is here again a case of men killing other men. But sociocultural complexities (if nothing else) do not incline us to view the "raw data" of this bloodshed apart from the spatiotemporal context of our special point of view. To begin with, it is not really other men who are being killed but "gooks" or "slants." On higher levels of *real politik* the viewpoint is far more delicately nuanced in terms of such things as energy needs and spheres of influence. But for the average citizen (long and subtly indoctrinated to this effect) it has been enough to know that the others are Communists to know that they are in fact the enemy. This basic category having established the point of view, the disconcerting fact that they too are men can be righteously disregarded.

With eyes focused upon the mission, the day-to-day details of destroying life become blurred and almost irrelevant. On the ground, those most ac-

tively engaged in the killing sometimes resort to "fragging" their superior officers, but more commonly seek escape in drugs and other "pleasures" of the city. From the air, men in planes destroy more flesh, flora and fauna in an hour than General Sherman could have handled in a week. Seen seldom on the ground (while still alive) and almost never from the air, "the enemy" is known ever so remotely as the reason for all the fuss. Thus to a large degree hygienically removed from the gross and widespread destruction effected by our shells, bombs, napalm and herbicides, we are shocked by the comparatively primitive efforts of the N.L.F. to show its power against the cities in the South. Hands clean, hearts pure, heads relatively empty (or emptied) of troubling thoughts, we bemoan the moral blindness of our opponents, make token withdrawals, and negotiate at an altogether leisurely pace. And by the time the average American citizen begins to see the cost to himself in terms of political unrest, inflation, unemployment, My Lai and Pentagon papers, the petroleum industry is well on the way to drilling for what may be the richest oil deposits in the world, and ping-pong diplomacy has begun to rediscover the forgotten virtues of the Oriental Communist.

In the case of this tragic war as well as in those previously cited, over-viewing has served as the basis for attempts to justify violence, but the descriptive and normative functions of over-viewing are inextricably interwoven in the concrete. This has been true not only of participants from underdeveloped countries, but of those from a country where the depersonalization of violence is in a far more advanced stage of development. Thus this most automated of all wars does not seem to offer a counterexample to my theses about the rationalization of violence. Electronics and operations research notwithstanding, whenever a deliberate act of violence is accompanied by an attempt at rational justification of that violence, a claim is thereby made to a knowledge of definitive truth that dispenses with the here and now. By relying on such a claim to justify acts of violence in the concrete, one confuses here with hereafter and now with forever.

### *11. The Ethical Myth of a Common Good*

I have been arguing that any description of violence, and specifically of killing, is limited in its validity by the viewpoint of the person or persons who are doing the describing and that such a description is inevitably tied to a tacitly or overtly approved set of norms which constitute one's context for deliberation. Assuming that these norms can be hierarchically related to one another, I now wish to raise the question of normative priorities and, if possible, tie this question to that of what might be called moral ultimates.

What, in human affairs, is the basic value with respect to which all other values are to be judged? For some, this basic value can be referred to as "the good"; and, natural fallacies aside, the good tends to be equated with "the common good," the latter being granted official priority over the good of the individual. Yet, whatever their theories, men have not yet managed to gain wide acceptance for any notion of common good that extends very

far beyond the borders of a given nation or cluster of nations. For it is behaviorally if not intentionally impossible to be genuinely concerned about "mankind" as a whole. We are told, for example, that in the shock of the atomic holocaust the living dead of Hiroshima concerned himself spontaneously with the other members of his own family, but only by way of exception with strangers or even neighbors.<sup>4</sup> In primitive societies loyalty to one's clan or tribe takes priority over loyalty to a nuclear family; and in modern states we have come to see loyalty to one's country, to the nation, defended as a primordial commitment. But we have also seen in modern times the chaotic consequences that can and do follow from a nationalism that makes of the nation the ultimate value. This, in turn, suggests the need for a supra-national concern that could not conceive of one standard for violence between, say, Harlem and Hawaii and another for violence "away from home."

That such supra-national concern is possible and even necessary has been a basic premise of international Communism. Rightly aware of the moral inadequacy of nationalism as a response to modern problems, the Marxist theoretician would have the individual dedicate himself to the welfare of all mankind. As the history of political Communism has shown, however, this type of dedication is historically premature if not in itself unrealistic: concern for "humanity" has been so broadly cosmopolitan as to allow for unlimited inhumanity to man in the concrete. The goal, in other words, has proven to be too sublime for the groundlings called upon to achieve it. And thus we have witnessed the gradual development of revisionism within Marxist circles — a gradual defocusing of the world vision to the dimensions of national or regional needs. Whatever else this may all signify, it at least suggests a certain human inability to be seriously concerned about a social entity so vast as humanity as a whole.

If, then, a man's choices are in fact made relative to a society considerably more confined than humanity as a whole, how significant are the moral imperatives that seemingly allow of no such confinement? If in fact man is (or is so far) constitutionally incapable of acting if not of thinking with respect to truly universalist categories, what is the point of an unqualified norm of behavior that has to be qualified to be relevant? What possible benefit can we derive from ethical norms that are seemingly beyond the capabilities of a culturally conditioned human being? These questions suggest many serious problems, all of which shall be dealt with here only with respect to the thesis that we are all the victims of our own ethical systematizations.

If logically consistent, a given ethical system is hardly more difficult to understand than any other logically consistent system. But, if and indeed because logically consistent, it can never go beyond itself to deal with what has not been systematized. In particular, no ethical system has ever dealt successfully with acts of violence. For, whatever rules a given social

group might favor for its own internal survival it might readily disregard in its external adventures; and what one group thinks and does with regard to another tends to be reciprocated in kind.

The adequacy of a systematic ethics has, of course, been seriously challenged by any of a variety of recent approaches, some of which go under the heading of a situation ethics.<sup>5</sup> But not even situation ethics has entirely overcome the rationalist flaws of the classical ethical system, and this is especially apparent when the issue is one concerning acts of violence. In the first place, the very notion of a concrete situation is itself an abstract ingredient of an (admittedly more flexible) system that is all the more dangerous for not being recognized as inevitably rationalist and often ethnocentric. Secondly, the obligation to love on one hand and the variability of circumstances on the other are indeed norms and are presented as such. That they are as inadequate as any other norms is obvious if we stop to consider how much maiming and killing has been justified on the basis of some estimation of a situation or, for that matter, even as a noble if not sacred deed of love.

Thus we are faced with a problem which, though seemingly insoluble, mankind must nonetheless resolve if it is to survive. On the one hand, no known ethical system is truly universal in scope because none can account for its built-in ambivalence with regard to acts of violence. On the other hand, so long as the human community is willing to grant as a valid principle that there are situations in which violence is rationally justifiable, then it is in principle possible for anyone to justify any act of violence whatsoever, including even the nuclear destruction of this planet.<sup>6</sup> So if not even the survival of our species can be taken as in any sense ultimate, what possible function does the notion of a common good now play in human affairs? Could it perhaps be the case that the common good is a myth that transforms the depersonalized bloodletting of electronically aided Neanderthals into a sacred offering to the unknown Moloch of our galaxy?

### III. Finite Systems and the Myth of the Infinite

The questions just raised are, in their essentials, at least as old as Soren Kierkegaard, whose knight of faith must at times go beyond accepted ethical norms. But, unfortunately, Kierkegaard's reaction against "merely" systematic ethics created as many problems as it was intended to resolve. This can be seen from a consideration of the problem of Abraham, whom Kierkegaard's rather fundamentalist hermeneutics sees as a striking example of

the priority of a divine call over ethical norms.<sup>7</sup> Taking the words of *Genesis* as they stand, Kierkegaard seems to assume that it is in fact God who tells Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac and not any social conditioning to the notion that a god must be appeased with human sacrifice. And thus he so tortures himself about the leap of faith that he misses the only element in the story that might be accepted as in some sense a revelation of the divine — that, whatever Abraham might have thought, the God of Abraham is not in fact pleased by the shedding of human blood.

It would be asking too much of this primitive tale to recognize the psychological problem of "enthusiasm," taken etymologically, but better might have been expected of Kierkegaard. As it is, the sober Dane has no defense against the charge, of, say, a Sartre that transcendence of the self may never be anything more than transcendence towards the self. For, if there is no God, then it is ridiculous to attribute to God a plan of action that originates with the self. And even if there is a God, one does not for that reason alone acquire the right to divinize one's own motives. And even if God not only exists but can and does speak to men, it does not follow that what one hears in the quiet of his own cogitations is necessarily the voice of God. In short, the postulate of theism does not in itself constitute a very reliable criterion for moral choice. For, ego remains ego even when it is called God.<sup>8</sup>

What all of this comes down to saying is that no system of ethics, and least of all one that includes God as a norm for action, provides an adequate antidote to the hypocrisy of moral self-satisfaction. To say, however, that there is no adequate system of ethics is not the same as to say that a systematic approach to ethics is without value. Not even the opponent of systematic ethics can avoid explaining his opposition in an orderly and, indeed, more or less systematic way. The difference in approach, then, is not so much that between accepting and rejecting as that between being satisfied with and not being satisfied with the systematic approach alone. What is needed is not to disavow all systematic approaches to morality but to learn how to anticipate and to acknowledge areas in which one encounters what the scientist might call non-systematic divergences. Kierkegaard saw this quite well enough, but his theistic egotry is in practice a very dangerous basis for decision-making. Abraham's God-complex, as far as we know, became pathological only with regard to his son Isaac. But there are men in power today — and more like them in quest of power — who hear God telling them that at least some of the many nations said to be descended from Abraham are expendable.

The weakness of Kierkegaard, in short, is essentially the same as the weakness of Heidegger. For, each assumes that an individual, by being attuned to the beyond, call it God or call it Being, can arrive at a superior

<sup>5</sup> See Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966; *Moral Responsibility: Situation Ethics at Work*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967.

Karl Jaspers, *The Future of Mankind*, trans. E. B. Ashton, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press Phoenix Books, 1963.

<sup>7</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling, in Fear and Trembling and the Sickness unto Death*, trans. Walter Lowrie, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1954.

<sup>8</sup> A similar view of Kierkegaard's interpretation of Abraham's sacrifice will be found in Martin Buber, *Eclipse of God* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957), pp. 115-20.

mode of existence that is adequate to the demands of human finitude. Each, though well nigh overwhelmed by man's finitude, presumes to teach that submission to an Infinite yields attitudes the concrete expression of which will be human *par excellence*. But neither is able to explain how the finite individual, the subject, can be sure that he is truly in contact with the Infinite and not simply with a self-created absolute.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, it may be humanly unbearable to suppose that the infinite is not in some way present in the finite. And thus are men constrained to suggest what this infinite might be and how it might be "finitized." For a Sartre it would be nothing more than the forever unachieved goals of the Marxist dialectic.<sup>10</sup> The personalist perspective of a Tillich or a Buber or a Teilhard de Chardin would recognize an element of truth in Sartre's position; but these writers would insist that the Infinite is not only personal and even interpersonal but also somehow supra-personal. Whether this Infinite be called Ultimate Concern or Eternal Thou or Omega, it is viewed as being the culmination of all human aspiration and yet an absolute which transcends the human.<sup>11</sup> What is ultimately important for these writers, however, is the claim that this absolute is somehow present in and indeed permeates the realm of the finite.<sup>12</sup> Thus, as the French phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas would put it, the Infinite can in a certain sense be "experienced" — not by a facile identification between Infinite and some existing social institution but in and through a commitment of respect for others which it is the purpose of social institutions to facilitate and even foster.<sup>18</sup>

An Infinite so conceived is, indeed, ultimately inconceivable and, I would suggest, mythical; but the significance of claiming that the Infinite breaks

<sup>9</sup> See Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Macmillan Paperbacks, 1965), pp. 161-81; Richard Schmitt, *Martin Heidegger on Being Human: An Introduction to Sein und Zeit*, New York: Random House Studies in Philosophy, 1969.

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*, special abridged ed., trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Citadel, 1965), pp. 49-81; *Search for a Method*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes, New York Random House Vintage Books, 1968.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 2nd ed., trans. Ronald Gregor Smith, New York: Scribner's Sons, 1958; Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. Bernard Wall, New York: Harper Torch books, 1961.

<sup>12</sup> A similar view will be found in Rudolf Bultmann, *History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity*, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962.

<sup>18</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *En Decouvrant L'Existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1967), pp. 53-107, 165-78; *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonse Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969. See also Rudolph J. Gerber, "Totality and Infinity: Hebraism and Hellenism — The Experiential Ontology of Emmanuel Levinas," *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry* vii (Fall 1967): 177-88; Edmund F. Byrne and Edward A. Maziarsz, *Human Being and Being Human: Man's Philosophies of Man* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969) Ch. 11.

into the finite can scarcely be exaggerated. For, out of this claim and the attempt to defend it there is implied the further conviction that peace among men is not merely passive and impersonal cessation of hostilities but *an active commitment of each man to whomsoever he may encounter*. Thus viewed peace is, on the one hand, the fruit of more than merely legal justice and, on the other hand, the seed of man's meeting with the Infinite. The Infinite, then, is seen neither as the limit of a temporal series of finite moments nor as any given social structure which is readily identifiable in the present. The desire to make this Infinite more present to all men does indeed create a certain dissatisfaction with existing social institutions; but it does not lead to the mistake of identifying the Infinite with any one institution, whether real or imaginary. Utopia, if such it must be called, is an appropriate goal within any social context; it is, however, more easily approached within a society whose members struggle vigilantly to maintain the priority of flesh-and-blood over money, markets and machines.

The hard-nosed theoretician (to say nothing of the Pentagon planner) might be sorely tempted to write all this off as tender piety at best and naive sentimentality at worst. But it could yet prove to be a fatal if not final mistake if technocrats do not try to appreciate these reflections of yet another European Jew who is well acquainted with grief. He has no need whatever to question the blatant reality of violence. What he does question is whether violence can ever be really justified in any strong sense of that word. For, he suggests to us, there are no ideologies so sacred as to take precedence over a flesh-and-blood human being who in his need calls to me beyond all ideologies. We are here involved with what Joseph Fletcher has referred to as agapeic love, but by no means with what the same situationist would call agapeic calculus. For, as opposed to Fletcher's so-called Christian utilitarianism, there is no "common good" so important that it must be obtained through injustice to individuals. It is not sentimentality that stops, as Tolstoy recommends, to care for the individual; rather is it a recognition that the other person may constitute the only norm of behavior to which all other norms are relative. If the concrete other person is not treated as an absolute, then there are no effective absolutes beyond the ego, be that ego singular or corporate, embodied or hypothetical. But if the concrete other person is treated as an absolute, then the ego is relativized. It is all the difference between what Levinas calls totality on the one hand and the infinite on the other. To the extent that the other person is "totalized" he is not viewed as a person but is "overlooked" or "overviewed"; to the extent that he is viewed as a person the infinite that is thereby acknowledged constitutes a rupture in one's over-view or totality. Totalization reduces everyone to the finite dimensions of apriori categories. Transcendence begins where totalization must leave off: in the spiritual depths of the other person that open out to the infinite.

This concrete infinite is, as it were, the outer edge of the paradox that calls into question the whole long history of attempts to justify violence. That there is violence in the world and among men is not in great need

of empirical verification; but that violence in any given instance can be strictly speaking *justified* is probably the least admirable heirloom of our rationalist ethical tradition. For, as the soldier Vassos discovers with regard to his prisoner Yanni in Nikos Kazantzakis' *The Fratricides*, if one ceases to look upon the other as an enemy and begins to recognize him as a person similarly caught in an absurd and inhuman situation, he may well lose his desire to destroy the life that is in his hands.<sup>14</sup> To be sure, a man can destroy another man even though he recognizes the other as a person. But, it is extremely important in such instances that one attach himself to a depersonalized system that will permit him to disregard the interpersonal reality of the situation in which he finds himself.

Thus are we led to what is perhaps the ultimate ethical question for any bureaucracy: what has priority, roles or persons? <sup>15</sup> The answer to this question, in turn, may be said to depend upon how one answers the age-old metaphysical question: what has priority, ideas or existing individuals? Some would still want to give rational answers to these questions. Others might prefer to explain away the questions themselves. Still others, who know something about living and dying, might simply answer with a tear. Yet what ultimately matters is neither the questions nor the answers but how we meet one another. For, if one could define the magnitude of violence as a function of alienation, the resulting set of values might very well range from zero to infinity in inverse proportion to a measure of one's sense of personal involvement.

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<sup>14</sup> Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Fratricides*, trans. Athena Gianakas Dallas (New York: Simon and Schuster Essandess, 1966), pp. 39-44.

<sup>15</sup> See Dorothy Emmet, *Rules, Roles and Relations*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966.