

around irritating young and old with mumbling about "socialism being problematic"; then I could have simply pointed to the horizon and said, "It is coming, our beautiful future!" Not that I really have wanted to go back to that moment of historical innocence: it is only that in every intellectual who tries to think, there is an all-too-human creature who prefers not to.

Many of the New York intellectuals grouped themselves into an organization called the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, of which Irving Kristol soon became executive secretary. Its line was close to that of Commentary, with some members (Max Eastman and James Burnham) leaning toward open support of the Wisconsin demagogue, and some (like David Reisman, soon to resign from the Committee) inclined toward a stronger defense of civil liberties. On most of the issues agitating the intellectual and academic world, the ACCF kept silent, refusing to defend Communists under investigation or attack, though it could rage against people like Arthur Miller and Bertrand Russell for exaggerating the dangers to civil liberties. As Michael Harrington wrote at the time, the ACCF "was too

jaded, too imbued with the sourness of indiscriminate anti-Stalinism" to devote itself to a tough fight against repression and intimidation.

To the notion long put forward by sociologists that groups on the decline are likely to stiffen into rigid moralistic postures, Hofstadter added that the same may be true for rising social groups eager to confirm their respectability. Texas oil millionaires who liked to see themselves as the last apostles of rugged individualism were drawn to McCarthy because they relished his attacks on Harvard "pinkos," mushy eggheads, decadent Easterners. At the same time, said Hofstadter, McCarthy was winning support from plebeian segments of the population, especially those in the Midwest among whom remnants of populist feeling remained. Rural Americans and small-town Midwesterners still trying to live by worn simplicities felt threatened by that modernist sophistication they identified with the big cities of the East. Jealous and frustrated, they feared Eastern liberals, Eastern "internationalists", Eastern businessmen.

What brought McCarthy his moment of fame was a gift for articulating the popular mood of the postwar years, a mood Dennis Wrong acutely describes as one of "blocked aggression". Something about his winking nihilism, which hung about him like a trailing shirt, caught that mood. Even after his downfall he left a considerable legacy to American politics, what Wrong called a "national climate in which departures from the most elementary decencies of a democratic society are imperceptibly becoming the norm."

There was, I think, one major reason for this turn to the right: communist politics having been a dominant force in the world since the early thirties, a severe reaction was inevitable. Those of us opposed to conservatism had to acknowledge a "rough justice" to this reaction. It was their turn, historically.

Conservative thought in the fifties, the kind that was openly declared, can seem fairly benign when compared to the rougher, meaner versions of three decades later. Only marginally political and about as far from actual power as were the few socialist intellectuals, the conservatives of the fifties did

not propose hacking away at the welfare state or venturing upon eyeball-to-eyeball confrontations with the Soviet Union. Their main interest was programmatic, philosophical. Writers like Peter Viereck, Clinton Rossiter, and Russell Kirk, civilized and moderate men, were searching for general principles that in the American setting might enable them to compete respectably with liberalism and socialism. Europe had conservative ideology, but America had only conservative politicians. At least during the previous few decades there had been no coherent body of conservative thought among us. Now there writers wanted a conservatism signifying more than small-town fears, hostility to social legislation, and enmity to modernist culture. They wanted a world view justifying a politics of democratic caution, a society rooted in the past, a morality of traditionalist principle.

One strand of conservative sentiment that made a notable impact on our culture was that associated with Southern poets and novelists like Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom and, more ambiguously, Robert Penn Warren. These writers hoped for a principled rejection of industrial economy and a commitment to an ordered, hierarchial mode of social life--never real options in America, but ideas serving to sustain a myth which,

through abrasion, offered a moral criticism of our culture, a little like that which nineteenth century Russian writers had made of Western Europe. The conservative agrarianism of the Southern writers had cultural power because it touched upon sentiments deeply connected with the American past. But it was now suffering a gradual breakdown, the fading of regional consciousness into little more than willed nostalgia.

The strongest force in the intellectual life of the fifties was not conservatism at all, it was a liberalism increasingly conservatized, or a rightward drift of ex-radicals as extremist in contrition as once in assertion. A major sign of this occurred in a 1952 symposium in Partisan Review, "Our Country and Our Culture." It began with an editorial statement suggesting that its earlier radicalism had vanished, the magazine's stance of "alienation" from established institutions having been replaced by a persuasion that "most writers ...want very much to be a part of the American life."

The brilliant social analyst Joseph Schumpeter had once written that Marx was mistaken in supposing capitalism would break down from inherent socioeconomic contradictions. If capitalism did break down, said Schumpeter, it would be as a result of its inability to claim people through bonds of loyalty.

"Unlike any other type of society, capitalism inevitably...creates, educates and subsidizes a vested interest in social unrest."

In 1954 I wrote, for instance, that "as social relations become more abstract and elusive, the human object is bound to the state with ideological slogans and abstractions--and for this chore intellectuals are indispensable." But with a crucial proviso: that while the institutional world of government, corporation, and mass culture needs intellectuals because they are intellectuals, it does not want them as intellectuals. It needs them for their skills, knowledge, inclinations, even passions, without which they would be of no use. But it does not look kindly upon, indeed does all it can to curb, their traditional role as free-wheeling critics who direct their barbs not only upon enemies but friends and allies, too.

What Philip Rahv had once said about our "literary periods" could be extended to the whole of our intellectual life: "In America, whose second name ... should be 'amnesia,' the historical sense in this century chronically suffers one lesion after another."

In the years before the war people like me tended to subordinate our sense of Jewishness to cosmopolitan culture and socialist politics. We did not think well or deeply on the matter of Jewishness--you might say we avoided thinking about it. Jewishness was inherited, a given to be acknowledged, like being born white or male or poor. It could at times be regarded with affection, since after all it had helped to shape one's early years. And clearly, it still shaped thought, manners, the very slant of being. I knew that. But Jewishness did not form part of a conscious commitment, it was not regarded as a major component of the culture I wanted to make my own, and I felt no particular responsibility for its survival or renewal. It was simply there. While it would be shameful to deny its presence or seek to flee its stigma, my friends and I could hardly be said to have thought Jewishness could do much for us or we for it.

The situation of the Jews does not reveal who the Jew is except when it becomes a situation that discloses his link with Abraham, Moses and David, from whom the Jewish identity sprung... The continuity of the modern Jew with the Jews of the Old Testament is established by those acts that arise from his internal cohesion with his ultimate beginnings in which his future is contained as a possible destiny--the acts of turning

toward the Promised Land in his crises. And these acts, not deducible from his surroundings, make the Jew's situation and reveal who the Jew is.

Nathan Glazer--who, as I recall, was the host for this Seder--was starting to recognize that over the centuries Jewish religious practice and Jewish folk experience had been completely intertwined, so that unbelievers too, if only they acknowledged themselves as Jews, could participate in religious holidays. First the deed, then faith.

What I used to wonder could be the unspoken feelings of these Yiddish literary friends? If their private talks, how did they cope with the certainty that the literature to which they had devoted their lives was approaching its end? I was a loyal ally, but still at least half an outsider. I did not share their memories and could not reach the floor of their emotions. There was a limit beyond which they would not go, even with me; they refused, as a gesture of both honor and will, to acknowledge the bleakness of their future. Undeluded no doubt inwardly desperate, they still felt an obligation to confront the world with a complete firmness of posture. One

of the arts of life is to know how to end.

Yiddish poetry is often a poetry of rhymed statement, addressing itself to readers, perhaps the people living next door, with an all-but-unmediated directness. Held back from ultimate sophistication by a burden of moral urgency, it is a poetry at once more threadbare and declamatory than other modern poetries.

Getting a littel closer to my father during his years of aging, I studied the frailties of his character, not unlike my own. As man and parent he grew smaller in my eyes, so that it became harder to accord the porper filial respect to whatever in his life seemed merely personal. Yet that did not make me care for him any the less. For in him, as in thousands of other immigrants, there was a force that went far beyond the merely personal, and this was a collective Jewish being as it drew upon received values and ingrained feelings. It was easy enough to see whatever was parochial in these values and feelings, but it took years to learn that they also formed the firmest moral norms I would ever encounter. Again and again I would fail my father through what he took to be my

disordered life--a broken marriage, a sudden unexplained stay in California. But his solidarity never wavered, and I came to feel that it was a solidarity more than familial, deriving from some unexpressed sense of what a Jew owed his son. Reading Mani Leib's sonnets and Moishe Leib's poems, I learned to value that solidarity. Reading those sonnets and poems I learned where I had come from and how I was likely to end.

When the writer Hillel Halkin sent from Israel a powerful book arguing that the Jews in the West now had only two long-range choices if they wished to remain Jews--religion and Israel, faith and nationhood--I searched for arguments with which to answer him. But finally I gave it up, since it seemed clear that the perspective from which I lived as "a partial Jew" had reached a historical dead end therm at ease or not, I would have to remain.

In 1963 A. Philip Randolph, the black labor and socialist leader, organized the enormous March on Washington at which Martin Luther King told of his "dream" of American fraternity. White students, some risking and a few losing their lives, poured into the South to help blacks register and vote. There were heady moments when it began to seem we might really be entering "an era of good feeling."

George Orwell writes in his essay about Gulliver's Travels: "In a society in which there is no law, and in theory no compulsion, the only arbiter of behavior is public opinion. But public opinion, because of the tremendous urge to conformity in gregarious animals, is less tolerant than any system of law. When human beings are governed by "thou shalt not", the individual can practice a certain amount of eccentricity; when they are supposedly governed by "Love" or "Reason", he is under continuous pressure to make him behave and think in exactly the same way as everyone else."

The rhetoric of the New Left escalated, and there was plenty of provocation from a government that kept lying about the war. For that very reason it was important that the methods used in opposing the war not give enemies of liberty a plausible excuse for destroying both the protest and democratic procedures. So at least my friends and I argued, though with little success.

Thoreau regarded freedom as an absolute, nonsocial state of being, in contrast to the view, necessary to all democratic thought, that freedom is a consequence of regulated arrangements

between authority and citizens.

Had I thought to look into Max Weber's great essay, "Politics as a Vocation," I might have gained a keener perspective on these moral protesters and my ambivalent feelings about them. Weber distinguishes between those who act from "an ethic of responsibility" and those who act out of "an ethic of ultimate ends." The latter cleave to the maxim, "The Christian does rightly and leaves the results to the Lord." But ordinary people wanting to live by "the ethic of responsibility" know it will not do to leave things with the Lord; all too often He seems not to be paying attention. It is we flawed human creatures who must take responsibility for what we do. All human action, suggests Weber, contains a tragic split between reality and desire, fact and value; yet he adds that "an ethic of ultimate ends and an ethic of responsibility are not absolute contrasts but rather supplements, which only in unison constitute a genuine man--a man who can have the 'calling of politics.'" "

A conversation with George Kateb, a subtle political theorist teaching at Amherst. Himself a liberal, Kateb admits an attraction of sorts to the hijinks of the New Left. "The trouble with your social democratic politics," he admits amiably, "is that it's so boring!" I bristle, yet the remark stays in memory. What I think Kateb meant was that, even for a rational mind, there are occasions when the power of the irrational is greater than that of rationality, and that the Fabian gradualism of the social democracy fails to take this into account. Call it liberal, call it social democratic, a politics devoted to incremental reform even while still claiming a utopian vision--how can such a politics satisfy that part of our imagination still hungering for religious exaltation, still drawn to gestures of heroic violence, still open to the temptations of apocalypse?

The new sensibility posits a theory that might be called the psychology of unobstructed need: men should satisfy those needs which are theirs, organic to their bodies and psyches, and to do this they now must learn to discard or destroy all those obstructions, mostly the results of cultural neurosis, which keep them from satisfying their needs. This does not mean that the moral life is denied; it only means that in the

moral economy costs need not be entered as a significant item. In the current vocabulary, it becomes a matter of everyone doing "his own thing," and once all of us are allowed to do "his own thing," a prospect of easing harmony unfolds. Sexuality is the ground of being, and vital sexuality the assurance of the moral life.

....But one is troubled by the following problem: what if the needs and impulses of human beings clash, as they seem to do, and what if the transfer of energies from sexuality to sociality does not proceed with the anticipated abundance and smoothness? The new sensibility...falls back upon a curious analogue to laissez-faire economics, Adam Smith's inevitable hand, by means of which innumerable units in conflict with one another achieve a resultant of cooperation. Is there, however, much reason to suppose that this will prove more satisfactory in the economy of moral conduct than it has in the morality of economic relations?

A small group passing a joint of marijuana often behaves like a Quaker meeting waiting for the spirit...In the end it is religion that constitutes the strength of this generation."

What I was wondering about was the mystery of goodness which, the bias of our culture notwithstanding, is finally a greater mystery than that of evil.

But then a perplexing question had to be asked: could you have a movement oriented toward public issues that also tried to transform radically the intimacies of personal life? What equality meant in the work place was reasonably clear; but what it might mean in the relations--familial, romantic, sexual -- of men and women was decidedly less clear. You could agitate for the right to legal abortion, but could you set up a campaign for those subtle and profound transformations of conduct that women wanted both among themselves and in their dealings with men? Sensing this difficulty, the feminist movement shrewdly organized "consciousness-raising" groups to provide women with that collective reinforcement which might enable them to restructure their lives. But alas, it was not that easy. An enormous gap between the reinforcement and the restructuring soon showed itself, even in the experience of women who sincerely joined the consciousness-raising groups.

Oh, the unmeasureable willfulness of these immigrant Jews, exerted to their last moment in the service of self-denial! My father had saved, literally from years of sweat, some forty thousand dollars, but that had to be kept.. for what? He didn't say, but didn't have to. I understood: the night cometh when no man can work. The last dike against helplessness is a bankbook.

It was pleasant to anticipate royalties that could yield more than a spaghetti dinner for two. The money mattered because I had just seen my father die and come to realize how important it is to end one's life with a minimum of squalor--an expensive undertaking in our society. But I can't say the money brought me much pleasure. It came too late, long after habits were formed and denials ingrained. Marks of youthful poverty, as Chekhov and Fitzgerald both knew, lie forever imprinted on one's soul. The ease of being that seems a privilege of inherited wealth is not to be acquired in middle age.

How long will it last? Seven or eight years? And then another of those abrupt oscillations, with a new "herd of independent minds" announcing itself to be terribly radical? It's as if in each turn of intellectual fashion we are fated to suffer another corrupted version of Emerconianism: either absolutist posturings of rectitude or cynical puffings of self-interest. But the spirit of community seems unable to thrive among us, even if it remains too enticing a dream to abandon completely.

The notion that as soon as "we" take power, all will be well; the notion that democracy, even in its debased forms, is anything but a precious human conquest; the notion that social change will occur through the automatic workings of the economy, just like to opposite notion that history can be forced through the will of a sacrificial band--none of these can be taken seriously by thoughtful people, none ever should have been.

I am inclined to think the case for socialism must be made increasingly on moral grounds: democracy in the work place as fulfillment of political freedom; an end to extreme inequalities of socioeconomic condition; the vision of a

humane society as one that requires a setting of cooperativeness and fraternity. But such moral arguments have their moral perils. A twisted and fanatic idealism can be put to ghastly service; from moral righteousness to the usurpations of terror there is a well-worn path.

My own idea of socialism rests on unbreakable liberal values, and if at any point a socialist proposal were to conflict with the fundamental values of liberalism, I would unhesitatingly opt for the latter. With liberty you can struggle for greater equality; equality without liberty is a new mode of enslavement.

God died in the nineteenth century, utopia in the twentieth. The writers gathered here, all endowed with a keen political sense, have sung the dirge of utopia. Their voices ring with skepticism, doubt, weariness: they are poets of limitation. But could their skepticism weigh so heavily upon them, had there not been an earlier enchantment with utopia--that of the generation of Silone and Malraux? Now, what separates these two generations is not just a few decades but a historical chasm.