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THE DISENCHANTERS

THE great minds of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries strenuously engaged themselves in exposing the follies of religious dogma, the false certainties of belief in supernatural authority. Pregnant with dreams of a new order of society for man, and a new kind of education that would not defile the innocence of the child, the Genevan reformer cried out: "Is it simple, is it natural that God should go in search of Moses to speak to Jean Jacques Rousseau?"

Those were the days! Who can forbear a philosophic envy of those forefathers of Western civilization who pressed the case for natural man, before whom lay the open pages of the great book of Nature, in which he might read the edicts of natural law, and reading, become both wise and free? The high confidence in the affirmations of the *philosophes* reproaches both the past and the future—the past, for its servile attachment to the priestly fraud of revelation; the future, which is our present, for its lack of faith in anything at all, except the terrible iron of our machines of war.

Writing on eighteenth-century conceptions of human knowledge, Carl Becker exclaims:

> Nature and natural law—what magic these words held for the philosophical century! Enter that country by any door you like, you are at once aware of its pervasive power. . . . To find a proper title for this lecture ["The Laws of Nature"], I had only to think of the Declaration of Independence—"to assume, among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station, to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them." Turn to the French counterpart of the Declaration, and you will find that "the aim of every political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man." Search the writings of the new economists and you will find them demanding the abolition of artificial restrictions on trade and industry in order that men may be free to follow the natural law of self-interest. Look at the wilderness of forgotten books and pamphlets dealing with religion and morality: interminable arguments, clashing opinions, different and seemingly irreconcilable conclusions you will find, and yet strangely enough controversialists of every party unite in calling upon nature as the sovereign arbiter of all their quarrels. The Christian Bishop Butler affirms with confidence that "the whole analogy of nature. . . most fully shews that there is nothing incredible in the [Christian] doctrine of religion, that God will reward and punish men for their actions hereafter." The Deist Voltaire, rejecting the Christian doctrine of religion, asserts with equal dogmatism that "natural law . . . which nature teaches all men" is that "upon which all religion is founded." The atheist Holbach, rejecting all religion, nevertheless holds that "the morality suitable to man should be founded on the nature of man." Christian, deist, atheist—all acknowledge the authority of the book of nature; if they differ it is only as to the scope of its authority, as to whether it merely confirms or entirely supplants the authority of the old revelation. In the eighteenth-century climate of opinion, whatever question you seek to answer, nature is the test, the standard: the ideas, the customs, the institutions of men, if ever they are to attain perfection, must obviously be in accord with those laws which "nature reveals at all times, to all men." (Carl Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers.)*

Various great enterprises were launched under the ægis of Natural Law, with Reason acting in an interpretive and supervisory capacity. The political enterprises are well known, since they include the American Republic as well as the numerous lesser institutions embodying the purpose of harmonizing human activities with the more or less manifest dictates of Nature. Arguments for *laissez faire* economics and free enterprise, as Becker notes, sought vindication in rules read out of the book of nature, and after Hegel concluded that human history unfolds according to a "natural" dialectical process, Karl Marx proposed a program for revolutionary socialism that would mirror in human affairs the law of universal progress.

Marxism or doctrinaire communism was in fact the most far-reaching *tour de force* of the nineteenth century in the interpretation of natural law. While it

lost touch with vulgar reality by the grandeur of its assumptions in regard to the dialectic, the loss was made up by the emotional power of its dream of universal betterment and the moral appeal of the idea of economic equality. There was also an aesthetic element in the fascination of the dialectic—an air of elegant completion which surrounds any doctrine laying claim to being a "complete" philosophy, provided the claim has sufficient plausibility to be initially convincing.

While critics of Marxism and Communism freely charge the Marxist interpretation of nature, history, and man with being "materialistic"—a charge amply justified and proudly admitted by Marxists—it is precisely the metaphysical element in Marxist thought which supplies much of its persuasiveness to the mind, while the feelings respond to the moral promise of social justice. The stubborn refusal of so many communists and communist sympathizers to acknowledge the abyss which separates communist profession and communist practice is the best possible evidence of the control which a "complete system" answering all questions can exercise over the human mind. Reality, for the communist true believer, has become the projection of communist doctrines upon the world, and those doctrines are then read back by him as proper observations of the laws of nature which he has discovered by examining the natural world.

It is with this sort of competition that the anti-communist interpreters of history and the natural world must deal. Their difficulties, we think, are obvious enough. First of all, while the communist believes that he is in fact reading out of the book of nature for the enlightenment and salvation of the suffering masses, his opponents, while also possessed of moral fervor, are without a grand intellectual conviction. They are unable to subscribe to the metaphysical sort of "science" which continually documents and supports the communist claims. A Russian scientist who dares to doubt the dialectic soon disappears from view. Not so with Western investigators, who long since abandoned the expectation that their day-to-day discoveries will form the sentences and paragraphs of a new revelation. "Science," said Lloyd Morgan, "deals exclusively with changes of configuration, and traces the accelerations which are observed to occur, leaving to metaphysics to deal with the underlying agency, if it exists."

In modern scientific philosophy in the West, the positivists hold almost undisputed sway. The scientist is a technician who tells us how to do what we want to do. He does not pretend to unveil the secrets of the universe. Probably, the positivist remarks, somewhat casually, there are no "secrets," anyway. In any event, he will not try to explain them. That is something for the metaphysicians to amuse themselves with. As Becker puts it, "The marriage of fact and reason, of science and the universal laws of nature, proved to be somewhat irksome, and in the twentieth century it was, not without distress, altogether dissolved. Natural philosophy was transformed into natural science. Natural science became science, and the scientists rejected, as a personal affront, the title of philosopher, which formerly they had been proud to bear."

Now, from an entirely different quarter, comes a criticism of communism which finds its energy in the claim that *reason itself*—from which the justifications of both civilizations, both the communist and the non-communist world, take their support—is the corrupter of our lives.

As we read this new type of criticism, it seems to mark the beginning of a new cycle of disenchantment, comparable to the rejection of the religious scheme of things inherited from the Middle Ages. "Reason" is no longer the high authority for human decision, but is held to be the betrayer of natural man. To show the basis for this criticism, we turn to the writings of Trigant Burrow, one of the more original of the modern psychoanalysts, whose works have had far-reaching influence. In his *The Neurosis of Man*, Dr. Burrow develops the proposition that man differs from the animals in the type of attention he presents to his environment, and from this difference in *attention* flows the entire diagnosis of the disorders in human life. The obvious objection to be made to this approach is that the selection of *animal* attention as the norm is misleading: why should animal behavior typify the

ideal, if man is not an animal, but something different? The answer is that the scientific analyst must start somewhere, and the comparison of man and animal represents an attempt to return to the book of nature for a fresh start. Burrow writes:

> In saying that attention is the process that primarily relates the organism to the outer world, our definition of attention covers the most instinctual and elementary, as well as the most intellectually specialized or symbolically complex reactions of the organism. If we consider the simpler mode of attention as manifested in the animal, we find it to consist of a process that relates the whole organism physiologically to the whole environment. There is not the intrusion of the partitive or symbolic itemization through which the symbolic or part brain of man separates outer objects into mentally differentiated entities. . . . With man, however, attention has been elevated to a far more delicate and refined mechanism. Through the employment by man of the symbol and its unique facility of sensory analysis, a special part-function has been added to this instinctual asset whereby the organism may now separate out and detach the object or condition from the environment as a whole. . . .
>
> But if through his acquirement of the symbolic faculty man is endowed with a tremendous asset, if through his facility of symbolic abstraction he has lifted himself to heights infinitely beyond the level of other animals, he has by the same token very heavy liabilities—liabilities so heavy that it may be truly said that man has descended as far below the animals as he has risen above them.

From this capacity to abstract from experience, man leads himself through endless self-deceptions. It creates what Burrow calls "the artificial system of prefabricated affects and prejudices that underlies man's present level of 'normal' feeling and thinking and that leads to inferences that are lacking in biological warrant. I mean the social conditioning that has placed a premium upon man's subjective emotions at the expense of his objective relationships." Burrow now traces the trouble to the fact of self-consciousness:

> The developmental modification that obscured the subjective outlook of man as a unitary organism was due to a unique mechanism operative within the phylum. I refer to the subjective mechanism of projection. This phylic phenomenon of projection emerged in man coincidently with his acquisition of the language-forming function of the brain and is therefore peculiar to the human species. With the development of language there was developed a consciousness of self. There was developed a subjective process that had heretofore been non-existent and that was all unconsciously brought into being.

There is a sense in which Burrow's ideal response as a "unitary organism," which has been distorted and thwarted by the human tendency to abstract from experience, to symbolize, and to formulate dogmas, which become conditioning traditions, of right and wrong, is comparable to the "noble savage" of Rousseau and the eighteenth-century vision of natural man. We do not wish to suggest that Burrow actually attacks the human capacity to abstract and to reason in a general way, but he endlessly returns to the true "biological foundation" of behavior, or the unconfused response of the "unitary organism," for his idea of "normality." His judgments are nevertheless of value. Burrow writes:

> We are solemnly taught to revere the alternatives "right" and "wrong" as representing "principles," but the sole authority for these principles is traditional habit. They rest upon no firmer support than the fanciful standards of fairy tale and folklore. . . . The tendency of parents to block the native spontaneity of children is traceable to this moralistic dichotomy, . . . Of course our intention is to give the child our utmost care and interest. But we ourselves, as parents, have already been caught up in the meshes of a moralistic, right-wrong dichotomy that deflects our own attention and blinds us to the real needs of our children. Being unaware of the child's inherent needs, each parent pursues the traditional course that "appears best" to him and, in accord with behavioural traditions, this is no other than the course that "appeared best" to *his* parents. It means that the parent (father or mother) following the line of apostolic succession, inevitably tells the child what *he*, the parent, has been taught to think and feel and do.
>
> Were we free to observe even such a simple and lowly process as the internal motivation of the so-called "wild" animal in its eminently successful approach to its young, we might at least begin to consider our own internal motives. But who ever heard of a human being taking lessons from a bird!

> And so we fail to inculcate in the child a sense of its relation as an organism to its environment but, instead, incite him to depend upon a certain vague authoritarian shibboleth called "right" and presumably personified by the parent.

It may seem a far cry from this sort of psycho-biological naturalism to criticism of communism—and, in this case, of capitalism as well, since capitalism, from this view, is a sort of unripened and unfinished social order which achieves completion in some wholly "rationalized" system such as communism—but the new criticism of Marxism shares fundamental premises with Dr. Burrow. John Hurcan, writing in the fourth issue of *i.e.*, *The Cambridge Review*, a "little magazine" of considerable substance, endeavors to show that the logic of Western rationalist society finds logical fulfillment of its premises in communism. He points to the "guilt" of Rubashov, Koestler's protagonist in *Darkness at Noon*, and Winston Smith's similar conviction (in Orwell's *1984*), as proving that the total authority of the "rational" state must be upheld. Rubashov, who was not a counter-revolutionary, who had not plotted against the Worker's State, was nevertheless guilty because he differed theoretically from the Party leadership. He violated the consistency of the rational system. He was therefore guilty in "the larger sense." Hurcan explains:

> Obviously the truth could not be told to the masses, they would not be able to understand that Rubashov was guilty because he was theoretically wrong. The less advanced masses were still in the moralistic phase of historical development, where the crime was that which gratified an individual's desire at the expense of the social. Theoretical dissent was not a crime in this way, for the individual did not gain by it, not in the usual sense. To make theoretical dissent a crime in the eyes of the masses it must appear that the individual was bribed or corrupted by foreign capitalists, it must further appear that *all* theoretical dissent had its origin in this, that is, that there was no such thing as an innocent error. The people must be taught that all theoretical deviators deviated because they had some selfish end to gain, some private desire to satisfy at the expense of the social. For the people's benefit, theoretical error was moralized, made a moral lapse.
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> But here the Communist ideocracy was hitting closer to the truth than it knew itself. For the abstract itself was functionally only a higher form of morality in that it arose from a higher degree of biopsychic repression. In the old form of morality, it was desire which was repressed, in the new rationalized one, it was *sensation itself*, which is also what had made it possible to form abstract ideas of freedom. Those who dissented from the Stalinist line did so because they perceived sensations or "facts" at variance with the theory, and failed to repress them. This failure was a resistance to further sensory deprivation, both functionally and politically, in that it endangered the schemata, the idea-institution of the Revolution. That was their guilt, which lay, like that of the old morality, in an insufficient degree of asceticism.
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> With Koestler in 1940 there was still some hope held out that this was a temporary stage, before the reaching of the distant goals, after which there would indeed be freedom (or unrepressed biopsychic functioning).

Orwell, however, harbored no such illusions. Writing nearly a decade later, he set the scene of his magnificent vision another three decades ahead, in 1984. Yet in many respects history seems to be swiftly overtaking him.

In another place, Hurcan describes the supreme authority of the rational system:

> Innocence is impossible before the Party or State, no matter what one has done or not done. There is no degree of conformance, obedience or repression at which the individual may stop, or in which he may feel secure, for the vision of communism is of History as an endless process of tightening rationality, thus automatically increasing in severity. Except, of course, in the last degree of conformance. This is death. As long as the individual is alive, he is potentially guilty, convictable by mere accusation of the Party: the hidden crime which always hangs over every Communist, and for which he may be prosecuted at any moment, is that he is alive. For to exist at all is necessarily to exist biologically, and this means that under the surface of rational consciousness there still exists the pressure of the organic impulses that were throttled in order to allow the abstractions to be formed. Thus as long as one is alive, one necessarily harbors a subversive force which is outside the Idea, the Party, the State, and a threat to it.
>
> Hegel said: "The State should so act as if individuals did not exist." And each Party member

knows that at any moment the Party has the right to remind him of this.

"The court-martial told him, 'You are under sentence of death.' Levine answered, 'We Communists are always under sentence of death'." This was one of the remarks which Whittaker Chambers quoted to the Grand Jury in his attempt to convey to them a sense of what being a Communist means, as he relates in his powerful narrative, *Witness*. He strongly confirms the conclusion of Koestler and Orwell that Communism cannot be rejected from a rationalist viewpoint.

What Hurcan fails to mention—possibly as beneath notice, since he is busy making his points—is that a proper use of reason is supposed to take full account of facts which conflict with theories or generalizations and, if necessary, abandon the generalizations which cannot accommodate stubborn facts. A good theory represses only irrelevant facts. His chief point, we suspect, is that this ideal is seldom realized, and that, historically speaking, a rationalist social order cannot *afford* the tentative mood of scientific uncertainty and a patient waiting for final proofs or "better evidence."

Even in the relatively "uncrystallized" rational system of American democracy, the tendency to require conformity to the implicit assumptions of the system is already frighteningly apparent. A "liberal spirit" who behaves in an unconventional way—who dares to question the current operations of the system—is automatically suspect, and for a large number of people, to be suspect is to be guilty beyond appeal. The reasoning goes this way: Our method of obtaining national security is our own, and therefore deserving of a respect which comes close to reverence. Mr. A. questions some of the procedures of this method. But to question these procedures is to suggest that our method is faulty. The best men, however, who always rise to positions of authority in our best of all possible political systems, have devised these methods. Therefore these methods, if not the best, are the best we can have, and critics can only spread weakness and indecision at a time when our very lives require assurance and confidence that we are right. Thus Mr. A. is not only wrong, but he is a menace to our way of life as well. Anyone who will allow himself to behave in this way is surely capable of greater infamies, and nothing we can say against him can be too strong, although certain proprieties may restrain us for a while. Look out!

So, Hurcan suggests, we cleave to our abstractions, our grand generalizations, ignoring the psycho-biological facts

On the ground of similar reasoning, Dwight Macdonald withdrew from political activity and advocated the development of a "new political vocabulary," in which "radicals" would be separated from the advocates of rigid rationalist systems who interpret historical processes in terms of ruthless necessities and surgical "liquidations." The radicals remain those who refuse to abandon the immediate ethical values which are given in the human heart—truth, love, and justice.

The anarchists chorus, "We have always known these things. Men must learn to do without impressive ideological systems and rationalist delusions of grandeur!"

The Buddhists echo, "Well, at last you of the West are learning to distinguish between absolute and relative truth, after having suffered a Babylonian Captivity to relative truth for nearly two thousand years."

The traditional Christian thinker patiently explains that we are now reaping the dark harvest of an arrogance born of the Renaissance, and hopes that we shall have the wisdom and the humility to return to the bosom of the Father.

The mystic—or, if you will, the philosopher who honors the possibilities of mystical vision—takes a position something like that of Trigant Burrow, except that he invites a response to the environment from the *whole man*, instead of from the "whole organism," and proposes that, while we must and will have theories and schemes of rational meaning, the folly lies not in the theories, but in our failure to make theories that can be tested by each individual. A theory which has no meaning except for masses, or States or Nations, he would say, is a blasphemy against the nature of man.

REVIEW

WHO THINKS FOR WHOM?

SOLOMON E. ASCH, professor of psychology at Swarthmore College, contributed to the November *Scientific American* an article, "Opinions and Social Pressure," which defines the central problem of a democratic social order. The fact that people are influenced in their decisions by others is nothing new, but Prof. Asch now shows most people can be influenced to go *against their better judgment* by the pressure of "majority" opinion.

The form of the experiment was this: Seven college students are seated around a table. The experimenter exhibits two cards, one of which bears a line of standard length, the other, three lines, of which only one is the same length as the standard. The students are then asked to select the one of the three which is the same length as the standard line. All but one student are "in on" the experiment, and are instructed to pick the wrong line. The seventh student, who is really the subject, is left to exercise his own judgment. Prof. Asch describes the effect:

> The experiment opens uneventfully. The subjects announce their answers in the order in which they have been seated in the room, and on the first round every person chooses the same matching line. Then a second set of cards is exposed; again the group is unanimous. The members appear ready to endure politely another boring experiment. On the third trial there is an unexpected disturbance. One person near the end of the group disagrees with all the others in his selection of the matching line. He looks surprised, incredulous, about the disagreement. On the following trial he disagrees again, while the others remain unanimous in their choice. The dissenter becomes more and more worried and hesitant as the disagreement continues in the succeeding trials; he may pause before announcing his answer and speak in a low voice, or he may smile in an embarrassed way. . . .

If we are willing to concede that the psychological duplicity of such doings is justified by the resulting "knowledge," these experiments may be seen to have interesting content. In one series.of tests, 123 persons were exposed in this way to the pressure of majority opinion. Nearly 37 per cent of the answers they gave were wrong—wrong because they decided to deny the evidence of their senses and "go along" with the majority. (Ordinarily, individuals make mistakes less than 1 per cent of the time.)

The experiment dramatized the differences among individuals in the tendency to conform. Students who were willing to stand by their own judgment, no matter what the majority said, could not be worn down by repeated trials. On the other hand, subjects who gave in to the majority opinion did not recover their self-reliance when the ordeal was prolonged. Prof. Asch comments:

> The reasons for the startling individual differences have not yet been investigated in detail. At this point we can only report some tentative generalizations from talks with the subjects, each of whom was interviewed at the end of the experiment. Among the independent individuals were many who held fast because of staunch confidence in their own judgment. The most significant fact about them was not absence of responsiveness to the majority but a capacity to recover from doubt and to re-establish their equilibrium. Others who acted independently came to believe that the majority was correct in its answers, but they continued their dissent on the simple ground that it was their obligation to call the play as they saw it.
>
> Among the extremely yielding persons we found a group who quickly reached the conclusion: "I am wrong, they are right." Others yielded in order "not to spoil your results." Many of the individuals who went along suspected that the majority were "sheep" following the first responder, or that the majority were victims of an optical illusion; nevertheless, these suspicions failed to free them at the moment of decision. More disquieting were the reactions of subjects who construed their difference as a sign of some general deficiency in themselves, which at all costs they must hide.

The experiment was varied in a number of ways. First one member of the group, then two, then three, were made to disagree with the subject. The conforming type was not much affected by the contradiction of one other member, but his conforming became substantial when two others disagreed with him. Three against him caused his errors to jump to nearly 32 per cent. Two subjects, both innocent of the plot to make them conform,

greatly strengthened each other. "The presence of a supporting partner depleted the majority of much of its power. Its pressure on the dissenting individual was reduced to one fourth."

If the "partner" was informed of the experiment, and told to agree some of the time with the subject, and on other occasions to disagree with both the majority and the subject, this had the effect of strengthening the subject's self-confidence. He would still conform, but not to the same extent. If a "wild" dissenter was introduced—a person who always made the worst possible selection—his apparent disregard for majority opinion had the effect of greatly reducing conformity. In these circumstances, wrong choices by the subjects dropped to 9 per cent.

Another phase of the investigation examined the psychic impact of "desertion." A subject was given an "ally" who would support him in his correct judgments for a while, and then go over to the majority opinion. When this happened, an abrupt increase in the subject's errors resulted. Apparently, the subject felt "left alone" by this desertion and started conforming.

Still other tests of individual self-reliance were performed. The majority would begin, for example, by giving correct answers, and then gradually make more and more wrong selections. Eventually, the subject would conform, as majority contradictions increased in strength. Even when the errors were made as glaring as possible a seven-inch difference between the standard line and the one chosen by the majority—there were still those who "conformed"!

In his conclusion, Prof. Asch makes this comment:

> Life in society requires consensus as an indispensable condition. But consensus, to be productive, requires that each individual contribute independently out of his experience and insight. When consensus comes under the dominance of conformity, the social process is polluted and the individual at the same time surrenders the powers on which his functioning as a feeling and thinking being depends. That we have found the tendency to conformity in our society so strong that reasonably intelligent and well-meaning people are willing to call white black is a matter of concern.

The results of these experiments are upsetting—upsetting, that is, because something that we have always suspected about religious beliefs and political opinions is taken out of the realm of speculation and made a matter of unavoidable fact. The question naturally arises: Is this willingness—even eagerness—to conform something new? We suspect that it is not new at all, and that there has always been a large element of self-deception in the popular assumption that most people make up their own minds.

In political matters, the mechanism of self-deception is the party system. In religious matters, it is indoctrination in traditional beliefs. Perhaps we had better admit that this is how human beings are constituted at the present time, instead of giving way to horrified alarm. The objective, however, remains the same. We want self-reliant people who think for themselves. This means that everyone, and especially parents, and responsible public figures need to give close attention to their habits in relation to others before whom they stand as "authorities" of one kind or another. It is the people with "influence" who must begin to institute the reform, and this they can do by withdrawing the reward of "security" that is generally associated with conformity, and removing the threat of punishment or isolation which has been made the penalty of dissent. If we want a populace of independent people, then independence must be shown to be valuable in itself. This is a lesson which mothers, fathers, teachers, college professors, policemen, judges, lawyers, governors, senators and representatives, and presidents of the United States will have to learn, and learn because they want to preserve the freedom of the American people.

COMMENTARY
NEW COURAGE OF MIND

WITH interesting candor, the editors of *i.e.*, the Cambridge quarterly quoted in this week's lead article, present some reflections on their intentions. They begin by declaring the necessity for a "point of view," but then point out:

> . . . does not the nature of a point of view necessitate the exclusion of reality to a degree? Point of view is formula—static. Reality is mainly momentary and immediate force of being and emotion. Can there be a formula that does not inhibit reality?

One is reminded of certain Buddhist scriptures, and of the skepticism of Zen, by this question. It illustrates the relative folly—along with the relative wisdom—of all definitions. But to ask the question is to embody the sophistication necessary for intelligent use of the mind. The universities, the editors point out, have adopted a "relativist" point of view toward *all* points of view, to protect themselves from the delusions of definition. But—

> The relativist attitude destroys point of view completely by saying that its end—a "true" formula—is impossible. If it is then one cannot object to this attitude. But this means the end of thought: in the University scholarship already passes for thought.
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> In our approach to the problem, we started with an attack on the University, because it was the University that pretended to be creating and striving for a point of view when it was only collecting bric-a-brac. It was posing as the designer of the stamps when it was the collector of them. We saw no *raison d'être* for collectors; we still do not. But the problem is vaster. It is the problem of the legitimacy of intellectual work.

There is more to this excellent editorial—much more than we have space to quote. The writers do, however, achieve a kind of synthesis, issuing in this conclusion:

> The intellectuals can no longer be flag-wavers. The waving and raising of flags that went on during the twenties, rather to our embarrassment, was a case of dissatisfaction that became its own end. . . . We have learned that to ask for change, like flag-waving, leads away from reality. For in the request for change is always embedded the vision of peace, a peace ending in mere non-involvement. Emotional reality cannot be contained in a system. And so it has become our ambition not to systematize or change reality, which would be to kill it, but to accept and describe. . . . Thought, like art, will live through its power and not through some inaccurate frozen formula which promises change.

Even with the passages we have left out (which have importance), these observations illustrate a new kind of intensity in the life of the mind. It is a return to the idea of first principles in the use of the mind—not any particular set of first principles, but the *idea of* first principles. Doubtless this approach will eventually be frozen into dogma, as it loses the fresh vigor of its present invention. Meanwhile, it has the quality of genuine discovery.

CHILDREN
and Ourselves

NOTES IN PASSING

ON the subject of "sex-education" in public schools, we confess to being a bit reactionary, and this for a reason rather hard to explain. The logic of such impersonal instruction as is favored in many communities is obvious: sex-experimentation at the adolescent levels tops a new peak each year, while at the same time many parents are either unwilling or unable to speak dispassionately about the procreative facts of life. Our objection is simply that making of "sex" a Subject is apt to result in some basic confusion. Group discussion leads to group attitudes—usually to the forming of oversimplified generalizations.

Personal relations between the sexes are not like economic or political relations. Here we have an extension of all the values a young man or woman possesses, with intuition as well as instinct brought to focus. A mass or crowd morality, easily or unintentionally encouraged by the treatment of sex as a Subject, often blunts those subtle differences of attitude and perception so important in the selection of a marital partner. In no realm is it more important for a young person to do his or her own thinking in private—to discuss rarely, and then with someone who is deeply known and trusted. If a parent fails to meet this requirement, the adolescent must have somewhere to turn, but "somewhere" must be some*one*, someone who is a natural part of the child's environment. A teacher may be such a person, and here, as with so many other departments of life, he can strive to provide what the parent failed to provide. But when the teacher *teaches* the biological equations to a classroom of pupils, the resulting impression is likely to be that sex is something you learn about as you learn swimming or football or algebra. So we would far rather have the teacher invite private discussion and consultation.

The fundamental problem in regard to sex is not, certainly, that of "original sin," of temptation, lust or beguilement. The fundamental problem is that attitudes toward the facts of "sex" so often prevent men and women, boys and girls, from viewing each other as persons. In one sense, then, people have the least "sex" difficulty when they think about sex the least—principally because most "thinking" on this topic simply involves dwelling on certain situational possibilities and contingencies which have little to do with individuals. In another and more important sense, of course, there is no better area in inter-personal relationships for the focusing of ethical subtleties, and one can hardly devote too much time to the sort of thought and talk which leads to deepening of ethical perceptions. Whether this can be done in the average class, however, is also debatable; a teacher must be something of a genius to avoid the deadly platitudes and clichés which destroy interest and obscure whatever essential principles are involved.

It is bound to be difficult, when you come to think of it, to help adolescent boys and girls to think of each other as persons instead of as symbols of the opposite sex. MANAS readers who are familiar with sociological writings may recall a classic study, included in many university texts, developing the extent to which adolescents, especially in low-income areas, arrive at an unfortunate condition typified by sex-hostility. Boys and girls strive against each other—the boys seeking conquest, and the girls the enforcement of guaranteed financial provision. The young men and women have no friends of the opposite sex, but only among their own. "Group attitudes" here prevail with a vengeance, and those who might otherwise be appreciated for whatever individual qualities they possess come to the focus of attention, not as persons but simply as symbols—or perhaps we should say "units," of the opposing faction.

So, while it is true enough that appreciation of the psycho-physiological differences between

the sexes is in some ways and at some times important, our contention would be that youth far more needs instruction on how much *alike* men and women are—a primary fact so easily overlooked at all ages, although the evidence of it is all around us. The noblest men must have in their temperaments something of what we call "woman's" delicacy and sensitivity, while the women of greatest worth exhibit "male" determination, toughness of fiber, and creativity. And always you can find marriages exhibiting reversal of the expected psychic roles—radical wives and conservative husbands are becoming almost as commonplace as the conventionally reverse prototypes.

It was a bit surprising, and more than a little encouraging, to note how often the 1955 "Christmas broadcasts" granted that the seasonal celebration is not entirely a Christian matter. We have previously noted, here, that every northern hemisphere culture has made something special of the season. Even "the Bethlehem story" has been told many times before and in many different ways. In fact, *were* we to try to suggest a plan for non-sectarian religious education in public schools, the symbolism of Christmas would recommend itself as an excellent starting point. For all the great world religions have had their Christs, variously named; there are at least three (probably more) distinct "virgin birth" stories, not one. The same is true of Easter and the idea of resurrection, for the mystery religions of Greece, antedating the Christian era, contained a philosophical version of resurrection as an essential part of the sacred drama.

It is only when traditional Christianity reaches beyond itself that the most important message of the Prophet of Nazareth can be grasped. That message, we are sure, was meant to be universal, and to provide an escape from the confines of tribal religion. "Good will to all" certainly implies a recognition that no one person, sect, or culture can claim an inspiration beyond that available to all others, whatever their backgrounds or shapes of belief.

The constructive core of religion—the sort of religion which helps people—is conviction. Now, conviction must be an individual matter, attained by each in his own way and in his own time. If a parent wishes his child to see something of the ethical inspiration which he himself derives from a certain tradition, there is no better way—however much this may seem the long way around—than to encourage that child to distinguish between that which he has been *told* and that which he himself actually *feels* to be true. For only those ideas to which we respond with personal conviction become useful directives in meeting the problems of life.

This point is well made by Henry Clay Lindgren in *The Art of Human Relations,* where he writes that "religion is a highly individualized affair, and the extent to which it aids or retards growth toward emotional maturity depends on the individual's reason for taking up religion and the conditions under which the change takes place."

Mr. Lindgren continues in a way that seems to verify suggestions in our opening paragraphs. He is also convinced that strong ethical conviction can not be born of "group opinion":

> Some persons become converts as a way of avoiding personal responsibility because they feel that by accepting the dictates of a certain religious sect, they are relieved of the necessity to make moral decisions and to think for themselves. Under such conditions, they are using religion as a support for dependent attitudes, and as a defense against becoming more mature emotionally. As we stated previously, growth towards emotional maturity needs the stimulation and the challenges of solving life's problems, and the person who places himself in a position whereby he can avoid their solution is placing limits on his own development. . . . One way in which we can determine how free we are to develop greater emotional maturity is to examine our own systems of belief.

FRONTIERS

Notes on Philosophic Discussion

THROUGH the courtesy of a reader, we have received a brochure describing the philosophical seminar held by the University of Melbourne, Florida, Dec. 27 to Jan. 1. We know little of Melbourne University, save that Ralph Borsodi's ideas and personality figure largely in its plan, but this institution is apparently very much alive to the need for revaluation of "the science of man"—especially in terms of the vast body of information now being acquired regarding unusual psychic capacities such as telepathy and clairvoyance. The seminar was limited to 76 persons, the maximum which the program directors felt could be accommodated to prolonged free discussion; and, as those who have followed MANAS book discussions will be interested to note, three of the volumes especially recommended for preparatory reading were J. B. Rhine's *The Reach of the Mind*, Erich Fromm's *The Sane Society*, and Krutch's *Measure of Man.* Topics for discussion included:

> The Nature of Man Considered as a Psychic Being
>
> The Nature of Man Considered as a Physical Being
>
> The Nature of Man Considered as a Psychological Being

This classification makes possible, it seems to us, a new beginning in evaluation, a distinction between "psychic" and "psychological" being in accord with suggestions implied by Fromm's and Rhine's works. And here, too, we have a return to Plato in the distinction between the *reasoning* "soul" and the "psyche"—the latter being the prevailing pattern of feelings, impulses, and sensations rather than the creative aspect of the human individuality.

Elaboration of the topics for discussion include these explanations: 1. "The Problem of Man's Moral Nature. Is Man inherently Selfish or Unselfish—inherently Good as Locke and Rousseau maintained; inherently Evil as Hobbes and Calvin maintained; or inherently neither Good nor Evil—in effect, morally born a *tabula rasa* or clean slate?" 2. "The Problem of Man's Responsibility. Is he by Nature a Conditioned Biological Machine whose Activities are Determined by Heredity and Environment, or is he Endowed with Free-will and the Capacity for Free Self-direction?"

This sort of philosophical approach is accounted for in a description of the purposes of the seminar:

> This Seminar is the first of a number planned for this Winter by the University as an introduction to its regular course dealing with the problems facing the generation to which we belong.
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> This program of the University is based upon the conviction—
>
> that there is a serious—almost fatal—defect in the manner in which we of the free world are dealing with the crisis created by the Marxist World Revolution, the rise of the great new nations of Asia, and the renaissance of the Islamic World;
>
> that this defect evidences itself *externally* in our reliance upon the nation's military superiority, industrial power, and enormous wealth, and our hapless acceptance of the confused national and international policies of our leaders, and *internally* in individual personal conflict between our professions, and our beliefs and values, desperate preoccupation with the accumulation and enjoyment of material wealth, and lack of real faith in liberty and the potentialities of man.
>
> that this is a defect in our present concept of the nature of life, of the nature of man, and of the nature of the crisis by which we are confronted;
>
> that this defect cannot be remedied by mere public and political action but must begin with such searching re-examination of our basic beliefs and values as is the purpose of this Seminar.

The Seminar was presided over by Ralph Borsodi, Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, whose earlier books have received attention in MANAS. Philip Wylie was included among the leaders of discussion, along with Joseph Wood Krutch, Willis Nutting of Notre Dame, and Harvard Divinity School's Paul Tillich.

One naturally hopes that some of the results of this unusual gathering will be made available.

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In the April, 1955, *Philosophy East and West* we note a provocative summation of recent philosophic trends in India, illustrative, we think, of the value to the West in absorbing an "Eastern" perspective. While the writer, Prof. A. J. Bahm, speaks as though the "philosophy of alternatives" is now in its most significant stage, he also shows that the elements of this point of view have been present from the remotest antiquity in Indian culture. Prof. Bahm writes:

> I found in India not only a great social hospitality but also a great intellectual hospitality. I was, to be sure, in a favorable position. Among all the Americans now in India to teach and help the Indians, one who was there only to get something from them could not fail to be favorably received. The philosophers were willing and eager to share their ideas with me.
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> India is enjoying a great philosophical renaissance. Many schools of philosophy are flourishing, many basic problems are being reformulated, many fine books are being published, many profound thinkers are developing old ideas and expressing new ones in ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, and logic. I am confused by the variety of philosophical activity. But I believe that I can identify the most important philosophical idea which is being developed in India at the present time. This is the idea of alternation.
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> The problem of alternation has occupied the thought of several outstanding Hindu philosophers of the last and the present generations. It involves a third sort of logic besides the two with which we are familiar. Our usual logic is based on the conflict of truth and falsehood. Hegelian dialectic is based on the synthesis of opposed alternatives. The former is the basis of dogmatic thought, the latter is the basis of liberal thought. The dogmatist accepts one view as true and rejects the opposite view as false. The liberal believes that opposed views may both be true in so far as they can be harmonized in some larger synthesis. The dogmatist says, "This, *not* that." The liberal says, "This *and* that." But the logic of alternation says, "This *or* that." The dogmatic logic fails to recognize the equal claim of the alternative. The liberal logic is irrational in uniting incompatible ideas. The logic of alternation avoids both these difficulties in accepting either alternative but not both. Neither alternative can be judged by the other, and for that very reason neither can destroy the other. The logic of alternation teaches that real alternatives can never be synthesized but that both may still be true, not simultaneously but alternatively.
>
> This logic of alternation involves a subtle and complicated dialectic, especially when more than two alternatives are concerned, and I do not intend to discuss it further. But I do wish to mention some of its applications. In the sphere of science, the alternative acceptance of incompatible hypotheses is a well-established practice. In the sphere of international relations, its consequence is a doctrine of coexistence: opposed political systems, each wrong by the standards of the other, may still exist together, not united in the same society, but side by side. In the spheres of philosophy and religion, the applications are far reaching.