

Morality and American Foreign Policy

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I

THE COMPLAINTS we hear today about the absence of morality in American foreign policy may be deceptive. A case can be made that there is already more morality in American foreign policy than we can survive. This case has never been presented, and I want to present it for consideration. There is an inconsistency in the modern frame of mind that almost precludes positive interpretations of Western experience. A result is that the considerable demands for progress are expressed in terms of accusations against ourselves. In short, our morality is inverted into a form of self-condemnation. Michael Polanyi has written about how the modern frame of mind has been shaped by an inconsistency in the intellectual foundations of Western civilization, an inconsistency that may work itself out in the destruction of our civilization.¹ The inconsistency stems from the secularization of Christian moral fervor, which produced demands for the moral perfection of society, and from the impact of modern science on our concept of knowledge, which produced a critical philosophi-

cal positivism that is sceptical of the reality of moral motives.

The result of the former is a social and political dynamism that is committed to the moral perfection of human society. But the result of the latter is a sceptical sophistication that tends to see morality in terms of high sounding rationales for lowly but truer motives. We are all used to moral motives being unmasked as rationalizations for class and individual interests or explained as expressions of social, economic, psychological or political needs.

This unmasking does not prevent moral expression or demands for progress, but does make it easier for moral expression to take a denunciatory rather than an affirmatory form. A morally affirmatory statement, especially if it is in defense of existing society or its achievements, arouses the suspicion of dishonesty and is subject to being unmasked. It encounters objections both from the advocates of social change, who see it as a defense of the status quo, and from sceptics who look for the real motive that is operating behind the moral guise.

On the other hand, a morally denunciatory statement, especially if it is an accusa-

tion against existing society, is seen as an expression of the indignation of the morally honest reformer. In this way moral motives can be asserted backhandedly in praise of social dissenters easier than they can be asserted straightforwardly in praise of society's achievements. Scepticism and moral indignation are complementary in the critique of society. Together they support the social and political dynamism that is committed to achieving progress by remaking society.

The combination of scepticism with moral denunciation has led to many reforms that have humanized Western society and also to outbreaks of revolutionary violence, because the way they combine against existing society preempts its moral defense while at the same time focusing moral indignation against it. In the intellectual world this has made it difficult for affirmative accounts of Western experience, whether in the interpretation of Western history, or in the explanation of social and political reform, or in the defense of an anti-communist foreign policy. Any scholar, intellectual, or student who attempts to establish that good will has been an effective force in Western civilization runs a risk of being dismissed as naive and unscientific or even as intellectually dishonest, because any reform attributed to the efficacy of good will can also be explained in terms, for example, of the triumph of class interests. As would be expected, affirmative interpretations of Western achievements drop out of contention, leaving the field to cynical accounts that further undermine the moral confidence of the West in its past experience and future direction.

The untenability of affirmation has rendered ineffective, and even impossible, any moral defense of the West. Affirmations of Western achievements or institutions are likely to provoke stiff and strident protests against jingoistic justifications of imperialism and neo-colonialism and, at best, to be chided for complacency. This poses a serious problem for the continued existence of Western civilization, but it is not the most

serious. The inconsistency in the modern frame of mind presents an even more serious problem. The restraint scepticism places on moral expression means that moral feelings, which have been secularized and given social purpose, have no legitimate positive form of expression. Since moral affirmations receive a sceptical response, moral expression has a safe outlet only in accusations of immorality against existing society.

This means, unfortunately, that a society in which this frame of mind is prevalent will express its desire for progress mainly in an attack on itself, and it will rely on self-criticism as its means for achieving progress. At the same time, however, attacks on alternative institutions will tend to be dismissed as defenses of the status quo, and scepticism about the policies and motives of an opposing society will be given short shrift as an expression of jingoism. An attack on an opposing society's practices and motives implies a defense of one's own—and that is taken as indifference to existing evils. Among many intellectuals such an attack will be more effective in eliciting resentment rather than support, because it focuses attention away from the domestic imperfections which are seen as the real barrier to progress.

The further a society is outside the Western framework, the less it will provoke the West's moral indignation. The "double-standard," to which (primarily) conservatives have objected, is merely a reflection of the modern frame of mind. It is only to be expected that within this frame of mind denunciatory rhetoric will rise to new heights over the execution of 5 terrorists in Spain but not over the execution of tens or hundreds of thousands of ordinary people by communists in Cambodia.

We are all by now familiar with the modern alienated intellectual whose alienation amounts to a moral hatred of existing society. He has a passion for moral improvement of his society, but he has worked out the doctrine of doubt to its logical conclusion. Since he cannot find moral motives

safe from the suspicion of mere conformity, self-interest, or hypocrisy, he can find no safe grounds for moral affirmation. His moral passions, being thus denied legitimate expression, are satisfied by turning his scepticism against his own society. He denounces its institutions and policies as masks for the material profit of vested interests. Michael Polanyi has shown that this inconsistent combination of moral scepticism with moral indignation is held together by their joint attack on society.²

Of course, everyone is not equally affected by this frame of mind to the extent that an alienated intellectual is, and all critics of society are not alienated intellectuals. Nevertheless, its impact is pervasive. Today we grow up in this frame of mind in the way we grow up in our language. But whereas the structure of our language has been extensively studied, the structure of our frame of mind has not. That something is amiss has not escaped notice,³ but the usual appellations of "double-standard," "death-wish," "guilt," etc., are too feeble to give us a handle on our dilemma.

Take a typical American liberal intellectual. His commitment to his society is usually conditional upon institutional and policy changes. Therefore, his allegiance at any point in time is weak, because to satisfy his desire for moral honesty he must forever remain an opponent of existing society. His program will not emphasize building on the past achievements and successes of the society, but correcting past failures and righting past wrongs. He will not see his country's gifts of foreign aid as attesting to its moral sense, but the insufficient amount will be evidence of an immoral foreign policy. He will justify foreign nationalization of his fellow citizens' property as a necessary remedy for neo-colonial exploitation. He will not see lack of progress in arms limitations as a reflection on the opponent's intentions but, instead, on his own country's lack of good faith. He will not see a strong defense posture as a justifiable response to an external threat, but as "provocative" and the cause of an arms race. On the domestic

scene he will champion the failures as victims of society, and he will explain the successful in terms of ill-gotten gains. He will not even be a Marxist, but just an ordinary member of a verbalist institution.

The fusion of moral scepticism with the demand for moral perfection means that the West's morality becomes immanent in attacks on itself. Readers of the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, and university students, are all accustomed to the use of moral scepticism to unmask the alleged immorality of existing society. To note this is not to attack the press and the universities, but to observe that this frame of mind is so endemic that the challenge it presents to foreign and defense policies necessary to the survival of the West and to protect its interests must be realized.

The West has relied for so long on a self-critical posture as its means of achieving improvement that it naturally and unthinkingly adopts this stance in its relations with external enemies. I want now to examine recent articles by three distinguished and respected men—George Kennan, George Ball, and Congressman Les Aspin—in order to show the problem posed by the modern frame of mind to the maintenance of a vigilant foreign policy and defense posture.⁴ That these reasonable men are far from the purest examples of this frame of mind merely establishes its pervasiveness. At the outset I want to turn aside comments that their articles were written for purposes of self-justification, acquiring visibility in quest of high government office, etc., by observing that to be effective in these ways, the articles must relate to widespread views and be acceptable as intelligent foreign policy and defense comment.

II

IN AN ARTICLE about US/USSR foreign relations, George F. Kennan attributes the post-World War II bad relations between the two powers to American mis-perceptions and over-reactions.⁵ The mis-perceptions and over-reactions had their origin in President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his associ-

ates misleading and manipulating American public opinion about the USSR. As Kennan puts it, "The unreal dream of an intimate and happy postwar collaboration with Russia" which was peddled during the war to large portions of the American public, who "were encouraged to believe that without its successful realization there could be no peaceful and happy future at all,"⁶ led to disillusionment and anxiety. The result was an over-reaction that was further intensified by the tendency of military planners to create an adversary:

In the case at hand, the Russians, being the strongest and the most rhetorically hostile, were the obvious candidates. The adversary must then be credited with the evildest of intentions. . . . In this way not only is there created, for planning purposes, the image of the totally inhuman and totally malevolent adversary, but this image is reconjured daily, week after week, month after month, year after year, until it takes on every feature of flesh and blood and becomes the daily companion of those who cultivate it, so that any attempt on anyone's part to deny its reality appears as an act of treason or frivolity. Thus the planner's dummy of the Soviet political personality took the place of the real thing as the image on which a great deal of American policy, and of American military effort, came to be based. (p. 682)

The postwar disillusionment, then, fell in "most fatefully, with the emergence of a new pattern of fears and misunderstandings—this time of a military nature." Kennan says we should not have been alarmed by the absence of Soviet demobilization after World War II. It was just a continuation of traditional Russian custom "to maintain in being, even in time of peace, ground forces larger than anyone else could see the necessity for." (p. 680) But since Western military planners are "trained to give greater weight to capabilities than to intentions" and Western strategists are inclined "to a chronic over-rating of the ad-

versary's capabilities," the "result, of course, was increased anxiety," which led to more American mis-perception and over-reaction. (p. 681)

The development by the Russians of a nuclear weapon capability, which further militarized "American thinking about the problem of relations with Russia," was also our fault. Stalin sanctioned the development of a nuclear weapon capability because "others were doing so,"⁷ but "he probably would have been quite happy to see it removed entirely from national arsenals, including his own, if this could be done without the acceptance of awkward forms of international inspection." (p. 681) Stalin, who "was entirely rational in his external policies," never allocated to nuclear weapons "anything resembling a primary role in political-strategic concepts." (p. 681) The reason Soviet doctrine today emphasizes the primacy of surprise nuclear attack is because Stalin's "successors were eventually forced into a somewhat different view of the weapon" by "Western powers, committed from the start to the first use of the weapon in any major encounter, whether or not it was used against them." (p. 681) The West couldn't see that it was the cause of all the problem, because "once again, the interest in capabilities triumphed over any evidence concerning intentions." (p. 681)

"Nor does this exhaust the list of those forces which, in the aftermath of World War II, impelled large portions of influential American opinion about Russia into a new, highly militaristic, and only partly realistic mold." (p. 682) I will not go through the rest of Kennan's list, which consists of various misreadings of events "by the official Washington establishment" as a result of their "exaggerated image of the menacing Kremlin, thirsting and plotting for world domination" and the tendency of American politicians to show "bristling vigilance in the face of a supposed external danger." (p. 683) The message of it all is that the U.S. is responsible for the cold war for taking seriously declared So-

viet intentions: "It was out of such ingredients that there emerged, in the late 1940's and early 1950's, those attitudes in American opinion that came to be associated with the term 'cold war.'" (p. 682)

Having mistaken hostile rhetoric and military capability for hostile intentions, and having allowed Soviet behavior "to feed and sustain" our "distorted image of Soviet Russia," Kennan believes we proceeded to provoke the Soviet blockade of Berlin by undertaking the Marshall Plan, preparations for a West German government and making the first moves toward establishing NATO. According to Kennan, we then provoked the Soviets into starting the Korean War by establishing a permanent military presence in Japan. We then misread the significance of Stalin's death and proceeded to bring down Khrushchev, who "was intensely human" in spite of "his occasional brutalities," by trying to achieve superiority in preparation for an inevitable future military encounter "for which there was no logical reason at all," and by letting "the interests of the gathering of military intelligence . . . be given precedence over the possibilities for diplomatic communication." (p. 685) The result was the U-2 plane incident, which shattered Khrushchev's "ascendancy over the Soviet military establishment" and may have forced him into putting missiles in Cuba "as a last desperate gamble on his part with a view to restoring his waning authority." (p. 685)

Kennan believes we are also guilty of letting the Soviet response to the 1956 Hungarian and 1968 Czechoslovakian revolutions get in the way of better US/USSR relations. Once again we failed to understand. This time a great many Americans displayed an apparent inability "to understand that the Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe, established by force of arms in the final phases of the war and tacitly accepted by this country, was a seriously intended arrangement that the Soviet leadership proposed to maintain, if necessary, by

the same means with which they had acquired it." (p. 685)

In Kennan's view we are likewise responsible for the demise of détente. Soviet culpability for the 1973 Arab-Israeli war and for Angola played no part, but it allowed "some people on the American side" to use the impression that the Soviets had violated at least the spirit of earlier understandings "to justify the very clear changes that did occur in American policy." (p. 687) Kennan places the question of any Soviet responsibility for the demise of détente as outside "the limits of this examination," and, indeed, the question is irrelevant to Kennan's frame of mind, because détente was doomed by the Americans regardless of any Soviet responsibility: "The pressures against détente had never been absent in Washington." (p. 687)

Once again an American President overdramatized US/USSR relations and bred false hopes, which led to disillusionment. This played into the hands of the Pentagon, which refused both any further SALT concessions and the unilateral suspension of weapons program development. We failed to understand that the Russians' "rhetorical and political stance of principled revolutionary Marxism" was "designed to protect them from charges by the Chinese Communists that they were betraying the cause of Leninism-Marxism." (p. 687) "The Jackson-Vanik Amendment, and the subsequent demise of the trade pact, dealt a bitter blow to any hopes" for better Soviet-American relations. (p. 688)

If things are to improve, "American statesmanship will have to overcome some of the traits that have handicapped it in the past." (p. 689) We must overcome our subjectivity. We must control "the compulsion of the military-industrial complex." We must exercise unilateral restraint in the weapons race. We must see Soviet power as a natural accouterment of a great power and not as a military capability consciously acquired at great cost for the purpose of aggression. We must understand that the

Soviet arms build-up reflects the Russian character and not Communist intentions. And "American politicians will have to learn to resist the urge to exploit, as a target for rhetorical demonstrations of belligerent vigilance, the image of a formidable external rival in world affairs." (p. 698) Time is running out, Kennan concludes, and that is our fault too.

All of this is sufficiently familiar that the reader knows I have not overdrawn the picture. I have not summarized Kennan's article in order to rebut it. My concern is not with Kennan, but with the structure of a frame of mind and the challenge it presents to American foreign policy. Kennan's article does not convey the strident tone of moral denunciation of American foreign policy that similar accounts do. Nevertheless, his scepticism is turned only against his own society. He expresses his desire for a better situation solely through his catalogue of American shortcomings, and he relies solely on criticisms of America to produce a better trend in US/USSR relations.

Simultaneously, he dismisses declared Soviet intentions with a claim that the obvious ideological hostility asserts "itself more as a rhetorical exercise than as a guide to policy." (p. 673) If Kennan believes this, one might imagine that he would criticize the Soviets for doing so much damage with meaningless rhetoric and ask them to drop it. Instead, threatening "Soviet rhetoric and Soviet behavior" are made into an American failure for allowing them "to feed and sustain the distorted image of Soviet Russia." (p. 683) The exaggerated reaction of the U.S. to intentions declared by the Soviet Union constituted "at all times a complication of the Soviet-American relationship." (p. 673) It is we who are responsible for the negative effect on international affairs of hostile Soviet statements and behavior. Kennan's account explains away any Soviet responsibility, right down to their rhetoric which is attributed to the necessity of fending off Chinese ideological attacks. Kennan's in-

dignation is reserved for only his own country. His catalogue of alleged American failures even makes us responsible for the Cuban missile crisis.

The fact that Kennan suspends his scepticism in regard to the motives of the Soviets reflects the limitation of the critical attitude in the West to condemnation of one's own society. I am not suggesting that criticism of one's own society is unpatriotic or that mistakes (when they actually occur) should not be acknowledged as a way of doing better. That is not, however, Kennan's message. The thrust of his article is that America is at fault for acknowledging the existence of an enemy and preparing to resist him. The challenge this frame of mind presents to our foreign policy is formidable.

George W. Ball, in a stinging criticism of American diplomacy in the Middle East, also suspends his scepticism in regard to the motives of the Soviets and subjects only our own foreign policy to condemnation.⁸ In his criticism he assumes that the Soviets desire peace and stability in the Middle East, and he does not even criticize the Soviets for complicity in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. Instead, he gives them credit for the cease-fire, which was "negotiated under pressure from the Soviet Union." (p. 42) He blames the terrible situation that he sees in the Middle East today on the U.S. for turning its "back on a serious effort to solve the problem." (p. 44) The U.S. exploited "Sadat's strong desire for peace merely in order to separate Egypt from the rest of the Arab world." (p. 44) The U.S. forced Assad of Syria, who "would have preferred an overall settlement that would enable him to concentrate on the peaceful development of his country," instead to "accept increasing Soviet domination as the price of keeping pace with Israeli armaments." (p. 43) The United States also "exhausted the Israeli tolerance for further compromise." (p. 46) Even Kissinger's success in separating the hostile forces is turned into an American failure because "by rigorously excluding the Soviet Union from any part in the negotiations, we re-

duced Moscow to a humiliating position." (pp. 42-43)

Mr. Ball expresses confidence in the Soviet Union, while he impugns the motives of Kissinger's diplomacy. Instead of working for a final settlement, Kissinger used diplomacy to fulfill "his elemental need for power and glory." (p. 41) Mr. Ball does not find the Soviet role in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war hurtful to détente. The damage to détente was done by Kissinger who, even though he "was publicly committed to détente, saw advantages in excluding the Soviet Union from participating in the negotiations, thus preventing Moscow from gaining a more solid foothold in the area." (p. 44) In other words, the American Secretary of State is not attacked for allowing Soviet successes, but for preventing them.

My purpose is not to defend Kissinger's diplomacy or to attack Mr. Ball, but to call attention to how our frame of mind undermines our own confidence while protecting our opponents from our criticism. Since we are always the focus of our criticism, the very concept of an external enemy is receding. This poses a difficulty to the maintenance of a strong defense posture.

The same self-criticism that diminishes the Soviet threat finds the real threat in our own defense budget. Congressman Les Aspin, a member of the House Armed Services Committee, warns us that "we must learn to see the dangers where they are, not where they are not."⁹ Aspin thinks that the main threat to peace is the Pentagon's "we want more" doctrine, which produces an arms race.¹⁰ In other words, the threat is in the Pentagon, not in the Kremlin.

Aspin uses the press to continually challenge the Pentagon's effort to disclose the Soviet military buildup.¹¹ In place of a Soviet threat, Aspin sees the Pentagon's "stripped down version of reality."¹² His use of information to down play the Soviet

threat has caused General Daniel Graham, former head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, to call him a prestidigitator. Since I believe the problem is a frame of mind and not personalities, it is not for the purpose of taking sides that I give one more example of that point of view which is adept at turning facts inside out in order to apply a critical scepticism only to the United States.

In June 1976 Aspin released a report that in the past ten years the United States has built 48 nuclear-powered attack submarines and the Soviets have built only 42. Aspin said these figures "are further evidence that the 'Russians are coming' claims have been grossly exaggerated." This is the way Aspin chose to describe the fact that the Soviets have switched their submarine production capability from attack submarines where their advantage over us is 3 to 1 to nuclear missile submarines where their advantage over us is less.

The structure of this frame of mind causes cynicism to be suspended in regard to the motives of foreign opponents. By focusing scepticism only inward, it undermines the self-belief and will of Western civilization and disarms it morally.

III

THE COMMUNISTS do not share our dilemma. In their doctrine the morality of Marxism is immanent in its historical inevitability. Marxism does not rely on self-scepticism as a means of achieving progress. The destruction of the West by Soviet communism poses no moral dilemma to them, because they see it as the inevitable consequence of historical progression. However, our own defense poses a considerable moral dilemma to us because of the frame of mind I have analyzed. In any realistic assessment of the strategic balance, this disadvantage must be included.

¹Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); "On the Modern Mind," *Encounter*, Vol. XVII (May 1965), pp. 1-9; and "Beyond Nihilism," in *Knowing and Being*, edited by Marjorie Grene, University of Chicago Press, 1969.

²*Ibid.*

³"... we tend to blame ourselves for everything that goes wrong in the world, and to assume that other nations share our good intentions, and will follow our good example. We take pride in self-flagellation, and seize every opportunity for excusing or ignoring the faults and shortcomings of others." (Eugene V. Rostow, "The Safety of the Republic," *Strategic Review*, Spring 1976, p. 14).

⁴I am not suggesting that Kennan, Ball, and Aspin are alienated intellectuals. All idealists are not alienated intellectuals, although the frustrations they encounter tend to move them in that direction. But the frame of mind that Polanyi analyzes is independent of the dispositions of individuals. It is a paradigm that, to a greater or lesser extent, we all live in mentally, and some live in it emotionally as well.

⁵George F. Kennan, "The United States and the Soviet Union, 1917-1976," *Foreign Affairs*, July, 1976.

⁶Curiously, Kennan's article perpetuates the same unreal dream and the same encouragement that he criticizes.

⁷In his review in the 8 August 1976 *Washington Post* of *Energy and Conflict: The Life and Times of Edward Teller* by Stanley Blumberg and Gwinn Owens, Colin Norman states that the authors have "convincing evidence that the Soviet Union actually led the race to develop the hydro-

gen bomb," testing both the first thermonuclear device and the first deliverable hydrogen bomb ahead of the U.S. "Astonishingly, the Department of Defense seems to have kept knowledge of the Soviet tests from the Atomic Energy Commission, and even Teller and his team were not informed."

⁸George W. Ball, "Kissinger's Paper Peace," *Atlantic*, February, 1976.

⁹Les Aspin, "How Much is Enough?," *The Center Magazine*, March-April, 1976.

¹⁰"It seems that whatever strategic doctrine happens to be enunciated by the existing Secretary of Defense, the Armed Services have always recognized only one doctrine, the same one that Samuel Gompers had for labor unions, 'We want more.'" *Ibid.*

¹¹Aspin's efforts have earned him *Pravda's* appreciative recognition: "L. Aspin, a member of the House of Representatives, came out in the U.S. Congress with a detailed critical analysis of the methods being used by the Pentagon and the CIA in their desire to prove what cannot be proved—that the military spending of the USSR is greater than the U.S. military expenditure. He then published a special article on this topic in the weekly *Foreign Policy*. A number of other members of both houses of the U.S. Congress also criticized the CIA and the Pentagon in this connection." *Pravda* contrasts Aspin with "the so-called big press of the United States," which gives "over the front pages to the slanderous fabrications of the Pentagon and the CIA." (K. Georgiyev, "Who is Whipping up the Arms Race?," *Pravda*, August 4, 1976).

¹²Les Aspin, "Comparing Soviet and American Defense Efforts: A Fact Sheet From the Office of Rep. Les Aspin," April 1976.

Welfare Without Injustice

DONALD J. DEVINE

Welfare With Coercion

The welfare state promises that a fully free society may be retained in its essentials if only the national government is given the single additional power of caring for those in need. This promise is alluring since it starts with a free and unhampered market to provide for the overwhelming number of individual preferences. It will only use the state to override these preferences with positive government intervention when these free decisions will lead to insufficient "food, safety, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, congenial employment or companionship" for the minority who are in need.¹

The promise, however, also has problems which are so manifest that they cannot be ignored. The best modern philosophical defense of the welfare state, consequently, recognizes that in order to use positive government intervention for these purposes, it is necessary to abandon the "perfectionist perspective" which demands that no individual rights be overridden. It even admits that popular preferences must be overcome on occasion and that this could be abused so that "all sorts of tyrannies" could be excused.² This defense expects that widespread understanding of who deserves welfare, how much they are

due and whether real welfare has been provided will weigh against the negative possibilities and will control abuses;³ but this is certainly something to be tested rather than assumed.

Beyond the problem of whether real welfare is provided and whether this reaches those who deserve it, is the fundamental problem that coercion, including government coercion, can cause injury which is typically feared as the worst injustice which can be inflicted upon a society.⁴ Government injury may be done to those who are forced to contribute so that others may have more goods or services, or to those who are forced to behave in a certain manner so that others may have a congenial environment and social companionship. More critically, not only may those perceived to be giving be harmed but those perceived to be receiving also may be aggrieved—either because by stating that the problem has been solved by government alternative assistance is not given; or as a result of an injury from an intended or, more often, an unintended consequence of this or another government policy.

As one looks at national government welfare involvement in the United States, moreover, injury seems a characteristic aspect of its conception and implementation in virtually every area of policy. Taking the