

BOOK REVIEW-ESSAY

RUBENSTEIN ON TWENTIETH CENTURY VIOLENCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS: A REVIEW ESSAY

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THE AGE OF TRIAGE

Richard L. Rubenstein,
Boston: Beacon Press, 1983,
pp.ix + 301, cloth \$15.50.

THE CUNNING OF HISTORY

Richard L. Rubenstein,
New York: Harper and Row, 1978,
pp. xiv + 113, paper \$3.50/

SECTION I

The 20th century has been a time of unprecedented violence. At the same time that science has provided means for reducing the death rate from natural causes, human beings have slaughtered one another on a scale never before equaled. Estimates of the number of people killed in this century by war, revolution, and state genocide range as high as 100,000,000. What explanation, if any, can be given for this increase in human violence? What, if anything, can we do to prevent such violence in the future?

It is Richard Rubenstein's thesis in his books, *The Cunning of History* and *The Age of Triage*, that there is an essential connection between the development of science and 20th century violence. One of the consequences of Western technology has been an extraordinary increase in economic production. Only a very small number of people are now engaged in agriculture. And fewer and fewer people are required to turn out an ever-expanding range of consumer goods. Medical SCIENCE has also reduced deaths from natural causes by finding preventions and cures for many diseases. The result has been a staggering increase in both population and unemployment. Western man did not foresee, Rubenstein says, that his ability to produce a surplus of food and manufactured

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goods would be a double-edged sword. Men did not realize that "*by producing a surplus men take the first step in making themselves superfluous*" (Age, p. 3).

The enclosure movement in England was one of the first instances of people being made superfluous by the production of an agricultural surplus. Because the development of more modern agricultural techniques required fewer people and larger tracts of land than were needed in traditional methods of farming, lands previously farmed by the peasants were taken over by the nobility. Thousands of peasants were driven from the countryside to the cities. Since the new methods of agriculture brought about an increased food supply, population expanded rapidly, far more rapidly than jobs could possibly have been created. English peasants were thus one of the first groups to find themselves unwanted people, victims of technological progress. The first surplus population of modern times had come into existence.

The same basic causes produced the Irish famine of 1846-1848. Ireland was an almost totally agrarian nation, prevented from developing an industrial base by its absentee British landlords. However, introduction of the potato around 1600 produced an agricultural revolution. Because it was more suited than grain to the soil and climate of Ireland, it yielded four to six times more food per acre. It also required less effort to cultivate. As a result, the Irish population increased from 2,500,000 in 1700 to well over 8,000,000 in 1841. In 1845 the potato crop was severely reduced by blight. Even worse crop failures followed in 1846 and 1847. Thousands died from starvation and outbreaks of cholera and typhus. Others perished at sea as more than 1,000,000 people migrated to the United States. Many went to England where they met great hostility from the working class which was also experiencing great unemployment. The British government pursued a basically laissez-faire policy, letting nature take its course. In fact, as Rubenstein points out, the famine was in the interest of the British ruling classes because it supplied them with a surplus of industrial workers willing to work for subsistence wages and reduced the military threat of a large Irish population.

Although the British ruling class profited from the deaths of what was for them a large number of unwanted or surplus people, the British government did not deliberately initiate the chain of events leading to the deaths. Governments in the 20th century have been quite willing to initiate policies they know will lead to the deaths of large numbers of people. Furthermore, they have frequently slaughtered their own citizens, not just people with whom they are at war. The first large-scale genocide of a number of its citizens by a modern government was the Turkish massacre of the Armenians during World War I. The most extensive program of state genocide in the 20th century involved the collectivization of Soviet agriculture in which it is estimated that 22,000,000 died. However,

it is the Nazis' attempt to eliminate the Jews which is more important for understanding the cause of violence in the 20th century.

Rubenstein argues that the holocaust cannot be adequately understood as the product of a small group of psychopathic individuals who gained control of the German people by appeal to racial and religious hatred and the use of terror to implement a policy totally at odds with the Western cultural tradition. He maintains, to the contrary, that the holocaust can only be understood if it is seen as the outcome of some of the deepest held values of Western civilization. This is not to deny that religious intolerance was one of the causes of the holocaust, because religious intolerance is one of the most deeply imbedded values of Western cultures. One cannot ignore, Rubenstein points out, the "biblical roots of the hideous Nazi caricature of the Chosen People doctrine" (*Cunning*, p. 93). Furthermore, while "it is 'fashionable' to see anticipations of Nazi anti-Semitism in Germany's greatest religious figure, Martin Luther . . . it is seldom acknowledged that Luther's intolerance and hatred was thoroughly biblical in its rejection of those who do not maintain whatever is construed to be fidelity to the only true word of the Lord" (*ibid.*). There was little the Nazis had to add to the negative image of the Jews they inherited from German Protestantism. Thus, "Hitler, Himmler, and Streicher . . . insisted that in eliminating the Jews they were merely carrying to the appropriate practical conclusion attitudes and aspirations that had long been rooted in the very substance of Christian civilization" (*Age*, p. 129).

But what accounts for the fact that the desire to eliminate the Jews which had previously been expressed in attempts at conversion, expulsion, and sporadic violence suddenly became more acceptable to the masses so that it could become state policy? Rubenstein believes that this did not occur earlier because "in premodern times . . . the harsh consequences of . . . religious conflict were moderated because the Jews played a necessary, albeit often resented and despised, role in Europe's procapitalistic economy" (*Age*, p. 134). Because most Jews were artisans, merchants, professionals, and moneylenders, they facilitated exchange in what was primarily an agrarian subsistence economy. But "with the rise of an urbanized middle class among the . . . dominant majorities of almost every European nation, the Jews ceased to play a complementary role and became competitors of . . . an infinitely more powerful group" (*ibid.*, p. 135). This led to a pattern of Jewish migration from the more highly developed areas of western Europe to those of eastern Europe, which were still primarily agrarian. Thus, in the early Middle Ages, the majority of Jews had lived in western and central Europe, but "for several centuries before World War II, the majority were domiciled in the economically backward regions of eastern Europe" (*ibid.*, p. 136). However, in the 19th century, modernization of agriculture, simi-

lar to that which had taken place elsewhere, produced great unemployment. The Jews now came into direct economic competition with members of the majorities of eastern European countries. From that point forward their fate was sealed. Given the "unresolved conflicts of religious belief and the inexorable trajectory of modernization with its population dislocations and its economic competition, *the European Jewish situation was without hope of fortunate issue*" (*ibid.* p. 149).

One reason the holocaust did not occur in the 19th century is that immigration served as a safety valve for population pressure. According to Rubenstein:

"From 1740 to 1914 the total number of people of European stock increased from about 120,000,000 to 718,000,000. As Europe industrialized, out-migration accelerated. Thus, from 1800 to 1840 between 30,000 and 40,000 people departed annually. . . . In the eighteen-forties annual emigration increased to between 200,000 and 300,000. . . . Between 1841 and 1880, about 13,000,000 people left Europe. Between 1875 and 1880 there was an average annual emigration of 280,000 persons; between 1880 and 1885 the figure was 685,000; between 1885 and 1890 the annual average was 730,000. In the peak year of 1910 2,000,000 left Europe! Between 1871 and 1914 almost 35,000,000 people emigrated, mostly to the United States" (*Age*, pp. 28-29).

Any civilization in which so many people are forced to migrate, says Rubenstein, is a civilization in crisis. However, the crisis was hidden because there were vast regions of the earth in which Europeans could settle because of their technological superiority to the indigenous people. In most cases the native people were either reduced to slavery or attempts were made to eliminate them entirely. But, in spite of extensive migration and colonization, "Europe was unable to escape the . . . social dislocations of two worlds wars, the Russian Revolution, and the smaller colonial wars" (*ibid.*, p. 29). When World War I began, Rubenstein remarks, Europe merely "exchanged one way of getting rid of people for another" (*ibid.*).

If Rubenstein is correct, then the primary cause of violence in the 20th century has been the development of modern technology, which has led to extraordinary population growth, massive unemployment, and economic competition, which exacerbates conflict between groups with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. These were the most important factors which transformed the traditional Christian intolerance of the Jews into the holocaust. However, Rubenstein believes we can obtain an even deeper understanding of the holocaust and other forms of violence in the 20th century if we take several other factors into consideration.

First, even though the consequences of modern technology, such as the extraordinary increase in population, were unforeseen and unintended, they cannot be said to be merely natural occurrences. To the contrary, they are direct results of Western man's attitudes toward reason, nature, and himself. "This unprecedented explosion in the number of people,"

Rubenstein maintains, "can be seen as one of the most important social consequences of the triumph of an attitude of value-neutral, calculating rationality as the predominant mode of problem-solving in practical affairs" (*Age*, p. 1).

Western man has more and more come to see reason as the calculation of means required to achieve ends, without regard for the validity or the consequences for others of achieving those ends. Indeed, since to evaluate the validity of a goal is to make a value judgment and this is thought to be beyond the capacity of reason because it involves an emotional component, it is held that reason can play no role whatever in determining the direction of human goals and purposes. Reason can tell us how to get what we want, but it can play no role in deciding what we ought to pursue. Although Rubenstein does not cite him, the following remark by David Hume is perhaps the classic expression of this point of view:

"Where a passion is neither founded on false suppositions, nor chooses means insufficient for the end, the understanding can neither justify nor condemn it. It is not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger. It is not contrary to reason for me to choose my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an *Indian* or person wholly unknown to me. It is as little contrary to reason to prefer even my own acknowledged lesser good to my greater." (*Treatise of Human Nature*, Book II, Part III, Section III.)

One expression of this point of view is the belief that science is, and ought to be, value free. The goal of science is not wisdom but power. It is to enable man to manipulate nature and other people so as to achieve what he desires, not to assess the validity of his desires. Decisions regarding what courses of action people should pursue are left to politicians. However, because reason is incapable of assessing the validity of goals, politics is ultimately a matter of prejudices and power. Rubenstein believes that this way of thinking is the product of the Western monotheistic tradition. Although I have doubts about this, there is no question in my mind that he is correct in maintaining that such a point of view is central to the Western intellectual tradition. He is also correct, in my opinion, in maintaining that this point of view forms part of Western man's attitude toward human institutions. Thus, as he points out, economic institutions have been conceived of in the West since the 17th century as merely means of increasing economic productivity without regard for the social consequences of increased productivity. The fact that this has resulted in uncontrolled population growth, unemployment, and increased violence among people has been considered irrelevant by economists.

This type of depersonalized and compartmentalized reasoning was central to the development of modern bureaucracy which Rubenstein believes was another factor playing a key role in setting the stage for the holocaust. As Max Weber pointed out, the generating idea of bureau-

cracy is to remove all personal and emotional elements from one's dealing with people. Bureaucracy can, therefore, best be understood in Rubenstein's opinion, as "a structural and organizational expression of the related processes of *secularization, disenchantment . . . and rationalization* (Cunning, pp. 27-28). Since bureaucracy is merely the organizational aspect of Western science and technology, it too should be seen as a direct outcome of Western civilization's most basic values. The indifference of the bureaucrat to larger goals bureaucracy may serve, and to the overall consequences of bureaucracy for human life, parallels the scientist's indifference regarding the uses to which technology may be put. Furthermore, both of them complement the intolerance of the Judeo-Christian tradition toward people with other life styles and values. Prior to the 20th century, the destructiveness of Western civilization was directed primarily toward the indigenous people it overran in colonizing the rest of the world. But in the 20th century, it was turned on Europeans themselves. The Jews, who were the largest group of surplus people in the European economy, were one of the first Western people to experience modern institutionalized violence on a massive scale. However, to demonstrate that the holocaust was an outgrowth of some of the most basic trends of Western civilization, Rubenstein compares their treatment with that of African slaves shipped to the New World and the proletariat in 19th century Europe and America.

Although the Nazis developed the most thorough techniques of domination and destructions the world has ever seen, it is Rubenstein's thesis that they merely did more efficiently and rationally what other Europeans had done less systematically and in other parts of the world. At first, the Nazis considered the Jews only as surplus people who stood in the way of progress as they conceived it. However, having set out to eliminate the Jews, they realized that economic gain could be derived from the program of destruction. They therefore instituted a system of slave labor in which inmates at Auschwitz and elsewhere were worked to a point near death before being murdered. The system of slavery they developed was far more efficient than the one Europeans had maintained in North America because "slavery in North America was . . . an imperfectly rationalized institution of nearly total domination under conditions of a shortage of productive labor" (*ibid.*, p. 41). Since there was a shortage of labor, and slave owners wanted their slaves to reproduce, this tended to moderate the treatment the slaves received. The Nazi death camp, on the other hand, "was a fully rationalized institution of total domination under conditions of a population surplus" (*ibid.*). Because they had a seemingly inexhaustible source of labor, the Nazis could calculate the precise point to which they wished to work inmates before disposing of them.

"Only one incentive was necessary to keep the slaves working at maximum capacity, terror. The workers knew that the moment they were no longer capable of meeting work schedules, they would be sent to the gas chambers. . . . If the slaves did not keep up with the schedule, they were gassed; if they did keep up with it, the work itself killed them within a few months. Their only hope of remaining alive was to maintain a schedule that was calculated finally to kill them" (*ibid.* p. 61).

Rubenstein also points out similarities between Nazi death camps and free labor in a market economy. "The bourgeois order, especially in England, produced a system of exploitation . . . unparalleled for its cruelty in all of human history. The abusive use of women and children and the utter indifference to the health and well-being of the workers were a normal part of the system. There is no more fitting term with which to describe those wretched men and women than wage slaves" (*ibid.* p. 56). Nevertheless, because it relied on unorganized workers who eventually banded together to protect their interests, laissez-faire capitalism was not so thoroughly a rational system of domination as the Nazi death camps. But the underlying principle of calculating, dehumanized rationality was the same. Rubenstein, therefore, claims that there is a cultural continuity "between the Nazi system and *both* the earlier slave systems and the impersonal use of 'free' labor in a money economy" (*ibid.*, p. 42). "The death camps were the end product of a very long cultural and political development involving all the major countries of the Western world, rather than the specialized and extraordinary hatred of the Germans for the Jews" (*ibid.*, pp. 42-43). "The record of the British, Portuguese, Dutch, French, and Spanish in Africa, Asia, and the Americas is quantitatively as blood stained as that of the Germans" (*ibid.*, p. 43). The Germans are noteworthy, he believes, only in the organizational skills they employed in dominating and murdering people and the extent to which they mobilized the entire society in the process.

"The destruction process required the cooperation of every sector of German society. The bureaucrats drew up the definitions and decrees; the churches gave the evidence of Aryan descent; the postal authorities carried the messages . . . business corporations dismissed their Jewish employees and took over 'Aryanized' properties; the railroads carried the victims to their place of execution, a place made available to the Gestapo and the SS by the *Wehrmacht*." (*Cunning*, pp. 4-5).

The German business community played an essential role in the death camp slavery. The slaves were primarily employed on the behalf of large conglomerates, especially the I. G. Farben Company. In this case also there was continuity between the employment of slaves and standard Western business practices. "I. G. Farben's decision to locate at Auschwitz was based on the very same criteria by which contemporary multi-national corporations relocate their plants in utter indifference to the social consequences of such moves: wherever possible costs, especially labor costs, must be minimized and profits maximized. . . . Their

mentality was not very different from that of corporate executives who closed down plants in such high labor cost areas as Stuttgart and Philadelphia and relocated them in Manila and Singapore" (*ibid.*, p. 58). I. G. Farben even made a profit from the manufacture and sale of the gas used to assassinate the prisoners.

Although the Nazi death camps took the logic of capitalism to its ultimate conclusion, egoistic profit motive was less a factor in the holocaust than the impersonal, calculating reasoning which capitalism exemplifies. The same type of reasoning underlies bureaucratic thinking wherever it occurs. It is the capacity of bureaucrats to compartmentalize their thinking and to serve whatever ideology that is in power that is the more fundamental threat to human existence. Thus, as the policies of the Soviet Union and other communist countries have shown, "it would be a mistake to assume that capitalism has a monopoly on programs of mass population elimination as a means of social reconstruction" (*Age*, p. 161).

The Nazi death camp exemplifies bureaucracy in the service of nationalism and capitalism. Rubenstein believes that the Nazi movement may in fact be said to be the culmination of nationalism which is the attempt to establish a totally secular state. The Nazis took the logic of nationalism to its ultimate conclusion, he believes, because for them: "The State becomes the only true god on earth with the power to define realistically what is good and will be rewarded and what is evil and will be punished; this truly sovereign god also has the ultimate power of divinity, the power to decide who shall live and who shall die" (*Cunning*, p. 91). However, bureaucracy may also serve other interests, such as personal ambition and the pursuit of scientific knowledge. Watergate illustrates the former. The latter is illustrated by the German doctors who seized the opportunity the slave camps provided to perform medical experiments on human beings who could in no way hold them responsible for the outcome. Furthermore, as Rubenstein points out, the results of the experiments were discussed in journals and medical meetings without a single protest from the medical community being recorded.

SECTION II

I have spent considerable space discussing Rubenstein's analysis of the holocaust. I have done so because I believe that he has succeeded better than any other writer in laying bare the factors which have produced so much social upheaval and violence in the 20th century. The most basic cause of contemporary social problems is the widespread acceptance of the amoral, purely instrumental conception of reason which is taken for granted in the sciences and underlies the development of modern technology, capitalism, and bureaucracy. The most pressing practical prob-

lem facing the 20th century is uncontrolled population growth which has resulted from a blind application of technology and the functioning of an economic system based on an ideal of ever-increasing production. Massive unemployment, pollution, and the depletion of scarce natural resources are direct outcomes of these developments. So are increased crime, meaningless violence, and the intensification of ethnic and racial hatreds. Nationalism and bureaucracy are both causes of these developments and their willing servants. Rubenstein is totally correct in maintaining that so long as population growth is uncontrolled and nations continue their mad scramble for the earth's resources, war is inevitable. He is also correct in arguing that so long as uncontrolled population grown, massive unemployment, and ethnic and cultural minorities are present in a country, genocide will be an ever-present temptation to bureaucrats trying to solve national problems. "Given the strictly formal nature of instrumental rationality, given further its indifference to moral values, it is unfortunately possible to image plausible scenarios in which, in a time of acute social stress, decision makers in a desacralized society conclude that genocide is the most rational means of 'solving' the problem of surplus people" (*Age*, p. 32). Since blacks constitute the majority of the unemployed in the United States, e.g., it is quite possible that some future administration, faced with massive unemployment, an overwhelmed welfare system, and intensified racial hatreds, might see genocide as an answer to these problems. If rubenstein's primary thesis is correct, and I believe that it is, that the holocaust was a produce of deeply held values and trends of Western civilization, rather than the result of some special hatred of the Jews by the Germans, then it would be foolish to deny that genocide is a permanent possibility of Western societies. In fact, if Rubenstein is also right in maintaining that the threat of nuclear destruction has reduced the likelihood of large-scale war, then the use of genocide as a means of population control is more probable than it has ever been in the past.

What, if anything, can we do to eliminate the problems which Rubenstein has so brilliantly called to our attention? Unfortunately, I think that his analysis of the ills affecting modern society is much more illuminating than his suggestions for dealing with them. The primary problem with his proposed solutions, in my opinion, is that they are in one respect based on the same type of thinking that produced the ills. For example, he rejects the claim that human beings have rights whether or not they are recognized by the state. He says: "The Germans understood that no person has any rights unless they are guaranteed by an organized community with power to defend such rights" (C[*Cunning*, p. 33).

Elsewhere he writes: "The dreadful history of Europe's Jews has demonstrated that *rights do no belong to men by nature*. To the extent that men have rights, they have them only as members of the polis. . . .

All that men possess by nature is the necessity to participate in the incessant life and death struggle for existence of any animal" (*ibid.*, p. 90).

Rubenstein's position is, in fact, one of moral relativism. In commenting on the Nuremberg trials, he says: "It is sometimes argued that there is a higher moral law against which the deeds of men and nations are measured. . . . Unfortunately, the outcome of the trial demonstrated that if such norms exist, there is little or no penalty for their violation. And norms that can be freely violated are as good as none at all" (*ibid.*, p. 88). It is because he believes that the existence of independent moral standards is problematic that he thinks there are no human rights. Thus, in commenting further on the Nuremberg trials, he states: "If there were in reality any credible moral standards binding on all human beings and guaranteeing the so-called human rights about which so much has been written, it would be possible to inquire whether the SS guards who received heavier sentences . . . were not unfairly treated in comparison with the business executives" (*ibid.*, p. 65).

Since he does not believe in any objective moral standard, Rubenstein sees the Nuremberg trials as merely "an elaborate exercise in vengeance" (*ibid.*, p. 88). In saying this, he does not mean to condemn the trials. To the contrary, because there are no objective moral standards, the threat of vengeance is all men have to rely on to protect themselves from their fellow man. "Some may claim that vengeance is indefensible in a world of evolving, higher moral sensibilities, yet it is difficult to see what other deterrent can exist in a world in which a legal system is binding within a state but never between political communities" (*ibid.*, p. 90). Of course, after Auschwitz, "membership in a political community is no longer a guarantee of the elemental human rights" (*ibid.*, p. 87).

The problem with this type of position is that if the only justification one can have for punishing wrongdoers is vengeance, it seems to follow that might makes right. If this is true, life is a struggle for existence in which force justifies itself. But this is precisely the view that the Nazis maintained. *In saying this I in no way intend to imply that Rubenstein's position is identical with the Nazis'. That would be a total distortion of his position because his purpose in writing is clearly to repudiate the type of thinking which led to the Nazi holocaust.* His moral indignation concerning the thought and actions of the Nazis and similar groups is apparent throughout his books. For example, he says: "There is nothing radical about insisting that *no human being ought to be considered surplus*. On the contrary, the real radicals are those who do not know the difference between a genuine human community and a jungle. Survival of the fittest may indeed be the law of the jungle, but a human community is not a jungle" (*Age*, p. 228). I agree thoroughly with this remark. However, I fail to see any reason why human beings should not be

treated as surplus to be eliminated at will unless they have an intrinsic worth or dignity which one ought to respect. That is to say, in my opinion, it is our recognition that humans have certain rights which animals lack that underlies our belief that the human community should be different from a jungle. It is because people have such rights that they should be treated as ends in themselves and never as means only.

Rubenstein, on the other hand, attempts to ground respect for persons in the concept of community alone. He attacks Malthus and the social Darwinists because their view

“constitutes a radical rejection of the traditional conception of public life in the Western world. . . . Historically, the political sphere was understood to be a joint effort on the part of men to shield themselves from the ravages of nature. Just as a new human settlement begins with clearing the wilderness and creating a humanized space that is essentially a thing of artifice, so too political institutions are artificial creations designed to structure the conduct of human beings for the good of the community. . . . It is therefore to politics rather than metaphysics or theology that we must look for the distinction between fact and value and between ‘is’ and ‘ought.’ Humanity transcends factuality whenever it creates a community To naturalize political thinking as did Malthus and the social Darwinists . . . is to deny the very purpose of the political order. It is also to take the first steps toward the dissolution of communities in which men and women are bound together by shared obligation” (*Age*, p. 53).

One reason Rubenstein rejects the idea of human rights is that he apparently identifies them with possessive individualism which is incapable of generating a sense of obligation among people. “Possessive individualism has helped to make ours a society of universal otherhood rather than brotherhood. Such individualism mistakenly dichotomizes the individual and society. It also misconstrues self-realization as largely a private affair. It is congruent with free enterprise capitalism and social Darwinism. Unfortunately, it is incongruent with any theory of obligation that would make the fate of one’s neighbor more than a prudential concern” (*ibid.*, p. 229). He thinks that the Jews put their faith in liberal society and it failed them. “What Jews took to be a pluralistic community, influential members of the dominant majority took to be no community at all, but a congeries of atomized strangers” (*ibid.*, p. 162). “While Jews tended mistakenly to identify rationality and modernity with pluralism, liberalism and tolerance, by the beginning of the twentieth century their opposite numbers were increasingly identifying it with homogenization, standardization, and centralization” (*ibid.*, p. 145).

Rubenstein believes that there are two conditions which must be fulfilled before community can be achieved. The first is that people must have opportunities for meaningful work. There is something fundamentally wrong, in his opinion, with an economic system in which certain groups of people are condemned to permanent unemployment. No one should become a “surplus” person, because he or she is unable to find a job. He therefore proposes, e.g., that the US government initiate a pro-

gram to put unemployed people to work.

The second development he believes must come about if mankind is to achieve a sense of community is for a religious transformation to occur. We must recognize he says that "*a purely secular, rationalistic approach to our social problems is unlikely to produce the collective altruism our situation demands* (*ibid.*, p. 232). He argues, for instance, that the American tradition of religious freedom and pluralism is inadequate to bring about the religious consensus necessary to create community among Americans. Religious pluralism, in his opinion, is the product of urban anonymity and rootlessness, not the outgrowth of deeply held convictions. It would therefore be unable to withstand the pressures which may develop from overpopulation, unemployment, and racial and cultural differences. He believes that only a genuine religious consensus—a shared faith—can prevent impending disaster. The development of such a shared faith would apparently result in some reduction of religious tolerance. He points out that there is a limit to tolerance beyond which even John Locke "was not prepared to go . . . because he knew that the bonds uniting men and women in a community required religious legitimation" (*ibid.*, p. 233). Thus, Locke, e.g., would not tolerate atheists.

Rubenstein is not certain how such a new religious consensus might arise. However, he is doubtful that it could originate from contemporary Western-trained clergymen, theologians or religious scholars. He states that there are precedents of such religious consensus developing. Both early Islam and early Christianity created such shared faiths. However, he believes that "perhaps the most influential example of a conger of strangers forming a community by adopting a common faith is that of the 'Hebrews' at Sinai. . . . Scripture offers ample hints that the group who escaped from Egypt with Moses did not possess a common inheritance" (*ibid.*, p. 235).

The primary problems I find with Rubenstein's position are:

First, I believe that it is a mistake to identify rights with possessive individualism. Rights are not, as is sometimes supposed, the opposite of obligations. To the contrary, to say that people have rights is to claim that there are certain ways they ought to be treated regardless of one's own desires or preferences. To believe that there are human rights is, therefore, to think that certain restrictions ought to be imposed on both possessive individualism and state action. In my opinion, it is only if human beings have certain rights which prescribe how they must or must not be treated that outrage against the actions of the Nazis can have any moral foundation. Otherwise, it is merely an expression of personal preference or prejudice.

Second, since religious consensus in the past has frequently led to genocide rather than universal brotherhood, it is not without danger as a

way of achieving community. As Rubenstein himself has so eloquently argued, "religion has its night side" (*Cunning*, p. 92). Religious pluralism may not have produced community in America, but it has allowed us to avoid religious conflicts such as those Europe has experienced. There is, of course, a great difference between Rubenstein's proposals and a movement such as National Socialism which "sought to restore civil altruism, not on the basis of a religious or humanitarian ideal of human society, but strictly on the basis of the myth of primal tribal unity" (*Age*, p. 150). Rubenstein repudiates both racism and religious exclusiveness. The religious transformation for which he hopes is one that involves "an inclusive vision appropriate to a global civilization in which Moses and Mohammed, Christ, Buddha and Confucius all play a role" (*ibid.*, p. 240). Nevertheless, I fail to see how such a shared global faith could come about without respect for the right of people to believe whatever they wish, whether or not it conforms to majority opinion. To me, unless the right of people to be atheists is upheld, religion will degenerate into tribalism. Respect for human rights and genuine community are not opposed to each other. To the contrary, the latter is necessary for the former. The task which confronts the modern world is to recover a sense of community without abandoning respect for human rights.

I agree with Rubenstein that we must solve the problem of unemployment before we can achieve a society based on community. I also agree with him that because the problem of unemployment stems from overpopulation and uncontrolled technological development, these problems must command a greater part of our attention. Finally, I agree with him that establishment of a world community will require a new religious synthesis in which the differences of traditional world religions are overcome. But, unlike Rubenstein, I believe that unless such a synthesis incorporates respect for human rights it will not produce any improvement over our current situation. Rubenstein's analysis of our current situation is profound. It is my hope that this analysis of his work will serve as an occasion for him to state more explicitly the basic assumptions on which his prescriptions for our problems rest and to sketch in greater detail his proposals for resolving them.

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