

MAKING A DIFFERENCE OR CHANGING THE WORLD?
Lars Hertzberg

So what can a man do where he sees so clearly that what lies before him is not the whole plan? Answer: No more than work faithfully and actively on that part of the plan which lies before him.

G. C. Lichtenberg¹

Someone reacts *like this*: he says “Not *that!*” - & resists it. Out of this, situations perhaps develop which are equally intolerable; & perhaps by then strength for any further revolt is exhausted. We say “If *he* hadn’t done *that*, the evil would not have come about”. But with what justification? Who knows the laws according to which society unfolds? I am sure even the cleverest has no idea. If you fight, you fight. If you hope, you hope.

Someone can fight, hope & even believe, without believing *scientifically*.

Ludwig Wittgenstein²

Parents bringing up their children; teachers educating children and young people in school or at the university; citizens involved in the life of the community or the state; politicians trying to organize our common affairs; scientists striving to develop a new technology; businessmen working to bring out some new commodity on the market; artists, clergymen, city planners, journalists – for all of them, the outcome of their efforts is in large part dependent on the actions of others which they have no power to control. How then can they retain their faith in the meaning of what they are doing? If their strivings are not taken up by others, were they not wasted? In what way are they responsible for the actions of others?

In short, how can our ability to see meaning in our lives survive the recognition that that we live in a changing, tumultuous world beyond our means of control?

1 Wishing to change the world

Some people see it as their task to change the world. They will settle for nothing less. Marx wrote: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it” (The 11th Thesis on Feuerbach). Whether this is the first occurrence of the metaphor “to change the

world” I do not know; it is certainly the most famous. It belongs in a tradition, by no means confined to Marxists, in which wanting to change the world is seen as a noble motive. The thesis seems to invoke a distinction between those who are content merely to live in the world, taking it as they find it, and those who have the courage, imagination and energy to want to *change* it, or who see it as their obligation to do so. The former, of course, are not just the traditional philosophers mentioned by Marx, but people in the mainstream of life, the little men and women going about their everyday business, the *petits bourgeois* in Marx’s terminology.

The world one purports to change is the “life-world” of human beings, the hubbub made up of the lives people live. This world, of course, is largely constituted by actions, many of which, in turn, have a bearing on what others do, and which hence themselves, strictly speaking, bring about changes in the (life-)world. So if one’s ambition is to change the world, what one is aiming to do is to change something that is in itself essentially constituted by change. One wants to change the way the world changes, as it were.

“Changing the world” is a metaphor and it would be silly to pretend to take it literally. Nevertheless, it seems to be used to mark an important distinction, that between simple change and *real* change. When I set out to “change the world”, the change I bring about must be decisive, irreversible, and unquestionably for the better.

This should alert us to a problem. Bringing about a change is conceivable only against a background of permanence. On the one hand it means that, unless one had brought about the change, things would have continued, in the relevant respect, more or less as they were before. On the other hand, after one brings about the change, things will continue in the new state. There are, we might say, certain counterfactual conditions for speaking about change. This points to the precariousness of any attempt to change the world. By taking action, say, against an oppressive system, I may at the same time suck away the strength from other forces of opposition, which would, perhaps, have stood a greater chance of achieving a balanced development. One might think here of Lenin and the Bolsheviks wresting the momentum of the Russian revolution from more reformist groups, thus blocking the possibility of a democratic transfer of power. And vice versa, of course: as Lenin clearly saw, small and moderate reforms may destroy the impetus for the radical change which one may deem necessary at some point in history. The German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck had the same insight as Lenin though putting it to the opposite use, instituting a social welfare system in order to forestall a revolution. Or, as the young Sicilian aristocrat Tancredi says to his uncle Fabrizio, the Prince of Salino, in Giuseppe di Lampedusa’s novel *The Leopard*: “Unless we ourselves take a hand now, they'll foist a republic on us. If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change. D'you understand?”

Those who try to institute change may be tempted to focus on the good they are trying to achieve and give themselves leave to disregard any incident consequences. These, of course, may be hard to foresee, and the more so the more radical the change. For instance, those who fought for the emancipation of married women in the Western world in the 19th and 20th centuries may not have anticipated the devastating consequences that this change, alongside all its undeniable beneficial effects, would have for the child's right to a secure family environment, in bringing with it a soaring divorce rate.

If we wanted to measure the real importance of change, we should compare the new state of things, not with how things were before, but with how they would have been unless the change had been carried out – which, of course, is in general impossible to do. So the assessment of change is mostly not a matter of knowledge but of faith. And the idea that one might *set out* to change the world is, on the whole, a fantasy. Whether a change will really come about, and if so, whether it will be for the good, depends on an infinitude of circumstances which it is impossible to survey.

This brings us to the world-changer's dilemma. He is committed to *consequences*: he is the utilitarian *par preference*. “You have to break some eggs if you want to make an omelette” is his motto. But he can have no way of knowing, at the start, *how* many eggs will have to be broken, or whether in the end anything will be achieved apart from the breaking of eggs. The Red Brigades who kidnapped and killed Prime Minister Aldo Moro in Italy in 1978 must evidently shoulder the responsibility for the *whole* calculation, including the fact that at best their murder accomplished nothing at all, at worst it was a step on the path that made Italy ready for the anti-political Berlusconi regime. It won't do for them to say “up until such and such a point in time, all our calculations were right” – the world doesn't simply stop at some point. So not only did they kill a defenceless human being; *by their own standards* they failed the people of Italy.

Consequences may be unforeseen in other ways too. Hitler's imperialist wars hastened the end of European imperialism, and the conflicts he incited provided the impetus for what became the European Union. But he hardly merits any thanks for that.

Of course there may be moments in history where decent people can see no alternatives to bringing about change, such as the abolition of slavery in the United States, or the bringing down of the Iron curtain in Eastern Europe in 1989. The situation here is like the response to being attacked in war, where one abandons the everyday and goes to the defence of one's country without regard to the likelihood of success.

2 The anxiety of responsibility

A successful Finnish athlete was asked whether he had made a contribution to the relief funds after the tsunami disaster in December of 2004. He replied that even if he gave away everything he owned it would not have made any difference. Well, the journalist should not have asked, I think, but since the athlete chose to answer, we are permitted to subject his answer to scrutiny. Obviously, what he said was literally false: even if he were a person of fairly modest means, his giving away all he owned, or even a substantial portion of it, would certainly have *made quite a difference*: so many dysentery cures, so many malaria shots, so many water purification tablets, etc: so many lives saved. But that, of course, was not the actual question: rather, it was about giving away some small share of his income. And yet, even that would have made some difference. (It would of course be ridiculous to argue, as Peter Singer does, that failing to save a life is just as horrendous as actually killing someone; even so, failing to act *is* in many cases a moral shortcoming.) It is true that the kind of difference it would have made would not even have made a dent in the total scope of the disaster. But why should that matter? It certainly does not matter to the human beings saved.

The athlete's response, I think, strikes a cord in all of us: "The world is a horrible place for a huge number of people, and it would remain horrible even if I sacrificed all I have, gave up my entire way of life, so how can I keep my peace of mind (seeing that I, personally, have, thus far, managed not to be touched by the horror), except by shutting out the world, living in my head, cultivating my garden?" It is not really a question of begrudging the small amount of money, it is a question about opening the door to the anguished recognition that we are all responsible for each other; and that this responsibility can never be met to the full – the anguish of the lawyer who asked Jesus "who is my neighbour?" and was perhaps hoping for a hard and fast criterion. And, let's face it, most of us, for most of the time, share that anguish. One may feel that the only way of coping with the infinite suffering of humanity is to try to blot it out from view. Indeed, someone may argue that that is the only *clearsighted* response, that, for most of us, imagining that we live, or even that we could live, in full awareness of the suffering of humanity, would itself be a form of self-deception.³

However, calling this response clearsighted is itself, perhaps, a form of self-deception. It means judging *both* alternatives from a purely self-centred perspective as if no other perspective mattered: keeping one's peace of mind is being weighed against the supposed self-satisfaction of being active in the face of suffering. To think along these lines is to place oneself in one's own line of vision, blocking the victims from one's view.

The athlete's response could perhaps be considered the flip-side of the world-changer's mentality. He might have been ready to chip in if there had been some guarantee that things would

not continue as heretofore. The present cause was not worthy of his effort since it did not qualify as a case of world-change.

3 Making a difference

In Frank Capra's film *It's a Wonderful Life* from 1946, which is shown every Christmas on American television, an angel, Clarence, is assigned the task of stopping the main character, George Bailey (played by James Stewart), from committing suicide. The angel is shown some flashbacks of Bailey's life. In one of them, the youthful Bailey tells his future wife of his grandiose plans:

Well, not just one wish. A whole hatful, Mary. I know what I'm going to do tomorrow and the next day and the next year and the year after that. I'm shaking the dust of this crummy little town off my feet and I'm going to see the world. Italy, Greece, the Parthenon, the Colosseum. Then I'm coming back here and go to college and see what they know . . . and then I'm going to build things. I'm gonna build air fields. I'm gonna build skyscrapers a hundred stories high. I'm gonna build bridges a mile long . . .

What is it you want, Mary? What do you want? You want the moon? Just say the word and I'll throw a lasso around it and pull it down.

Hey, that's a pretty good idea. I'll give you the moon, Mary.

However, time and again during his life, the needs of the people around him have intervened, deflecting him from his big plans. Now, facing disaster after misplacing an \$ 8,000 loan, George Bailey is shattered by the realization how far his life has fallen short of his dreams. He wishes he had never been born. However, Clarence lets him see how his town, his family and friends would have turned out if he had not lived. Bailey is allowed to see, literally, the difference he has made – rescuing his brother from drowning, preventing a pharmacist from causing a lethal accident, taking over his father's loan company on which the poor people of the community are dependent.

The atmosphere of the film is undeniably somewhat saccharine (though tempered by humour). Nevertheless, it does convey a thoughtful perspective on life: I would suggest it can be viewed as an allegory of acquiring a mature relation to one's world. The young Bailey, as it were, is ready to swallow the world whole. It is perhaps characteristic of the young (male?) person's dreams that thoughts of what he will do for himself and what he will do for the world – experience and

action – are intermingled. What life teaches him, however, is that the world does not belong to him; he belongs to the world. In his decency he is unable to turn his back on the people who depend on him and to stick to his plans. What the angel must do is to help him bring this insight to consciousness: to make him realize that his responsiveness has not made him lose but rather find himself. This realization is necessary in order to forestall bitterness. Once he has made that realization, the fact that the missing money is also retrieved is superfluous; or rather, it can be seen as symbolic of his rediscovery of himself.⁴

Bailey dreamt about changing the world, then settles for having made a difference. In doing so, he has not traded one way of being extraordinary for another, but surrenders his claim to the right to be extraordinary. I see him as an everyman: in the nature of things, I would suggest, it is given to each one of us to make *some* difference to the lives of those around us or those we happen to encounter, provided we do not shut ourselves off from others. Some of us get the chance to achieve more, but that will only happen through a special dispensation. On the other hand, putting one's life plans (or one's *Lebensanschauung*, one's ideology) before the way one is claimed by others would be self-centred. Bailey comes to embrace, life teaches him to embrace, an anti-utopian view of life: or rather, he comes to realize that the real utopia should be found in the centre, in our midst, not in the periphery. Thus he avoids having to pay the cost of an unresolved utopianism, which is bitterness.

People may have a psychological need to make plans, but whether those plans are fulfilled will not necessarily matter a great deal for the ways in which they will touch other people's lives. (I am not saying it could not matter.) Thus there is perhaps a deep truth in John Lennon's saying, "Life is what happens while we're busy making other plans". Indeed, I would suggest that a person may pass through life without any clear perception of the good she has brought into the world, though not because of any blindness on her part, but rather because her goodness may lie precisely in the things she does not think about, in the decisions she does not consider. Our importance to others lies first and foremost in what we *are*. (On this account, if the world should "change" as a result of people doing the decent thing that would be an accidental byproduct.)

Bailey has joined the ranks of all those whose anonymous contributions, rather than change the world, have kept things from gradually getting infinitely worse. This theme is illustrated in another great film on the nature of agency, Akira Kurosawa's *Ikiru* (1952). This is the story of a faceless bureaucrat who is told he has a terminal illness. He decides to devote his remaining days to trying to make a difference: he battles for the construction of a children's playground in a city neighbourhood. At his funeral, the city bureaucrats who had done their best to stall his project are filled with contrition as they recall his unyielding efforts to overcome their resistance. However, by

degrees they talk themselves out of their guilt and into believing that the credit for the whole project actually belongs to them. The ending symbolizes the fact that many of the most important contributions to the edifice of our culture carry no copyright sign.

In answering the calls from the people around him, it might be said, Capra's *George Bailey* did his bit in trying to keep up the order of things. In saving his brother's life, in preventing an accidental poisoning, in rescuing the loan company, he kept the lives of those concerned from plunging into chaos. Now, "order" has a repressive ring to it, as in the catchword "law and order" often heard in the United States during the Nixon years, or in the even more ominous associations it carries to national socialism. But that is because of misuses of the word. A repressive regime is simply chaos in frozen form: the fact that things are static does not mean that they are in order. Those who fought to abolish slavery or to bring down the Iron Curtain were not attempting to tear down an existing order but rather to enable one to grow.

When order prevails, it means that people are able to retain a sense of meaning in their everyday lives. It prevails as long as they are able to carry on their lives without having to encroach on what gives a sense to the lives of those around them. The order may be torn apart through human aggression or natural disaster, through loss, pain, guilt or humiliation. This may bring people to a state in which they feel they have nothing to lose. The only semblance of meaning they are then able to find may lie in hatred and revenge. A movement like the Palestinian Hamas seems to be an embodiment of this form of despair.⁵

Setting out to change the world is a gamble. It carries with it the risk of disrupting the existing order of things without replacing it with anything of value. In this respect it is difficult to do something that is better than doing nothing at all. In many situations, just trying to help keep up the order is the best we can do.

4 Control vs. hope

The idea that my efforts are wasted if they do not leave a lasting mark on the world, one that I can claim as my own (which is not the same as saying that I expect to be honoured for them) places the focus on myself as the agent of change. It means acting in a spirit that demands guarantees for the result. This is one way of seeing one's responsibility for the outcome: the underlying thought is that action is only meaningful to the extent that the agent can control what will happen. Real action, in other words, is an exercise of power.

World-change, in fact, is just a special case of this. In a political context the demand for control means that measurable results are the only thing that counts, and that the methods used should have been proven effective. When this view of things is adopted it shapes all political

thought. In contemporary politics, it is expressed in the idea that the government is a caretaker, looking after the trade balance and the tax base. Politics becomes invisible. Society is here regarded under the metaphor of a mechanism. Side-effects and long-term effects are regarded as non-existent. Social engineering, we might say, is the first cousin of world-change.

However, control is not the only form that my responsibility for others may take. Consider the case of parents bringing up their children. Good parents will try to give their children all they can: they try to make sure that their children feel safe and loved, try to nourish their imagination and intellect by reading books to them, by listening to their questions and trying to answer them, etc. They go on doing that although they know that sometimes children may grow up to be miserable or antisocial in spite of having been brought up in a warm and nourishing environment. (Nor do they give any thought to what the odds of any given outcome might be.) On the other hand, a sensible person would not give up on a child just because he had been deprived of the things one considers essential. We have no right, we feel, to abandon hope (which is not the same as saying that our hope should be blind to realities). It seems that *in prospect* there are things we consider necessary for the child's growth and which we still do not consider necessary *in retrospect*.⁶

Again, we do not think of the goals of upbringing in terms of measurable results. Indeed, it could be argued that if we have definite goals in mind and a tested method for reaching them, that would be failing our responsibility as educators. We would then be treating the child as a means rather than an end in herself (that would be so even if the goal we set ourselves were the good of the child). The good parent will rather see his role as that of providing a setting that maximizes the child's chances for becoming who she is: he will strive to make a difference to the child rather than shape her. Of course, "who the child is" is not something that could be established by empirical methods; rather, the notion itself is ethically conditioned. If a child grows up to be greedy or inconsiderate, for instance, we should hardly accept that as a case of having let the child become who she was.

Let us explore this a little more closely. When children are brought up with thought and sensitivity, the responsibility one assumes for the consequences of one's actions takes a form that is different from that of *control*. The guiding principle, we might say, is *hope*. In dealing with the child, the educator is not relying on empirical evidence of the causal efficacy of a method; rather, in responding to the child he is communicating with her, trying to *make himself understood* to her. There are two aspects to this. First, the child is given the space to be, or to become, an agent in her own right. In this respect this form of influence is dialogical. But, second, the dialogue is what might be called Socratic in nature. That means that it is grounded in a conviction that when left to her own devices, the child will have the capacity to see what is best called the truth; i.e. that she will

come to recognize how things stand, what is important, how a decent human being must act or cannot act.

Though in trying to make oneself understood one is not trying to mould the child, neither is one abstaining from trying to have an influence on the child. Of course abstaining from influence, too, is in many contexts a pedagogically sound course of action: we may often think the child should have a chance to make her own experiences; sometimes we may even find it reprehensible to influence the child, say, in her choice of friends. In both cases, however, a responsible parent would limit the degree of freedom. There are certainly some kinds of experience he would dissuade the child from testing, or some kinds of friend he would encourage her to avoid.

At this limit, however, if the child is not open to parental influence, the parent will have a dilemma. He may feel that the matter at hand is too important to be left to the child, and at the same time it would be unfortunate to have to use coercion (i.e. some causally efficacious method such as bribes, threats, physical force, etc). The possibility of such dilemmas, I should like to suggest, is internal to the educator's role. In calling them dilemmas, I am suggesting that there can be no formulaic solution to them: the parent will have to make his choice.

In such a case, however, to let the child have her way without even recognizing a dilemma would be an abdication from parental authority (the parent may not care enough to take on the problem; he will perhaps try to belittle it). But neither would one see a dilemma if one thought of education under the aspect of control. On this conception, one would have nothing to blame oneself for provided one used the method that promised to maximize the desirable outcome at the minimum of cost. If this entailed the use of coercion that might be a drawback, but no more than a drawback.

Hope, on the other hand, unlike control, does not require guarantees of success. For someone who regards his role as educator under the aspect of hope, what he would have to scrutinize is not the reliability of the methods, but the spirit in which he was acting. This does not mean that as long as one's intentions were good, one has nothing to blame oneself for. Indeed, if *all* one was ready to bring to the situation was good intentions, those intentions weren't really all that good. But if one can honestly tell oneself that one's choices were lucid, that one had spared no effort, then even if the end result was a failure, there should be no room for guilt. These are the categories in which one will consider one's actions, when looking at them under the aspect of hope: what matters is the *spirit* in which one acts. This form of acting, we might say, involves a different logic of justification than acting under the aspect of control.

The distinction between control and hope as modes of activity may throw some light on public decision-making and on public debate about policies, legislation and the allocation of resources. For instance, on the engineering approach, the place of the humanities and the arts is

precarious. Many of us are convinced, for instance, that access to works of art, music and the theatre, public support for libraries and for practising artists and scholars, the room given to art subjects in schools, make a difference to the lives people will live in our culture – maybe not to the life of each individual, still to enough people to matter, and to the overall spirit of human interaction.⁷ At the same time, we recognize that the difference it makes is not quantifiable. We may even feel suspicious of any attempt to *make* it quantifiable: as it were, to operationalize the importance of culture; in part, perhaps, because we feel that it is internal to the kind of importance culture can have that it is itself open to change: art is constantly looking for new ways of mattering. This means that in defending the continued public support for the arts and the humanities, what needs to be resisted is the very form of argument which belongs to a politics of control.⁸ (It is no accident that world-changers, beginning with Plato, have usually had little room for the arts in their utopias, or else have assigned them to determinate tasks.)

Of course, being open to this possibility means being open to the possibility that the arts may have a destructive impact on people's lives. If the arts do make a difference, that means that those who practise them carry a burden of responsibility. The artist cannot avoid the question whether she is a force for truth, hope, human dignity, compassion, or the reverse. Of course, being a moral question, it is one that can only ultimately be asked by each individual on her own behalf. (It is paradoxical that those who like to speak about the responsibility of the artists are often also the most eager to wrest it away from them, assigning it instead to some supervisory authority – this undoubtedly is what has given the notion of the artist's responsibility a bad name.)

In this connection, one might also consider the role of the mass media. The saturation violence shown at child-friendly viewing times on television has sometimes been defended by arguing that no causal link between violent entertainment and violent behaviour has been conclusively established. Some of the parties to this debate like to hide behind the logic of control: “no known links, hence no problem”. Someone who considered this business from the point of view of hope, on the other hand, might ask himself whether he would really *wish* to enrich himself by devoting his life to the continuous portrayal of ever new forms of human pain and degradation.⁹

5 Perennial politics

Dilemmas analogous to those facing an educator have a prominent role in politics. I would even submit that the dilemmas of hope essentially constitute the arena of political disagreement. Thus, in debating the conditions of democracy or of a market economy, a central issue is this: can the general public can be relied on to judge its own needs and interests? To what extent is its judgment subject to manipulation? Do people need to be protected against themselves sometimes, or should

they always be free to run their lives without outside interference? (This issue is closely connected with the contrast between negative and positive liberty famously formulated by Isaiah Berlin.) The issue cannot be answered once and for all. Apart from some academic philosophers, there are hardly any advocates for unrestricted negative liberty. It is true that after the experience of the United States and Finland, the prohibition of alcohol has been almost universally rejected, but in several countries the sale of liquor is strongly regulated. And where drugs are concerned, the advocates of legalization are few. People's attitudes towards regulation tend to depend on the particular issue, however: those who support liberal gun laws are often quite restrictive with regard to drugs, and vice versa. The advocates of liberalist policies usually argue that social problems should be resolved by the use "information", by "enlightening" the public (though it is not always quite clear how the work of enlightenment is to be done, or why it should be expected to work).

Another perennial issue to which the dilemma of hope is central is social welfare. Any policy has to be a balancing act between doing enough to protect people from hardship and not doing so much that their ability to assume responsibility for their own lives is undermined. There can hardly be an empirically grounded answer concerning the correct degree of support.

Some motives pull us in the direction of maintaining control, while others pull us in the direction of abdicating responsibility. Compassion is one of the strongest motives inclining us towards control, a classical case in point being the wife who supports her alcoholic husband, thus enabling him to keep up his drinking habit by not having to face up to the truth. There are obvious analogues to this in politics. But the temptations of abdication may be strong, too. We see this in conflicts which take the form of washing one's hand of responsibility, each side expecting the other to see the truth. Labour conflicts often have this character: thus, in a health-care strike, each party may be content to blame the strike's consequences for the lives and health of patients on their opponent. A contemporary conflict which has long had this form is that between Israel and the Palestinians: the Palestinians have been justifying their attacks as aimed against the injustice of the occupation (without regard to the innocence of the victims), while the Israelis have been justifying their repressive actions as a defence against terrorism (without addressing the underlying motives) – neither side stopping to ask itself whether its present policies are really getting it where it wants to go. The temptations of abdication may also take the form of moralism, as in the proposal to combat the spread of the HIV virus through sexual abstinence (a policy that seems particularly irresponsible since the victims of contagion are often innocent). Ecologists, too, sometimes strike a moralist tone, as in blaming the threats to the environment on people's ignorance and greed, without assuming the burden of analysing the social and economic conditions for preventing environmental disaster.

The dilemmas of politics cannot be resolved once and for all. Because of that, I believe, they will continue to define the sphere of politics. It is characteristic of them that different horns of the dilemmas tend to be combined with the interests of different social groups; thus, the privileged and the deprived, employers and employees, the wealthy and the poor, the fortunate and the unfortunate, will naturally align themselves with opposite sides on many of the issues. As long as privilege and fortune will tend to vary along with the roles of individuals in the life of society, these issues will be kept alive, the pendulum of opinion swinging at irregular intervals and with irregular force from one side to the other. (In this way, they differ from more particular issues like those, say, of the environment, which today, unfortunately perhaps, are not perceived as having a bearing on the lives of any group in particular, but will – if the environmentalists are right – sooner or later be of equal concern to all.)

It may sound as if I am saying that nothing ever really changes. But this is not my point. Perhaps the misleading word is “really”. It is true that the individual’s *ambition* to change the course of history is vain at best and destructive at worst. But if we stop looking for “real” change and look around us instead, we will notice that, like it or not, things are continually changing; and that we will constantly feel called upon to get certain things to start changing or to try stop other things from changing. And, if we are lucky, a great number of these startings and stoppings may combine to bring about a big change for the better: an improved order of things. But we are not always so lucky.

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¹ Quoted in M. O’C. Drury, *The Danger of Words* (London, 1973), 115.

² *Culture and Value*, 69e (13.4.1947), (2nd ed.; Oxford, 1998).

³ This line of thought is sometimes brought forward in defence of Finland’s niggardly attitude to refugees (in this respect Finland has one of the worst records in Europe): “we can’t take care of them all, so what’s the use of saving just a few?” This will occasionally be backed up by the do-no-gooders’ ultimate alibi: “Anyway, *you* only want to help them so you can be pleased with yourself.”

⁴ Sidney Lumet’s film *The Pawnbroker* illustrates a similar theme from a very different point of view. In it, a holocaust survivor who has lost all his family in a death camp lives out his life as a pawnbroker in New York. He feels he has had to pay more than his share and is entitled to turn his back on the world, until he is brutally awakened by the murder of someone who was dependent on him. What the film illustrates, I would suggest, is that the world has the power to claim us as long as we go on existing.

⁵ I will not, in the present context, discuss the complex etiology of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But it is clear that the history of this conflict is an example of the type of chain-reaction that is often caused by a disruption of order; going back, in this case, to the Roman conquest of Palestine. Simone Weil's thoughts about the disastrous consequences of being uprooted are relevant in this connection. See her book *The Need for Roots* (London, 1995; French original *L'Enracinement*, published in 1949).

⁶ For a view of education similar to that suggested here, see R. F. Holland's essays, "Education and Values" and "Education and the Spirit" in his *Against Empiricism* (Oxford, 1980).

⁷ Those defending the importance of the arts will also have to contend with anecdotes such as those about the death camp commander who went home and read his Goethe after a day's work of slaughtering people. But that is a problem only for someone who imagines that the impact of art on people's consciences is somehow magical, independent of what the reader himself brings to the encounter. Especially, an officer who reads Goethe because among German officers one is supposed to read Goethe rather than because he is seeking for ways in which literature might challenge him is not likely to take away a great deal from the experience.

⁸ This realization has unfortunately tempted some advocates of the humanities to use even more corrupt forms of justification, as in appealing to the use of the humanities for political "identity-building".

⁹ The logic of control sometimes provides an alibi for those in power. After the scandal concerning the torture and degradation of prisoners by American forces in Iraq had broken in 2004, the military authorities were quick to declare that they had not ordered the illegal treatment. I will not raise the question how credible those denials were. What I find interesting is the restricted terms in which the authorities regarded the issue of responsibility, and in which it was also regarded by the press. The authorities failed to acknowledge their responsibility for maintaining an organization in which such dehumanizing practices were possible and widespread. They were blind to the matter of spirit. It is perhaps a sign of the times that the press concurred in this view of the issue.