

## NEW RESPONSIBILITIES

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**I**N THE LAST few years we — all the members of the human race — have been precipitated into a new kind of world, where the conditions of survival are quite different from those of any previous time. Our ancient pattern of survival, by groups in competition to the death with other groups, was universal and went almost unchallenged throughout some thousands of years. Security depended on the defensibility of the group and on its ability to attack other groups successfully, to win wars. Only about fifteen years ago it became evident that no group on earth could any longer count on its ability to defend itself or to attack other groups without itself risking complete destruction. This situation is new on earth, totally unknown to our ancestors or parents, and not provided for in any of our national constitutions, institutions, or social, economic, political, or moral systems. Only a few international organizations, the United Nations and its specialized agencies in particular, were, to some extent at least, designed or developed for survival under these new conditions. Even they are largely controlled by attitudes that belong to the prenuclear era and are quite inappropriate to the present and future reality.

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One of the signs of this cataclysmic change, and end of an era, was the emergence of a new word to describe a new phenomenon, "overkill," which simply means the ability to kill more people than there are. With our present armament — nuclear, biological, chemical, and conventional — we are capable of killing everyone on earth, including ourselves, at least three or four times over, which to any sane mind would appear to be enough. In spite of that fact, large numbers of people earnestly believe that if we can arrange to be able to kill everyone on earth, including ourselves, say twenty times over instead of only three or four times, in some unknown way we shall be safer and less frightened.

Obviously this is ridiculous, but such beliefs are not open to reasonable consideration in many people, because they are founded on conscience values learned early in life. Most of us were taught in childhood by very forceful systems of myth, heroes, and biased histories that when we feel threatened the appropriate, right, and effective response is to increase as much as possible our ability to kill and then to "negotiate from strength," which means to threaten our enemies or potential enemies into behaving as we want them to. This has been the standard method of group survival throughout all human social history, and its representation in all our cultures and in most personalities is planted deeply.

In fact, that old pattern was usable only when we could win wars, when groups could survive at the expense of the destruction of other groups. We can no longer defend our family, clan, tribe, city-state, principality, kingdom, empire, or nation, and the methods we used to do so in the past are obsolete and suicidal. The human race itself has now become the survival group. We shall survive as members of the human race or not at all, but our traditions of exclusive concern for the survival and welfare of

lesser groups, and at whatever expense to anyone else, are very strong and now very dangerous.

**W**E HAVE ENTERED an age of universal co-operation or universal death, with no previous experience of such a situation and no appropriate training or traditions of concern for the survival and welfare of the human race. The occasion for such concern had not arisen until now; the human race has never been threatened before and so we have no national institutions designed for dealing with such threats, or even for recognizing them. That responsibility has not yet been allocated to any of our national institutions simply because it is new and most of us as individuals are still almost exclusively concerned about the welfare of the group into which each of us happens to have been born or adopted.

Because of our upbringing, most of us are able to ignore even major threats to the human race; we just did not learn to feel or think that way. Consequently little is being done about such acute threats as the food situation, which also is new. It is not that hunger is new — it is an ancient and persistent evil — but that attitudes about it on the part of hungry people have been changed. Until recently, resignation was to be found wherever there was hunger and starvation. Crop failures and famine were commonly accepted as acts of punishment by an angry neglected god or an antagonistic one, or as just one of those things about which nothing could be done. Indeed, until recently, nothing effective could be done about most famines. Adequate stores of food and transportation did not exist, and communications and institutions for effective action had not been developed.

During the last ten or fifteen years, however, the whole situation has changed. There are still many hungry people, perhaps more than ever before, but resignation is rapidly

disappearing from the earth. All hungry people know now that their hunger is not necessary. The world *could* feed all the world's people adequately and the attitude of hungry people is very simple and valid: "My children are ill from lack of food because the world's well-fed prosperous people don't care," which for the first time in human history is true. The underdeveloped consciences of the prosperous people do not make them uncomfortable enough to force effective action, and it is possible for them to ignore the intense new hostility being generated in many millions of people by unnecessary deprivation of food.

Another of these new and acute threats to the human race is our frighteningly rapid increase in population, the so-called population explosion of recent years. Again, any representation of concern about this threat in human consciences is almost universally lacking. For our ancestors, rapid increases in the numbers of people in our family, clan, or tribe meant greater security, power, prosperity, and prestige, and so was highly desirable. If we became too large for our space, we could and did take what we wanted from weaker groups, which also was admirable and was indulged in by all the best people. Throughout the world the only social security for most old people was to have enough surviving children and grandchildren to provide food, clothing, and housing. In many cultures not more than ten per cent of the children survived to adulthood, and in all cultures the survival rate was far below its present rapidly rising levels.

While millions of unwanted children are still being born, doomed to hunger and misery throughout their short lives, most of the discussion about this highly dangerous situation still revolves about the question of whether this or that method of reducing birth rates is respectable or allowable according to the rules of the ancestors, who, incidently, knew nothing whatever about this situation.

This, again, is a problem of underdeveloped consciences in people afraid to make their own thinking appropriate to the reality of the present and future.

A further example of this same pattern of persistence of now inappropriate behavior is seen in relation to natural resources. Many of the newly developing and poor countries are still being used as suppliers of irreplaceable natural resources, with little regard for the welfare of people whose birthright is being wantonly dissipated.

**I**N THESE AND MANY OTHER AREAS, the old patterns are being repeated, showing concern only for the welfare of our own traditional group at whatever cost to other people, a failure of development to the levels of identification that have now become essential to continued existence. We continue to behave as though we were still in the past era of tenable exclusive nationalism. It is important to note that the areas on which we are failing to behave effectively have certain factors in common. They are new situations, unknown to our ancestors, and they are areas in which ancestral patterns have been implanted very early in the development of our personalities and have been strongly reinforced by familiar and group attitudes. They are also in areas where ancestral behavior is now demonstrably inadequate and very dangerous. Generally, we have been trained from infancy to accept without question the systems of values into which we happen to have been born and the behavior patterns built on those values. We have been expected, under strong sanctions, to submit tamely to the accident of our birth, to believe whatever our parents have believed before us, as most of our parents have themselves done.

This is a part of the usual training of children in all cultures, to follow ancestral and parental pathways, regardless of whether circumstances and knowledge have

changed. Belief and conformity have been given the highest moral approbation, making unquestioning obedience to the local native customs more admissible than effective intellectual functioning. Indeed, any visible tendency of children or even adults to think independently of local custom is strongly discouraged and even punished as heresy, disloyalty, or subversion. These multiple strong pressures, commonly reinforced still further by magic religious sanctions, are powerful causes of impotence in the presence of new situations, and tend to cripple the capacity for appropriate change, which is essential to the survival of any form of life.

Any type of cultural change, no matter to what general and widespread benefit, will involve a real or fancied threat to some personal or sectional vested interest. When such local interest has been given primary moral value in the emotions of the interested parties, as has happened with national sovereignty, even essential changes will be fought with every available weapon, as is happening now. To teach children that perfection has been attained in any human pattern — constitutional, legal, political, educational, institutional, moral, or other — is to make appropriate changes in that pattern difficult or impossible and to jeopardize the very survival of the victims of such local certainties, and also of the others whose development they will prevent.

This type of perversion of man's unique and most important ability, to think appropriately to present and future reality, should be of the greatest possible concern to this generation, but that very perversion has ensured our inability to react effectively to the sudden and vast changes in our environment. In the presence of the widespread and firm conviction that all the right answers to questions of constitutional, political, institutional, moral, and religious patterns are already known by the "good

people," (who are always ourselves, wherever and whenever we happen to live,) we have not provided for the recognition and study of new situations that warrant concern, nor for appropriate decisions about them to be taken by our best informed and wisest people. We have no department of government charged with that responsibility. None of our legislative, administrative, or judicial branches of government has any such franchise, nor has it been arranged for any other institutions to fill this gap.

True, a few generally underfinanced, undermanned and struggling voluntary groups in a few countries have at least begun to call attention to this dangerous pattern of blindly following ancient pathways that now can lead only to destruction, but even such efforts are usually related only to a specific situation or set of fixed loyalties. There has been almost no general approach to, or even definition of, the problem, though it is probably the most important of all the problems of the human race. Roughly it may be stated thus: "How can we of the human race ensure that there will be enough people, in enough places, and soon enough, who are free enough from limiting loyalties to the locally accepted customs to be able to initiate and support reasoned and appropriate personal and group behavior calculated to provide equal, or nearly equal, fulfillment and security for all the world's people?"

While this is the first generation that has ever held a veto power over evolution of life on this earth, it is also the first generation that commands the communication, production, research, and distribution resources that could enable it to take charge of its own destiny. Can this association play any part in the solution of this most important problem? If so, what part? If not, who can?