

# FACING THE FUTURE: SOME ISSUES FOR AMERICANS

AN ESSAY BY

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# Facing the Future: Some Issues for Americans

With the coming of age of America, and indeed with the assumption of far-flung world responsibilities by the United States, American political thought is necessarily faced with great issues. The suddenness with which these issues have descended upon this country has left the American mind little time to think them through leisurely to the end. As a result, there is in the prevailing mood a sense of urgency issuing in an effort at improvisation. We may expect this mood of search and tentative formulation to last for several years, indeed perhaps for decades, before it settles into some definitive reconstruction of American political thought. But what can be done even now is to raise the issues, elucidate their character, relate them organically to the age of tragedy, but also of great opportunity, in which we live, and suggest some first principles, grounded, not arbitrarily, not in the contingency of interest, but in the nature of things, which may—and, if true, which must—guide the coming reconstruction.

I speak as a student—but, to be sure, as a foreign student of these matters. Nevertheless, my experience of them has been somewhat intimate, both in idea and in the rough-and-tumble of concrete decision. But my whole outlook is such as to require that, far from being autonomous and ultimate, the political is in reality something very modest, deriving from and answering to the deeper truth of man. The fundamental, the first, the generic truths are all non-political; their matrix is to be found in friendship, in love, in religious existence, in the creation and appreciation of the beautiful and sublime, in the active life of the intellect, including science, in both the narrow as well as the wider sense of the term. There is thus error to the extent to which politics, whether as science or as practical wisdom, does not submit to a higher principle. These, then, are the personal limitations from which my present discussion may suffer.



The fundamental assumption of American democracy is that the people rule themselves, certainly within the framework of the Constitution. No one who has observed with some diligence especially in election years—how the process of representative government takes place in this country, whether on the municipal, the state, or the federal level, how the individual citizens exercise their freedom by coming up with suggestions and demands to the candidates and later to their elected representatives, and how these representatives and candidates are eagerly responsive to these suggestions, can fail to admire the sense in which ruler and ruled are merged into one in this country.

But whatever may have been right or possible in former epochs, the present age imposes significant limitations upon this fundamental democratic assumption. In the first place, the technological situation, especially with respect to the art of defense and war, can no longer—even if ever in the past it could—be judged by the people. The emergence of the expert, side by side with the elected politician, is of the essence of the present situation. So also is the necessity for almost absolute secrecy in these matters. The notion of the sovereignty of the people must therefore be somewhat tempered in the present age.

In the second place, political and economic relations among peoples—and especially between the United States and the rest of the world—have become so complicated, and international interdependence has developed and deepened so fast, that the ordinary citizen, with only considerations of his immediate interests and only his general sense of patriotism, cannot serve—in all justice to his powers—as a guide, or even in certain cases as a check, to his ministers in the determination of policy. The notion of enlightened self-interest here comes in. But while the citizen may be led, with proper guidance and education, to appreciate this notion, he cannot be expected—again in all fairness to his powers—himself to elaborate it. It is obvious there is a certain lack of seriousness in the supposition that, whereas for medicine or for theoretical physics, for example, you need years of specialization before your opinion can be worth much, for the critical and complicated relations between nations, cultures, and governments in the modern world, any citizen can be a judge.

It seems to me, out of respect for their own profession, political scientists, even in a democracy, must put—not arbitrarily, but as a matter of principle—a far higher premium upon knowledge and depth than upon the immediate reactions of mankind. It follows that a democracy like that of the United States, with its present heavy burden of international responsibility, demands more than just the principle of self-rule—no matter how perfect this principle might be in idea and in application, no matter how perfectly the government

“represents” and “responds to” “the people”—to exist and to flourish. The objective complexities of the world situation require the rise, side by side with the ordinary citizen, of an intelligent citizenry capable of grasping these complexities and thereby of guiding and supporting the government in the formulation and prosecution of policy. Democracy cannot in these critical days function properly without this core of intelligent, educated, responsible, politically conscious, and politically effective citizenry. And this raises profound questions with respect to the rôle of the school, the Church, the political party, the press, radio, and television in the maturation of political consciousness and decision.

In the third place, there is—as I see it—a radical war of ideas in the world today. The causes, character, and possible consequences of this war can only be comprehended by the ordinary citizen in the vaguest possible way. For what seems to be at stake is not this or that nation, not this or that government, not this or that party, but Western civilization as a whole. It can be shown that nothing pleases more the adversary of this civilization than to have its fate depend upon the fluctuating whims of the masses. For the masses, unable to take sustained responsibility for the ultimate issues, maybe—and often are—lulled into premature relaxation of effort and determination. Fundamental policy, where whole cultures are at stake, must certainly be conceived and developed far from the din of the masses.

It follows from all this that the notion of the sovereignty of the people has become ambiguous. There is clearly, therefore, a need for a fresh, grounded re-examination of this notion. Three things, I believe, will emerge from such a re-examination.

First there is the need for continuity of vision in regard to fundamental United States policy, a continuity that can only be assured through some permanent, high, planning authority, completely detached and free in its outlook, and as independent of the changing fortunes of politics as possible. It will not be easy to meet this need adequately, for there is a natural distrust of the planning function—which is always something removed and intellectual—by the practical politician. But while the practical politician must have—and in any event he naturally has—the last word with regard to every decision, he must also have available to him, as never before, the deepest and most responsible vision possible, a vision grounded in eternal principles and dealing with the ultimate worth and long-range fate of whole cultures.

Second, never was leadership, whether political, intellectual, or spiritual, more challenged really to lead than it is today. Because the times are anxious and the issues are so baffling and complex, there is an unbelievable hunger for authoritative guidance.

And last, this means that the virtues of trust and discipline will prove of the utmost importance. Nothing would seem to be more helpful today than the effort at deepening the dimension of trust between the people and their leadership.

This is not a state of peace; this is a state of profound anxiety. World movements are afoot today whose general development can be foreseen decades ahead. Because we are all crowded within a contracted world, these movements will bear upon everybody's fate. If, then, whole cultures and civilizations are in the balance, will future generations ever forgive present-day leadership if, foreseeing the future—and the means of knowledge are so abundant today that there is no excuse not to foresee the future—it yet should blame the lethargy of the masses or the imperfections of the democratic process for being unable to move resolutely and decisively at critical junctures in the interest of its embattled civilization? It is no comfort for future generations that certain turns in history were wrongly taken because through the ordinary workings of democracy the people so willed. They have every right to shout; but where were the leaders, why did they not awaken the people to their mistake? It is given to man to re-examine everything, including his forms of government, and to demand that in the face of absolute danger nothing shall hinder or weaken the defense of truth and goodness. And so present-day leadership has two obligations: to make absolutely sure of the truth, independently of what the masses think; and then, so to love the people, in humility and in genuine concern, as to be able to lead them in the necessary effort for their common good.



The crisis does not affect the ordinary workings of democracy alone—the practical order; it imposes novel challenges upon the life of the mind—the theoretical order. All men engaged in theory must reappraise their calling today, not indeed as to its truth and ultimacy, not as to its superior value, but as to what is practically demanded of them. For it is always and essentially true that, as Aristotle emphasized, the life of thought is more excellent than any other life. And this necessity for “practical” reappraisal does not apply only to the professional philosopher or scientist, but also to that important segment of a free society, dispersed throughout all ranks, which craves after knowledge, theory, vision. Since it is the political scientist who is in the first instance concerned with thinking through, critically and fundamentally, and with justifying the presuppositions and workings of democracy, I wish to consider his predicament for a moment. But what I here say applies, with appropriate qualifications, to theoretical existence in general.

It seems to me evident that the general crisis of civilization does not leave the political scientist unscathed. Certainly there are these different forms of government which he loves describing. Certainly political power is organized in patterns he so faithfully reproduces. Certainly policy is developed historically under the stress of such and such factors.

Certainly it is noble in the highest to impart to youth the elements of good citizenship and to train them in political virtue. But the political scientist who is satisfied today with this much endeavor is several degrees removed from the center of things.

Without detachment, objectivity, and freedom, science is impossible. The principle that political science, as science, has its own autonomous laws and therefore is independent of politics, is unconditionally true. But what now if politics itself encroaches upon science? What if, as in totalitarianism, there is a theory and practice of the state—and the forms of totalitarianism are legion—which denies to science, including above all the science of politics, its freedom and objectivity?

When that happens—and the ultimate spiritual judgment upon the world today is that this is precisely what is happening—then political science, to survive as science, cannot remain blissfully independent of politics. It must take a stand. The struggle then is not one of a conflict of theories which may be reconciled upon further investigation, by making the proper distinctions, on the basis of some underlying unity. The struggle then is one for existence at all; and a struggle for existence is necessarily an existential struggle, namely, one where you take a metaphysical stand, where you have decided for or against.

Thus there are natural limits to freedom, even to freedom of thought, and even in a free society. These limits are exactly where freedom is itself at stake. When responsible freedom, grounded freedom, the freedom that has enabled the spirit to flower unto the highest joy and vision, when this freedom is hated, combated, fundamentally repudiated, then freedom is no longer free to allow that to happen.

Science, then, to retain its necessary freedom, must take a decisive stand against the enemies of science and freedom. Only as he is overtaken by a sense of danger, only as he participates in profound existential anxiety, only as he overcomes his sheltered empiricism in order to penetrate to what is really at stake in the world today, only as he subordinates his political formalism to the matter and content and ultimate issues of culture, can the political scientist not only really live in the present age, but carry out the required reappraisal of his own enterprise. The political scientist must wax deeply philosophical in this age of fear and uncertainty.

There are three reasons why a stand, an “engagement,” a personal commitment, a groundedness in first principles, is necessary today even for science. First, Communism is a total doctrine which has taken a stand about everything, including the nature and function of science, and above all of the science of government. This stand is a militant challenge flung in the face of Western thought, and therefore it must be answered. Second, the older cultures of Asia and Africa are now rising again, and the critical contact of the West with them, as

they vigorously and boldly assert themselves, is forcing the West to become conscious of its own presuppositions. Third, within Western thought itself there have arisen for a century now serious movements against all formalism and all abstraction. I refer in particular to materialism of every stripe, to realism, to phenomenology, and to existentialism. These movements have raised very serious doubts, within the Western tradition itself, as to how much form can really be independent of content. And this in turn raises radical questions as to the nature and limits of science, including especially all the sciences of society. And thus it seems that in face of the “practical” challenge of Communism, the “practical” challenge of the East, and the inner “practical” criticism of Western thought itself, neither the political scientist nor any other lover of theory can remain theoretically unperturbed.

The ultimate justification for this emphatic return to personal “engagement,” to the sense of danger, to profound concern about the ultimate issues of culture, is of course none of these contingent things. Even if Communism and the East did not present formidable challenges today, it would still be profoundly true that the scientist could not abstract himself from his world. There is a sense in which to enjoy its own autonomy, and to be worthy of it, science must be conscious of a higher loyalty. Science and the liberal arts in general have flourished only where there is infinite love of the object for its own sake, only where the spirit is so free and so calmly intense in its desire as to seek to know everything. This is the legacy of Greece. What is at stake then is not something accidental and passing, not something concerning which the political scientist—as a human being who belongs to the Western heritage, as a scientist, and precisely as one who deals with the truth of society—can remain in any sense indifferent. What is at stake is theory, truth, love, freedom, the universal, the highest destiny of the spirit. And if one is not deeply and personally committed to these things, one is really in a state of rebellion—whether or not one realizes it—against some of the dearest things in history: things without which history has no justification and life itself, I dare say, no meaning.

## IV

For years now—indeed one can show for decades—the Western mind has, for reasons into which I need not enter now, been softened and undermined from within and without. The effect of this softening has been for this mind to lose faith in itself, to turn away from what it has seen and ascertained down the centuries, and to seek other gods than those which have so faithfully protected and nurtured it. The traditional virtues of faith and faithfulness, of faith in the existence of objective truth in every field, of faith in the ability of the human mind to grasp this truth and be absolutely sure of it, of belief in law and in absolute norms of conduct, of love of country and of gratitude for all that one’s country and one’s heritage have meant for him, and of attachment to the positive values—social, political and spiritual—which

have cumulatively come down to us from the past—all these wonderful things have as a result weakened. One word characterizes the resulting spirit: revolution. There is then a pervasive revolt against all tested values.

Communism is the acutest form in which this spirit of revolt crystallizes itself. It is not so much the inherent truth of Communism that attracts the rebellious and uprooted; it is the fact that they desperately want something to attach themselves to. In other words, it is not Communism that uproots and unhinges them: *they are already uprooted and unhinged*, and when Communism comes along they find it very handy to express their rebelliousness through. If Communism did not exist, and if a new religion had arisen, say in Persia or South America, that had nothing to do with economics, but that declared the same unrelenting war on the positive values of Western society that Communism has been waging, the rebel souls would be today adherents of it.

The revolutionary virus reached the United States. There was an incubation period in the aftermath of the great depression, but it was largely the strange episode of the second world war that enabled it to flare up quite unabashed. For reasons that are not quite clear to me and that history might one day find of the strangest kind, the Western world could not alone cope with Hitler. Certainly Hitler and all his works had to be extirpated from the face of the earth, but it is still a mystery why this had to be done in alliance with Communism.

Today there is a multiform awakening in this country as to the real state of affairs. A kind of fear has struck the heart of people. I shall abstract, first, from the unkind words that are often said about America abroad in connection with this awakening, words that I believe are by and large completely unjust; second, from some of the methods whereby this awakening has been brought about; and third, from how this awakening has, justly or unjustly, hit this or that person or this or that particular situation. The fact is that people are more sensitive to the softening and undermining, more alert to Communist infiltration, more anxious lest they have been dupes of it themselves. And all this, together with the accompanying self-questioning and anguish, is eminently healthy.

The fear is good. People should be infinitely more careful in their imagination, in their association, and in their experimental ventures than they have been. The critics of the methods whereby the fear has been instilled should themselves suggest and carry out better methods. At least they should prove that in their mature reflection on the general softening of which I speak they have come to the conclusion that the situation had in fact reached such a serious state that something drastic had to be done about it. Criticism without previous self-criticism and above all without suggesting and pursuing better alternatives is uncritical.



The challenge here to the man of good will is threefold. There is first a doctrinal challenge, which consists, if he is a teacher or a scientist, in his seeking and teaching the truth and in his refuting error, namely, if he is a social scientist, in exposing Communism for the radical conspiracy that it is. It is also the doctrinal duty of the ordinary intelligent citizen of good will to seek depth and truth, to refuse to be taken by propaganda and superficial appearances, to test every alien theory by the established values of his own culture. There is second a social challenge, namely, to help his society in every honorable way overcome the spirit of rebellion and regain its moral health and vigor, by turning away from the lure of alien gods to its own deities which have blessed it for centuries.

And there is thirdly a personal challenge. For, being human, the intelligent citizen, despite his good will, may himself have rebelled, or he may have been unknowingly compromised. In either case the challenge is to repent. But repentance is not a simple or mechanical thing. Nor does it follow that he has really repented who shouts loudest. Repentance presupposes the possibility of forgiveness; for if one, although he recognizes his error and is genuinely sorry for it, should never be able to disentangle himself from its smear, how could he ever turn a new leaf? With proper probationary safeguards, it ought to be possible for the genuinely repentant to get rehabilitated, with dignity and without sentimentalism. But even that is not enough. The rebellion is often so deep that mere social rehabilitation cannot cure it. Is it an accident that many a repentant Communist had to have religion to be able to live with himself? Only God, and not society, can understand our personal sufferings; and only He can heal our wounds. And when He really forgives, it does not much matter if society still condemns.

## V

There is a growing mutuality of recognition between the world and the United States. American business has worldwide connections. Thousands of foreign students enroll in American universities every year. American missionaries are very active abroad. The United States has economic, political, and military commitments all over the globe. The world coverage of the American press surpasses by far the coverage of any other press. I doubt whether there is any capital in the world in which there is as intense and sustained an interest in every corner of the earth as there is in Washington today. The intervention of Washington is often decisive in many a delicate international affair. The existence of twenty or thirty million immigrants and their children who still retain vivid memories of the lands of their origin enhances further America's consciousness of the world. The United Nations in New York and other international organizations in Washington remind the American

people daily of the world, and also remind the world of America. And then there is of course Hollywood and the ubiquitous American tourist.

America and the world are conscious of each other as never before. Even when people advocate isolationism or neo-isolationism, they witness thereby to the potency of the international idea. For it is the increasing pressures of the world, the dangers of over-extension, that lead people to consider how they may husband their commitments abroad.

And yet internationalism is undergoing severe strains. On the ordinary diplomatic level, there is distrust and perhaps even misunderstanding among friends. On the juridical level, one cannot say international law has advanced, or that, in important instances, nations abide by it. Their relations are established not by law, but by convention based upon mutuality of interest. Witness how the International Court of Justice keeps reminding people that it is not being used. There is an evident slump in people's faith in the United Nations since San Francisco. It has not prevented the formation of distinct blocs. The effective international groupings function independently of the United Nations, and this organization often only reflects understandings reached completely outside it. I am not saying that any of this can be helped; I am saying that we have in all these phenomena a revelation of the essential limitations of internationalism.

Political science must examine the limitations of nationalism as well as of internationalism. It must raise the problem of the myth of independence in the modern world. And this is of the utmost practical interest not only to the political scientist, but also to the intelligent citizen of good will. For the basic relationships today, the basic conflicts are not international, but intercultural. According to strict Western legalism, the world is made up of eighty or so nation-states, each with a sovereignty indifferently related to the rest. But this rigid Roman legalism has broken down. Let it relax its hold completely for one minute, and the world will fall automatically into only six or seven cultural groupings. Thus the concept of the nation-state, both from the legal and from the metaphysical point of view, must be re-examined. Ideas and interests are ruthlessly cutting across all boundaries, and no national or international law can stop them. I shall mention only three instances.

There is in Communism a political loyalty above the loyalty to the nation.

There is often in the gospel of "rising standards of living," which America is trying to propagate, a conflict with the prevailing national mores.

The Asian-Arab or Asian-African bloc in the United Nations came to the support of, for example, North Africa, not for reasons of direct legalistic national interests, but largely in manifestation of a certain cultural solidarity.

It follows that all discussion today of international matters strictly on the internationalist basis is pathetically artificial. There is something forced and unreal about it.

The international lawyer is useful and will always have a place, but if he keeps plying between one legal concept and another, without grounding himself in intercultural relations, the margin of his usefulness will progressively diminish. The ultimate units in a world suddenly brought together are cultures and not nations. This is why all fundamental conflicts today are not strictly political, but ideological; they all have the character of religious conflicts. Internationalism is breaking down—as in my opinion it should—into interculturalism. The problem of the diversity and interaction of cultures is infinitely more complex than any international problem. It raises the ultimate questions of suffering, of destiny, and, above all, of the truth of culture. Over and above any international challenge today, the United States must gird itself to face these questions.

## VI

The last actual invasion of the English-speaking world occurred in 1066. There was a real danger of invasion by Spain in 1588, but that was warded off. I doubt whether there has been any real serious danger since then. It is true, Napoleon looked covetously at England from across the Channel, but he never dared to cross it. Whatever may have been the danger in the first and second world wars, first of all, it did not materialize, and secondly, even if it had materialized, there were vast realms beyond the oceans in which Anglo-Saxon culture would have continued Hourishing. Only part of the Anglo-Saxon domain was attacked from the air in the two world wars, but America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand remained beyond the reach of the air weapons. It is therefore perfectly true that for nine centuries the English-speaking peoples have not been actually invaded from without, and for four centuries the danger of such invasion—or at least the danger of the whole of their realm being invaded or of any and every part of it being attacked—did not exist. I doubt whether there ever lived a people on earth who were as “fortunate” as the English-speaking peoples have been in their insular and oceanic position.

Think, on the other hand, of the peoples of continental Europe, of the Middle East, of Asia: they have never been free either of actual conquest or of immediate danger of one. I suggest therefore that life must have appeared differently to the Anglo-Saxon from what it did to the rest of us.

But now for the first time, perhaps in nine centuries, certainly in four, no Anglo-Saxon hamlet or back yard anywhere in the world is not exposed to attack. And, on the spiritual plane, for the first time there is no Anglo-Saxon mind that is safe at least from exposure to alien doctrine. There is therefore for the first time at least an equalization in the sense of danger.

Real national and cultural suffering is hitherto quite unknown in the United States: unknown not only in fact, but even in possibility. And even what England has known of this kind of suffering is really nothing compared to what every other region in the world has gone through.

The changed situation today is going to force the English-speaking peoples to articulate and explain themselves, both to themselves and to the rest of the world. And this articulation will have to take place on a basis infinitely more profound and serious than anything attempted so far.

The reasoned despair of reason of which Hume was the perfection, and the vigorous spirit of optimism which finally culminated in this country in the philosophy of pragmatism and the doctrine of adjustment, may both be described as “taking things as they come!” Now so long as the national-cultural—in short, the historical—existence of America was safe, American thought could afford to “take things as they came.” Life did not need then to reveal itself to the inquiring mind as something tragic, something extending to and demanding dimensions beyond the senses, beyond conventional morality, beyond the crude evidence of success, beyond human experience altogether.

But today, America can no longer afford to pass by in silence the questioning eyes, if not also the doubting hearts, of the Chinese, the Russians, the Indians, the Arabs, and even the Europeans. The responsible American must pause, and pausing, he must try to cultivate, I will not say the love of these peoples, but at least their understanding, their trust, their respect. When you think of it, America never really had need of these things in the past.

There is an age-old wisdom first known, affirmed, and enacted in the Near East, which we must all rediscover today. It is that truth and being and salvation can come only through suffering, and that in a very real sense we can reach life only through the portal of death. Fortunately for America this truth is living in this land.

## VII

Political science must issue in political wisdom. This is something much deeper than science. But no people on earth have had the experience in politics, in the great art of self-government, that the Anglo-Saxon peoples have had. This is one of their greatest contributions. Already their forms and procedures have transformed practically every political system in the world. The nine hundred years of quiet development have not been in vain so far as the attainment of solid wisdom is concerned.

The American statesman, politician, and political scientist represent in a special way one natural gift with which, in God’s economy for mankind, the English-speaking peoples are endowed. And this representation is made possible only because Anglo-Saxon society in general,

with its multiform institutions and customs, has attained a pre-eminent degree of political maturity and wisdom. It is literally true that we all feed upon what the Anglo-Saxons have acquired by way of wisdom and experience in this realm. And thus one of the basic challenges with which America is faced is none of the things I have mentioned: it is rather—like the faithful and wise steward of Scripture—to preserve and perfect God’s special political gift to the Anglo-Saxon world. Democracy is their perfection and therefore its future depends upon their development.

Side by side with this challenge which springs from the very character of Anglo-Saxon experience goes another challenge which answers to the state of the world. Since we all constitute today one community of danger and fear, we cannot live by political forms alone, no matter how perfect. In such a world where men cry, while there is time, for the fullness of the truth, politics must acknowledge its profound limitations. While it teaches and tries to ensure justice and order, it is religion, philosophy, poetry, the arts, and the concrete knowledge and contemplation of tragedy, that can fill our life with purpose, meaning, hope, and joy. Perfection is to be fully what you are, and at the same time to take your humble place in the general scale of things.