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I.

`Religion," Nehru wrote to Gandhi in 1933, "is not familiar ground for me, and as I have grown older, I have definitely drifted away from it. I have something else in its place, something older than just intellect and reason, which gives me strength and hope. Apart from this indefinable and indefinite urge, which may have just a tinge of religion in it and yet is wholly different from it, I have grown entirely to rely on the workings of the mind. Perhaps they are weak supports to rely upon, but, search as I will," Nehru concluded, "I can see no better ones." But what was it, exactly, that gave Nehru--a man whose political career spanned a long history of expectation, achievement, and disappointment, and took in the highest and lowest points of **India's** twentieth-century history--"strength and hope"? What were the "workings of the mind" upon which he grew to rely, on which he rested his faith?

By speaking of Nehru's faith, my intentions are not purely historical. I wish to recover faith's primary meaning: trust or confidence, unshakeable belief or conviction--meanings that do not necessarily imply a strictly religious sense. It is crucial to do this, at a moment when our ideas of faith are in danger of becoming unnecessarily restricted. When religion is being held up as the unique source of a sustaining faith, we need to remind ourselves that there are other firm foundations upon which we can build moral projects, in both private and public life. If secularism has multiple meanings, so, too, does faith. In the recent history of the subcontinent, certainly, there is perhaps no better practical instance of the effort to find a non-religious bedrock for morality than the faith of Jawaharlal Nehru.

Unusually for a politician, Nehru was a man of deeply held moral convictions: he believed in the moral life not just as sustaining private life, but also as necessary for the living of any kind of political life. Yet he never placed his faith in religion. He wrote in his Autobiography that "organized religion" filled him "with horror ... almost always it seemed to stand for a blind belief and reaction, dogma and bigotry, superstition and exploitation." And yet he wrote in prison at Ahmadnagar Fort in 1945 that "some kind of ethical approach to life has a strong appeal for me." That ethical approach he discovered in the disciplined exercise of his mind. Reason was not merely an instrument by which to accomplish practical goals: through reasoning, both moral ends and practical goals were determined, and by reasoning for oneself one took responsibility for one's commitments and beliefs. This, I think, captures the meaning of Nehru's faith: reason, and the processes of reasoning, are the greatest resources we have through which to create and to sustain our moral imagination. Indeed, Nehru's overriding importance at this tense point in India's great democratic experiment rests not so much in his obvious historical significance for India's national story, but rather in his intellectual and political understanding; in his struggle, not always successful, to base public life on a reasoned morality.

It has lately become fashionable to attack reason. In many intellectual circles, reason is portrayed as an ill effect of the Enlightenment, of the imperium of Western theories and assumptions, an imperium oblivious to cultural differences and diversities. The rise of postmodernism and the expanding claims of contemporary religion are by no means directly connected, but they also are not entirely unlinked. At a time when our universities are being encouraged to produce postgraduates with degrees in astrology and all ideas are increasingly deemed to be merely a series of interpretations based upon the realities of power, it may seem misplaced to offer a defense of reason. The political landscape today seems to have become the territory of the non-rational and the post-rational, strewn with strident new claims to selfhood--couched in terms of identity and religion, of nation, tribe, and culture--all ready to use violence to assert their desires. Reason seems to have been utterly disarmed.

So we need to find ways to re-assert a confidence in reason. This will mean first and necessarily having to see reason in a more complex light, not as a smiling rationalism or a strong belief in human perfectibility. "Perfection," Nehru wrote, "is beyond us for it means the end, and we are always journeying, trying to approach something that is ever receding. And in each one of us are many different human beings with their inconsistencies and contradictions, each pulling in a different direction." It is precisely because of this--our human contrariness--that we need a capacity like reason to find a way out of the dark, individually and collectively. A proper faith in reason is owed not to a sense of the simplicity of the human mind and its motivating passions, but to a deep regard for its complexities and its mysteries.

Nehru's own understanding of reason was complicated and subtle, more so than is recognized by his admirers and his critics; and it was forged in circumstances that resonate with our own, in times when reason seemed in retreat--in the 1930s and 1940s, when fascism was ravaging Europe and religious chauvinism was splintering India. Self-proclaimed Nehruvians, who have tried to subsume his thinking under such phrases as "the scientific temper," and similarly those who criticize Nehru for what they have called his "rational monism," miss what is truly distinctive about his thinking. Nehru's faith in reason did not lead him to an easy belief that history was on the side of reason: he was without the rationalist's faith that reason's historical triumph was guaranteed. He saw it, instead, as a fragile faculty; and in relation to a life, it represented the attempt to hold within a single mind the range of considerations on how to live.

In recent years in India, the works of such figures as Mohandas Gandhi, Vallabhbhai Patel, Subhas Chandra Bose, and Rabindranath Tagore have all benefited from more nuanced interpretations of each man's life and thought. Nehru, by contrast, has been subjected to simplifications that border on caricature, portrayed as a mouthpiece for a one-dimensional view of science and for a vacuous universalism. This actually says more about our own hopes and fears than it does about the period and the man that it claims to illuminate: almost as if it is a way of helping us deal with our disappointments and frustrations over what India might be.

Nehru certainly recognized the instrumental power of reason. In its two most materially powerful forms--scientific reason (the project of trying to bend the natural world to human purposes) and social reason (the project of trying to use human institutions, above all the state, to remake society)--reason was, for Nehru, a tool for altering the natural and human worlds, for good or for ill. Yet this instrumental aspect did not exhaust the resources of reason. Reason could be used to sustain raw power, but it could also be used as a way of creating an ethics, of sustaining a moral imagination. He also recognized that reason was not a Western import--that there was a long and refined Indian history of reasoned argument about moral life and moral action. It was Nehru's deep conviction that moral beliefs had to be argued for, and held up rationally to the harsh light of history and experience. They could not be taken for granted, or accepted merely because they were laid down in religious edicts and texts or sanctioned by ancient traditions. And it was precisely because morality was accessible to reason that it was possible to bring others over to one's beliefs--by hearing and acknowledging opposing views, by offering one's interlocutors reasons to believe, by persuading them.

Nehru lived, with varying degrees of nearness and distance, through some of the bleakest days of the bleak twentieth century. All the century's slaughter inevitably shadowed his sense of what was humanly possible. Both Tagore and Gandhi ended their lives with pessimistic or fatalistic views about the human future. Tagore, in his late essay "The Crisis in Civilization," gave elegant expression to his pessimism, while Gandhi's fatalism was visible in his growing distance, in the last years of his life, from the political sphere and his withdrawal into a realm of private moral and spiritual experimentation.

But Nehru's destiny was quite different: he was hurled into the ruckus of politics. Put in command of a vast new state, he had to act--during and after Partition--in circumstances in which violence and hatred had burst all known bounds and reason had fled the scene. What kept him going was a conviction that even in the darkest times, intellectual inquiry--"the workings of the mind"--could not be given up: the true failure of faith, the real moral collapse, would be to give up one's faith in reason. And so Nehru reasoned his way through the great gloom.

If it is unusual to consider political leaders in this way, it is perhaps because we have become too accustomed to thinking of them as professionals pursuing a career. We have come to assume that politicians are effective to the extent that they are single-minded in the pursuit of power, and adept at criticizing others, never themselves. But surely anyone who chooses the political life has a moral and intellectual responsibility to be self-critical, to examine his or her own commitments coldly and lucidly. Nehru's political career--and he was certainly the most complex politician, I mean the most complex person wholly devoted to politics, that India has ever produced--is significant for having exemplified the belief that morality must have a place in political life. In the absence of such a perspective, Nehru's career makes little sense: what makes him interesting as a politician, what sets him apart, is his constant probing of how to combine morality with politics.

If Nehru was unusual as a politician in the depth of his moral commitments, it is necessary to see also how he was entirely ordinary, in ways that Gandhi was not. Gandhi was unique: he developed extraordinary qualities of character, intensities of self-denial that seem almost freakish. But Nehru was not like that: he was in a profound way like any one of us--teeming with human appetites, often bewildered by life's choices, self-doubting, indecisive, short-tempered, needy, sometimes downcast. Unlike Gandhi, he set himself no superhuman moral feats. Like Gandhi, he possessed a remarkable steadfastness of faith. Yet it was distinctly his own faith: Nehru tried to use to the utmost the great capacity that we all possess, the capacity to reason.

II.

From the late nineteenth century onward, all Indian thinkers and political figures faced a fundamental problem: how to discover or to devise coherent shared norms and values that could hold all Indians together under modern conditions and could define a public sphere for Indians. This deep theme of India's intellectual and political history has too often been subsumed under the story of Indian nationalism, as the search for what could unite the diversity of India in a common identity. And as the question to which nationalism was a response is revisiting Indian society and politics with a new and dangerous force, we need to broaden our forms of address toward it, and to recover this other, more encompassing history, to reconstruct its shape. For at its core lies the fundamental question of political life, anywhere and anytime: how can we create and sustain a moral public life?

What we find in Tagore, in Gandhi, and in Nehru, in their self-criticisms as well as in their debates, is a search for a modern morality. They sought principles and practices through which Indians could engage in the public political life to which they were now, in the form of their new state, necessarily condemned and committed. Tagore, Gandhi, Nehru: each represents an important moment in the creation of a tradition of public reason--the creation of an intellectual space that allowed moral principles, and the political choices that moral principles entail, to be debated, revised, decided upon. In their finest moments, the

arguments and the ideas that were generated by these extraordinary figures exceeded the bounds of nationalism or nationalist thought: their intellectual ambitions were much greater than those who think merely in terms of a narrow Indian identity, however defined. They asked large questions and demanded ambitious answers. When thinking about moral questions, they did not ask, "What should an Indian do?" or "What should a Hindu or a Muslim do?" Instead they asked, "What should a moral being do?" And alongside this powerful universalist impulse, they were also compelled to retain a vivid sense of the constraints that they and their compatriots faced: the presence of a colonial state, and also the pervasive grip of tradition. But these political and cultural realities did not inhibit the pursuit of more capacious perspectives. Interestingly, and unusually if one looks at contemporary political and ethical thinking, their thinking struggled to combine universalist ambitions with a vivid sense of the specific contexts in which one had to act.

Tagore, Gandhi, and Nehru frequently disagreed, but together they are the most notable examples in India's history of the effort to invent a modern ethics for Indians and India. How can a moral and integrated life be lived under modern conditions, where political power is concentrated in the state, but beliefs are multiple and diverse across a society? What is the relationship between morality and personal identity? How can public norms of morality be agreed upon? What can ensure that the institutions of modern politics--the state--will pursue moral ends by moral means? These were their questions, which mark them as more than merely nationalist thinkers--as men who tried to find a universal basis for the morality and the politics of a particular country.

All three saw the extent to which politics was going to become increasingly important in India, the dominant medium of public life. And all three, even as they intervened and acted in the realm of politics, dreaded the prospect that the expansion of politics would corrupt public life by reducing it to the cynical pursuit of material gains. All three understood that in a world in which religion was declining (as in the West) or in which religious faith existed in multiple forms (as in India), no particular religion or belief system could claim universal allegiance, no shared morality could be taken for granted. In the absence of a generalized and common religious faith, religion in its traditional sense could not claim to be a universal foundation, and moral beliefs were relativized. This spiritual situation was fertile territory for social conflicts. And so new, shared moral vocabularies had to be devised: and this could only be done through reasoned public debate--through procedures that could identify areas of overlapping moral commitments and then extend them.

If we treat such thinkers as remarkable merely within the context of Indian history, we do them an injustice. Their concepts and their methods address more general problems, not least the question of how to construe the relation between political power and the plurality of faiths. We tend to assume that universalist ideas are a feature only of Western theories. In fact, the differing universalisms of the twentieth-century tradition of public reason in India may be better suited to today's world, disjointed and disrupted by the claims of identity: they are more deeply and innately sensitive to the claims of diversity in the construction of a moral public life.

III.

What set Tagore and Gandhi apart from other Indians who wished to root public morals in religion was their recognition that no religion in its traditional sense could serve as the basis of a universal faith or morality. Thus, Gandhi's own intellectual itinerary involved a strenuous dismantling and re-assembling of religious traditions; and the result was a profoundly unconventional ethical sense, one that cannot be understood in the terms of traditional Hinduism. By opening himself to Islam, Christianity, and the folk traditions of Hindu devotion, he created his own moral language, which was profoundly respectful of existing religious faiths even as it moved beyond them. Tagore, in creating what he called his "poet's religion," which was "neither that of an orthodox man of piety nor that of a theologian," looked outside and beyond religious traditions to forge his spiritual faith, which he described as "the Religion of Man": a humanist faith in the capacities of man, and a belief in the transcendent powers of art and aesthetics.

Where Tagore and Gandhi clashed was in their valuations of the role and the force of reason. The difference was brought out clearly in their exchange over the Bihar earthquake in 1934. Tagore thought that Gandhi was sorely mistaken in his readiness to explain to his countrymen that the earthquake was a "divine chastisement" for persisting with the sin of untouchability. In Tagore's view, Gandhi's explanation sanctioned a kind of terrorism on the part of the divine order. When it came to explaining the natural world, Tagore was firm that reason and science must have priority. In this respect, Tagore granted a greater scope to reason than Gandhi did.

Personally, Nehru was far closer to Gandhi than to Tagore. For Nehru, Gandhi was more than a father figure; he was something like a surrogate mother. Intellectually, however, the proximities were reversed: Nehru felt himself closer to Tagore, except that Tagore had a sharply defined sense of the limits of science and rational inquiry. The fact that science dealt in statistics and numbers, that its logic was probabilistic, meant that the domain of moral questions escaped it: moral questions required certainties, not probabilities. For Nehru, by contrast, the moral life was a constant pursuit of an elusive idea, and it had to allow testing and revision through the exercise of reason.

Nehru had a natural sense of the many-sidedness of reason, and saw how it encompassed diverse aspects of human life; but throughout his life he drew out and worried its limits. The instrumentalities of reason, as expressed by science or by politics, could in the absence of moral direction undermine themselves. Science, he wrote, had

no knowledge of ultimate purposes and not even an understanding of the immediate purpose, for science had told us nothing about the purpose of life.... There is no visible limit to the advance of science, if it is given the chance to advance. Yet it may be that the scientific method of observation is not always applicable to all the varieties of human experience and cannot cross the uncharted oceans that surround us ... for there appears to be a definite stopping place beyond which reason, as the mind is at present constituted, cannot go.

Nehru also observed that science, if "uncommitted and isolated from moral discipline and ethical considerations, will lead to the concentration of power and the terrible instruments of destruction which it has made, in the hands of evil and selfish men, seeking the domination of others--and thus to the destruction of its own great achievements."

A life devoted to political reason, to the pursuit and fulfillment of political ambition, also stood in danger of subverting itself. In an essay that he published under the pseudonym "Chanakya" in the Modern Review in 1937, Nehru tried to uncover some of these moral dangers by subjecting his own political ambitions to a public critique. There were tactical reasons for his publishing this essay, known as "The Rashtrapathi," in this pseudonymous way; but it remains a rare piece of public self-criticism by a practicing politician. "Chanakya" wrote of Nehru's ability to win the support of crowds and of his political adeptness, and then declared that Nehru

has all the makings of a dictator in him--vast popularity, a strong will directed to a well-defined purpose, energy, pride, organisational capacity, ability, hardness, and with all his love of the crowd, an intolerance of others and a certain contempt for the weak and inefficient. His over-mastering desire to get things done, to sweep away what he dislikes and build anew, will hardly brook for long the slow processes of democracy ... is it not possible that Jawaharlal might fancy himself as a Caesar?

So Nehru recognized in himself his will to power, and his enormous (and therefore potentially dangerous) political skill. In this, as on later occasions when he was prime minister, he expressed a fear of the temptations of power and a revulsion toward the mechanics of politics. This was not merely high-minded posing: it stemmed from a deep moral anxiety about politics as a career. Nehru understood that political success--of an individual, a movement, a party, or a state--could be corrupting. He had written, in The Discovery of India, that "today in the world of economics and politics there is a search for power and yet when power is attained much else of value has gone ... power has its limitations, and force recoils on itself." For a

politician, success lay not merely in the ability to capture power, but also in the knowledge of how to deploy it for moral ends. Otherwise, political success was a promise of moral failure. But perceiving the limits of reason did not lead Nehru to abandon it. On the contrary, it drove him toward an expanded view of reason, through the steady "workings of the mind" and the workings of the pen--through practice.

IV.

Often in his personal life, Nehru needed something like faith or certitude to sustain him: anyone who has spent close to ten years of his life in prison would need some such mental fortitude. In the mid-1930s, while in jail in Dehra Dun and Almora, he was hit by bouts of depression. His wife, herself isolated and ill, increasingly found faith in religion; his daughter was away in school; his mother was bedridden with a stroke; and he was without his father, in the past his bulwark in troubled times. He was angered by Gandhi's methods and bitterly critical of the leadership of the Indian National Congress, the great engine of the nationalist movement against British rule. His sense of isolation and helplessness seemed total. In his diary, he wrote that "I grow lonelier than ever. The home that father had built up so lovingly is going to pieces.... I am losing most footholds I had." And again, during his second long period in jail, in Ahmadnagar Fort in the 1940s, he grew dark. As the bombs fell in Europe, the freedom struggle and civil disobedience in India seemed to have run into the sands, and his own family life seemed to unravel. "In the mind where there was once certainty," he remarked, "doubt creeps in."

Yet even during these periods of personal and spiritual crisis, Nehru did not turn to the certitudes of religion to sustain him--and it was at every step a hard-won refusal. Instead he found refuge in writing: the mannered self-analysis of the Autobiography in the mid-1930s, and his major work of the 1940s, The Discovery of India. When Nehru found himself intellectually stranded or confused, his response was to articulate his confusion and thereby arrive at clarity. For a long time, these reckonings took the form of writing--letters, books, diaries; in later years, pressed for time, he turned to speechifying, and to his fortnightly letters to chief ministers. The prolixity of Nehru has a particular meaning: one senses a constant effort to reason out his notions and his views. It is hardly a coincidence that the figures who helped to define the tradition of public reason in twentieth-century India--Tagore, Gandhi, and Nehru--were all great letter-writers who ceaselessly engaged their correspondents in dialogue and debate. It was one of the tragedies of Nehru's life that, with the death of Tagore and then Gandhi, he was bereft of great interlocutors, of formidable intellectuals who could challenge his most significant beliefs.

To reason about one's moral beliefs is a more strenuous and troubling process than merely to use reason as a means to achieve particular ends. This sense of exertion that is required for the determination of one's moral principles is often visible in Nehru. Consider Gandhi's commitment to non-violence: could this be a supreme principle? Writing in jail, entrapped by the violence embodied in the modern state, Nehru subjected Gandhi's principle to rigorous scrutiny. Those not fortunate to have Gandhi's faith, Nehru confessed, are "troubled by a host of doubts ... [which relate to] the mind's desire for some consistent philosophy of action which is both moral from the individual viewpoint and is at the same time socially effective." Could the principle of non-violence make sense in politics? After all, the life of the politician is lived in constant contact with violence and the instruments of violence: "Violence is the very life blood of the modern state and social system.... Governments are notoriously based on violence," including the more covert, subtle violence of "false propaganda, indirect and direct through education, Press etc, religious and other forms of fear, economic destitution and starvation." "Neither the growth of reason nor of the religious outlook nor morality," Nehru wrote, in a passage that bore the influence of Reinhold Niebuhr, "have checked in any way this tendency to violence."

Did it make sense, then, in opposing a state--or in thinking about how one might use the powers of a state--to abjure violence as a tenet of faith? Nehru was here wrestling with the problem of how to wield power in a moral way. Could what was moral at the individual level become a principle of political and social action? Even when it came to a principle so

fundamental to Gandhi's morality as that of non-violence, Nehru felt it necessary to reason through the argument. He refused to accept Gandhi's principle of non-violence simply as a dogmatic principle or a matter of religious faith; he insisted on subjecting it to a close intellectual examination, testing it against examples.

Such self-critical awareness often characterized Nehru's struggles to determine his moral commitments. On the vexed question of how to handle one's opponents he and Gandhi exchanged thoughts in the early 1930s, when Gandhi's activism against untouchability was winning him enemies, especially among the orthodox Sanatanists, the devout defenders of Hindu faith, or dharma, who launched an abusive campaign against him. Writing from prison in 1933, Nehru noted how poorly his opponents tolerated differences of opinion--and he also recognized something of this brittleness in himself. "Under great strain all tolerance disappears, and their [the Sanatanists'] intolerance at present is a sign of the great strain you are putting on them," he wrote to Gandhi.

It is all very well for the likes of [Sir Tej Bahadur] Sapru and me ... to talk pompously and in a superior way of our tolerance in matters of religion when neither of us has any religion worth talking about.... But touch either of us on some particular subject and you will find the raw side and there will be little of tolerance then. Who is more intolerant than you are in certain matters? The fact is real tolerance hardly exists; what goes under the name of tolerance is indifference. What we do not value we make a virtue of tolerating in others.

Nehru had no difficulty in admitting where his own ground might be shaky.

Moral reasoning was also practical reasoning: not the discovery of abstract principles, but the continuous selfconscious reflection on experience and history. "The necessities of today," Nehru wrote, "will force us to formulate a new morality in accordance with them. If we are to find a way out of this crisis of the spirit and realize what are the true spiritual values today, we shall have to face the issues frankly and boldly and not take refuge under the dogmas of any religion." Nehru's life, understood as an intellectual project, was an attempt to reconcile the claims of instrumental reason with the claims of ethical reason.

In the realm of policy and political action, there are many examples of how Nehru chose to deliberate rationally, to reason through an argument before adopting a course of action--and at times this involved going against his instincts. Perhaps the most well-known and instructive case was the demand, from the early 1950s, for the establishment of states based on language. After Partition, Nehru feared that any re-drawing of India's internal boundaries along linguistic lines would further endanger the country's unity. But over a period of several years, in the face of demands (often violent) as well as arguments, he came to revise his views on the matter. Nehru has often been criticized for being dilatory and evasive on this subject; but by temporizing and refusing to give in immediately to popular passions, by allowing positions to be stated and gradually revised, he enabled a more satisfactory solution of the language issue to emerge--one that actually strengthened the Union and has endured remarkably well.

Unlike Tagore or Gandhi, Nehru found himself in command of a state, which is the most powerful structured concentration of instrumental reason that exists. The choices and the responsibilities that came with such power brought with them, for Nehru, a certain quality of nemesis, as Arnold Toynbee once pointed out. "It is more blessed," Toynbee wrote, "to be imprisoned for the sake of one's ideals than to imprison other people, incongruously, in the name of the same ideals. Nehru lived to have both experiences." It was the painful sense of the potential arbitrariness of power, and of the need to justify its uses, that urged Nehru toward a reasoned public morality.

Others might have turned to religion to find sources for such a morality. Nehru did not. One often hears the argument today that the institutions of the Indian state--as it becomes more democratic, as its political process becomes more inclusive--must become more "faith-based." But surely two cautionary lessons can be gleaned from the historical experience of Europe: first, that there is something disastrous in all attempts to define the character of the state in

terms of the claims of religious faith, and to endow the state with a religious identity; and second, that the citizenry cannot ever safely relinquish its powers to a small number of political agents for more than short periods of time, that political power must be made accountable through the institutions of democracy. The relationship between these two lessons--the lesson of democracy and the lesson of the secular state--is today being tested in many difficult ways all over the world.

Nehru was one of the few Indian intellectuals who, through his study of the European experience, saw the vital importance of these two lessons: that democracy is the only acceptable standard of political legitimacy for the modern state; and that if democracy is linked to faith, the consequences will be catastrophic. Most importantly, he was also one of the rare Indian intellectuals who had studied not only European history but also Indian history, and he was able to relate his reading of European history to his own reasoned understanding of the pattern of Indian history--in particular, to his insight that the distinctive configuration of power and belief that all large-scale political entities in India had adopted was one in which political power kept a distance from the beliefs of society, and interfered only minimally.

V.

The Indian political scene is today dominated by a paradox. We observe plenty of politicians who profess to have religious faith, but we find it difficult to get any sense of moral depth from their characters, any sense of moral struggle or self-questioning over their actions and their policies. They seem to view politics and the capture of state power as ends in themselves: theirs is a purely instrumentalist understanding of reason and faith. And this hollowing out of the moral content of faith is symptomatic of a deeper and quite startling development in the domain of religion. Philosophers and intellectuals at the end of the nineteenth century tended to assume that religion, and matters of faith, would increasingly become private matters, that religion was being driven inward. In fact, quite the opposite has occurred. Religion today almost never refers to an inner space of contemplation and private struggle, and almost always to an outer realm of conflict and commotion. The interiority of religion has been all but lost. Religions today are more and more politicized. They aspire to capture the space of public morality, to define the content of public life.

It is important to see that Nehru's sense of the place of religion, and of the need to keep it separate from the state, was not based upon some hopeful view about secularization. Especially after the mid-1940s, he did not regard secularization as the ineluctable dynamo of history's movement, resulting in the elimination of religion through, say, economic development. For anyone of Nehru's historical intelligence, one clear lesson of the Partition of India was to drive home the ineliminable force of religion in Indian society, its rootedness--something that Nehru had already learned at the individual level through his engagement with Tagore and Gandhi, as well as with Congress Party colleagues such as the nationalist Muslim leader Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and C.R. Rajagopalachari, the first Indian governor general and a translator of Indian religious legends. Nehru's views about religion and the state were based not on a prospective optimism about the evanescence of religion, but rather on a retrospective pessimism about its persistence--and the dangers this posed if it should ever be linked to that most powerful modern form of instrumental reason, the state. It was an insight based on an understanding of the historical experiences of both Europe and India.

Today, as we survey the shattered nationalisms of the Balkans, as we feel collapsing about us the ruins of Arab nationalism, as we see the precipice on which nations such as Indonesia balance, it is more important than ever to appreciate the force of what Nehru understood. It is exactly religion's persistence--its fulsome presence as we stumble into the new century--that, far from undermining or disproving the force of Nehru's views on the subject, underlines their pertinence for us today. Each generation inevitably condescends to its predecessors. Indeed, there are many things that we can rightly claim to know and understand better than earlier generations did, better than Nehru may have. But on this particular point, he was wiser than the political and intellectual elites of India are today. We may disagree with him about his economic choices or his conduct of foreign policy, and we may not admire his style or aspects of his personality; but we must be able to separate between those of his ideas that retain their

validity and force and those that do not.

Ultimately, the power and meaning of Nehru's life does not lie in the mere fact of his contingent acquisition of political power--his biographical good fortune. Its importance for India and Indians lies in the philosophical and political understanding that he worked out. It was his ability to comprehend the alien political experience of Europe, to interpret its relevance to India, and to assimilate it into the Indian experience that bestows upon him a continuing, indeed surpassing, importance. Gandhi can stand as a powerful moral exemplar, but he offers little with which to think about the central problem that India faces today: how to reconcile the modern Indian state with the thicket of Indian beliefs. Unlike Gandhi's, Nehru's life cannot be said to have been a spectacular moral performance--but he did leave a legacy of reasoning, of intellectual and political understanding, upon whose recovery depends the continuing viability of the Indian enterprise.

There is nothing in the professional routines of modern politics that is inherently uplifting. Unless India's politicians and its intellectuals push themselves to reflect more critically on the values and goals that they claim to uphold, they will be unable to arrest India's political decline. The situation is indeed curious: at the very top, India's intellectual elites are world leaders--in technology, in the natural and human sciences, in literature, in business; but the quality of its professional politicians is markedly inferior. They are good at winning power, but they are without moral intelligence. Politicians often plead that they must please and pander to their constituencies; but perhaps it is time to point out that the capacity to think intelligently not only about means but also about ends is more widely distributed across Indian society than some of its leaders would have us believe. And modern Indian history shows how the political life can be lived both morally and rationally, primarily in the exemplary figure of Jawaharlal Nehru, a politician without religious faith but in possession of the most profound and indefatigable moral sense.