

## *A Thoughtful Cruise through the Seven C's*

*A geographer guides us through some bodies of thought in an attempt to chart a route to a rather remote destination*

As a geographer I feel a little unsure about accepting my own preconceived ideas of what I meant by ethics and so I have been forced to do some homework. By virtue of this, I find that I should discuss not only the ethics of excellence but also *ethical excellence*. In searching *Webster's New World Dictionary* I find that essentially I was right: ethics is defined as "the study of standards of conduct and moral judgment; moral philosophy." A little bit higher up on the page under "ethical," I found "conforming to the standards of conduct of a given profession." Then, being a good researcher, I cross-referenced to the word "moral" and sure enough under synonyms there is "ethical." The elaboration here was "implies conformity with an elaborated ideal code of moral principles, specifically, with the code of a particular profession." I thought well, now, that's quite appropriate because what we are professing here tonight is excellence. And it's precisely this code of excellence that I wish to make a few comments about.

Before doing so, however, let me show you the real depth of research I've done to and mention, as those of you who have done dictionary work before know, that in some of the unabridged editions there is a little history of the word with perhaps some peculiar or archaic meanings. Under "ethical" I found this: "essential quality, own character." I think we ought to keep that kind of a definition in the back of our minds as we proceed through the seven seas of the geographer tonight. The seven seas that I allude to are not those commonly associated with us of the geographic profession but are characteristic concerns of young people of excellence the world over.

Our first sea stems from the very definition itself, wherein we had to cope with the word Conformity. In

talking about ethics, we no longer mean conformity to the standards or ideal codes that are set up by others for us. If I sense the times at all correctly, the phrase that sticks in my mind now is not the "ideal code" but "situation ethics."

This idea of a code was discussed last year at this banquet by Dr. J. Clayton Feaver. In talking about the ethic of law, he said, "The individual is made subservient to an external authority and is in danger of being trapped, enslaved. . . . The law does not know the internal unique person though it does protect the person from interference. An ethic of law is for man in his dependence, his infancy."

If the ethic is not one of law as stated in this former context, surely it is not what Dr. Feaver has called the ethic of redemption, i.e., the individual's concern for his own welfare without incisive reference to the good of others and/or other species. Rather than either of these two possibilities, it strikes me that the ethic which we are searching for deals with our second sea, which is Community.

Community is the byword of our present times. We have special connotations of the word itself. Once again I'm beholden to my colleague, Dr. Feaver, when he says "by community I'm meaning a situation among men wherein the ethic of creativity (a continuous increase) is the highest ethic. By community I mean the state of accepted interdependence of man with other men which is brought about by what some philosophers call a "yes-saying." In this kind of community the categories of good and evil are transcended and as Dr. Feaver says, "The acts are appropriate proportionate to their significance to persons in this re-

lationship." This kind of relationship, of course, evokes from all of us another sea, Courage.

Courage has special meaning to the person of excellence. Paul Tillich in a very significant book entitled *The Courage to Be* looks at courage from a two-fold position. In one way he thinks of courage, perhaps as most of us do, as a human act wherein given valuations are made—and surely this is an ethical kind of a concept—but he also concerns himself with courage on a much broader scale. That is, the universal scale wherein he feels that this is the unique self-affirmation of one's very own being. In days such as we live in now, quite frequently referred to by existential philosophers in a somewhat despairing fashion, Tillich writes, "The courage to take the anxiety of meaninglessness upon oneself is the boundary line up to which the courage to be can go. Beyond it is mere non-being. Within it all forms of courage are re-established in the power of the God above the God of theism. The courage to be is rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubts." For most of us when we speak of God a quite natural impulse is to talk about that institution which professes great concern about God. Obviously we are at our fourth sea, Church.

If I may have your permission, I think I'm going to use a little bit of academic license. I would call it poetic license; however, I'm afraid that I don't quite qualify there. An idea has just come to me. I believe I'm going to designate you all here as a church. Yes, that will work if I use a fairly broad definition, "a community of believers." For the sake of argument, let's restrict our beliefs to a "belief in excellence." With those qualifications

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*This article is adapted from a speech given by Dr. Stephen M. Sutherland, associate professor of geography and assistant dean of University College, at OU's annual Salute to Excellence banquet, which recognizes the state's brightest high school seniors and their families.*

I feel sure that this peculiar community, and by that I mean particular, will live and grow in the very best senses of the word. Surely this "growth encounter" that we are initiating tonight, one to the other, will actualize itself in what we might truly call community. Surely this "belief in excellence" has as a major premise the acquisition of knowledge, and knowledge in modern thought structures can be intimately related to our fifth sea, Consciousness.

The man who is perhaps the most articulate spokesman concerning himself with this special word is Leslie Dewart, the author of a very fine and provocative book called *Future of Belief*. Dewart says that in the understanding of recent philosophical thought, man's psychic life exhibits a peculiar character which animals do not appear *even in part* to share. For man is the being who is *present to himself*. This presence of his being to himself is called "consciousness." This use of the word wherein Dewart distinctly separates humans from animals leads, by a way of intensification, to such activities as conceptualization, symbolization, and then, ultimately, linguification. And when we get to the very essence of concepts, symbols, and eventually language, we get to the necessity of traversing our next sea, Communication.

It is my own public opinion that perhaps the most outstanding crises that man faces today are not technological advances, air pollution, or the miniskirt, but the appalling lack of communication which exists among humans. If man actually does possess qualities which we inherently assess as being good, I feel that it will be to no avail if mutual communication does not exist between the several parties. Communications are not static. One needs only to look at Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding of Media* to see the very dynamic quali-

ty involved in the fields of communications. But let me bring something before you which, in an esoteric perhaps even esthetic way, communicated to me very deeply. Teillard de Chardin, writing in *The Divine Milieu*, says, "A breeze passes in the night. When did it spring up? Whence does it come? Whither is it going? No man knows. No one can compel the spirit, the gaze, or the light of God to descend upon him.

"On some given day a man suddenly becomes conscious that he is alive to a particular perception of the divine, spread everywhere about him. Question him. When did this state begin for him? He cannot tell. All he knows is that a *new* spirit has crossed his life.

"It began with a particular and unique resonance which swelled each harmony, with a diffused radiance which haloed each beauty . . . all the elements of psychological life were in turn affected: sensations, feeling, thoughts. Day by day they became more fragrant, more colored, more intense by means of an indefinable thing—the same thing. Then the vague note and fragrance and light began to define themselves. And then, contrary to all probability, I began to feel what was ineffably common to all things. The unity communicated itself to me by giving me the gift of grasping it. I had, in fact, acquired a new sense, the sense of new quality, of a new dimension. Deeper still: a transformation had taken place for me in the very perception of being. Thenceforward being had become, in some way, tangible and savourous to me; and as it came to dominate all the forms which it assumed, being itself began to draw me and to intoxicate me." This kind of communication inevitably, in my own thoughts, leads to our final sea: Commitment.

A meaningful way to approach the topic of commitment is by looking at

two questions. The first question is one that was probably asked by the parents in this audience as well as by me and others here at the head table when a time for searching was encountered. This question was, "Who am I?" Now this question has been changed for the generation of excellence which sits in our midst tonight. The question appropriately now is "What is my vocation?" I have in mind a special usage of this word vocation. The question might perhaps be better restated this way: "To which appeal have I to respond with an act of commitment in order to confer significance on my life?" Let me raise this question to you in terms we referred to earlier as we talked of that archaic usage: "essential quality, own character." I say, then, what is the *essential quality, your own character of your ethical commitment to excellence?* Mine has been stated as follows:

*To dream the impossible dream,  
To fight the unbeatable foe,  
To bear with unbearable sorrow,  
To run where the brave dare not go.  
To right the unrightable wrong,  
To love, pure and chaste, from afar,  
To try, when your arms are too weary,  
To reach the unreachable star!*  
*This is my quest:  
To follow that star,  
No matter how hopeless,  
No matter how far.  
To fight for the right  
Without question or force,  
To be willing to march into Hell  
For a heavenly course,  
And I know if I'll only be true  
To this glorious quest  
That my heart  
Will lie peaceful and calm  
When I'm laid to my rest.  
And the world will be better for this:  
That one man, stormed and covered  
with scars,  
Still strove with his last ounce of courage  
To reach the unreachable star.*

"The Impossible Dream"  
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