

BOOK REVIEWS

Without Guilt and Justice: From Decidophobia to Autonomy, by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Peter H. Wyden, Inc., 1973. \$7.95. Pp. vii, 274.

On the parched range of U.S. academic philosophy, where the prevailing brands are analytic, positivist and British, Walter Kaufmann chews over an existential cud, rears a continental head of irreverent erudition and looks vaguely like a maverick.

Having immigrated from Germany in 1939, and after receiving a doctorate from Harvard in 1947, he has since taught philosophy at Princeton, with time out for "visitor" stints at Heidelberg, Hebrew University and several U. S. campuses. A prolific writer, translator, editor and guest lecturer, this self-styled "faithful heretic" has long tirelessly guided young elites through the shallows of cynicism, beyond their cradle pieties to the open mysteries of the world.

Announced as a new autonomous morality, and dedicated to Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the present book is a hodgepodge of pseudo-scholarship, neologisms, self-help lists and sophistic attacks on such mildly liberal concessions as equal opportunity and affirmative action. Kaufmann addresses himself expressly to *need*: at the outset, the need of "those who see themselves as radicals and revolutionaries"; later, the need of "humanity." "What we need is a new morality," he says in the preface. A few pages later, concerning the Communist Party, "the movement" and the Catholic Church, he ridicules what he calls "the We-We orientation," which is "infantile," "recognizes no singular You," and "is not progressive." But he soon regresses to his own "We-We orientation," frequently placing himself among a "we" who jointly make decisions materially affecting other people's well-being. (Our autonomy is their heteronomy.)

According to Kaufmann, "we" tend to avoid autonomy because of a hitherto nameless dread which he dubs "decidophobia," a play on the fear of deciding and the fear of falling. He outlines ten psychological "lures or strategies" by which we avoid "fateful decisions," listing them under three headings for ready reference. Presumably, by resisting these strategies "we" can—autonomously—become autonomous.

As impediments to autonomy, guilt and justice need to be eliminated. To this end, Kaufmann attacks the pieties of retributive and distributive

justice on the ground that both entail each person's receiving what that person deserves; while deserts, whether of punishment or of scarce rewards (which "we" bestow), are incalculable. Because they cannot be proportioned to offenses, "punishments can never be just" (or unjust); yet he claims they are socially needed because "a prohibition that is not backed up by any penalties is generally useless if there is any great temptation to disregard it." Thus, "in deciding what to punish and how to punish, *we* should banish from our minds the chimaera of justice" (My emphasis). In effect, as Göring would have it, "*Recht ist das was uns gefällt.*" (Right is whatever suits us.)

Descending from generalities and contrived casuistry to historically concrete cases, Kaufmann continues in the same vein. On distributive justice, he says it is "quite impossible to say how much income surgeons, lawyers, executives or miners deserve." He fails to mention mine *owners* and their income. (But there can be no question of deserving or not deserving.) He tries to reduce the concept of deserts to absurdity by listing seven categories, each with potentially innumerable sub-categories, according to which individual deserts might be determined. Thus, because of what one is by sex or race, etc., one may be "held to deserve preferred treatment in some cases, such as university admissions" for Blacks, to offset prior exclusions. Then it would "make little sense to apply it only, or almost only . . . to Blacks. . . . Why not to Poles, dwarfs, and homosexuals?" In denying that his opposition to equality is bigoted, Kaufmann soars from banal flippancy to idealistic heights without budging; he claims that bigots regard all members of a group as "equal," or "alike," while to him, "no two men or women are alike."

Observing that views on justice are devoid of content apart from "a decision about the kind of society we want," he leaves no doubt that he wants the kind we have—minus the residual queasiness which continues to inhibit some of its elites. As a purported foil, he contrives an "alternative" society involving equal opportunity in its most extreme, mechanical form, and forensically reverses a point already made by Plato against sex discrimination. In his catalog of leveling horrors associated with equal opportunity, he retails as a new—and obviously terrifying—discovery, the ancient insight that equality would require abolition of the monogamous/patriarchal family.

"Men are not equal. Men should not be made equal. And equality of opportunity is either a hollow cliché or a pernicious goal." (Except when he makes them, Kaufmann stigmatizes such dichotomies as Manichaeism.) Further, he solemnly adds, in the Far East "equality of opportunity" is associated with the odious "open door." Five chapters later, he urges that "a more creative society might well be preferable

even if it were more inegalitarian. It is better to create than to receive, and autonomy surpasses possessions. This is not a defense of the *status quo*." (Apart from create/receive being another Manichaean dichotomy, he fails to indicate, *e.g.*, how *we* decide what is better; or how *we* are to create without receiving). But alas, we are easily distracted from such higher things by urgent material considerations. Thus, although problems of distributive justice arise only when something desired by many is too scarce to satisfy all, says Kaufmann, even Hume is to be reproached for having "associated justice far too much with property and 'the love of gain.'"

Kaufmann's "full-fledged attack on guilt feelings," in the spirit of Freud, is pretentious but unexceptionable. However, his "new" morality would replace guilt feelings with "humbition," a melding of humility and ambition. Courage, honesty and love complete his list of cardinal virtues. Still another list joins honesty or "the new integrity" with autonomy. Honesty requires applying to any "proposition, view, belief, hypothesis, conviction . . . the canon, which commands us to ask seven questions. . . . Autonomy consists of applying the canon to fateful decisions." The final aim is to maximize "creative autonomy."

Kaufmann's treatment of Marx and alienation is exceptionable—and apparently dishonest. The "thesis" that alienation, "the condition of feeling estranged . . . from one's fellow men, . . . from the universe, and from oneself . . . is the price of self-consciousness, autonomy and integrity" against "three popular errors" (later "theses") allegedly derives from "the early manuscripts of Karl Marx." These theses are: 1) all alienation is bad; 2) alienation is distinctively modern; 3) alienation is a function of capitalism, or at least of advanced industrial society.

Brushing aside the common, objective, economic use of the word "alienation" and its cognates, which was primary to Marx, he focuses exclusively on the psychological use. He claims that Marx "was paying homage to Hegel's terminology" in 1844 but that by 1848, in the *Manifesto*, he "denounced talk of 'alienation' as 'philosophical nonsense' . . ." (Marx specifically "denounced" only the unhistorical, aping talk of contemporary German literati about alienation *des menschlichen Wesens*.) But here Kaufmann clamorously overreaches himself in quest of a debater's point, claiming that Marx's analysis of alienation in capitalist society derives from "a far-fetched use of the term" in 1844, which leads *directly* to "the climax of *Capital*" (*i.e.*, Vol. I): "the expropriators are expropriated." Thus what Marx had supposedly denounced in 1848 was still crucial to him in 1867.

One of Kaufmann's most grotesque straw men is built of examples stuffed among examples to "demonstrate" the constancy of alienation

throughout history. Ignoring the obvious fact that Marx recognized alienation as an objective characteristic not only of capitalism but of all class society, he reveals to his readers that "things are and always have been terrible"; and apparently it would indeed be terrible if they were not terrible, for creative autonomy, Kaufmann's *summum bonum*, is "forged in hell." (Coming from someone else, Kaufmann would describe such double-speak as Manichaeism; and, among other things, it calls into question his use of the word "progressive." *Vide supra*.)

From his perch on "the new integrity," beyond guilt and justice, Kaufmann is further able to reveal that Marx emphasized alienation because he was a self-hating, alienated Jew "who did not fully understand the hidden springs of his own interest in the problem." (Yet "no two men or women are alike." *Vide supra*.) At the same time, he attains new heights of creative autonomy in retranslating a passage from Marx's "On the Jewish Question" (1843). Obviously to make the essay less respectable, he renders four instances of *Schacher* as "jewling" instead of the usual "bargaining" or "haggling," though there is a German word *Schacherjude*. While it was not even Marx who posed the question, Kaufmann reinforces his anachronistic claim that "Marx's slanders on the Jews" were racist by suggesting that we consider "an attack 'On the Negro Question!'" to bring out the "extreme irrationality and inhumanity." (He fails even to mention Thomas Carlyle, "On the Nigger Question," and J. S. Mill, "On the Negro Question," both published within a decade after Marx wrote his posthumously published essay.)

Kaufmann sets Marx against Freud, who supposedly "made a virtue of . . . alienation." Yet, in the key passage Kaufmann quotes from Freud's autobiographical essay, Freud says he could not understand "why I should be ashamed of my descent, or as was then beginning to be said, my race." (This *beginning* was in 1873.)

Apart from its inaccuracy, Kaufmann's pseudo-genetic account of Marx's views serves to veil the fact that he does not treat those views themselves. It also obscures the nature of—racist—anti-Semitism, which apparently begins with the bourgeois era.

In the main, what Kaufmann proposes are nostrums of auto-suggestion for Mandarins yearning to be cavalier; while for "those who see themselves as radicals and revolutionaries," and join in comradesly struggle to eliminate oppression and exploitation, he proffers a bad conscience: guilt feelings.

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