VOLUME IX, NO. 52
DECEMBER 26, 1956

BASIC UNREALITIES

THERE are stretches of time in history when it becomes more important to recognize the basic unrealities than to define the realities. In the first place, defining "realities" is a little too much for most of us. It is so easy to make mistakes. Most final truths—and a definition of reality is an attempt at stating final truth—are either paranoid declarations or practically unspeakable, so that the wisest among us generally avoid any pretense at laying them out. Socrates, who is the archetype of Western wisdom, was, as we may remember, singled out by the Oracle as the wisest man in Athens because he had realized the extreme difficulty in establishing almost any kind of "truth."

Exposing "unrealities" is a less hazardous occupation, while at the same time it contributes to the discovery of truth by eliminating certain common deceptions from the competition for our belief. A further inducement to this activity comes with the times, for this seems to be a season of disillusionment. We may even be able to get rid of a whole pack of unrealities all at once.

Most prominent among the misconceptions of our time is the prevailing idea of what education is for, and why we must have it. Of course, to speak of *the* prevailing idea of what education is for is to invite endless argument; here, we mean what leading citizens claim is the *real* reason for improving our educational situation. In two current magazines—one an important engineering journal, the other issued for the businessmen of the nation—are articles which offer essentially the same counsels. Education, these writers propose, is to keep us abreast of the Russians. This is the club they use while insisting that America must educate more thoroughly for greater strength. The issue is survival, nothing less. If public interest in education continues to lag, the "grim threat" of Russian technological progress may overtake us.

The emphasis of these writers, naturally enough, is on the need for scientific education. What they say about scientific education is doubtless very good in places. The difficulty in recognizing a great delusion lies in the impressive rationality of its details. You take a bright young man and urge him to become a scientist or an engineer. You point to the distinguished figures in the past who have followed these professions. You tell him about the monetary rewards and the emotional satisfactions which come from the. practice of science and technology. You warn him that he must also undergo the civilizing influence of humanistic studies. You remind him that Science owes much to the Humanities—even its origin in the Renaissance revival of learning. You urge him to become a Balanced Man. Why should he do all this? Because we have to beat the Russians.

This, then, is the over-arching purpose of his life. This is why the nation's distinguished leaders worry about the decline of science education in the secondary schools. School used to conduct us to the Search for Truth, but this high purpose has been displaced by a more practical consideration. Of course, we may find some Truths along with being practical. That is the wonderful thing about being practical. You get to survive and to have the truth, both in the same handy package.

Now these worthy gentlemen—all the worthy gentlemen who think this way—take their responsibility as leading citizens quite seriously. It probably never occurs to them that they belong to a tribe of innocent and naïve Machiavellis. The sagacious Italian knew that he was advocating a special and privileged "morality" for the guidance of rulers. He knew he was an outright heretic

offering a revolutionary theology of Power. And he had the honesty to call a spade a spade when it came to defining the policies he recommended for gaining and maintaining power.

Not so the champions of more and better education in science. Their Machiavellian proposals are ingenuous monuments to the status quo in both "ideals" and in "being practical." They are not prepared to commit incalculable immoralities in the name of naked power. Their proposals merely hold out the promise of wiping away the dark menace which hovers at every border of the "free world"!

In the hour when the very concept of modern, atomic war is being challenged by some of our leading scientists—the highly trained and experienced contributors to the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*—the advocates of drumming up more and better scientific education do not even whisper that perhaps we ought to question the entire project of preparation for war. This, apparently, is not regarded as an "educational" need. This is a question which must remain hidden from view, lest it demoralize the *practical* workings of our plans for a practical education.

What more is needed to show how "unreal" is the freedom which we presently enjoy? There is an obvious conspiracy of silence to suppress any serious inquiry concerning a course which may be the sole path to freedom and a peaceful world.

A second supposed "reality" which should be examined is the idea that the United States and Soviet Russia represent the most important forces of our time. A comment from a reader throws an interesting light on this assumption:

> To the ignorant but interested layman, there seems a possibility that this scramble for neutralism among the "uncommitted" (and even some of the "committed") nations of the world which the Soviets have successfully recognized and exploited while we think in military-alliance terms, may reflect a profound, inchoate awareness of the changing nature of violence within the concept of "force," rather than the "enlightened self-interest" which previously constituted the cardinal motive. Simply a loathing of war is not enough—a generation is enough to expunge that.
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> It will probably seem quite humorous to the historian of the future, looking back at our time, to see virtually all the other nations of the world uneasily regarding these two titanic protagonists, hoping nothing will happen, and deep in their hearts wanting to have nothing to do with either of us. "If we have to, we'll hold your coats—but do you really think you'll leave the premises standing?"
>
> Perhaps there is another critical question: In the inevitable emergence of these "fringe" areas into autonomy, is there *any* emergent pattern short-circuiting the nascent nationalism of rebellion, violence and xenophobia which has been the established route so far? We and the Soviets force each other more and more into entrapped positions of deadlocked violence: perhaps we should look to the "backward" areas.

It would indeed be ironic if these two great powers, held immobilized in the past by their mutual fears and sense of potential power, should remain in hypnotic stance, glaring at one another, while other peoples, who can do nothing about the situation, anyway, proceed to become humane and civilized cultures!

Emergent patterns? The letter from Tanganyika of two weeks ago may suggest one such pattern of independent development. And we might keep an eye on India and Indonesia for further evidence. The greatest blessing of our time, so far as national development is concerned, may be to be without sufficient tools of destruction to compete in the race for absolute power.

If we had the imagination, we could probably anticipate what it would be like to *have* absolute power, and then we should have to ask ourselves, *What next?* If we had absolute power, what would we be good for? How many people that you know would you trust with *absolute power?* What happens to most paranoids when it begins to look as though they might get what they insist they have to have, and will be left without an Enemy? They break up the game and run like sixty in the opposite direction!

This, then, is a major Unreality of the present—the delusion of our importance to Civilization. Everyone is of course "important" in principle, just as all men are equal in principle. Everyone remains important until he accepts the notion that he is *more* important than others, and then he is not important at all. The best thing to do with the self-important is to leave them alone, and this may be the course that will eventually be followed by the small nations in their relations with the great powers—to ignore them as much as they can.

There is something of this mood in the letter of the Tanganyikan farmer:

> In spite of a few of our Europeanized Africans, many Africans are not convinced of the self-advertised "superiority" of Western standards. Their sheer materialism, in spite of their claims to the Christian philosophy, and their anarchic individualism often seem to produce the most frustrated masses of individuals and the most savagely destructive nation-states. The culmination of centuries of "progress" in these civilized countries seems to be their proud ability to annihilate God's entire world according to their uncontrollable self-interests and paranoiac fears. If "Western civilization" does not succeed in giving us more godly character, orderly and lawful human relations, and joyful living than most of the European nations have, there is no good reason for us to rush to desert our African traditions.

Sometimes we wonder if the expectation of the Westerner of some "far-off divine event" such as "salvation" or the coming of the "millennium" has not greatly diminished his capacity to live like a human being in the present. He looks toward the one great act of vindication which is to end all his troubles—the making of his fortune, the "liberation" of the masses, the winning of the final "victory"—and meanwhile he only marks time. A terrible *futurism* afflicts the West. Is it a hangover from belief in millennial religion?

Another Unreality we are beginning to suspect is our loudly acclaimed prosperity. We have it, of course. And we also have the endless anxiety that it may get away from us. There is no point in a moralistic condemnation of what we are pleased to call the Good Things of life. Prosperity itself never hurt anyone; but, on the other hand, it doesn't have the magic power we looked forward to when we were trying to get it. Like nearly everything else which a man can acquire, he gets the good out of it only when he doesn't feel dependent on it.

We need, in short, non-acquisitive ideals to replace the delusion that material progress is all that life is for. This is a very old recommendation and there is not much use in repeating it unless some fresh perspective is added as the means of giving such ideals a grip on human motives. So far as we can see, this means a definite break with most of the familiar conceptions of man's nature and the way to its fulfillment. It means the advocacy of actual revolution, not against our economic system, although this might change radically as a consequence, but against the attitudes and values which have led us to suppose that our economic system is the Key to the Kingdom.

The beginning has to be made with the things which children learn to respect by watching their parents. There is no use in preaching at our children, nor even in "wanting" them to be good or worth-while people. We are not living in the Age of Faith any more, and faith is not the currency of our time. It is just another "unreality" to suppose that our children will be any happier than we are, or have more courage or vision, unless they see that we prize courage and vision ourselves. We cannot give them courage or vision. We may be able to give them some admiration for it, if we feel that admiration, too. Nor can we buy them an "education." You save your money and you pick a college, and then the president of the college announces that education is important because we have to beat the Russians! And the preacher at the Community Church explains that belief in God is important because religion is a spiritual resource which makes us better than the Communists!

The first thing, then, to teach one's children, concerning this matter of prosperity, is that they can't ever have anything that is really important to have; that money, while useful, can never be substituted for other ends in life. Wanting money so that the finer things can be acquired is as bad as expecting your children to accomplish the things you failed to do yourself, or hoping that Jesus will save your soul.

These lessons have to be taught by example. You can't fool children, any more than you can fool the Russians, or the Russians can fool us.

The perversion of our lives by the psychology of buying extends into everyday speech, to the extent of talk of "selling" religion to the public and "buying" an idea that you happen to like or agree with. The truth is that buying and selling have practically nothing to do with the good life for human beings. The good things of life are without price, and we had better start proving it to our children, so that they will find something better to do than "beat the Russians" when they grow up.

You can never really beat the Russians. You can't beat the Russians because they won't stay Russians. They become the Germans or the Japanese or the Chinese or the Egyptians, or maybe even the British or the French. They might even become the American South or the Industrial North. It depends on where you live and whom you do your buying and selling to.

REVIEW
MACDONALD IN LONDON

WHEN we heard that Dwight Macdonald—whose World War II writing has been more frequently quoted in MANAS than anyone else's—had gone to London to join the staff of *Encounter,* it seemed likely that this would be an auspicious and rewarding arrangement for both parties. The November *Encounter,* containing Macdonald's "Notes of an American in London" on "Amateur Journalism," bears out our anticipations.

MANAS has once or twice been accused of Anglophilism in certain cultural and political areas, and it is true that there is something about British political criticism which makes us wish that some American imitation could be successful. The Britishers may still sing "God Save the King," but they have come far closer than we have to mastering the technique of handling sharp differences of opinion with dignity. Nor is this simply a matter of sophistication. During World War II, while the bombs were falling up and down the Thames, conscientious objectors were receiving treatment so courteous and respectful that our own Selective Service Draft Boards suffered greatly by comparison. English army officers have even been known to be accorded the right to leave their uniform and duties, on the grounds of conscience, without permanent stigma. In other words, an Englishman can frequently have a dissenting opinion, be respected for it, and contribute to the awareness of his society in voicing it.

It is for this reason, we think, that Macdonald begins his article by remarking how much he was initially impressed by the fact that there are *seven* weekly publications in Britain which are not only worth reading regularly but "interesting." (He lists *The Economist, The Listener, The New Statesman and Nation, The Observer, The Spectator, The Sunday Times,* and *The Times Literary Supplement*—plus two dailies on the same level, *The Times* and *The Manchester Guardian.)* And now to an explanation of Macdonald's use of the word "amateur" in discussing British writing:

> The English weeklies are not exactly highbrow—their circulations are too large, their writing too relaxed, their spirit too clearly that of a confident and sizeable social group rather than of an embattled minority—but they are not in the least middlebrow, either. I think they may best be described as "amateur." The word has acquired a pejorative overtone, in this businesslike, scienceminded civilisation. No one is insulted if he is called a professional or an expert, but nobody likes to be brushed off as an amateur, usually with "mere" in front. But the amateur is not necessarily inferior in skill to the professional; the difference between them is simply that the former does because he wants to what the latter does for pay. In journalism, this means that the amateur is less vulnerable to the pressure of the market, and so to what I regard as the most corrupting influence on art and letters today, that of the cheap cultural goods sold in bulk to the mass public. The amateur may not know as much about any particular subject as the expert does, but what he does know (which may be rather impressive) he knows as part of his own life and of our culture in general, instead of in the narrow way the specialist knows it. Even those who fling "amateur" about as a term of abuse complain of the increasing tendency for knowledge to be subdivided into a myriad of special fields that are each worked intensively without much relation to the whole. The amateur, even the dilettante, would seem a necessary figure if our culture is not to dry up into academicism. The London weekly press is delightfully amateurish in spirit. (I am aware that, in literal fact, its editors and writers are paid, but the pay seems less the central motive than is the case in America.) This, I think, is what gives it its special distinction.

London seems to house a community of intelligent men, many of whom write "because they want to," and many of whom are acquainted with each other in a way unknown to the higher echelons of specialized American Journalism. Perhaps it is this which allows Macdonald to remark that "oddly enough, considering the informality of American manners, our writing is much stiffer than English writing, more artificial, removed to a greater distance from the reader, since an easy, personal style is risky with an amorphous audience. English reviewers speak in their own individual voices." Macdonald's "Amateur Journalism" is an eleven-page article well worth reading. Demonstrating that he is a very good "amateur" himself, Macdonald provides provocative ideas which range beyond praise for the London intelligentsia. A sample:

> Liberal intellectuals in England and in America are worried because the circulation of serious journals

> is in the tens of thousands while that of mass magazines is in the millions. While it would admittedly be cheering if the figures were reversed, I think this anxiety overdone for several reasons: (1) an audience of fifty or even five thousand is large enough for all practical purposes (that is, for the communication of art and ideas to a public large enough not to be monolithic and ingrown); (2) a smaller audience on a higher level will be more affected by what it reads than a larger audience on a lower level, partly because the material itself will be more significant, more able to "make a difference" to them, and partly because they will be intelligent enough to let it make more of a difference; (3) the smaller group will be in general more articulate, energetic, intelligent, and powerful (that is, with higher status and more important jobs) than the masses who drowse over *The News of the World* or the American tabloids, and so it will make more of a difference what they read. This line of thought is obnoxious to conventional liberals because it is "undemocratic" (they really mean inegalitarian, not the same thing at all, since, as the Nazis and Communists have demonstrated, levelling can produce a most undemocratic mass society), but it may nonetheless have some validity.

Such generalized evaluation really becomes a brief essay on the interesting differences one may observe between a "traditional" society, where something of an intellectual and political elite is accepted with much less suspicion than it might be in our "egalitarian" structure of the "States." While a more popular devotion to Culture, in Macdonald's opinion, does not necessarily "water down" serious writing, and although the serious weeklies and monthlies going to the general public are much more numerous in England, the *total* number of publications where an author may express himself on the "things that matter" is actually far greater in the United States. After remarking, "I can't think why this should be so," Macdonald points out in a footnote:

> . . . the American thus has at least one advantage over the English writer—he has many more places in which to publish long, ambitious articles. The almost complete absence of such articles is the chief weakness of the London weeklies; 2,000 words is their usual top and, for some kinds of writers and themes, this is not enough room to turn around in. There is an exaggerated fear of being "heavy" or "boring," but some ideas, and writers, are "heavy" by nature, often the greatest—would Marx, Freud, or Kierkegaard have been able to make *The Spectator*, one wonders—and an unrelieved diet of short, graceful articles has its own kind of monotony. It seems odd that an important literary critic like F. R. Leavis, because he writes long, weighty articles, appears in *Commentary* but not in the British weeklies.

In other words, the value of a variety of "little magazines" is not to be denied if one assumes, with Macdonald, that "a smaller audience on a higher level will be more affected by what it reads than a larger audience on a lower level, partly because the material itself will be more significant, more able to 'make a difference' to them, and partly because they will be intelligent enough to let it make more of a difference."

Returning to the favorable side of British journalism, we encounter another interesting footnote on the subject of anonymity. Discussing the fact that a magazine such as the *Listener*—consisting entirely, except for a book review section, of material from radio programs—would in America have to appear "not weekly but annually," Macdonald comments on the anonymity of the *Listener's* writers:

> This sort of anonymity is interestingly different from that of *Time* magazine. *Time* writers don't sign their work because it isn't theirs; they are the middle workers on an assembly line that begins with their researchers and ends with a corps of editors who blue-pencil and rewrite until the final product has the glossy, brash, dynamic *Time* style. English anonymity doesn't imply collective fabrication, it is just that the family is so closely knit that "everybody" knows who wrote last week's *T.L.S.* lead articles, just as "everybody" knows who "Pharos" and "Strix" in *The Spectator* are and that Kingsley Martin writes the London Diary in *The New Statesman.*

In any case, Macdonald quite apparently likes his new friends, and if they possess the discrimination with which he credits them, the feeling should be mutual. He will be sharp in his criticism, but accurate and impressive in his praise. It is not only the Londoners, it seems, who are "born with silver pens in their mouths," to reverse the direction of a compliment paid by Macdonald to British writers.

COMMENTARY
MYSTIC AND ARTIST

THE "futurism" said to be characteristic of American attitudes (page 2), the psychological habit of living in one's longing or hopes, creates a natural interest in mystics and artists. Both the mystic and the artist, if they know something of what they are about, avoid the blight of futurism.

The mystic is not attractive because of a busy pursuit of the "spiritual life." The man who wants to be "spiritual" is usually a tiresome character who makes you uncomfortable with his mannered pretensions. The mystic has an authentic hunger which engages his whole being. He wants to *know*. This, we think, is the real spirituality—for what is more spiritual than engagement in the highest calling of human beings?

The word "spiritual" may perhaps be recovered for intelligible discourse in some distant epoch when we have gotten rid of the sticky emotionalism and saccharine flavor of most "spiritual" enterprises, whether individual or collective. Meanwhile, we feel most at home with "secular" mystics—the intuitively original individuals, that is, who take such delight in a life of the mind and the imagination that they wholly neglect to define their activities as a heavenward pilgrimage or a "search for God." There is something more, of course, in authentic mysticism than a facile play of ideas. Ultimately, it is a deep sympathy with life in all its forms, and a sense of confraternity with all intelligence.

Most of all, however, it is a contentment which lies deep in the nature—a well of repose which gives stability to the most active life, a firm foundation to the ambitious projects in which mystics who are not merely quietists must engage.

The artist has almost the same endowments. In fact, we wonder if, in the dreamed-of Utopia which even a dislike of futurism cannot prevent us from thinking about, the mystic and the artist will not be the same person. Like the mystic, the artist is a man who can make the right kind of peace with the status quo, and who refuses it the wrong kind of capitulation. This, in any age, is the true practice of the art of living.

The artist lives a life unmediated by convention. There are conventions in the arts, to be sure; each age, moreover, lends the artist part of his vocabulary and may even supply a little of his light; but the artist cannot accept his truths at second hand. He cannot be "organized." He can march with no regiments, however worthy their objectives or holy their war. The artist must breathe his own air, think his own thoughts and feel his own feelings. Anything else, for the artist, is decay, corruption, and gross immorality.

It would be a wonderful thing if the rest of the world could learn a little of the morality of the artist. In conventional society, imitation of paragons commonly passes for virtue. For the artist, this is the unpardonable sin—the sin against the Holy Ghost.

The arts are not embellishments of a polite and refined life. The arts, so far as man's moral nature is concerned, are schooling in the meaning of integrity. It is a great pity that from the Greeks we seem to have learned only that the practice of art is the creation of beautiful forms. This is the least part of art—its mere consequence.

The arts might be, for every man, a conscious participation in the great dialogue between man and nature. It is a dialogue we all ought to hunger to resume.

CHILDREN
and Ourselves

CORRESPONDENCE AND NOTES

EDITOR, Children . . . and Ourselves: I have noted with sympathy your many references to the educational advantages of what in retrospect we now call "frontier living." The more so, since any writer who persistently pushes such an idea risks being charged with cultural nostalgia. But despite the cliches of pioneer and "Western" virtue the fact remains that the education of young children was once integral to their parents' way of life, and that today it is extremely difficult to approximate these conditions. A few "radicals," of course, leave lucrative opportunities in the city, willing to put up with the low income of ranch living for the sake of their children, and some radicals—radicals like Scott Nearing—have even demonstrated that it is *possible* to establish a program of self-sufficient family living without suffering penury. Many parents, however, to whom such a program might appeal, are unable or unwilling to make a break with their role in a highly specialized economic system, and these might be interested in the possibility of making even ordinary daily living processes educative.

It occurred to me the other night, while engaged in what most housewives would feel a time-wasting task, that we may be missing many experiences immediately underfoot: My four-year-old boy placed a request for some almonds and walnuts as an after-dinner snack. Since we had only the unshelled variety on hand, it was not possible to toss him a snack and go on about presumably more important business. He and I, a nutcracker and an assortment of nuts, sat down together, and during the ensuing fifteen minutes I felt as though I was experiencing a minor revelation. In the first place, and from a very practical point of view, the child who has to wait for the edible part of a nut to emerge also waits long enough to insure a reasonable amount of mastication. Unable to gobble, he chews thoughtfully, since he is interested in the procedure. A bit of challenge also exists at the outset, since he will immediately display an interest in one day becoming a cracker of nuts himself. Next, because he sees that time and labor are necessary to make the nuts consumable, he has greater respect and appreciation for what he eats.

I seem to recall that you have casually mentioned, once or twice, the psychological value of allowing even young children to participate in the preparation of a meal, and the same factors apply in both examples. Here—and possibly in this case for nutritional reasons too—fresh vegetables are certainly more educative for the child than their frozen or dehydrated counterparts. Stripping and cleaning ears of corn, washing and preparing any of the green vegetables, assembling the ingredients of a meat-loaf—all of these processes should be known to the child and will be appreciated by him. All too often, our home meals these days are nearly indistinguishable from restaurant ordering, since a brief flurry results in food on the table.

An essay on nut-cracking may seem hardly up to the specifications of a MANAS theme, yet this is the simplest leisure-time experiment we know which anyone can make in slowing down the pace of eating and opening the door for practical instruction. It is all very well to read about Father Brown's Farm, about how vegetables—or nuts—are grown, but the child who does so is still expected to thrill to mere theory. A lecture on seeds and growth cycles which would ordinarily fall on inattentive ears may itself take root and last a lifetime if the occasion is the simple cracking of a nut: The child will manifest, rather inevitably, I think, a desire to know how the nut got its shell, where it came from, and all that is involved in bringing it into a home. And since everything grows from seeds, he begins to know something about the entire world of plants and trees.

Well, my intention was just to pass on the thought that, according to our tastes and experiences, we can always return to some aspect of less specialized, less commercialized food preparation—and establish interesting communication with our children in doing so. One thing leads to another, too. From nut-cracking one can move, in appreciative companionship with one's child, to the planting of a tiny garden of edible plants. I am sure that Gandhi would approve, and also the most devoted among the "modern educationists."

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Harper's for December carries a short article by a Tennessee manufacturer who reports "An Experiment in Reading" conducted at the Yale & Towne Manufacturing Company in Gallatin, Tennessee. Using a list drawn up by the office of children's services of the New York Public Library, and acting upon the suggestion made by the National Book Committee, Yale & Towne's President, Gilbert W. Chapman, recently spent ten

dollars to nail together a reading rack for children's books and another two hundred dollars to stock the rack with titles. A sign above the rack reads as follows:

> The books on this shelf are books that small children enjoy. Take one home with you to read to your children. They will have a good time and so will you. Bring it back when you and your children have finished it together so other families may enjoy it too.

Yale & Towne's Gallatin manager suggested that the books circulate without any formal system, and this method was employed, the aim being to encourage the working parents in every way possible to try something with their children more emotionally and intellectually rewarding than sitting before a TV screen. The results of the experiment are quite impressive, as described by Mr. Chapman:

> We notified employees by letter that the plant was participating in a National Book Committee experiment which could lead to similar reading-aloud projects in other companies.
>
> "The important thing is that your children get to know and to love books," the letter explained. "It will, of course, be necessary for you or someone else to read the stories to them. Both you and the children should enjoy that!"
>
> The Reading Aloud Shelf in Gallatin, conveniently located on the wall between the men's and women's locker rooms, opened in August 1955. By the end of the second day, it had been swept clean of books. By the third day, some of the first books taken began trickling back. Circulation was so brisk that twenty-nine additional titles, selected by Miss Ann Puryear Wright, local bookstore owner, were added in October. Today, there are seldom more than a dozen books on the shelf at a time. Some days the shelf is completely empty. Not a single book has been lost and not one has suffered serious mutilation. All are well thumbed.
>
> A questionnaire on the Book Shelf sent to employee-parents in February 1956 reflected overwhelming approval of the program. More than half the parents who had taken home books recalled at least one occasion when their children had chosen to have a book read aloud in preference to a favorite radio or TV program.

Last, but not least, the results seemed to show that participating parents are either discovering or rediscovering that reading is an enriching experience, calling forth something creative and imaginative in their own natures. *They* do more reading now, probably because they see how much reading can do for their children.

FRONTIERS

Religion and the Imagination

WILLIAM BLAKE, explaining why John Milton did his best work in *Paradise Lost* when he wrote of the Devils and Hell, and not of God and the Angels, remarked that this was because Milton "was a true poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it." Something similar might be said of Dr. Henry Murray, professor of clinical psychology at Harvard University, who recently accused contemporary religion of imprisoning the imagination in dogmas inherited from the past. Comparing the Christian story of Creation with the scientific account of evolution, he remarked of the latter process:

> . . . instead of falling from his [man's] primordial state of being, he has risen—increasing his powers by periodic leaps as well as by more gradual acquisitions. Also noteworthy is the evidence that this wondrous evolution from the simple to the complex may be credited, in large measure, to the very propensity which in the Garden of Eden drama led to man's disgrace and fall, that is, the propensity of all organisms to explore and to experiment.

It was, after all, the Devil who inspired in Adam and Eve a hunger for experiment and discovery—for knowledge of good and evil gained independently of the instructions of the Deity—and for this theological crime they were cast out of Paradise. Zeus manacled Prometheus to Mount Caucasus in punishment for the same offense—for bringing fire (the fire of mind, perhaps?) to unillumined mortals. Anyone who is for eating the apple of knowledge of good and evil, who supports the human yearning for originality and creativity, is a Promethean spirit and of the party of Lucifer, whether he admits it or not. He is also a *heretic*, in the original meaning of this word, for the true offense of the heretic is that he insists upon choosing for himself.

Dr. Murray's paper, quoted above, was presented early this year at the Star Island conference on Religion in an Age of Science, and later published in the *Christian Register* (May, 1956) under the title, "Creative Evolution, or a Deity Imprisoned in the Past?" He begins by proposing that "the sphere of religion is superordinate to that of science," and then devotes the rest of his discussion to describing the sort of religion which qualifies as "the sphere of ultimate concern." It is, in brief, religion which is "defined, not in terms of its beliefs—which vary from one religion to another—but in terms of its objectives." The objectives chosen by Dr. Murray as belonging to religion are the following:

> . . . the ultimate concern of man is man himself, the development toward perfection of his inner being, the development toward perfection of his interpersonal relationships, the development toward perfection of his societies, and eventually the creation and maintenance of a harmonious world community; in short, better personalities for a better life for a better world, the highest spiritual good of all men and women of this earth.

For his positive thesis concerning evolution, Dr. Murray borrows broadly from Bergson, in order to establish the basic creativity in natural processes:

> The error, which some scientists made, of supposing that the procession of organic variations could be represented in purely mechanistic terms might never have been launched, had Darwin's terminology not concealed the crucial fact of creativity in nature, irreversible and hence unmechanical activity. His theory depends upon the occurrence of variations in form; and what is a variation of form but a new configuration of elements, a unique pattern, that retains its structure for a while? And by these very words creativity is defined.

But the assignment of creativity to nature, as Dr. Murray notes, "is contrary to the orthodox belief that creation is a special power and prerogative of a transcendent personality who like a master artisan manipulates natural objects from the outside." As a matter of historical fact, creative activities were once believed to be limited "to God alone." Today, however, the idea of creativity has widened in application to include the work of artists, poets, musicians, and scientists and inventors. But if the idea of a universal creativity, expressed through both nature and

man, is incompatible with the doctrine of a personal Creator, "it is not," Dr. Murray notes, "discordant with Pantheism, the belief that God and nature are identical, or with the not-uncommon inclination to deify creativeness in general or beneficent creativeness in particular."

Dr. Murray's thesis emerges with the question: "Strangely enough, the word 'creative' is seldom applied to the mental processes of religionists: Why is that?"

Without meaning to rewrite Dr. Murray's article for him, we should like to suggest that the mental processes of religionists are not called creative because they are not creative, they are sacrosanct formulations inherited from the past, and if it were permitted to meddle with these doctrines, all security would be lost to *orthodox* religion. For then, no man could claim to be religious unless he, too, called upon creative powers within himself, and this would make true religion both difficult and painful. Dr. Murray does say something like this, later in his article, but the point seems important enough to receive extraordinary emphasis.

Dr. Murray's critical departure from the claims and teachings of religious orthodoxy occurs in his discussion of revelation. He makes revelation a natural instead of a supernatural process, likening it to the creative acts of human beings. This, of course, is practically overt pantheism; it makes human beings into potential gods, or half-gods. Following is Dr. Murray's account o£ "inspired" productions:

> Today it is pretty generally agreed that imaginations of any real consequence are generated outside or below the stream of awareness, during a more or less prolonged period of incubation, and they are apt to leap to consciousness abruptly at the most unexpected moments. Sometimes, like a dream, they seem to come from without rather than from within the mind. A vision is called a vision because it is a presentation or gift, to the inner eye, just as the heavenly constellations at night are a presentation, or gift, to the outer eye. We cannot dictate the emergence of an idea of great import to us or to society. These are extremely rare and when they do come, they do not come from the conscious "I" in us, but from a deeper layer of nature.
>
> The point I am getting at is that visions which appear as promised or possible fulfillments of a great craving, were for centuries attributed to a superhuman force, to the gods, or to *the* God, because they were engendered by unpredictable, autonomous forces. Since the vision does not conform to the regular laws of human nature, it is, by this criterion, unnatural, and since, in addition, the kind of vision we have in mind strikes the visionary as something of supreme worth, the most desirable, the most valuable thing he has ever contemplated, it is, in his estimation, not only unnatural, but supernatural, a veritable miracle.
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> Perhaps the most famous recent description of the state of creative possession is Nietzsche's account of how his *Zarathustra* was composed:
>
> "Can anyone at the end of this nineteenth century possibly have any distinct notion of what poets of a more vigorous period meant by inspiration? If not, I should like to describe it. Provided one has the slightest remnant of superstition left, one can hardly reject completely the idea that one is the mere incarnation, or mouthpiece, or medium of some almighty power. The notion of revelation describes the condition quite simply; by which I mean that something profoundly convulsive and disturbing suddenly becomes visible and audible with indescribable definiteness and exactness. One hears—and one does not seek; one takes—one does not ask who gives: a thought flashes out like lightning, inevitably, without hesitation—I have never had any choice about it. . . . The spontaneity of the images and similes is most remarkable; one loses all perception of what is imagery and simile; everything offers itself as the most immediate, exact, and simple means of expression."

There is a startling resemblance between what Nietzsche says of the inspiration of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and the reports of other great artists. Mozart, whose genius was as great or greater, has described for us the process by which he composed. The following passage, which is taken from J. C. Colquhoun's *History of Magic*—a completely plausible source for this sort of material!—is as lucid as Nietzsche's description:

> When I am in good spirits, and in the right trim, for example, when travelling in a carriage, or

> walking, perhaps, during the night, when unable to sleep—thoughts flow in upon me more readily, and, as it were, in a stream. Whence they come, and how, I know not, and I have no control over them. Those which come upon me I retain in my head, and hum them to myself—as others, at least, have told me. If I remain steady and uninterrupted, sometimes one thing, sometimes another, comes into my head to make a piece of confectionery, according to the rules of counterpoint, and the tone of the different musical instruments, . . . Now this warms my soul, provided I am not disturbed. Then my mental work gradually becomes more and more extended, and I spread it out farther and more clearly, until the piece really becomes in my head almost ready, even if it should be of considerable length; so that I can survey it, in spirit, with a glance, as if I saw before me a beautiful picture, or a handsome person and I hear it in imagination, not in detached portions, but, as it were, altogether, as a whole. Now, this is a feast. All my feelings and composition go on within me only as a lively and delightful dream. But to hear all this together is the best.

What a small part of genius, apparently, is Dickens' "infinite capacity for taking pains"!

One may wonder, however, whether religious or philosophical inspiration should be classed with poetic and artistic inspiration, with no further distinction. Ought not a greater self-consciousness to be present, with respect to philosophic truth? Plato addressed himself to this question, if only obliquely, in his seventh epistle, in which he is discussing the difficulty of communicating the highest truth. Plato declared:

> One statement at any rate I can make in regard to all who have written or who may write with a claim to knowledge of the subjects to which I devote myself,—no matter how they pretend to have acquired it, whether from my instruction or from others or by their own discovery. Such writers can in my opinion have no real acquaintance with the subject. I certainly have composed no work in regard to it, nor shall I ever do so in future: for there is no way of putting it into words like other studies. Acquaintance with it must come rather after a long period of attendance on instruction in the subject itself and of close companionship, when, suddenly, like a blaze kindled by a leaping spark, it is generated in the soul and at once becomes self-sustaining.

Then, much later in this communication, Plato adds:

> The study of virtue and vice must be accompanied by an inquiry into what is false and true of existence in general and must be carried on by constant practice throughout a long period as I said in the beginning. Hardly after practicing detailed comparisons of names and definitions and visual and other sense-perceptions, after scrutinizing them in benevolent disputation by the use of question and answer without jealousy. At last in a flash understanding of each blazes up, and the mind, as it exerts all its powers to the limit of human capacity, is flooded with light.

But whence these illuminations, whether poetic, musical, or philosophical? Nietzsche himself, who was by no means a conventionally religious person (he had but recently declared that God was dead), felt a mighty presence upon him, yet, as Dr. Murray points out:

> He [Nietzsche] does not intimate that this almighty power has a separate existence outside of him and we can safely infer that he would have identified the creative force of which he, in his own proper person, was the instrument with a natural force, a force which happened to vent itself more powerfully in him than it did in other men. If this was his opinion there would be few dissenting voices from the ranks of today's psychologists. It is the grandiose assertion that the source of such unleashed energy is an all-knowing and utterly truthful Being in the sky which provokes dissent among my colleagues.

It is now that we come to Dr. Murray's chief complaint concerning contemporary religion. Not only is religious inspiration restricted to a few, select vessels who belong to the distant past, but, also, the inspiration comes from a source which "stands outside the order of nature." These assumptions imprison the imagination and stultify religion itself, forcing creativity to seek other channels of expression.

> My thesis [writes Dr. Murray] is that enchantment always keeps company with the creative imagination, and what results from their combined play is evolution. Religion, by sitting pat in its citadel of solidified improbabilities, repelled the goose that lays the golden eggs—the creativity in man—and thereby lost its charm, its lure, its magnetism, its

> spring of inspiration and renewal, the only source of veritable progress.
>
> This is the rudest and crudest thing I have in my heart to say about religion. Forgive me if you can.

There is interest in the fact that the individuals who make this sort of criticism of religion are always people who themselves possess imaginative power—and who, so far as we can see, are appalled by any other conception of religion but that which belongs to each man for himself, through his own inspiration, however helped by teachers and nurtured by a sympathetic and culturally rich environment. Dr. Murray has long seemed to us to be one of the most provocative writers in the field of psychology, unable to make dull and unoriginal sentences.

It is never such men who confine religion to the memory of past revelations, who quiver in indignation at the suggestion that a borrowed light, in religion, is ultimately no light at all, for the reason that a borrowed light conceals the need of every man for his own light, however dim.

But what a chaos of petty nonsense and undisciplined imaginings might result, were every man to author his own religion! Perhaps, but are we altogether positive that this would follow? The primary assumption in any such theory of religion at once expands the idea of human potentiality, and therefore of human responsibility. At least one consequence would be the recognition that no man can be "saved," religiously or philosophically, except as he learns to think for himself. We suspect that if this idea could be widely circulated, all the other consequences, however confusing, would be of small importance and easily dealt with.