



drawing by Liza Meyer

our own strength, it cannot be overcome by challenging someone who stands a chance of defeating us; we must attack the weaker, the powerless, those who threaten us on a level we don't understand, those who are able merely to influence policy. Those are all in America.

What disturbs me about our contemporary Dodo is his cockiness and his self-assurance. What disturbs me about those of us who, correctly, find him a caricature is that we seem to think he is a caricature incapable of action. Dodo seems to believe that he can force us to do his will. And we seem to believe that he is either too stupid to succeed or merely lying. He is neither. Dodo sees his worst enemies at home because they are the most like him. That they should seem to be like him but still to be different perplexes, annoys, and frightens him. If the people lose all reason they will destroy those like themselves; when they regain it, they will destroy Dodo. Dodo is the witch-hunter, red-baiter, disillusioned veteran of World War II and Korea, respectable xenophobe, and credulous American who believed the idealist slogans of the past until they came to be a political PATER NOSTER. He carves his program in ice and protects it with a

I do not propose to discuss our foreign policy beyond warning that to internalize the thought patterns and behavior that have governed our international relations during the last quarter century will be to invite domestic disaster.

blow-torch. Dodo is the mean side to America and American politics: intolerant, visceral, suspicious, fearful, and, worst of all, unimaginative. Which is to say, Dodo is the human side to America, the side which is capable of bringing together and calling it an administration such flotsam of the discouraged generation as Messrs. Mitchell, Agnew, and Nixon. Dodo's most imaginative moment was when he thought that these three could unify the country in any but the most unsalutary fashion. Dodo, praying at the sanctuary of mediocrity, has institutionalized the

commonplace.

After more than twenty years of simmering disillusionment—of being the NEW POOR outsider—with only an occasional approach to authority, as during the McCarthy period—the common man who covers holes in the wall with Disney-kitsch and who finds radio talk shows “informative,” has become the ARBITER ELEGANTIARUM or, even worse, the ARBITER POLITICARUM. We finally really have taxation AND representation. The little man, the back-bone of any movement of grotesque proportions and banal doctrines, who paid the taxes and fought the wars, this is Dodo. But one thing we must say for him, and it is frightening: HE IS HONEST. And he is so damn obvious that he might still win. But if Dodo wins, his namesake may still become our national bird. It is this obviousness that makes him dangerous and still rather engaging. We are not accustomed to the obvious because we are unable NOT to let our belief in dissembling—the hallmark of youth, scholarship, and liberalism—get in the way of seeing clearly how things really are. We continue to read aimlessness into the politics and policies of an administration which has stated quite clearly what its aims are: to be tough, to return to first principles, including that which insists on America's essential difference from other nations, and to measure intelligence in terms of loyalty. This is a monotonous litany which the mediocre can follow and repeat.

But before we become too smug, let me note that a similar intolerance exists on the other side of the spectrum. Everywhere in America today we find the appeals to emotion, to temper, subjectivity and toughness. We are everywhere being urged to give up our objectivity, to consider the moral consequences of our acts, our involvements, and our ideas. This is alright, as long as the moral aspects conform to our moral outlooks. But since we do not, and cannot, all share the same moral perspectives, what do we propose to do with those who differ from us?

Dodo, unfortunately, sometimes sounds rational: he offers something to everyone, including his opponents. To his adversaries he offers an object of scorn, ridicule and even hate. And on these he feeds; their intolerance for his commonplace behavior becomes his intolerance for their difference. Dodo is honest. We have so long been nurtured on the notion that politics and falsehood are inextricably linked that we assume that Dodo must be lying, must be pretending to be what he is: the straightforward, myopic gunslinger of the average man.

Do not deceive yourselves: what you like least about Dodo is his integrity. He is not artful enough to lie and not decent enough to pretend, not realistic enough to compromise, and not idealistic enough to want to reason. He simply falls back on the truth. We must be prepared for a new onslaught of candor. Our civilizing veneer, which is suitable for polite parlors, is anachronistic. We, who are about to become the victims of truth, probably still nourish hopes that the truth will back-fire. We are unprepared, totally unprepared for honesty; we shy away from the honest, candid individual; we rarely call things by their right names. The process began about half a century ago when, as Freud said, World War I stripped the veneer of civilization from us. But at that time, it was merely an international phenomenon, not YET a national one. Hitler made it national. And he was honest. But we as Americans somehow still view it as foreign and aberrant. Yet, honesty, so much the catch-word of the middle class, is also its most frightening commodity. It leaves the rest of us defenseless. Either that, or it forces us also to be honest, to recognize the nature of the problem, the nature of

the beast, and the nature of the conflict before us. And that is essentially to admit that we can: succumb to the honest beast or resist it and remain loyal to our own views.

I have called these remarks “the insurgent dagger.” By this I mean that honesty is merely an instrument of those who manipulate it, and that honesty threatens at this moment to revolt. Honesty means to do away with pretense; to forget about disguising; to be straight-forward even though someone might be hurt. It is surely no surprise to anyone here that there are socially useful aspects to pretense and dissembling and that without them, our lives would be intolerable. As our lives become more crowded, as more demands are made on our resources, as the tempo and tenor of life change in seemingly geometric fashion, what most of us are least prepared for are frankness, candor, and honesty. Heretofore it was the lower classes, with their uninhibited patois which were known for these qualities. We somehow fooled ourselves into believing that they had different needs, compulsions, and reasons for being, and that they, therefore, had need of different and more open and direct forms of expression. We will not find that although this might once have been the case, it no longer holds. Anyone who perceives threat, frustration, anger, confusion, and doubt is capable of wielding the insurgent dagger of honesty and candor. The

We had a highly aggressive, active policy, albeit one without a model. Lacking a standard, we were forced to temporize and extemporize. Let's have enough of the most sterile and conservative defense that we lacked a policy.

middle American, once finding his existence threatened is capable of brandishing the dagger; the only question remaining is, will he also employ it? Why, may I ask, should he not use it? He will not compromise; his confusion is sincere, his fears are real, his response will be honest—and so will his victims. A deceptive quiet surrounds the Potomac. We may smugly draw parallels between a Nero who fiddled while Rome burned and a man who designs police uniforms. But let us not forget that the legend about Nero is two-edged: one side for the opponents of the Emperor, the other for his supporters. The former argued that setting the fire and singing about the downfall of Troy was quite in keeping with the man, while the latter claimed, as the ANNALS of Tacitus tell it, that he “raised temporary structures to receive the destitute multitude,” and provided them with food. And two-edged might well be the legend about Mr. Nixon as he made the symbol of “law and order” colorful. His opponents would ridicule and draw comparisons with the operettas of Johann Strauss, while the supporters would find in the ridicule further fuel for their argument that the police—however intelligently and sensibly attired—remain items of jest and scorn.

I have earlier referred to the crusader's inability to compromise. I must now return to that point and warn that the spirit of compromise is completely lacking in contemporary America. Here I am not referring to the protestations of NO COMPROMISE as these are expressed by so-called revolutionaries. I am, rather, referring to those whose vocabulary is essentially conservative and who believe that all would be well here if those who claim that we are ourselves partially responsible for our international frustrations and who call attention to our

domestic anxiety would simply “lay off.” The crusade which is on the horizon will not take the gauche form of traditional anti-Communism. It will be an older, more respectable crusade: the crusade of a blunted national expansion, the search for a scape-goat, and the allegations of treason.” It will be the crusade of THE CRITO of Plato. Here, more than two thousand years ago, Socrates—probably the worst witness any defense attorney ever had argues that the Laws say that “anyone who does not like us and the

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city and who wants to emigrate to a colony or to any other city may go where he likes...But that he who has experience of the manner in which we order justice and administer the state, and still remains, has entered into an implied contract that he will do as we command him.” Today, Dodo says it more simply, more directly, for he says, “My flag, love it or leave.” And with his straight-forward manner, his refusal to pretend—for pretense is a form of compromise—Dodo will disarm all those who disguise their objectives with fanciful slogans. WE deal in a dangerous commodity: ideas.

Even if we were to dispense with labels, there should be little doubt that all of us here would terrify the middle American. Even an innocent man today may be found guilty according to the principle that “a) one who has done nothing MUST be guilty and b) the penalty is deserved by everyone.” Our objective innocence is more frightening to the middle American than is our subjective guilt—and all of us are guilty of something we have had the audacity to conceal from the authorities.

But, you know, I must also assess us with some responsibility for the likelihood that we will become victims of the truth. Too many of us in the academic field—faculty as well as students—practice politics without understanding it. Politics is both the active and the contemplative life, the VITA ACTIVA and the VITA PHILOSOPHIA. We have tended of late to emphasize the former, thus projecting an entirely new image for the middle man to respond to.

The middle man, having lost his original American frontier, having found that it does not lie at the gates of Moscow or Peking, now seeks it nearer himself again. And he is far better equipped to regain it than are we. Politics without contemplation is madness. It is a good example of the statement. NON ARMIS SED VITIS CERTATUR—war is not fought with weapons but with crimes. The middle man prefers simple solutions and the simplest of all is the use of force: even the greatest argument will fall before it. The most insignificant peasant of Vietnam and the most insignificant middle man in America share this one thing: neither one will be budged from his position by force if he deems his position to be the right one. As far as the Vietnamese are concerned, no American administration has ever understood this point. As far as those of us who have repeatedly and continuously opposed our involvement there are concerned, we have apparently failed to understand the point as it relates to the middle American. All around we find that sentiment confounds

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