

Daniel Ellsberg
Truth and Consequence:
Reflections on Catastrophe, Civil Resistance, and Hope
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The threat of falling dominos is not primarily of Communist regimes, but of action by regimes (whether left or right) to control the benefits of their own resources, such as nationalizing industries, raising prices, or establishing import restrictions.

Kissinger said, "Let's, for God's sake, see this as a serious matter on which reasonable men can disagree, and where all morality and human concern is not on our side. When there is a matter of U.S. influence and credibility, it is a moral commitment."

The loss of awareness of evil, of the meaning of what one does, is the evil of our time.

What does it take to get evil done? What does it take to get someone to do something he would normally regard as evil -or to do right, to stop, to disobey?

What sort of personality is required to carry out torture?

Milgram's answer: an order from an authority, which leads the person to see himself as an agent, an instrument -i.e., not responsible.

(Note the difficulty of inducing autonomous, spontaneous human decision-making, once the subject starts to obey such an order.)

Hypothesis: lesser evils lead to greater evils.

In late 1963 and 1964, after the Cuban Missile Crisis, I set out to examine crises as a form of "communicating to an enemy"

Instead, I became aware of crisis behavior as a form of communicating to, concealing from, or misleading a domestic audience.

"Necessity is the mother of deception." In a crisis, urgent necessity facilitates the exercise of imagination in inventing a "suitable, plausible, convincing useful lie."

Why did I never hear anyone raise the question "Is this right?"

Why were ethical or moral principles never mentioned?

The only questions raised were:

- Will this work?
- Is it expedient?
- Is it worth the risk?
- Will we get away with it?

Corruption is easiest and strongest when it is non-conscious. Hence the role and function of self-deception as to one's working goals and actions--sources of one's identity and values, autonomy, and cues for action and opinions.

Hypothesis: the very concept of "conscience" simply doesn't apply to organizational behavior.

Bureaucracies provide a way to unhook from a sense of personal responsibility -and hence, from the critique or inhibition of conscience--through the agentic mode of obeying legitimate authority.

In 1961, Gary Snyder presented me with "an alternative way of being". The memory stuck, and in 1970, I set out to see him again."

By then I was in a "different line of work" from the bureaucrats: telling the truth about the war --not "the" truth, but truths compared to the usual reporting. I was resisting Authority and the war, taking risks of my career and reputation --and later, my freedom.

My committed, risk-taking behavior was the same as, or inspired by the same values as, a large class of critics of the war, consisting of many young people, along with a relatively few Radical Outsiders my age or older.

A much larger class of insiders disliked the war without resisting it. However, I had a peculiar, unique background and character traits not shared by other insiders: guilt over my role in Vietnam, and a big secret to impart.

Young people have more intense consciences (especially social conscience) and feeling of responsibility for the plight of others. They decry society's failure to live up to their ideals, many of which they share.

What is actualization within a very sick society, or a highly repressive one? Is it healthy to be in a state of constant resistance, perhaps without much immediate apparent effect --or perhaps without any effect?

Is it healthy to feel constantly guilty, powerless, cowardly, and compliant for not doing so?

If I am willing to "kill for my country", am I also willing to torture? lie? starve other people? subvert democracy?

Learn to be angry about the right things.

We are in a stage of overt struggle to expand or contract our Democracy.

I suspect the current system is not viable. I choose to work for human freedom to enlarge, in hopes of having a free and humane future --indefinite or not.

After a Conversation with Dave Dellinger:

Dave says we need to combine personal humanity and politics and create oases of practical love and trust. We need to join the political and the personal, the spiritual and the material --to defend against despair and sustain a sense of continuity and meaning.

Individual enlightenment and individual example are no longer adequate to create the changes in consciousness that could prevent species-suicide (which may prove to be humans' karma, whatever we do).

We must work to change values, as well as the structures and conditioning of society --from loyalty, not to tribe, but across nationality to humanity, life, Earth; from bureaucratization to humanism; awakening from hypnotic, patriotic, bureaucratic slumber to open our own eyes and say "no" to power.

How am I to live my life? What is the future of humanity and all life, and how may my life relate to that?

Is there a way out? Is there another way to live together with neighbors, countrymen, humanity, nature, and our whole selves?

I am seeking wisdom, enlightenment. I am studying, meditating, seeking teachers, looking for explanations and examples of humans and societies.

Pat notes that meditation is *a way*, not *the way*.

Mystical experience, feeling, insight come not only or mainly from meditation. Awakening can hit at unpredictable moments of daily living, often in nature.

Do separate waves in the ocean exist? Yes, for some purposes, such as when we are riding a wave and trying to stay on top.

It is also true that waves are continuously undergoing a change of form.

Moral: kinship, even "oneness" does not annihilate meaningful, creative, beautiful (or not) differentiation!

Our society has effectively secularized most activities -except for a sanctification of the State, National Security, obedience to the rules, and individual acquisitive success. This secularization is based in individualization, isolation, and selfishness, alongside the loss of community and the impulse toward mutual obligation.

This does not seem a sufficient basis for values, goals, and actions that satisfy all our innate instincts and desires, that permit us to achieve fulfillment, satisfaction, and serenity.

On the national level, it leads to behavior that can increasingly be seen to be suicidal, as well as homicidal and oppressive.

In the artificial environment of cities, people are removed from participating in natural cycles of plant and animal creation and growth cycles. They are also sheltered from the vicissitudes of the natural world.

The total consumption of oil 50 years ago was 5% of present day, and the total transport of oil across oceans 50 years ago was less than the amount of spillage now.

We need a return to self-sufficiency, with trade the exception. California could have five or six largely self-sufficient regions.

What if humanity was a fatal error for Earth?

The dangers to species and Earth began to appear in the last 5,000 years especially the last 100 to 300 years.

Even if glimmers of a wrong turn can be seen in pre-Socratic Greek scientific theorizing, objectifying things -that's only 2500 years ago. It's hard to conclude that it was inevitably in human genes for us to become a threat to the Earth itself.

Does history have direction? Is it good (for humans)?

The period of written history has had, for its subject, the last, decaying phase of the human species. What may await us: extinction by pollution, totalitarianism, or one or more cataclysms.

Yet, a basis for joy still exists. Humanity may transcend its present direction and survive longer, in which case there will probably be some return to Neolithic-like smallness, community, being-in-Nature, and sacredness of Life and Reality.

We evaluate the world as if we had chosen it or constructed it -as if we had discovered a continent, or chosen a distant vacation site, or planned and constructed a model city.

But this Earth evolved us. To say that it chose us, planned and constructed us, or found us might be somewhat misleading -but less so than the reverse statements, or any assertion of totally independent evolution of Earth and us.

Act on the hypothesis that it is the will, purpose, aim of the Cosmos that the human species should survive a while longer -and that its creative, evolutionary, aesthetic usefulness is not at an end.

Act as if the Cosmos wanted humans and spiritual virtues to flourish -at least, in our lifetimes, and well into mid-term posterity.

Reality is the simultaneity of great horrors and great beauty.

My alternative to sharing the truth was to live outside jail as a knowing accomplice of war. Small as the chance seemed of influencing the war's course, releasing the Papers was by far the most effective nonviolent act available to me.

My isolation after the trial was immediate, stressful, and very prolonged. There was a feeling of being unable to cope, fighting hopelessness.

I was an ordinary, smart, somewhat bold and original intellectual -a minor, subordinate official- who happened to notice that history demanded and allowed me to take a dangerous, but perhaps significant, act. The effectiveness of my action was magnified in unexpected ways by certain other players and events.

Now I am returning to my former area of interest: the nuclear problem. I have known this to be my fate, my task, since 1960.

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