

The Human Way Out

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Our age has been characterized as the Nuclear Age or the Space Age, to celebrate modern man's sudden command of time, space, and energy, in a fashion more absolute than he ever before dared to dream. But this bright side of science and invention has a dark face. As never before, ours has proved to be an age of mass extermination and mass destruction; and in the conflicts that now threaten between great states, extermination, too, may become absolute and universal. There is no mechanical escape from the dangers mankind as a whole now confronts: no rocket missiles or counter-missiles will save us. We must find the human way out. Instead of planting our flag on the moon, we must quickly move to reclaim this planet for humanity.

One fact should be plain at last to all open-eyed citizens. Our national policy of exploiting nuclear energy and developing nuclear weapons was conceived on false premises and has been directed toward unsound, and ultimately inhuman and morally repulsive objectives. As a result, the dangers we now face threaten not only ourselves and our children, not only the Russians and their children, but the very existence of the human race. What seemed only a distant possibility of danger to potential enemies in 1945, now lurks ominously in the shadows by our own doorstep; or, to speak more accurately, boldly circles over our heads.

Our American pursuit of national security, no less than our peculiar faith in our innate moral superiority, has been built on a series of delusions. Our complacent belief in our solitary preeminence in scientific knowledge and technical skill reveals itself now for what intelligent observers always knew it to be – a childish vanity. Our monopoly of nuclear power has been broken before the eyes of the world. Our supposed scientific secrets, which we guarded with such

tremulous vigilance, at the sacrifice of our own political and intellectual liberties, have plainly been open secrets to our rivals, who freely draw on the same common reservoir, supplied by the same historic sources as ours – offering many outlets it was not in our power to control. Our political realism has now proved a gaping foolishness. Our government's goading boasts of unlimited powers of massive retaliation have only hastened Soviet Russia's development of similar powers: our solid wall of military bases is now a sieve. Instead of producing a situation of strength and security, our policy has produced a situation of impotence and total insecurity. The military measures we took have proved infinitely more dangerous than the dangers they sought to fend. Only those whose cold-war minds are still in a deep-freeze, can imagine that these dangers will not be immensely aggravated by concentrating our resources on developing mightier long range weapons to make more swift and certain the present plans and counter-plans for ending political conflicts by mass extermination.

By now the outcome of these errors should be plain to all but the invincibly ignorant. The life of every creature on this planet hangs from moment to moment by a thread. No pious professions of peace, no imbecile threats of counter-destruction and counter-extermination, can hide this fact. Our present plight has been dramatized by Russia's success in producing space satellites; but it was emphatically not produced by it. In their first reaction to these menacing rockets, the American people have overlooked the genuine grounds for their present humiliation and anxiety. What should cause the deepest concern at this moment is not our technological but our moral backwardness; and what should awaken our well-justified fears is not only Russia's powers of unlimited extermination, but our own. Not willing to meet each other on any other ground, the two rival governments have at last collaborated in a suicide pact: their tacit ultimate

goal is not co-existence but non-existence. The United States is crestfallen and disheartened over Russia's success in manufacturing weapons similar to our own only because we ourselves acted under the same irrational impulses, embraced the same immoral means, and devoted our resources to the same lopsided scientific and technical pursuits as the Communist leaders. In the one matter that we should have made our central obligation – schooling ourselves and the rest of mankind for the new personal responsibilities and the new collective disciplines that nuclear energy imposes – our leaders have shown no better grasp of the problems of the atomic age than their Russian rivals.

Equal Blindness

The first step in overcoming Soviet Russia's advantage is to withdraw from this kind of competition. We have more important business on our hands. But we must first understand that, in all that concerns mankind's political security and biological survival, the policies of the American and the Russian governments have so far been equally short-sighted, equally inimical to the general welfare, equally lacking in elementary morality of the kind that even animal societies must maintain to preserve the species. Both governments have sought, in overconfident self-imposed isolation, to solve the problems of absolute power, suddenly presented by nuclear weapons, in terms of their immediate self-interest. In their increasingly life and death struggle, each government has chosen the way of death: parity or superiority in the capacity for human extermination. The fact that they have acted in this fashion proves that both governments have been under the sway of stagnant ideas and obsolete patterns of behavior. They have applied a savage stone age morality to an atomic age civilization. As soon as

nuclear weapons were invented, the irrationality of war became total. Alike for the militarist and pacifist, total war could only mean total defeat, as a succession of our own military leaders, from General Douglas MacArthur on, promptly recognized. The American way of life is now as dead as the Russian way of life, unless we both admit to ourselves that the human way of life is the only way that matters. That way is now threatened by the very mechanisms and weapons to which we have entrusted our national existence. If this is true there is but one method of insuring our national survival today; and that is by pursuing a goal large enough to embrace the entire human race. In short, the only way out is the human way out.

To dare to be human, then, is the chief imperative for statesmanship today; and that seemingly innocent injunction imposes a heavy burden. Even to take the first step in this direction will not be easy for us: for it involves a recognition of the fact that our conduct has departed, in the most astonishing and frightening fashion, from the human norm. Not the least dangerous part of the situation, since it almost puts it beyond correction, is that we have no sense of horror, no sense of guilt; indeed, we act as if nothing unusual had happened to us. In our one-sided preoccupation with science and technics, we have taken the automatic machine as the model for human behavior; and in our high regard for the super-human feats performed by the machine, we forget that the most lifelike of our machines are utterly incapable of a full human response, of registering mercy, pity, tenderness, love, or imaginative anticipation. The specialized minds who model their own patterns of behavior most closely on the machine, have trained themselves to eliminate the human factor from their thinking, and so ultimately from their conduct. The very success of this mode of thinking in the world of machines and mechanical organizations has hidden its effect in the world of men,

namely, the fact that it gives authority to dehumanized automatons and demoralized human agents. These agents, thinking exclusively in terms of physical results, in utter disregard of the human elements, have imposed a pathological dream of total extermination upon their own fellow citizens, and they have made the acceptance of their dream the criterion of patriotism and sanity.

To Be Human Is –

If we were sufficiently human, we would long ago have recoiled from our self-made nightmare; for we would have been on guard against those who deny the primacy of life and the moral responsibility of the human personality acting under the providence of a higher power than man's own. To be human is to admit that we are limited and fallible, frail in all our powers, and prone to perpetual self-deception, fomented by pride. To be human is to admit that we are constantly open to corruption and error; and that these are never more damaging than when we are too sure of our rectitude to allow even the possibility of correction. To be human, further, is to confess that our own sins are no less real, no less offensive, than those of our enemies, and that even our virtues may mislead us and betray us the moment we complacently acknowledge them.

Those who recognize their humanness know that they are weak even when they seem strong, and that they need on all occasions the self-knowledge, the help, the sympathy, and the timely correction they can get only from active intercourse and equal partnership with other men. To remain human, we must look for the truth about ourselves in the taunts of our enemies no less than in the rebukes of our friends. In this acceptance of the human condition, men who are not insolent with the powers of office, or steeped in self-righteousness and self-justification, realize that even

their most limited decisions must be made in humility, always subject to the challenge of contrary opinion and the correction of facts and events. So they know that any kind of protective secrecy or censorship tends to heighten their liability to error, indeed to unseat their judgment, by removing it from the watchful eyes of their fellow men.

As for the cosmic energies that man now wields, and the god-like powers of life and death over all animal creation, including man himself, that go with his new knowledge, those who guard their humanness know that it is not for any single nation, still less for any single human agent, to make final decisions as to their use. Those who are ready to exercise these new cosmic powers with no outside guidance prove by their readiness their total unfitness to make even much less momentous decisions. The truly sane know that they are not sane enough to wield these powers except under worldwide guidance and superhuman restraint.

The peoples of the world at large have already given many signs of their apprehension over the course that the governments of the United States and Soviet Russia, now joined by Great Britain and other misguided states, have been following. But so deadened has our moral sense become, by daily immersion in myths of extermination, in paranoid dreams of absolute power, in every form of moral disintegration and criminal delinquency, purveyed hourly by our organs of mass communication, that even the first stirrings out of this nightmare have long been delayed. Even now, one cannot be sure that our countrymen are yet sufficiently awake to realize that our present political and military program, based upon the obsolete conception of national interest, has become flatly bankrupt. Certainly our leaders, who formulated and carried out this policy, have not yet had the humility – or should I say the courage? – to acknowledge that insolvency.

Our government is demanding more money for rocket weapons, more equipment for basic research, more support for scientific and technical education, as if they still hoped out of these new liabilities to create fresh assets. This pitifully imitative attempt to come abreast of the Russians in the fields where they now outrank us has proved extremely flattering to the Russians: it may well lead these totalitarians to look forward to the time when we will carry this imitation faithfully into every other department of life, forfeiting the last vestiges of spiritual freedom and democratic control. Our country has already gone much farther in this totalitarian direction than any but the most pessimistic dared imagine possible a decade ago. Once more our government is demonstrating A.E.'s dictum: A man becomes the image of the thing he hates.

In the present babel of bellicose counsels, only one leader, General Omar Bradley, has shown himself worthy of the hour. We are "attempting," he reminded us recently, "to stave off disaster by devising arms which would be both ultimate and disastrous." "This electronic house of cards," he went on to say, "will soon reach a point where it can be constructed no higher," and at that point all the cards must fall. With that terrible certainty before us, all our plans must be recast; and as General Bradley again said, we must turn our attention to saving mankind, if we are to have any prospect of saving ourselves. When a plain soldier can think with such clarity, with such quick foresight, with such sanity and humanity, the timid silence of so many of our professed moral leaders becomes shameful – hardly less shameful, hardly less reprehensible, than the panicky furor of those who would continue to expand our self-defeating commitment to the strategy of extermination by piling up more deadly atomic, bacterial and chemical weapons and more certain means of delivery.

No Scapegoats, No Saviors

In appraising what has happened, let us not hunt out scapegoats; and in looking for a human way out, let us not seek human saviors. The guilt lies heavy on all of us, and if an awakening comes, those who have sinned most heavily may be the first to repent. The mistakes that have been made in this country have been confined to no one political party or group or class; and the mistakes that have been made in the world at large are not the mistakes of any single system of government, or any single ideology. No one doubts that America's errors have been made, largely, by patriotic men earnestly serving their country, hoping, incidentally, that they were also serving the cause of freedom and democracy throughout the world. But nowhere in the circles where political policies are formulated and political decisions made has there been a recognition of the fact, clearly stated by many distinguished physicists in 1945, that once nuclear weapons were invented, no nation was any longer at liberty to pursue its own exclusive goals. These cosmic energies demand worldwide controls, if even the peacetime exploitation of nuclear energy is not to upset the balance of organic life and poison the whole planet.

The industrial pollution of air and water with ordinary chemicals has long been a serious health hazard, and this pollution is far from being under control, even after a whole century. Radioactive pollution now adds a far greater hazard which no pre-atomic habits and precautions suffice to handle. Even Christian morality is not adequate to control the dangers mankind now faces from nuclear energy in both peace and war. For Christian faith, admitting the inevitability of error and sin, provides mercifully for the possibility of repentance. That Christian retreat is denied man by the very nature of radioactivity itself; for the mistakes committed through misapplication of nuclear energy, even the unguarded and premature exploitation that now goes on for

peacetime uses, cannot be undone by any act of human will or divine grace. Once the fatal error is committed, it cannot be reversed by a change of heart or mind. The lethal effects will continue over the entire life of the radioactive materials, often many centuries, if not, through the mechanism of biological inheritance, through thousands of years. In handling nuclear energy no one can afford to make guesses or miscalculations, for here, as nowhere else in life, error is irreversible and irretrievable.

Our leaders, in their psychological immaturity, in their moral nihilism, – or, as a Christian doubtless would say, in their sinful pride – have insulated themselves against the knowledge that would halt them in the course they have taken. Though they pay lip service to this knowledge, their glassy-eyed stare and their rigid, automatic actions, show that they have not taken it in and are not influenced by it. Let us ask ourselves if these leaders have in truth the popular support they seem to have; and if so, is that support nearly as unanimous, nearly as free from anxiety and apprehension, as the silence of our mass media would lead us to believe. Those of us who have tried to expose the crippling defects of our national policy on war, extermination, and nuclear energy, know how loath the newspapers are to report meetings where such condemnation is made, or even to publish letters in which private citizens take issue with their government on such matters. Too often those who have dared to speak up on behalf of the human race, even if they are Nobel-prize winners in physics or biology, have been officially denounced and besmirched in all falseness as special friends of Russia. That kind of official censorship on political opinion also circumscribes the circulation of vital scientific knowledge, when held by those who work under security regulations: another matter in which our flattering imitation of Russian totalitarianism confounds our professions of democracy.

Compulsives and Submissives

Now in various places one finds indications that not a few Americans are, despite appearances, alive to the disastrous nature of our atomic policy and our frozen-minded conduct of the cold war, to say nothing of the Air Force strategy of total genocide, disguised to none but the dullest by the glib Dulles' phrase: massive retaliation. There are many devoted patriotic Americans who are as yet pitifully unrepresented in the Halls of Congress, wantonly flouted by the Atomic Energy Commission, righteously dismissed by the expert advisers to the President, misrepresented and vilified by those who can conceive no other policy than the one we have been pursuing. These awakening people must face the stubborn resistance to reason put up by the dominant coalition of the Compulsives and the Submissives: the Compulsives, whose fears, hatreds, suspicions, irrationalities and morbid death-directed myths have now been built into our normal institutional fabric; and the Submissives, those vast millions whose conformity to the official doctrines has been assured, not merely through the smooth indoctrination of Madison Avenue and Radio City, but through a whole range of tranquillizers and sedatives, not least the habit-forming hypnotic of speed and power supplied by the cosmeticians and morticians of Detroit. Perhaps millions of our countrymen, to say nothing of the hundreds of millions we are certain of on the rest of the planet, share these anxieties. Above all, there are the young: the young who are sometimes called the Silent Generation.

As a teacher, I know that the young are not as silent as their deaf, unheeding elders too easily imagine. Their actions are eloquent enough; and even their whispers by now should have penetrated the White House. What is the reason that the young plunge into the responsibilities of life so swiftly, get married and become parents almost before they have

cut the last childish cords of family attachment, seeking, as might a doomed person, told by the doctors he had only a few months to live, to taste the full savor of life before that gift is taken from them? Or what is it that turns the young who are unloved and morally undeveloped to imitate their elders, by anticipation, in acts of juvenile delinquency – though these acts are no more senseless in their infantilism, no more horrible in their results, than the planned acts of wholesale adult delinquency we hypocritically call ABC warfare, that is, atomic, bacterial, and chemical extermination.

The reason for this swift attachment to adult life or this even swifter alienation from it through random acts of murder and hot-rod suicide is not too difficult to understand if we view the actual situation candidly. These actions are the response of the young to the prospect of the Big Bang, as they call it – meaning by that the final act of nuclear extermination by which mankind will perish and all life on earth come to an end. The actions of the young show that they have a shrewder sense of probabilities than the experts: for the latter cannot go on with their sinister preparations without in some measure hiding from themselves these final, fearful results. In the depths of their being, our children are more alive to the realities we face. Indoctrinated by a docile, one-sided press, befuddled by an infantile radio and television, blackmailed into conformity by the constant threat of being treated as security risks, the young are frustrated and silent, but they are not fooled.

Our leaders and our voters have yet to learn, what our children know almost from the cradle; namely, that our nuclear and electronic house of cards is so delicately balanced that it will fall without any order from Washington or Moscow. The hundreds of air bases with which our extermination strategists have, not unprovocatively, surrounded the Communist nations, are now an uncon-

ditional liability, as tension and hostility continue to mount. A single lonely commander on one of these bases, misreading the nature of an atomic accident or a series of lightning flashes and explosions, might trigger a full-scale outbreak of nuclear genocide without a single word from Washington other than his standing orders. Mr. John Foster Dulles, with a burst of blundering candor that must have embarrassed the Air Force, has boasted of this irresponsible commitment.

Pearl Harbor in Reverse

Does our government believe that it lives in a perfect world, free from error and accident? Has the Air Force never heard of unidentified flying objects, reported in the hundreds by competent observers, even visible on the radar screen? The very fact that they themselves classify these flying objects as hallucinations or misinterpretations of natural phenomena only drives home the point: if these self-induced projections can produce flying saucers, they can also produce equally imaginary Russian planes, rockets, and nuclear explosions, under pressure of fear and suspicion. In the present situation, one need not even suppose either psychotic malice or a mental collapse on the part of the commanding officer, though both are surely possible. All that would be needed to start full-scale extermination and destruction would, on Mr. Dulles's confession, be a normal human error. Instead of the somnolence that made Pearl Harbor possible, over-vigilance could produce a Pearl Harbor in reverse.

Is it not plain, then, that the fate of the whole planet, at this moment, lies in the hands of any one of a few score weak, fallible, human beings: people who are vulnerable, like all the rest of us, to illness, to error, and to mental disorder: people made all the more susceptible to these derangements by the burden of responsibility placed upon

them. Yet the strategists who have fabricated this death-trap look upon themselves as hard-headed realists, and talk proudly in public as if these bases and their nuclear warheads and their jet bombers constituted a monument of security. How far can human self-deception go? Does any sane man still believe that the values we hold dear, the values of freedom and democracy and human responsibility, are being effectively safeguarded by this system of defense which has transferred the power to make war from the President and Congress to the Chief of the Air Force and the base commanders he has picked?

How is it then that these plans, which have been contrived as if cunningly to ensure catastrophe, have been pushed to their fullest dimensions without arousing a deluge of horrified protest, a barrage of sharp, intelligent, many-sided criticism, such as would keep us from moving another inch toward this fatal abyss? Only gamblers of the most desperate order would accept the odds against bare physical survival under which we are now precariously living. And only those who had become too deeply involved in error to admit to themselves the inevitable consequences of what they are doing, would pretend that this unqualified gamble was in fact a prudent sort of life insurance. In our eagerness to keep the world from being overrun by the Communist powers, we have let all our moves be dictated by our opponent. We have behaved, in fact, like the mad Captain Ahab in Herman Melville's fable, *Moby Dick*. In his unrelieved hatred for the White Whale, in his desire to come to grips with him and destroy him, Ahab forgets every other aspect of life – his wife, his child, his crew, the claims of love, or even the economic reason for whaling itself. Dominated by his inscrutable enemy, Ahab drives his ship and all but one on it to destruction. But before he comes to this insane end, begotten of his monomaniac obsession, Ahab has one

singular moment of illumination, when he exclaims: "All my means are sane: my motive and object are mad."

Our leaders have not yet had, it would seem, even this brief gleam of self-awareness. But does anyone think that a full-scale outbreak of nuclear war, even if it were wholly successful in exterminating the enemy and enabling a remnant of our own countrymen temporarily to survive, would achieve any of the objects that prompted us to start it? Freedom, democracy, security, health, wealth, the very capacity to become human would all vanish in that holocaust. Hating ourselves, hated by the rest of the human race, we would breathe radioactive air, drink radioactive water, eat radioactive food, even though not a single enemy bomb had dropped on our country. In due time the lethal poisons that killed our victims would invade our own miserable bodies. "The gift is to the giver, and comes back most to him," as Walt Whitman said, and these vile gifts, which we would like to reserve for our enemy, will surely come back to us, if ever we commit this final infamy.

Have we now lost every criterion for sane, normal, humane behavior, so that no one dare say aloud the one thing that needs to be said: the plans that even remotely admit of such an outcome are without qualification both diabolical and mad. The fact that there are now three governments equally capable of utilizing these weapons, triples the range of this madness; it does not alleviate our own pathological condition.

The Moral Bulwarks We Destroyed

In pursuing this one-sided policy, with our eyes fixed solely on Russia, we failed to rebuild the ancient moral bulwarks we ourselves ruthlessly helped to destroy. In concealing that failure from ourselves, we have likewise neglected to erect even the elementary physical safeguards

against something infinitely worse than Russia's temporary tyranny over this or that country: that is, the damage that even a one-sided nuclear war would do to all the living places on the planet, and to the whole fabric of organic life. If we were competently dealing with atomic age realities, the widespread knowledge of certain retribution would be the world's best protection against the large-scale misuse of nuclear power. Without doubt the Communist governments' brutality and tyranny, even to their own peoples, have greatly increased the problems mankind as a whole now faces, and will possibly retard their solution for a long time to come. But who are we to cast a reproachful stone, while our own moral position remains as exposed and vulnerable as it actually is shamelessly plain to all who care to see? The mote in Soviet Russia's eye is a real mote: but the beam in our own eye is no less real and ugly a beam. Our chronic commitment to nuclear weapons, as a cheap substitute for manpower, makes us unwilling to reduce armaments or actively pursue peace, except on our own inflexible terms.

As a first step back to sobriety and decency, let us acknowledge that the menace under which mankind is now living was not, in the first place, the invention of Soviet Russia. If we examine the origins of our nuclear policies with unsparing regard for the facts, we shall have to admit, in all contrition, that the main lines of it were established without any reference whatever to Russia's enmity or Communism's expansion. The admission of this fact would be the first essential move toward correcting the errors we have made; but I will not pretend that this admission, more bitter and humiliating than any weakness in our technology, is easy for our nation to make, or that anything short of an overwhelming popular demand will induce our government to correct it, until disaster overtakes us – when alas! it will probably be too late.

Our present danger springs from a fact that we have deliberately thrust from our consciousness: that the physical disintegration of the atom was accompanied by the moral disintegration of modern man. Yet the moral reversal of values which now pushes us toward an irretrievable catastrophe had nothing directly to do with an atom bomb, in the first instance. This reversal actually took place, without more than a cursory public examination or public debate, in the midst of fighting the Second World War, though the inner preparation for it had long been made. At this point, early in 1943, for the sake of minimizing combat losses and perhaps bringing about an earlier end of the war, our military and political authorities adopted the policy of extermination bombing, hitherto advocated and practiced only by the fascists and the Nazis. This policy seeks not just to conquer the enemy's armies but to slaughter at random the entire enemy population, if and when possible, if and when "necessary," in order to force them, by terror, to an early surrender.

The most atrocious military conquerors of history, whose names have been anathema and whose deeds have been held up as a black reproach to the human race, never conceived anything worse; and if they had, they would still have been limited, as we were not, in their capacity for putting such a method into effect. If we had asked our airmen to kill their victims, men, women, and children, by hand, one by one, how many do you suppose would have become victims before the executioners sickened of their task and revolted against it? Face-to-face contact, to say nothing of bodily fatigue, once protected the human race from atrocities of extermination that now know no limits. The farther away our human victims are, the easier it is to treat them as inanimate objects, as physical targets, not as human beings, with all our own dimensions and potentialities, whose pleas

might move us, whose suffering would arouse our compassion.

Compared to this unlimited genocide, even modern war, with all its violence and death, was a relatively humane institution. Overnight this new policy of total extermination wiped out restrictions and limitations that had been built up over centuries. This dethronement of morality, and the human callousness that accompanied it, have cost us dear. Once we violated that taboo against random extermination, we put ourselves in the same class as the criminal and psychotic Hitler, for we turned every city we assaulted into an extermination camp. In a single night, American fire bombs killed 180,000 people in Tokyo: a demonstration whose horror anticipated that of Hiroshima.

The Path of Nihilism

Make no mistake about the date or the cause: it preceded the invention of the atom bomb. It was not the atom bomb that forced us to become exterminators: it was rather our decision to use the method of extermination that led to our one-sided, obsessive preoccupation with nuclear weapons. This moral disintegration vastly augmented the dangers of atomic power. If we could cold-bloodedly exterminate 180 thousand human beings, as if they were so many noxious insects, why should we not be prepared to exterminate 180 million? Our present national policy is based on this premise, and we console ourselves too easily by looking upon this as a merely deterrent threat. But since we so lightly removed our own inhibitions, we have by the same token also increased our well-grounded fears, now mounting steadily, that our own country and our own people are open to complete extermination by the same scientific methods.

The total nature of our moral breakdown, accurately predicted half a century ago by Henry Adams, can be gauged by a single fact: most Americans do not realize that this change has taken place, or, worse, that it makes any difference. They have no consciousness of either the magnitude of their collective sin or the fact that by their silence, their apathy, they have individually condoned it. It is precisely as if the Secretary of Agriculture had licensed the sale of human meat as a wartime emergency, and people had taken to cannibalism when the war was over as a clever dodge for lowering the cost of living. Many of our professed religious and moral leaders have steadily shrunk from touching this subject; or if they have done so, they have too often given their blessing to it, for reasons just as specious, indeed just as infantile in their assumptions, as those our government has used.

This utter collapse of moral values, this breakdown in the elementary code needed to preserve even animal species from extinction, first occurred under a decision made by a public servant of the highest probity and personal rectitude, Secretary Henry L. Stimson. Doubtless this fact made it easier for other presumably virtuous people to close their minds to the implications of our catastrophic moral collapse; for when the righteous sin, they add the force of their virtue to all the evil that they do.

Our behavior is explainable only on the assumption that a whole side of our consciousness has been cut off from contact with reality, by a sort of moral nerve-block. If this had not happened, how could we face ourselves? Unfortunately, this very insulation keeps us from taking the measures necessary to correct our errors: above all, it keeps us from taking the first step, and this is to repent.

And now we come to the heart of our problem. Can we open our eyes wide enough to realize where we are and where we are going? Have we enough human-heartedness to repent

of our conduct in the past, and to alter our plans and purposes for the future: sufficient sense of our moral obligations to think and act, not just for our threatened selves, but on behalf of all mankind? Our involvements and commitments to evil are so great, our prejudices in favor of orthodox political procedures and professional military routines are so deeply entrenched, that it will not be easy for us to abandon our present course, even if there is a growing recognition of the fact that it is a fatal one.

The old Greek poet, Theognis, once observed that "wisdom is supple; folly keeps a groove." Our leaders have confined us politically to the groove of pre-atomic politics this last decade, with only an occasional break through in the right direction, like the Marshall Plan, though that, all too speedily, was perverted into an instrument of the Cold War. They are now so deeply sunk in this groove, that they can imagine no alternatives. The policy we have committed ourselves to, without even a pretence of open debate, proceeds by a fatal inertia of its own: error breeds error, as lies breed lies; and in order to cover up the magnitude of our original mistakes and the difficulty of retreating from them, our leaders in both parties have trained themselves to believe that no other course is possible. They go on doggedly, convinced that they are acting as patriotic men, protecting their country. They have yet to admit that patriotism is not enough: that the country they must now protect is the planet, and their countrymen are now the human race.

Quite apart from the possibilities of general nuclear extermination, the truths about radioactive contamination in general are grave enough to call for a slowing down, if not a halt, in our headlong program for exploiting these new powers. Did not the Atomic Energy Commission recently inform us that it sanctioned continued nuclear testing, because such tests had, as yet, only shortened our lives by

a few days – that they will, for example, cause less than two thousand children to die every year by leukemia and cancer. As usual, in the A.E.C.'s publicity, this is a studiously optimistic estimate. "Only a few days": only, say, fifteen hundred children dying in pain from cancer, as if in atonement for the Japanese children of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Yes: our gifts come back to us. But those few days, multiplied by the population of our planet, come to considerably more than four billion days. Even four billion days, divided by 365, amount to something around eleven million man-years. If the American people were soberly awake, they would have asked, as I now ask: Who are these self-appointed judges, sitting in judgment on their own decisions, who sanction the robbery of this magnitude of life? And who are the executioners who dared to carry out this sentence, without anyone's questioning its justice or its wisdom? What the guardians of nuclear power call a "tolerable risk" is in fact a lethal and intolerable certainty.

End the Secrecy

I submit that the first rational step toward mankind's salvation is to break through the formidable wall of secrecy and suppression, of half-truths and outright prevarications, that our own government agencies have erected. Our leaders have been as willfully indifferent to the warnings of our physicists and physiologists, our geneticists and our ecologists, as they were to the protests of the Polynesian and Japanese fishermen whose bodies they violated and whose food they contaminated in their nuclear tests. Yet even on the basis of the knowledge that has filtered through, with the Atomic Energy Commission's reluctant consent, the medical need to limit even the peacetime exploitation of nuclear energy has become plain. Instead of calling a world Congress to examine these actual and potential injuries,

our government, with its ugly commitment to nuclear weapons, has periodically handed out soothing reassurances, whose scientific quackery cannot be concealed by the eminent names that have been attached to them. I use the word quackery with deliberation. Since the genetic effects and the inheritable injuries done by radioactivity will not be visible for two generations, no scientific evidence yet exists as to what unfortunate results even the present level of radiation may produce. The required time for judging the effect of this mass exposure, not only on man but on all his organic partners, from the viruses and bacteria upward, has been lacking, lacking by at least fifty years. One does not have to be a scientist to recognize that these baseless reassurances are addled science and tainted politics, any more than one has to be a hen to recognize the unmistakable odor of a bad egg.

The reason for this official policy of suppression and reassurance should be obvious. If even the peacetime utilization of nuclear energy is fraught with grave difficulties and dangers, then the concentrations that would be used in wartime would be recognized for what they plainly are – genocidal assaults upon all life, whose utilization under any circumstances would be a criminal act against mankind at large: no less criminal in retaliation than in one-sided assault. To live with any degree of security in company with nuclear energies, we must share with all other men not merely our knowledge but our responsibility. For their own self-protection the peoples of Russia and the United States now need the active aid of the rest of the human race. Our security lies not in our weapons, but in our all having an equal stake in keeping alive and in health. Woe to the American nation if it lags in the future as it has in the recent past in seeking that way. The German poet Holderlin said: “Where danger is salvation also lies.” The fact is peculiarly true of nuclear energy. Because we need wisdom, self-

restraint, and human sympathy on a universal scale to safeguard the human race and all its living partners, no single nation, no single order of men, can claim the capacity to act alone in these matters.

No Half Measures

We shall not demolish this Maginot line of atomic armament we ourselves have concentrated on building by removing a few stones, or by abandoning a few minor salients, too dangerous for military use. We will ask too little of our government if we ask only for it to put a stop to nuclear testing, now that Russia has given repeated promises to stop; or to disarm a few nuclear units, if Russia also promises to disarm. Not in this fashion, by piecemeal bargaining and haggling, timing our own unwilling moves to Russia's, waiting hopefully for Russia to reject our proposals – it is not in this fashion that we shall find salvation, or even have physical safety. If we approach peace and security by such timid shuffling measures, one ventures little in saying now that we shall not reach those goals at all. The only way to escape our present death trap is to *abandon it, forthrightly and unconditionally*, as an affront to our own humanity. Both Soviet Russia and the United States are now close to the precipice at the end of the fatal road they have both been following. Let us as a nation at least have the honor of being the first to turn back.

To assume that there is no turning back on the road to destruction, now that the error has become plain to all awakened men, is to exhibit all the clinical symptoms of neurotic compulsion and automatism: a narrowing of the field of vision, a deadening of human sensibilities, a substitution of a single senseless repetitive act for the varied responses of a living organism. Even a rat, caught in his scientific cage, punished each time he seeks one special

exit, will soon try other doors in order to escape. So let us hope that our countrymen have at least enough rat-like intelligence, if not divine inspiration, to seek a human way out. When normal men, driving a car, find they have taken the wrong road, they do not press the accelerator or demand a bigger engine: they apply their brakes and go no further. Their second act is to look around them and consult their maps and guides, especially taking note of those they had ignored. If they see no shortcut that promises to bring them on the right road, they turn around and go back to the crossroads where they made the wrong turn.

In the present case we took the wrong turn because the old maps we doggedly followed had not been brought up to date: there was no indication that what was always a dangerous road – the road of war – had now been obliterated by nuclear energy and other instruments of genocide. And we failed to find the right road, because it was still only a faint track, marked by a few surveyor's stakes, the rude outline of a broad highway that could not be used, in fact, until we called upon our neighbors for help in laying it out and building it. It is not for me here to translate this parable into a series of specific political measures, though the main burden of it, surely, is to do only with the help of others, and through the medium of the United Nations, all the things that we have reserved the right of doing single-handedly, and often high-handedly, in futile conflict and competition with Soviet Russia. But the first need is to consider nothing, any longer, as an exclusively national problem: nuclear radiation knows no boundaries, and the victims of it are distributed all over the planet. As a first step, perhaps, toward orienting our national policy toward a common human goal, it might be wise to call in for a preliminary canvass of the human situation, not a few experts in diplomacy and government, but men from every land – not least Russia – preeminent for their balanced judgment and

human-heartedness. Their voices, such voices as those of a Niels Bohr, an Erich Fromm, a Bertrand Russell, a Radhakrishnan, a Boyd Orr, an Albert Schweitzer, have been muffled by our own unwillingness to listen. But when once such supple and vigilant minds are called into action, there will be no lack of visible alternatives to the policies that the power elite in both Soviet Russia and the United States have been following.

About Face! Forward March!

At this moment, our eminent specialists, military or scientific, whose very genius in their narrow fields makes them incompetent to face life as a whole, or deal with human problems on a truly human level, are the last people whose advice we can safely take. We need, rather, the guidance of men who have developed themselves in every human dimension, and who, when at a loss for an answer, draw freely upon historic wisdom and prophetic hope. But before these men can help us we must admit to ourselves the fact that the security we have hitherto relied on never existed: for the simple reason that large-scale nuclear war threatens the victor as well as the victim. Admitting this, our hardest task will be to retrace our steps without making our own plans and purposes conditional upon what other nations at this moment may or may not be willing to do. It is time for Americans to venture boldly in a new direction, trusting that the rest of mankind, when their fears and suspicions are allayed, will follow.

In short, the only way to escape the dangers we are now facing is to completely reverse all that our government has been doing. To go forward, we must retreat. Our only effective defense against the misuse of nuclear power is a moral one: our own capacity to be fully human, and to

appeal, through our own manifest humanity, to the feeling and understanding of other men. Here, too, the gift will be to the giver and come back most to him. What we have not been able to do by threats and compulsions, we may yet be able to do by human understanding; but before that is possible, we shall have to win over our most formidable enemy, namely ourselves. We must lead the way in limiting and slowing down the exploitation of nuclear energies in every form, until mankind has had time to erect both the physical and moral safeguards, not merely against their perversion by criminal groups, but likewise their misuse by the careless in a general pollution of air, soil, and water by premature medical and industrial applications.

Instead of making cold war against the Communist world, we must abandon that war and endeavor by every means at our command to find goals and purposes we can share with the Communist-led peoples. Instead of maximizing the differences between ourselves and those who oppose our aims and our institutions, we must recognize, in our own national conduct up to now, the same suspicion, the same arrogance, the same indifference to moral principle that we find in Soviet Russia. That self-knowledge will save us from priggishness and downright hypocrisy. Instead of making our own plans with the sole purpose of countervailing and containing Soviet Russia, our plans must be based on the realities of nuclear power, and they should therefore be addressed to the protection and salvation of mankind. Our national duty at this moment is to take this road, even if at first we have to take it alone. No risk we will face, if we are strong enough to make this decision, is half as formidable as the hazards we live under every day while we postpone this duty. It is more important to give a bold lead to the world than to arrive at any devious bargains or compromises with Russia.

Has the moment at last come when, if a few people have the courage to express these thoughts, millions will rally behind them? Perhaps the wakeful minority of Americans who have long been desperately anxious, but silent and frustrated, will at length take heart and demand that our leaders dismiss the phantasms and delusions of absolute power and seek, with the help of all other men, to make a fresh start. But what spiritual influence will produce this change in the majority of our countrymen? What event will bend the stiff necks of our present political and military leaders? What will overcome this rigidity, which our leaders mistake for principle, or these suspicions and hatreds, which would make it impossible to come to terms with our opponents even if they were angels? – as heaven knows they are not.

Divine Grace and Human Duty

The situation calls for a great collective illumination, made operative by a providential act of grace, of the same nature, though of far greater magnitude, as that which transformed the righteous, hate-breathing Saul on the Road to Damascus into the magnanimous Paul, an example to all men in charity, forbearance, and the capacity for self-examination and self-correction. Plainly it is not in the power of any group or institution, to bring about such a transformation. Neither earnest propaganda, nor prayerful beseechment, nor rational demonstration will of themselves produce the needed result. But to say that we are individually helpless at this moment to bring about such a change is not to say that we are beyond help. Those who hold, as a final axiom of life, that politics is the science of the possible, will reject with undisguised derision the very suggestion that our countrymen would ever reverse the direction of our

government's policy, and seek unreservedly for common ground and a human way out. Who, they will sagely ask, would go to Congress with such a proposal, or carry a national election on such a utopian program? I am not troubled by this snuffy wisdom: those who cling to it, and pass it on with a certain condescension, presume to know in advance the limits of human potentiality. I do not claim such powers; neither do I respect such pretensions. Though I am not a church-going man, life itself has taught me the meaning of the grace of God; and in the confrontation of illimitable powers and dangers, such as man has never before had to reckon with, who can tell what capacities our fellow men may at the last moment summon forth, in order to cope with them?

It may be helpful to draw on recent experience for an instance of the kind of change, as sudden as it was unpredictable, that may yet take place. What shrewd population expert dared to predict, before the Second World War, that the curve of population growth, which had been steadily sinking, would suddenly rise again and continue to rise? In the previous decade, neither religious exhortation nor direct government subsidies for large families produced an increase in the net birth rate in most advanced industrial countries. Who or what could turn this ebbing tide of population? In terms of the politics of the possible, any such plan, any such expectation, was therefore doomed. Certainly, it was not a specialist in population growth who dared to write, in 1937: "One can easily imagine a new cult of family life, growing up in the face of some decimating catastrophe ... a generous urge toward procreation that might clash in policy with the views of the prudent." But against all scientific probability, this cult of the family has in fact come into existence, and it has brought with it an almost tidal wave of new babies. What brought about this abrupt reversal of a

downward population trend that had been going on in some countries for a century? No propaganda campaign caused this change: no political party promoted it. When it came, it came spontaneously, as a result of a total response so deep it was almost unconscious, taking place simultaneously in millions of souls, of all nations and religions, all over the world. This was their first human answer, if I interpret it correctly, to the threat of decimation, indeed of extinction, that now hangs over this entire planet: an answer on the deepest, most universal level: instinctive but irresistible.

Who is so brash, then, as to fix in advance the limits of human imagination and invention, of human intelligence and sympathy, in confronting at last the present threat to mankind? Who is so sure of his own judgment that he will predict, with confidence in his own ineffable wisdom, what is or is not possible under circumstances that mankind has never faced before? The records of ancient history, which tell us nothing about the discovery of nuclear fission, have nothing whatever to tell us, either, on the evidence of past acts, about how man may react to this unique challenge. It is only those who are themselves obstinately committed to past ways that dare gamble so readily, on the basis of the dismal historic records, on human stupidity, human brutality, and human destructiveness. Our business is not to masquerade as providence by laying down in advance what is possible. Ours is the humbler task of recognizing what is necessary, and of acting with all our power so as to bring it about, leaving the issue itself to God. And as to that, our path and our duty are plain: the one thing necessary today is to save the human race from the possibility of wanton extermination no less than the probability of biological degradation. This is the basis and prelude to every other rational act and ideal goal. If we seek only to save our own skins, by new technical devices and

more extensive terrors, who will help us? And who will forgive us for our insensate folly, if any human souls should survive it? But if we dare to speak and act on behalf of the human race, as brothers helping brothers, who will oppose us?

The hour is late for finding the human way out. It will not be easy to replace our selfish plans, our limited purposes, our diabolical instruments, with plans that have a truly human purpose, springing from a divine inspiration. It may be long before the darkness that now surrounds us will lift; for the mistakes we have made cannot be undone in a day, nor yet in a decade, even if a general awakening and a transformation of purpose actually takes place. "Let us then abide in hope, faith, and charity, these three," and let us seek "not our own profit but the profit of many, that they may be saved."