

## WE ARE ALL PHILOSOPHERS

EVERY human being expresses a philosophical evaluation of himself and his relation to the world. He may not be aware of this, but we can learn something of what he thinks he is from his actions, his habits, his ideals. And his idea of himself is important. Behind his various social and political attitudes can be discerned a desire to be consistent with some basic view of the scheme of things into which he is trying to fit himself and by which he is trying to define himself. He has, therefore, a concept of Self which is an important determinant of his action, even though his attempts to be consistent with this concept may not be consciously undertaken. And since he cannot act without motivation, he has a scale of values, and all the values that men choose are, in effect, definitions of Self. Conversely, any fundamental belief concerning the nature of Self influences the selection of values.

It is apparent that few men are articulate concerning their concept of Self, partly because they have not made an effort to reconcile the usual discrepancies between their religious or scientific heritage and the ends they personally are working toward. The majority tend to accept certain judgments about life without much thought to their philosophical implications, and may at the time accept some view of human nature, through either religion or science, which is inconsistent with the values chosen. Take, for instance, the fundamentalist who believes that man is a degraded sinner, yet who, strange to say, does not *feel* degraded, even when he “sins” outrageously. Or take a hot-gospelling mechanist psychologist who has a passion for justice, honor, and the qualities of self-sacrifice, while professing the belief that man is nothing more than a cunning animal. Now, these discrepancies leave man’s concept of Self dangling somewhere between expressed beliefs and preferred values. For this

reason, he is never very sure of the values he is trying to serve, for the struggle to reach consistency when following antithetical counsels results in confusion.

If a scale of values and a code of conduct are to be fully lived, the individual must have a reasoned faith in a philosophy of human nature which supports that way of life. If he is led to believe in democracy, freedom, and the goal of human brotherhood, he should have faith in man as a being who can achieve all these things. But man, it must be inferred from what we are most commonly told by both theologians and the materialists, is fundamentally irresponsible. He is the creature of a God whose mercies are needed to save him from his inherent tendency to sin. Or he is the creature of random cosmic happenings and his rational allegiance should be only to the principles of self-preservation and self-aggrandizement.

We live in an age psychologically dominated by these fundamental preconceptions, and they have their influence upon the subconscious as well as on the conscious mind. There is a great contradiction between the basic philosophical premises of our age and the values we would like to achieve. Neither religion nor science gives us a concept of human nature which will rationally support all the fine things we expect from it. In the interests of consistency, therefore, we must either forget our hopes on behalf of a brotherhood of men and nations or develop a conception of man that will give these hopes reasonable foundation. The dilemma must be resolved if we are ever to become sure of anything—the way we want to live, the way we expect others to live. No new “system” will produce entirely new men. Systems grow from attitudes, even more than attitudes grow from systems.

If there is a more constructive philosophical view of human nature, we need to find it. We know that we need a new view because we don't like what happens when people act as basically anti-social beings. Let us, then, begin by forgetting the preconceived premise that men are innately inclined to animalism and proceed inductively to a fundamental reevaluation of human nature as we ourselves experience it. This fundamental search should be regarded as an obligation to one's own integrity of judgment. Men need to think through basic philosophical questions for themselves, if they are to be "free men," and if they are to make any unique contribution to the world. All social problems, all world problems, are intrinsically philosophical, and social evolution can come only as a reflection of growth in the basic perspectives of men. Social evolution is dependent upon the evolution of individuals, and, more particularly, upon the mental and moral evolution of each individual.

The process of conscious growth proceeds as men desire to free themselves from the preconceptions of their age. It is apparently natural for man, as a self-conscious being, to respond to his active relationship with life by a widening of perception which qualifies, enlarges, or changes basic ideas. His idea of himself, his concept of justice and his view of evolution all undergo periodical revision. This can be deliberately encouraged by mature reflection. Man, whether willingly or unwillingly, is always something of a philosopher. He wants to know upon what altar he should worship. He has only to seek more consciously his rightful place in the scheme of the universe. He has the innate ability for this quest. In fact, he emerges at birth a philosopher and metaphysician. He may not like this vocation; may, in fact, refuse to admit his part in it, yet he remains a philosopher nonetheless. As F. H. Bradley put it:

The man who is ready to prove that metaphysical knowledge is wholly impossible is a brother metaphysician with a rival theory of first principles. To say that reality is such that our

knowledge cannot reach it, is a claim to know reality; to urge that our knowledge is of a kind which must fail to transcend appearance, itself implies that transcendence.

By various causes, even the average man is compelled to wonder and to reflect. To him the world, and his share in it, is a natural object of thought, and seems likely to remain one. And so, when poetry, art, and religion have ceased wholly to interest, or when they show no longer any tendency to struggle with ultimate problems and to come to an understanding with them; when the sense of mystery and enchantment no longer draws the mind; when, in short, twilight has no charm—then metaphysics will be worthless. For the question (as things are now) is not whether we are to reflect and ponder on ultimate truth—for perhaps most of us do that, and are not likely to cease. The question is merely as to the way in which this should be done. And the claim of metaphysics is surely not unreasonable. Metaphysics takes its stand on this side of human nature, this desire to think about and comprehend reality.

A practical view of metaphysics suggests three comprehensive questions: 1. What is the origin of man, and, in the light of that origin, what is his actual relationship to other beings and finally to the whole of life? 2. What are the laws and processes of interaction between the Whole, or the universe, and the part, man? 3. Of what significance is the individual man, as an individual, and what should be his conscious purpose in selecting and weighing life's experiences?

Every social movement as well as every religion and philosophy obtains its dynamics from answers to these three questions. Most important, the thought and action of each individual are profoundly influenced by his conclusions upon these same matters, whether they are consciously adopted or unconsciously absorbed from the general environment. This is not to say that every man must employ the jargon of intellectual philosophy, nor is the man of reflective mind to be identified by his ability to state the fundamental questions in just the way above suggested. The *actual* question usually first asked is one occasioned by intense suffering—occasionally by intense joy: "Why does this happen to *me*?" For

the personal consciousness of the individual man, the essential elements of human experience are simply happiness and suffering. Yet when man seeks to understand these states, which he alternately passes through, when he seeks to find some measure of control over them, he needs perspective and orientation—basic orientation. Here he arrives at the doorway of the great impersonal, fundamental questions, and is driven to find answers complete enough to provide at least a temporary working basis for integration of needs and desires in his own living.

Fundamentals are *realities*, not intellectual phrasings; yet it is through the natural disciplines of the reflective mind that one can expand his perception of the reality within himself and of the world around him. Though philosophy is, of itself, but a means to the end of intelligent, right and satisfying *action*, it is an all-important means. It is through the medium of self-conscious mind that human evolution proceeds, and by “evolution” is meant both the attainment of more significant self-realization and the improvement of social forms.

## *Letter from* **CENTRAL EUROPE**

INNSBRUCK—There can be no doubt that in any modern war, both sides, whether they fight each other in a civil war or in a world war, are convinced that they stand for the right ideals. It is no wonder, therefore, that while the successful group regards its victory as the endorsement of its ideas and conceptions by God or Fate, and tries to make the best possible use of the advantage to spread them, the beaten side—after having overcome the shock of defeat—wonders whether its ideals have been wrong, and asks what, primarily, the ruin was caused by, and whether there are any chances for recovery.

Although many publications in Central Europe are hampered—not only by the lack of paper, but also by the varying regulations and ordinances of the different departments of the four Allied Military Governments—*thinking* is more in the foreground than ever. This is what people want to know:

Can the final destruction of the human world be regarded as near at hand, or has the world situation, at other times during the history of mankind, seemed as dangerous as it does today? By what means can the next war possibly be prevented? Or: should one support the idea of another war, arguing that there will be no continuity or lasting safety until one of the two big Powers has thoroughly defeated the other? Why is it that the nations participating in a future combat would readily spend any fantastic amount of money, from the day of the outbreak or threat of war, while in peacetime, their governments show only a laggard interest in solving the housing problem, in cancer research, or in anything else of good? Has mankind, being caught in its own trap, to choose between the exhausting anxiety of a trying-to-avoid-war world, or being extinguished in the course of a not-to-be avoided clash?

It has become a well-known fact during the past two years that the people of all European

nations are disillusioned with politics—with meetings, conferences and committees. To draw up the Austrian State Treaty (*Staatsvertrag*), for instance, up to the present there have been nearly a hundred committee meetings of the representatives of the four Foreign State Secretaries, a number of meetings of four Foreign State Under-Secretaries and a few meetings of the four Foreign State Secretaries themselves—with no decisive success as yet. No wonder that the people have lost interest. Most of it faded away at the beginning of the discussions, the rest as soon as the differences between the Western and Eastern Powers became obvious. Many people can remember, even during their lifetime, nearly as many treaties broken as concluded; they know that this State Treaty, too, might become a “scrap of paper,” if, one day, some big Power wants it to be.

The average man—the labourer as well as the intellectual, and even the politician—is truly fed up with politics. Not because he dislikes this or that issue, but because he feels strongly that politics has no competence to answer his questions. He knows subconsciously that politics can cause or perform little alterations on the existing conglomeration of human society, but that it can be expected to possess neither the power nor the instruments to begin a new and more efficient reconstruction of mankind.

What he, this average man, is really looking for is a new philosophy of life. After this is found, politics may, led to new and quite different tasks, again take its place in the scheme of things.

CENTRAL EUROPEAN CORRESPONDENT

## *REVIEW*

### WORLD WITHOUT CREDO

IT will not, we trust, be disturbing to our readers if we acknowledge that our search for a “great” modern novel has ended in complete and dismal failure, lending support to the view, harbored for some time, that the present is a period when serious writing ought not to be embodied in fiction at all. No one, today, we think has the starting-points of greatness that were possessed by Dostoevsky, for example, or by Tolstoy. We are not ready for a grand tour of the imagination, in modern terms. Our best writers are still seeking for a true-ringing sense of balance between the part and the whole, the individual and the social totality, and for fitting conceptions of the inward nature of the human being. A Steinbeck may faithfully picture the dilemma of society, and raise his head to question, as *In Dubious Battle* questions. A Silone may walk through the human wilderness, exchanging disconsolate despair for simple acts of kindness. But the meaning of tragedy has not become articulate, as yet there is no legend of the Grand Inquisitor for our time. The less ambitious writer—that is, one who does not attempt to mirror life entire, as the novelist must—seems more equal to his task, these days. Peattie’s *Flowering Earth*, the books of Henry Beston, and the skilled works of conscientious biographers afford greater satisfaction to the reader who seeks in books some element of transcendence, some conclusion, however incomplete, that will endure. The intense self-searching of reflective autobiography—Harold Maine’s *If a Man Be Mad* and Edmond Taylor’s *Richer by Asia* are illustrations—seem to represent the frontier of the questing intelligence, rather than the novel.

Someone, perhaps, will mention Thomas Wolfe. We are prepared for that. One cannot ignore Mr. Wolfe’s lava-flow of words, nor quite escape from the contagion of his chaotic sympathies. He is, it seems, a very distant relative of Walt Whitman; but where Whitman emitted ecstatic enthusiasms for the meaning of life as he divined it, Wolfe’s echo ignores any sense of meaning and exclaims, only, “Ah, Life!”

There is vista and intelligibility beyond the tumult of Whitman’s stream. There are waves and the storm’s lashings, but above are the stars, the serenity of the poet’s vision. In Wolfe one finds only the straining muscle and the succulent flesh of life—a Bacchic frenzy. The serious modern novel contains no reference-points for reverie; its subtlety is sensuous, its impact the impact of animal spirits. It erects no altar but to immediate emotional experience. Writing, for Thomas Wolfe, as he described it in *The Story of a Novel*, is an orgiastic rite, a compulsion neurosis. This essay on the composition of *Look Homeward Angel* and his later books might have been titled, *Portrait of the Artist as Obsessed by his Art*.

The novel, in other words, when it is not a mere pastime, has become a drug, an atavistic revival of either romanticism or barbarism. From Hemingway to Wolfe, it is all the same. Samuel Putnam in *Paris Was our Mistress* tells the story of many of the post-war generation of American writers—their mood of alcoholic desperation, their sterile contempt for “commercial” America, their intense fads and their larger aimlessness. John Dos Passos’ *Three Soldiers* captures the bewildered spirit of the young American writer of the twenties, and Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* reflects the revulsion and the decay which followed. But it is not really worth while to catalogue the symptoms of the defilement which was taking place, nor to note, except in passing, that a kind of angry vitality returned in the thirties with the depression-born interest in communism—it was something to believe in, and now, even that is gone.

To understand the present impoverishment of literature, it is necessary to judge contemporary writing by the standards of Tolstoy and Lafcadio Hearn, to recognize that books should deal with the movement of the human spirit, with the quest for truth, and that these qualities do not exist in literature, today. Some fifteen hundred years ago, Julian, styled the “apostate” by the historians of Christendom, told of a theophanic vision in which he saw the pagan gods of antiquity, but found them pale and wasting images, faint simulacra of their former glory. Unnourished by human faith, Julian’s gods,

the gods of Greece, were dying. A millennium was to pass before their rebirth in Renaissance Italy. And now, today, they have died again. Belief in human excellence, in the immortal spirit of man, has been replaced by a mechanical literalism, a cinematic and statistical report of neurotic behavior. The mysteries are named superstitions, the secrets of the heart become materials for the psychoanalyst and the columnist.

It is difficult, of course, to discuss such matters without seeming to make only a plaint for the uncorrupted and beautiful past. There was once, doubtless, a past which was not corrupt, which had its own truth and beauty, but this is no time to long for an escape from history. It is rather a time to inquire whether literature, and the other arts as well, do not suffer from the same cultural lag and moral barrenness that is so appallingly evident in other fields of human activity—in international affairs, for example. Why should we heap all the criticism and challenge of the atom bomb on the shoulders of a handful of physicists, when every class and calling gives an all but casual assent to the same compulsions which have made of science a dignified thralldom? Who can really say what has been our undoing? The disease lies deep and omnipresent, in the roots of our common life.

It may even be that there will be no pictures worth painting, no songs worth singing, until some bedrock of reality for a *human* existence is sought and found. Can there be any civilization, any arts or sciences, in a world without a credo, among men who seem to believe only that they were born into the world in order to distill every natural thing into an intoxicant of one sort or another? What can we build, without the invincible conviction that man is a builder, and not a destroyer and a wastrel? And how can such a conviction be generated while we are lacking in reverence for life?

It may even be that we must take our children by the hand and tell them that they must be heroes, and try to be heroes ourselves. Possibly we are called upon to create, consciously, a scheme of meaning like that which grew to inspire the golden Age of Greece, or which laid, in another epoch, the quest for the Holy Grail upon young men who would

live worthy lives. In attempting such tasks, we shall be told that we are dreamers, that the practical world was never constructed out of vain imaginings, and we shall have to answer that it is not our purpose to create another practical world such as the one we already have. Aurangzeb, a Mogul Emperor, wrote to his tutor thus:

You told my father Shah Jehan that you would teach me philosophy. 'Tis true, I remember very well, that you have entertained me for many years with airy questions of things that afford no satisfaction at all to the mind and are of no use in humane society, empty notions and mere fancies that have only this in them, that they are very hard to understand and very easy to forget. . . . Have you every taken any care to make me learn what 'tis to besiege a town, or to set an army in array? For these things I am obliged to others, not at all to you.

Those who set out to build the foundation for a civilization in which genuine literature may be possible, once again—in which how to besiege a town or to array an army will be accounted arts well lost—will encounter many Aurangzebs who, if they have their way, will sacrifice the future to present timidity and conceit by continuing to maintain that the truths of the human spirit are but “airy questions,” to which they are not obliged. The Aurangzebs of this world are legion. Thrasymachus of Plato's *Republic* was one, the Didymus of the Gospels another. Today, they fill the universities, the Senate and the House of Representatives, and are too frequently the inhabitants of the doubting, spiritless hours of us all. An yet, the Aurangzebs of history are forgotten, while the Platos and Christs live on, being reborn again and again, in the hospitable hearts of aspiring men.

## COMMENTARY

### WHAT DAVIDSON DID

IN the fall of 1898, an aging Scotsman, a teacher and itinerant scholar, was speaking to a working-class audience at Cooper Union, New York, on the subject: "The Problems which the Nineteenth Century Hands Over to the Twentieth." The speaker stressed the importance of a liberal education as a preparation for life, and during the question period, a young man asked: "How can people like us who work nine or ten hours and sometimes more a day, who come home tired, who have few books and no one to guide or instruct us, obtain a liberal education?"

This was the teacher's reply:

That is just the chief educational problem which the nineteenth century hands over to the twentieth. Of course, you do not expect me to solve it. But one thing I can do for you, of a practical sort. I cannot procure for you shorter hours, or make you less tired at night. I cannot supply you with home conveniences or with books; but one thing I can and will do if you care to have me. If you will organize a club of people who are really in earnest and who will work with all their might, I will devote one evening a week to it.

An they did, and he did. The speaker was Thomas Davidson—a teacher who was willing to do all he could. The class began under the sponsorship of the Educational Alliance and in time developed into a school known as Breadwinners' College, offering classes in English, mathematics, philosophy, literature and science, located in the lower East Side of New York City. It lasted only eight years, but was the means of starting on their careers a number of young men and women who later became some of America's most valuable citizens. To name only one, Morris R. Cohen was an immigrant boy of New York's East Side who came under Davidson's influence, was a student in Breadwinners' College, and eventually became one of the leading thinkers and teachers of philosophy in the United States. No one familiar with Prof. Cohen's writings—his *Reason and Nature*, for example—can fail to be grateful to Thomas Davidson, upon learning that it was he who opened the door to learning and to the wide wisdom of philosophic reflection for Morris Cohen. Something that Cohen wrote suggests the spirit that animated his life:

It is romantic foolishness to expect that man can by his own puny efforts make a heaven of earth. But to wear

out our lives in the pursuit of worthy though imperfectly attainable ideals is the essence of human dignity.

And this, perhaps, may sum up the picture obtained of the life of Thomas Davidson, as it is described by Louis I. Dublin in the Spring, 1948, issue of the *American Scholar*. Mr. Dublin, now a vice president of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, enjoyed similar contacts with Thomas Davidson, enabling him to convey an unforgettable impression of this teacher of his youth.

The Breadwinners' College lasted only eight years, but its contribution to American life is immeasurable. To perpetuate the quality of this voluntary effort in education, the teachers and students of that period still meet, annually, as members of the Thomas Davidson Society, now bringing their children in the hope that they, too, from the spirit of these gatherings, may gain something of the "abiding interest in what is good and true" which Davidson represented. "Thomas Davidson," says Mr. Dublin, "is still a living force among a group of people very few of whom ever saw or heard him."

Why, one wonders, are the Davidsons so few? There never has been nor ever will be any substitute for this kind of teaching, this kind of giving of oneself to the needs of others. We do not know if Davidson was ever a storm center of academic controversy, what his "theories" of education or philosophy were, nor if he subscribed to what then were judged to be Correct opinions. He simply put into practice a conviction about the good life that has never been arguable at all—that it is no good unless it is shared.

The problem handed by the nineteenth to the twentieth century has not been solved. It will soon be handed by the first half of the twentieth century to the second half—in much the same condition. And it will *never* be solved, except by men who act in the same spirit that animated Davidson—who will do, independently, consistently, freely, what Davidson did.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

A RECENT survey reported in a college text brings to light some interesting facts concerning the relation of home conditions to juvenile delinquency. A high correlation is shown to exist between the almost fanatical opposition to all laws and social conventions of some children and the authoritarianism of their parents. Mounting resentment against autocratic decisions in the home produces in children a latent rebellion which, while not erupting in the home itself because of economic dependence, may spread itself out as a general bitterness against society. Further encouraging this type of reaction—which so easily leads children into the “delinquent” category—is the obvious similarity between the sanctimonious attitudes of authoritarian parents and the hypocrisy embodied in certain of our social customs. An example is that of the evening “curfew,” still persisting in many of our small and medium-sized towns. The curfew is an authoritarian substitute for constructive community activities for the young. The parent who, without regard for the circumstances, feels it imperative that the child should always be in bed by a specific hour, is speaking the same language. If the child resents the parent’s demand he may, in his early teens, transfer his resentment to the arbitrariness of the Town Council which imposes the curfew, and, if he can arrange to be on the streets during forbidden hours, will be apt to see just how bad a boy he can be.

It was once assumed that broken homes—that is, homes in which the parents no longer live together as man and wife—were the principal cause of juvenile delinquency. This explanation was popularized chiefly by the churches: divorce is “unchristian,” and when parents become divorced they should know what may happen to their children and recognize their guilt in the eyes of both God and the congregation. More careful analysis reveals, however, that the real contributing causes to delinquency are *attitudes of*

*mind* in the home, a single illustration of which—that of arbitrariness—has just been mentioned. Quite conceivably, a single, *divorced* parent may provide a much better home atmosphere for a child or children than antagonistic marital partners who remain together only because of social or theological pressure. Only forty per cent of juvenile delinquents actually do come from broken homes, and, according to one study, in each instance of the forty per cent, other factors—racial, attitudinal or economic—were assigned as the chief causes of the delinquency.

Wherever a community allows lower-income groups and racial groups to suffer forms of ostracism, obvious social causes of delinquency arise. The main qualification for a delinquent is social resentment. If economic or racial ostracism is a factor, a child may also do his “resenting” in a sort of tribal fashion by hating the dominant factors in society which minimize the human importance of his family or his race. But any strong antagonism may of itself influence a child to become a “J.D.” If the child of a wealthy family sufficiently resents a parent who personifies “society” to him, he may react against even the few sensible laws we possess.

Conventional society throughout the Western world is steadily moving toward disorganization, *i.e.*, disruption of once accepted standards of living, and children *feel* this “trend of disorganization” in countless minor ways. This is particularly true among urban populations, which have been steadily increasing. It is futile to try to impress children with the specific rules and habits once associated with a different type of family life and in terms of now non-existent types of family responsibility—unless we first can reconstruct our whole pattern of living.

It would be easy, but not particularly helpful, to argue from the presentation of prevalent trends in disorganization that we need to become as “homey” as our great-grandparents were, in order to eliminate delinquency. This answer is too simple, suggesting a shortcut which the prevailing

circumstances of society will not allow us to take. We cannot, as a society, restore the type of home which was once made possible by rural and semi-rural conditions of living. Some may, as individuals, be able to leave the city for what we imagine to be better educative atmosphere for children in country life. Those who can thus deliberately simplify and de-urbanize their lives are fortunate, and sometimes achieve a new vision and practice of the family life (see *Flight from the City*, by Ralph Borsodi, reviewed in MANAS for April 7). But we cannot develop a socio-educational philosophy that is based on exceptional circumstances alone; we must also be able to meet city problems in the city. The average child of our time has no roots in society, not only because he has no stable home, but also because he lives among people who have few stable *attitudes*. We cannot stop “social disorganization,” which is apparently an unavoidable prelude to a new type of future organization, but we should be able to do something about the necessary quest for stable attitudes toward “*disorganization*.”

What are the roots of purposive life? What are the real factors conducive to growth of the human soul? And what is so sustainingly creative as to provide a calmness and sense of proportion which cannot be deranged by occupational transfers, by the loss of apartment or home leases, by financial failures that compel eviction from mortgaged homes, etc.? We can do with no less than the philosophy which enabled Socrates to encourage some Greek children to become wise and tolerant men, even though they, too, were surrounded by the social disintegration of a dying urban culture. He did this by saying that disorganization could not touch the soul unless the soul was afraid, and by himself living fearlessly.

This is, of course, asking for something more than the development, in our urban life, of practical equivalents of “roots in the soil.” It is asking that we find eternal psychological verities—a

presumptuous demand, perhaps, but no more impossible than it is necessary. Juvenile delinquency is only one form of the neuroses of our world, yet related to all the others.

## *FRONTIERS* Questioning the Oracle

A READING of some of the current books on psychiatry induces a wonderment at these specialists who obviously know so much about human behavior—behavior within the circumscribed area of psychiatric theory, of course—and so little about man. It is possible to offer this judgment without being a psychiatrist or having any great familiarity with the technical aspects of a psychiatrist's work, just as it is possible to conclude that the best engineers are not always the best administrators of engineering projects, simply by noticing the important human considerations they so often neglect.

Psychiatrists have obviously discovered and are progressively laying bare the dynamics of a large section of the human *psyche*. In their written accounts of what they have found out, they display a commendable scientific humility, but little or no philosophic humility. There may be exceptions to this, but they are neither frequent nor notable. This lack of philosophic humility is a fact of incalculable importance to coming generations, for the reason that any discovery at all in the field of human behavior—so darkly obscure for ordinary mortals—is bound to endow its possessors with a measure of power not accessible to other men, and not only power, but an accompanying prestige involving almost magical implications.

It is hardly debatable that a working knowledge of psychiatric concepts in association with practical intelligence and good will produces an extraordinary sagacity about the problems of personal relations and also public affairs. The practicing psychiatrist attains, it seems, a startling objectivity toward every sort of human foible and weakness, and is peculiarly adept at exposing the institutional delusions of modern society. This impression is gained, not from the “psychiatry made easy” sort of books currently in use for college courses and for popular consumption, but

from reading carefully a few works by the leaders in psychiatry, today. To be recommended for this purpose is Harry Stack Sullivan's *Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry*, comprising the first series of the William Alanson White Memorial Lectures, reprinted from *Psychiatry* by the William Alanson White Psychiatric Foundation in Washington, D.C.

What is impressive in Dr. Sullivan's writing is the laconic intensity of his thought, the lucidity of his insights, and the particularized fruitfulness of his conclusions in so many directions. What is disturbing in his book is his brittle certainty, the tight symmetry of the world in which he lives and works, and the vast extent of the universe which he leaves out. He says, for example:

The unique individuality of the other fellow need never concern us as scientists. It is a great thing in our wives and children. They have, however, aesthetic and other values that are outside of science; when it comes to science, let us confine ourselves to something at which we have some chance of success. We can study the phenomena that go on between the observer and the observed. I hold that this is the subject matter of psychiatry; some rather remarkable results have already come from its definition.

Again, in discussing the fatuous mistakes of some analysts in interviewing patients, he says:

Somewhat related to this interpersonally meaningless production is the patient's pre-occupation with what one *ought* to do. A great deal of time and effort is wasted in discussion of will-power, choice, and decision. These three terms which refer to products of acculturation in the home, endure and are functionally very important because they are potent forms of rationalization in our culture. They are, in fact, embodied in various institutions of law and religion; and all too often are powerful factors in the work of the psychiatrist himself.

Any *philosophical* consideration of psychiatric thinking must come into focus over passages such as these, for here, without subterfuge, are basic ideas expressed by a psychiatrist on what human beings *ought* to think about themselves and their familiar moralistic vocabulary. It is important to realize that in these

apparent rejections of traditional moral ideas—the idea of the “self,” of will-power, choice, and decision—the psychiatrist is not primarily concerned with expounding a mechanistic philosophy of human behavior, nor is he attacking directly the metaphysical conceptions upon which moral ideas rest. The psychiatrist takes, or rather, accepts, *no* metaphysical position. His quarrel is with the reflection in human behavior of delusive attitudes that are historically related to the metaphysics he seems to be attacking. He is a critic, not philosophically, of moral ideas, but practically of moralizing distortions which lie at the root of functional mental disorders.

Within the purview of the mental operations that he admits to be real, the psychiatrist repeats the gospel of the mystery religions of antiquity and formulates a modern equivalent of the admonition of the Delphic Oracle. From a lifetime of experience in treating sick minds, Dr. Sullivan declares that “the person who knows himself has mental health.” But the “self” to be known is a functioning system of satisfaction-seeking drives and longings for “security.” It is evident that to Dr. Sullivan, talk of the “soul;” of what one “ought” to do, and pretentious discussions of “will-power” are substitutions for self-knowledge—are, in practice, the means by which his patients and many other people—the majority, perhaps—avoid genuine self-discovery.

So, the new moralists throw out the deceptive symbols of the old morality, and come perilously close to throwing out morality itself. It is, in a sense, a repetition, at the level of mental science, of what John Dewey accomplished in the academic world for modern education. Dr. Dewey swept out all the “bloodless categories” of old systems of idealism, and introduced the dynamism of experience as the basis for all moral judgments. He brought education to a state of furious activity, of assiduous “doing,” but left it with little or no guidance as to what is *worth* doing.

It is impossible to believe that Dr. Sullivan really wishes to eradicate the sense of *ought* from human life. But only the sense of ought which operates as an irrational compulsion. Psychiatric cure is doubtless frustrated when the patient attempts to react to treatment in a way that he imagines the psychiatrist “wants” him to react—believing that this is what he “ought” to do. In this case, the patient seeks approval, not knowledge. He is like the Puritan who wants to “please” God. He is like the child in school who has learned to believe that being a successful pupil means making a careful catalogue of the prejudices of his teachers and catering to them. Quite evidently, the psychiatrist has come to regard the entire structure of authoritarian morality in this light. What has never occurred to him at all is that precisely the same criticism of modern culture can move from a frankly spiritual conception of the human being, which, because more broadly based, will include areas of like which psychiatry is forced to neglect because of its theoretical limitations, its assumption that man is a biological organism plus cultural modifications—nothing more.

A book like *Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry* ought to be read in company with some other work on the mind, originating from ideas which have no connection with the development of modern psychotherapy and which deals with facts never mentioned by psychiatrists. For psychiatry is amazingly narrow in its selection of material deemed relevant for study. Take for example the admission in Dr. Sullivan’s book (contained in a closing paper by a friendly critic) that nowhere has he published the important observation that “gifted” individuals are unlike the great majority in that the former are able to forget themselves and to think without concern for their personal “security” or “success.” In other words, the normative conception of man, in psychiatric science, develops without serious regard for the qualities of human greatness. We would suggest, therefore, as an antidote to the calm righteousness of these doctors of the mind, that a book such as

Louis K. Anspacher's *Challenge of the Unknown* be allowed to create another and more majestic psychological horizon for the reader. Mr. Anspacher offers a cosmopolitan Cook's tour among the authentic wonders of psychic research—a field no doubt frowned upon by the science of psychiatry, but worth looking into if only to be familiar with some of the “damned facts” that psychiatric theory sees fit to ignore.

For psychic research, like psychiatry, deals with the phenomena of the mind. *Challenge of the Unknown* has an approving Introduction by Waldemar Kaempffert, science editor of the *New York Times*, who is hardly a man to be taken for a ride on a witches' broomstick. This book, moreover, contains considerable matter drawn from the records of psychiatric science. Mr. Anspacher, of course, is a literary person, not a scientist. He calls as witnesses the great philosophers, religious teachers, artists and poets of every age. The reader, however, may come to share the view offered by Mr. Kaempffert on their behalf:

The only reality that we shall ever know must come directly as a spiritual experience and not through a knowledge of particles and fields of energy. The fierce faith of the martyr willing to die at the stake, the sense of communing with something higher than himself that Beethoven must have had when he composed his last sonatas and symphonies, the rare rapture of a poet at one with nature, the exaltation that lifts a mystic out of himself, the intuitions, premonitions, and telepathic messages that compel us to act contrary to all reason, yet correctly, as the event often proves, the vivid dreams that are later verified: these are probably the only reality we shall ever know. . .

## READING AND WRITING

A reader writes to object to the enthusiasm shown in “A Birth and a Death” (MANAS, April 28) for Gandhi’s program of non-violent resistance. This method, our correspondent argues—

may have achieved some results among the weak, ignorant and superstitious hordes that continue to outbreed the food supply of India, but it can never be anything but a detriment, and possibly a disaster, to self-respecting people, when they are called upon to make a stand against the unscrupulous aggression of another nation of half-savage and bigoted people like the Russians who are under the control of a few ruthless leaders bent on expanding their boundaries and their ideologies, and who have no more respect for Gandhi and his doctrines than did Hitler and his followers.

There is nothing new about this viewpoint. It is the analysis of history which made it possible for the Nazis to rise to power by telling the German people that the rest of the world would respect nothing but “brute force.” It is the analysis which enables the “ruthless leaders” of the USSR to justify their policies to the Russian people in the name of “security” and by pointing to the military threat from without. It is the analysis which Gandhi spent his life trying—with some success—to discredit.

It is also the analysis which gives point to some observations of Scott Nearing, which recently appeared in *World Events*”

In days gone by, the people of the United States adopted a motto, “In God We Trust.” Today U.S. factories are turning out atom bombs, buzz bombs, rocket weapons and gargantuan military machines. While U.S.S.R. Laboratories are manufacturing mass poisons, disease germs and viruses to destroy vegetation and animal life, as well as human life. Almost all these new weapons are to be used against civilian populations—women, children, the sick, the aged, homes, schools, hospitals, to crush and starve bodies, pollute sources of food and water, spread terror and disrupt human relationships.

When I was in school, studying the campaigns of Attila and Genghis Khan, my teachers referred to well-poisoning and indiscriminate butchery as “barbaric.” They were in error. Water-pollution and

the production of implements of mass murder are the present objective of the highest-ranking militarists, politicians, scientists, engineers and industrialists of the United States. They are today *part and parcel of the American way of life*, and are therefore among the proudest achievements of Christian civilization.

Under the circumstances, the leaders of U.S.A. public life owe it to themselves and their fellow oligarchs abroad to clear the record by obliterating “In God We Trust” and replacing it with a more accurately descriptive slogan.

The obvious and in a measure justified retort to Mr. Nearing is that “we, the people,” don’t *want* to do these terrible things—but we may *have* to, in self-defense. But Gandhi, alone among the moral and political leaders of the world, proposed the possibility of an alternative<sup>4</sup> to mass destruction as the<sup>4</sup> means of self-defense. It would seem that a “self-respecting people” should welcome such a proposal for consideration. Neither Gandhi nor other advocates of non-violence have ever suggested that military unpreparedness be *forced* on any nation in the world. If such people “threaten” the security of America, as our correspondent seems to think, then rational discussion of national policy is a threat to peace. This is a curious position for “self-respecting” citizens of a democracy to take.