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THE "GUILT-FEELINGS" OF MODERN MAN

FOR a generation or more, the psychotherapists have been endeavoring to release modern man from the pressures of "guilt-feelings." Perhaps we should amend this by saying *neurotic* guilt-feelings, since our discussion is concerned with the possibility of other kinds of guilt-feelings than neurotic ones, and some psychiatric writers are careful to connect objectionable guilt-feelings with symptoms of neurosis. And we might recall, also, that the great social reformer, Edward Bellamy, long before psyctotherapy had much claim to being a science, published two novels in which the evil of guilt-feelings was the theme (*Dr. Heidenhoff's Process*, in 1881, and *Miss Luddington's Sister*, in 1884). However, what was probably the climactic public denunciation of "guilt" in the modern world came in 1945, with Dr. Brock Chisholm's William Alanson White Memorial Lectures. Speaking on "The Re-establishment of Peacetime Society," Dr. Chisholm minced no words. After detailing the "neurotic necessities" which he found to be the cause of war, he said: "We have never had enough people anywhere who are sufficiently free of these neurotic symptoms which make wars inevitable." He then added:

> All psychiatrists know where these symptoms come from. The burden of inferiority, guilt, and fear we have all carried lies at the root of this failure to mature successfully. Psychotherapy is predominantly, by any of a variety of methods, the reduction of the weight of this load. Therefore the question we must ask ourselves is why the human race is so loaded down with these incubi and what can be done about it.

Dr. Chisholm makes his own answer unequivocal:

> What basic psychological distortion can be found in every civilization of which we know anything? . . .The only lowest common denominator of all civilizations and the only psychological force capable of producing these perversions is morality, the concept of right and wrong, the poison long ago described and warned against as "the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil."
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> In the old Hebrew story God warns the first man and woman to have nothing to do with good and evil. It is interesting to note that as long ago as that, "good" is recognized as just as great a menace as "evil." They are the fruit of the one tree and are different aspects of the same thing.
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> We have been very slow to rediscover this truth and to recognize the unnecessary and artificially imposed inferiority, guilt and fear, commonly known as sin, under which we have almost all labored and which produces so much of the social maladjustment and unhappiness in the world. For many generations we have bowed our necks to the yoke of the conviction of sin. We have swallowed all manner of poisonous certainties fed to us by our parents, our Sunday and day school teachers, our politicians, our priests, our newspapers and others with a vested interest in controlling us. "Thou shalt become as gods, knowing good and evil," good and evil with which to keep children under control, with which to prevent free thinking, with which to impose local and familial and national loyalties and with which to blind children to their glorious intellectual heritage. Misguided by authoritarian dogma, bound by exclusive faith, stunted by inculcated loyalty, torn by frantic heresy, bedevilled by insistent schism, drugged by ecstatic experience, confused by conflicting certainty, bewildered by invented mystery, and loaded down by the weight of guilt and fear engendered by its own original promises, the unfortunate human race, deprived by these incubi of its only defenses and its only reasons for striving, its reasoning power and its natural capacity to enjoy the satisfaction of its natural urges, struggles along under its ghastly self-imposed burden. The results, the inevitable results, are frustration, inferiority, neurosis and inability to enjoy living, to reason clearly or to make a world fit to live in.

To complete Dr. Chisholm's meaning, we should add his reply to a question about "original sin":

> Of course we have original sin. It can be called human nature or anything else you like, but it is the

> same thing. The way people are when they are born is not civilized. Therefore, it is sinful, because that is what sin is—and so of course we will have sin in that sense always with us.
>
> The thing I object to is everybody having to feel guilty all their lives for having been born the way they were born. That is what makes the trouble, it is the learning that they weren't supposed to be that way, despite the fact that everyone who has been born is that way and will probably go on being that way for quite a while yet. It is the guilt that is foisted on people, on children while they are still defenseless, for being natural products, for not having been born civilized, that makes the trouble.

It is difficult to find fault with the eloquence of Dr. Chisholm's indictment of "morality" and "guilt-feelings." The odd part of it, however, is that this crusading psychiatrist is himself campaigning for another kind of "morality" which we are obliged to conclude he regards as "good"! Meanwhile, the "old" morality is what is condemned as "bad."

Are we, then, entitled to regard his agreement with Jehovah as serious—believe that he really would like to see mankind go back to the state of innocence of the Garden of Eden, to eliminate "moral" pressure?

He does say that "most psychiatrists and psychologists and many other respectable people have escaped from these moral chains and are able to observe and think freely. Most of the patients they have treated successfully have done the same and yet they show no signs of social or personal degeneration, no lack of social responsibility, no tendency toward social anarchy." So far as we can see, Dr. Chisholm means by "morality" a system of beliefs which makes people immature, inferior, and guilty. "Freedom from moralities," he says, "means freedom to observe, to think and behave sensibly, to the advantage of the person and the group, free from the outmoded types of loyalties and from the magic fears of our ancestors."

We have some questions. Does the "mature person," the person who has emancipated himself from "morality," feel no "moral obligations"? Does he never fall short of his ideals? Is he incapable of weakness, without sensibility to the effects of actions thoughtlessly pursued?

Probably Dr. Chisholm takes for granted that the mature person will be very much aware of his inadequacies, whatever they are, and will do what he can to correct them. Dr. Chisholm must mean simply that the mature person will refuse to torture himself because he is not yet "perfect," and will be intelligent enough to formulate his ideals in realizable terms.

Perhaps, then, we can say that the "mature person" is incapable of "guilt feelings," because guilt feelings are by definition a mark of immaturity. But this is a circular definition. What *does* the mature person feel when he looks at himself and finds something wanting? What are the norms, the standards, of "maturity"? Dr. Chisholm borrows his answer to this question from two practicing psychiatrists, Drs. Strecker and Appel:

> Maturity is a quality of personality that is made up of a number of elements. It is stick-to-itiveness, the ability to stick to a job, to work on it, and to struggle through until it is finished, or until one has given all one has in the endeavor. It is the quality or capacity of giving more than is asked or required in a given situation. It is this characteristic that enables others to count on one, thus it is reliability. Persistence is an aspect of maturity: persistence to carry out a goal in the face of difficulties. Endurance of difficulties, unpleasantness, discomfort, frustration, hardship. The ability to size things up, make one's own decision, is a characteristic of maturity. This implies a considerable amount of independence. A mature person is not dependent unless ill. Maturity includes determination, a will to achieve and succeed, a will to life. . . .

The definition continues, but already we can see that the "mature person" is well on his way to being a secular kind of "saint." The mature person, alas, possesses all sorts of what we used to call "moral" qualities!

Well, there is probably great value in getting rid of the vocabulary of the old morality and in

having a new account of human goodness or "maturity." But after we get rid of our guilt feelings, or try to, as a first step toward maturity, what counsels do we hearken to? Has Conscience any status? If conscience "hurts," is this inevitably a nasty old "guilt-feeling," or might it be the legitimate complaint of our nascent maturity?

Dr. Chisholm seems himself to be slightly "guilty" of an over-enthusiastic iconoclasm, although the offense is only a technical one, since his manifest good will and large-hearted concern for the sufferings of human beings are more than enough to make his influence widely beneficent. The least he can have accomplished is to make people reconsider their "moral values," to see if they have added to the distortions Dr. Chisholm lays at the door of Morality itself.

Possibly Dr. Chisholm would prefer to defend the idea of developing an *ethical* sense, to replace the old moral sanctions. He would find many people ready to agree. The idea of ethical obligation implies a conception of human duty which flows from a choice of principles, and from deduction of a course of action consistent with the principles selected.

But then, to replace the function of guilt feelings, some other motive is needed. Dr. Karl Menninger, we understand from one who knows him, takes the view that "anxiety" is not an unqualifiedly destructive force. On the contrary, anxiety may be the only tool with which the therapist has to work, since anxiety may find expression as the hunger of a man to reconstruct his life.

What we are trying to get to, with these ideas, is the conclusion that, in order to replace "guilt-feelings" with a wholesomely animating emotion, we need another conception of the *self*. What is man, that he should want to be better, wiser, more "mature"? What is man, that he may have confidence in his *ability* to be better, wiser, more mature?

The diagnostic side of this question is clear enough. The human race, according to Dr. Chisholm, is sick almost unto neurotic self-destruction of a degrading conception of the self. The self of the man haunted by guilt is a self which is a "miserable sinner," doomed to inadequacy, helpless from the beginning, and condemned like Sisyphus to find his burdens ever too great for him. He was born a failure; how can he be anything different?

But note, for a moment, the extreme simplicity of this idea. Man is a creature, made in the image, not of his creator, but of sin. This is the meaning of the original sin. It is an idea which has captured the minds of billions—enough, at any rate, for Dr. Chisholm to feel justified in calling it the "only lowest common denominator of all civilizations." From a purely pragmatic point of view, can we suppose that a conception of the self possessed of dignity and inspiration can produce a reverse effect, unless it has a similar simplicity?

The pragmatic justification is not enough, by itself, but it is surely worth notice in passing.

The thing we are interested in is the tremendous tropism in the idea of the self. We work all around it, but seldom get at it. People who define "maturity," which has become—quite rightly and properly, no doubt—the new word for "morality," do so in purely functional terms. They tell you how a mature person acts; but they don't tell you what he *is*.

The theologians who started this mess, in the psychiatric account of the Fall of Man, were not in the least reluctant to say what man is. Can they be refuted in any other way?

This, of course, is inviting psychiatrists to become philosophers and metaphysicians. They won't especially welcome this invitation. Psychiatrists are, after all, scientists, and scientists are committed to descriptive accounts of the nature of things. They are not supposed to tell about "essences." They are not permitted by the

tradition of scientific analysis to produce hypotheses involving overt metaphysics.

But psychiatrists are also men; and they are men with a deep sense of the need of their fellow human beings. Who, indeed, more than they, have had opportunity to feel this need, and who, more than they, have responded to it with all the resources at their disposal? Being men, psychiatrists are not entirely bound by professional tradition. They can also be poets and mystics and metaphysicians in their private hours. They can intuit the needs of human beings as well as offer reasoned diagnoses. In time, perhaps, we may have an open marriage of psychiatry with philosophy, and even with mysticism and metaphysics. For it cannot be too obscure to them that metaphysics is the discipline which prevents thinking about the nature of things from becoming contradictory and partisan; or that mysticism is an approach which forever defies the rigidities of dogma.

Conceivably, the time has not yet come for such a union. Nothing could be worse than a premature attempt to make a "religion" out of psychiatry. Scientific dispassion would be lost, and orthodoxies far worse than the "classical" Freudian cult of past years would be sure to result. What we should like to suggest, now, is that there is no escape, for mankind, from ultimate thinking. Sooner or later, some synthesis of the disparate elements of our culture is going to be made. This essay has attempted only a brief review of some of the problems which may be involved.

REVIEW
NOTES ON NOVELS

KAREN HORNEY, were she still alive, would probably enjoy certain passages appearing casually in a tempestuous romance entitled *A Man's Affair*. For with the maturation of psychoanalytical perspectives it becomes increasingly apparent that a large proportion of adult neuroses have a social or cultural origin. The woman who is the subject of the paragraphs to be quoted is having trouble with her marriage—trouble which the pattern of her past thought and living had made it impossible for her to recognize. When she finally discovers that a person has to find himself without help from any external standards—however great the cost—she at least has a fighting chance to escape emotional disorganization. An intelligent woman, her ruminations take the following form:

> Lately Mary had thought more and more about going to a psychoanalyst. Something was going queer in her mind, but the trouble was she was not having hallucinations, she was having facts. What could the doctors do about that?
>
> Well, doctor, she would say if she went to one of Them—(she always thought of the psychoanalysts as Them) I was perfectly normal for the first twenty-nine years of my life. I lived on a normal diet of Hallucinations; an unusually intelligent and cultured upbringing enabled me to conduct my life decently blindfolded, but lately by mind seems to be shaking. Doctor, I think I'm going sane.
>
> Then the doctor, of course, would say, Nonsense, Mrs. Donovan, you can't tell me that an intelligent woman like you is beginning to doubt your insanity. Why, Mrs. Donovan, he would say, smiling indulgently, I assure you on my word of honor as a medical man you are as insane as anybody in this room. Forget it.
>
> These Truths, which you describe as disturbing your night dreams and your day thoughts, will soon pass. Why not go to New York on a shopping binge? Forget yourself, don't think about your husband for a few days, don't wonder about these problems; I'll guarantee you'll be your happy smiling insane self in no time.
>
> The difficult thing about Truths was that, unlike Hallucinations, they could not be shared with anyone else. Truth came in little individual portions and that was all there was to it.
>
> Doctor, she would say—though of course she would never in the world dare go to a psychoanalyst, Lou would be horrified, but just supposing she did—Doctor, she would say, can you suggest some harmless powder to restore Hallucinations? Is there some dietary cure for loss of complacency, is there some hypodermic needle to inject self-deception?
>
> For the life of her, Mary could not understand exactly what moment had brought this unwelcome blaze of perceptiveness to her life. It may have been a glance intercepted, a word overheard, but whatever the starting point was it had happened and now everything she heard or saw in her day's routine had significance.

A Man's Affair is no great shakes as literature, nor does it pretend to be, but these are paragraphs one might like to have around for Appropriate Moments. It is curious, too, how closely these incidental thoughts relate to the psychological message of Gautama Buddha—whose concept of self-conquest involved exposing the subtleties of self-deception—and the hopelessness of trying to leave suffering behind save by moving to higher ground.

* * *

There seem to be three stages in man's relation to the hallucinations induced by cultural standards. The first stage is one of vague unease, with Miss Horney's "real self" somehow registering the discrepancy between the feeling of happiness that is *supposed* to be present, and an inner suspicion of its savor. Or, rather, that there is something *qualitatively* wrong with the whole situation. A poetic expression for this unease would be "divine discontent," suggestive of the strange fact that, though we all labor for security, we always want something more. The evolution of the soul, as someone has said, is a series of progressive awakenings, and we are entitled to use that much abused term "soul" for the reason that no conceivable circumstances, however glamorous or fortunate, can of themselves supply the feeling that further "awakenings" are on their way.

The second stage may be one of enthusiasm, generated when a person thinks he is now ready to undergo the pangs of psychological death in order to obtain the birth of a new perspective. Buddha spoke to this point when he remarked, "Upon leaving the dominion of illusion, the mind trembles and quivers like unto a fish snatched from its watery home and cast on land." It is well, therefore, to realize that before qualitative psychological change can take place, we are apt to become more depressed than we were when uneasily subsisting on our "hallucinations."

The third stage, then, is the critical one. Cast loose from familiar moorings, does one drift into iconoclasm and cynicism, does he flee to the protective arms of recognized religion, or is he enough of a philosopher to be able to affirm that moments of clear vision are worth any ordeal?

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The popular novel is often a medium for expressing distaste with conformity. This is welcome enough, but various passages in post World War II novels show an interesting resistance, also, to the dogma of biological determinism. Some writers are daring to suggest that life must somehow outreach its roots in biology. An illustration of the psychological problem is provided by two passages in Louis Brennan's *An Affair of Dishonor*. The leading characters have acquired the familiar feeling of beating heads against an unyielding wall, and are being persecuted, not because their malefactors hate integrity in the abstract, but because vested interests are at stake:

> "There must be a purpose," she said. "Let me change that. I think there is a purpose."
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> "Evolutionarily speaking," he said, "I wonder if there's any purpose to me. The only kind of creature that makes evolutionary sense is the one that is able to survive and reproduce offspring who are strong enough to survive. Can an anti-conformist survive?"
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> "I'm not a conformist," he said. "I guess I'm too stiff in the joints; I guess my heredity keeps me from being simple. Why is it that some of us are born stiff-jointed? It's like being a cripple, sort of."
>
> "I'm not a philosopher, like you. I'm just a style-conscious woman and what I think is that on you conformity doesn't look good. If I were you I don't think I'd feel sad about it at all. In the first place you got fired even faster when you tried conformity than when you were in there fighting back."
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> "Could you name five men in this town who wouldn't sell their jobs at the right price?" he said. "I can name only two and one of them died yesterday."
>
> "And the other one is you," she said.
>
> "The other one is me," he said. "And I'd like to know why. With what I know about the situation now, and a little relaxing of the conscience I could make myself a pocketful of change and get to be highly thought of around here. Then why don't I behave like everybody else, according to the first principles of self-interest? Because it would make me feel bad. That's all I can tell you. I'd feel worse than if I were half-starved, worse than if it were winter and I had only a shirt to my back, worse than I do now with my ribs bashed in. Maybe that doesn't seem odd to you but it certainly does to me, and there's only one possible explanation. When I learned my definitions of honesty and honor they entered into the bone structure of my skull, and now my head is too old to have its shape changed and it hurts when I try."

The last passage is perhaps equivocal. One might imagine that the author is crediting orthodox religion with helping "definitions of honesty and honor enter into the bone structure of the skull." But since he apparently holds the psychology of Roman Catholicism responsible for the moral disorder which afflicts the villain in the tale, the reader is permitted to think that, whatever the words used in the above passage, honor must be learned by each man for himself, in his own time and in his own way.

COMMENTARY
THE PASSING OF POLITICAL "GUILT-FEELINGS"

THIS week's leading article is concerned with the passing of "guilt-feelings" which derive from the pressure of authoritarian moralizing. The mature man, according to Brock Chisholm, makes himself free of such pressure and is able to decide what to do without accepting the compulsions of irrational religion. Maturity, in short, is freedom.

From India comes a new magazine, *Mankind*, published monthly in Hyderabad, in which an article by Harris Wofford promises a similar emancipation in the political sphere. In this case it is the "liberal," and not the creed-ridden believer in ancient decalogues, who has need to be "saved." Mr. Wofford writes:

> The liberal has been paralyzed by the idea that he can do nothing about a bad law until he has a majority of one on his side. If the liberal had not forgotten that his tradition begins with Socrates, he would know that a minority of one is enough. As Gandhi showed, "it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire to save his honour, his religion, his soul, and lay the foundation for that empire's fall or its regeneration."

The mature man, it seems, has as much obligation to reject the unjust presumptions of the State as he has to deny the irrational assertions of the Church. Plainly, this idea of freedom or "maturity" is a dangerous thing! However—

> His [Gandhi's] way of regeneration is not subversive of the law, but profoundly constructive and respectful. Civil disobedience is civil. It has such respect for the law that it asks for the full penalty of the law. . . .
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> At a time when the withering of consent is everywhere a fact in the centralised bureaucracies of the West, civil disobedience feels like a breath of fresh air. This wind is blowing in our midst at this moment in America. Negroes in Montgomery, Alabama, are in large numbers defying local segregation laws, and under criminal indictment they are approaching jail cheerfully. They are living up to Gandhi's prescription that the civil resister should enter prison as a bridegroom enters the bridal chamber. Their action is putting meaning into the Supreme Court's words about equality.

There is something thrilling about the Socratic liberalism of the twentieth century. It represents the socio-political application of the maturity psychiatrists are talking about. Both Socrates and Gandhi proved that no man is deprived of freedom except by himself. Both were killed by their enemies, but while they lived they were the freest men of their time. And before they died, they showed to all the world how men will behave in a society shaped by the intelligence of maturity. In India, according to Harris Wofford, the idea of civil disobedience has proved to be catching. No longer is there the feeling that men must be obedient to the civil authorities. This may mean a measure of embarrassment to government, but an occasionally embarrassed government is a very small price to pay for the birth of the idea that human beings are really free to do what they think is best and right.

CHILDREN
and Ourselves

NOTES ON THE QUAKER PERSPECTIVE

RARELY does one encounter vital material on education in an alumni magazine. Such a discovery, however, now confronts us, in "Contributions of Quakerism to Education," appearing in the Summer 1956 issue of *Westonian*, quarterly of the Westtown Quaker School in Pennsylvania. Courtney C. Smith, President of Swarthmore College, who delivered the address upon which the article is based, is a newcomer to the Quaker tradition, and more able to evaluate, perhaps, from the standpoint of "the outside world," what is most distinctive in the Quaker attitude and approach to education. While Quaker educators tend to be much more concerned than others with talking about "the ethical life," Dr. Smith is chiefly impressed by the fact that they have a clearer idea of what *use* they want to make of a well-developed intellect. All the members of the Society of Friends may not articulate their responsibility to society in this way, yet the elements of articulation seem present in most Quaker thought.

Dr. Smith begins by remarking that education consists of "whatever has a tendency to invigorate the intellect, to train the mind to thought and reflection, to mould aright the affections of the heart and confirm us in the practice of virtue. It is indeed a course of discipline undergone to fit and prepare us for all our duties in this life and for that life which is to come." So the schools, as has often been piously but also emptily said, really must be concerned with the development of "character":

> But how, given this concern does one develop character? How, in a school that is inevitably enmeshed in [a] fluid, materialistic and brassy society, . . .is character to be developed? Well, not, I would insist, by inculcating values, by trying to impose values, not, I would insist, by indoctrination, because that just doesn't work, nor should we want it to work. But character can be developed through the methods of the mind and the intellect, for one thing, for the mind can grow capable of distinguishing, and of clarifying choices; and through the matter that the mind can master, for another, because the record of human experience and of human aspiration, I'd say in particular of the Greco-Roman and Hebraic-Christian traditions that have shaped our culture, can broaden and inform our sense of the possibilities of life. Now to this extent, character, values, are so to speak in the curriculum. But we have to do more than that, because, as I've said on another occasion, if we've failed in our colleges and I suspect even in our preparatory schools, in recent decades, it's been, I think, because at times and for reasons that then seemed compelling we allowed our educational institutions to become value vacuums. Actually for a long period it seemed to me that faculty members in colleges and schools would rather have been caught eating peas with their knife than they would have been using such a word as values.
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> Now values are not, however, something which one teaches because I repeat that I am not speaking of inculcating values or of imposing them or of indoctrination. But we can let out of our institutions what I would call the dead air of neutralism, and scientism. So that the living air of attitudes and faith and belief may enter. As teachers and administrators we can make our own values, our own attitudes, our own presuppositions known in such a way that they'll be seen by the student to be a live option rather than an abstract opinion. We can make known the factors in our choices, because where any one of us chooses, he values. We can, without violating scholarly method, make it known what relation we feel our special areas of knowledge bear to a larger human and superhuman context. Which is a way of saying that we'll be willing to face up to its ultimate implication. We can make it known what dimensions we feel are left out by our objective accounts of our science, of our special field, whatever it may be. It's been said that we can't think without thinking from a point of view. I would say that we ought to make that point of view known. And if religious presuppositions are a shaping influence in our interpretation, we should articulate those presuppositions. Because, when in the name of science, or neutrality, or objectivity, we refuse to let it be known what values we value, students will graduate from school with the feeling that values don't count for much at all, with the result that they'll balk at religious, or moral, or ethical, or political commitment, or stake everything on getting ahead in this world, which will always be viewed in a

materialistic way, or they will confuse opinion surveys and statistics, like Kinsey's, with standards.

The Quakers strive to create integrated communities, believing that when men are free from compulsion and allowed to pursue ethical values in their own way, integration will naturally result. But the Quaker community, unlike societies which grow around orthodox religions, is never ideally intended for isolation. Each integrated school is conceived as a center of brotherhood—which will become as "integral" with the larger community of state or nation as the state or nation will allow. Or, as Dr. Smith puts it, "when we try then to verbalize what the Quaker influence is on our schools, we may not get very far. Because it abides almost entirely in intangibles. It's been called a kind of built-in gyroscope—a sort of inner directed character. It's an atmosphere, and a way of life, springing from a basic faith. And as one who first came to a Quaker college and to Quaker Meeting not more than two and a half years ago, I would like to say that in my opinion this atmosphere, and this way of life, make all the difference."

A similar paragraph concerns those who believe "the only profit lies in free enterprise of the mind and free enterprise of the spirit":

> Quaker schools can, too, if they will, lead the way in keeping education free. I don't need to detail the kind of thing the temper of the times, that I have in mind, the pressure for conformity, which are headline produced, which can enervate our schools and colleges until every faculty member is frightened to subscribe to anything to the left of *Boys' Life*, the fear that leads faculty members to be timid about what they join, or whom they listen to. The history of the Quakers makes them especially alert to this danger of outside control—to investigations, and oaths, and intellectual bullying, outside control over inner light. We must resist every effort to suppress free thought, or free speech, just as the Society of Friends, known first as the Friends of Truth, have from their very beginning, three hundred years ago, resisted every form of suppression and insisted on the importance of questioning the accepted and of trying out new ways of doing things. We must defend free enterprise of the mind and free enterprise of the spirit because in this is the only profit. Now this may seem radical but I would say that to anyone who believes in Man because he believes in his potential, it is the most conservative stand of all.

The members of "The Society of Friends" do indeed provide one of the honored meanings of the word "conservative." Gentle but unbending opponents of slavery during the early history of America, they held that "owning" other human beings was even more impossible than it was wrong. J. C. Furnas, whose *Goodby to Uncle Tom* recently became a Book-of-the-Month selection, himself comes from a well-known Quaker family, and is in an excellent position to highlight the point of view. Quakers who lived along the "underground railway" just prior to the abolition of slavery habitually "lied" to searching parties who traced Negroes to the vicinity of Quaker homes. The last people in the world to tell untruths, it was no lie for them to say, "No, we have seen no slaves in this vicinity, nor do we have a slave concealed in our home." "Slave" could not, for them, represent a human being. And then there have been the wars in which many Quakers refused to fight, again, because they refused to see any human beings as sufficiently alien to warrant extinction. But in those same wars, the Friends performed many heroic services on the battlefield—so long as, in the guise of medical attendants without military command, they were not forced to distinguish between nationalities of the wounded. The Quakers seem unpretentious people, and when they found a school—or show continued interest in an alma mater after leaving it—they do this because they believe that the only life worth living is that which seeks improvement of understanding. The influence of the Quakers at the present juncture of psychological history, moreover, is particularly welcome, for these gentle but determined non-conformists have always been on the side of the angels when it comes to resisting compulsion and opposing racial cruelty.

FRONTIERS

Science and Mysticism

WHILE it is not our purpose to set up permanently as a champion and advocate of "mysticism," simple justice requires that we take notice of the misuse or misinterpretation of this word to the point of making it into an epithet. In a recent article appearing in the *World Humanist Digest,* Dr. D. M. Morandini compares mysticism to scientific humanism in a manner which, while endeavoring to be fair, results in practical ridicule of the mystical approach to knowledge. This writer starts out with a discussion of the intangible character of "ultimates":

> Neither religion, nor science, nor philosophy, nor any other field of human endeavor, such as art, for instance, can reveal to us the "real *ultimate* nature of the universe" (if this wording has any meaning at all) or make us realize how space-intervals or time-periods are or can be limitless, that is, without a start or an end. Nor can they give us, at the present time, a clear explanation of such concepts as life, consciousness, thought processes, mind, etc., although they often can induce the *feeling* of our close affinity with them.

This seems a useful statement, although it might also be pointed out that the "concepts" named all have a decisive influence on ethical judgments and are, indeed, the foundation of human character, insofar as that foundation has been rationally constructed. However, Dr. Morandini now turns to a critical comparison of mysticism with scientific humanism:

> Grasping then the straw of rescue which is floating before us on the ocean which hides the "fundamental mysteries," grasping the straw of feeling these close affinities, the mystic sets out to create his dream world of felt or revealed truths and certainties by intuition. He does this not by penetrating the ocean surface into the secret depths—this is just what he escapes by grasping the straw—but by constructing for himself (often without knowing that he does so) elaborate and emotionally very satisfying "realities"—enduring truths and certainties—out of the deeply felt nearness to and relations with the great unknown.
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> The scientist and the scientific humanist with him does not do this. He, too, feels his nearness to and kinship with the great unknown, but instead of indulging in *mere* intuitive speculations about its nature, the scientist tries to see how deeply into the ocean of the formerly fundamental mysteries can he descend in his diving bell without losing his firm contact with his ship of scientific coordination above. He does not "solve" the mysteries by this altogether; he only replaces them by other ones which remain, for the time being, below the as yet unpenetrated depths of the great unknown.
>
> Thus are discovered the atoms and their constituting parts, the protons, neutrons, electrons and numerous other basic constituents of the universe. . . .
>
> . . .The scientist, too, believes in fundamental mysteries that persist behind the continually expanding limits of scientific knowledge. Contrary to the mystic, however, he does not permit intuitive insight to rule him during his search. He puts his mysteries where they, in his belief, belong, namely, at the *start* of his procedure and does not let them interrupt his consistent experimental and logical program at any step later. If such a basic interruption does happen, he starts the entire program anew with more circumspection, greater carefulness, better control.
>
> The mystic, on the other hand, contemplates deeply in an armchair, or, still worse, "just feels truths intuitively." He recognizes them without hesitation and without any desire for consistency. They simply *are* true, and there cannot be any doubt about them, regardless how contradictory these truths may be to each other or to experience. Most of the time the mystic even shuns experiences of the conventional type because they cannot bring him truths at all. All truth is beyond the boundaries of this shadow world of experiences, truth emanates from the mind, from consciousness, or from that real world of spiritual nature which is behind the world of physical experience and which constitutes the really real world, perhaps the world of ideas of Plato.

The mystic, in other words, is little more than an emotional fool—benevolently inclined, perhaps, but still a fool.

There is about as much justice in this as in the claim that all scientists are materialists who seldom raise their heads above the prosaic study of "matter and its motions," and who are wholly

contemptuous of all forms of transcendental idealism. There may be mystics who behave in this way, but they are certainly not worth considering seriously. If you are going to compare mystics with an ideal humanistic scientist, you ought at least to choose examples of men with a comparable dignity, if any can be found.

First, some definitions. The term "mystic" derives from the Eleusinian Mysteries and signifies those who were initiated into the lesser Mysteries—with "eyes veiled." The next degree of the Mysteries was represented in the *epoptae*—those who understood the secret meaning of the rites of the Mystery Drama.

Thus, at the outset, we have a clear distinction between the role of the ancient Mysteries and the role of Science in our own time. The Mysteries sought first to induce a feeling of reverence for the processes of life. As Jane Harrison has put it, "A *mystery* is a rite, . . .enacted with magical intent. It is secret, not because it is indecent, but because it is intensely social, decent, and entirely sacred."

Mysticism is not, therefore, on this view, a substitute for science, nor does it deal with the same sort of experience, nor with the same purpose. The mystic, in this antique sense, sought an ordering of his psychic life, a sense of harmony with the world. His perceptions were not "facts" to be broadcast as claims to new knowledge, but were rather a temper, an attitude, toward life and knowledge.

Now this is not, of course, the meaning we assign to mysticism, nowadays, but it is a meaning worth recalling. The contemporary meaning grows out of Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy. According to Hastings' *Encyclopcedia of Religion and Ethics,* "Mystical experience is marked by the emergence of a type of consciousness which is not sharply focalized, or clearly differentiated into a subject-object state. The 'subject' and 'object' are fused into an undivided *one.* Deep-lying powers, not ordinarily put into play, seem suddenly liberated. The usual insulations, which sunder our inner life into something like compartments, seem shot through. The whole being—in an integral and undivided experience—*finds* itself."

Now, manifestly, without subject and object there is no science. Further, all intellectual communications assume the relation of both subject and object, so that mystical receptions tend to defy scientific embodiment and to frustrate intellectual embodiment, except in obscure symbolic terms. Can, then, the scientific critic review and evaluate the "findings" of the mystic—which are not "findings" at all, but at best expressions in paradox and symbolic cipher? Only the mystic in the scientist can respond to such expressions, as for example, was the case with Isaac Newton. William Law, the eighteenth-century English mystic, wrote in a letter to a friend (Dr. Cheyne):

> When Sir Isaac Newton died, there were found amongst his papers large abstracts out of J. Behmen's works, written with his own hand. . . . It is evidently plain that all that Sir I. has said of the universality, nature and effects of attraction, of the three first laws of nature, was not only said, but proved in its true and deepest ground, by J.B. in his Three first properties of Eternal Nature. . . . Sir Isaac did but reduce to a mathematical form the central principles of nature revealed in Behmen.

We may admit that Law was a disciple and partisan of Behmen, but no such accusation can be leveled at the *Cambridge History of English Literature,* in which it is declared that "it is almost certain that the idea of the three laws of motion first reached Newton through his eager study of Boehme [Behmen]."

The point, here, is not to minimize the greatness of Newton by disclosing that he drew on one of the greatest of the German mystics for his inspiration, but rather to show the intimate psychological relationship which may exist between mystical insight and scientific law. The conclusion one might draw from this relationship is that there are clear parallels between mystical

realizations and the formulations we call "natural laws," just as there are correlations between metaphysical ideas and natural laws. Mystics, metaphysicians, and scientists are not *competitors*—they are human beings who look at different aspects of the universe in different ways. The scientist has the advantage—if it is an advantage—of being able to place his constructions in public evidence for verification by others. He does this by eliminating the subjective element from his conclusions. The great question before us is*: What sort of truths are those which have no subjective element in them.?*

The conventional view of the value of science asserts that this is precisely the merit of the scientific method. You can demand acceptance of any statement which has no subjective aspect, since it can be proved at will. The mystic might reply that from truths that can be proved at will you can obtain only the achievements of technology; that it is from realization of the truths that *cannot* be proved at will that human growth results.

Now this, of course, is open to the label of "obscurantism," to which it can be said only that if the nature of authentic human development is obscure, it is not "obscurantism" to point out the fact.

An obvious difficulty in this view is that ideas or theories about the nature of things which begin with a subjective ingredient often seem to graduate into the class of scientific fact. The heliocentric system, for example, was a philosophic doctrine of the Pythagoreans and a teaching of the Platonic Academy. It was connected with Pythagorean mysticism and mathematics and was not transformed into "science" until the age of Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, and Newton. Is this, we shall be asked, not "progress"? Well, we have no fixed opinions on this score. But, shorn of its philosophic significance, the heliocentric system may have lost something of its grandeur. Like so many of the "facts" known in our time, it is taken with complete complacency, with little or no appreciation of the splendor of the conception. And there still remains for modern man the need for a feeling of wonder at the universe, and a sense of relatedness such as metaphysics and mysticism, however "primitive," may provide. Our "factual" surroundings have greatly changed, but the moral struggle of the individual still persists with different reference-points of supposed "reality." There will *always* remain the central problem of existence—the relation of the individual to the whole and to the rest of life. We can build great edifices of technological genius around the individual and provide him with endless catalogues of facts, but he will still have to learn to be human.

It may be said that this is only a "delaying" argument in behalf of mysticism. This is not quite so. For the claim that science is busily converting the deliveries of mystical intuition into reliable science is commonly guilty of two tacit assumptions—first, that present-day science will suffer no serious upsets in theory; and second, that the science of the day is an adequate substitute for the sort of balance one may gain from philosophical reflection, an awakened intuition, and disciplined metaphysical thinking. Neither of these assumptions can be supported. If mysticism is not "scientific," this may be a very important independence to be noted, since if mystical insight were dependent upon science, there could have been no wisdom at all in pre-scientific days. We should have to throw away the psychological and ethical profundities of the *Upanishads*, of Buddha, Plato, Plotinus, and scores of other thinkers who have given the world most of the wisdom it possesses. As a matter of fact, it is so obvious that our scientists, while often wise and devoted men, have not been able to give the world wisdom, nor even to order their own relationships with the power-mad politics of the twentieth century, that it should not be necessary to labor this point at all.

There is an important difference between the mystics and the scientifically inclined. In general, the advocates of science have a program of conversion. They want more education in science and a wider appreciation of scientific facts. The margin between scientific fact and scientific theory may be fuzzy, and a source of misconception, but the general intent of those interested in more scientific education is both clear and admirable. Scientific facts *are* public truths. They should be as widely known as possible. Communication of established scientific truth is communication of the unequivocal.

This is far from true of the realm of mysticism. Those who attempt to convert mystical insight into "revealed truths" are the destroyers of philosophy and the perverters of religion. They make dogmas and creeds out of ideas that should represent principles and quests. They drive honest and independent men into the ranks of the atheists and materialists. They create autocratic gods and then become the "authoritative" priests of those gods. There is no end to the evil which results from the degradation of mysticism into dogmatic religion, which is a far worse materialism than anything any scientists ever conceived of. In fact, Materialism may be the only practical defense which can be made, in cultural terms, against the widespread corruption of religion.

The mystic does not proselytize. He is a seeker, possibly a finder, but he does not seek to "convert" anyone to his views. He cannot even express his views with precision. He may give voice to what he feels within him, in the hope of lighting up some darkness in human life, but the last thing he wants is "followers" or "believers." His whole life is a testament to the rejection of "following" and "believing." The eminent American teacher of philosophy, Josiah Royce, said in his Gifford Lectures, *The World and the Individual:*

> That the mystic is dealing with experience, and trying to get experience quite pure and then to make it the means of defining the real, is what we need to observe. That meanwhile the mystic is a very abstract sort of person, I will admit. But he is usually a keen thinker. Only he uses his thinking skeptically, to make naught of other thinkers. He gets his reality not by thinking, but by consulting the data of experience. He is not stupid. And he is trying, very skilfully, to be a pure empiricist. Indeed, I should maintain that the mystics are the only thorough-going empiricists in the history of philosophy.

Now that there are those who call themselves "mystics" who answer to the description given by Dr. Morandini, we should be the first to agree. In a field where every man is wholly on his own, there are bound to be pretenders and sentimentalists. Anyone can set up as a mystic, just as anyone can set up as an artist. There are no official "tests" for these callings. Perhaps Dr. Morandini's complaint is directed only at bad mysticism and the follies and presumptions committed in its name.