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### INDICATIVE ETHICS

Some of you are aware of the way Confucius went about creating by far the most important revolution that the great people of China have ever known. That revolution was a structural revolution; that is, it was from within the establishment. And it was a radical revolution. By that term I mean foundational, or basic, or primal.

What I mean when I call a revolution radical is that it touches the dimension of humanness, or that it recreates the image of what it means to be a human being. That is the kind of a revolution that we are engaged in now -- and, for the first time in history, it is happening across the globe rather than within any particular national or cultural history. Such a revolution can only be a quiet non-violent revolution within the establishment. Violent revolutions, which history has to have from time to time, are relatively superficial revolutions. Even our own revolutionary war was superficial in that it was simply the continuation of the European culture. That one was not in the same ball park with the revolution that is now involving our nation as a part of the whole globe.

Whether one wants such a revolution or not, it is a necessary fact of our moment of history. Man's image is being reconstructed and people of good will ought to be concerned deeply, passionately, with the way that it is going to be reconstructed, and the way that it is going to be articulated. The way it is articulated is what actually happens to the mind-set of the masses. It is the manifestation of the revolution, or the manifestation before the manifestation in the social processes or web or relationships.

The ancient revolution in China that Confucius instigated was that kind of a revolution. Once you get relatively clear on the theoretical aspects of what you're about, then you have to become practical and think in terms of strategies and tactics. Confucius decided, first, that the way you did that was to infiltrate the upper echelons of the ruling structures of China. So for over twenty years he was the prime minister in the court, and worked away at trying to change the situation in China. Then he saw that that would not work. He could get nowhere because it is the job of the ruling structures, of the establishment, to maintain the establishment. You and I would not want it otherwise -- at least, I wouldn't -- because I like to see the bread come around daily and the milk, and have the railroads run, and so on. So what he did was to go out to the country and begin to get young men who, I suppose, were restless, who wanted to see something happen in China, and together they began to forge the concrete practical vision to be communicated to the minds of the grassroots level of China. He sent these young men, called the literati, to every single Middlesex village and crossroads of China. This was called the bureaucratic structure. And they did such things as make out deeds, and collect taxes. In fact, they were the only people who could read and write. But fundamentally, they were communicating a new image of what it meant to be a human being in China. The result was that China's understanding of itself in history was transformed.

The literati were the guild dynamic, and when we talk of making it overt and active and geared for the future, it means that in each local community of the world you have an awakened human being whose life is in the breach and who has the practical vision and the prowess to communicate that practical vision. Only, one will never make it -- or if he does, it will be a miracle. Let's say you need at least ten. And around that ten, if they stand there as iron, you could have a thousand. But do not ever get the mixed-up idea that the guildsman is a layman. I am a guildsman. A guildsman is a religious; the core of the guildsman is the religious.

In our day, the recovery within the church of a sense of vocation in civilization is more important than anything else, and that task is of the religious. Some of the religious are clerics, and some are "lay-ics." The division here is incidental, though both are needed. The important thing is the calling of the religious. They are going to be the religious in every local community in the world. These literati, these guildsmen, are going to be like the carrier mosquito. They will carry the malaria of a new morality to every local community on this globe. There's no one else to carry it.

I rejoice over being able to use the term "the new morality" here in an authentic way; we have waited a long time for this moment in history. When we talk about the functional or the practical significance of what the Other World chart represents, or the breaking through of the Other World that is in the midst of this world, one thing I'm very clear about is that it's the basis for the new evangelism. It points to the secular evangelism in and through which men's hearts and lives and social relationships are changed. Another practical or functional consequence is

the seed of the new mythology by which a man in our time can grasp again his relationship to the Ground of his being. This is not an intellectual activity, but when one suddenly experiences this relationship, that is what I mean by "awe."

But the Other World is the stuff from which comes the new morality that our time has been waiting for. In New Testament days also, they were waiting for the coming of the Messiah, the new morality. The most important thing about the youth revolt in our day is that it was a revolt at the point of morality. If you want to understand the youth, you will see them yearning, however brokenly, fragmentedly, even distortedly, for the invention and articulation of a new system of ethics. When we old ones scream back at their screaming, what we are screaming for, in the sociological sense, is for the appearance of a new morality that will replace the old. Sometimes you interpret this scream, especially from people who are my age, as an attack on the youth who are screaming for a new morality. But no, deep in our hearts the thing that makes old folk and young folk a kind of companions that you in-between ones do not even understand, is that we want the same thing.

The term, "the new morality," may sound strange to you, but there is nothing strange about it. I am not talking about the moral life. The moral life is a thing that goes on in the life of every human being at every moment, all the time. Wherever the activity of observing, judging, weighing up, deciding and acting is going on, that is the moral activity of man. Morality is a system of ethics, a human invention superimposed upon everything that happens in life. It serves somewhat as a roadmap, whereby this judging, deciding, and acting is given direction.

As you are aware, two great systems of ethics have been invented in Western civilization. I recall being shocked and delighted, although I was not bright enough at the time to understand it, by the statement of G.E. Moore, an English ethicist of the last century, that there were many systems of ethics that had not been invented. I had been taught all my life that ethics was ethics! They were not seen as invented but as somehow coming down from an intellectual super-universe or from divine revelation. Man's only problem then was that he did not embody that system, rather than that the invented system was no longer adequate to the situation or to man's image of what it meant to be a human being.

You are very familiar with these two systems of ethics. One is called teleological ethics and the other ontological ethics. Those are hard words, as long as the ones YOU US~ in your secret societies in business and medicine. We ethicists have our jargon too. But whenever you are talking about what is good or about virtue or about goals or values, you are using the system of ethics called teleological ethics. Your mother started training you in this system, and your Sunday School took it up, and your business firms and your professions: it is through every fiber of your consciousness. On the other hand, whenever you use words like "right" or "conscience" or "mores", you are dealing with ontological ethics. You are not asking then about the goal, but about the right line, the right rule to embrace.

There is another system of ethics, which H. Richard Niebuhr called dialogical ethics, and that uses the word "must" rather than "good" or "right." Paul used the word "befitting" and asked what the "befitting" thing was. He took that from the Stoics. That approach is very close to contextual ethics, which raises the question of what is the appropriate thing to do in your given situation. Lord Shaftesbury, one of the first anti-slavery men in England and a great philosopher, was very close to this kind of system. There is a sense of art in it. What is the befitting thing to do in the midst of this context?

Now, I believe that this group of people, and those that you represent across the world, are in the midst of creating a new ethical system. As a matter of fact, if you were not, you probably would not accomplish what unconsciously you set out to do twenty or thirty years ago. But this invention is not sitting down and conjuring up out of your minds something that did not exist. A new system of ethics, like any kind of new philosophy, is a drawing together into a rational unity, of insights that an age has produced from many sources. I think you will see that as I try to describe this quickly. But it will only come to be when that coagulating process takes place.

If I had to give a name to this system of ethics, instead of calling it ontological, teleological, or dialogical ethics, I would use a very simple word and call it the indicative ethic. In a way, it is all summed up precisely in that. To call it an indicative ethic is to say that we begin with the "is" and not the "ought." There is nothing new about this. You have been bumping up against this for fifty years. You begin with the given, and morality then has to do with what is rather than what ought to be.

The Other World is what gives you the clue to this. Those four areas-mystery, freedom or consciousness, agape or love, and tranquillity or serenity-are the trans-ontological indicatives of humanness itself. What is humanness all about? It is all about mystery. It is not that humanness ought to be about mystery. Humanness is about mystery. When one grasps the state of being in which he senses that he is not what he is except by this encounter with the mystery, then he knows that the indicative of his life, down underneath all other indicatives, is this relationship with the mystery. No "ought" is being introduced here, it just is the indicative of life. In our day, in the midst of a malaise that is deeper and more complex than any man has yet been able to say, this basic indicative of life has been obscured.

The second indicative of life is freedom of consciousness. It is not that I have freedom, but that I am freedom. What it means to be a human being is to be and to be able to take an attitude toward "to be." That is the indicative of life. It is what you have been teaching in RS-I. I am not my relationship to my wife. I am the relationship to my wife, but beyond that I am the attitude that I take toward the relationship that I call "being related to my wife." That is freedom. This is what I mean when I say to my wife, "You cannot keep my conscience for me." I am not telling her that she ought not keep my conscience for me, I am articulating an indicative: she cannot keep my conscience for me even if I tried to permit her to keep my conscience for me. That is an indicative of life. Even if you thought all your life that your mother ought to keep your conscience, that is indicatively not the way life is. She cannot do it.

The next is the mountain of care. This is the concern for the world. Never again in this understanding of ethics do you say that somebody ought to care for the world. That is in another system that somebody else invented. What you are saying is that man, as man, cares for the world. My illustration for that is the awareness that when I came into being I did not first come into being in a family and then have to say "no" to my family in order to care for the world. Nor did I first come into being as a citizen of the United States, and therefore have to say "no" to my nation. Do you know how I came into being? It is a crude image, but someone got hold of my feet and pulled me out of the rear end of a human being. What I am saying is that I came into humanity. I came into humanness. I did not come out of a family. This is an indicative of life. Therefore, my concern, when I dare to embrace what it is to be a human being, is -- not ought to be -- mankind. If you are not concerned with mankind, then I say to you that you have refused a fundamental indicative of your life. Never again shall anybody say to me, "I ought" first.

Last is the Sea of Tranquillity. When you grasp your having shown up with one great life to live and one great death to die, when you grasp the delight of your life just as it, with all of the suffering, all of the tragedy -- then you experience that that is what it means to be a human being. This is sheer indicative. And in those moments when you reject that indicative, say "no" to it, and go to a psychiatrist, what you grasp is that you are refusing the indicative of your existence. So you go to him, not because you are sick as you say, but because you are immoral. Then, only if you want to raise the question of how you became immoral can the psychiatrist help you. This is the ethics of the indicative.

In the second place, you also have to call this the contextual ethic. For these states of being, because the Other World is only in this world, exist only in concretions. This is the reason I told that rather gruesome story about the toilet. My hanging over that toilet and vomiting into it, believing that life was going to find me out was not the state of being. The state of being was that which was occasioned by that externality which I had described there, but that state of being does not exist except in that externality. That is to say, if you tell me that you are experiencing a glowing or unglowing state of being that is outside of a knock-down or drag-out fight with your wife or a moment of fantastic love with your wife, then I conclude that you don't know what you are talking about. For contextually, ethics is also a part of that indicative. There is no Other World, there is no sense of being me, there is no awareness of an "I", except in the concrete given- situation of life.

The third way you have to come at the new morality of our times is to call it a morality of creativity, a decisional ethic, an ethic of freedom. I create my own morality in every given situation, morality defined the way the other systems talked about morality. I decide the "right". I decide the "good." All of life is a relationship on the ontological level, and living is constant and sheer creativity out of nothingness. The significance has to be created and injected into any given relationship. That is what I mean by decision, or what I mean by freedom. It is an ethic of God-awe-full creativity. You can see that the rigor in this ethic surpasses the most rigorous dimensions of the inventions of the past, This is not new to you, but you have to pull it together into a statement that can be grasped by the masses.

The fourth way to come at this is to see that it is a morality of authenticity. This is the last point of the Ethics lecture in the CS-I course. It is the relationship of authenticity to authority. Out of the two-story universe which created the other systems of morality that I have suggested to you, it is always necessary to appeal to authority -- either the authority of universal reason or the authority of some religion or pseudo religion. It is as if there is a ten-point code that is superimposed on me.

Authenticity on the other hand, has to do with assuming final responsibility for your concrete created moral deed. I like to say to myself these days, using the ancient poetry, "When I get to heaven, they are not going to ask me what my wife thought of me, though she may have tried to keep my conscience a sterling puritan. They are not going to ask me what my colleagues thought of me or what youth thought of me. They are not even going to ask me what history thought of me. They are really going to ask me what I think of myself." And if they do, they will fit right into the indicative ethic. That is authenticity. It is like teetering on the edge of that six foot hole, at which moment your life turns from many, many happenings and many, many deeds into one great big happening and one great big deed. To be a moral man is to take it all into your being and then fall back into that hole. That is authenticity. That is what they are going to inquire about when you get to heaven.

There is no imperative in this ethic, and yet there are imperatives all over the place. But you understand that the imperatives are those requirements that you place upon your life out of the great indicative of your existence. That is to say, when a moral man sees that these are his indicatives, he requires of himself that he be what he is, that he be his indicatives. Then he builds his models, not as some theoretical exercise at two o'clock in the morning but as his decisions regarding what he is going to require of himself when he rises in the morning. That is the imperative in the midst of the indicative.

It has been a long time since we knew what we meant with the term "a Christian man." It has been a long time since we really knew about such a man's concrete posture in the world. That sentimental stuff that some churches have carried over from the nineteenth century into the twentieth century which is phony today. It does not work with us anymore--it is out of another age. We have been wandering around trying to be moral men without knowing what moral meant. How long has it been since you knew a moral man when you saw him -- I mean with every bit of integrity and fiber of your being? The bourgeois morality that you and I were given is no longer adequate. Or how long has it been since you really had a criterion for being what used to be called a man of character. No wonder we pay those head-shrinkers sixty dollars an hour. Little wonder we have not had any map.

I say to you that the dawning is at hand, not for the sake of virtue, but for the sake of the integrity of living and dying as an authentic human being. The hour is at hand when we are going to know again what it means to be a man of the Spirit, what it means to be a moral man, what it means to be a practical Christian man in the everydayness of the world. We guildsmen have a horrendous march ahead. But at the center of all the work we have to do is one task and that is the communication of the ethics of the indicative.

Joseph W. Mathews