

RESPONSIBILITY AND REVOLT

by

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Responsibility and Revolt

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In his Dunning Trust Lecture for 1967, Principal LePan argues that erosion of the bases, particularly the moral bases, of authority tends to undermine responsibility and discredit those in positions of authority.*

SOME ten years ago I travelled down from Ottawa to Quebec City in an attempt to see Premier Duplessis on behalf of an enquiry that had been established by the federal government. It was a wild goose chase — as I had been warned it might be — and I spent an uncomfortable three or four days, cooling my heels in various ante-rooms, waiting for telephone calls that never came, and desperately rehearsing my French for an interview that never took place. But after I had given up and was about to return home, I spent a very pleasant evening with the family of a French-Canadian of my acquaintance for whom I had very considerable fondness and regard. At that time he was a man in his early sixties and had achieved quite substantial if modest position and reputation in his own society. He was properly proud of his house and before I left he showed me around it. We lingered particularly before a series of prints in the hall which showed old Canadian customs on the various festivals of the year — Christmas, Easter, St. Jean Baptiste Day and so on. The print for New Year's Day showed the father of a family bestowing

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his blessing on his wife and children who were kneeling at his feet, I was so startled by such a highly patriarchal relationship that I asked my friend whether he could remember such a scene from his own childhood. "Oh, yes", he said, "and the very same thing happens in my own family today."

I tell this little story as a prelude to my theme because it suggests very vividly, I think, how rapidly in our time attitudes towards responsibility and authority have been changing, and also because it suggests that the public manifestations of these changes have been accompanied by — and perhaps are in a large measure to be explained by — much more intimate and inward things. That incident occurred only twelve years ago. But I doubt whether even in Quebec City today there would be many families who would gather around the knees of the head of the household to receive his blessing on New Year's Day. The children would be much more likely, I am reliably informed — and certainly this would be true of Toronto — to be spending the day planning a demonstration against the university authorities for their brutal disregard of student opinion, or arranging for an exhibition of psychedelic art, or discussing their sex lives with interviewers from the C.B.C.

As I read the report last May by Mr. Stuart Keate on the dispute over "This Hour Has Seven Days", I was impressed by the evidence it presented of arbitrariness and ineffectiveness and mismanagement on the part of senior executives of the C.B.C. But I was almost equally impressed by the evidence that there had been a highly influential group of producers within the C.B.C. who were pursuing a policy of their own and who seemed to hold themselves accountable to no one even though their operations were being very amply supported from public funds. I was also fascinated by the disclosure that came only a few weeks earlier from a C.B.C. film director, of what had happened one morning when she was filming a sequence about boys on motor-cycles for a C.B.C. feature on contemporary youth. She had been out early taking shots of two youths on their motorcycles, one of them with a girl on the pillion behind them, and then had returned to the boys' apartment. But I should let her tell what followed in her own words:

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I instructed my cameraman to enter the apartment with the camera rolling. We found two boys whom we had not met before in the living room listening to music. I think one was doing steps to it. We kept moving forward with the camera still rolling and found ourselves in a bedroom with the girl lying on the bed under bedclothes with the two boys. They were talking and not engaged in sexual activity. I was frankly surprised but my every instinct as a director was briefly to capture the event on film and to leave it to the producer to decide later whether any of it could with propriety be used in the completed film. The cameraman acted entirely under my direction. I kept the camera rolling briefly and instructed him to take shots of the head and feet. I then stopped the camera. The cameraman and the boys left the room.

You will notice that the account has the inevitability necessary for all effective story-telling: the director's every instinct carries her past her every scruple. You will notice, too, that it has the necessary narrative surprise: she tells us herself that she was surprised by what she found, although in rereading her account I am left a little in doubt whether she was surprised because she found the boys and girl in bed together or because she found that they were *not* engaged in sexual activity. In any case, I confess I am a little surprised myself by the account. But I am not sure whether my surprise is more over her naivety or over her lack of responsibility toward the young people she had engaged or over her consuming mania for "verité" — which I suppose must be translated as the truth.

Well, you may say that there is nothing very new in these disclosures about what has been going on in the C.B.C. There have always been people, and people in positions of influence, who have acted either irresponsibly or else in a way to make it clear that they acknowledge no responsibility to any authority within organized society. That is true. But if you examine what we have learned about the C.B.C. during the past year, I think there is something new that emerges. It is the fact that those charged with responsibility for the Corporation have been unable to exercise an authority commensurate with their responsibility. The explanation may be found in their own inadequacy, or in an unfortunate series of circumstances, or in subtle but profound shifts in the public's attitude towards those in positions of ultimate responsibility — or perhaps in a combination of all these

reasons. But whatever the reasons, the result has been a situation in which the management apparently has often failed to make its policies stick, with the result that it has found itself for long periods in a state of half-protesting, half-ashamed complicity with policies and programmes with which it disagreed. That is something new, I think. It is also something new that such policies and programmes should be generously alimented and fostered from within the very Corporation that disapproves of them. Nor am I speaking of a situation that is found uniquely within the C.B.C. I would remind you that only a few years ago one of the great Christian communions in Canada commissioned a book by a popular entertainer and professed unbeliever to explain what was wrong with the church's life and work, and that the book was published with something very close to an official *imprimatur*. And it is credibly reported that even within the Roman discipline, many bishops and provincials find that their authority is much less extensive than it was and that they have to spend much of their time in discussions with young priests who want to get married and with nuns who have participated in sessions of group dynamics and now want to wear short skirts and enter the world.

I am speaking, then, of a wide and deep erosion of the bases, and particularly of the moral bases, of authority which is much wider than any of its Canadian manifestations and which has had the result of robbing responsibility of much of its effectiveness and authenticity. Some of the causes of what is happening are obvious enough. In our civilization, authority and society have been given moral sanction by tradition and by analogies drawn from within the family and from religion. But tradition has been rendered relatively powerless by the accelerating pace of change. Within the family the father has been dethroned, either through deposition or abdication, long before the son becomes of age, so that even revolt, as Mr. Hugh MacLennan has penetratingly pointed out in a letter to me, has been deprived of the legitimacy of taking place within an intact, Oedipal situation. The father was dead before there was any need for the son to slay him. And deicide has gone hand in hand with parricide. Nowadays it is no longer even necessary for a bishop of the Church of England to resign his see before announcing the death of God the Father. In broad

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outline, these altered circumstances are clear enough. And there are many other causes, which I will try to elaborate later, that are tending to discredit authority and to reduce the regard in which those in positions of responsibility are held.

I would not have the courage to take this for my theme if I did not feel in my own person the sway of many of the forces that are moving in this direction. If I thought of myself merely, or even mainly, as the principal of a college, I would be shy of examining the movements of thought and feeling that are giving responsibility such a bad press nowadays. But the fact is I am not fitted by temperament to be a Victorian father even if I had the opportunity. I have never ceased to be chafed, either, by the shams and hypocrisies that are perhaps unavoidable in any organized society, however free, and that are certainly prevalent enough in our own. The things that have always seemed most important to me are not things that can be confined within any social order, however loose its weave, and are certainly not things that our society values highly. I feel in myself the impulse to desert, and I know now that I always will. The art of poetry, too, which is the only art I know anything of at first hand, is an activity, I believe, that has rebelliousness at its core, even though it endeavours to make from that rebellion a new and deeper order. Nor have I been able since I came of age to find support in any articulated system of absolute values. (Perhaps I would seem less weather-beaten if I had!) So you will see that it is not with any lack of sympathy that I embark on an examination of the tides in contemporary life that are making the exercise of responsibility so difficult and so distrusted.

And yet When I ask myself why I have never entirely slipped the meshes of responsibility, nor ever been lacking in some ultimate respect for those who try to exercise it, I sometimes am at a loss to know how to answer. But gradually answers do come to me — and sometimes of a kind that I might not have expected. I have to recognize, for example, that ever since I was a boy, my senses have been scored and haunted by the music of Mozart, and that I have been permanently disabled for some forms of revolt by those marvellous compositions which, for all their personal profundity and rapture

and scintillation, for all their ideal perfection, yet often seem to offer hints of some possible and delectable order for human beings in society. I have to recognize as well that I have known at least a few men whose lives suggested that responsibility, far from being in any way conventional or diminishing, could be instead a means for sounding a very wide range of human possibilities. When I remember, for example, the passionate intelligence and intensity that General McNaughton brought to a long succession of public responsibilities, the figure of him in my imagination grows large and emblematic and luminous; it shines with something like genius, it explores the far reaches of the human condition as might a great artist or scientist. Finally, I never entirely forget the sheer constancy and courage of some of my friends who have taken on themselves the responsibility of dealing, day in and day out, with the confused and turbulent and endless flow of national problems and who have striven not to be overwhelmed by them nor to allow their humanity or their generosity to be diminished by them, or their largeness of mind. Perhaps I need hardly add that I am thinking pre-eminently of the present Prime Minister of Canada. Remembering that inward honour, which is not infringed by success or failure or popularity or unpopularity, I cannot but be disturbed by the indications I see that responsibility as such is becoming more and more suspect. I cannot help feeling that it would be worthwhile to try to sift the causes a little more deeply and, in the process, perhaps, try to restore to responsibility some of the moral authority that it seems to have lost.

I will begin by trying to draw out some of the implications of the simple fact of change. Change has become so constant, so pervasive and so rapid that those charged with responsibility in society are obliged to get whatever purchase on it they can. And one of the few ways that that can be done is through prediction. And prediction almost always involves reducing human problems to statistical terms. The result is that the ground around those who take decisions is littered with forecasts of what the Gross National Product will be in 1980, or when the current hog cycle will reach its peak, or how we will vote if a federal election is held this year, or how much Fab we will buy next month, or what the United States' balance of payments will be

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over the next decade. I remember when I was leaving Washington to become the Secretary and Director of Research of the Royal Commission on Canada's Economic Prospects having a conversation with Mr. Dean Acheson in which he described to me how much he had relied, when he had been Secretary of State under President Truman, on research and particularly on statistical research, to throw up the problems to which he should direct his attention and often to suggest solutions into the bargain. When I showed some mild surprise, saying that I had supposed that he would have depended more on the judgement and intuition of American diplomatic observers throughout the world, he replied that, no, that might once have been the case but it was so no longer: now it was the figures that threw the problems into relief and often also indicated the direction in which to look for the answers. So it is with great things and small. Quantification is necessary for analysis and prediction. And before there can be statistical forecasts, of course, there has to be statistical information about past experience. So there are endless series to be compiled about butter consumption and margarine consumption, and the flow of traffic on Highway 401, and how much the average housewife spends on detergents, and how much the average wage-earner spends on beer and spirits, and how he voted in 1963 and 1965, and whether he is for or against birth control or aid to underdeveloped countries or fluoridation. All this is raw material to be fed into statistical models, which are the indispensable machinery for producing predictions. The models may be many-sided and highly sophisticated. They may have so many moving parts that you can tell from them, within the limits of the hypotheses on which they are constructed, what the effect will be on total output, or life expectancy, or juvenile delinquency, if X per cent of the population gives up drinking and takes to smoking marijuana instead. But however much of a polyhedron the model may be, it can never duplicate the orb'd fullness of human life. And however many figures you put down on a chart, you can never join them into the profile of a man.

Or so it seems to me. And I suspect that many of the public have an inkling of rather the same sort. If the exercise of responsibility is less respected than it used to be, I think that is partly due to an im-

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precise but widely-diffused awareness that decisions nowadays are taken more often than not as a result of peering into a sea of numbers that float in crystal balls that are shrouded from the eye of the ordinary man. The statistical operations I have mentioned are so extensive that they require many hands to carry them out. But the number of individuals who understand the processes of data-gathering and model-building and prediction is small. And the number of individuals in our society who are in a position to make use of the end-products of these occult processes, if perhaps larger than the number of those who understand how the results are reached, is still very limited. The public has an inkling that decisions affecting its future are constantly being taken on the basis of statistical evidence that it cannot hope to grasp or even perhaps to glimpse. That sets up a gap of distrust between the few who take decisions and the vast majority who are affected by the decisions taken. And the public has more than an inkling, I believe, that this method of reaching decisions, however necessary and however skilfully and successfully carried out, always runs the risk of compromising the humanity of those who are affected, since, even if it is for their own good, they have been reduced to numbers in the process. That sets up not only distrust, but some measure of resentment.

There is another aspect of the fact of change that is relevant. It is to be found in the present nature of the engines of change. What are these principally, what are the main driving wheels that make change so constant and so remorseless, that keep making jets larger and faster, highways more costly and more fatal, and life in cities more and more noxious? Well, some of them are the drive of business ambition; and the onward logic of defence planning; and the organized advance of scientific research. And all these forces have become more highly autonomous than they were and less easily harnessed to felt human needs. Professor J. K. Galbraith has pointed out how much less nowadays the level of business production is determined by the level of demand or even by the level of effective demand; advertising and new credit facilities have stretched that link almost to the breaking-point and have transformed production into something much more like an independent function of society than it ever was before.

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In the field of defence, it is only with great difficulty that the civilian authorities in the most powerful countries in the world can impose ceilings on expenditures and limits on planned military requirements; and the ceilings continue to be pierced and the limits to be broken, and no doubt they will continue to be, so long as the present state of nuclear tension persists and no effective tranquillizer has been found to abate the fear of being outstripped in the weapons race.

In the background is the steadily mushrooming growth of scientific research which is puffed up by very large expenditures of public funds but which is still very little responsive to public control. How could it be when the art of fashioning criteria to decide between supporting one branch of science and another is still in its infancy, when so few outsiders know what scientists are up to, and when scientists are so avid to further their own interests and curiosity? Some of you may remember the remarks made by Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer in 1954 when he was being questioned by the Personnel Security Board of the Atomic Energy Commission of the United States, about the part he had played in the decision taken in 1949 — it was reversed two years later — not to go forward and produce a hydrogen bomb:

I do not think we want to argue technical questions here, [he said,] and I do not think it is very meaningful for me to speculate as to how we would have responded had the technical picture at that time been more as it was later.

However it is my judgement in these things that when you see something that is technically sweet, you go ahead and do it, and you argue about what to do about it only after you have had your technical success. That is the way it was with the atomic bomb. I do not think anyone opposed making it; there was some debate about what to do with it after it was made. I cannot very well imagine if we had known in 1949 what we had got to know by early 1951 that the tone of our report would have been the same.

In other words, when you see something that is "technically sweet", you keep the cameras rolling, whatever the implicit risk to human existence or however fantastic the cost. To have any control over an appetite of that sort, when our society has been so radically pervaded and shaped by science, and when what scientists do is

usually so arcane to those who are not scientists, is obviously extremely difficult. But the bills that government is having to meet for scientific research have become so large that an attempt cannot be avoided. I have been particularly interested and encouraged by the discussions that have been going on for some three years now in the pages of *Minerva* about the criteria for scientific choice and by the consensus that seems to be emerging there among scientists and non-scientists alike that criteria drawn from outside science as well as criteria drawn from within science itself are relevant when decisions have to be made about what research to support. It will likely be a long time, though, before techniques have been perfected for making such choices in the best interests of society as a whole.

In the meantime, many of those who are particularly alert and sensitive to change — I mean particularly the young — may be forgiven if they have the sense that many of the most powerful forces in the society where they live are almost completely out of control, and roam the streets wantonly so that you have the feeling sometimes of being lost and afraid, as you might when you have forgotten where you parked your car under the new City Hall in Toronto and you trudge endlessly and aimlessly back and forth along the circling ramps, hardly knowing whether you are moving up or down, the grading is arranged with such infernal cunning. They may be forgiven, too, in such circumstances, if their attitude towards those above them in positions of responsibility is different from that of their elders.

One of the deepest causes of the diminished authority to those in positions of social, and especially political, responsibility is the sense that they seem to be presiding over forces that have got out of control. The war in Viet Nam is a cardinal illustration. When the State of the Union Message was delivered for the first time over television in January, 1966, by the President of the United States, he made it clear to the whole world that he didn't know where he was going. I confess that I have a good deal of sympathy with President Johnson in the excruciating dilemmas he faces in Viet Nam and in the almost impossible situation, partly of his own making, and partly an inheritance from the policies of President Kennedy and President Eisenhower, in which he finds himself there. I am not concerned at this

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moment with praise or blame. I am concerned rather to underline the plain fact that the President of the United States on that occasion was seen around the world to be going into the dark, not knowing where the course might lead or what decisions might lie ahead of him. After such an exhibition, authority is bound to seem morally diminished and power less valid.

But, of course, power has been undergoing a deeper and deeper moral eclipse for more than half a century. Although it is difficult perhaps even to imagine a continuing human society from which power would be completely absent, the naked operation of power has never been a pretty thing to watch. And when power has been used as it has been in our own age to wipe out whole cities, to exterminate millions of Jews in the gas-chambers and other millions in Siberia, and to inflict lasting genetic damage, the very idea of power must suffer as a consequence, and those who are implicated in its operations, however restrained and responsible and humane they may be, must be affected by the spreading taint. For the taint does spread. It affects not only those in positions of political power but also those in other positions of responsibility in society as well, since the prerogative instances of the expressions of power in our own age have been so total that they have involved the cooperation of all the established institutions in society. That is another of the deep and continuing causes of the disaffection of some in our society, and particularly the young, from those in positions of responsibility. And when power has now become the power to obliterate the species, when it has fulfilled itself in such a towering crescendo of absurdity, it is not surprising that some of the young, and not necessarily the worst of them, should want to withdraw from organized society entirely, if that is what our society issues in and means, and set up a new life for themselves in catacombs here and there, that may be barbarous in appearance and yet deeply human by instinct and intent.

Our human situation today is without parallel in history. But it has some resemblance to other periods when there has also been a continuing crisis of power; and it is calling forth some of the same responses. The slogan, for example, "Make love, not war" echoes, however barbarously and heretically, the intransigent protest of Ter-

tullian in the third century of the Christian era, against the power of the Roman Empire. "The fact that Christ rejected an earthly kingdom," he declared, "should be enough to convince you that all secular powers and dignities are not merely alien from, but hostile to, God." And in another place Tertullian wrote, "I owe no obligation to forum, campus or senate. I stay awake for no public function. I make no effort to monopolize the platform. I pay no heed to any administrative duty. I shun the voter's booth and the jurymen's bench . . . I serve neither as magistrate or soldier. I have withdrawn from the life of secular society." I have deliberately quoted from one of the early Christian fathers in order to suggest the depth of justification there may be for some of the spirit of revolt in present day society. But I should add that within less than a century of Tertullian's death, the Christian community had entered into the first of its many concordats with the state and so had initiated that long and tangled institutional story in which the works of power and the works of love are so curiously intertwined and which parallels so disturbingly the intertwining of power and love in the lives of individuals. For love and war are not always so antithetical as that crass slogan would suggest — or as the young might suppose.

Revolt has always been a generic prerogative of the young. Their eyes are less dimmed by custom and habit, so that they can see the world more clearly as it is, with all its madness and cruelty. Their veins are more thrilled by "bright shoots of everlastingness". Their palates are still fresh with the taste of remembered perfection. They still have the strength and energy to make them feel that they can bring about something better than what they see in the world about them. In all these ways they have the advantage of a man of fifty, even if he still retains some glimmering afterglow of all those qualities. But in the close connection between revolt and youth is to be found still another clue, I think, to the dwindled respect there is nowadays for responsibility. I am not thinking so much of the demographic facts that indicate that almost half of the population in a country like Canada are under 25. What I have in mind is rather that youth in our time constitutes something like a new class. If the revolutions of the past two centuries have not succeeded in obliterating tradi-

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tional class distinctions based on property or birth or money, they have at least smoothed them down a great deal and sharply depreciated their prestige and importance. In their place is growing up, it seems to me, a new structure of class distinctions based on youth as the new aristocracy. It is they who are catered for, looked up to, admired; it is they who set new styles and whom everyone else would emulate if they could. No doubt such a new class structure is as open to abuse and perversion as any in the past. But for myself I cannot say that I altogether regret this new development. At least in the new structure there is an inherent democratic bias. And certainly "there is no damned merit in it!" If there is to be an aristocracy in our society, I think I would almost as soon see it based on youth as on anything else. But one consequence is that, as youth acquires increasing prestige, so does revolt, which is a natural accompaniment of youth; and the respect paid to responsibility is likely to decline proportionately. And it may be noticed in passing that some of the revolt of the young nowadays, of some students, for example, differs in one fundamental characteristic from similar revolts in the past: instead of wishing to substitute one social order for another, it is a revolt against all forms of organized society. How could the end be otherwise when the causes of revolt are so radical and fundamental?

The last cause that I will mention of what has been happening is the decay of absolute values and of the religious and philosophical systems that have supported them. It seems to me that until recently this process has been shielded from us in Canada by the exceptional position that Christianity has had in the life of this country. I myself once wrote of Canada as "A Country without a Mythology". But, of course, ever since the beginning almost everyone in Canada has accepted, at least ostensibly and for most public purposes, the Christian myth — and the Christian faith, and Christian values. It has not been so in many other Western countries. A Canadian reading Albert Camus' "L'Homme Revolté" (or "The Rebel" or "Man in Revolt"), after he has got over the initial shock of finding the Marquis de Sade regarded as a serious political thinker, will be hardly more surprised by Camus' apparent ignorance of the long tradition of Anglo-Saxon political theory stressing the importance of constitu-

tional checks and balances (that can be traced back at least to the time of John Locke) than he will be by the welter of continental ideologies, often with some absolutist kernel at their core, that Camus deals with. He will be surprised because many of these ideologies have hardly affected Canadian life at all. And if they have failed to, one of the main reasons is the dominant position that Christianity has always enjoyed here. As a people, we have had little acquaintance with other ideologies because we have been attached to an alternative and rival ideological system. But now all that is changing. Increasingly the absolutes of the Christian faith are being questioned even within the Christian church itself; and elsewhere they are increasingly being rejected or ignored. For some they are still as valid as they ever were. But the process has gone so far that I think it is fair to say that Christianity as a system of absolute faith and values has now far less hold than it had in Canada even twenty-five years ago. And I see no other system of absolute values arising to take its place.

As absolute values fade, their place is taken by the quest for absolute experiences. I mean those experiences that are so complete that they seem to involve the whole personality while they last, experiences that seem to be quite free of contingency or qualification, experiences that partake of something of the eternal because they seem to take place outside of time or, better perhaps, because they seem to annihilate it. These are also a particular province of the young, since the old know that they cannot last, or at least that their cells cannot long support them. In the civilization of the West, they have always been suspect in the eyes of the great philosophic and religious systems, and when not placed under the interdict, have been held to be only marginally permissible. Now with the weakening of metaphysical systems and metaphysical restraints, they come to the centre of the stage. It seems to me that there is in man, or at least in most men, or in many men, a thirst for the absolute that will find satisfaction in one way if not in another. If it fails to find satisfaction in any system of absolute beliefs and absolute values, it will seek for it through passion or sex or the hallucinations induced by drugs. This is the deepest revolt of all, I think. If the philosophers will forgive me, I would venture to call it a metaphysical revolt, since it

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thrives through the death of metaphysical systems, since it seeks in personal experience some substitute for the absolute that might have been supplied by metaphysics, and since it strives through nature to go beyond it. The more it spreads, the harder must become the task of those in positions of responsibility, since by its very nature it aspires to complete self-sufficiency and a complete absence of those moral and emotional affiliations without which responsibility has no thread for its looms.

This form of revolt has its beginnings in the effort to restore meaning to life through transcendent personal experience. But it runs the risk of deepening the very meaninglessness it wishes to defeat by setting up a Manichaeian dualism with a few significant personal experiences on the one hand, and on the other, the whole of the rest of human experience and the whole of human society consigned to outer darkness and indifference. That is true. Yet it would not be fair to place on a relatively few acts of isolated, if extreme revolt, much of the blame for the sense of meaninglessness which seems so prevalent and so inescapable. That has been produced much more by the decay of religious and philosophic systems, by the willed mass horrors of our age, and by the debauching of power. Even if there were no individuals who were trying to escape from social responsibilities and to find some transitory heaven of their own, we would still be involved in a landscape that seems drained of meaning.

Of that sombre and almost featureless panorama the best rendering that I know is to be found in the work of Samuel Beckett, and particularly in his trilogy of novels, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*. There the sparks of light are few and intermittent and soon go out, the tangled underbrush encroaches right up to the limits of such few towns as there are, the most common buildings are hospitals and asylums, the land is as depopulated as though it had been stricken by plague. The few wanderers who are left have no idea what errands they have been sent on, or where they are going. When a meeting occurs by chance in the darkness, it ends as often as not in casual violence. If the figures are whole when they set out, they are usually maimed or crippled on their travels. At the end there is only death without any trace of dignity, or else an "I" who has been

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stripped of possessions, affections, faculties, even of most of his organs. And he leaves behind him crutches, a battered bicycle, a torn notebook.

It has occurred to me that something of the course we have travelled in this century might be suggested by setting down three quotations from three writers, all of them born in Dublin, each approximately 25 years after the other.

George Bernard Shaw said that it was reading Karl Marx in the early years of the century that had made him a man with a mission.

James Joyce wrote to Nora Barnacle, who ran off with him from Ireland to the Continent, that she had made him a man.

At the end of Samuel Beckett's *Molloy*, one of the characters is made to say, "I have been a man long enough. I shall not put up with it any more. I shall not try any more."

But it would be unfair, both to our times and to Samuel Beckett, if I were to stop with that quotation. For the last novel in the trilogy, *The Unnamable*, which is the simplest, the most rhapsodic, the most moving of the three books, closes with these words: "I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on." And with these words we reach the simplest, barest root, both of responsibility and revolt. From some such radical affirmation of primal courage have flowered the great acts of revolt against society, and the great acts to preserve and continue it. Perhaps it is not even too much to hope that among all the possibilities that are implicit in the tempestuous change of our time, there is a possibility that from that same root may leaf out in time a spreading order of thought and ideas that will be more comprehensive, more human, richer in difference, more rippling with freedom, than any that have been known in the past.

But the time for that is not yet. For the time being we must do what we can with such provisional wisdom as we can find.

If I am at all accurate in my analysis of the forces that are sapping the moral bases of responsibility and depriving it of authority, it is obvious that it will not be easy for the exercise of responsibility to recover acknowledged authenticity and regain some of the scope it needs if it is to be effective. The traditional supports of responsibility

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that have been drawn by analogy from the church and the family have largely disappeared and are unlikely to be reinstated. The accelerating rate of change is weakening the influence of tradition among wider and wider swaths of the population, and is operating in other ways to discredit those in positions of responsibility. In a time of rapid change, the predictive arts become more necessary, more refined, more subtle, and — it seems to me — more widely resented. The principal engines of change often seem uncontrolled or even uncontrollable, so that those in positions of seeming authority forfeit respect because they appear to be presiding over events that go as they will. The fabric of absolute beliefs and absolute values is in tatters, and in its place is a craving for absolute experiences. Power in one form or another is still necessary if society is to be held together, but power has been invalidated for many in our age by the monstrous uses to which it has been put in this century, and by its culmination in the power to destroy the species. In such circumstances, what can those charged with responsibility do to restore their credit? What can they do, I mean, beyond what the best of those with responsibility have always done in all ages and all countries — that is to go on, to go on day after day, taking decisions without full knowledge, judging in ambiguous situations and without the benefit of absolute standards, knowing that no one with responsibility can ever be guiltless and learning to live with that knowledge?

What can they do beyond that? Perhaps something. But even that something is not likely to change matters much unless there is an answering effort of imagination and character on the part of those whose lives may seem to them to be entirely lived out far from any focus of responsibility. For all of us have duties in this regard; and if all of us are among the ruled in some relationships, we all are, or will be, among the rulers in other relationships. One of the things, I think, that is required from those of us who are ruled is not to ask for too much. I am not thinking, perhaps I hardly need say, in economic terms, of demands for increased social security benefits and increased coverage. During my lifetime great progress has been made by society in shielding us all from at least the worst effects of the accidents and misfortunes to which we are all subject — and

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that is all to the good. Gaps remain to be filled and levels of protection to be raised, and it is healthy that demands for such improvements should continue to press against the total resources of society available to meet them. What I have in mind, though, is something quite different. As society comes closer and closer to the point where it can satisfy the physical wants of all its members, and as concurrently the influence of religious and metaphysical systems declines, the claims of subtler human cravings become more naked and more insistent. They cannot be satisfied by government. They cannot be satisfied, I believe, by institutions of any kind, although perhaps they sometimes may be satisfied through institutions. To ask that governments or other institutions fill that role is to ask too much of them. That is to court continuing disappointment and frustration. All that governments and other institutions can do is to weave the loose free networks within which such individual cravings, of so many different kinds and qualities, can conceivably find and consummate their satisfactions. And that suggests another sort of tact and forbearance that is required from those of us who are ruled. The networks of freedom in any society are complicated and delicate and far from invulnerable. To forget that, to forget that they require constant care and instead to focus exclusive attention on the quality of the experiences that take place within them and that they help to make possible, is to court not only disappointment but disaster.

And from our rulers, what is required from them? Well, as I have suggested, all the things that have been required of them in the past, and particularly that daily courage and resilience which is such a rare and remarkable thing, and which is so difficult to describe to those who have never watched it in practice. And then, too, that they should heed Cromwell's warning that they "may be mistaken" and Lord Acton's, that "power tends to corrupt". But in our new circumstances, I think there are other things required of them as well. Those who have been chosen to govern must have power and must have the courage to wield it. But it is an imperative of our situation that they use such power as they have been given to curb power that is out of control and bring it to the test of the public good. Obviously that is easier said than done. But it is equally obvious how necessary

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that undertaking is if we are to have a truly human society. More largely still, it may even be that if we are to have a human society at all on the face of the globe, those who govern us must be working for a regime in the relationship between states where power itself will be transcended or transformed. Or so at least I would see the developing implications of our own legacy of political ideas that have insisted for so many centuries that government should be responsive, responsible, and limited.

In domestic affairs it seems to me that those who rule us must increasingly try to see their tasks in a different light than they ever have before. For more than three centuries it has been the task of the liberal imagination and the liberal will to break the shackles of the past, the shackles of privilege, monopoly, arbitrary power — and that task, in some form or another, to some degree or another, is probably unending. But for fifty years or more it has been taken as an additional task by the liberal imagination to give positive content to freedom by promoting directly the economic and social welfare of families and individuals. That task is not done either, and will probably be with us for decades. Enough progress, however, has been made in both directions to permit energies now to be released for still a further task — and that is to create a human environment about the lives of all of us. That task also will probably prove not only difficult but unending. Even if it were finally achieved, the creation of a human environment about our lives would provide no sure appeasement for human cravings, aspirations, longings. But it would be something good in itself, and it might offer suggestions and provide means for a wider range of truly human satisfactions.

If progress is to be made in the direction of creating a human environment about our lives, it seems to me essential that there be brought into the foreground an image of man in all his complexity, mystery, and splendour. I say an image of man because that is the way my mind moves — in images. But it must be an image large enough to include great differences within itself, differences biological, temperamental, psychic. It might be an image, I would suggest, of man rising from the sea, with the surf, the brine, breaking round him, and with all the sea's potency and potentiality in his veins, an

image of man, the critic and master of nature, and yet its finest testimony, with each of his organs bound oracularly to the cosmos as they appear in the old almanacs. So seen — a creature of divided allegiance, the product of nature and yet its judge and master, born of it, and yet separated from it by consciousness and self-consciousness, and still suffering, whether nobly or ignobly, from that separation — so seen, it might be more possible to create about him, about us, a truly free and human order. It is nothing less, in any case, than some such image that I would commend to those who are set over us, bidding them at the same time remember that the creature so figured has sometimes on his tongue the taste of some impossible consummation in the future or of some remembered perfection, now hauntingly, irrevocably, lost.

Those intimations are of moments out of time. And we need — if I may use words from a poem by Boris Pasternak — “We need eternity to stand among us like a Christmas tree”. If I am asked what those words mean, I am abashed and unsure. But as a gloss on them, I might offer a sentence by a modern philosopher who was a great cleanser and analyst of language, Ludwig Wittgenstein. “If we take eternity to mean”, he wrote in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, “not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present.” I think that Pasternak would have agreed with that. So do I. But I think that Pasternak perhaps meant more than that. And so would I. But however the words are taken they will serve to suggest both one of our deepest needs, and also the difficulty of those who, called on to rule, must try to create a human environment about us that will leave large room for human differences and human longings.

To the extent that they are trying to do that, however fallibly, however imperfectly, I can see no reason to deny to those in positions of responsibility the tribute that is their due because of the necessity and difficulty of their task. They have nowadays little support from tradition or from authority in the family or the church. They must deal with forces that are largely out of control and which they must yet try to curb. They work with the possibility of annihilation, of world-wide annihilation, always at their back. The causes of revolt,

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particularly of revolt among the young, are deeper than they have ever been before. There are no widely-recognized religious or philosophic systems to redeem the world from meaninglessness. And yet, in the midst of these difficulties, they must go on.

And so must we, finding in ourselves such courage as we can; the young, I would hope, making of all their youth and ardour the best use they know, since the taste of perfection, the taste of the absolute, fades too quickly into the taste of death, and since youth, if it is today a kind of new aristocracy, is an aristocracy more surely to go to the guillotine than any other in the past; and those of us who are older, remembering — but not allowing our memories to turn into bitterness — developing, I would hope, a strength that has sweetness rather than bitterness at its core, and striving in the face of meaninglessness not only to survive but to begin to sketch a lattice of ideas that may be a fit counterpart for the more human environment that we so greatly need. Those too are difficult tasks. If we shoulder them with honour, it may be easier for us to find it in our hearts to pay honour to those who are charged with the political and social responsibility for providing and ensuring us a human habitation.

DUNNING TRUST LECTURES

The aim of the Dunning Trust Lectures, established in 1948 in honour of The Honourable Charles Avery Dunning, Chancellor of Queen's University, 1940-1958, is "to promote understanding and appreciation of the supreme importance of the dignity, freedom and responsibility of the individual person in human society."
