

## ***Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics*** **Reinhold Niebuhr**

One of the foremost philosophers and theologians of the twentieth century, Reinhold Niebuhr was for many years a Professor at Union Theological Seminary, New York City. He was also the founding editor of the publication *Christianity and Crisis*. This book was originally published in 1932 by Charles Scribner's Sons.

### **Introduction**

The thesis to be elaborated in these pages is that a sharp distinction must be drawn between the moral and social behavior of individuals and of social groups, national, racial, and economic; and that this distinction justifies and necessitates political policies which a purely individualistic ethic must always find embarrassing. The title "Moral Man and Immoral Society" suggests the intended distinction too unqualifiedly, but it is nevertheless a fair indication of the argument to which the following pages are devoted. Individual men may be moral in the sense that they are able to consider interests other than their own in determining problems of conduct, and are capable, on occasion, of preferring the advantages of others to their own. They are endowed by nature with a measure of sympathy and consideration for their kind, the breadth of which may be extended by an astute social pedagogy. Their rational faculty prompts them to a sense of justice which educational discipline may refine and purge of egoistic elements until they are able to view a social situation, in which their own interests are involved, with a fair measure of objectivity. But all these achievements are more difficult, if not impossible, for human societies and social groups. In every human group there is less reason to guide and to check impulse, less capacity for self-transcendence, less ability to comprehend the needs of others and therefore more unrestrained egoism than the individuals, who compose the group, reveal in their personal relationships.

The inferiority of the morality of groups to that of individuals is due in part to the difficulty of establishing a rational social force which is powerful enough to cope with the natural impulses by which society achieves its cohesion; but in part it is merely the revelation of a collective egoism, compounded of the egoistic impulses of individuals, which achieve a more vivid expression and a more cumulative effect when they are united in a common impulse than when they express themselves separately and discreetly.

Insofar as this treatise has a polemic interest it is directed against the moralists both religious and secular, who imagine that the egoism of individuals is being progressively checked by the development of rationality or the growth of a religiously inspired goodwill and that nothing but the continuance of this process is necessary to establish social harmony between all the human societies and collectives. Social analyses and prophecies made by moralists, sociologists and educators upon the basis of these assumptions lead to a very considerable moral and political confusion in our day. They completely disregard the political necessities in the struggle for justice in human society by failing to recognise those elements in man's collective behavior which belong to the order of nature and can never be brought completely under the dominion of reason or conscience. They do not recognise that when collective power, whether in the form of imperialism or class domination, exploits weakness, it can never be dislodged unless power is raised against it. If conscience and reason can be insinuated into the resulting struggle they can only qualify but not abolish it.

The most persistent error of modern educators and moralists is the assumption that our social difficulties are due to the failure of the social sciences to keep pace with the physical sciences which have created our technological civilisation. The invariable implication of this assumption is that, with a little more time, a little more adequate moral and social pedagogy and a generally higher development of human intelligence, our social problems will approach solution. "It is," declares Professor John Dewey, "our human intelligence and our human courage which is on trial; it is incredible that men who have brought the technique of physical discovery, invention and use to such a pitch of perfection will abdicate in the face of the infinitely more important human problem. What stands in the way (of a planned economy) is a lot of outworn traditions, moth-eaten slogans and catchwords that do substitute duty for thought, as well as our entrenched predatory self-interest. We shall only make a real beginning in intelligent thought when we cease mouthing platitudes.... Just as soon as we begin to use the knowledge and skills we have, to control social consequences in the interest of a shared, abundant and secured life, we shall cease to complain of the backwardness of our social knowledge.... We shall then take the road which leads to the assured building up of social science just as men built up physical science when they actively used techniques and tools and numbers in physical experimentation." (John Dewey, *Philosophy and Civilization* [New York: Minton, Balch], p.329.) In spite of Professor Dewey's great interest in and understanding of the modern social problem there is very little clarity in this

statement. The real cause of social inertia, "our predatory self-interest," is mentioned only in passing without influencing his reasoning, and with no indication that he understands how much social conservatism is due to the economic interests of the owning classes. On the whole, social conservatism is ascribed to ignorance, a viewpoint which states only part of the truth and reveals the natural bias of the educator. The suggestion that we will only make a beginning in intelligent thought when we "cease mouthing platitudes," is itself so platitudinous that it rather betrays the confusion of an analyst who has no clear counsels about the way to overcome social inertia. The idea that we cannot be socially intelligent until we begin experimentation in social problems in the way that the physical scientists experimented fails to take account of an important difference between the physical and the social sciences. The physical sciences gained their freedom when they overcame the traditionalism based on ignorance, but the traditionalism which the social sciences face is based upon the economic interest of the dominant social classes who are trying to maintain their special privileges in society. Nor can the difference between the very character of social and physical sciences be overlooked. Complete rational objectivity in a social situation is impossible. The very social scientists who are so anxious to offer our generation counsels of salvation and are disappointed that an ignorant and slothful people are so slow to accept their wisdom, betray middle-class prejudices in almost everything they write. Since reason is always, to some degree, the servant of interest in a social situation, social injustice cannot be resolved by moral and rational suasion alone, as the educator and social scientist usually believes. Conflict is inevitable, and in this conflict power must be challenged by power. That fact is not recognized by most of the educators, and only very grudgingly admitted by most of the social scientists.

If social conflict be a part of the process of gaining social justice, the idea of most of Professor Dewey's disciples that our salvation depends upon the development of "experimental procedures?" ( Cf. *inter alia*, John Childs, *Education and the Philosophy of Experimentalism*, p. 37) in social life, commensurate with the experimentalism of the physical sciences, does not have quite the plausibility which they attribute to it. Contending factions in a social struggle require morale; and morale is created by the right dogmas, symbols and emotionally potent oversimplifications. These are at least as necessary as the scientific spirit of tentativity. No class of industrial workers will ever win freedom from the dominant classes if they give themselves completely to the "experimental techniques" of the modern educators. They will have to believe rather more firmly in the justice and in the probable triumph of their cause, than any impartial science would give them the right to believe, if they are to have enough energy to contest the power of the strong. They may be very scientific in projecting their social goal and in choosing the most effective instruments for its attainment, but a motive force will be required to nerve them for their task which is not easily derived from the cool objectivity of science. Modern educators are, like rationalists of all the ages, too enamored of the function of reason in life. The world of history, particularly in man's collective behavior, will never be conquered by reason, unless reason uses tools, and is itself driven by forces which are not rational.

The sociologists as a class, understand the modern social problem even less than the educators. They usually interpret social conflict as the result of a clash between different kinds of "behavior patterns," which can be eliminated if the contending parties will only allow the social scientist to furnish them with a new and more perfect pattern which will do justice to the needs of both parties. With the educators they regard ignorance rather than self-interest as the cause of conflict. "Apparently," declares Kimball Young, "the only way in which collective conflicts, as well as individual conflicts, can be successfully and hygienically solved is by securing a redirection of behavior toward a more feasible environmental objective. This can be accomplished most successfully by the rational reconditioning of attitudes on a higher neuro-psychic or intellectual symbolic plane to the facts of science, preferably through a free discussion with a minimum of propaganda. This is not an easy road to mental and social sanity but it appears to be the only one which arrives at the goal." ( Kimball Young, *Social Attitudes* p. 72) Here a technique which works very well in individual relations, and in certain types of social conflict due to differences in culture, is made a general panacea. How is it to solve the problem between England and India? Through the Round-Table Conference? But how much would England have granted India at the conference if a non-co-operation campaign, a type of conflict, had not forced the issue?

A favorite counsel of the social scientists is that of accommodation. If two parties are in a conflict, let them, by conferring together, moderate their demands and arrive at a *modus vivendi*. This is, among others, the advice of Professor Hornell Hart. (Hornell Hart, *The Science of Social Relations*.) Undoubtedly there are innumerable conflicts which must be resolved in this fashion. But will a disinherited group, such as the Negroes for instance, ever win full justice in society in this fashion? Will not even its most minimum demands seem exorbitant to the dominant whites, among whom only a very small minority will regard the inter-racial problem from the perspective of objective justice? Or how are the industrial workers to follow Professor Hart's advice in dealing with industrial owners, when the owners possess so much power that they can win the debate with the workers, no matter how unconvincing their

arguments? Only a very few sociologists seem to have learned that an adjustment of a social conflict, caused by the disproportion of power in society, will hardly result in justice as long as the disproportion of power remains. Sometimes the sociologists are so completely oblivious to the real facts of an industrial civilisation that, as Floyd Allport for instance, they can suggest that the unrest of industrial workers is due not to economic injustice but to a sense of inferiority which will be overcome just as soon as benevolent social psychologists are able to teach the workers that "no one is charging them with inferiority except themselves." (Floyd Allport, *Social Psychology*, pp. 14-17.) These omniscient social scientists will also teach the owners that "interests and profits must be tempered by regard for the worker." Thus "the socialisation of individual control" in industry will obviate the necessity of "socialistic control." Most of the social scientists are such unqualified rationalists that they seem to imagine that men of power will immediately check their exactions and pretensions in society, as soon as they have been apprised by the social scientists that their actions and attitudes are anti-social. Professor Clarence Marsh Case, in an excellent analysis of the social problem, places his confidence in a "reorganisation of values" in which, among other things, industrial leaders must be made to see "that despotically controlled industry in a society that professes democracy as an article of faith is an anachronism that cannot endure." (Clarence Marsh Case, *Social Process and Human Progress*, p.233.) It may be that despotism cannot endure but it will not abdicate merely because the despots have discovered it to be anachronistic. Sir Arthur Salter, to name a brilliant economist among the social scientists, finishes his penetrating analysis of the distempers of our civilisation by expressing the usual hope that a higher intelligence or a sincerer morality will prevent the governments of the future from perpetrating the mistakes of the past. His own analysis proves conclusively that the failure of governments is due to the pressure of economic interest upon them rather than to the "limited capacities of human wisdom." In his own words "government is failing above all because it has become enmeshed in the task of giving discretionary, particularly preferential, privileges to competitive industry." (Sir Arthur Salter, *Recovery*, p. 341) In spite of this analysis Sir Arthur expects the governments to redeem our civilisation by becoming more socially minded and he thinks that one method which will help them to do so is to "draw into the service of the public the great private institutions which represent the organised activities of the country, chambers of commerce, banking institutions, industrial and labor organisations." His entire hope for recovery rests upon the possibility of developing a degree of economic disinterestedness among men of power which the entire history of mankind proves them incapable of acquiring. It is rather discouraging to find such naïve confidence in the moral capacities of collective man, among men who make it their business to study collective human behavior. Even when, as Professor Howard Odum, they are prepared to admit that "conflict will be necessary" as long as unfairness in the distribution of the rewards of labor exists," they put their hope in the future. They regard social conflict as only an expedient of the moment "until broader principles of education and cooperation can be established." (Howard W. Odum, *Man's Quest for Social Guidance*, p. 477.) Anarchism, with an uncoerced and voluntary justice, seems to be either an explicit or implicit social goal of every second social scientist.

Modern religious idealists usually follow in the wake of social scientists in advocating compromise and accommodation as the way to social justice. Many leaders of the church like to insist that it is not their business to champion the cause of either labor or capital, but only to admonish both sides to a spirit of fairness and accommodation. "Between the far-visioned capitalism of Owen Young and the hard-headed socialism of Ramsay MacDonald," declares Doctor Justin Wroe Nixon, "there is probably no impassable gulf. The progress of mankind . . . depends upon following the MacDonalds and Youngs into those areas." (Justin Wroe Nixon, *An Emerging Christian Faith* p. 294) Unfortunately, since those lines were written the socialism of MacDonald has been revealed as not particularly hard-headed, and the depression has shown how little difference there really is between Mr. Young's "new capitalism" and the older and less suave types of capitalism.

What is lacking among all these moralists, whether religious or rational, is an understanding of the brutal character of the behavior of all human collectives, and the power of self-interest and collective egoism in all intergroup relations. Failure to recognise the stubborn resistance of group egoism to all moral and inclusive social objectives inevitably involves them in unrealistic and confused political thought. They regard social conflict either as an impossible method of achieving morally approved ends or as a momentary expedient which a more perfect education or a purer religion will make unnecessary. They do not see that the limitations of the human imagination, the easy subservience of reason to prejudice and passion, and the consequent persistence of irrational egoism, particularly in group behavior, make social conflict an inevitability in human history, probably to its very end.

The romantic overestimate of human virtue and moral capacity, current in our modern middle-class culture, does not always result in an unrealistic appraisal of present social facts. Contemporary social situations are frequently appraised quite realistically, but the hope is expressed that a new pedagogy or a revival of religion will make conflict unnecessary in the future. Nevertheless a considerable portion of middle-class culture remains quite

unrealistic in its analysis of the contemporary situation. It assumes that evidences of a growing brotherliness between classes and nations are apparent in the present moment. It gives such arrangements as the League of Nations, such ventures as the Kellogg Pact and such schemes as company industrial unions, a connotation of moral and social achievement which the total facts completely belie. "There must," declares Professor George Stratton, a social psychologist, "always be a continuing and widening progress. But our present time seems to promise distinctly the close of an old epoch in world relations and the opening of a new.... Under the solemn teaching of the War, most of the nations have made political commitments which are of signal promise for international discipline and for still further and more effective governmental acts."(George M. Stratton, *Social Psychology and International Conduct*, pp. 355-361.) This glorification of the League of Nations as a symbol of a new epoch in international relations has been very general, and frequently very unqualified, in the Christian churches, where liberal Christianity has given itself to the illusion that all social relations are being brought progressively under "the law of Christ." William Adams Brown speaks for the whole liberal Christian viewpoint when he declares: "From many different centres and in many different forms the crusade for a unified and brotherly society is being carried on. The ideal of the League of Nations in which all civilised people shall be represented and in which they shall cooperate with one another in fighting common enemies like war and disease is winning recognition in circles which have hitherto been little suspected of idealism. . . . In relations between races, in strife between capital and labor, in our attitudes toward the weaker and more dependent members of society we are developing a social conscience, and situations which would have been accepted a generation ago as a matter of course are felt as an intolerable scandal."(William Adams Brown, *Pathways to Certainty*, p. 246.) Another theologian and pastor, Justin Wroe Nixon, thinks that "another reason for believing in the growth of social statesmanship on the part of business leaders is based upon their experience as trustees in various philanthropic and educational enterprises." (Justin Wroe Nixon, *An Emerging Christian Faith*, p.291) This judgment reveals the moral confusion of liberal Christianity with perfect clarity. Teachers of morals who do not see the difference between the problem of charity within the limits of an accepted social system and the problem of justice between economic groups, holding uneven power within modern industrial society, have simply not faced the most obvious differences between the morals of groups and those of individuals. The suggestion that the fight against disease is in the same category with the fight against war reveals the same confusion. Our contemporary culture fails to realise the power, extent and persistence of group egoism in human relations. It may be possible, though it is never easy, to establish just relations between individuals within a group purely by moral and rational suasion and accommodation. In inter-group relations this is practically an impossibility. The relations between groups must therefore always be predominantly political rather than ethical, that is, they will be determined by the proportion of power which each group possesses at least as much as by any rational and moral appraisal of the comparative needs and claims of each group. The coercive factors, in distinction to the more purely moral and rational factors, in political relations can never be sharply differentiated and defined. It is not possible to estimate exactly how much a party to a social conflict is influenced by a rational argument or by the threat of force. It is impossible, for instance, to know what proportion of a privileged class accepts higher inheritance taxes because it believes that such taxes are good social policy and what proportion submits merely because the power of the state supports the taxation policy. Since political conflict, at least in times when controversies have not reached the point of crisis, is carried on by the threat, rather than the actual use, of force, it is always easy for the casual or superficial observer to overestimate the moral and rational factors, and to remain oblivious to the covert types of coercion and force which are used in the conflict.

Whatever increase in social intelligence and moral goodwill may be achieved in human history, may serve to mitigate the brutalities of social conflict, but they cannot abolish the conflict itself. That could be accomplished only if human groups, whether racial, national or economic, could achieve a degree of reason and sympathy which would permit them to see and to understand the interests of others as vividly as they understand their own, and a moral goodwill which would prompt them to affirm the rights of others as vigorously as they affirm their own. Given the inevitable limitations of human nature and the limits of the human imagination and intelligence, this is an ideal which individuals may approximate but which is beyond the capacities of human societies. Educators who emphasise the pliability of human nature, social and psychological scientists who dream of "socialising" man and religious idealists who strive to increase the sense of moral responsibility, can serve a very useful function in society in humanising individuals within an established social system and in purging the relations of individuals of as much egoism as possible. In dealing with the problems and necessities of radical social change they are almost invariably confusing in their counsels because they are not conscious of the limitations in human nature which finally frustrate their efforts.

The following pages are devoted to the task of analysing the moral resources and limitations of human nature, of tracing their consequences and cumulative effect in the life of human groups and of weighing political strategies in the light of the ascertained facts. The ultimate purpose of this task is to find political methods which will offer the most promise of achieving an ethical social goal for society. Such methods must always be judged by two criteria: 1. Do they do justice to the moral resources and possibilities in human nature and provide for the exploitation of every latent moral capacity in man? 2. Do they take account of the limitations of human nature, particularly those which manifest themselves in man's collective behavior? So persistent are the moralistic illusions about politics in the middle-class world, that any emphasis upon the second question will probably impress the average reader as unduly cynical. Social viewpoints and analyses are relative to the temper of the age which gives them birth. In America our contemporary culture is still pretty firmly enmeshed in the illusions and sentimentalities of the Age of Reason. A social analysis which is written, at least partially, from the perspective of a disillusioned generation will seem to be almost pure cynicism from the perspective of those who will stand in the credo of the nineteenth century.

### **Chapter 1: Man and Society: The Art of Living Together**

Though human society has roots which lie deeper in history than the beginning of human life, men have made comparatively but little progress in solving the problem of their aggregate existence. Each century originates a new complexity and each new generation faces a new vexation in it. For all the centuries of experience, men have not yet learned how to live together without compounding their vices and covering each other "with mud and with blood." The society in which each man lives is at once the basis for, and the nemesis of, that fullness of life which each man seeks. However much human ingenuity may increase the treasures which nature provides for the satisfaction of human needs, they can never be sufficient to satisfy all human wants; for man, unlike other creatures, is gifted and cursed with an imagination which extends his appetites beyond the requirements of subsistence. Human society will never escape the problem of the equitable distribution of the physical and cultural goods which provide for the preservation and fulfillment of human life.

Unfortunately the conquest of nature, and the consequent increase in nature's beneficences to man, have not eased, but rather accentuated, the problem of justice. The same technology, which drew the fangs of nature's enmity of man, also created a society in which the intensity and extent of social cohesion has been greatly increased, and in which power is so unevenly distributed, that justice has become a more difficult achievement. Perhaps it is man's sorry fate, suffering from ills which have their source in the inadequacies of both nature and human society, that the tools by which he eliminates the former should become the means of increasing the latter. That, at least, has been his fate up to the present hour; and it may be that there will be no salvation for the human spirit from the more and more painful burdens of social injustice until the ominous tendency in human history has resulted in perfect tragedy.

Human nature is not wanting in certain endowments for the solution of the problem of human society. Man is endowed by nature with organic relations to his fellowmen; and natural impulse prompts him to consider the needs of others even when they compete with his own. With the higher mammals man shares concern for his offspring; and the long infancy of the child created the basis for an organic social group in the earliest period of human history. Gradually intelligence, imagination, and the necessities of social conflict increased the size of this group. Natural impulse was refined and extended until a less obvious type of consanguinity than an immediate family relationship could be made the basis of social solidarity. Since those early days the units of human cooperation have constantly grown in size, and the areas of significant relationships between the units have likewise increased. Nevertheless conflict between the national units remains as a permanent rather than a passing characteristic of their relations to each other; and each national unit finds it increasingly difficult to maintain either peace or justice within its common life.

While it is possible for intelligence to increase the range of benevolent impulse, and thus prompt a human being to consider the needs and rights of other than those to whom he is bound by organic and physical relationship, there are definite limits in the capacity of ordinary mortals which makes it impossible for them to grant to others what they claim for themselves. Though educators ever since the eighteenth century have given themselves to the fond illusion that justice through voluntary co-operation waited only upon a more universal or a more adequate educational enterprise, there is good reason to believe that the sentiments of benevolence and social goodwill will never be so pure or powerful, and the rational capacity to consider the rights and needs of others in fair competition with our own will never be so fully developed as to create the possibility for the anarchistic millennium which is the social utopia, either explicit or implicit, of all intellectual or religious moralists.

All social co-operation on a larger scale than the most intimate social group requires a measure of coercion. While no state can maintain its unity purely by coercion neither can it preserve itself without coercion. Where the factor of mutual consent is strongly developed, and where standardised and approximately fair methods of adjudicating and resolving conflicting interests within an organised group have been established, the coercive factor in social life is frequently covert, and becomes apparent only in moments of crisis and in the group's policy toward recalcitrant individuals. Yet it is never absent. Divergence of interest, based upon geographic and functional differences within a society, is bound to create different social philosophies and political attitudes which goodwill and intelligence may partly, but never completely, harmonise. Ultimately, unity within an organised social group, or within a federation of such groups, is created by the ability of a dominant group to impose its will. Politics will to the end of history, be an area where conscience and power meet, where the ethical and coercive factors of human life will interpenetrate and work out their tentative and uneasy compromises. The democratic method of resolving social conflict, which some romanticists hail as a triumph of the ethical over the coercive factor, is really much more coercive than at first seems apparent. The majority has its way, not because the minority believes that the majority is right (few minorities are willing to grant the majority the moral prestige of such a concession), but because the votes of the majority are a symbol of its social strength. Whenever a minority believes that it has some strategic advantage which outweighs the power of numbers, and whenever it is sufficiently intent upon its ends, or desperate enough about its position in society, it refuses to accept the dictates of the majority. Military and economic overlords and revolutionary zealots have been traditionally contemptuous of the will of majorities. Recently Trotsky advised the German communists not to be dismayed by the greater voting strength of the fascists since in the inevitable revolution the power of industrial workers, in charge of the nation's industrial process, would be found much more significant than the social power of clerks and other petty bourgeoisie who comprised the fascist movement.

There are, no doubt, rational and ethical factors in the democratic process. Contending social forces presumably use the forum rather than the battleground to arbitrate their differences in the democratic method, and thus differences are resolved by moral suasion and a rational adjustment of rights to rights. If political issues were really abstract questions of social policy upon which unbiased citizens were asked to commit themselves, the business of voting and the debate which precedes the election might actually be regarded as an educational programme in which a social group discovers its common mind. But the fact is that political opinions are inevitably rooted in economic interests of some kind or other, and only comparatively few citizens can view a problem of social policy without regard to their interest. Conflicting interests therefore can never be completely resolved; and minorities will yield only because the majority has come into control of the police power of the state and may, if the occasion arises, augment that power by its own military strength. Should a minority regard its own strength, whether economic or martial, as strong enough to challenge the power of the majority, it may attempt to wrest control of the state apparatus from the majority, as in the case of the fascist movement in Italy. Sometimes it will resort to armed conflict, even if the prospects of victory are none too bright, as in the instance of the American Civil War, in which the Southern planting interests, outvoted by a combination of Eastern industrialists and Western agrarians, resolved to protect their peculiar interests and privileges by a forceful dissolution of the national union. The coercive factor is, in other words, always present in politics. If economic interests do not conflict too sharply, if the spirit of accommodation partially resolves them, and if the democratic process has achieved moral prestige and historic dignity, the coercive factor in politics may become too covert to be visible to the casual observer. Nevertheless, only a romanticist of the purest water could maintain that a national group ever arrives at a "common mind" or becomes conscious of a "general will" without the use of either force or the threat of force. This is particularly true of nations, but it is also true, though in a slighter degree, of other social groups. Even religious communities, if they are sufficiently large, and if they deal with issues regarded as vital by their members, resort to coercion to preserve their unity. Religious organisations have usually availed themselves of a covert type of coercion (excommunication and the interdict) or they have called upon the police power of the state.

The limitations of the human mind and imagination, the inability of human beings to transcend their own interests sufficiently to envisage the interests of their fellowmen as clearly as they do their own makes force an inevitable part of the process of social cohesion. But the same force which guarantees peace also makes for injustice. "Power," said Henry Adams, "is poison"; and it is a poison which blinds the eyes of moral insight and lames the will of moral purpose. The individual or the group which organises any society, however social its intentions or pretensions, arrogates an inordinate portion of social privilege to itself. The two most obvious types of power are the military and the economic, though in primitive society the power of the priest, partly because he dispenses supernatural benefits and partly because he establishes public order by methods less arduous than those of the soldier, vies with that of the soldier and the landlord. The chief difference between the agrarian civilisations, which

lasted from the rise of ancient Babylon and Egypt to the fall of European feudalism, and the commercial and industrial civilisations of today is that in the former the military power is primary, and in the latter it has become secondary, to economic power. In agrarian civilisations the soldier becomes the landlord. In more primitive periods he may claim the land by his own military prowess. In later periods a grateful sovereign bestowed land upon the soldiers who defended his realm and consolidated his dominion. The soldier thus gained the economic security and the social prestige which could be exploited in further martial service to his sovereign. The business man and industrial overlord are gradually usurping the position of eminence and privilege once held by the soldier and the priest. In most European nations their ascendancy over the landed aristocrat of military traditions is not as complete as in America, which has no feudal traditions. In present-day Japan the military caste is still so powerful that it threatens to destroy the rising power of the commercial groups. On the pre-eminence of economic power in an industrial civilisation and its ability to make the military power its tool we shall have more to say later. Our interest at the moment is to record that any kind of significant social power develops social inequality. Even if history is viewed from other than equalitarian perspectives, and it is granted that differentials in economic rewards are morally justified and socially useful, it is impossible to justify the degree of inequality which complex societies inevitably create by the increased centralisation of power which develops with more elaborate civilisations. The literature of all ages is filled with rational and moral justifications of these inequalities, but most of them are specious. If superior abilities and services to society deserve special rewards it may be regarded as axiomatic that the rewards are always higher than the services warrant. No impartial society determines the rewards. The men of power who control society grant these perquisites to themselves. Whenever special ability is not associated with power, as in the case of the modern professional man, his excess of income over the average is ridiculously low in comparison with that of the economic overlords, who are the real centres of power in an industrial society. Most rational and social justifications of unequal privilege are clearly afterthoughts. The facts are created by the disproportion of power which exists in a given social system. The justifications are usually dictated by the desire of the men of power to hide the nakedness of their greed, and by the inclination of society itself to veil the brutal facts of human life from itself. This is a rather pathetic but understandable inclination; since the facts of man's collective life easily rob the average individual of confidence in the human enterprise. The inevitable hypocrisy, which is associated with all of the collective activities of the human race, springs chiefly from this source: that individuals have a moral code which makes the actions of collective man an outrage to their conscience. They therefore invent romantic and moral interpretations of the real facts, preferring to obscure rather than reveal the true character of their collective behavior. Sometimes they are as anxious to offer moral justifications for the brutalities from which they suffer as for those which they commit. The fact that the hypocrisy of man's group behavior, about which we shall have much more to say later, expresses itself not only in terms of self-justification but in terms of moral justification of human behavior in general, symbolises one of the tragedies of the human spirit: its inability to conform its collective life to its individual ideals. As individuals, men believe that they ought to love and serve each other and establish justice between each other. As racial, economic and national groups they take for themselves, whatever their power can command.

The disproportion of power in a complex society which began with the transmutation of the pastoral to the agrarian economy, and which destroyed the simple equalitarianism and communism of the hunting and nomadic social organisation, has perpetuated social injustice in every form through all the ages. Types of power have changed, and gradations of social inequality have varied, but the essential facts have remained unchanged. In Egypt the land was divided into three parts, respectively claimed by the king, the soldiers and the priests. The common people were landless. In Peru, where a rather remarkable despotic communism developed, the king owned all the land but gave the use of one third to the people, another third to the priests and kept one third for himself and his nobles. Needless to say, the commoners were expected to till not only their third but the other two thirds of the lands. In China, where the emperor maintained the right of eminent domain for many centuries, defeating the experiment in feudalism in the third century A.D., and giving each family inalienable rights in the soil which nominally belonged to him, there has probably been less inequality than in any other ancient empire. Nevertheless slavery persisted until a very recent day. In Japan the emperor gave the land to feudal princes, who again sublet it to the inferior nobility. The power of the feudal clans, originating in martial prowess and perpetuated through land ownership, has remained practically unbroken to this day, though the imperial power was ostensibly restored in the latter part of the last century, and growing industry has developed a class of industrial overlords who were partly drawn from the landed aristocracy. In Rome the absolute property rights of the *pater familias* of the patrician class gave him power which placed him on top of the social pyramid. All other classes, beginning with his own women and children, then the plebeians and finally the slaves, took their places in the various lower rungs of the social ladder. The efforts of the

Gracchi to destroy the ever growing inequality, which resulted from power breeding more power, proved abortive, as did the land reforms of Solon and Lycurgus in Greece. Military conquest gave the owners of the Roman *latifundia* hundreds of slaves by the labor of which they reduced the small freeholders to penury. Thus the decay of the Roman Empire was prepared; for a state which has only lords and slaves lacks the social cement to preserve it from internal disintegration and the military force to protect it from external aggression.

All through history one may observe the tendency of power to destroy its very *raison d'être*. It is suffered because it achieves internal unity and creates external defenses for the nation. But it grows to such proportions that it destroys the social peace of the state by the animosities which its exactions arouse, and it enervates the sentiment of patriotism by robbing the common man of the basic privileges which might bind him to his nation. The words attributed by Plutarch to Tiberius Gracchus reveal the hollowness of the pretensions by which the powerful classes enlist their slaves in the defense of their dominions: "The wild beasts in Italy had at least their lairs, dens and caves whereto they might retreat; whereas the men who fought and died for that land had nothing in it save air and light, but were forced to wander to and fro with their wives and children, without resting place or house wherein they might lodge.... The poor folk go to war, to fight and to die for the delights, riches and superfluities of others." (Plutarch, *The Parallel Lives*, see "Tiberius Gracchus," *Loeb Classical Library*, Vol. X). In the long run these pretensions are revealed and the sentiment of patriotism is throttled in the breasts of the disinherited. The privileged groups who are outraged by the want of patriotism among modern proletarians could learn the cause of proletarian internationalism by a little study of history. "It is absurd," says Diodorus Siculus, speaking of Egypt, "to entrust the defence of a country to people who own nothing in it," (Quoted by C. J. M. Letourneau, *Property; Its Origin and Development*, p. 277) a reflection which has applicability to other ages and other nations than his own. Russian communists of pure water pour their scorn upon European socialists, among whom patriotism outweighed class loyalty in the World War. But there is a very simple explanation for the nationalism of European socialists. They were not as completely, or at least not as obviously, disinherited as their Russian comrades.

The history of slavery in all ancient civilisations offers an interesting illustration of the development of social injustice with the growing size and complexity of the social unit. In primitive tribal organisation rights are essentially equal within the group, and no rights, or only very minimum rights are recognised outside of the group. The captives of war are killed. With the growth of agriculture the labor of captives becomes useful, and they are enslaved rather than destroyed. Since rightless individuals are introduced into the intimate life of the group, equality of rights disappears; and the inequality remains even after the slaves are no longer regarded as enemies and have become completely organic to the life of the group. The principle of slavery once established, is enlarged to include debt slaves, victims of the growing property system. The membership of the debt slaves in the original community at first guarantees them rights which the captive slaves do not enjoy. But the years gradually wipe out these distinctions and the captive slaves are finally raised to the status of debtor slaves. Thus the more humane attitudes which men practice within their social groups gains a slight victory over the more brutal attitudes towards individuals in other groups. But the victory is insignificant in comparison with the previous introduction of the morals of inter group relations into the intimate life of the group by the very establishment of slavery. Barbarism knows little or nothing of class distinctions. These are created and more and more highly elaborated by civilisation. The social impulses, with which men are endowed by nature are not powerful enough, even when they are extended by a growing intelligence, to apply with equal force toward all members of a large community. The distinction between slave and freeman is only one of the many social gradations which higher societies develop. They are determined in every case by the disproportion of power, military and economic, which develops in the more complex civilisations and in the larger social units. A growing social intelligence may be affronted by them and may protest against them, but it changes them only slightly. Neither the prophets of Israel nor the social idealists of Egypt and Babylon, who protested against social injustice, could make their vision of a just society effective. The man of power, though humane impulse may awaken in him, always remains something of the beast of prey. He may be generous within his family, and just within the confines of the group which shares his power and privilege. With only rare exceptions, his highest moral attitude toward members of other groups is one of warlike sportsmanship toward those who equal his power and challenge it, and one of philanthropic generosity toward those who possess less power and privilege. His philanthropy is a perfect illustration of the curious compound of the brutal and the moral which we find in all human behavior; for his generosity is at once a display of his power and an expression of his pity. His generous impulses freeze within him if his power is challenged or his generousities are accepted without grateful humility. If individual men of power should achieve more ethical attitudes than the one described, it remains nevertheless typical for them as a class; and is their practically unvarying attitude when they express themselves not as individuals but as a group.



The rise of modern democracy, beginning with the Eighteenth Century, is sometimes supposed to have substituted the consent of the governed for the power of royal families and aristocratic classes as the cohesive force of national society. This judgment is partly true but not nearly as true as the uncritical devotees of modern democracy assume. The doctrine that government exists by the consent of the governed, and the democratic technique by which the suffrage of the governed determines the policy of the state, may actually reduce the coercive factor in national life, and provide for peaceful and gradual methods of resolving conflicting social interests and changing political institutions. But the creeds and institutions of democracy have never become fully divorced from the special interests of the commercial classes who conceived and developed them. It was their interest to destroy political restraint upon economic activity, and they therefore weakened the authority of the state and made it more pliant to their needs. With the increased centralisation of economic power in the period of modern industrialism, this development merely means that society as such does not control economic power as much as social well-being requires; and that the economic, rather than the political and military, power has become the significant coercive force of modern society. Either it defies the authority of the state or it bends the institutions of the state to its own purposes. Political power has been made responsible, but economic power has become irresponsible in society. The net result is that political power has been made more responsible to economic power. It is, in other words, again the man of power or the dominant class which binds society together, regulates its processes, always paying itself inordinate rewards for its labors. The difference is that owners of factories, rather than owners of land, exert the power, and that it is more purely economic and less military than that which was wielded by the landed aristocrats. Needless to say, it is not completely divorced from military power. It may on occasion appropriate the police and the army of the state to defend its interests against internal and external foes. The military power has become the hired servant and is no longer the progenitor of economic ownership.

There will be opportunity to discuss these modern developments in the growth and use of power in society at greater length in another chapter. At the same time it will be possible to do justice to those aspects of the democratic creed which transcend the interests of the commercial and industrial classes and add a permanent contribution to the history of social life. At present it must suffice to discount a still widely held conviction that the democratic movement has given society a permanent solution for its vexing problems of power and justice.

Society is perennially harassed not only by the fact that the coercive factors in social life (which the limitations of human intelligence and imagination make inevitable) create injustice in the process of establishing peace; but also by the tendency of the same factors, which make for an uneasy peace within a social group, to aggravate intergroup conflict. Power sacrifices justice to peace within the community and destroys peace between communities. It is not true that only kings make war. The common members of any national community, while sentimentally desiring peace, nevertheless indulge impulses of envy, jealousy, pride, bigotry, and greed which make for conflict between communities. Neither is it true that modern wars are caused solely by the modern capitalistic system with its disproportion of economic power and privilege. Without an almost miraculous increase in human intelligence it will not be easy to resolve the conflicts of interest between various national communities even after the special privilege and the unequal power, which now aggravate international conflicts, have been destroyed. Nevertheless the whole history of mankind bears testimony to the fact that the power which prevents anarchy in intra-group relations encourages anarchy in intergroup relations. The kings of old claimed the loyalty and the sacrifices of their subjects in conflicts with other tyrants, in which the interests of the state and the welfare of the people were completely subordinated to the capricious purposes of the monarch. No personal whim, which a human being might indulge, is excluded from the motives, which have prompted monarchs to shed the blood of their unhappy subjects. Pride, jealousy, disappointed love, hurt vanity, greed for greater treasures, lust for power over larger dominions, petty animosities between royal brothers or between father and son, momentary passions and childish whims, these all have been, not the occasional but the perennially recurring, causes and occasions of international conflict. The growing intelligence of mankind and the increased responsibility of monarchs to their people have placed a check upon the caprice, but not upon the self-interest, of the men of power. They may still engage in social conflict for the satisfaction of their pride and vanity provided they can compound their personal ambitions with, and hallow them by, the ambitions of their group, and the pitiful vanities and passions of the individuals who compose the group. The story of Napoleon belongs to modern and not to ancient history. He could bathe Europe in blood for the sake of gratifying his overweening lust for power, as long as he could pose as the tool of French patriotism and as the instrument of revolutionary fervor. The fact that the democratic sentiment, opposed to the traditional absolutisms of Europe, could be exploited to create a tyranny more sanguinary and terrible than those which it sought ostensibly to destroy; and that the dream of equality, liberty and fraternity of the French Revolution could turn so quickly into the nightmare of Napoleonic imperialism is a tragic revelation of the

inadequacies of the human resources with which men must try to solve the problems of their social life. The childish vanity of the German Emperor, who wanted a large navy so that he could stand on equal footing with his royal English uncle at naval manoeuvres, helped to make the World War inevitable. (See *Memoirs of Prince Von Bülow*, Vol. III, p. 204) He would not have been permitted to indulge this vanity however had it not seemed compatible with the prejudices of his people and the economic necessities of a growing empire. Theodore Roosevelt belonged to a little junta which foisted the Spanish-American War upon the American people. The ambition and vanity which prompted him could be veiled and exalted because the will-to-power of an adolescent nation and the frustrated impulses of pugnacity and martial ardor of the pitiful little "men in the street" could find in him symbolic expression and vicarious satisfaction. The need of the modern industrial overlord for raw materials and markets, and rivalry over control of the undeveloped and unexploited portions of the earth are the occasion of modern wars. Yet the ambitions and greed of dominant economic groups within each nation are not the only cause of international conflict. Every social group tends to develop imperial ambitions which are aggravated, but not caused solely, by the lusts of its leaders and privileged groups. Every group, as every individual, has expansive desires which are rooted in the instinct of survival and soon extend beyond it. The will-to-live becomes the will-to-power. Only rarely does nature provide armors of defense which cannot be transmuted into instruments of aggression. The frustrations of the average man, who can never realise the power and the glory which his imagination sets as the ideal, makes him the more willing tool and victim of the imperial ambitions of his group. His frustrated individual ambitions gain a measure of satisfaction in the power and the aggrandisement of his nation. The will-to-power of competing national groups is the cause of the international anarchy which the moral sense of mankind has thus far vainly striven to overcome. Since some nations are more powerful than others, they will at times prevent anarchy by effective imperialism, which in our industrial period has become more covert than overt. But the peace is gained by force and is always an uneasy and an unjust one. As powerful classes organise a nation, so powerful nations organise a crude society of nations in each case the peace is a tentative one because it is unjust. It has been achieved only partially by a mutual accommodation of conflicting interests and certainly not by a rational and moral adjustment of rights. It will last only until those, who feel themselves too weak to challenge strength, will become, or will feel themselves, powerful enough to do so. It is not necessary to discount the moral influence of the League of Nations completely or to deny that it represents certain gains in the rational and moral organisation of society, to recognise that the peace of contemporary Europe is maintained by the force of French arms and that it will last only as long as the ingenuities of French statesmanship can maintain the combination of political and military forces which holds the people, who feel themselves defrauded by the Versailles Treaty, in check. Significantly the same power, which prompts the fear that prevents immediate action, also creates the mounting hatred which guarantees ultimate rebellion.

Thus society is in a perpetual state of war. Lacking moral and rational resources to organise its life, without resort to coercion, except in the most immediate and intimate social groups, men remain the victims of the individuals, classes and nations by whose force a momentary coerced unity is achieved, and further conflicts are as certainly created. The fact that the coercive factor in society is both necessary and dangerous complicates the whole task of securing both peace and justice. History is a long tale of abortive efforts toward the desired end of social cohesion and justice in which failure was usually due either to the effort to eliminate the factor of force entirely or to an undue reliance upon it. Complete reliance upon it means that new tyrants usurp the places of eminence from which more traditional monarchs are cast down. Tolstoian pacifists and other advocates of nonresistance, noting the evils which force introduces into society, give themselves to the vain illusion that it can be completely eliminated, and society organised upon the basis of anarchistic principles. Their conviction is an illusion, because there are definite limits of moral goodwill and social intelligence beyond which even the most vital religion and the most astute educational programme will not carry a social group, whatever may be possible for individuals in an intimate society. The problem which society faces is clearly one of reducing force by increasing the factors which make for a moral and rational adjustment of life to life; of bringing such force as is still necessary under responsibility of the whole of society; of destroying the kind of power which cannot be made socially responsible (the power which resides in economic ownership for instance); and of bringing forces of moral self-restraint to bear upon types of power which can never be brought completely under social control. Every one of these methods has its definite limitations. Society will probably never be sufficiently intelligent to bring all power under its control. The stupidity of the average man will permit the oligarch, whether economic or political, to hide his real purposes from the scrutiny of his fellows and to withdraw his activities from effective control. Since it is impossible to count on enough moral goodwill among those who possess irresponsible power to sacrifice it for the good of the whole, it must be destroyed by coercive methods and these will always run the peril of introducing new forms of injustice in place of those abolished. There is, for instance, as yet no clear proof that the power of economic overlords can be

destroyed by means less rigorous than communism has employed; but there is also no proof that communistic oligarchs, once the idealistic passion of a revolutionary period is spent, will be very preferable to the capitalistic oligarchs, whom they are to displace. Since the increasing complexity of society makes it impossible to bring all those who are in charge of its intricate techniques and processes, and who are therefore in possession of social power, under complete control, it will always be necessary to rely partly upon the honesty and self-restraint of those who are not socially restrained. But here again, it will never be possible to insure moral antidotes sufficiently potent to destroy the deleterious effects of the poison of power upon character. The future peace and justice of society therefore depend upon, not one but many, social strategies, in all of which moral and coercive factors are compounded in varying degrees. So difficult is it to avoid the Scylla of despotism and the Charybdis of anarchy that it is safe to hazard the prophecy that the dream of perpetual peace and brotherhood for human society is one which will never be fully realised. It is a vision prompted by the conscience and insight of individual man, but incapable of fulfillment by collective man. It is like all true religious visions, possible of approximation but not of realisation in actual history. The vitality of the vision is the measure of man's rebellion against the fate which binds his collective life to the world of nature from which his soul recoils. The vision can be kept alive only by permitting it to overreach itself. But meanwhile collective man, operating on the historic and mundane scene, must content himself with a more modest goal. His concern for some centuries to come is not the creation of an ideal society in which there will be uncoerced and perfect peace and justice, but a society in which there will be enough justice, and in which coercion will be sufficiently non-violent to prevent his common enterprise from issuing into complete disaster. That goal will seem too modest for the romanticists; but the romanticists have so little understanding for the perils in which modern society lives, and overestimate the moral resources at the disposal of the collective human enterprise so easily, that any goal regarded as worthy of achievement by them must necessarily be beyond attainment.