

PACIFISM AND DEMOCRACY

BY GEORGE W. HARTMANN

In the May 1944 issue of the MERCURY we printed an article under the title "‘Peace Now’ Rests in Peace," which was a critical discussion of the Peace Now Movement, headed at that time by Dr. George W. Hartmann. Dr. Hartmann took serious objection to what was there said in a letter which we published in the succeeding issue. A year later Dr. Hartmann filed a libel suit against the MERCURY, and the case has been in the process of litigation during the past three years. Dr. Hartmann has maintained he was held up to ridicule and contempt and that his movement and motives were unfairly criticized. The MERCURY contended that the article did not libel Mr. Hartmann, who was described in it as a sincere pacifist, and claimed that the criticism of the "Peace Now Movement," which operated in the winter of 1943, a critical stage of the war, was in the realm of fair comment. Nevertheless, in the interest of fair play, the MERCURY and Dr. Hartmann decided that the differences of opinion between them could best be resolved by the presentation by him of the case for Pacifism in the pages of this magazine. Accordingly, the matter has been adjusted and the following article is published by the MERCURY, exactly as written by Dr. Hartmann, who is Professor of Educational Psychology at Teachers College, Columbia University, and is presented to the readers of THE AMERICAN MERCURY for their own judgment and conclusions. — THE EDITORS

PERHAPS the most inspiring political slogan of all time appeared when the great social ideals of the French Revolution crystallized into the famous triad, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity." Like St. Paul's "faith, hope and charity," this historic phrase reveals an ascending climax; love or brotherhood are declared "the greatest of these" since the first two terms in each sequence are included and culminate in the third and last attribute.

What is usually forgotten by current protagonists of the familiar American pattern of democracy is that the pacifist position is a vital part of this grand tradition. One may go further and confidently assert that complete or mature democratic behavior implies and requires pacifist conduct in dealing with all types of social conflict.

The basis for this conviction is the insight that war and democracy are permanently incompatible with each

other. A pacifist America — and a pacifist world order — will be the clearest proof that mankind has moved from its present quasi-democratic or proto-democratic stage of evolution to a thoroughly developed and full-flowered democratic era.

Someone has remarked that it is significant that we have a famous Statue of Liberty in our chief port, but that nowhere in the harbors or public squares of the United States is there a statue to Equality or Fraternity. This suggests that our national fabric is at best no more than one third democratic. Popular attitudes endorsing the good of freedom are relatively more explicit or at least more frequently enunciated than those affirming the worth of justice and peace. Actually, these three distinguishable values are organically interdependent in any society and usually tend to rise and fall together. The individual or collective struggle to realize any one of them cannot be effectively divorced from the rest since they are all part-aspects of some comprehensive whole.

Pacifism (or “fraternalism”) is therefore inherently *more* than an anti-war movement — but it cannot be *less* than that, for war is the supreme negation of human solidarity. Whatever else he does and however much his efforts may miscarry because of personality and situational limitations, the pacifist is a *positive* exponent of democracy in striving for the “removal of all causes of war.” This fact makes the various penalties

imposed upon conscientious objectors by an allegedly popular government utterly incompatible with its own integrity. To punish what should be rewarded (and vice versa) is hardly a sane policy for furthering man’s ethical growth.

A common response to the pacifist orientation is to acknowledge the idealistic impulses it embodies, but to dismiss it as impractical and Utopian, *i.e.*, an ineffectual gesture of protest or pure escapism from the brutal realities of human conduct at home and abroad. Instead, it is alleged that since there are “tigers and sharks” among the world’s population, others are justified in exterminating them. Such an anti-pacifist view implies that agents of lofty principles and deeds (the non-tigers and anti-sharks) are more worthy to live than representatives of ignoble ones. This might have a certain plausibility if battle-drunk nations could discriminate with certainty the finer from the baser cause, but actually it is perilously close to postulating a Master Race in terms of provincially limited loyalties. Thus for many American eyes, the Red Army was presumably on the side of “progress” from 1941 to 1945; these same men are now commonly lumped with the legions of Satan. The skeptical pacifist suspects that such facile pseudo-moral judgments are dictated by the rawest kind of power politics, expediency, or self-interest and not by objectively significant differences in conduct.

A harsher objection to pacifism

holds that it is disloyal, unpatriotic, and "un-American" repudiation of natural community ties and obligations. On the contrary, the pacifist is loyal to the largest and most inclusive World Community; devotion to the ultimate welfare of a part-region (one's own country) is perfectly consistent with such a sense of duty to the entirety — in fact it follows inexorably. Under the conditions of modern warfare, there are no real victors because all mankind is the loser. The pacifist's sense of identification with the totality of his species is "philanthropy" in the original etymological sense and is therefore a genuinely patriotic — but admittedly not narrowly nationalistic — sentiment.

The absurd claim that pacifism, albeit unintentionally, seditiously or treasonably assists the aggressor forgets that "non-violent resistance and non-cooperation with the evil-doer" is a mighty social weapon, as Gandhi and his followers amply demonstrated. The garden variety of militarist appears to be irritated by the pacifist because the latter is a chronic challenge to his lack of imagination in relying so exclusively upon armed force as the ultimate arbiter of all controversies, and to his associated blind spot in not acknowledging that one's worst foe has basic human rights of which he cannot — or ought not — be deprived. Even the reluctant militarist fails to sense that there are many varieties of aggression — the enemy's kind and his own; the former

may be the "hot" type which recklessly creates new injustices while seeking to correct old ones, while the latter's aggressive hostility may be manifested in a "cold" refusal to correct inequities from which his side derives advantage.

Characteristically, the pacifist sees the strengths and weaknesses of both contestants with something approaching judicial or third-party objectivity — the very standpoint which nation-states themselves insist must be used to settle domestic disputes but inconsistently refuse to employ in more serious foreign affairs. By preserving this rare "detached" view of group antagonisms in times of stress, the pacifist proves himself a better social scientist than most of those "experts" formally classified as such who are usually found on one or the other partisan bandwagons during these periods.

II

However useful these rebuttal arguments may be in meeting criticisms emanating from non-pacifists, they are distinctly subordinate to the more significant affirmations which constitute the core of the pacifist credo. These are many and varied, but the most important of them — omitting for brevity's sake those grounded largely in sectarian and denominational religious authority — are comprised in the eight propositions which follow:

(1) *Modern wars destroy more human values than they preserve or create.*

This is not just an emotional revulsion (although this vital reaction cannot be safely disparaged) but a severely intellectual audit akin to Bentham's hedonic calculus. Gladly accepting the pragmatic test that the relative merit of any particular war can be responsibly determined only by the demonstrable net balance of value-consequences in the light of the total situation, the pacifist holds that both World War I and II demonstrated the correctness of his thesis. The militarist who gets a different result in adding gains and losses does so only because of a spurious weighting he assigns to certain quantities, such as claiming that it was worth while to slay untold millions in order to achieve — well, whatever “it” is that has been currently achieved at that price. To gloat over dubious derivative values acquired or kept while the original loci of all primary values — people themselves — are destroyed on a planetary scale is pure lunacy.

(2) *The sanctity of all human life is a precondition to any decent social structure.* This proposition seems axiomatic to the pacifist. In proper perspective, the life of every individual, even if he is counted among the enemies of one's country, is as precious in the eyes of the Eternal Cosmos as one's own. To deny this is a curious contemporary kind of blasphemy which the revolting practice of capital punishment does not make less repugnant.

(3) *War never in itself shows who is right — it is merely a clumsy way of*

proving who is stronger. The assumption that only the righteous win battles is too absurd to be discussed. If one takes a long enough time span, the chances are 50-50 that the losers had as “good” or “bad” causes as the victors — but fewer resources. That's the way we view ancient and medieval conflicts, and it is practically certain that the people of the twenty-first century will look upon recent catastrophes in the same light.

(4) *The ends of war are only possible goods, but the means of war are certain evils; the goals and methods of even so-called “just” wars cannot be harmonized.* This basic contention, emphasized and popularized by Aldous Huxley before the recent cataclysm, has received dramatic confirmation during the last decade. A just war requires a good objective and a good procedure. But since these two requirements cannot be met, there can no longer be a “just” war. What ever became of the Four Freedoms? In what limbo does the Atlantic Charter rest? The dead of Hiroshima and Nagasaki not only trouble the conscience of the atomic scientists, but make us suspect that if in the not too distant future we perish likewise it will be because in some perverted way “we asked for it.” And the ruined cities of Europe mock those who said all this was necessary if a world of beauty and reason was to be saved — or born.

(5) *War eventually engenders less worthy aims than those which initially led people to engage in it.* It may, e.g.,

begin in the spirit of "defense" and steadily lead through the accelerated moral deterioration fostered by mutually suicidal conflict to distinctly "offensive" behavior. Initially men claim to fight merely for the privilege of remaining master in their own house (survival); then they fight in order to prevent others from enjoying that same privilege by compelling them to submit to armed occupation for an indefinite period and to "surrender unconditionally" all self-government (tyranny). This is but one of the many manifestations of the elastic Double Standard fostered by war.

(6) *War usually makes social problems harder rather than easier.* War is a "frying-pan-into-the-fire" or circular type of solution for any difficulty, particularly if the changed status of *all* — and not just *some* — people is made the basic criterion of improved adjustment. The world today is less adequately fed, clothed, and housed than before the cataclysm; justice and mercy are no more in evidence; insecurity and spiritual malaise probably greater; and there are certainly more disordered personalities or chronically unhappy individuals than before the bombs began to fall. The gap between the Haves and the Have-nots has widened rather than diminished; the grip of the military mind is stronger than ever; and the boundaries of human freedom globally have generally contracted rather than expanded. Hence, one war by its injuries occasions another; we even

number them now as though they constituted a series! War intensifies the mass neurosis of hate and resentment for suffering attributed to the misdeeds of the adversary. Pledged to erase infamy, two vast aggregations embark on a crusade to save themselves — from each other — only to find regularly after each holocaust that the very stimulus-conditions producing this Great Madness have waxed a thousandfold.

(7) *It is a reasonable hypothesis that the evil of war would end if enough people adopted pacifism as a way of life.* Part of the motive for popular acceptance of the war method is the knowledge that "everybody's doing it." But if a new principle of social relations is ever to triumph, it must first win over the conscience of the vanguard of humanity. It must be a principle so compelling that it will lead more men and women to challenge the arrogance of the Police or Garrison State and the complaisant submissiveness of their fellows in the face of monstrous wrongs by announcing, like Martin Luther at his highest: "Here we stand; we can do no other."

(8) *In this age of "total" atomic and bacteriological warfare, pacifism is an imperative expression of the democratic impulse.* Democracy is much more than the rule of a majority of the qualified and interested electorate; it is a social order characterized by mutual kindness and helpfulness with unfailing respect for the inalienable rights of even the tiniest minority. There are some things no major-

ity can do and still act democratically — and war is the key example. Chancellor Hutchins in a speech at Frankfurt, Germany, on May 18, 1948, cited with approval Tawney's brilliant definition, "The foundation of democracy is the sense of spiritual independence which nerves the individual to stand alone against the powers of this world." It is appalling that here in America (where one would think the frontier tradition of pioneering and venturesome exploration in all areas of human experience was deeply rooted and honored) pacifists in war and peace time have been subjected to the crudest kind of defamation and persecution by the most influential agencies in the community. Why? Mainly for insisting on being adult rather than childish or adolescent exponents of democracy!

III

At bottom, a democracy is a world view which holds that all men's needs are better satisfied by friendly utilization of physical and human resources than by any other form of organized group life. The supreme mission of democracy is the establishment of the Good Life and the Good Society by making "peace, plenty and freedom" concrete realities in the experience of every human being. These are goods or values which cannot be securely enjoyed by any individual or group until *every* inhabitant of this earth has been assured them. By its very nature, the democratic ideal is international or universal rather than nationalistic

and parochial, humanitarian rather than cruel or indifferent to men's frustrations and wants, intelligently "reasonable" and experimental rather than superstitious or dogmatic in its approach to community problems and issues.

Implicit in all this is the outlook which cherishes the life of every one, even of those who reject the aims and methods of the democratic philosophy. Our highest allegiance is to the human species as a *whole*. Specifically, this means that the democrat *as* democrat cannot kill, or help to kill, even those who endanger his own existence. There just is no democratic way to execute a man. Democracy is a spirit and a technique for the promotion of human welfare — and no man's well being is advanced by first murdering him! Furthermore, nobody's selfish individual gain is in the long run truly dependent upon some one else's extinction. Yet so long as any man's "success" appears to be conditioned by another's "failure," just so long will human relations remain poisoned.

If the only way democracy can survive is by hurling more explosives than its opponents then the "winning" system is not really democratic. It is merely one that has more effectively mastered the despot's technology of beating other folks to their knees. Consequently, democrats can not be soldiers, *i.e.*, individuals prepared to slay anyone, even their own countrymen and comrades, upon orders. There is no war so holy or any cause so noble that it can sanctify this

form of personality degradation. This insight admits of no exceptions at any time or in any place. Blood and tears, ruin and destruction, falsehood and violence — are these the instruments for creating a fairer world for ourselves and our children?

Some readers, impressed with the obvious fact that the pacifist has many strong points on his side, may weakly

observe, "But there are things worse than war." Name them! Don't omit a single item. Then note — WAR INCLUDES ALL OF THEM.

Perhaps the only evil in any way comparable to war itself is that pathology of thought and feeling which in the fourth year after Hiroshima can still mechanically mumble, "Some things are worse than war."

THE GOLDEN BOY

BY ROBERT HILLYER

Too much success would win the wayward heart
 With small desires of tablecloth design,
 And, within limits of that damask art,
 Call for gold service, crystal, vintage wine,
 Small talk, and all the bowing left and right
 That help the rich forget how poor they are:
 No, it is easier for the eremite
 To count his jewels on some quieter star,
 Though never (so they say in every age)
 Has earthly fabric been esteemed so dear
 Or spirit famished on so scant a wage:
 Whatever be the truth of that, I hear
 That once in Florence, gilding a fair boy
 They smothered him. And so it is with joy.