VOLUME IX, NO. 20
MAY 16, 1956

# THE FEAR OF LOOSE ENDS

A SCIENTIFIC discovery can be either a promise or a threat. Last March, Charles Francis Potter, founder of the Humanist Society of New York, in an address at the Community Church of New York, proposed that the Dead Sea Scrolls, brought to fame by Edmund Wilson's *New Yorker* article (see MANAS for July 6, 1955) and subsequent book, have been found disturbing to orthodox Christian preachers and scholars, as possibly undermining conventional views of Jesus and the supernatural origins of Christianity. Part of the public interest in the scrolls, Mr. Potter declared (New York *Times,* March 26), is due to a growing suspicion that Biblical scholars are endeavoring to conceal information that might "upset Christian theology and perhaps even throw doubt on the deity of Jesus."

Mr. Potter may be right. At any rate, no institution with claims to knowing the truth has ever been noticeably friendly to discoveries which tend to weaken its authority. The history of institutional religion since the time of Copernicus and Galileo hardly reflects any glory on Christian apologists, who, almost to a man, resisted the march of scientific discovery with something very close to blind determination. Even Louis Agassiz, "beyond question one of the ablest and best informed of the biologists of his day," rejected the idea of evolution, holding that "each species of animal or plant was in itself 'a thought of God'." *(Encyc. Brit.)*

For reasons which are doubtless plain enough to psychologists, the formation of a theory is often the most effective way to sidetrack and ignore future discovery. The love of a familiar explanation dies hard, so that the very hunger to know, which prompts all research, may be turned against itself, and transformed into righteous partisanship, or, in the case of scientific attitudes, into supercilious indifference toward theories which compete with the ones which have current acceptance.

A full-length study of the vulnerability of scientists to this weakness of the intellectual "flesh" was provided in 1938 by David Lindsay Watson, in his book, *Scientists Are Human* (London: Watts), and the recent shame of anthropology arising from exposure of the Piltdown hoax brings reassuring evidence that scientists are not, after all, the supermen we had thought them. Even if the scientists are really the best men among us, so far as integrity and devotion to facts are concerned, we shall profit by recognizing that they have no supernatural immunity to the universal habit of rationalization. The adjective "scientific" before the word "fact" confers no magical infallibility. Scientific facts need as much examination as any other sort of fact by all the rest of us.

As if this were not complicated enough, the conclusions of scientists rarely reach the mass reading public in the form that the scientists themselves intended. Another "processing" is given "the facts" by the publishers of large-circulation magazines, which add the atmosphere of their own editorial infallibility to what they print. Speaking of a *Life* article on a scientific subject, David Cort writes in the *Nation* for Feb. 18:

> It will be noted that the scientists' books are not listed. Furthermore, if I know scientists, they told *Life's* researchers a great number of contradictory things, so that the published compromise among their disparate opinions represents no one of them accurately. One scientist tells his friends, "I don't know why they gave my name. All I did was tell them to read my book, and now I tell my classes not to read that issue of *Life* or they'll fail my course."

A former staff member of *Life,* Mr. Cort adds to his account of how such stories get written an

amusing, if also alarming, side. Commenting on *Life's* "The World We Live In" series, he says:

> These stories were signed "Lincoln Barnett and the Staff of *Life"* in the republication in book form. The latter half of the signature must have been insisted on by Mr. Barnett.
>
> When Luce or a stand-in gives a modest and honest man like Barnett such a subject as "Man" or "The Universe," he has two peremptory, if implied, commands. One is, "Make like Carlyle"—or Darwin, or Toynbee. The other is, "Work God in, preferably in the King James version." The fact that the classy Presbyterian writing of "The World We Live In" has excited no parodies and no hilarity is a serious defect in literary America today. . . .
>
> The stories are loaded, not exactly with errors, but with self-destroying compromises between irreconcilable and unprovable hypotheses, all issued as solemn and holy truth.

We should make a clear distinction, however, between compromises in the interest of journalistic simplicity and the scientist's quite natural clinging to the familiar, the somewhat tried, and (he hopes) true. Years ago, W. H. Rivers, British ethnologist and psychologist, described the beginnings of modern ethnology (in *Psychology and Poli*tics, Harcourt, Brace, 1923), showing how the context of inherited religious teachings shaped the first scientific theories in this field. The earliest ethnologists trained in scientific methods began with assumptions borrowed from the Biblical account of the dispersal of the lost Ten Tribes of Israel. Thus man was thought to have spread around the world by slow diffusion of race and culture. This view was eventually succeeded by the doctrine of Adolf Bastian, the German traveler and ethnologist, who held that "the similarities between the beliefs and customs of different peoples are due to the uniformity of the constitution of the human mind, so that, given similar conditions of climate and conditions of life, the same modes of thought and behaviour come into existence independently, which are in no way due to the influence of one people upon another."

Bastian's claim of independent origin for different races and cultures was bolstered by the belief that the arts of navigation were unknown to ancient peoples, suggesting that the diffusion of culture has been possible only in modern times. It was Rivers' contribution to show that knowledge of navigation once existed among the inhabitants of the islands of the Pacific, and has since disappeared, so that Peru, for example, which had been taken as a prime example of independent development of culture (the Inca civilization), could easily have been settled by colonists from across the sea. Rivers comments: "If the inhabitants of islands can give up an industry [navigation] which would seem to be essential to their welfare, there is no great difficulty in assuming the degeneration or even disappearance of the art of navigation among the inhabitants of the coasts of a continent."

A time is reached, of course, during these oscillations of theory, when the last elements of religious influence are eliminated, when the material forming the body of the field is entirely the result of scientific investigation. But even here, the weight of the familiar is made greater by its contribution of security to all agreeing doctrines and proposals.

What we are trying to establish is not an artful contempt for scientific theories, but a fair hearing for the view that present-day science is never the "last word," but only this moment's version of an outlook which is in continual flux. The more flux the better, so far as we can see, since the man in the street should never accept his own security from the practitioners of a special branch of science, who are, after all, not teachers and philosophers, but technicians and collectors of a limited category of physical and natural facts.

A recent instance of flux, which threatens to untie a few more of the knots in the fabric of modern anthropology, is the claim by Dr. Johannes Hurzeler, of the Basle (Switzerland) Natural History Museum, that fossil remains found in Italy in 1872 belong to a creature some 10,000,000 years old, which was a human-like ancestor of man. It is Hurzeler's view that these

remains leave basic evolution theory undisturbed, but alter ideas about a "common ancestor" of man and ape. According to the New York *Times* of March 14:

> Dr. Hurzeler said the theory of evolution was proved but he emphasized that the finding of a 10,000,000 year-old hominid "will change the opinion that man came from an ape-like creature." In this respect, he said, the discovery—if established—challenges that part of the original Darwin concept that held that man's earliest ancestor was an ape-man. Dr. Hurzeler said that the commonest ancestor of man must now be assumed to have neither the characteristics of an ape nor those of a man. It must be a "neutral common ancestor," he said.

In curious alliance, Dr. George Gaylord Simpson of the American Museum of Natural History, and the Rev. J. Franklin Ewing of Fordham University, both rejected Hurzeler's claims, arguing that the relics should not be taken to represent a human-like ancestor of man.

Well, time and the diggers, and possibly the metaphysicians, may eventually have these matters these matters straightened out. Meanwhile, we are getting more and more loose ends on the subject of who or what man is, and how he came to be. This may be a needed insecurity in an age when new philosophies have opportunity to be born.

# *Letter from*
## CENTRAL EUROPE

INNSBRUCK.—The German-speaking territories of Central Europe—forming during the period of Nazi power the German Empire—have since World War II been divided into three countries with independent sovereignty: the Federa1 Republic of Germany (Western Germany), the German Democratic Republic (Eastern Germany), and Austria.

While most of the large cities in both West and East Germany had been erased by Allied air raids and the conditions (immediately after the war) did not make for a quick recovery, Vienna, the city of Austria, had been able to maintain its spirit. Of course, this city bore its share of the burdens typical of modern war, but since it seemed to be the largest Germanic metropolis still fairly intact, the Austrians toyed with the idea of developing it into the leading European center for literature, art and motion pictures in the German-speaking regions.

One conviction, however, dominated this dream: the representation of Vienna to the world should now be a true one. Artists as well as officials regarded it as necessary to liberate the city from that sugar-like glamour of the past and to show Vienna to the world as it is—a thickly populated place with hard-working people who are labouring for their daily existence, and not a romantic conglomeration of generous emperors, glittering soirees, immensely rich aristocrats, sweet little laundry girls, humming violins, and endless singing and drinking in the wine-gardens.

Motion pictures especially, it was hoped, with their ability to reach hundreds of thousands, would show "Vienna as it is." Some years after the war Austrian productions used stories intended to characterize the economic difficulties which had become typical for the daily life in that formerly glorious city. *Der Dritte Mann* (The Third Man) with Orson Welles and the Harry Lime theme marked the culmination of that period, which, however, proved to be of short duration.

The Austrians themselves, the Germans, and audiences in other countries into which the films were exported, gave little response to this effort to change the Vienna of romance, which they still loved, into a Vienna of labour and sober struggle. People contended that the new pictures were not as interesting and artistic as they had been during the times of UFA, major producer of the National-Socialist era (liquidated by the order of the Allies after the war). Even the actors of that time were still so popular that movie-goers accepted only hesitantly new faces and preferred the old ones.

The producers had no choice if they wanted their films to be successful. They brought back former favorites, and if the famous UFA actors had grown too old for the younger parts, these were given their sons and daughters, making it possible to advertise the old names, at least. For this reason, names such as Wessely, Lingen, Schneider, Breuer and Gebuhr are represented on the screen by a second generation.

More recently, however, it became apparent that the movie-goers wanted even more of the past. They wanted to see—it is really unique—even the same old films, produced in the modern way, of course. Accordingly, films such as *Three of the Filling-station, The Postmaster,* and others are remakes of UFA productions of twenty years ago, and with *Congress Dances, Sissy, The Deutschmeister,* the movie-Vienna has become again what the Austrian producers, literateurs and officials hoped to have blotted out forever as a ridiculous anachronism: the city of archdukes, princesses, singers, musicians, wine-drinkers, and people who seem to live only for gaiety, without ever bending a finger in work.

CENTRAL EUROPEAN CORRESPONDENT

# REVIEW

## WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION

THERE'S not much point in saying that the White House Conference on Education, held at the end of last November, was a disappointment, since we didn't expect very much of it, or wouldn't have, had we thought much about it. Nor have we actually read the Report, which makes this discussion no more than a "review of reviews," although the comments which appeared in the April Phi Beta Kappa *Key Reporter* are probably more informing than the official issue of the conference. The some 2,000 delegates who attended—both teachers and laymen—were to consider six questions. The delegates were divided into 166 "tables," and the group at each table made a report on the questions, which report was then "assimilated" with others at sixteen more tables, and so on, until, by a process of "boiling down" and "distillation," the final report resulted.

The *Key Reporter* has short articles by delegates, one of which presents the comment of Joel H. Hildebrand on the distillation process:

> The procedures were too much like those that the Soviets call "democratic," where opinions may be expressed more or less freely at the bottom level, but in their ascent to higher levels they are worked over and over by good party men, and finally emerge as orthodox "party line."

Mary C. Bingham, an editor of the Louisville *Courier-Journal,* offers the opinion that the contents of the reports "could have been dug up by any reporter out of the existing committee reports of the National Education Association." The educators, according to this writer, dominated the discussions and "their responses to certain questions were as immediate and as instinctive as those of Pavlov's dogs." As a consequence, the Conference came up with "not much more than . . . routine answers to current school problems which have been grinding out of the journals and reports of the professions for years, made democratic Gospel by the affirmations of this so-called grass-roots conference."

While some "minority views" were reported, Prof. Hildebrand sat with a group whose opinions were apparently ignored. The delegates at this table thereupon wrote the following letter of protest:

> Table 40 regards the final report on the question, "What should our schools accomplish?" as failing to represent our opinion in two important respects.
>
> 1. After emphasizing those aims that we regarded as primary, we made the following statement:
>
> "The schools cannot effectively perform their functions if their efforts are widely scattered among objectives that are either relatively unimportant or beyond their capacity to attain. Such demands should be resisted."
>
> We heard no reference to this principle in the report. On the contrary, "Fourteen Points" were presented, with no analysis of their relative importance or their practicability. . . .
>
> 2. The blanket praise given to "the schools" as "better than ever before" is not consistent with the catastrophic decline in many schools in . . . teaching competence in science and mathematics, subjects now basic to the very survival of western civilization. . . .

A further observation by Table 40 related to the question, "How can we get and keep good teachers?":

> There are many persons well qualified to teach, by virtue of intelligence, knowledge of specific subjects, facility in speech, personality, and sympathetic understanding of young people, who could be recruited to teach school if these natural qualifications were accepted for certification in place of course requirements in education.
>
> Many persons, otherwise well qualified, are repelled by courses in education that they regard as repetitive, doctrinaire, or inferior in intellectual quality.

Prof. Hildebrand reports that this "trial balloon" was shot down—in other words, ignored—as he expected it to be, and goes on to remark that in modern education, teachers are

expected to be "child-centered', rather than 'Asubject-centered"—except, that is, the football coach, who is supposed to know his subject.

Well, supposing that the acids of these criticisms are not unfairly biting—that the White House Conference on Education was in fact trivial in conception and superficial in result—whom or what shall we blame? As good a way as any of avoiding personalities is to list the six questions the conferees considered, for here, at least, is part of the explanation. The topics were:

1. What should our schools accomplish?

2. In what ways can we organize our school systems more efficiently and economically?

3. What are our school building needs?

4. How can we get enough good teachers—and keep them?

5. How can we finance our schools—build and operate them?

6. How can we obtain a continuing public interest in education?

We should be hard put to it to compose a less unsettling group of questions. These are questions, as Mrs. Bingham pointed out, for which stock answers exist and are well known to the teaching profession. "Controversy," even under these cagy headings, was apparently shunned like the plague. Mrs. Bingham recites an experience at her table:

> Our chairman turned a blank and hostile stare toward a member who suggested that, in view of the Prosser report and its enormous influence upon school philosophy, the table should consider its conclusions. That report, perhaps more responsible than anything else for the creation of the "life-adjustment" curriculum, states the grim conclusion that 20 per cent of our high-school population is capable of being prepared for college entrance, and 20 per cent for the skilled trades. The residual 60 per cent is incapable of being educated except by such things as "experiences in the areas of the practical arts, . . . family life, health . . . and civic competence." If these figures are correct, there is really little hope that America can maintain its present form of government. We can hardly be trusted with self-government if 60 per cent of us are incapable of grasping an abstract idea.

Such questions, apparently, fell outside the amiable context of the final report.

The fundamental questions of education are all unanswered questions, and will, we suspect, remain unanswered so long as need for education exists. The role of the teacher is to deal with the ultimate, unanswered questions as best he can, but to do this he must perpetually ask them of himself. *What,* for example, *is a child?* From the Prosser report we learn that a child has two chances in ten to be college material, two more chances to be a mechanic, and six chances to be a . . . .

Prof. Hildebrand thought the report smacked of complacency. How can real teachers ever be guilty of complacency? A strenuous wrestling with the problem of human identity—surely basic in all educational enterprise—would lend both inspiration and humility to the work of the teacher.

Of course, to divide questions about education from the far-reaching philosophical questions is an artificial separation. Educational objectives share in all human objectives, and the defining of human objectives is a philosophical venture. We do not ask that a White House conference on education display wisdom, but that it at least display an interest in wisdom. And an interest in wisdom, these days, would have to include the admission that we have very little of it. The questions asked at the White House Conference last November were questions which suggest that modern education has no philosophical problems—that there are really only three problems: (1) to raise money to build schools and pay teachers; (2) to devise better "systems"; and (3) to keep the public aware of all the fine things modern education is doing. The question about what the schools should accomplish was just thrown in to make the affair sound serious and "onward-looking."

One other observation by Prof. Hildebrand deserves wider circulation. It has to do with the pretentious promotion of the Conference as compared with the result. Prof. Hildebrand wrote:

> At the opening of the conference, Vice President Nixon congratulated us upon being able to talk directly through the conference procedure to the President of the United States. But I must confess that the procedure seemed to me a little like trying to deliver a bottle of good California Burgundy to a friend in Edinburgh by pouring it into San Francisco Bay, and letting him dip such of it as he could from the Firth of Forth after it had time to diffuse thither.
>
> In this case there were formidable barriers even to free diffusion. At every stage, there were watchful men who honestly believe more in "social competency" than in grammar and arithmetic, and because good-natured committeemen try to fix up their reports so as to make every member happy, anything seriously critical of certain doctrines and practices largely responsible for the present deplorable and dangerous situation could not get through into the final "distillation."

So, with honesty, good nature, and good intentions, 2,000 delegates, the White House for prestige, and Vice President Nixon thrown in for good measure, a carefully planned and skillfully executed meeting of teachers, educators, and laymen joined in Washington to deliberate on the destinies of the young, and accomplished exactly nothing.

If there is a choice between such conferences and the modern anti-intellectual campaign and the attack on reason, we prefer the conferences, but the one does help to explain the other, even if an explanation is neither an excuse nor a justification.

# *COMMENTARY*
## TEMPERED CRITICISM

THE balanced—one may say, the *rational*—criticisms of intellectualist follies that are appearing in print these days are encouraging evidence that a new sense of being for man may not be far off. For illustration we have two quotations, both probably better than "typical," yet certainly "representative." The first is from Laurens van der Post's *The Dark Eye in Africa* (Introduction):

> I believe that the ideas we use and on which we base our actions are unworthy of the being which is clamouring for expression in modern man. It is bigoted rationalism and fanatical adherence of Western man to outer physical reality and his overvaluation of the demonstrable objective world round him which is the cause of his undoing. He is neglecting all manner of invisible and imponderable values in his own life, and therefore ignoring them in the lives of those in his power, or in the lives of those with whom he is thrown into contact. Those factors sooner or later combine in rebellion against him. The explosions which are blowing European man out of many parts of the world and which are making many so-called inferior, less cultured and less civilized nations increasingly mistrustful of him, are caused largely by his neglect of these great imponderables in himself—and therefore inevitably in others. This is particularly true of Africa. . . .

Mr. van der Post's book (Morrow, 1955), which brings some of the "imponderables" to bear on the problems of Africa, is soon, we hope, to be reviewed in MANAS.

Our other quotation is a similar passage from *Man on Earth* (Random House, 1955) by Jacquetta Hawkes, with an additional comment comparing East and West:

> When overflattered at the expense of the emotional centres and the unconscious mind, the cerebral intellect develops the silliness to which it is prone, while the neglected depths, denied outlets through the harmonious working of the whole psyche, may suddenly surge up in a violent and corrupted form. Cut off from one another, the mind's light and darkness both alike degenerate.
>
> While we men of the West were active and curious, achieving wonders and finally hurling ourselves into the present predicament, eastern thinkers and mystics had learnt the mastery of the psyche, the balance of mental powers, of light and darkness. Now we are waking to our need of their wisdom, even while they seize, rather blindly perhaps, at the fruits of our activity. It is easier for the East to make good its failure to control the exterior world than it is for us to learn the ways of the psyche. Nor, of course, must we try to ape the Eastern methods and ideals, only be humble enough to learn from them. The West cannot forsake its own active ideal.

This sort of intelligence needs no amplification here.

# CHILDREN
## . . . and Ourselves
### CORRESPONDENCE

OUR last invitation to comment and discussion for readers has brought several communications. Taking these in order, we turn first to some exploratory remarks in regard to the meaning of "principle"—its definition in terms of education and ethics. Our correspondent begins:

> My response is in the form of an appeal for a positive, uncomplicated conception of "principle" in respect to human character and conduct. Let us understand basic principle in that area as the simple yet comprehensive directive permeating the structure of personality and validating certain attributes and kinds of conduct. This sort of principle is defined: "A fundamental truth; a comprehensive law or doctrine, from which others are derived, or in which others are founded."

Children, as they grow toward adolescence, begin to hear adults talk about "the principle of the thing"—or, perhaps, "It's not the money, it's the principle involved." This common usage, however hackneyed, does convey a meaning of "principle" not covered by the above definition. Since a principle is also *a basis for action,* we are reminded that, in respect to conduct, the principle which inspires ethical concern is simply whatever motivation inspires a word or an act. Somehow or other, in the long and complicated history of formally developed ethical systems, "discipline" and "motivation" have become separated. Perhaps the approximate origin of the split, so far as western history is concerned, may be traced to the theological mindset of the Middle Ages: ethical discipline then, was God's law, as interpreted by the clergy. Independent human motivation was held in distrust, the implication of the dogma of original sin being that any human, left to his own motivations, would tend toward corruption.

This dogma, like all others, was held by its exponents to be "a fundamental truth; a comprehensive law or doctrine." Expanding ethical insight, on the other hand, depends on a faith that men may be as responsive to inner spiritual aspiration as to "evil temptations." Now, if this humanist interpretation of man's nature is correct, all ethics must be based upon it. The fundamental claim of humanistic ethics is that "God"—or the power of spiritual striving—is within each man and is, moreover, always seeking *some* kind of expression. Instead of viewing general human nature with suspicion, the humanist, along with Buddha and Jesus, looks for the best. For those who have followed our discussions of Erich Fromm's distinction between authoritarian and humanitarian ethics, it is easy to see that self-respect and self-reliance are integral with the humanist viewpoint. An important footnote, however, is that the humanist, by his very expectation of spiritual striving, becomes a metaphysician. He affirms, however implicitly, that each man is destined to transcend the context of self-centered biological instincts. He grows in ethical stature by following a *natural tendency* to question his own motivation, to seek elevation and improvement of its quality.

Our correspondent continues with some remarks relating to respect for individuality as a cornerstone of sound ethical doctrine, and endeavors to indicate that proper doctrine, and respect for individuality, should be interdependent:

> It is very important that principle in the sense of fundamental truth be held distinct from principle as it is understood when we speak of a person of principle; that is, one who is just, honest, truthful, chaste, kind, and so on. But while the two conceptions of principle are distinctly different, they are in inseparable association. The attributes of a principled person are based, consciously or unconsciously, on the reality of individuality and upon truths concerning the individual in his social setting. How can a "man of principle" be defined as one who "tries to think evaluatively, *before* he speaks or acts," unless he has a standard, or principle, by which he can judge values of thought or action?

Now this is where we encounter a good deal of theoretical difficulty. A number of our readers,

we have come to learn, are wary of all "standards" which tend toward pre-judgment. We all have opinions and convictions, whether expressed formally or held quietly, and these are our "doctrines." The distinction between the rigid moralist and the ethical philosopher, however, is that the latter regards his doctrines as but temporary stepping-stones to deeper insight. The man too easily satisfied with formalized standards, on the other hand, believes himself to have already solved the ethical problem, and he finds it far easier to condemn unorthodox human behavior than he would if interested in the "essential constituent" of motivation. We wonder, therefore, if the search for a "standard" can serve as well as the awakening of a desire to examine, sympathetically, *all* standards. The morality of the searcher is never a self-righteous one, for his objective tends to be an increase of knowledge rather than the making of "judgments," and knowledge begets compassion. We fail to see how a conception of universal brotherhood can be built on any other foundation.

Our correspondent continues, discussing the ideal of Universal Brotherhood in abstract terms:

> How do we form the conception of a basic principle, as truth, in respect to the spirit and conduct of mankind? It is clear that mankind is a brotherhood of individuals of common origin, and having the same definitive characteristics of human existence. That is a religious truth that has corroboration in any logical, truth-seeking reasoning about the origin and nature of man. The individual, therefore, is endowed with the rights and is given the responsibilities that pertain to membership in the brotherhood of man. The rights are the natural rights that assure, in principle, equality of opportunity in all that has to do with maintaining the dignity and worth of the individual in his position of supreme importance.
>
> The truth of human brotherhood, then, is the truth that underlies the principle of natural right and responsibility. The derived principle is the fundamental truth that validates thought, feeling and action that are in agreement with the conception of mankind as a brotherhood. It is the point of reality to which must be referred the principles and practices in all of the departments of life—the family group, religion, economics, sociology, politics, education, and just neighborliness.

It is our thought that present philosophy and psychology are now beginning to redevelop the broad intellectual hospitality found in some ancient thinkers—in terms which link timeless precepts to the need for improved motivational orientation in the modern world. Modern man, to borrow Carl Jung's phrase, is on "a search for a soul." The search has two aspects, the first characterized by honest "self-searching"—a looking within to discover the roots of one's aspirations. Then there are modern philosophers and psychologists who wonder if hypothesizing a transcendental entity within man is such a bad idea after all, merely because Christian orthodoxy has assigned ownership of "soul" to God and the church, rather than to each individual. The attitude of brotherhood is founded on a basic kind of respect—not simply respect for what a man does or what he presently is, but, more important, *what he may become.* The errant mortals who complicate the lives of their fellows with destructive assertion may be only "princes in misfortune whose speech, at least at times, betrays their birth."

So we are all for discussion of "principle," but are unable to see how even the most generalized efforts at philosophizing on this topic can be "uncomplicated." It is true enough that the man who expects the best from himself and hopes for the best from his fellows will solve the ethical problem, but no one attains to this ideal by adopting broad intellectual abstractions alone, however clarifying. Right thinking, as Buddha said, must precede right action, and right thinking is a distillation of innumerable conscientious evaluations.

# FRONTIERS

## Ducasse and Rebirth—Comment

[Our printing of the Foerster Lecture of C. J. Ducasse, "Is a Life After Death Possible?" (MANAS, April 25), will probably occasion comment for some time to come. So far as we know, this is the only brief treatment of reincarnation theory available from the pen of a respected academic figure, and Dr. Ducasse's disciplined examination of the question makes it at least *difficult* to deny that the possibility of immortality thus conceived is worth talking about. Some MANAS readers have already indicated a propensity for "metaphysical speculation" of this order, and these may find in Ducasse interesting lines of departure. Other subscribers, who are impatient with anything classifiable as "metaphysical wandering," will perhaps be stimulated by the Ducasse article to formulate their own positions in more detail—thus augmenting discussion in spite of themselves.

The first comment of this latter sort comes from an occasional contributor. While declining an invitation to criticize the Ducasse thesis in detail—on the ground that the question of possible rebirth does not submit to logical argument—this writer nevertheless sets foot in the arena of reasoned discussion. His background is that of Logical Positivism, though, as what he says makes clear, he is no longer content with this label. Portions of his comment follow.—EDITORS.]

Ducasse writes: "Thus, whether or not survival as a plurality of lives on earth is a fact, it is at least coherently thinkable and not incompatible with any facts empirically known to us today." Of this I should like to say that metempsychosis *is* thinkable, but that it is only thinkable in a certain language or in a certain type of language, or in what Wittgenstein would call one language game. I should then like to add that the bare statement that metempsychosis *is* thinkable (that is, this statement without any qualification; that is, again, as Ducasse makes it and, as I suspect, anyone who seriously considers the question, is life after death possible, would make it), to repeat: the bare statement that metempsychosis is thinkable is inextricably associated with the assumption that the language in which it is thinkable is the best language we have.

The language in which one can say that metempsychosis is thinkable (and, therefore, conceivable and, hence, empirically verifiable when properly stated) is a language in which the substantival form of speech predominates over, or completely excludes the adjectival form of speech. It is, that is to say, a language in which nouns such as "consciousness," "mind" and "matter" (to name just three) are used with more emphasis, care, attention and centrality of position than their corresponding adjectives "conscious," "mental" and "material." It is, therefore, a language in which one is enabled (when using it) to speak of entities. (In this process one tends easily to ignore the fact that one is simply speaking AS THOUGH *there were* entities.)

In a language in which one does not speak of entities, that is, in which the substantival form is of less importance than the adjectival or disappears altogether, metempsychosis is unthinkable. For the theory presupposes that there is some sort of entity (the mind, the soul, the personality, etc.) for which it is possible to speak of its identity, as this language has it there are no entities. At this point something of great importance must be interjected. The tendency is strong to suppose that one or the other of these two languages is the correct one, or an approximation to correct language. This tendency must be overcome.

I have tried to put the above without using any of the terms which logical positivists employ (such as "meaningless"), although some of these terms are quite handy. This is not because what I want to say about the question is what the logical positivist would say. Nor is it to conceal the fact that I am a logical positivist. For I am not, nor is what I have to say about the question what a logical positivist would. I mention this because what I have said is reminiscent of what a positivist might say and once this suggestion gets hold of

you, you will (rightly) be able to dismiss what I have said. It is, I repeat, not as simple as all that.

My conclusion is roughly this. I do not believe that this is an empirical or a logical question. That is to say, I do not believe that one can profitably be concerned with looking for and examining empirical evidence for life after death. And I do not believe that exploration of the *meaning* (that is, of the logic) of the question will yield much; particularly since such exploration tends almost inevitably to be based on the assumption that there is something to the question and that sooner or later empirical considerations will be important.

On the other hand, investigations as to what the question (or the asking of it) is a *sign* of are, I should imagine, quite important. One cannot, then, ask me whether I believe in the possibility of a life after death. To make this clear I must in haste resort to the positivist's terminology. The question is not a significant one. *Although* one can give it a kind of "significance" by playing the language game in which it usually occurs.

> [It seems to us that the question, from this point on, revolves around what philosophers call the Problem of Theory of Knowledge—a topic on which, we are interested to note, Dr. Ducasse is presently preparing a book. In portions of his Foerster Lecture which were omitted from the MANAS version, Ducasse may have furnished clues as to the nature of the work now in progress, and this seems an appropriate place to print some of these passages. Having devoted considerable space to review of various objections to speculation about immortality, Ducasse proposes that "scrutiny of them [the objections] will, I think, reveal that they are not as strong as they first seem and far from strong enough to show that there can be no life after death." He then continues with some passages which, while not directly concerned with positivist objections, should be of general interest.—EDITORS.]

Let us consider first the assertion that "thought," or "consciousness," is but another name for subvocal speech, or for some other form of behavior, or for molecular processes in the tissues of the brain. As Paulsen and others have pointed out, no evidence ever is or can be offered to support that assertion, because it is in fact but a disguised proposal to make the words "thought," "feeling," "sensation," "desire," and so on, denote facts quite different from those which these words are commonly employed to denote. To say that those words are but other names for certain chemical or behavioral events is as grossly arbitrary as it would be to say that "wood" is but another name for glass, or "potato" but another name for cabbage. What thought, desire, sensation, and other mental states are like, each of us can observe directly by introspection; and what introspection reveals is that they do not in the least resemble muscular contraction, or glandular secretion, or any other known bodily events. No tampering with language can alter the observable fact that thinking is one thing and muttering quite another; that the feeling called anger has no resemblance to the bodily behavior which usually goes with it; or that an act of will is not in the least like anything we find when we open the skull and examine the brain. Certain mental events are doubtless connected in some way with certain bodily events, but they are not those bodily events themselves. The connection is not identity.

This being clear, let us next consider the arguments offered to show that mental processes, although not identical with bodily processes, nevertheless depend on them. We are told, for instance, that some head injuries, or anesthetics, totally extinguish consciousness for the time being. As already pointed out, however, the strict fact is only that the usual bodily signs of consciousness are then absent. But they are also absent when a person is asleep; and yet, at the same time, dreams, which are states of consciousness, may be occurring.

It is true that when the person concerned awakens, he often remembers his dreams, whereas the person that has been anesthetized or injured has usually no memories relating to the period of apparent blankness. But this could mean that his consciousness was, for the time, dissociated from

its ordinary channels of manifestation, as was reported of the co-conscious personalities of some of the patients of Dr. Morton Prince. Moreover, it sometimes occurs that a person who has been in an accident reports lack of memories not only for the period during which his body was unresponsive but also for a period of several hours *before* the accident, during which he had given to his associates all the ordinary external signs of being conscious as usual.

Let us now turn to another of the arguments against survival. That states of consciousness entirely depend on bodily processes, and therefore cannot continue when the latter have ceased, is proved, it is argued, by the fact that various states of consciousness—in particular, the several kinds of sensations—can be caused at will by appropriately stimulating the body.

Now, it is very true that sensations and some other mental states can be so caused; but we have just as good and abundant evidence that mental states can cause various bodily events. John Laird mentions, among others, the fact that merely willing to raise one's arm normally suffices to cause it to rise; that a hungry person's mouth is caused to water by the idea of food; that feelings of rage, fear or excitement cause digestion to stop; that anxiety causes changes in the quantity of the milk of a nursing mother; that certain thoughts cause tears, pallor, blushing or fainting; and so on. The evidence we have that the relation is one of cause and effect is exactly the same here as where bodily processes cause mental states.

It is said, of course, that to suppose something nonphysical, such as thought, to be capable of causing motion of a physical object, such as the body, is absurd. But I submit that if the heterogeneity of mind and matter makes this absurd, then it makes equally absurd the causation of mental states by stimulation of the body. Yet no absurdity is commonly found in the assertion that cutting the skin causes a feeling of pain, or that alcohol, caffein, bromides, and other drugs, cause characteristic states of consciousness. As David Hume made clear long ago, no kind of causal connection is intrinsically absurd. Anything might cause anything; and only observation can tell us what in fact can cause what.

A word, next, on the parallelism between the degree of development of the nervous systems of various animals and the degree of their intelligence. This is alleged to prove that the latter is the product of the former. But the facts lend themselves equally well to the supposition that on the contrary, an obscurely felt need for greater intelligence in the circumstances the animal faced was what brought about the variations which eventually resulted in a more adequate nervous organization.

In the development of the individual, at all events, it seems clear that the specific, highly complex nerve connections which become established in the brain and cerebellum of, for instance, a skilled pianist are the results of his will over many years to acquire skill.

We must not forget in this context that there is a converse, equally consistent with the facts, for the theory, called epiphenomenalism, that mental states are related to the brain much as the halo is to the saint, that is, as effects but never themselves as causes. The converse theory, which might be called hypophenomenalism, and which is pretty well that of Schopenhauer, is that the instruments which the various mechanisms of the body constitute are the objective products of obscure cravings for the corresponding powers; and, in particular, that the organization of the nervous system is the effect and material isomorph of the variety of mental functions exercised at a given level of animal or human existence. . . .

To the question: What is it that could be supposed to be reborn? an intelligible answer may be returned by saying that it might be the core of positive and negative capacities and tendencies which we have called a man's individuality, as distinguished from his personality. And the fact might further be that, perhaps as a result of persistent striving to acquire a skill or trait he

desires, but for which he now has but little gift, aptitude for it in future births would be generated and incorporated into his individuality.

[It is apparent that both Dr. Ducasse and his present critic are in agreement on one thing—that extensive formulation is needed even to touch all aspects of such a discussion. The disagreement appears to stem from the fact that Ducasse regards the labor as eminently worthwhile—worth far more than the tomes of conventional philosophizing circulated among scholars in current books and periodicals. Our correspondent grants that the proclivity to inquire into such questions as immortality may be an important "sign" of something in the inquirer, but drops the matter there. Too soon, we think. For, while a propensity of this sort may indicate only a rather complicated escape-mechanism for frustrated imagination, it may also turn out to be a manifestation of intuitive insight, moving ahead of empirically based logic in a way something like the anticipation of *presently* "verifiable knowledge" of the Heliocentric System by ancient Greek speculators. The insistence that only one sort of language is "really real" is not so characteristic of independent metaphysicians, we think, as it is characteristic of their critics. Why not learn to talk in as many philosophical languages as possible? The result, in our opinion, could be less a matter of the best language winning than an improved language for everybody—less factional, and therefore more universally communicable.]