

Selective Compassion

By Walter Kaufmann

posite direction were mostly landless tenants, an about 40 million Moslems remained in India. Pakistan did not offer the Sikhs any compensation, and neither the other Moslem countries nor the rest of the world insisted that there could not be any lasting peace until the Sikhs were either given back their land or compensated for it. Perhaps some people would feel compassion for the Sikhs if India had kept them in camps and insisted that the United Nations take care of them, or if the Sikhs had become terrorists and publicized their cause by hijacking planes or killing Pakistani women and children. But they reclaimed barren and swampy land in India.

During the decade after World War II, more than 40 million people were uprooted and moved, according to the

article on "Refugees" in the 1974 edition of the "Encyclopaedia Britannica." It is surprising how selective international compassion has been.

In 1971, after the people of East Pakistan won a huge election victory, the President of Pakistan "loosed the Punjabi army on the East in a terror campaign that eventually took the lives of more than one million Bengalis and drove 9.8 million into exile in India," Newsweek reported at the time.

The first President of Bangladesh, which eventually emerged as an independent state from this war, estimated the death toll at about three million. President Nixon supported the aggressor, and even those who hate Mr. Nixon rarely recall his role in this war. "Not one Arab state . . . supported the Bengali struggle. Algeria and Libya, Saudi Arabia and Jordan—radical and reactionary alike—joined in denouncing . . . the struggle for Bengali liberation, while proclaiming Islamic solidarity with West Pakistan," the "Encyclopaedia Britannica" says.

Compassion is influenced by fashion. One feels it for West Bank Arabs but not for the Arabs killed by King Hussein or for the Arabs in most Arab

countries, who are far worse off in almost every way and have fewer civil rights—not to speak of the Jews in Arab countries. The lack of international outrage, protests, and pressure in the face of what has been going on in Cambodia since the end of the Indochina war is no less striking.

Must compassion be selective? The Buddha preached universal compassion, but as Buddhism spread, his teachings were overgrown by a multitude of other ideas and practices. Buddhist countries have waged many aggressive wars, also against one another. It is easier to see all of this clearly when one looks at distant lands, but the point is to examine our Government and ourselves.

Probably, compassion has to be selective in all but a few people who approximate the Buddha's state of mind. But that is obviously no warrant for going to the opposite extreme, Hitler's. Nor is it an excuse for hypocrisy.

Walter Kaufmann, professor of philosophy at Princeton University, is author, most recently, of "The Future of the Humanities" and "Religions in Four Dimensions."

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PRINCETON, N. J.—We often think of people as either compassionate or not compassionate and regard the former as morally superior. But compassion is usually selective, and this poses problems. The most striking example of selective compassion was Hitler. He was a vegetarian and opposed vivisection of animals. His case was extreme, but the syndrome is typical. Millions of people have more compassion for fetuses than for starving and abused children, not to speak of their mothers.

Richard Wagner, whose operas meant so much to Hitler, was also a vegetarian and antivivisectionist as well as an impassioned anti-Semite. Indeed, many vegetarians have more compassion for animals, or at least some animals some of the time, than they have for people who do not belong to their own group. In India, a motorist who hits a cow is in danger of his life from irate vegetarians. In 1975, some outcaste boys were playing near a Hindu temple; when one child ran into the courtyard to fetch a stray ball, a vegetarian temple priest beat the child with a stick until he was dead.

Cows, unlike outcastes, have been allowed for centuries to walk through

the temple precincts and to defecate where they please. Yet the feeling for cows, not to speak of other animals, is selective also. Starving cows are a common sight in India, and one rarely sees animals being treated kindly. Vegetarianism has been conjoined in India for a very long time with a lack of compassion for outcastes, people of low caste, and Moslems.

Of course, the Moslems cast the first stone by invading India, and their religion promised perdition for unbelievers and did not encourage compassion for idolaters. The partition of India after World War II was precipitated by the refusal of the Moslem leadership to live in a predominantly Hindu state, even if it was secular.

There was to be no room in the new country, Pakistan, for Hindus or Sikhs even if some should wish to remain. The price: 15 million people had to leave their homes and hundreds of thousands were killed in the process. The Punjab, a state in which there were about five million Sikhs, was divided, and the 2.5 million Sikhs who lived in the part given to Pakistan had to leave their homes, their rich agricultural lands, their temples, and virtually all their possessions.

The Moslems who moved in the op-