
Editor's Comment

"Conscience, however, is not innate, but acquired: and varies with geography . . ."

—Spinoza

To Dostoyevski, and to the Russians *in toto*, conscience means goodness and sinlessness. Someone who just killed somebody is accused of lack of conscience. If we accept Spinoza's geographic theory, the American variety would be rather socially oriented. Pragmatism and practicality seem to have been irking the American soul for centuries. Blind faith, superstition, prejudice have variously been tried as counterbalances. Repulsive by nature, they couldn't count on lasting success with the American soul.

The American conscience thus became a respectable irrationality nicely grounded in rational decencies, later known as positive thinking. A blissful truce between reason and unreason was established once and for all, and turned into an ideology.

Conscience is a purely Judeo-Christian heritage, geared into the individualistic hierarchy of values. The supposition—that there is in each of us some contraption that tells us good from bad—is a venture of personalism and pluralism, the stalwarts of Western civilization. Other civilizations looked for more solid guarantees in regard to the distinction between good and evil. This does not mean they were less conscience-conscious, or that they minimized its need. They just couldn't afford it. Which brings us to the economics of conscience.

The general opinion prevails that conscience is a universal human attribute. Christianity locates it in anyone who is righteous, and claims that even the beastly among us have it as well, but of a quality that must be improved. Marx and Lenin, however, put a lot of effort into demonstrating, through countless examples of heinous class-exploitation, that only the poor and wretched have conscience while the rich are entirely devoid of it.

The fate of doing away with both views fell to America. I, for one, have always suspected that the bosom of affluence is where conscience blooms to the fullest. It's not exactly a matter of luxury, people of modest means certainly possess conscience if they insist and make sacrifices, nevertheless conscience flourishes better amidst material plenty where no sacrifice is necessary to voice moral outrage. Nations which developed, or conquered, wealth and abundance have always been the most eager to debate conscience and its obligations—although this rarely meant they followed its guidance, or felt an overwhelming urge to obey its judgments. As Europe was, for centuries, the center of the world's riches, through productivity or conquest, it was natural that a lot was spoken about conscience there. Whenever a European

nation was licked by its stronger neighbors, it immediately adopted the title of "the conscience of Europe." Its laments were scarcely heard, since European oppressors were always masterful at keeping airtight lids of security and censorship over their oppressed. So available and resounding voices were usually from among the free, powerful and rich, whose independence—political, cultural and financial—amplified the moral torments of their conscience. Which makes me surmise that a business-like approach to conscience is as proper as any and, in fact, more beneficial in many respects.

First of all, conscience is a good deal, and not only in the metaphysical sense: we do not need Horatio Alger to know that sensitivity to goodness pays off in the long run, especially in the sociopolitical sphere. Secondly, dealing in conscience brings handsome and tangible profits in our day: conscience has proved an ideal fuel for thriving industries, a fabulous source of individual fortunes in both moral and pecuniary areas. Under one condition, however—namely that the activities of conscience take place within huge and complex social organisms, for only these can afford conscience both as a regulatory value and colloquial argument in the never-ending dispute about human affairs.

This is where America comes in. With its bustling, prosperous marketplace of ideas, America is able to invest in the most adventurous ways—even in conscience and its far-out excesses, its unreliability and caprices. This, naturally, distances America a bit from its current partners in the Judeo-Christian civilization, which nowadays can already afford to make daring investments, but consider the adventures and eccentricities of conscience, especially in foreign policy, an American obligation. Actually, nothing alienates America's admirers more than her experimentation with conscience, which they deem sociomoral antics. Occasionally, the frivolities of the American conscience, which, at first sight, appear to push America into the red, prove finally to land it in the black. Which makes Western Europeans shrug with bogus indulgence—a routine concealment of envy. This, once again, amply attests to the verity that it is the rich who really have conscience and can safely frolic with it.

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This is how things look in a global and civilizational perspective. What remains is to situate conscience within our everydayness of social affairs, supermarkets and television. The quality of conscience—national, social, individual—is not immune to the laws of supply and demand: a surplus brings about devaluation of the marketed commodity. Therefore, if we care about American conscience—and I believe we all, regardless of our persuasions, do—something has to be done to improve that quality.

This, however, may prove to be a Herculean task. Conscience may thrive with material affluence and social plural-

ism, but it certainly becomes a victim of elitism. The Liberal Culture, which for so long has claimed a monopoly on conscience, obviously turns into its most destructive wrecker. To the "relativists," as Rabbi Schiller calls the libicultural activists and gurus in his book (reviewed in this issue), conscience is a matter of stimulating incoherence, which in itself is the yeast of the Liberal Culture. The elites take pleasure in making conscience as elusive and esoteric as possible, this gives them a sense of elevation, superiority, freedom from pedestrian notions of right and wrong, good and bad. They indulge in freakish "psychology" as a substitute for social and private morality, and look to it that paralyzing banalities become "wisdom," "science," "knowledge."

But people desperately try to live their lives unaffected by the Liberal Culture. It's not easy in America, stricken by the libicultural "conscience." The *Playboy-cum-Hustler-cum-Penthouse* operations clamor for the freedom to display certain aspects of life and human persons, not a transgressive demand in terms of laws, but cultural thuggery in its effectual creation of a social and behavioral climate which erodes both the general sense of normalcy and, consequently, the conditions under which people attempt to live their lives as they wish. This is what makes the liberal elitism in America offensive to anyone with an unwarped conscience.

—Leopold Tyrmand

Philosophy in America

"O philosophy, thou guide of life, O thou explorer of virtue and expeller of vice!"
—Cicero, 45 B.C.

Every philosopher has his moment of tender incertitude, an hour of self-examination, a time of reckoning—when he sees himself at the mercy of impossibility which transcends his forces of cognition and judgment. That monumental Chicago sage, Mr. Hugh Hefner, who devoted his life to discovering and defining the noumenon of carnality, is no exception. He thus confessed, in a recent issue of *Playboy*, an epistemological journal founded 25 years ago to disseminate Mr. Hefner's philosophy, his portraits, and the auxiliary materials

indispensable for the study of his ideas:

"It's been a personal adventure, and I've taken people along with me . . . Everything that has happened to me has been a product of my own adolescent dreams and aspirations. I have lived out my dreams as a kind of surrogate for a large part of the population."

He then announces a mind-boggling revelation, one which in itself irrevocably proves the tremendous power of Mr. Hefner's indomitable and investiga-

tive brain:

"But I have learned something very interesting. And that is that women, although they say they like a faithful and monogamous man, are very attracted to a man who has . . . had a lot of romantic experiences. The more experienced you are, the more desirable you are to a woman. If a woman knows you have been with a great many beautiful women, she somehow finds that a very attractive thing."

Gee! No one ever knew that!



Most of the commentary about the harmful impact of television and most of the efforts to improve matters have responded to the symptoms rather than the disease. To be sure, it would be a step in the right direction to have a decrease in the violent and sleazy programs that are broadcast, but a civilized society is neither built nor sustained by a cultural avoidance of the worst in human nature. A worthy and productive society is characterized by the prevalence of high-minded, responsible citizens. A public respect for the principles of honor and virtue and thrift and useful accomplishment can only be perpetuated with continuous and effective reaffirmation in literature and drama and education and religion, and by the examples of parents and fellow employees as well as public figures.

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