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THE HUMAN SITUATION

UNTIL about ten years ago, philosophizing about the nature of things was regarded by scientists and technologists as a harmless but fruitless armchair activity. It might provide intellectual entertainment, but it could lead to no conclusion that a *real* thinker would interest himself in. Today, this mood of condescension toward philosophy has almost completely disappeared, and not only scientists, but writers, poets, and everyone at all affected by the atmosphere of "crisis" that pervades the world are now attempting to take inventory and to strike off totals on the human situation. It is as though the Proctor in the great Examination Room of Life had suddenly entered and announced, "You have just five minutes to draw your conclusions and turn in your papers," with the result that wildly scribbled judgments about Nature, Man, and Reality are hurriedly being published.

It hardly needs pointing out that some of the papers betray the uncertain and desperate state of mind of their authors. The most familiar conclusion is the one which insists that a merely "human" solution is bound to be inadequate and advises the reader to "make friends" with the Proctor and others who are Higher Up. So Lecomte du Noüy and Gustaf Stromberg, authors of *Human Destiny* and *The Soul of the Universe,* who tell us that only the Grace of God can get us through the exam.

Another group, less numerous, perhaps, but exceedingly articulate, asserts that *there is no answer;* that to the query, What does life mean? the only possible reply is*: Nothing—absolutely nothing.* The fact of our existence is all that is real, and no theological or metaphysical scheme relating man to the rest of the world— to a general destiny of Being, that is—can be made acceptable. The exam itself, therefore, is a fraud: don't bother to finish your paper, or even write anything down. Why invite the agony of one more exploded illusion?

A third section in the Examination Room is made up of people who refuse to listen to the Proctor's warning. We have a few more light-years to finish up, they say. All this talk of "crisis" is only a "failure of nerve." Don't think; find out. Get the facts. The scientific method has not let us down; the trouble is, too many stupid people refuse to use it—refuse to listen to us. *We* have no illusions. We need more time, that's all.

Still another category is needed to account for persons who are not sufficiently frightened to be willing to accept God's easy way out of the dilemma, but who, on the other hand, have uneasily realized that the dilemma is real and cannot be ignored. Such people, one may say, are trying to become genuine philosophers. *Their* difficulty is in lack of orientation and lack of teachers. While the past holds many great and inspiring teachers of philosophy, these teachers seem to have lived in a world very different from our own, making it difficult to gain practical nourishment from what they have said. Certain Greek teachers of philosophy, for example, maintained that the world or universe is a living and intelligent whole—even that gods inhabit the stars and planets. The very word for gods, *theoi,* in Greek, meant "the movers," or those who run—and this background of faith, theory or religious conviction opened up possibilities in philosophy which seem denied to modern man. Among the first steps in philosophizing is the assembling of the "facts." What are the appearance and the nature of the things we have to cope with? In *The Bhagavad-Gita,* the philosophical poem of India, the "action" begins with the assembling of the opposing armies, and the reader, who is on Arjuna's side of the fray, is first presented with a recapitulation of the forces which are on the "other side." But the modern amateur in philosophy cannot enjoy even this measure of simplicity, for he is not sure how many "sides" there are in his struggle—whether there are two, or many; nor has he any reliable information on which are the "neutral" forces, if any. However, he must make a beginning, somewhere. We borrow such a "beginning" from a contemporary journal, in

which the writer attempts to set forth what seem to him to be the major facts of the human situation. Thus:

> Man struggles for existence in a hostile, lifeless Universe within a narrow temperature band, above or below which he perishes. The Earth itself extruded from the Sun, a gaseous mass; cooled, and eventually produced Life. Man is its highest development. On Earth Man is faced with two problems: the successful management of himself; the successful management of his environment. We are dealing first with the second. Man knows what he wants: he wants health and happiness, security from war and want, which alone can bring the end of fear. He desires Justice, which is demanded by his intellect; and he needs love, which is the craving of his soul. So far, he has achieved only some of these goods, and then only imperfectly, and over limited areas of the inhabited earth and for limited periods of time only. In the main he has failed and brought upon himself, poverty, disease and death, injustice, fear and hatred.

The primary question, here, concerning these alleged "facts," relates to whether or not the Universe is actually "hostile" and "lifeless." What are the reasons for this assumption ?

The idea that external nature is hostile to man and to human interests is generally based upon the fact of death, which is regarded as an evil. The universe eventually blots out our physical existence, even as Chronos devoured his own children. But if life is good, then the fate of death is balanced by the gift of life, which also comes from the universe, just as Chronos procreated his children. Further, there is evidence that Nature conspires to produce life with the same resourcefulness that she then devotes to destruction of the forms of life. This being the case, has the expression "a hostile, lifeless Universe" any meaning?

Some years ago, Lawrence J. Henderson, a professor of biological chemistry at Harvard University, assembled a great quantity of facts under the title, *The Fitness of the Environment,* all pointing to the view that the universe is favorably rather than unfavorably disposed toward life. After setting forth these facts, he wrote

> There is, in truth, not one chance in countless millions that the many unique properties of carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen, and especially of their stable compounds water and carbonic acid, which chiefly make up the atmosphere of a new planet, should simultaneously occur in the three elements otherwise than through the operation of law which somehow connects them together. There is no greater probability that these unique properties should be without due cause uniquely favorable to the organic mechanism. These are no mere accidents, and explanation is to seek. It must be admitted, however, that no explanation is at hand. . . .
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> There is but one immediate compensation for this complexity; a proof that somehow, beneath adaptations, peculiar and unsuspected relationships exist between the properties of matter and the phenomena of life; that the process of cosmic evolution is indissolubly linked with the fundamental characteristics of the organism, that logically, in some obscure manner, cosmic and biological evolution are one. In short, we appear to be led to the assumption that the genetic or evolutionary processes, both cosmic and biological, when considered in certain aspects, constitute a single orderly development that yields results not merely contingent, but resembling those which in human action we recognize as purposeful. For, undeniably, two things which are related together in a complex manner by reciprocal fitness make up in a very real sense a unit,—something quite different from the two alone, or the sum of the two, or the relationship between the two. In human affairs such a unit arises only from the effective operation of purpose.

Readers will have noticed that in this line of reasoning, Prof. Henderson has anticipated du Noüy's "anti-chance" theory of the Divine Plan. The Purpose which Henderson discovers in the collaboration of the cosmos and life, is, according to the author of *Human Destiny,* God's purpose. But like Prof. Henderson, we are not so bold. We conclude only that the universe is neither lifeless nor hostile to life.

A generation ago, this assertion would have been greeted with extreme skepticism by persons schooled in scientific modes of thought, but today, objection to it is little more than a habit of mind that is no longer supported by scientific theory. For the biochemist, the distinction between "living" and "lifeless" is only a matter of energy potentials. The redefinition of matter in terms of concentration of

energy has rendered the term "dead" matter almost meaningless. What used to be called the phenomena of "life" are now regarded as potential in the basic stuff of the universe, the crucial factor being the form of organization rather than some secret "life essence," present in some things and absent in others. Both matter and life seem to be essentially the same, finding expression through graded *fields* of existence.

But if the idea of a "lifeless" universe is no longer significant, the question of "hostility" remains. The determined pessimist is likely to argue that, even though the universe be found to be an eternal regenerator of living forms, he still finds it an unfriendly place to live in. It seems fair to point out, however, that this revision in our summary of the "facts" makes the initial proposition about the universe at least partly "subjective." The universe can no longer be said to be hostile to life itself, but only to certain of the hopes, the objectives, the values, of human beings. It is quite possible, therefore, that if we had other values, we should not find the universe hostile to them at all.

While the hypothesis that some sort of *intelligence* is at work in cosmic and evolutionary processes is still in its most tentative stages, this seems to be the next great area of research to be entered. Already, the static, material world of Newtonian physics has been transformed into a dynamic complex of electromagnetic energies—a thing almost "alive" and not too unlike the "cosmic animal" of Greek speculation. It is true that "intelligence" is not generally admitted to be an attribute of universal nature—science is still dominated by the "world-machine" psychology—yet there are certainly stirrings of thought in this direction. Julian Huxley, for one, who is hardly a "visionary," as long ago as 1936 proposed that, in this epoch, "Man's so-called supernormal or extra-sensory faculties are in the same case as were his mathematical faculties during the Ice Age." This was rather daring in 1936, but in 1949 such declarations come from scientists almost as a matter of course. Last month Prof. A. C. Hardy, of Oxford, President of the Zoological section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, announced that existing ideas of evolution might have to be altered to account for the facts of telepathic or extra-sensory forms of cognition. Addressing the annual meeting of the Association, he said that no unbiased mind could reject the evidence for telepathy, and added:

> If telepathy has been established, and I believe it has, then such a revolutionary discovery should make us keep our minds open to the possibility that there may be much more in living things and their evolution than our science has hitherto led us to suspect. (New York *Times,* Sept. 1949.)

Prof. Hardy goes on to suggest the possibility of a revival of the evolutionary theories of Lamarck and of Samuel Butler, to balance the ideas of Darwin and Mendel. He speaks of the possibility of a "group" memory as playing a part in the molding of species and races—a conception which would find confirmation in the "collective unconscious" theory of the analytical psychologist, Charles Jung.

In short, the psychic factor in human life may be an independent as well as an interdependent evolutionary reality—an actual and probably *causal* element of the cosmic whole. And there may even be an aspect of psychic reality which is not subject to the ordinary vicissitudes of birth and death, the alternations of mortality experienced by all organic beings. Supposing this were the case—and there is no reason to think it impossible —what, then, should we say concerning the "hostility" of the universe to our heart's desire?

Conceivably, such researches into the nature of our being, if consistently pursued, would create a rapport for humans with the processes of universal evolution, and what once appeared as "hostility" would take on another, a transcendental aspect. "That which in the beginning is as poison," says *The Bhagavad-Gita,* is "in the end as the water of life." It is even possible that some such realization as this is the next step in the processes of *human* evolution.

Letter from
CENTRAL EUROPE

VIENNA.—The United States and Soviet Russia have obviously divergent opinions about the unification of Europe. But the European nations themselves have different conceptions with regard to the solution. The French still think mostly of their own safety, while in England, the Conservatives want to erect a wall against Bolshevism, and the supporters of the Labour government would prefer an attachment to European unity not too close and not too soon.

It is, therefore, not surprising that in the small European countries which are less entangled in international alliances and security systems, the press tends to offer views which are based on existing realities.

Particularly, during recent months, the Austrian press has tried to dig to the roots of the problem. The present European situation is regarded from the historical point of view. Because of its fine climate, its varying soils and its vast possibilities for agriculture and mining, Europe has for thousands of years attracted nomads and wild tribes from inner Asia, as well as fanatical adherents of Oriential religions. While many of these invaders were repulsed—the Arabs once occupied the Iberian Peninsula and the Turks reached the center of Austria— others succeeded in remaining, either settling by themselves in special areas or intermarrying with conquered peoples. Territorial states were not artificially created, but developed slowly from the blending of different races, languages and customs. Attacks of neighbors who sought room for their growing population or further invasions of uncivilized hordes did their part to foster the growth of national feeling. Countless treaties were concluded, aiming at cooperation as well as at the expansion of might and influence; innumerable wars were fought to rehabilitate "honour," to blot out a threatening enemy or to defend freedom and religious belief. But through all this time, it has proved impossible to bring order to this conglomerate of men and lands. One of the reasons is that the individuals of the different nations have, in spite of the short distances and the growing rapidity of transport, little connection between them. They even see themselves in a deforming light, according to the ideological and the military propaganda which has been impressed on each generation.

To speak of a Union of European States presently goes somewhat too far, as half the continent is now ruled by an Asiatic metropole. And it is unfortunate that this fact—and probably this fact alone has been behind the attempt of those of the other half to stand together. It is known from long experience that anything created by the free enterprise and the good will of a group of men can be regarded as soundly founded. The Western European States seem to lack this foundation, as they have been forced into alliance by a lasting threat of war. There is no cause, however, to look at this fact as destructive of any hope for the future. We all know that distress has often turned out to be the start for comradeship, lasting mutual assistance and even love. The difficulty lies in another direction, namely, in the circumstance that the leading politicians for foreign affairs of the different countries, who act as negotiators for the unification (or federation) of Europe, are the same men who, at official occasions, often display exceedingly national attitudes and even denounce those countries with which they pretend to want to unite.

The confidence of European peoples has been abused so many times during the last generation that most of them have become rather indifferent to conferences, agreements and pacts; they do not care any more about procedures. They are solely interested in truthful and independent acting. Their ears will lift again when the conferences announce that the system of European treaties has been changed into a European Constitution. And the final success will not depend on "procedures," but on the integrity of the Conference in general,

so to say.

A lot of good will has been mobilized already by private institutions that propagate this idea. But it will be condemned to fruitlessness so long as the different governments theoretically postulate the dissolution of national sovereignty and, at the same time, practically cling to the slightest prerogatives of independent statehood. To create another living corpse, another dead institution, would be not only dangerous, but stupid as well, as events would, in a short time to come, wipe out not only the organization, but probably even the men who were responsible for it.

Austria, as the heart of the old continent, still hopes that, this time, the dream of generations and centuries will come true.

CENTRAL EUROPEAN CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
THE BHAGAVAD GITA

THERE have been strenuous protests in the Indian press, recently, to the assertion by the Indian envoy to the Vatican that Gandhi believed "that it would not matter if all copies of the *Bhagavad Gita* were destroyed, so long as one can turn to the Sermon on the Mount." The fact that the envoy made this statement during an interview with the Pope may explain it as a form of oriental extravagance, but can hardly excuse it. A follower of Gandhi quickly pointed out in *Harijan,* the weekly founded by Gandhi, that the latter stressed rather the importance of equal regard for all religions, and called the envoy's statement "a very inaccurate representation." He might have gone further and quoted from *Young India* in1925 (pp. 1078-79), where Gandhi wrote:

> I find a solace in the *Bhagavadgita* that I miss even in the Sermon on the Mount. When disappointment stares me in the face and all alone I see not one ray of light, I go back to the *Bhagavadgita.* I find a verse here and a verse there and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming tragedies—and my life has been full of external tragedies—and if they have left no visible, no indelible scar on me, I owe it all to the teachings of the *Bhagavadgita*

Nevertheless, Gandhi, more than any other man— much more, for example, than the missionaries sent to India to "Christianize" the East—has made the moral splendor of the Sermon on the Mount known to his countrymen; and, conversely, he has also aroused an extraordinary interest in Eastern religion among occidental peoples. It seems fair to say that Gandhi was a kind of "opportunist" in matters of religious doctrine. In a world over-organized by religious sectarianisms, he broke with party lines as a matter of principle. It was not just the "truth-content" of other religions which made him resort to scriptures not belonging to his ancestral Hinduism, but the need of the world to realize that truth itself is not exclusive and sectarian.

It is a question whether or not the Westerner of Christian background and upbringing will be able to enter into the spirit of the religion of India as easily as a man like Gandhi learned to appreciate the Sermon on the Mount. There are difficulties, for two reasons. First, the Western religious tradition has nothing comparable to offer in the way of a profound religious psychology, so that the American or European reader of, say, the *Gita* or the *Upanishads,* is likely to feel himself lost in a sea of psychological subtleties. Eastern devotion—excepting Hindu "Fundamentalists" and many of the "yogis" and "swamis" who visit the United States—is much more than an emotional commitment to the God-is-Love idea. Second, the West has been carefully instructed to think that Eastern religion is a form of high-toned escapism. For example, in giving account of a recent translation of four of the *Upanishads,* a *Christian Century* reviewer cautions the reader to remember that

> the *Upanishads* are addressed to persons who have already spent three fourths of their lives in escaping from the "relative world," and who are presumed already to have freed themselves from joy, sorrow and desire. For those who have not had the benefit of even the first three stages of discipline and renunciation, it must remain a matter of conjecture whether that training gives its devotees insight into a huge store of wisdom hidden in the *Upanishads,* or merely disqualifies them for seeing that it isn't there.

Such tongue-in-cheek observations will hardly increase the understanding of the East by Christian readers, nor encourage them to seek what wisdom is to be found in books like the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita.*

A book that should help to undo the sectarian mischief of such misconceptions is Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan's rendition of the *Gita,* which was issued last year by Harper & Brothers. The author, who is probably India's leading scholar, for years occupied the chair of oriental religions at Oxford University, and a month or so ago was appointed by the Indian Government to serve as ambassador to Soviet Russia. He is one of a number of Indians who combine the qualities of

high cultivation with the practical competence of men of action, a blending which proves beneficial in both directions. There was a period in American history when statesmen were also accomplished in the scholarly arts, and it seems fitting to recognize the high portents for India's future in this corresponding conjunction of abilities, today.

Radhakrishnan's Gita is not the easiest to read, although one may believe that it is meticulously faithful to the Sanskrit text. Westerners will probably find most useful the introductory essay in which the philosophical implications of the religious poem are set forth at length. The form of the work is that of a dialogue between Krishna, the spiritual guide, and Arjuna, his disciple and friend. While the setting seems to be historical—Arjuna, the banished prince, has come with a great army to challenge the usurper of his kingdom—the realities are psychological. Arjuna, in fact, has reached the great inner crisis of his life. The important thing to realize about the Gita is that this crisis is intended to represent the archetype of all human struggle. *Every* man, in other words, will come upon this crisis, sooner or later. It is a natural part of growing up, morally, as a human being, and the Gita offers practical instruction in how to meet it.

At the outset, Arjuna, on the verge of recovering the ultimate in worldly position, suddenly feels "fed up." In Radhakrishnan's words:

> Arjuna, in the opening scene, faces the world of nature and society ant feels utterly alone. He does not wish to buy inward security by submission to a social standard. So long as he looks upon himself as a ksatriya [warrior] required to fight, so long as he is chained to his station and his duties, he is unaware of the full possibilities of his individual action. Most of us, by finding our specific place in the social world, give a meaning to our life and gain a feeling of security, a sense of belonging. Normally, within limits, we find scope for the expression of our life and the social routine is not felt as a bondage. The individual has not yet emerged. He does not conceive of himself except through the social medium. Arjuna could have overcome his feeling of helplessness and anxiety by submitting completely to the social authority. But that would be to arrest his growth. Any sense of satisfaction and security derived by submission to external authority is bought at the price of the integrity of the self. Modern views like the totalitarian declare that the individual can be saved by his absorption into society. They forget that the group exists only to secure the complete unfolding of human personality. Arjuna disentangles himself from the social context, stands alone and faces the perilous overpowering aspects of the world. Submission is not the human way of overcoming loneliness and anxiety. By developing our inner spiritual nature, we gain a new kind of relatedness to the world and grow into the freedom where the integrity of the self is not compromised. We then become aware of ourselves as active creative individuals, living, not by the discipline of external authority but by the inward rule of free devotion to truth.

It is this theme of the *Gita* which makes the work an extraordinary one, so far as manuals of religious devotion are concerned. The *Gita* is continually subversive of the orthodoxy which it seems to represent. Krishna tells Arjuna that, of course, if he performs the necessary rites, says his prayers regularly and attends to the counsels of the *Vedas,* he will get to heaven; but, he adds, no strong man wants to go to heaven! Not even heaven lasts forever; it is only a celestial illusion. Nothing short of absolute knowledge of things as they are, is worth striving after, Krishna says. And to obtain that knowledge, something more than a life of pious conformity is needed.

The *Gita,* Radhakrishnan points out, offers no short cut out of this "vale of tears":

> Right through, the teacher emphasizes the need for action. He does not adopt the solution of dismissing the world as an illusion and action as a snare. He recommends the full active life of man in the world with the inner life anchored in the Eternal Spirit. The Gita is therefore a mandate for action. It explains what a man ought to do not merely as a social being but as an individual with a spiritual destiny.... It is incorrect to assume that Hindu thought strained excessively after the unattainable and was guilty of indifference to the problems of the world. We cannot lose ourselves in inner piety when the poor die at our doors, naked and hungry. The

Gita asks us to live in the world and save it.

The important consideration, here, seems to lie in the meaning of the phrase, "spiritual destiny." A man must act, as Krishna says, but to what end? It is the subtle analysis of man's psychological nature and the dynamic pantheism of Hindu religion which prevent the idea of "spiritual destiny" from becoming a hazy generality. Man, both personally and impersonally, is a God. He is not essentially a "sinner," but essentially the Self—the pure essence of Being. This he must realize, through every department of his nature. Then he is free for the reason that he no longer thinks of himself as less than the highest. Meanwhile, he must work—work at the things which everyone in the world must work at, but not *for* them, not to be enslaved by them. He must work because work is a way to truth, just as philosophy is a way to truth, and universal compassion is a way to truth. He is a type of great Nature—he *is* Nature become self-aware.

The Gita, then, as a treatise on the meaning of action, needs to become a pervasive influence in life, before it can be thoroughly understood. That, at any rate, is the import of Prof. Radhakrishnan's essay, and an idea which glib Western critics of Eastern scriptures might take to heart.

COMMENTARY
A QUESTION OF PREMISES

"EVEN philosophers," a subscriber informs us, "must eat before they can think." His letter amounts to a challenge to program tomorrow's social revolution. "What right have we," he asks, "to criticize any system unless we can suggest something else in its place?"

> Under the law [he writes], I have a right to run for the U. S. Senate, but, I shalL never be Senator, because I do not possess the $100,000 necessary for the election campaign. My inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness consists in selling my labor power to someone who has a need for it and is willing to buy it. And, if there is no one who thinks he can turn my labor power into profit, my inalienable right to life, liberty and happiness is so much hooey and is not worth a pipe of ashes.

Well, if you had the $100,000 and could get to be Senator, would that make everything all right? Or if you could be sure someone would always pay a good price for your labor power, would that give the Declaration of Independence a place among the Eternal Verities? Or, if *everybody* could be a Senator and *everybody* have a good job, would *that* settle all your problems?

How many of the premises of the present system are you going to accept, in planning a new and better one? Most of the revolutionary programs we are familiar with have accepted enough of the premises of the present system to spoil almost completely anything they planned for the future.

Take this question of philosophers having to eat. We don't know of a single philosopher worth mentioning who worried about eating. Not even good revolutionists worried much about eating, for themselves. Marx and his family were often hungry. Lenin in the Kremlin probably ate no more than Lenin in London. Debs shivered through a bitter, Midwestern winter because he had given away his overcoat.

The eat-before-you-think theory of human welfare is a petty bourgeois theory and a petty bourgeois practice. Of course, if you're planning a revolution for *other* people, and not for yourself—if you think that the "masses" can't be expected to be stirred by ideals, but have to be fed, first, like so many cattle—then the eat-before-you think theory will make a good fascist slogan, if you're interested in fascist slogans. So far as we can see, the people who have to eat before they think generally shoot before they think, too. That is not our kind of revolution.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

A SUBSCRIBER recently suggested that we look at the works of A. S. Neill, whose latest book, *The Problem Family,* has attracted considerable attention, both favorable and unfavorable. As founder of the Summerhill School in England, Neill has managed to shock several generations of parents and orthodox schoolmasters during his twenty-seven years of superintendency. What most upsets the sensibilities of the orthodox about Summerhill is its encouragement of complete freedom in respect to all behavior spontaneous to adolescents.

To those of conventional religious background in particular, it has probably seemed that Neill suffers from a lifelong preoccupation with "sex," for Neill has only one "taboo" for his children—that there shall be no taboos. However, in reading *The Problem Family* it becomes rather clear that Neill is mostly just a strong believer in protecting children from flat negatives. He has always believed that warped, fearful personalities come from centering a child's education around various negative commands.

Neill, we think, is fundamentally right. People do not learn what is good by being made to dwell on what, in our opinion, is *not* good. And Neill, discovering that moral education is generally thought to be the process of informing children about the innumerable sins which they might commit, discovered also that sex has traditionally been considered the greatest sin of all. His vehement assertion of a child's right to be free from parents' and teachers' impositions of fear and guilt complexes, especially those associated with impulses developed during adolescence, is a result of Neill's fight against Negativism. By making sex the greatest sin, Neill believes we foist unnecessary guilt complexes on generation after generation, finally producing what he calls an "anti-life" society.

Dr. Harry Overstreet in *The Mature Mind,* a Book of the Month Club selection—and, therefore, quite acceptable to the American public—has enough to say about the question of sexual maturity to bolster Neill's justification of his experiment in schooling without "taboos." Dr. Overstreet writes

> The scandal of most homes, if we would recognize it as such, is that the adults in them are not themselves sexually mature.
>
> Sex is for them, all too often, a hush-hush affair, an ugliness, an indelicacy, a thing of shame. Before any mention of it, they catch their breath nervously—like primitives in the presence of a taboo. They find it impossible, therefore, to put their children on honest good terms with their own bodies and their own emotions. They blush, stammer, put off the day when they must explain to those children "the facts of life" as though sexual facts were somehow divorced from all others that have to do with the how of things.
>
> Or sex is for them a channel for the release of their own emotional immaturities. Family life is too often made to seem a battle of the sexes. The father tells his son that all men, sooner or later, get trapped by some woman; but he neglects to say that the reason he feels trapped is that he has never actually wanted to take on adult responsibilities—that, emotionally, he would have preferred to remain a dependent child or a flitting adolescent. The mother tells her daughter never to trust any man too far: "They're all alike." She neglects to say that she has always envied men their role in a "man's world"; or that she finds in sex antagonism a handy outlet for her general hostility toward life.

We find *The Problem Family,* or, for that matter, any of Neill's works, very difficult to review. His criticisms of conventional opinion seem entirely justifiable, while his solution seems too easy and questionable a short cut. He apparently pays no attention to the possibility that inhibitions against completely unrestrained sexuality may have their origin not in any theology, but in some deep-seated and distinctly *human* instinct. If there is such an "instinct," and it seems to us that there is, it must be rooted in that center of man's essential moral being which urges us to transcend *any* particular kind of experience in order to re-create its most valuable elements at a higher level—thus finding a more

meaningful and perhaps less "animalized" method of expression. There can be no doubt that, as Neill contends, theology corrupts this instinct, but the instinct itself may be man's most important treasure in the quest for psychological well-being.

Neill's former pupils, according to all available records, have freed themselves from the more vicious competitive instincts and from other forms of hatred and aggression. It may be significant, however, that none of them, according to Neill's own report, have shown any great interest in political and social "causes." Now this, of course, can be either good or bad. It is certainly true, as Neill suspects, that many people lose themselves in various kinds of vague "work," claiming to perform humanitarian service, because they can not find understanding or harmony in their personal lives. But it is not satisfactory to assume that all men who devote their lives to "causes" are simply neurotics. There is some potential in most men, some portion of their natures—in full flower bringing forth our respect or veneration, as with Gandhi—which seems to be a transcendence of exclusive involvement in sensory living. It may be that the greatest danger in Neill's approach, if there be one, is that his pupils and disciples will inadvertently so oversimplify life, by concentrating on sexual freedom, that they will remain static in other respects. Neill seems to say that the *absence* of current neuroticisms will mean fulfillment of human living. Here, we are sure that he is mistaken.

In any case, Neill's book should be read with a measure of respect. In many ways he is a character to emulate, for he courageously and successfully has defied convention in the quest for an educational ideal. Of Summerhill School, Goodwin Watson of Columbia University once wrote: "At other schools we might nod approval or express polite criticism. But Summerhill immediately got under our skins. It stirred us up. Some of us were delighted and others were shocked. No one was indifferent."

This is quite a lot to say for any school.

FRONTIERS

The Pundits and the Common Man

THE modern world still awaits some form of sociological analysis which cuts deeper than the political issues of the day. There are scores of books which summarize accurately enough the political consequences of widespread personal disillusionment. Leland Stowe, for example, in *Target: You,* is much concerned with the vulnerability of the average American to fascist appeals. He thinks that the spread of fascism in this country might be accomplished under the cloak of "Christian Nationalism" and quotes the Hearst columnist, Paul Mallon, for evidence of a propaganda drive in this direction. Mallon had written, speculatively, that if another depression should drive "God-fearing" Americans "to seek refuge in strong-arm government," the large majority would be likely to work out a "Christian" method of solving the problem. Without explaining what sort of Christianity he had in mind, Mallon added: "In all reasonable expectations, then, any future totalitarianism in this nation is apt to be Christian in essence." Stowe comments:

> . . . the profoundly significant thing about his [Mallon's] article is this: in a powerful chain of newspapers the idea has been placed boldly in print that another depression may well justify—presumably for lack of any alternative—the establishment of a so-called "Christian totalitarian dictatorship" in the United States. In essence that is a Fascist idea: an invitation to a clerical Rightwing totalitarianism.

The "average" American, Mr. Stowe suggests, is a bewildered individual who no longer knows what to do. He is "Mr. John Between"—caught in the middle of the ferment of the revolution of the twentieth century. He is a member of the most powerful segment of the population—the American middle class—yet he feels almost wholly impotent as an individual. An interesting fact unearthed by Mr. Stowe is that, in 1947, more than a thousand young Americans, mostly veterans, emigrated from the United States. They felt that America was no longer a "land of opportunity." When Stowe publicized this fact, he received letters from other young Americans with similar ideas. One of them wrote:

> My wife and I are definitely interested in removing to Australia, or to any other young progressive country in whose future we can have confidence.... I will briefly give you my reasons. First and foremost, I am opposed to American policy, both foreign and domestic.... Our leaders can change easily. But the public attitude that America is a satisfactorily-finished product, worth preserving as it is, will probably prevail during my lifetime. I choose to be part of a population which realizes that its homeland is far from completed and intends to move on toward that end.

Lecturing around the country, Stowe sometimes talked with serious-faced youths who would say to him: "But, Mr. Stowe, do you really believe that our civilization is worth saving?"

What has happened—is happening—to the common man in the United States ? Turning to a student of America's political culture, Harold J. Laski, we find this analysis in his recent volume, *The American Democracy:*

> The importance of Americanism until the end of the Civil War was as a faith, or a principle of faith, which insisted on the elevation and fulfillment of the ordinary man. If it left an undemocratic Europe unconvinced, at least that principle left it profoundly disturbed. But the importance of Americanism to Europe since the end of the Civil War has lain in principles like industrial combination, scientific management, mass production, competitive power. The failure to revitalize Americanism has reduced it from a moral principle to a technological one. It has deprived it of a purpose which achieves in a community a new level of integration. In its new phase Americanism has transferred the center of its speculative effort from the issue of what a man is to what a man has.

The difficulty with all these diagnoses—which, incidentally, seem remarkably accurate—is that they present no source of moral momentum, no starting point from which to institute changes. In a recapitulation in his last chapter, Mr. Stowe adds up the meaning of nationalism and

preparation for war in the modern world, and asks: "Could the inmates of our insane asylums conceivably adopt a policy of greater madness?" He proposes the formation of a world government to eliminate the fear of war—a most logical course to suggest—and yet, a genuine connection between the diagnosis and the cure is missing. The fears and uncertainties which his book reports arise at a much more fundamental level in human beings than the plane of political activities, whether domestic or international.

Harold Laski, likewise, for all his insight, seems to find the answer in political terms. The United States, he says, "has reached a state of its historical development where the objectives of its labor movement are in fact unobtainable without the formation of a political party directly concerned with their promotion." Statements of this sort no more affect the mood of the average American than talk of world government.

None of these proposals gives any promise of affecting or justifying the basic pattern of life in the twentieth century, with its motiveless whirl of activity, its stupendous emptiness. It is not too much to say that this middle-class man, Mr. John Between, who is the target in *Target: You,* is just now beginning to suspect that *nobody knows*—or, at any rate, nobody can tell him— what his life is supposed to be all about. This dim, blurred twilight in his sense of meaning is what he wants cleared up, and not the "international situation," which is only a symptom or a symbol of his inner discontent.

He wants connections drawn between the things he is worried about and the things that the Leaders, the Better Minds, are talking about, and if he doesn't see any connections rather soon, he won't bother to listen at all.

In *On My Way Home,* Richard Phenix, an ex-GI, tries to convey something of this requirement. This is a refreshingly unpretentious book, dealing with the wanderings of the author from the time he was demobilized at Camp Crowder in 1945 to the time when he made up his mind to go back to college under the GI Bill. It is not a tired, cynical book, but neither is it bright and cheery. One has the feeling that it is a completely candid record of a man's notes by the way—a way which led him to Reno, Salt Lake City, the High Sierras, San Diego, Hollywood, Carmel, Palo Alto, and then "home." The climax of the story is reached on a Carmel beach where, late at night, the writer muses to himself about how he might answer his army friends who were asking in letters, "What are *you* doing, Cap'n ?"

The reply Phenix makes seems worth repeating almost entire:

> "I'm looking for something, Joe. I'm not satisfied with life as it is, and I don't know why, but I've got to find out before I can settle down.
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> "People seem different to me, Joe. They live by the Mosaic law. They are full of distrust and unrest and fear; they no longer want freedom *to do* something, they want freedom *from* something. I can't see where to stand in this new world.
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> "I'm looking for a label, Joe. A label that will tell me what I am and that will identify me to others. There are millions of labels, Joe, from those that say 'executive' to those that say 'bum,' and each of the million is shaded from black to white through every color in the spectrum. The colors mean 'Democrat,' or 'Catholic,' or 'Jew,' 'Communist,' 'Moralist,' or one of the thousand others. And the more subtle shadings of each color mean 'good' Democrat, 'bad' Catholic, 'indifferent' Communist, 'political' Moralist, and so on. And the faint streaks in the shades are for the different interpretations of the meanings of 'good' and 'bad' and 'political.' But all the elements must be there for people to see, Joe; you have got to be labeled.
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> "Supposing I said I fought for the rights of man, Joe, the basic dignity of man, the basic goodness of man? The simple values that meant *work* and earn, not just earn. What does that mean? Nothing any more. You, Joe, might react to me as if I were a liberal. Another would see me as a reactionary, a third as a romanticist. That stand would not be a label, Joe, it would be the delicate shadings without a color or label underneath, and all three of you would think that I had said too much or not enough. 'What ARE you, exactly?' you would ask. 'What axe do you grind?' 'What is your angle?' 'How do you make money from that?'

> "Supposing I said that was all, Joe. That that *was* my label. That if I found something else which was bigger but which engendered the rights and dignity and goodness of man, I'd willingly call myself that something else. But until then . . . I'd be called crazy, Joe. And I would be crazy, Joe, by comparative standards.
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> "In fact, I *am* crazy, Joe, because I'm wanting a responsible world where industry and friendship lie behind and govern all things."
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> No, I could not have told that to Joe. And I said, "I'm on vacation, Joe," and Joe thought to himself that I was a lucky sonofabitch not to have to work....

It is too much, perhaps, to expect Leland Stowe and Harold Laski to write books for Joe, but they ought to begin to write books for Richard Phenix. Or, on second thought, perhaps it is Richard Phenix who ought to write books for Leland Stowe and Harold Laski. Not that Stowe and Laski write over people's heads—that is not the point. But they are writing about things which are important after a man decides he has good reasons for being alive, and today, most of the "good reasons" people talk about are only echoes from the nineteenth century. Today, we are staying alive mostly by instinct, and for the life of a man, instinct is not enough.