

## PSYCHOLOGICAL CURRENTS

FOR some years now, a kind of intrusion of psychological forces has been taking place in human life. Not that "psychological forces" are anything new and different in human experience—it is simply that we are becoming increasingly aware of their influence, and, in some measure, learning to manipulate them ourselves. The most obvious instance is the professional propagandist—a technician of the conditioned reflex, a virtuoso in the art of suggestion. He serves with equal facility the politician, the statesman or the vice-president in charge of sales. His ethical credo is commonly determined by his pay check; his personal justification is the theory that people have to be "managed" for their own good.

Another group of emerging psychological energies is described by psychoanalysis. Beginning with Dr. Sigmund Freud, a long succession of explorers have unsealed the cavern of the "subconscious mind." Psychoanalysts are anatomists of self-deception. Unlike the priest in the confessional, who for centuries employed similar methods, the psychoanalyst teaches no specific doctrine of right and wrong, and no more than Pontius Pilate has he a theory of the Truth. Ironically enough, the psychoanalyst feels that he is helping to undo the harm caused by centuries of twisted moralizing by priests of religion. Without either moral theory or secret of salvation, he wishes simply to bring about "adjustment" in the psychic life of his patients. But who or what in man must make the adjustment? Suppose the priest be right in saying that there is a soul in man, but wrong in assigning both its origin and obligations to the theological personal God? This question, however, is substantially meaningless to the typical psychoanalyst.

Nevertheless, psychoanalysis has uncovered much of the dynamics of non-rational behavior in

man. It has isolated and partially defined a series of deep-seated fears. Although its technology fails to distinguish between the voice of conscious and impacted prejudice, it has at least demonstrated the depths of human consciousness and shown the enormous importance of torn and tangled emotions. The eccentric scholar, Dr. Johnson, kicked a cobblestone to prove the reality of the physical universe—a stubbed toe is no "illusion," he argued. But the psychoanalyst knows the fixed and rigid complex and the neurotic attitude to be the more solid reality in the lives of many men.

It is a matter of some interest that modern psychological analysis of human nature is very largely founded on observation and treatment of unbalanced and abnormal people. The vocabulary of psychiatry is based, not upon health of the mind, but upon its diseases. The aberration is the recognizable entity, not the mind itself. Just as our society refuses official cognizance of its weakened human units until they are broken and helpless—candidates for the state hospital, the poor farm or the morgue—so the concepts of psychotherapy have evolved in the milieu of psychic disaster. Preventive psychiatry is in its infancy. We have many theories of mental disease, but none worth mentioning of mental health.

Another spreading psychological influence in modern life is indicated by the interest in telepathy. Extra sensory perception as a faculty which is probably possessed in some degree by all human beings has been made scientifically respectable by Dr. J. B. Rhine of Duke University. Against the contemptuous opposition of "scientific" psychologists, Dr. Rhine has successfully demonstrated the non-physical transmission of human thought from one person to another. "Non-physical" means without regard

for the known laws of physics, for thought-transmission is as easy at 300 miles as at three feet, a fact somewhat devastating to those who would like to explain it in mechanical terms. The world of thought, it seems, in this respect at least, is a frictionless universe, or perhaps it is spaceless instead!

Formal academic resistance to the idea of telepathy is founded on the revolutionary implication of facts like this. Dr. Rhine, through his experiments, has opened the way to every sort of "non-scientific" speculation concerning the nature of man. As the late Joseph Jastrow, an able defender of orthodox psychology, wrote in 1938, "In the minds of psychologists who accept a comprehensive view of their responsibilities, it is the *general objections* to ESP that weigh most heavily." To illustrate, Jastrow quoted a scientific contemporary:

ESP is so contrary to the general scientific world picture, that to accept the former would compel the abandonment of the latter. I am unwilling to give up the body of scientific knowledge so painfully acquired in the Western world during the last 300 years, on the basis of a few anecdotes and a few badly reported experiments.

Jastrow himself refused to accept anything "so subversive as ESP." Without a theory to account for them, Jastrow rejected the observed facts of thought-transference, condemning them as impossible because "unbiological."

But telepathy, like propaganda and psychoanalysis, is here to stay, and whether it will finally remodel "the general scientific world picture" remains to be seen. Actually, ESP is the legitimate offspring of scientific psychic research which began with the investigations of Spiritualism by the London Dialectical Society about 80 years ago. Impressed by the impartial spirit of these first students of so-called "psychical phenomena," other open-minded men continued the study, often at the cost of their friends and personal reputation. It was the eminent English psychologist, William McDougall, for years head of the department of psychology at Harvard, who

was instrumental in establishing the Duke program of psychic research, carrying out a personal conviction he had expressed in 1923, when he wrote:

Unless Psychical Research can discover facts incompatible with materialism, materialism will continue to spread. No other power can stop it; revealed religion and metaphysical philosophy are equally helpless before the advancing tide. And if that tide continues to rise and advance, as it is doing now, all signs point to the view that it will be a destroying tide, that it will sweep away all the hard-won gains of humanity, all the moral traditions built up by the efforts of countless generations for the increase of truth, justice and charity.

Dr. McDougall's pioneering campaign against the theoretical materialism of science may end in a technical victory, but whether psychic research, isolated from both religion and metaphysical philosophy, will become, as he hoped, the protector of "truth, justice and charity" is an open question. For psychic research has itself a few camp followers more on the side of the apes than the angels. Hypnotism, for example, is potentially an instrument of incalculable evil in the hands of practitioners without moral responsibility. Hypnotism is a psychological weapon mightier than any drug, and with effects upon victims that may be more irreparable than addiction to narcotics. Two chapters in *Hypnotism*, by George Estabrooks, a modern authority, describing the possible uses of hypnotic suggestion in crime and war, are sufficient to make ridiculous the popular claim that hypnotism is "harmless" and that no subject can be made to perform actions he would reject while in full possession of his faculties.

We seem to be entering an epoch of extensive and practical psychological experiment, in which hypnotic techniques will play a leading part. There is certainly the possibility that the various forms of psychological influence will converge and become the unified psychic environment of human experience, leading to a multitude of strange new dangers as well as to new intensities

of living. Some years ago, the leading biologist, Julian Huxley, proposed that "man's so-called supernormal or extra-sensory faculties are in the same case as were his mathematical faculties during the Ice Age"—it following that a spurt in psychological evolution is entirely possible. In 1936, a reputable psychiatrist seriously suggested that radio waves may have something to do with the vulnerability of modern man to neurosis. "Sensitized persons," he said, "suffering from certain atomic changes in their tissue may . . . tune their special senses or brain cells into a specific radio frequency and so become sensitive to suggestions that are known to be always passing through the ether and which are normally detected when proper instruments are devised." If the extra-sensory faculties of man were to undergo a preternatural development, like that anticipated by Edward Bellamy in one of his short stories, or in keeping with Dr. Huxley's suggestion, what then could limit the power of the propagandist and the hypnotist? Who would exercise control over their activities, and how would it be done?

As though obliquely answering this question, Dr. Arturo Castiglioni, who teaches the history of medicine at Yale University, observes in a recent book:

Does not the most recent discovery of the fission of the atom prove that antagonistic forces existing in the atom in an apparently stable equilibrium are revealing, when the structure is destroyed, an unexpected, and for our common judgment supernatural, destructive violence? Is it not almost instinctive to think that, in an analogous way, the perturbation of the equilibrium in the human mind is unleashing the violent action of opposing hidden forces? (*Adventures of the Mind*, 1946, p. 402)

It is folly to wait until *after* the explosion to seek for the means of controlling these hidden forces, as we have done in the case of the atomic bomb. For then the dilemma will be personal and psychological, instead of merely physical and political. It seems no exaggeration to say that the world is becoming "one" in more ways than we think, and that the problems of the psychic community of the world may soon overshadow

merely political and economic issues, or at least establish a new structure of human relationships in which political and economic issues will play a relatively unimportant and insignificant part.

If it be true that the realities of the world we live in are changing, then we, who see the change, are more than mere functions or products of the cosmic process. At any rate, we have to save ourselves. There is no cosmic Engineer to bottle up atomic energy and hide the bombs until a wiser age. There is no personal shadow of the Infinite to administer appropriate doses of serenity to twisted and invaded minds. The only defense against the atomic bomb is fearlessness, and the attitudes of mind consistent with this spirit. The only psychological security that man can gain lies in personal integrity and self-understanding, and, most of all, in the moral self-dependence which will enable the individual to stand his ground against the psychological terrors of modern life.

## *Letter from* **ENGLAND**

LONDON.—The failure of the Foreign Minister's Conference (USA, UK, USSR, and France) to reach agreement on the future of Germany was not unexpected. They met in November last under the shadow of civil disturbances in France, riots and strikes in Italy, a Palestine reeling under the impact of a United Nations organization decision, reports from the Moscow correspondent of *L'Intransigeant* that the Soviet Union had exploded her first atomic bomb at 10 a.m. on June 15, 1947, and of the establishment of a Communist Bureau pledged to resist "plans of imperialist expansion and aggression." The wheel of history has turned full circle. A defeated Nazi-Germany has become, in a truly Dostoevskian manner, the catalyst of Europe, just as a fallen Japanese Empire promises to be the touchstone of Occidental intentions with regard to the Orient. In the realm of dogma, to be met only by agreement or denial, the path of dialectic (democracy and dictatorship, freedom and tyranny, prosperity and poverty, good and evil) is strewn with perils. Compromise in action is seen too often as perversion of principle. The world looks on while sanguinary liquidation proceeds in Poland, Roumania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia, in the cases of all those who do not subscribe to the dominant political régime. Meanwhile, the United Nations organization gathers about itself the tattered remnants of the Charter which alone justifies its existence. Its naked pretensions are seen by all people, though not acknowledged by all.

A destroyed Germany, with its four zones of the occupying Powers, had become a symbol of the world's *malaise*. Externally, the trouble may have been seen as lack of food, the endless destruction by war, the failure of the existing currency, and the shortage of labour, with the barter and theft of black market operations. In relation to Europe the Paris Conference of sixteen nations dealing with the Marshall plan reported:

"Other Western countries cannot be prosperous as long as the economy of the western zone [of Germany] is paralysed." From the world point of view, Mr. Ernest Bevin (British Foreign Minister) spoke truly when he said, before the November Conference opened, that the meeting would be "perhaps the most vital conference in the world's history." One world, or none!

Not a few observers here have come to realize that below the surface events of the historical drama there are hidden truths. Nations and continents, no less than political parties and religious creeds, are riven because man's consciousness is split asunder by the manifest conflict of self-interest (enlightened or otherwise) with compassionate altruism. Tolstoy argued that history must always seek those laws which govern the relationship between man's necessity and his free will. Among those laws is individual responsibility. As Stephen Spender wrote in his recent *European Witness*:

But today we are confronted with the choice between making a heaven or a hell of the world in which we live, and the whole of civilization will be bound by whichever fate we choose. Moreover, it seems that we have to make the choice; we have to decide one way or the other: we cannot abdicate from the position of having to choose.

Fundamentally, in the context of a European settlement which so affects the peace of the world, the choice is one of relationship between peoples, ultimately decided by the deliberate will of the individual, and conditioned by the innumerable choices inevitable in everyone's life. A free, mutual, and creative relationship is not the choice of a single moment. It is the result of countless past decisions in matters great and small: "The whole of the future is in unbroken continuity with the present, as the present is with the past." Similarly, there is unbroken continuity between success or failure in world unity, and the integration of consciousness in the individual.

International affairs are in such and such a state because they reflect the unbroken images of human thought, past and present. One English

observer has remarked that the sermons in the stones of Germany preach nihilism. The fact is that Europe as a whole has preached little else than nihilism from the days of the Neo-Platonists and Gnostics in the fourth century A.D. The forcible suppression of their serene thinking inaugurated a rule of bigotry and fanaticism which lasted for centuries—until the breakup of feudalism and the revival of Platonism, which produced the Renaissance man. But today, there is no home for the Renaissance man in Europe. It is appropriate at this point in history, when there is growing displacement of the continent of thought, to quote a Russian genius against both nihilistic and totalitarian tendencies which seek to remove the inherent responsibility of the individual man and woman for what is happening in the world. If man is to live at peace with himself and to bring peace to a tortured world, he would do well to remember Tolstoy's words in *Resurrection*:

It became clear to him that all the dreadful evil he had been witnessing in prisons and jails, and the quiet self-assurance of the perpetrators of this evil, resulted from men's attempting what was impossible: to correct evil while themselves evil. Vicious men were trying to reform other vicious men, and thought they could do it by using mechanical means . . . The answer he had been unable to find was the same that Christ gave to Peter. It was to forgive always, every one, to forgive an infinite number of times, because there are none who are not themselves guilty and therefore none who can punish or reform.

ENGLISH CORRESPONDENT

## REVIEW

### PERIODICALS: RANDOM NOTES

ACCORDING to *World Report*, UN's International Children's Emergency Fund has resources and plans to care for only 3,800,000 of the world's needy children—less than five per cent of the 80 million young who lack adequate food, clothing and medical attention. Many are parentless; others, victims of bombing, are crippled, and all are hungry. In Europe, rickets, scurvy and pellagra—diseases of malnutrition—are common, and the food supply for this winter is less than in 1946-47. Dairy cattle are being slaughtered to provide meat, which means there will be less milk, butter and cheese, later on.

In the midst of the war, Hugh Johnson wrote for the *Satevepost* (Feb. 20, 1943) an account of the effects of prolonged hunger among children. Worse than the actual starvation is its psychological and moral result:

When parents cannot give the necessary food to their children this inability changes the question of food into a deeper problem. . . . The children sense the tragedy of the family, and there gradually takes place in their minds something which is against all the laws of nature—the hope of childhood turns into despair. This, because the fundamental characteristic of childhood is hopefulness, is more than just a deformation; it is a monstrous transformation.

So the new generation, unless a means is found to prevent this, will be at best a generation of despair, responding to the force of survival, but having little understanding of . . . the qualities of generosity, pity, love, goodness or hope. Theirs will be a survival of the body, but a death of the heart. . . .

We send food packages to Europe, we speak hopefully of the Marshall Plan, but we are all but impotent, really, to cure this massive despair. And there are no self-justifying explanations that we or any other people can make to 80 million hungry children. Either we feed them, or we ignore them, that is all. But whatever we do, now, we should realize the result of things already done. As Henry Beston writes to *Human Events* for Dec. 23:

It is so important that our people should be told that their major effort was one of destruction; it may help some among them along a path to intellectual honesty. How great the destruction is, I imagine that none of us really know, for the dust of the massacre by bombing" is still in the air, and we cannot see through it to know what has gone. But have you noticed how anything written before the massacre is literature from another and quite vanished world? . . .

I think with the Greeks that what is done "outside of life" is punished. There is no exact Greek phrase for my English one, but the meaning held in the shell of the words catches an enduring mood of the Greek mind. Things done "outside of life" (like Orestes' killing of his mother) well . . . we have waged a war and it too will be punished. When jellied gasoline and unquenchable gobbets of phosphorus are showered on women and children huddled in the open fields, the stars cannot but work against us in their courses.

A century ago, Thoreau was writing paragraphs like this, addressing himself, like Beston, to the human spirit—to hearts that have not died. So there is a literature that can survive "massacre by bombing," which reaches across the wastelands of history and speaks in a language that lacks the vocabulary of either hate, fear or despair. The real death, for America, would be to lose its capacity to understand that literature, to respond only to the anxiety-shaped speech of "security" and material well-being.

Our capacity to write, and read, such literature has been considerably lessened by the war. Among periodicals, the transformation of *Asia*, once a humanizing power in the intellectual life of America, into *United Nations World*, which has become a strident tom-tom of international organization, is a symptom of the growing dominion of fear. Last November, this magazine presented its readers with a feverish account of biological weapons more deadly than the atomic bomb. The writer, Rear Admiral Zacharias (Ret.) assures us that several of the Great Powers possess chemical, biological and climatological poisons "capable of exterminating the last vestige of human, animal and even vegetable life from the face of the earth." Lest this point elude the

reader, the editors repeat in large, bold italics, set within heavy black borders, the following words:

*"A single milliter of the highly infectious psittacosis virus could kill 20 million men. This virus can be produced cheaply in bulk by a small laboratory anywhere in the world."*

These poisons, we are told, are not merely theoretical, but *"are being manufactured right now, while you are reading these words."* A picture shows a graceful, streamlined dirigible covering the planet with a haze of powdery death, and the article ends with the promise that, if measures of control are not immediately put in force, "humanity's days upon this earth are numbered."

The facts of the Admiral, doubtless, are true, and his warning pertinent. Yet these dangers and the "measures" to protect ourselves against them seem petty interlopers of thought when set inside the world of Beston's grave concern with ultimate moral responsibility. Possibly those who think like Beston have little time or energy for speculating upon the specific dangers of new weapons invented to increase the deadliness of war. Is there some kind of psychological "law" in this—that the mood of compassion, of accounting to oneself, for oneself, somehow creates an armor against obsessing anxiety?

What do these recitals of threatening doom accomplish, after all? If we die, we shall not be the first, even if it be by sudden atomic explosion and searing burns from radiant energy. Death by a virus is doubtless an unpleasant fate, but three quarters of all Europe died from virulent germs in the fourteenth century of the Black Plague. Why do we honor Damien, who died serving the lepers of Molokai, if wasting disease is so hateful an end to human life? It should not be hard to see that leprosy never touched the Damien we honor.

Yet fear of these things is today made the spring of human action, and human hope for security is exploited like an omnipresent lust. Even the good we do is tainted by fearful and prudential considerations—we expect all

Europeans fed by the Marshall Plan to be good, grateful anti-communists. It is dollar diplomacy once again, bartering lives for buffer states to guard us from the scheming men in the Kremlin.

Surely, there are other ways to build a strong America—things to do which can be begun without the drive of all-possessing fear. But if there are such ways, it is difficult to learn them from contemporary periodicals.

---

Today the path of self-understanding which all the sages have taught was the way to inner peace, which the psychiatrists have discovered is the key to psychic health, does not end at the foot of the Boh tree nor at the analyst's couch. It winds through the battlefields, the propaganda services and the council-chambers of the world, it explores the group-antagonisms which poison our individual minds, which fill us with nightmares of personal insecurity, it leads into the prison camps of race and caste and cultural prejudice in which we segregate ourselves from our brothers.

—Edmond Taylor, *Richer by Asia*

## COMMENTARY DIALOGUE ON SOCIALISM

"YOU," said our Socialist friend, "have got to make up your mind. You're either on one side or the other. The underpaid, the underprivileged victims of the capitalist system are finally becoming politically mature and they demand a new economic order. Some of their attitudes may be 'rough and tough,' but they have to be. Labor union psychology often sets class against class, but I know and you know that unions must exist to save the common man from exploitation. The idea of the Class Struggle helps to keep them going. It is part of the world-wide economic war to be decided by pressure and counter-pressure in the long hard years of so-called 'peace.' You can't be neutral in this war. You have to make up your mind—stand up and be counted—and don't try to answer me with saintly phrases like, 'If men would only try to understand each other all friction would cease.' We've heard them before."

Our friend has a great deal of justification for his position. He is right about the imminence of demands for a new economic order. Such a situation exists. He is also right in condemning the "much-to-be-said-for-both-sides" excuse for doing nothing, for making no decision. If you want to be a just man, you do have to stand up and be counted, for justice, like freedom, must be won anew each day.

But when our friend tells us that we are dealing with two great impersonal forces labelled respectively Capitalism and Socialism, the former being Evil and the latter Good, we can ask—how about the *man* who believes in Capitalism—is he a social nonentity, a parasite, and evil? That he may be, we well know. But even if he is, a greater evil lies in believing that an economic faith such as "Capitalism" or "Socialism" can determine a man's worth to society. Capital misused Labor because Capital thought Labor was a tool instead of a man. But the day also came when Socialists shot and imprisoned "Capitalists" because they were considered to be hopelessly conditioned in the wrong direction. It is the same old racist theory of "superior" people and "inferior" people—with bad reflexes instead of bad genes. The Calvinists who were "saved," the aristocrats who had "blood," and the capitalists who were rich, gave similar arguments to justify their power and elevated position.

No social problem is ever solved by this "we" and "they" philosophy, which always requires scapegoats, whether of class, color, or theological predestination.

Marx, however, was right in predicting world-wide revolution. It was beginning to boil throughout Central Europe at the termination of the first World War. The revolutionary tide receded in France following the 1918 Armistice, and in Germany, following the promises to the Weimar Republic. Paralleling the advent of Hitler, it rose again in an ugly, aggravated form. In every case, the early steps in this revolution were accomplished with accompanying obeisances to the Gods, if not the doctrines, of Socialism. It may, perhaps, be thought unfair to connect in any way the Socialist idea of Revolution with the brutal excesses of Soviet Communism, or with Fascist and Nazi crimes, but the fact remains that these regimes all promised to bring about a material Utopia such as the socialists describe.

What is Socialism? Ideally and theoretically, the word means production for actual needs, production for the total body of society. It means "from each according to his capacity, to each according to his need." Socialism claims to seek the development of techniques of public control over the production and distribution of goods, for common benefit. Historically, however, it seems to mean consolidation of power and the use of that power by the State for the subjection of the individual.

The Socialist, therefore, often finds himself in a position embarrassingly similar to that of the Christian who enthusiastically describes the Beloved Community that will come about when Christianity is universally accepted. Christianity, say the Christians, has never been tried. Realists, however, are driven to pragmatic criticism. Historically, Christianity has been tried. Similarly, Socialism has been tried, with equally discouraging results. This need not lead to a complete lack of appreciation for the values in both Christianity and Socialism *as formulated*. Both have professed to seek the creation of a moral society. But as yet, both have produced something less, far less. Perhaps they failed because both expected and expect too little of men and too much of systems.



## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

BEFORE much is said on "what to do with children," it will be a good idea to look over the sources of our conventional attitudes on the subject. More of them than we suppose may be founded on popular prejudices.

It should be clear that every philosophy of education rests upon whatever notions its authors hold on (a) the innate potential of each individual, and (b) the best way to make the "best" use of that potential.

Unfortunately, while the logic of these propositions is simple and direct enough in the abstract, it is difficult to discover in the formal writings of most educators any simple or direct formulation of their basic beliefs regarding man's nature. This, we surmise, is not due to wilful concealment, but rather to the fact that educators—like most busy, practical people—have more or less taken for granted the usual preconceptions of western civilization. The possibility that they ought to be replaced is seldom considered. Further, the hereditary perceptions of our culture seem firmly established the orthodoxies of both religion and science. Current notions about man's nature have roots so deep that even the well-known conflict between religion and science fails to disturb them. It is natural, therefore, that much confusion arises from the fact that "scientific" education and "religious" education are commonly believed to embody different first principles as to the nature of man, while this is actually not the case at all. *Individual man* is conceived as a comparatively helpless and insignificant thing on either basis. Our culture, and particularly our new economic totalitarianisms, reflect this enervating conclusion.

The Middle Ages offer a notorious example of "integrated education." All teaching had to fit into the theological structure of the then orthodox Christianity. While there were individual apostates and occasional heretical sects, a nearly

universal acceptance of medieval Christian concepts of the nature of man was compelled by fear of ecclesiastical power. And while the implications of "original sin" as to the moral helplessness of man was formally a part of the earliest teaching of the young, total religious education of the time extended far beyond childhood instruction to include all environmental influences, leaving no escape from the doctrine of initial human depravity, which saturated the entire social structure.

The "beginning of the end" for this system of total education—which for centuries embraced the European continent—came a little before the attack on the Ptolemaic-Aristotelian astronomy, sometimes called the Copernican Revolution. Thus, preceding the inauguration of what is now called "the scientific method," there arose in Italy, through the Revival of Learning, a radically different approach to education. The Florentine Platonists were heirs to Pythagorean and other ancient Greek teachings regarding the essential nature of man. There gradually developed, through the influence of the Florentine School, the proposition that the universe had meaning only when viewed as a vast harmony of cooperative, interacting intelligences: there could be no fixed pattern, the only pattern of life being that devised by the beings themselves—whether "gods" or men.

It is significant that the Grecian gods were only relatively more perfect than mortal men, and also that there was constant traffic on a personal or individual basis between the gods and mankind—in sharp contradistinction to the Christian view of divine and human affairs. All the dogmas of the Holy See implied that the aim of the individual could be nothing more than the ambition to fit himself submissively into God's pattern. While Catholicism required, first by instilling fear of Hell, and later by faggot and rack, belief in a Personalized Absolute, the great emphasis of Pythagorean and Platonic teaching was upon the immense potentialities of each

human being—the "divine perfections" were relative to other virtues, and all were within the reach of man. For the Platonists, the Absolute was the spiritual potential of the Individual; for the theologian, the Absolute was an external and static perfection.

The revival of Platonism and Neoplatonism furnished a strong dynamic for the overthrow of medievalism, a fact attested by the intellectual history of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Later, the same revolution found convincing political expression during the eighteenth centuries, when the humanist philosophy—the idea of individual worth—was diffused among those who planned to substitute an evolutionary society on earth for the static "heavenly city" of after-life. Yet many of the fundamental assumptions of Catholic theology remained embedded in the culture of modern Europe.

In each historical cycle, it appears, there is a subconscious as well as an obvious lap-over from the period just passed. While "the dignity of man" was again asserted by the free spirits of the eighteenth century, it was a different sort of dignity from that asserted by either Greek or Renaissance thinkers, who conceived man as an eternally enduring soul. During the cycle of European liberation, man's potentialities came to be considered as limited by the political and economic context of his social existence; and when Newton's laws, and subsequently Darwinian theory, supplanted God's personal rule, man, though less helpless a creature, a creature still remained.

This historical sketch may serve to introduce the view that, notwithstanding the rejection of formal theological dogmas by men of science and by a great proportion of the populace as well, Western civilization has yet to conceive the human potential in a way that is *essentially* different from the "sinful creature" teaching of the medieval church. Whether men be ruled by an incomprehensible God or by impersonal cosmic destiny makes little difference, educationally

speaking. That another view of the nature of man has existed in unbroken continuity from antiquity to the present is clear enough, but this view has never been dominant in the Western mind.

## THE REAL ISSUE

A featured article in *Harper's* for December summarizes the Kinsey Report on "The Sex Habits of American Men." This Report presumably discloses in statistical terms the extent of our departure from what we have professed to regard as "moral" behavior. While based on ten years of painstaking research, the Kinsey investigation is by no means unique in forcefully bringing this fact to our attention. We have encountered an increasing number of such public revelations in recent years.

The real issue, however, is not in these facts, but in the way they are interpreted. First of all, our understanding of human nature, of its potentialities as well as its limitations, will hardly be increased if we assume that statistical accounts of sex behavior help people to harmonize their personal lives. The fundamental question about any form of behavior is not "what is" but, "can it be improved upon?" To conclude from the Kinsey Report that the behavior outlined is the most we can expect from our attempts to come to terms with biological forces would be a mere dogma of the *status quo*—as reactionary for medicine and psychology as political dogmas which defend the present social system because it happens to be our own. Scientifically, we know little or nothing about what may be called "ideal" sexual behavior, and it is a question whether our kind of "science" is capable of any such discovery.

Many readers of the *Harper's* article will find that they dislike it. In some instances, such a response may be an unwholesome inheritance from New England prudery. For others, the reason for disliking this type of presentation may be quite natural. One may be constantly seeking to improve his emotional and mental reactions, not only in intimate human relations, but in all fields, and such a man may justifiably resent the implication that his personal behavior will shortly become just another statistic. His drive in life is to move ahead in terms of an increased emotional balance and understanding. Statistics suggest no

meaning and no growth. They simply sit and stare at you.

The cult of tabulation often obscures rather than discloses the matters of greatest significance. A culture which depends upon surveys of the present "norm" for enlightenment, in any field of human action, is a culture doomed to unimaginative and uncreative mediocrity. May there not be some "scientific" justification for dislike of featured published material which tells us only that many men are living in confusion? Possibly we only "like" such material and argue for its "extreme value" when we wish to justify our own failure to rise above the dead level of defeatism.

The Kinsey Report may have its uses for pathologists, but it brings the average *Harper's* reader no closer to a philosophical understanding of the vast problem of sex.

## *FRONTIERS*

### The Religion of Frustration

SOME twenty-five hundred years ago, an Indian Prince left a wealthy kingdom on a quest for knowledge. According to the scribes, his quest was rewarded, first by the discovery of a universal fraternity of suffering to which all creatures of the earth belonged, and, secondly, by his own attainment of mastery over the mental conditions which cause suffering.

The Buddha did not try to make suffering popular, as did many Christian churchmen during the Middle Ages; instead, he endeavored to make suffering so unpopular that it might be conquered. And because of this, the judgment of ages may well be that Buddha taught a better doctrine than any we embrace today. We apparently enjoy the "tragedy" of our own times—at least we like nothing better than to talk about it.

Although we are much more sophisticated than the medieval sinners who enjoyed a feeling of acute sin-awareness in common with others of like mind, it is simply a fact that people today delight in explaining the ways in which they are fundamentally frustrated by life. And this word "frustration" is very interesting. It sums up the philosophy of "you can't expect life to offer clear meaning and purpose."

Every philosophy, even the philosophy of frustration, impels people to seek acquaintances and lovers who view things similarly. The cult of the frustrated is very large. It seems to cut across the boundaries of conventional politics and religions to a considerable degree. The values of life, for those who belong to the fraternity, are evanescent and only to be approached in occasional romantic episodes. To see that we are hopeless fools and to be amused at the spectacle is the last word of wisdom. Which means, in the minds of those who adopt this doctrine, that the very structure of nature decrees that men must always suffer and be frustrated. What alternative

exists to such a viewpoint, in a world filled with psychotic patients, increased crime waves, atom bombs and the like?

There is a significant difference between the knowledge that all men suffer *until* they learn the laws of life, and the notion that all men suffer *because* of the laws of life. The first position, which apparently was Buddha's, is that the task of mastering all mysteries is difficult enough to take all that a man has, but that it is a task which can be accomplished. The second view is that we all have a perfect excuse for our present ignorance and for a final failure, since we are essentially sinful or essentially bestial.

This last belief has been a psychological keynote in the life of our times. For a while we thought that if we could get a good enough environment through social reform or revolution, the human being could be conditioned into improvement. We don't really believe this any more. We have lost our faith in human organization because human organization has shown itself also to be "sinful and bestial." This, of course, might be regarded as a natural historical consequence of originally failing to find faith in the spiritual or moral capacities of man. But however it has come, the fact is that today it is popular to consider oneself "frustrated." Even the United Nations and Franklin Roosevelt failed to make the world happy. So now we know that the human being was born to be frustrated, that he is too weak ever to be anything else. We suspected this for a long time, and now, in our popular literature, in our motion pictures and in the majority of our art forms, we say it more audibly and with disarming frankness.

This is a new religion. A fascinating one, too, for it requires nothing more than that we try to be frustrated romantically while we are about it. Our weaknesses and failures are the bonds which link us most closely with our fellows. We like to feel that "we, too," are doomed, that we afford a picture of secret glamour as we are moved from place to tragic or pathetic place on an

unintelligible chessboard of life's experiences. This state of mind might rightly be called the death of civilization, if we ever had a real civilization, but, since we never have yet closely approximated that state, we really have not lost anything. We simply have not gained anything yet.

There are two ways of answering the question as to how frustration became so popular. The simplest is that we were always doomed to frustration, but now for the first time recognize it, and since the ultimate senselessness of life is thought to be the ultimate reality, we are now able to enjoy the delicious irresponsibility of knowing that neither we nor anyone else can ever get anywhere or do anything important. The second is to question the way in which Christianity, first, and then modern science, became cynical in regard to human nature, for if we have been falsely propagandized, we are simply hypochondriac about our "frustrations" and not glamorous at all. It would be, of course, a great shock to discover that we are not glamorous, but only hypochondriacs; yet such an investigation seems basic, and perhaps we should take the risk.

There are two things which the human being wants more than anything else. Sometimes he wants knowledge and the courage to find knowledge. Other times he wants most an excuse not to look for knowledge, for everyone intuitively knows that looking for knowledge is the hardest work you can undertake. There are several well-advertised excuses available for deserting the quest for knowledge. One may be summed up by the conventional use of the word religion, which tells us that our own knowledge will always be limited by the inherent weakness of human nature, and that what progress can be attained will only come through divine intervention. This leaves us without much to look forward to except sensations—the only realities, even if they are not very important ones.

If this is indeed our characteristic doctrine, we have a good explanation for the popularity of

"frustration." Another question, though, remains to be asked and answered: Is it impossible to have faith that man can still make sense out of the story of human evolution? May our struggles have some sort of permanent meaning which we, not alone God, can understand? Buddha's philosophy was splendidly hopeful, and, being hopeful, possessed a certain logic. All human beings, whether of this age or of Buddha's, continue to *look* for an abiding sense of purpose, and to *hope* that it may be found—for if hope is worthless, so is everything else.