VOLUME VIII, NO. 19
MAY 11, 1955

# SET FREE OR SET LOOSE?

FROM Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* to David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* is not long in time, but it has been a period long in discovery—discovery, one might say, of a kind of negative self-knowledge. For in this period have been chronicled the failures—if not The Failure—of the non-traditional society.

What is the non-traditional society? It is the society conceived in rational rather than organic, hierarchical terms. American society is an attempt at a rational social order which has been copied around the world. It is founded upon philosophical principles. It is consciously ethical and universalist. Its equalitarian basis is proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence. Its abandonment of non-rational, traditional authorities is announced in the Bill of Rights. The American is pugnaciously attached to the idea that no one is going to tell *him* what to do, what to believe, what to like, when and where to go. He will decide these things for himself. He need not be conceited in order to jeer at the notion that he has "betters." There is, we think, a great advance for mankind in this peculiarly American feeling of independence—the more or less unanalyzed conviction of the average individual that while there may be more educated men, even wiser men, richer men, more articulate men, he is still himself, with his own judgments most important to himself, and he believes that it would be in some sense a debasement of his manhood for him to live his life under the direction of someone else.

This is not to say that this celebrated "Common Man," this "average individual," has made any great success of his independence. The serious magazines are full of accounts of his failures. We have had enough history—nearly two hundred years of it—to accumulate evidence that substantial losses have been sustained by the emancipation of the common man from the guidance of an élite class or group. The crimes of the elite classes of the past need not be ignored in admitting this. Further, several "empirical" élites have emerged to take over the functions of the old "upper classes" and "nobility." We have successful businessmen, industrial leaders, politicians, movie stars, columnists, and a whole range of lesser "authorities"—fortune-tellers, astrologers, and cultists who attempt to set the pace for our "rational society." Of all these, however, it may be said that they operate "competitively." If they have a mandate to rule, it comes from popular and not supernatural sanctions.

Today, the rational, non-traditional society is getting its due of criticism. Even Walter Lippman, who comes very close to being the people's choice as chief Pundit of American Democracy, has written a book about democracy's sickness, calling it *The Public Philosophy.* Naturally enough, he addresses himself chiefly to the political aspects of the situation, and his indictment is severe:

> With exceptions so rare that they are regarded as miracles and freaks of nature, successful democratic politicians are insecure and intimidated men. They advance politically only as they placate, appease, bribe, seduce, bamboozle, or otherwise manage to manipulate the demanding and threatening elements in their constituencies. The decisive consideration is not whether the proposition is good but whether it is popular—not whether it will work well and prove itself but whether the active talking constituents like it immediately. Politicians rationalize this servitude by saying that in a democracy public men are servants of the people.
>
> This devitalization of the governing power is the malady of democratic states.

There is a great deal of sagacious analysis in Lippman's book, and doubtless some wisdom in his proposals. Here, however, we are concerned with what may be called the "human" significance

of what has happened. For it is not only in politics that changes and transitions have occurred.

Along with the weakening and cheapening of politics, there has been a dilution and adulteration, really a perversion, of what is called "culture." In the field of education, Robert M. Hutchins has been the most articulate critic of the general cultural failure; and, unlike some other critics, he has actively engaged in an attempt to build new foundations for rational inquiry and intellectual discipline. Outside the reach of the university and the schools, however, is a vast wilderness which has been labelled "Mass Culture."

Most of the investigations of mass culture are pursued in a coldly clinical mood, as if the millions who live by its standards were not quite human; yet the other extreme, that of sentimentalizing over the vulgar, the coarse, and the merely imitative, on the ground that it is "democratic" to find hidden values in what the masses enjoy, has little to recommend it as a basis for criticism. What seems to have happened, actually, is that the mass forms of "art"—if they can be called art at all—have moved in to fill the vacuum left by the decline of traditionally derived values.

The notion of the "spectacle" seems to afford the closest ancient parallel to the role of the mass arts of today. Unlike art forms which require an element of creative participation for them to be enjoyed at all, the "spectacle" is simply witnessed and felt. The ancient Greeks had several sorts of spectacles. First, there were the sacred Mysteries which, as Aristotle said, were intended to create an elevated *feeling* rather than to instruct. The Mysteries were a part of the Greek religion, and, along with the monuments of Olympus and elsewhere, provided a background of psychic content for the community life. The Greek dramatists offered a kind of transition between the pageantry of the spectacle and the more intellectual expressions that accompanied the age of the Sophists and, finally, Plato's essentially rational basis for culture. The Greek comedies might be said to represent the "mass art" of Athens, requiring much less of the spectators than the tragedies.

In Roman times, the concept of State Religion as the stabilizer of social life emerges in full development. Not belief, but outward conformity is required of the people. Not inner meaning, but the "appearance" or "spectacle" side of religion or culture is regarded as of the greatest importance. The "triumphs" and the "circuses" are other instances of the dominance of "spectacle" or "mass" forms of entertainment joined with rite.

In all these ancient forms of psychic engagement of the masses, however, there is an evident connection between the "show" and the background authority of religion, or of religion and emperor. In modern times, that connection does not exist. The displays are wholly profane, wholly without the *rationale* of being "social controls" or related to acts of loyalty or devotion (the Nazi and Fascist ceremonies of State were recrudescences of ancient spectacles). They are, in short, unsanctified by symbolism; they have in common with the decaying forms of ancient mass art only the gross appeal to the senses.

This parallel was carefully drawn by Milton Klonsky in the *Partisan Review* for April, 1949. Writing of "Hollywood, where the stars like gods and goddesses of a new Olympus merely play at being human," Klonsky says:

> Their [the stars'] love affairs among themselves and, sometimes, with favored mortals outside the movies, recounted years later around every American fireside, bar and soda fountain, are already a part of our national folklore. The stock characters of romantic pulp—and of Western, Detective, Sport and Horror stories as well—are only copies of these larger-than-life originals in Hollywood. There the daydream is given local habitation and a name.
>
> Accordingly, what was at first joined only by a metaphor—the Hollywood constellation and the Pantheon of ancient Greece—now present certain real points of contact. The stars of Hollywood can be conceived as archetypes existing apart from us, in a preternatural dimension of their own, for the images on the screen are ikons rather than photographic

representations of real persons. In this sense, Clark Gable and Lana Turner are merely actors who represent CLARK GABLE and LANA TURNER. These great shadow-gods, entering our lives in all the guises of Zeus—the Swan, the Bull, and the Shower of Gold—and their goddesses with their smooth, lovely faces unlined by any trace of anxiety or intelligence, together living, loving and dying but always rising again on other screens in other films, immortal and grand, what have they in common with our own petty cares and interests and even, for that matter, with the lives of the actors who portray them? The archetypes persist under many transmogrifications even when the actors who originally portrayed them are dead. Their cosmetic masks are forever renewed. Yet the gossip columns and picture magazines where the stars are worshipped, and the press agents who are their priests, all conspire to identify these ideal images with the physical beings of actors and actresses.

Another passage connects these "ideal" images with the psychic life of the people:

> . . . it is the great indistinction of both the mass arts and contemporary life that they reflect one another so closely, feature by feature, it is almost impossible to tell the image from its source. Both collaborate to form a common myth, that vague gray area of the "collective unconscious," where psychoanalysis and sociology overlay one another. The fictive heroes of this myth are the archetypes to which the masses try to conform, and the dies from which they stamp their own behavior. Consider the style of the city gangster, in all his synthetic moods, from the brash hood to the smooth operator; the style of the strong and silent Western cowboy; the style of the country Gable and the hick siren; the style of the Cynical reporter on a metropolitan newspaper; . . . and the characters that kids throughout the U.S. assume when they play at War or Cops and Robbers or Cowboys and Indians—all are derived, to a greater or lesser degree, from the classic types of the movies, pulp fiction and comic strips. . . .
>
> So, then, to recapitulate . . . the base forms of popular culture have an autonomous system of values indifferent to the standards of artistic criticism, and a career separate from that of traditional Western art. . . . all are committed by formula to the appearance of things presented by immediate sensation. And since, by definition, it is impossible for them to evaluate experience by means of form, the glass they hold up to modern life is a mirror that focuses certain aspects sharply but reflects nothing in depth. It is this two-dimensionality that makes them seem closer to artifacts than to art.

Klonsky concludes by pointing out that the "base forms of mass culture are capable of undercutting the most rooted traditions of art and religion in Europe, not by any competition of values—they are aesthetically neutral—but because, on the broadest social level, these traditions are already exhausted." Troubled spirits abroad, among them Malraux, have suggested that a kind of "Freedom Train" of great works of art be routed throughout Prance to restore appreciation of the Renaissance tradition, but this, Klonsky feels, would be more of a funeral procession than a stimulus to creative expression. He ends with these words:

> Of course, works of art of a high order, equal to the best of the past, can still be produced, though increasingly rarefied, professional and aloof. For the tradition begun with the Renaissance is ending. As the advanced arts have surpassed themselves in the refinement of sensibility even to the point of nullity—the blank page of Mallarmé and the empty canvas or Mondrian—so the mass arts have become violently sensational and garish. Following parallel directions, both lead to an equal exhaustion. The humanistic and scientific tradition of the Renaissance, of which American mass culture is the ultimate product, has strained itself over the centuries to lay those eggs slowly hatching under the deserts of New Mexico.

What was the Renaissance tradition, why has it died out, and how or in what sense is American mass culture its "ultimate product"?

It is common to speak of the Renaissance as being the Rediscovery of Man and the liberation of thought from the shackles of Medievalism. Life began to be regarded as good in itself, without recourse to Christian interpretation. Out of this temper arose a great creative period of artistic expression, the study of nature as it appears to the senses, bringing the birth of modern science, and a new view of man, his capacities, his potentialities, his aspirations, and his rights. With the Florentine Revival of Learning, there developed "a new conception of the world and man independent of the Christian medieval world view." As a writer

in the *Encyclopædia of the Social Sciences* puts it:

> The cleavage between this world and the next was obliterated; the other world was in a measure absorbed into the present. Through beauty the higher world was revealed on earth. The transcendent world is now posited in the soul of man, expressing itself in man's ceaseless striving. This striving, it was held, particularly by Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, represents the dignity of man.

The strongly ethical currents of this revolution in thinking joined with the reduction of external religious authority accomplished by the Reformation to release the tremendous revolutionary forces which swept the Western world in the eighteenth century. The return to ancient philosophy for the roots of Humanist thinking eventually brought an end to the organicism and hierarchy of Church and State and placed the Rights of Man on the altar of human endeavor. The independent idealism which had been suppressed for centuries, or closely confined to channels of orthodox belief, now burst into play throughout Western Europe and America. The old religions remained, but they were no longer the center of gravity in human enterprise. Abstract principles of justice, truth, and knowledge took the place of Divine Revelation. The Social Contract superseded the Ten Commandments and the Theocratic dictates deduced from the utterances of Jehovah. Not salvation but the pursuit of happiness became the rule of life.

Then came the Industrial Revolution and the surging determination to make its material fruits available to all. The machine age had hardly begun when the socialists and a little later the Marxists proclaimed the gospel of a classless society without economic privileges for any group. By this time, the old, traditional principle of order, supplied in the past by religion and the sacred persons of kings and princes, had given way to the wielders of naked economic power, and the ugliness of unregulated acquisition was hideous enough without any exaggeration from the radicals and reformers.

The twentieth century saw the final emergence of the modern mass society, so aptly characterized by Ortega in his *Revolt of the Masses,* from which all respect for inner excellences was gone, except in the hollow echoes of traditional religion.

So long as the Industrial Revolution was in process, and a New World being settled, with the methods for its exploitation but crudely developed, the loss of the old source of order and degree was not acutely felt. But now, with a maturing technology, and what appears to be the beginning of a cycle of undreamt-of power from atomic energy, the terrible aimlessness of the rational society which has developed no transcendental scale of values is beginning to frighten not only the members of that society, but the entire world.

Here is a basic explanation of modern authoritarianism, whether fascist or communist, and for neo-orthodoxy in religion. The void which ought to be occupied by an inner sense of order and purpose—the logical development of the dream of the Renaissance—must soon be filled, or the West will slide back into the Middle Ages.

The call to return to a safe and plainly labelled social order is often heard, these days. In *Time* for April 25, a Catholic priest who is dean of the St. Louis University Graduate School, Rev. Robert Henle, is quoted as complaining about scientists who start "philosophizing at the age of 40" without being trained to do so. This is a key issue in relation to the success of a rational society. The *Time* account continues:

> Einstein, for one, has been speculating out loud about the "nature and existence of God," and Father Henle objects "to his making an authoritative statement about an absolute. He has no training to talk about the existence . . . of God." Philosophy Professor Henle also does not expect "scientists to

> have sufficient wisdom to make moral judgments about the use of the atomic bomb. . . ."

This spokesman for a hierarchical order of authority in religion attacks the very basis of the inner excellence of human beings—the capacity and right to make their own judgments in relation to ultimate philosophical and moral questions. At the political level, the distrust of the officials of the Atomic Energy Commission for Robert Oppenheimer's moral concerns about the manufacture of the H-bomb is a parallel instance of denying the prerogatives of individual moral judgment.

The cry for institutional direction comes from many quarters, and McCarthyism is but a particularly virulent instance of the trend. In the *Christian Century* for April 20, a university chaplain makes this plausible appeal:

> American Protestantism is increasingly realizing that Christian teaching must be vigorously and straightforwardly supplemented by the home and the school. This has become an issue of almost fantastic complexity as its urgency is borne in upon us. It is a fact of incredible naivete and sociological stupidity that we try to keep fooling ourselves with the notion that any religious-ecclesiastical position can be maintained in health without some noticeable support from the schools, primary, secondary and higher. We have come thus far with eyes closed only because our culture until recently provided a sympathetic hinterland for Protestantism. This support, this ethos, is disappearing rapidly, and now even the most latitudinarian Protestants are beginning to wake up to the facts. No cause, no government or religion or ism, ever thrives or long endures without a. supporting educational system.

Can the dream, and the values, of the Renaissance be saved? Is the non-authoritarian, rational society to be written down of failure of modern times? Is it *possible* for the mass-man to become a free man instead of a man merely set loose, and soon to be confined again, "for his own good"?

The difficulty with the abstract, general analyses and criticisms of the mass society such as Klonsky's is that they somehow pass the intensely human individual by in their ruthless descriptions of his collective behavior. They neglect the currents of hope and wondering which flow behind his aimless, largely manipulated existence. There is obviously need for some kind of help, some kind of direction by way of example or inspiration, yet of a sort that will not undermine the great advance of the Renaissance and the epoch of Revolution and Liberal Reform.

Actually, the present age seems to be one of great trial for all mankind. The turbulence of its affairs has arisen very largely from what might be termed an evolutionary attempt to give to all men a larger degree of personal responsibility—to allow them to reach some new plateau of individuality. This we may choose to regard as a stage in the natural order of evolution—moral evolution, if you will, as distinguished from the biological evolution with which we are more familiar. It is a time, then, on this view, when a great patience and understanding is called for, in recognition of the great enterprise which is so sadly marked by failures and disasters during its first, almost tentative steps toward a higher state of existence.

# *REVIEW*
## MATTERS OF SURVIVAL

THE Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, whose policyholders are so numerous that the record of their illnesses and deaths is statistically significant of trends in the population of the United States as a whole, issues a monthly *Statistical Bulletin* which highlights the discoveries of Metropolitan actuaries. For example, the March *Bulletin* reports on the "Increasing Chances of Survival" for the present and future generations of Americans. The reduction of infant and child mortality is well known, but it is now established that older people are living longer, too. More people are reaching 65 and the outlook for living beyond 65 has also improved. The young, too, have a bright future of life extension. "If current levels of mortality were to remain unchanged, better than two out of every three men over 20 years of age, and more than four out of every five women at these ages, would survive beyond their 65th birthday." Actually, statisticians expect further gains, which will make the picture brighter still. "These trends in longevity," the *Bulletin* writer soberly observes, "have important social and economic implications for our country."

So has the report (in the same issue of the *Bulletin)* on population growth, which has surprised experts by its rapidity. The United States, it is estimated, "will pass the 200 million mark before 1970 and will exceed 220 million by 1975.

These facts, we gather, are cause for rejoicing. On the hypothesis that a bigger and longer-lived population is a mark of progress for the United States, we suppose they are. Fertility is a sign of vigor, life-extension is a sign of health, and numbers, at least potentially, are a sign of power. The title of the *Bulletin* article, however, "Increasing Chances of Survival," seems negligent of other facts which are not within the province of life insurance actuaries—facts like some of those disclosed by Val Peterson, national Administrator of Civil Defense, in an interview published in *U.S. News & World Report* for April 8. Questioned about the capacity of an air-borne enemy to penetrate American defenses and to drop nuclear bombs on the key cities of the United States, Mr. Peterson replied:

> . . . I know of no responsible person in the military or in the Government who believes that the military will be able to stop the Russians from making a reasonably successful attack on the United States.
>
> In other words, no matter how good our defenses are, a certain number of these airplanes will get through, and if they are willing to expend enough planes and enough bombs, they will get enough through to bring in large measure the devastation that they desire to bring upon this country.

Mr. Peterson is certainly not interested in scaring the American people, and *U.S. News* has already shown its interest in "reassuring" us about the policies of the Government in respect to A- and H-bomb experiments, so that we may assume that this statement is as "optimistic" as possible. In this context, then, pleasant talk about our better chance for survival has about as much point as the road side sign, "Drive Carefully, Save a Life," shown in a war time cartoon, while an endless line of tanks chugged along the highway, past the sign.

We ought not to need "experts" to tell us what atomic war will mean to *all* the participants, but since the experts have not been backward in saying what they think, their views may have some small advantage over expressions of lay opinion. As long ago as January, 1953, S. A. Loftus, Commander, U.S.N., Ret., warned that armament races *always* end in war, and pointed out what may be expected if World War III comes:

> It is important to describe the difference between future wars and past ones. As now planned by our military strategists, modern war is scientifically organized mass *extermination* of the vast majority of the urban population of an enemy nation—men, women, and children. The world had a sample of this type of warfare during the month of August, 1945, when our nation dropped atom bombs on two Japanese cities.
>
> The vitally significant point to consider about future nuclear weapons is the opinion of the most competent and unbiased military strategists that *no* nation will ever win such a war. There will be no Victor! And this is *why.* In case of a Pearl Harbor

> type of attack by 100 or so planes, each carrying a modern H-bomb, at least ten per cent, or ten of them probably would get through the best radar and antiaircraft defenses. Since the exterminative or explosive power of only *one* modern H-bomb is equal to that of *all* the bombs dropped by *all* the nations engaged in the six years of World War II, including the two A-bombs dropped on Japan, only one H-bomb landing within three miles of the center of a large city would destroy it and most of its inhabitants.
>
> It is true that within 12 hours after such an attack, that enemy nation's big cities would be similarly destroyed, but that would be of no comfort to the millions of persons exterminated in our nation, nor would it rebuild the ten or so cities wiped out by that enemy's attack.
>
> One thing is certain: there will never be any profit in the future as in the past wars, financial or otherwise, derived by any person or corporation.

Liddell Hart, Britain's leading military expert, is as forthright in his warning to the British people. Writing of the ease with which H-bombs will reduce attacked nations to chaos, he says (in the London *Times* for Jan. 3 of this year):

> In the case of this country, where the vital targets are closely grouped, it has been estimated that as few as five thermo-nuclear bombs might suffice, and that 10 would almost certainly suffice to blot out all its main centers of industry—comprising half the population. Still fewer would be sufficient to paralyze the vital centers of France, Belgium, and Holland. Moreover, paralysis, and collapse, can be produced by moral effect, even where destruction does not take place.
>
> To prevent such a catastrophe, air defense would have to attain nearly 100 per cent effectiveness of interception at the outset, and that is almost inconceivable. The most optimistic estimate from any authoritative quarter is that "one out of every four Soviet bombers" might be intercepted. In any case there is no means in existence or in prospect of intercepting atomic missiles.

Mr. Hart's point is that while experts are generally agreed on these facts, governments continue to plan for the next war as though the facts did not exist. Vast sums are poured into armaments which will be entirely useless in the event of an atomic war. Further, after an atomic attack, there will be nothing left for conventional forces to "defend":

> The supreme fact of the hydrogen bomb era is that war has become palpably suicidal. . . . The value of armies lies in providing a non-suicidal defence against attack. To arm them with atomic weapons is to destroy the case for maintaining them. In that form they would increase the risks of spreading a local conflict into a universal conflagration without diminishing the fatal prospect.

In the fact of the destructiveness of thermo-nuclear weapons, Liddell Hart sees an opportunity for great reduction of expenditures on armament and an end to draining the economic resources of a nation to prepare for war. There is no preparation worth talking about for atomic war, except preparation to retaliate in kind. He concludes: "A realistic appreciation of the military factors could change the whole economic outlook for the better, while also providing security, by putting first things first."

Increasingly, it seems to us, the logic of war has become, such as it is, the logic of insanity. Already armament races and "preparedness" have become compulsive activities which amount to madness, from any long-term, humane point of view. And even the modern conception of how peace is "made" has little to do with the real elements of friendliness and international harmony. A paragraph from a letter sent to us by a reader sums the matter up:

> A real state of peace will have been attained only when mankind can, without armies at battle, settle those problems that cannot be left as "live and let live" with each going its separate way, by the process of peaceful discussion. The ticket for admission to such a discussion should not be the fact of having killed this or that number of an enemy, or enough to force a surrender by their commanders. That is not the way to a peaceful path for the future. For to assert that the death of one man or 100,000,000 men by our side in war is "not to have died in vain is to admit, as do the communists and fascists, that any means justifies the end they hope ultimately to reach.

# *COMMENTARY*
## HERO AND VICTIM

IT was perhaps typical of Albert Einstein, that while he would submit to no operations during his life, he left his body to be studied by physiologists after he died; and typical, again, of the mystery of human beings, that the surgeon who examined Einstein's brain announced that it was no different from any other brain!

Here was a man who was both hero and victim of his time. Most of us have little hope of grasping Einstein's greatness of mind, but practically all of us have been able to feel his greatness of heart. It would be foolish to try to "explain" this man in familiar terms. If any man was a genius, Albert Einstein was, and he seemed altogether free of the weaknesses we have come to expect of "geniuses." His quest for a unified account of the workings of the physical world had a natural parallel in his lifelong devotion to world peace. His role as a member of the social community was one of outspoken courage; his last public statement, so far as we know, was that made in reply to a question put by the *Reporter,* in which the physicist showed that he valued human freedom far above the pre-eminence he had reached in the practice of science. He said that if he were a young man again, he "would rather choose to be a plumber or a peddler in the hope to find that modest degree of independence still available under the present circumstances."

This is Einstein's way of saying that a society which measures its most distinguished scientists by the yardstick of political bigotry does not deserve to enjoy the services of such men.

Einstein's personal tragedy lay in his connection with the development of the most terrible instrument of physical destruction known to man. As a guest of the United States—a refugee from Nazi Germany—Einstein responded to the appeal of his fellow scientists that he lay before the President the possibilities of the atom bomb. Simply to write that letter to President Roosevelt must have cost him much. One can imagine his feelings after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

For all his devotion to peace, he could not escape being blemished by the nihilism of his time. Yet we shall not remember him for this, but for his revelation of the immeasurable capacities of the human mind, his gentle, friendly way of life, and his personal integrity.

# CHILDREN
## . . . and Ourselves

THE present follow-up on the subject of various types of "reports to parents" in our public schools furthers a practice we should like to see more of our subscribers adopt. The mailing of useful excerpts to this column, in other words, will always be appreciated, as part of a "community sharing" process. Particularly valuable, of course, is material bearing on matters under current discussion.

* * *

I have followed with interest your recent discussions concerning "reports to parents" by the schools and would call your attention to some passages from *Teaching for Better Schools* (Prentice-Hall), by Kimball Wiles (College of Education, University of Florida). Mr. Wiles suggests that any report to parents is a seeking to bring the parents into the evaluative process. "We hope that our reports to parents will enable them to know of their child's progress, give them guidance in assisting the child's education, stimulate them to offer advice, and help them counsel the child concerning his future plans." He continues:

> In recent years, there has been a definite trend away from the use of percentage marks in reporting pupil progress. . . Letter marks such as A, B, C, D, and F are little better in communicating with parents concerning pupil growth, even though most schools use them. *Letter marks tell parents only that their children conformed or did not conform to a set of unknown standards held by a variety of teachers* . . .
>
> Marks indicate class standing. The parents know that a pupil receiving an "A" is at the top of the group being rated. But that's all. It obviously tells them nothing about what progress the child is making, nor does it suggest ways in which they can help in his education. What does the fact that their child is first in his class each month really mean? Only that he is at the head of a group which may be inefficient, lazy, and unintelligent, or brilliant, hard-working, and effective. Or suppose the pupil's standing is always the lowest in the group. Does it necessarily mean that the child is a poor student or lazy? Not at all. He may be a good student who tries hard, but who has been placed in the best group in the school. He may be getting more valuable educational experiences in this group than he could possibly get in any other. Yet his report of standing leaves the impression that he is doing poor work and is unsuccessful in school. Further, marks on class standing promote competitiveness instead of cooperative learning. The comparative-standing method of marking forces each child to use every stratagem at his command in his efforts to excel his friends. He may even resort to cheating when approved procedures fail. An improvement in standing may mean only the development of more effective techniques of cheating.
>
> In the past, reports have often consisted of comparative ratings for work already finished. They have told parents nothing about what they can do to help their child succeed in what he is currently doing. Parents have not been recognized as partners in education. Rather, they have been regarded as stockholders to whom dividend declarations must be sent at regular intervals.

With reference to "competition," Mr. Wiles has the following to say:

> Some teachers justify marking on the basis that our society is competitive and that youngsters should be trained to compete with others in order to become effective participants in our society. Such an argument overlooks all the cooperative aspects of present-day society. Moreover, it is false in the premise that competitiveness provides the best preparation. In schools where success is reported to parents in terms of class standing, the mark becomes the pupils' objective rather than learning or mastering skills and subject matter. Interest in the subject is supplanted by interest in obtaining a high mark. Sad to relate, the result is that pupils become less interested in the whole experience. Youngsters with high intelligence become bored because the highest mark is so easy to obtain. Children in the lowest portion of the class become disinterested because they have no hope of attaining a mark that will be regarded as successful by the school or by their parents. Only those children on the borderline between passing and failure, or those who are striving for honors which they find difficult to attain, can be strongly motivated by comparative marks. Marking on a comparative basis creates emotional tension and it fails to provide motivation for many of the students.

> Comparative marks tend to build an intellectual snobbery based on position without performance. For the students with superior intelligence, the homage they receive—honor roll, membership in honor societies, and class scholarship awards—comes without real effort. It is easy for students living in such an environment to assume that recognition is their due.
>
> But the students aren't the only ones who are deceived. Parents may be misled as well. If their child receives the highest marks in all his classes, they feel that he is showing evidence of superior work. Actually, he may or may not be performing conscientiously. He may have found it possible to lead his classes without difficulty, because of previous learning experiences or greater ability. Other children, meanwhile, find to their sorrow that the system also works in reverse. No matter how many hours of diligent effort they spend, they are never able to take a respectable report to their parents.

Naturally, from the foregoing, you must realize that Mr. Wiles much prefers the parent-teacher conference and the individual ability report card.

* * *

Returning to an aspect of "competition" briefly mentioned last week, it is not, we have come more and more to think, that any form of competition is of itself an evil, but simply that the competitive spirit in regard to the higher accomplishments of man seems singularly out of place. The Hopi Indians traditionally restrict the realm of competition to athletic endeavors—a tradition born of profound insight. (The youngster who discovers he can be bested in physical prowess, by the way, whether Hopi or not, need never feel himself a "failure." There are always those with whom he can enjoy the stimulation of athletic activity, who possess abilities close to his own, just as it is possible for the middle-aged business man to enjoy and benefit from golf, even if totally incapable of winning the National Open.)

The Hopis proclaim a full taboo on competition at the level of what we would probably call tribal "politics," which means, in effect, that the strident sort of politicking for which civilized nations are famous is eliminated entirely. Public service is an obligation and a privilege in the Hopi scheme of values, never a ground for personal pride in the role of leadership he may be called upon to play.

It is easy to see how the better human qualities are debased by competition at the intellectual level by imagining a university wherein each professor strives, as in the business world, to somehow "pass" his colleagues. There are such professors, but they are generally devalued on the campus, and even students are able to realize that the man activated by petty pride should peddle this commodity somewhere else. Is the grading of children really so different a matter? Again, the field under consideration is that of the mind, and there is nothing more basic than recognizing that the mind is not meant for triumphs over or subduing others, but simply for *understanding.* Consider, also, the havoc wrought in any religious or philanthropic endeavor by the entrance of competitive pride and ambition, so that if one purports to be concerned with the development of "character" or the "spiritual" nature of children and men, he should be the first to decry any method which confuses competition with learning.

The fact that such confusion does exist goes all the way back to one of our more undesirable medieval heritages, for during the ages when the quest for truth was stifled and a premium placed upon having the least imagination and the most memory, young men could prove their worth only by careful repetition of authorized shibboleths. Whenever our schools emphasize the acquisition of information and devalue imagination and original thinking, they perpetuate the same low-grade values, and unfortunately, parents who have grown up in this sort of schooling may easily fall into the habit of thinking that their children should have more of the same.

# *FRONTIERS*

## "Autonomy" and Autonomous Groups

THE *Autonomous Groups Bulletin* (see MANAS for Dec. 15, 1954, Children . . . and Ourselves) again focusses attention upon a subject of importance—the role of small groups in "personality development"—in its Summer, 1954 issue. The existence of this "Bulletin" is itself of some significance. Without endowment or substantial backing, the editors simply decided, in a way somewhat similar to the decisions responsible for the first appearance of MANAS, to do what they could to pass worth-while information along to people who might appreciate it. This mimeographed publication, therefore, may be of interest to those who were enthused by Arthur Morgan's community-betterment program, and/or who think with David Riesman that the word "autonomous" is one with which we should become more familiar.

In the Summer, 1954 issue, which is chiefly devoted to reviewing the late Harry Stack Sullivan's ideas on the subject, Maria Rogers, editor and secretary of the Committee on Autonomous Groups, introduces the discussion:

> According to this analysis, it is clear that informal social control conformity to group norms and acceptance of collective goals without coercive force—is created by the incalculable number of small groups that make up society. This is a finding which has recently been confirmed by a number of sociologists, like Homans, Whyte and Loomis, and also by social psychologists. But Sullivan was the pioneer in the strictly psychiatric field.
>
> A point worthy of note is Sullivan's analysis of the relationships between the small group, the individual, and the larger society: In the growing stage, his small groups educate the individual to become a member of post-adolescent and adult groups; as these groups have overlapping memberships, by virtue of his membership in one or several, the individual participates in the web of relationships denominated as "society"; small group membership is direct and immediate, membership in society is indirect and mediated.

We have been saving for some time a copy of an address given by Philip MacDougal over Station KPFA, Berkeley, California, which provides a discussion of the "community spirit" of the early American frontier. MacDougal examines the history of the Hyampom Valley as a means of revealing those elements of "frontier spirit" which have been of such clear value in the past—and are still respected and admired by many, as evidenced, in part, by the wide market for good Western novels. MacDougal's description reads as follows:

> Because it was on the early route to Oregon and near some of the earliest gold-workings of '49, the homesteads and ranches of the Hyampom valley were taken up quite early in the American period of settlement. The Spanish grants did not come up this far, the whole area is very inaccessible and the timber did not then have a high value. The pressures were not great, in short, and enough land was left. A little fertile valley in the hills could be "overlooked" by the general economic flux and the processes making for large holdings, and subsistence ranching supplemented by a little mining was not so impossible as elsewhere. Therefore there is some continuity of the holdings and even of the families from the first days of settlement—a continuity not just with the physical, but also with the old historical frontier, and the peculiar frontier social climate or spirit.
>
> One is almost ashamed to speak of this "frontier spirit," because it has been made into such a terrible nonsense and put through so much pitiless commercial exploitation. Yet it was real, underneath the literary paint and celebration of side-aspects. Behind the gun-play and the horse-play and other rubbish, it *was* there. My great surprise and pleasure was to find traces of it in this little place. Its basis was the voluntary and free formation of small, new, self-supporting communities in conditions of substantial equality—*actual material equality* and not just the juridical kind, even though it only meant that nobody had had a chance to accumulate anything yet. Such communities had the need for mutual aid and certain clearly communal or near-communal social forms. A curious thing to find at the heart of the "American tradition" when you think of it, for we do not need to read Vernon Parrington to know that this celebrated frontier spirit is closely connected with such positive distinct features the American mind or temperament has to show. Mind is the product of its

environment, and the paralleling of features is often surprisingly exact. The obvious peculiarity of frontier society was its explicit impermanence. George Herbert Mead once observed that these men thought of the community as issuing from them rather than they from the community. But one can control one's own creations, and no one thought of the frontier society as an enduring order, everyone willed its disappearance for the sake of growth. In that is reflected the special spiritual posture of America. Unlimited material opportunities to expand in breadth, in quantity, and always we look away into a dream of growth from those values or qualities which are already there and whose depth is perhaps in great need of exploring.

Last but not least in this, to us, interesting collection of material on small community groups are some passages from an article on Mass Politics by Andrea Caffi, who wrote for Dwight Macdonald's *Politics* under the pseudonym "European." Reaching *Politics* too late to appear in its last issue, this article was finally printed by Macdonald at the conclusion of the Cunningham Press edition of his *The Root Is Man.* Caffi deals with basic points touched upon by Macdonald in the *Root*, and gives particular attention to the meaning of "autonomous" ideative federations, stressing the need for keeping groups small:

> As long as today's problems are stated in terms of "mass politics" and "mass organization," it is clear that only States and mass parties can deal with them. But, if the solutions that can be offered by the existing States and parties are acknowledged to be either futile or wicked, or both, then we must look not only for different "solutions" but especially for a different way of stating the problems themselves.
>
> To begin with, it is evident that it doesn't make any sense to worry about "problems" as long as one has the feeling that one cannot "get to the bottom" of anything, and that it is imperative to go on living, to cultivate one's garden, to ingest the daily meal, and to pay one's debts (as George Eliot put it).
>
> There are men and women. As units in a "mass," they submit to uniform rules of housing, eating, and dressing; go to the factory or to the movies; vote for a party or acclaim a Leader. Finally, it is as "masses" that they let themselves be enlisted, drilled, and led to the slaughter for the Fatherland, for democracy, or for civilization. Yet, each one of them has been a child. Each one has made, *by* himself and *for* himself, the discovery of the world and of his own consciousness. Each one, as an adolescent, has experienced "unique" moments of love, friendship, admiration, joy of living or unmotivated sadness. Even in the greyest existences, there are traces of aspiration to a life less debased, to a real communion with one's neighbors. One can hardly imagine a human life without some moments of carefree enjoyment and enthusiasm, or without dreams.
>
> What distinguishes "mass politics" is the fact that it reduces human beings and their occasional spontaneity to the function of undifferentiated and interchangeable particles of energy of which the only thing that matters is how quickly they can be agglomerated into large numbers and "big battalions."
>
> As everybody knows, the Moscow apparatus succeeds in exploiting for the sake of "mass operations" the strongest and noblest qualities of the individual. The consistency, and hence the superior effectiveness, of the Communist leadership stems from the fact that it inculcates in the minds subjected to it the explicit conviction that a man has neither existence nor value outside of the mass, and that any contemptible "free will" must be suppressed in favor of a vigorously disciplined unanimity, which the Communists extol as the supreme, and final, state of the human kind.
>
> If the preceding considerations are at all relevant, we must conclude that the first thing to do, in order to get to the point where "politics of the people" will be more than a phrase, is to begin from the beginning, that is: with the rescue of individuals from the mass that mechanizes and dehumanizes them. We must find again the direct language, the genuine feelings, the clear notions, the limpid images through which we can establish a true communication with the "people."
>
> In order to define the "politics of the people" we should, for example, refuse to stop at the surface of the desire for peace which, in the general and vague form exploited, for example, by Wallace, is a typical mass phenomenon. We should probe deeply into the cluster of feelings, hopes, altruistic or egocentric dispositions which color, and make more or less consistent the "pacifism" of a particular group or individual.
>
> Rather than solidarity, we should promote friendship among the individuals who struggle to

emerge from the "mass." Those friendships should then be strengthened through some constructive enterprise carried out in common. The aim remains the rebirth of true "popular" communities. The humblest aims, from an association for mutual help to a club where people meet to spend time together, can eventually lead to an association whose unwritten norms will actually inspire both the private and the public life of its components. Two conditions are obviously indispensable: the first is that the number of people so associated be limited, so as to permit each individual to get to know *well* all his companions; the second, is that such an association be not made dependent on an authority endowed with means of coërcion.