ETHICS, ETHOS AND HABITAT – PART TWO

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In the previous section it was suggested that ethics is an art rather than a science. A science is a body of systematized knowledge utilizing general laws or principles, and surely ethics may be regarded as scientific to that extent, unless one considers ignorance to be an advantage in the quest for a good life and that there are no broad generalizations available from the experience of humanity. But in the modern sense science generally has connotations of a fairly high degree of exactitude, dependable predictability, and of factors that can be quantified and stated in terms of relationships that can be quantified. The great advantage of being able to state such relationships in terms of measurable quantity is that they can be "falsified," that is, if they are false, the falsity is clearly demonstrable. If a truth claim could not in any way be demonstrated as false, regardless of what results occur or what evidence turned up, then the claim, even though it might be true, could not be regarded as "scientific," at least not in the modern sense of common usage. It is the great advantage of science in the modern sense that when it is mistaken that can eventually be demonstrated unequivocally.

It so happens that many important areas of human enterprise are not easily subject to scientific testing in any very precise way. Many examples come to mind: artistic productions, quality of lifestyle, and the practice of the healing arts. To some extent this may be due to the inappropriateness of quantification. How do you quantify the creative ingenuity of a composer or painter? And to some extent it may be due to the impossibility of isolating a quantifiable factor. How does one isolate the precise extent to which a disease is chemically caused or psychologically induced, if there is the possibility that states of mind contribute to the glandular activity – or lack of it – in the body? You may very well isolate the voters' shift to Carter on a broad scale, but how do you isolate the variety of hopes and fears that led to this? These things can only be done on a very rough and broad scale. Hence the predilection of certainn behaviorial scientists for inconsequential types of research. Anxious to be "scientific," they focus on topics that lend themselves to fairly precise quantification – i.e. factors they can count or measure – and undisturbed because the issues are trivial, they come out with scientific, but uninteresting, conclusions. Other behavioral scientists concern themselves with

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matters of significance, without any pretense of precisely "scientific" methodology. Yet these latter scholars would surely make a distinction between merely impressionistic or intuitive claims about the principles operative in human behavior and social structures and those conclusions which claim to rest upon and be supported by empirical – and hence "falsifiable" – justification.

Thus when an enterprise is called an art, in contrast with a science, it is important to recognize the following things: First, that it is an art does not cut it off from either empirical or critical observation. Second, that it is not cut off from a body of scientifically established rules and skills. On the contrary, every art that I can think of, that is worthy of the name, presupposes a highly disciplined mastery of a body of knowledge and development of skills.[20] For example, a musician who even approaches the designation "artist" knows a great deal about the conventional forms and principles of music and is able to handle the materials or instruments worked with with skill. By way of contrast, the merely rhaposodic improviser, who has found that it is possible by fiddling with the piano keys to arrive at assorted sequences of sounds that are pleasing or dramatic, does not know what key he is in and stays close to the original key, returning to it again and again, with the most boring results. So far as I know nobody has ever written a musical composition deemed worthy of remembrance by following generations who was innocent of musical knowledge. But it is necessary to make clear that "musical knowledge" is not limted to formal training; it may be acquired by other routes, however, all of them require disciplined drill and knowledge that builds on and extends that which previously had been learned. Some folk music might seem to be an exception to this, but, again, it inevitably arises out of a very considerable body of traditional material and utilizes principles and forms provided by tradition. Third, that an activity is an art does not immunize it from being evaluated by its results, however difficult it may be or however long it may take to do that evaluation. This may be illustrated in the healing arts as well as ethical and aesthetic. An art no less than a science or technique must ultimately be judged by its achievements and the quality and utility of those results. That this judgment is sometimes complicated or uncertain does not eliminate the necessity of such judgment, if qualitative judgment is possible at all. It seems to me important that in viewing ethical issues we be clear about the fact that we are dealing with an "art," but that that does *not* eliminate all relevance of

[20]Cf. John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (N.Y.: Minton, Balch, 1934), 270 f.

factual matters or the disciplines of experienced skill or the end results of policies and programs.

V. Contentment and Discontent

There was a world conference on habitat in Vancouver, Canada, sponsored by the U.N., May 31 to June 11, 1976. Previous world conferences have ranged from modestly significant to disastrous, albeit calling attention to highly important problems: environment, population, food, status of women. Some nations have been far more interested in scoring points against their enemies – or more precisely in finding scapegoats for failure – than in dealing with the problem at hand. This has been called politicization, which is a misnomer, because politics has properly to do with finding viable means for dealing with problems. Unfortunately we are all familiar with that style of politics which has to do with the smoke screen gambit rather than with realistic programs for coping with genuine social problems.

Now "habitat" deals mainly with physical living conditions, and it should: housing and the lack of it, necessary services for adequate housing and their absence. Housing requires heat and the availability of water and sewage disposal. It means adequate space and accessibility to services as well as a roof. This is a worldwide concern. Just prior to the U.N. conference there were riots in India (April 19 and 20, 1977) by slum dwellers protesting against forced resettlement. Later there were similar serious disturbances in the Philippines and elsewhere. Having a shelter and access to services is no small matter. I do not want to fall into the trap of claiming that housing is unimportant while I live in a relatively comfortable house.

So it is a risky subject, but I venture the opinion that intolerable habitat is not necessarily the most austere and lacking in conveniences. "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fated ox and hatred with it... Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife." (Prov. 15:17, 17:1) I have talked with bedoins in the Negev Desert in Israel, who live in tents of skins in what seem to me the most inhospitable circumstances. I cannot imagine anybody wanting to live that way, but the fact is, as it is with so many nomadic peoples, that they like it. They are a proud people, secure and dignified. Furthermore, unlike the Kurds of Iraq or Iran, they have a choice. They could leave the desert and work in Beershiva or Tel Aviv. Many Eskimos live in housing which would not meet standards of the Denver Housing Code. To me a Navaho hogan is incredible: small, ugly, a smoke hole in the center of the ceiling that is inefficient. But you have to ask the people who live in a particular situation. Professor Hill, who did one of the pioneering anthro-

pological studies in Navajo culture, quotes these words from a Navajo trying to explain to an outsider how they regard things:

> When a man goes into a corn field he feels that he is in a holy place, that he is walking among Holy People, White Corn Boy, Yellow Corn Girl, Pollen Boy, Corn Bug Girl, Blue Corn Boy, and Variegated Corn Girl. If your fields are in good shape you feel that the Holy People are with you, and you feel buoyed up in spirit when you get back home. If your field is dried up you are down-hearted because the Holy People are not helping you.

That is the attiude toward the place where that man worked. Notice how another informant relates it to the place where he lives:

> The corn fields are holy places because you plant the seed and it grows. The Yei make it grow. You raise your corn just as if it were a baby. You sing Holy Songs in your home and in your corn field. Your corn field is a Holy Place like your home.[21]

Surely there is something about this that cuts through all the veneer of civilization. You want to explain what it means to say that something is holy – incomparably precious –, and the comparison that comes to mind is, it is like your home. One must wonder how many of the earth's privileged people would select that example. To take an extreme case, if you recall *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* you can hardly imagine Martha as saying something was holy and adding for perfect clarity, "like home." You can more readily picture her as using that reference to explain the nature of hell. One need not romanticize poverty in order to maintain that meaningful habitat in the midst of secure affluence is an achievement of no mean degree.

What is intolerable in physical shelter, I suspect, is not the hovel or hogan, but the apartment which, although it has running water and electricity, has rats and roaches, thin walls and noisy neighbors, stench and thugs in the halls. That is the product of urban civilization, whether communist or capitalist, eastern or western. Given adequate physical conditions, nothing affects human habitat as much as the religious environment, by which I mean the value resources, the awareness and celebration of life sustaining relationships, the atmosphere of mutuality and rootage in heritage. Or the absence or negation of these. So the question becomes a searching one: Where do you live? In what milieu? Some live in the midst of the holy, surrounded by a loving, sustaining sense of a Presence. Heraclitus

[21] "Navaho Agricultural and Hunting Methods," *Yale Publications in Anthropology*, Vol. 18 (1938), 53.

was warming himself by the cooking fire when visitors arrived and he is said to have remarked: "Here, too, are gods." Many others, of ancient times and modern, alas, live in visible luxury amid invisible garbage, sewage and polution.

This brings up a problem for which, I think, there is no pat solution: on the one hand progress, intelligence, sophistication and, indeed, justice required dissatisfaction and protest. For centuries multitudes of people have accepted living conditions and social arrangements of the most intolerable sort and have adjusted accordingly. This is not to say that they did not rage inwardly and among themselves over the more arbitrary and outrageous instances, but partly because there was little they could do about it and partly because rebellion was not within their ken, acceptance rather than resistance was the general rule. Beginning in the nineteenth century with resistance to colonialism we find increasingly that subject peoples no longer accept oppression as eternal and inevitable. The "revolution of rising expectations" is merely one manifestation of this. It is a welcome and exciting, if difficult, period to be living in.

On the other hand contentment and acceptance are to some extent requisites for a good life and probably for a just society, inasmuch as a just society requires a measure of stability. Many writers have dealt with the theme of the happy, contented and rather admirable family which in a generation or two becomes a pack of jackals. The later generation has a great deal more of everything, but is satisfied with nothing. The earlier generation was like Robert Burns' portrayal, "contented wi' little, and cantie wi' mair." The theme is not entirely fictional, and that poverty can produce miserable people – as in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* – does not cancel out the point that contentment in some measure, in some form, with one's human lot is a necessary part of the good life.

Nor is this problem confined to the affluent. Discontent that is pervasive, ill-focussed, and unrelated to constructive energy can plague and dupe the poor and the poor nations of the earth quite as disastrously as the rich, although it will do so in different forms. The "less developed countries" that are making a go of it are without exception those which have been able to harness the energy of discontent to programs of social service and development within which individuals find a place, purpose and contentment. Tanzania, for example, provides a striking and happy contrast in this regard with its neighbor Uganda, although of course there are many other factors also involved.

The problem is that mere contentment breeds stagnation; per-

vasive discontent breeds confusion and unhappiness. There is no way to go back to a previous age of contentment as an unqualified virtue, nor would we wish to, if it ever, in fact, existed. But it remains that the governance of discontent and the perception and possession of reasonable, reality based values – in a word, contentment – are more difficult and no less necessary in this stage of history. Religion has often been identified with undiscriminating contentment. It has also energized powerful rebellions, sometimes beyond all reason or appropriate measure. What is now required is a more discerning and focussed use of both traits. Particularly in a nation like ours, where the economy has stressed dissatisfaction with what you have, so that you will buy something "better," the cultivation of abiding satisfaction with some circumstances of your life poses a very real difficulty and for many people an urgent yet unacquired necessity.

VI. Dwelling and Building

This leads to consideration of a doctrine of Heidegger's, that the human being is a world builder, which includes but is more encompassing and illuminating than inventor, tool user and symbolic communicator. "World" here refers to that milieu in which a phenomenon "lives," is shaped and draws sustenance and meaning, as we speak of the Elizabethan World or the World of Art. Each person builds his/her own particular and peculiar realm or world, although the major portion of it is drawn from a commonly shared source of society and heritage. The *human* achievement is not merely to exist on the earth, but to *dwell* in a world.

> Earth is that which comes forth and shelters. . .Upon the earth and in it, historical man grounds his dwelling in the world. In setting up a world, the work sets forth the earth.[22]

He quotes Rilke's seminal words:

> Our task is to impress this preliminary, transient earth upon ourselves with so much suffering and so passionately that its nature rises up again "invisibly" within us. We are the bees of the invisible.[23]

This is close to what Thoreau meant when he said he loved to "see nature carried out" in a human being.[24] Now this is not the same

[22]Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought,* transl. A. Hofstadter (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1971), 46.

[23]*Ibid.,* 130 (italics omitted).

[24]*Walden,* "The Pond in Winter." It must be admitted that Thoreau often wrote as if wildness were necessarily good and civilization necessarily depraved, but his overall view — especially in the light of his last essays — seems to me clearly in line with the position I have taken. Dewey, Whitehead and Teilhard are explicitly in line with this position.

thing as a naive desire or attempt to return to an animal state of mindless innocence, an escape from culture and civilization. It is to recognize that there is a great difference between modes of human life that are artificial, destructive and dysfunctional and modes of human dwelling that are as it were an extension of nature: fulfilling, harmonious and healthsome. In a word, wholesome or saving.

> Mortals dwell in that they save the earth. . .Saving does not only snatch something from a danger. To save really means to set something free into its own presencing. To save the earth is more than to exploit it or even wear it out. Saving the earth does not master the earth and does not subjugate it, which is merely one step from spoliation.[25]

It is a view that is inescapably ecological. Admittedly there is a serious semantic difficulty in differentiating between the natural and unnatural. "Natural" can be used in the broadest sense, as John Stuart Mill insisted in his essay on *Nature*, to include anything that happens or exists; then nothing real or possible is unnatural. But that misses the point intended by those from the Stoics on who advocated as a moral norm living "according to nature." Surely it is an understandable view which regards health as natural and disease as unnatural, child nurture as according to nature and child battering as aberrant, a symphony as an extension of nature's sound carried out in the human mode of dwelling – as "natural" as the bird's nest or elephant's burial patterns – in contrast with the painful screeching of wheels and gears that are ill-designed and mis-matched.

As I say, there are real difficulties here, because nature includes violence, noise, struggle and destruction. Perhaps from the microbe's point of view disease that is inflicted is most natural. And another difficulty is that it is not easy to avoid the designation of that which is customary as being sanctioned by "natural law," as we used to hear it said that it was unnatural for boys to have long hair and natural for women to be subjugated. Nevertheless, recognizing these difficulties when it comes to trying to make distinctions, I am here concerned only to establish that it is a reasonable position to maintain that some human enterprises are in accord with nature and some are not, that there are modes of living and dwelling that are productive of health and joy, mutually satisfying and fulfilling, encouraging and ennobling. And there are some that are sick.

VII. Faith, Hope and Egospasm

The doctrine of emergent creativity holds that while the novel

[25]Heidegger, *cit sup.*, 150.

emergent entity is rooted in its prior constituent elements, the new emergent reality is genuinely more than and different from those elements.[26] It is not merely the old constituents in disguise. To understand this clearly is to grasp one of the important distinctions between the views of antiquity and modernity. As applied to ethics, this means that although there is continuity between the ways of nature and human morality, neither ethical norms nor just human systems can be derived from non-human data or animal behavior. Any adequately sensitive and just ethics must include norms, judgments and criteria that represent as it were a human super-imposition upon the animal world and a creative extension of the ways of nature. But there is a great contrast between those ethical systems that deny or forget their rootage in nature and those which grow out of and extend and sensitize "reverence for life" in distinctively and appropriately human terms.

Schweitzer, after all, extolled reverence for life and rejoiced on the edge of the primeval forest, but he did not learn from nature the injunction to take in the sick to care for them or to sound off to the whole world about the dangers of nuclear testing. Recognizing the truth in Schopenhauer's description of nature as a vast struggle for survival and Nietzsche's will to power, Schweitzer was forced to conclude that the God revealed by nature has power and majesty, but "has no ethical character."[27] It is precisely in the human dimension that the possibility of ethical knowledge (and error) arises. "In the world He appears to me as the myterious, marvellous creative Force; within me He reveals Himself as ethical Will." I believe he has, judging by his own writings elsewhere, exaggerated the dichotomy. For there are many profoundly ethical lessons to be learned from nature. Also, we learn from history as well as from our hearts. But the central point that the human dimension adds significantly and distinctively to the largely instinctive patterns of other forms of life remains. For one thing there are occasions for sensitivity and sympathy that are in contrast with the usual patterns of behavior in nature. For another, the concept of justice in its various forms is manifestly lacking in the animal kingdom apart from humanity. It is striking that the ancient myth depicts Adam and Eve as internalizing or incorporating (eating) the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and thereby being expelled from the paradise of in-

[26]Whitehead regarded this as "the ultimate metaphysical principle." *Process and Reality* (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1929), 32. Cf. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (N.Y.: Harper, 1959), 86.

[27]Albert Schweitzer, *Christianity and the Religions of the World,* transl. J. Powers (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1923), 73 ff.

nocence. The concern for equitable adjudication of goods in situations of conflict is distinctively human. Tenderness and care are found among animals; justice is a human invention. If it is a divine ordinance, it comes to birth only in respect to the human realm.

Borrowing from Toffler's term "ecospasm,"[28] I would use the term *egospasm* to depict a human trait that gushes forth from time to time and has particularly marked the recent past. It is the unreasonable and unrestrained assertion of the individual ego. It takes many forms. One form is that of ambition and power, commended as a lifestyle by R. J. Ringer in *Winning through Intimidation*. One might call it skilled aggression in contrast with raw physical attack. Several forms of therapy center on sheer personal, individual self-assertion. Another form is found in the divinization of feeling or emotion. Whatever is wanted or felt is good, and again we can find several forms of therapy which extoll this. Still another form is found in the cult of violence, regarded as the proper human expression of meaning in a world that fails to conform to our wishes. I am unaware of schools of therapy which express this, but that there are other modes of instruction which do so is all too evident. What is to be noted here is that each of these has an ethics – a set of norms and a program of human behavior – which expresses in normative terms what human life should be and what the demands of the "ought" are.

If there is anything which we can derive from the race's experience, surely it is this: that there are requirements for living together which demand consideration of others, and thus sheer self-centeredness is not an adequate basis for ethics.[29] And equally that it is necessary for the individual to be self-concerned, self-directed, self-realized. Both of these are necessary from an ethical as well as a psychological and sociological viewpoint. The problem of life is to balance them out, to find the appropriate ways for self-realization and for social responsibility. So Whitehead defines religion as world loyalty[30] as well as what the individual does with his own solitariness, the latter oft-quoted, the former seldom quoted. And Hocking as the "redemption of solitude,"[31] which suggests both the privatistic dimension and the social. Or we may turn to the Second Commandment, based on Leviticus, to love one's neighbor as oneself, which implicitly recognizes self love as well as love of others.

The point to be drawn is not merely that self-centeredness is in-

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[28]Alvin Toffler, *The Eco-Spasm Report* (N.Y.: Bantam, 1975).

[29]Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (N.Y.: Knopf, 1977) deals perceptively with this theme in both the contemporary and selected historical settings.

[30]*Religion in the Making* (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1926), 60.

[31]*The Meaning of God in Human Experience* (New Haven: Yale, 1912), 404.

adequate, although that is true, whether one turn to tradition or contemporary observation. The point, apparently, is that many people in our society feel that they have given too much consideration to conventional demands and too little to personal realization. This may be true or it may be that it is only their reading of the situation, but in either case it cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. What has to be concluded – so I would argue – is that they must come to see and understand the problem as one not of self concern exclusively but of finding the proper balance between self and social concern. Having said that I have to recognize that as a strategy it may be necessary for some people to concentrate on one or the other to be on the road where they are able then to confront the real problem.

It is very likely that the egospasm movements which we have witnessed in the past two decades were spawned as much by social conditions as by inadequate personal lifestyles. What virtually all schools of ethics assert, however, is that the human being need not be and ought not be the complete victim of circumstance. There is simply no escape from decisional responsibility of the individual, although that is patently burdensome at times. The antidote for selfishness, when the pendulum swings in that direction, is not sentimental altruism, but discovery of where the real problem lies, which is not only in striking a balance between self and social concern, but in discovery of the appropriate and productive ways in which to direct self-realization and in which to serve and sacrifice for the commonweal. Furthermore, it requires a recognition that this distribution will always involve arrangements that are less than totally satisfactory and dilemmas that require commitments that cannot be known to be exactly correct. The frequently heard appeals of egospasm – whether in terms of return to irresponsible childhood, amoral animalism or assertive competition – are, as it turns out, self defeating as well as socially destructive in the long run.

VIII. Finitude and Grace

What this comes down to is in part an acceptance of one's finitude. To be overly self-centered or aggressive whether by means of assertion of power or exercise of manipulation, is to exaggerate one's own importance in the scheme of things. Or, what amounts to the same thing, it may be an obsessive rebellion against one's limited importance. The clear fact of the matter is that any one of us is of quite limited power and importance in the on-going scheme of life. The world will one day go on, one way or another, without any one of us and without all of us. This I find to be as disconcerting as it is true.

It is, however, the truth of it that is relevant to our discussion. Faith is that orientational stance within which it is possible to come to terms with one's finitude, not as either defiance or defeat, but affirmative acceptance.

First of all, acceptance of one's finitude means ability to be grateful for life on whatever terms it has been given. In other words, it requires a certain maturity that can be contrasted with the spoiled child who cannot be happy with anything because he does not have everything. Thomas Hardy often struck this note.

> Let me enjoy the earth no less
> Because the All-enacting Might
> That fashioned forth its loveliness
> Had other aims than my delight.

A basic part of what it means to have learned anything at all is to have accepted that we cannot always have our own way, especially including those situations in which our way seems to be reasonable and right. Life simply is not given on such terms. Thus on his eighty-sixth birthday Hardy wrote:

> Well world, you have kept faith with me; kept faith with me.
> Upon the whole you have proved to be much as you said you were.
> Since as a child I used to lie upon the leaze and watch the sky,
> Never, I own, expected I that life would all be fair.

Now these terms may be outrageously unfair. The faith stance does not deny that, but regards it as our task to make life more just, to mitigate the inequities that are given. Yet, when all is said and done, life does not owe any one of us anything. The Calvinists have perhaps understood this point best of all, despite some of the curious doctrines that it has been tied up with. I have in my files a letter by my grandfather, a hard-bitten Calvinist if ever there was one, written to my father, who was dying in middle age at the height of his career. What he said was in essence: don't complain, look at your blessings, die like a man of faith. You may object to that on the basis of fatherly feelings or kindness, and I would agree, but you cannot gainsay its direct honesty and truth. We have only to consider the pitiable lot of the multitudes of humanity throughout history to recognize that none of us has any *claim* upon a long life of abundant happiness. Whatever we are or have, we live by grace.

Secondly, acceptance of finitude means acceptance of the limits of our own power and ability. The point is obvious enough; it is in its applications that we have difficulty. For instance, this means

recognition on the part of a minister that there are persons to whom he/she cannot minister adequately, and that this is not necessarily the fault of either minister or parishoner. This is a hard saying for clergy who have a messiah complex or who have not fought and won the battle against illusions of omni-comptence. It also means putting aside the fond delusion that it must be a problem of failure in communication or of training that did not equip me to be omni-competent. Or, to take another instance, it may mean that there are international situations with respect to which there is nothing a given nation can do to make it all right. There may very well be world situations in which there is nothing that the U.S. or the U.N. can do that will transform a destructive conflict into a productive and cooperative enterprise. Like all sound wisdom, this has obvious dangers, especially as an invitation to retreat into the excuse of helplessness and indifference. The counsel of mature faith has ever been that we are called to do what we can, not more, not less. "The task is not upon thee to finish; neither art thou free to desist from doing it."

The applicability of this to parents who discover that they are no longer in control of their children's lives, of public servants who find their institution has lost sight of its purpose, of retired persons who see their former enterprise head down a road they sincerely believe to be disastrously mistaken — all these speak poignantly of both the tragic threads that intertwine with human destiny and of the finitude of human powers. There wisdom stands in opposition to despair, as Erikson has pointed out, and in that circumstance only some larger faith orientation can provide the hope that triumps over cynicism.

Thirdly, acceptance of finitude involves recognition of the inevitability of proximate achievement and arbitrary limitations.[32] Thus it contrasts with perfectionism, legalism and self-righteous certitude. It is well known that convicts often complain about the discrepancy of sentences meted out by courts. This is a commentary not on injustice but an immature understanding of what life is like and how we are to respond to it. For only in the most rigid legalism would all sentences "fit the crime," without consideration of circumstances. Recently I heard a convicted man complain bitterly because someone else he knew of had received a lesser punishment for a more serious crime. Somehow he thought this proved he was getting a raw deal, whereas in fact his sentence was reasonable and appropriate. His in-

[32]Reinhold Niebuhr is, of course, unsurpassed in dealing with this theme and remains instructive on the perils of hubris. However, my stress on acceptance is somewhat at odds with Niebuhr's stress on the impossible, yet inescapable, demands of perfection, which I find both unrealistic and unhelpful.

ability to comprehend the justice of his own situation was directly related to a similar confusion about the wrongness of his own deeds. There are no doubt many sentences imposed which are unwise, but the fact that they vary from one case to another is not of itself a miscarriage of justice.

From this illustration we can move on to think of many aspects of social existence which are unfair, where distributive justice is at best a rough approximation. An important dimension of maturity has to do with recognition of the fact that that is unavoidable and that habitual complaining over it is a good way to diminish the quality of life. Of course distributive justice should be refined to reduce life's inequities to a minimum, but it is sheer folly to expect it to reach a point of exactitude and it is bad faith, in Sartre's sense, to rail against the givenness of life on such terms. It is clear that the lack of such acceptance is related to the failure to recognize and accept the human condition — and one's own existence — as one of finite creaturehood.

The word "acceptance" may suggest a more passive stance than is intended. There is a form of acceptance that is defeatist and sullen. It has connotations of helplessness and resignation. Many people have come to terms with their finitude on such terms. Here is where the orientation of a sustaining faith makes the difference. It is, if it is mature in its understanding, equally realistic about the limitations of power and impossibility of perfection in either individual character or social justice. But having come to terms with that, one works on with a will, cherishes the quality of hope, and beholds it all with a serene wisdom.[33] This is what I mean by grace. It is a by-product of work and faith, acceptance and purposeful discontent, individual dignity and authentic relatedness. Buber has somewhere said that the person of faith always has two pieces of paper in his pocket. On one it says, "Remember you are dust." On the other, "Remember you are a child of God." I have used the word "orientation" to suggest the faith dimension; now I would like to substitute abode or habitat. It is where and how one lives: one's dwelling.

In a famous passage in *The Fires of Spring* James Michener has summed up the matter beautifully, using the metaphor of journey as well as abode. But after all our abode is portable in life.

For this is the journey that men make: to find themselves. If

[33]No one, in my judgment, has surpassed Dewey in writing about the unifying and holistic function of the religious dimension, and it does not surprise me in the least to see his writings being re-discovered, especially in this regard *Art as Experience* (*cit. sup.*), *A Common Faith* (New Haven: Yale, 1934), *Human Nature and Conduct* (N.Y.: Holt, 1922). The same may be said with regard to the earlier point about an ecological faith perspective, e.g., *Experience and Nature* (LaSalle: Open Court, 1929).

> they fail in this, it doesn't matter much what else they find. Money, position, fame, many loves, revenge are all of little consequence, and when the tickets are collected at the end of the ride they are tossed into a bin marked Failure. But if a man happens to find himself – if he knows what he can be depended upon to do, the limits of his courage, the position from which he will no longer retreat, the degree to which he can surrender his inner life to some woman, the secret reservoirs of his determination, the extent of his dedication, the depth of his feeling for beauty, his honest and unpostured goals – he has found a mansion which he can inhabit with dignity all the days of his life.

It is noteworthy in his listing how every item has connotations of limits, boundaries, structure. Furthermore, these tickets which are worthless at the end, served their purpose at one time or another, and in that striking phrase he has, I think, caught what grace is about. Our achievements and possessions may have legitimate utility, but in the milieu of grace one does not mistake them for the journey or what life is really about.

Insofar as ethics has to do with character and quality of life, it is necessarily concerned with prescriptions and contracts, but far deeper than that it has to do with the style of abode in which we live and move and have our being. To do so with life affirming character is ethics. To do so with grace as well is the legacy of faith.