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IN BEHALF OF JOHN DEWEY

JOHN DEWEY has been charged with many things, from blighting with aimlessness not only the theory but also the practice of education, to lending too willing an ear to the objectives of political revolutionists, with the effect of inclining his followers to view their task as including grandiose projects of social reform. The reaction against this distinguished and devoted man has gone so far as to allow recent publication of a book entitled *The Nihilism of John Dewey,* in which the author is at great pains to show that Dewey, in his philosophical works, makes the easy classification of "values" almost impossible for the reader.

We do not propose, here, any sort of formal defense of John Dewey. This has been effectively accomplished by his disciples and admirers. What we find of interest is his tendency, termed "nihilism" by this critic, to reject all familiar means of deciding what is "good." For in this tendency, it seems to us, is the secret of what may be called the Deweyan revolution.

John Dewey conducted a lifetime war of attrition on cultural hypocrisy. The marks and symbols of traditional morality, he found, when paid the conventional deference that was expected, became permits to ignore the actual moral relationships between human beings. He set out, therefore, to destroy those marks and symbols, the accepted signposts of righteousness. He wrote in *The Quest for Certainty:*

> "Ideals" are thought to be remote and inaccessible of attainment; they are too high and fine to be sullied by realization. They serve vaguely to arouse "inspiration," but they do not evoke and direct strivings for embodiment in actual existence. . . . The ineffectiveness in action of "ideals" is due precisely to the supposition that means and ends are not on exactly the same level with respect to the attention and care they demand. . . . Sentimental attachment and subjective eulogy take the place of action. . . . After a polite and pious deference has been paid to "ideals," men feel free to devote themselves to matters which are more immediate and more pressing. . . . Men hoist the banner of the ideal, and then march in the direction that concrete conditions suggest and reward. . . . To many persons, the idea that the ends professed by morals are impotent save as they are connected with the working machinery of economic life seems like deflowering the purity of moral values and obligations.

Years ago, in a college text on Ethics, written in collaboration with James H. Tufts, Dewey set the problem of morality for this age by saying:

> When social life is stable, when custom rules, the problems of morals have to do with the adjustments which individuals make to the institutions in which they live, rather than with the moral quality of the institutions themselves. Men take their social relations for granted; they are what they are and, in being that, are what they *should* be. If anything is wrong it is due to the failure of individuals to do what social customs tell them to do. Only a few daring persons criticize ancestral habits, and then only guardedly. When social life is in a state of flux, moral issues cease to gather exclusively about personal conformity and deviation. They center in the value of social arrangements, of laws, of inherited traditions that have crystallized into institutions, in changes that are desirable. Institutions lose their quasi-sacredness and are the objects of moral questioning. We now live in such a period.

Clearly, Dewey was one who undertook this sort of "moral questioning," and who concerned himself with developing an approach to ethics which would make such questioning unavoidable. As said in the text, *Ethics:*

> In one sense the change to social morality makes morals more acutely personal than they were when custom ruled. It forces the need of more personal reflection, more personal knowledge and insight, more deliberate and steadfast personal convictions, more resolute personal attitudes in action—more personal in the sense of being more *conscious* in choice and more voluntary in execution. It would

> then be absurd to suppose that "social morals" meant a swallowing up of individuality in an anonymous mass, or an abdication of personal responsibility in decision and action.

Dewey, in short, opposed all "formula" morality and endeavored to show that the element of original reflection and decision is an indispensable ingredient of every moral act.

Morality of this sort naturally resists any sort of codification. In a very real sense it says that the right thing has each moment to be discovered anew, so that, in a treatise on ethics written from this point of view, the good will be defined most elusively, or solely in terms of general ideas.

Dewey's philosophy is a kind of agnostic's *tour de force* in a world without fundamental convictions. He sought to *compel* men to become philosophers, and for reasons of both method and personal conviction, he refused to label items of human behavior for classification as good or evil. Instead, he maintained that "philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers, and becomes a method for dealing with the problems of men."

The reason for Dewey's unpopularity with the followers of traditional morality should be plain enough. He speaks in an entirely different language from theirs. What they call "moral," he condemns as unthinking habit or conformity, what he terms moral they are likely to regard as a dangerous deviation from familiar (and therefore effortless) definitions of righteousness.

The contrast between the two viewpoints is well put by Jane Addams:

> Certain forms of personal righteousness have become to a majority of the community almost automatic. It is as easy for most of us to keep from stealing our dinners as it is to digest them, and there is quite as much voluntary morality involved in one case as in the other. . . . To attain personal morality in an age demanding social morality, to pride one's self upon the results of personal effort when the time demands social adjustment, is utterly to fail to apprehend the situation. . . .

A similar contrast, on a larger scale, is suggested in a recent announcement by the President of the United States. The President told the nation that in behalf of a "safe and sane" Fourth of July, fireworks would be prohibited this year. People all over the country doubtless noted this decision as a progressive step toward the prevention of accidents on the national holiday. But a bitter irony persists through the fact that this same nation is busily preparing "fireworks" of an absolutely incredible order of destruction. Firecrackers and such belong to the "personal morality" of the American people, while atom and H bombs are factors in the "social situation" of the nations of the world, and critical questioning of these matters is regarded with great suspicion.

If anything is to be said in criticism of Dewey's attempt to reform the moral thinking of his time, it is that he taught only the discipline of moral reflection, without allowing for the needs of those for whom that discipline remains a kind of *esoteric* teaching. This has been the greatest problem of teachers and reformers in every age. Jesus spoke in parables to the multitudes; in India, the Vedas and the Institutes of Manu were available to the masses, while the path of the yogi was open to heroic souls who wanted to know the truth at first hand. Sensing this lack, perhaps, Dewey chose the rising "authority" of his time to fall back on—the Scientific Method.

But, as has happened with every religion, every reform, the inner spirit of Dewey's movement often gave way to rulings of its "authority," Science, and Science, as everyone knows, is far from infallible. Current scientific opinion may easily take the place of "custom" in the formulation of a moral code, so that the very substitution of authority for original moral reflection which Dewey warned against has sometimes led to the trivialization of the Deweyan tradition.

However, when all the votes are in, and after the agnosticism of Dewey's time has been balanced by a wiser perception of the nature of the

human situation, we suspect that Dewey will be remembered with nothing but gratitude—gratitude for the primary and irrefutable truth which he represented: *We cannot accept our moral convictions at second hand.*

Despite Dewey's war on "absolutes," here is an absolute which will survive all Dewey's mistakes, whatever they be. And Dewey's critics, however important their objections, will never be the man that Dewey was until they embrace this principle; and when they do, they will cease to be his critics, to become his collaborators.

We have a final quotation, from *Human Nature and Conduct,* which exhibits the spirit of the man:

> Religion has been distorted into a possession—or burden—of a limited part of human nature, of a limited portion of humanity which finds no way to universalize religion except by imposing its own dogmas and ceremonies on others. . . . Religion as a sense of the whole is the most individualized of all things, the most spontaneous, undefinable and varied. For individuality signifies unique connections in the whole... every act may carry within itself a consoling and supporting consciousness of the whole to which it belongs and which in some sense belongs to it. . . . There is a conceit fostered by perversion of religion which assimilates the universe to our personal desires; but there is also a conceit of carrying the load of the universe from which religion liberates us. Within the flickering inconsequential acts of separate selves dwells a sense of the whole which claims and dignifies them. In its presence we put off mortality and live in the universal. The life of the community in which we live and have our being is a fit symbol of this relationship. The acts in which we express our appreciation of the ties which bind us to others are its only rites and ceremonies.

Letter from
INDIA

MADRAS.—Many fear that the territorial reorganisation of India into linguistic states would contribute to the balkanisation of India. For, the present agitation in favour of linguistic units has generated passions and loyalties provincial and separatist.

Historians have stressed the promptness with which centrifugal forces assert themselves in India after the withdrawal of a centralised regime and contemporary observers would now identify these forces. Most Westerners have not understood the oft-repeated concept of the unity of India, which, they feel, never seems to be achievable or maintainable except by force.

This stems from a fundamental confusion between *unity* and *unification.* The unity of India, unlike unification, is non-political and is rooted in sentiment which is more than amorphous.

The geography of India, with its clear-cut mountains and maritime frontiers in the north and the south, has influenced the thought habits of the average Indian to a remarkable degree. He thinks in terms of the Indian landmass from Kashmir to Kanya Kumari (formerly known as Cape Comorin). The expression, "Banaras to Rameswaram," two far-flung places in North and South India, has been in use for centuries. This consciousness was seldom disturbed by India's political vicissitudes to which only secondary importance was given.

The pre-British "imperialisms" of India—Maurya, Gupta, Moghul and Maharatta—were not as far-reaching as the British. The orbits of their civil services—far from being as well-knit as that of the British—extended at best to the metropolis and the chief provincial towns. The structure of village and urban society was based on *panchayats*—small local assemblies of elders—and these democratic pockets functioned undisturbed. The impact of British rule on Indian society was, however, cataclysmic. It was an imposition of Western methods of government characterised by ruthless centralisation, the tendency towards which in India was facilitated by the revolution in transport and communications. The deep penetration of British rule into the popular mind and the consequent solidarity of the nationalist opposition it encountered projected politics for the first time into the consciousness of the essentially non-political Indian.

The centralised democracy which has replaced the centralised British bureaucracy in India is inspired by the political doctrines of the West where religious and linguistic homogeneity renders its working less hazardous. Such homogeneity is conspicuous by its absence in India. The strong regionalism of area, language and sentiment in India must discourage all who would idealise political unity. And yet, if democracy is to be made meaningful in India, there must be a degree of decentralisation to the point where one may fear disintegration.

If homogeneity were to be a requisite for the successful working of democracy, then the case for linguistic states whose territories comprise a population linguistically homogeneous is unassailable. But Gandhi's ideal unit of Indian polity was the village *panchayat*—a much smaller entity than the linguistic state.

The kind of unity that the politician would recommend is based on centralisation of power which in religiously and linguistically heterogeneous India would negate democracy.

At least two writers (J. A. L. Talmon in *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy,* and Lord Percy of Newcastle in *The Heresy of Democracy)* have emphasised the totalitarian character of centralised European democracy, which by its nature is unsuitable to India's composite population. The disproportionate domination of Indian life by politics is a legacy of British rule and it will continue as long as the Central Government, though Indian, towers as a Colossus and militates against true regional democracy.

Community life in India will be democratic only with a multiplicity of regional units and there is a steady relegation of politics to secondary importance. The non-political pre-British "India of mind and heart" (to quote Mr. Nehru) must permeate Indian consciousness.

The dangers of "disintegration" of India are more apparent than real. At present no Indian state challenges the authority of the Central Government. They are unlikely to do it in the future. The economic unification of India has been very thorough and more beneficial than the steamrollered political unification; and political secession by a State would amount to dismantling. It will not be attempted as long as the authority wielded by the Central Government is by consent and is democratically delegated.

C. V. G.

REVIEW
UNUSUAL PERSPECTIVES IN NOVELS

NEVIL SHUTE is one of the surprising writers of our time, though the surprises he occasions are of a rather unique character. This writer does not depend upon dramatic situations for the success he has with his readers. Just what he does depend upon is not easy to determine, but the contrast between the emotional battering one receives at the hands of most authors and the gentle insinuation of interest provoked by Shute is plain enough. Perhaps he has set himself to prove that overdoses of action, contrived humor, and stark tragedy are not needed to tell a story well, or perhaps—and there is considerable evidence for this—he is simply a natural philosopher who is stimulating on all subjects because of the way he approaches them.

In any case, our reading of *The Breaking Wave* (titled *Requiem for a Wren* in England) duplicated previous experiences with the same author. After completing the book, and enjoying it thoroughly, the initial impression was that, while we had been provided a pleasant and instructive way of spending time, no outstanding points or quotations had emerged. Subsequently, however, it occurred to us that Shute managed to isolate one psychological aspect of modern warfare that has received very little attention. What he tells us—and this is a rather shocking thought, if not shockingly expressed—is that a great number of very nice people *liked* their roles in World War II. They liked them because a sure sense of purpose was provided during the war years—because adventure and excitement, if not present with every moment, were at least always in prospect. Their youth, the most impressionable time of their lives, was spent in the war situation, and, ever afterward, many found the vividness of its experiences something they did not wish to forget, and would not have missed for the world.

The story of *Breaking Wave* revolves around a professor's daughter who joins the Navy. As a Wren she drifts into ordnance work and displays remarkable instinct for handling guns. When a German plane flies unaccountably low over an armed boat in which she is traveling, she is asked to man one of the guns, and she shoots the plane down. Subsequent discovery, however, leads to the speculation that this particular plane carried a full complement of Axis flight sergeants, who may have been deserting Hitler, intending to surrender to the British. An official reprimand for "unauthorized action" then becomes the least of the worries of "Leading Wren Prentice." She feels keenly her moral responsibility in causing the death of those who may have been the enemies of Hitler and friends to England. Shortly thereafter her fiancé is killed, then, her father. She finds her life psychologically shattered by these three events, all a part of the structure of war. At the same time, though a girl of sensitivity and ingenuity, she is nevertheless entirely engrossed in the war experience and, when her psychological state argues for release from the Service, finds herself without any call to interesting or constructive endeavor. Finally, years afterward, she commits suicide. The brother of her fiancé, having looked for her ever since the series of tragic occurrences, muses in this way after discovering her—too late:

> I moved slowly down the stairs, and as I went I wondered a little at the decency of my home, after all that I had read during the night. Even into this quiet place the war had reached like the tentacle of an octopus and had touched this girl and brought about her death. Like some infernal monster, still venomous in death, a war can go on killing people for a long time after it's all over.

Earlier in the book, the same man, during his search for his brother's fiancée, comes to know one of Janet Prentice's closest acquaintances, a girl who had served with her during the war years. Again, attention is turned to the complicated impact of the war experience upon the emotions of those who had participated:

> She sat silent for a moment, and then she said, "Until we're dead, we Service people, the world will always be in danger of another war. We had too good

a time in the last one. We'll none of us come out into the open and admit it. It might be better for us if we did. What we do is to put our votes in favour of re-armament and getting tough with Russia, and hope for the best."

I stared at her. "Is that what you really think?"

She nodded. "You know it as well as I do, if you're honest with yourself. For our generation, the war years were the best time of our lives, not because they were war years but because we were young. The best years of our lives happened to be war years. Everyone looks back at the time when they were in their early twenties with nostalgia, but when we look back we only see the war. We had a fine time then, and so we think that if a third war came we'd have those happy, carefree years all over again. I don't suppose we would—some of us might.

"When you and I are dead, and all the rest of us who served in the last war, in all the countries," she said, "there'll be a chance of world peace. Not till then."

"Get a nice hydrogen bomb dropping down upon Earl's Court tonight," I said. "That'll get rid of a good many of us."

She smiled. "Maybe that's the answer. But honestly, war's always been too pleasant for the people in it. For most young people it's been more attractive as a job than civil life. The vast majority of us never got killed or wounded; we just had a very stimulating and interesting time. If atom bombs can make life thoroughly unpleasant for the people in the Services, in all the countries, then maybe we shall have a chance of peace. If not, we'll have to wait till something else crops up that will."

"Actually, in the last war, people in the Services in England had a better time than the ones who stayed at home working in the factories," I said.

"Of course they did," she replied. "That's the trouble. You'll never get rid of wars while you go on like that."

Perhaps Mr. Shute puts the case too strongly, but here he seems to offer some important food for thought. However much one may deplore the suffering caused by war, it has been for many the one time in their lives wherein every experience good and bad alike is lived to the utmost. If this be so, to point it out is not to argue that every generation needs a war, but only to suggest that human beings crave crucial situations, need tests for their capacities and their endurance. Since most people live lives of mere routine, the impact of the war years is tremendous.

Another illustration of the war's lingering psychological saturation is provided when Janet Prentice's friend explains her preoccupation with the painting of naval craft—four years after the cessation of hostilities:

The easel stood beneath a skylight in the roof which gave it a north light, probably why she lived in that flat. The canvas was a fairly large one, perhaps twenty-four by twenty. It showed a brightly camouflaged motor torpedo boat ploughing through a rough sea at reduced speed, under a lowering sky with a break at the horizon giving a gleaming, horizontal light. The curved bow of the vessel was lifted dripping from the water in a trough showing a fair length of her keel; there was vigour in the painting and life in the pitch and heel of the boat, and in the gleaming, silvery light.

I glanced around the room, taking in the other pictures. Most of them seemed to have to do with naval matters, studies of ships and landing craft, and one or two portraits of naval officers. One recent painting showed white painted yachts moored in a harbour; this was principally a study of water reflections.

"Are most of your things naval?" I asked.

"Most of them," she said. "I'm beginning to get it out of my system now." She worked on in silence for a time, and then she said, "It seemed so much the normal way of life after the war that one didn't do anything about it. And then one day I woke up—we all woke up—and had to realize that it had all been quite unusual; it would never come again. Not for us, not in our lifetime. We should be too old, or married out of it. And then I felt I had to work and work and put it all down on canvas, everything I'd seen, before I forgot what it was like." She worked on in silence, and then she said, "It's very hard to realize that it will never come again. To realize we've had it."

"I know," I said. "I think we all feel that."

We might add all this up by saying that wars present a definite challenge to all that is best in men and women, as well as an opportunity for the worst. But this is *organized* opportunity,

produced by situations which *come to* people. The only solution would seem to be the intensification of *individual* life so that intensity of challenge is encountered by each one in the discovery and molding of his own world. Certainly, when one tries to be an individual—as David Riesman and Allen Valentine have recently reminded us—the way is difficult enough. But if a person lives merely by routine, he will find more excitement, more of a feeling of "living up to the hilt," in crisis situations—whether of war, flood, fire or famine. Just what this tells us about ourselves is difficult to say, but that it tells us something is hardly to be doubted.

* * *

Honorable mention under the heading of "Unusual Perspectives" goes to *The Night of the Hunter* by Davis Grubb. This tale, correctly called "part idyll, part nightmare," lets the reader feel something of the unknown terrors of childhood—which occasionally accompany the bright magic of most hours. Some of Grubb's passages, such as the following, are memorable:

> Rachel reflected about children. One would think the world might be ashamed to name such a day for one of them and then go on the same old way: children running the lanes, lost sheep crying in the wind while the shepherd drank and feasted in the tavern with never an ear to heed their small lament. Lord save little children! Because with every child ever born of woman's womb there is a time of running through a shadowed place, an alley with no doors. . . . With every child—rich or poor—however favored, however warm and safe the nursery, there is this time of echoing and vast aloneness, when there is no one to come nor to hear. For even when the older ones love and care and are troubled for the small ones there is little they can do as they look into the grave and stricken eyes that are windows to this affrighted nursery province beyond all succor, all comforting. To Rachel the most dreadful and moving thing of all was the humbling grace with which these small ones accept their lot. Lord save little children! They abide. The wind blows and the rain is cold. Yet, they abide.
>
> And in the shadow of a branch beneath the moon a child sees a tiger and the old ones say: There is no tiger! Go to sleep! And when they sleep it is a tiger's sleep and a tiger's night and a tiger's breathing at the midnight pane. Lord save little children! For each of them has his dark river of fear and tonguelessness and never-a-door. Each one is mute and alone because there is no word for a child's fear and no ear to heed it if there were a word and no one to understand it if it heard. Lord save little children! They abide and they endure.

COMMENTARY
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

SINCE John Dewey, the subject of this week's leading article, is sometimes accused of being a source of "subversive" ideas—as in the Reece Committee Report on Foundations, where he is charged with spreading "a new and revolutionary philosophy"—there should be value in isolating this question for special consideration.

Actually, John Dewey was the proclaimed and inveterate enemy of what is really wrong with communism. Dewey urged the deliberate and undoctrinaire inspection of the probable consequences of all proposed actions on other human beings. This was his "revolutionary" idea, and, as a passage in the quotation from the text, *Ethics,* suggests, it is "absurd to suppose that 'social morals' means a swallowing up of individuality in an anonymous mass, or an abdication of personal responsibility in decision and action."

The communist program involves precisely this effect. Communist morality is "State Morality" (see Frontiers) carried to an absolute extreme, requiring the blind allegiance of the individual to the State's drive for power, until individuality is indeed "swallowed up" in an anonymous mass of compliant subjects.

Dewey was never a blind adherent of any social program or point of view. When Soviet Russia charged Leon Trotsky with being the leader of a counter-revolutionary plot, Dewey, no longer a young man, went to Mexico as a member of the commission to sift the evidence. This interest in exposing the totalitarian leanings of the Soviet Union was consistent with his life and his principles. Needless to say, he found the charges against Trotsky unproved.

The real meaning of the political complaint against Dewey is that his critics sense that his demand for a vital social morality based upon continuous questioning of assumptions and examination of consequences would prove an unsettling influence. Dewey objected to the testing of actions by simple reference to slogans and rituals. He wanted to know how those actions would affect *people.* This is very different from claiming to have an infallible system of social justice.

Those who attack John Dewey on political grounds are usually persons who refuse to distinguish between the insistent asking of questions and insistence on dogmatic answers. What they do not seem to realize is that only dogmatists regard serious questions with suspicion. Men like Dewey, therefore, are among a democracy's best defenders against communism, for they represent the principle of opposition to every type of authoritarian politics.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

THIS seems to be a season for letters from readers—a welcome development, for we have always hoped to encourage discussion.

The present communication neatly catches us out in some unqualified generalizations attributed to Socrates. We console ourselves, however, with the thought that Socrates has been embarrassed many times before by poetic license taken by his chief biographer—Plato! Our reader writes:

> Sir: Your "Children" article in MANAS for May 18, while engagingly interesting, and perhaps "provocative"—as you so often say of the writings of others—seems to leave out of account certain undeniable realities.
>
> You speak of the "intelligent young" and the very old as being those who show the most interest in maintaining the Socratic" point of view. This may sometimes be the case but I would have you consider certain other facts. Entire books, for one thing, have been written to show that the rigidities of mind which come with age tend to confine and frustrate the activities of younger men who wish to institute constructive changes. This is the verdict of the gerontologists—who practice the new science of geriatrics, concerned, among other things, with the psychological effects of ageing in the human organism. Should not one so wise as Socrates is reputed to have been be made to take account of these rather noticeable phenomena?
>
> Second, another of your "heroes," Dr. Robert Hutchins has devoted much of his life to arguing that youths unguided by their elders in choosing the subjects and emphasis of their education are likely to grow up without even a nodding acquaintance with the Eternal Verities. There may be the "intelligent young, but they are not very much in evidence these days. On the contrary, observers point out that the young men of our time are disappointingly preoccupied with finding "safe" niches in the existing system, such as it is.
>
> Mind you, I am not uncompromisingly against the bright optimism of Socrates, so far as the old and the young are concerned; I think, with you, that he has authentic insights in this respect; but there are other, more mournful aspects to be considered.

We did not, however, suggest that all the "very young" and the "very old" are natural philosophers, simply by courtesy of their years. It can hardly be denied that the very young and the very old often *are* extremely intolerant. But, on the other hand, the young and the old are blessedly unoccupied with *management* of human affairs. Standing on the sidelines, not yet or no longer enjoying authoritative status, they are at least free to follow their natural inclinations of opinion, wherever these may lead. And this feeling of freedom the philosopher must have. So long as he is concerned with any accepted standard of values or way of doing things—because of its bearing on his own public reputation—he is clearly handicapped.

Our correspondent incorrectly quotes Socrates as suggesting that the young and the old "show the most interest in *maintaining* the Socratic point of view." The very young and the very old are not, fortunately, interested in "maintaining" anything; this, of itself, can encourage philosophizing. The Socratic viewpoint cannot be "maintained," for it is the essence of free thought, free investigation. We *maintain* institutions, conclusions, and mores, but the Socratic position cannot be secured by any orthodox means. It exists when the mind has free flight, and our suggestion was that, in cultures chiefly concerned with the pursuit of practical ends—the ordering of the State and the amassing of wealth—the free flight of the mind is exceedingly difficult, especially for those directly occupied with such matters.

Western civilization has done very poorly by its old people, chiefly because it has not recognized the great potential value of the opinions and counsel from those no longer embroiled in practical affairs. We let the old ones "live" a very long time, it is true, but those who become octogenarians and older are generally regarded as handicaps to family and community. In other cultures, especially the Oriental, an entirely different kind of relationship has

prevailed. The querulousness and the dogmatism of old age which we now observe is not a necessary outcome of advancing years; instead, we think, these qualities are reflexes of a conditioning which proclaims that "doing" things is more important than trying to understand them.

In China, as has been made known through the writings of many interested Westerners, including Pearl Buck, the "ancient ones" were not only accorded respect by the entire family, but were also encouraged to give their best in counsel, because of that respect. Grandparents, in China, were habitually regarded as better qualified for educating children than mothers and fathers, and family education was arranged with this in mind. Whether or no there is a correlation between this practice and the remarkable sense of idealism and responsibility which the youth of China still embody is hard to say, but a possible connection suggests itself.

Robert Payne, in *Forever China,* a diary of the war years, speaks of the startling contrast between youth in the West and in the Orient. After being impressed, along with many others, by the dissipated, enervated lives of spoiled Western youth, Payne remarked the Chinese students' "impression of terrible responsibility and a perfect acceptance of that responsibility." He continues with a description of stray children who had little or no connection with the "New China"—indicating that this sense of responsibility derives more from inborn psychological characteristics than political conditioning. Payne found communities of orphans, remnants of the war years, who nevertheless demonstrated the capacity both to care for themselves and to care for those among them who were ill or comparatively helpless. After observing these youngsters who lived without benefit of direct adult guidance, Payne wrote:

> There is so much goodness in these waifs of Chungking that I begin to believe again, as I used to believe many years ago, that it would be better if the world were given over to children, and anyone reaching the age of twelve should be painlessly executed. To watch the children of Chungking is an education in expediency and beauty. They live with terrible intensity; at night they lie in small heaps in doorways or underneath the great piles of timber near the river, and yet they do not live for themselves but for each other. And that curious mixture of maturity and childishness in their faces is so beautiful that it sometimes becomes unbearable. At night, in the shadows, sleeping in the cold mist, shivering in their brilliantly coloured rags, they dream of the sun.

Perhaps we can summarize with the following suggestion—that while the young can hardly be spoken of as mature philosophers, they do possess, or are apt to possess, one necessary prerequisite—freedom from entrenched self-interest in a system of ideas or behavior. The fact that middle-aged persons are not philosophers stems, in our opinion, largely from the fact that philosophy receives short shrift in our culture. But since Western culture, and American culture especially, is based upon a disproportionate worship of all things "youthful" (but not childlike) those who have passed the zenith of physical life easily come to believe that they have passed all living. In reality, they have only resigned *one* kind of interest, from which they should simply graduate.

In any case, we are happy for all those who are able to have something to do with free philosophizing, even if only when they are "intelligently young" or "very old"—and if they live conventional lives, these two periods may be their only opportunities. As implied by the comment on Robert Hutchins, in the world of scholarship and teaching the situation is somewhat different. There we often find, and this certainly is natural, the finest flowering of the mind taking place during the middle years.

FRONTIERS

Trial and Error

A READER who was much impressed by the television drama, *The Rack,* presented last month on the U.S. Steel hour, writes about the problem set by this play, which deals with the trial of a released POW who is charged with collaborating with the enemy while in a prisoner of war camp. This reader says:

> The theme [of *The Rack*] was extremely thought-provoking and brilliantly handled. There was such relentless honesty and intelligence brought to consideration of the case in support of both the prosecution and the defense, that, predisposed as I was to be sympathetic to the individual dilemma involved, I found myself, at the play's end, intellectually and, to a certain extent, morally, in sympathy with the government's position. For anachronistic as it may seem, the government's preoccupation with the practical consequences involved in a dismissal of the charges against the prisoner, led it into the position of upholding not only strict standards of discipline, but a strict morality, in the face of adversity and suffering.
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> The premise upon which the prosecutor based his plea for a conviction was that, if the prisoner was judged innocent, then his colleagues and all the POW's who had withstood the same trials and persecutions without capitulating, must be judged stupid to have suffered for nothing; that it would wreck the morale not only of the army, but of the country, to establish the precedent that a man need suffer only just so much for his principles, and beyond that is justified in abandoning them. Subsequently, a priest summed it up by stating that the soldier was guilty of failing to sustain his morality in the face of an alien morality, but that we were all guilty in being part of a world in which prison camps existed.
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> Intellectually and morally, this added up and made sense. But something was missing. Here was a case where either justice or compassion must prevail, with no half-measures. I could not help feeling that the soldier had found himself in a situation not of his own making, regardless of all the talk about collective guilt; a situation for which he had not been prepared. And in spite of the fact that he came of a military family with all the traditions inherent in such a background, doubt and confusion could conceivably sprout in his mind, as well as in the minds of others.
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> For several hours I was literally on the "rack," and thankful that I was not a member of a jury whose duty it would be to pass judgment on such a boy, and yet tortured by the need to resolve this problem in my own mind. Then it occurred to me that the ends of justice and compassion could be served if, instead of singling out those men who had failed to meet the test, the government would single out for special honors those who had withstood it. There may be many causes for a man's defection, none of them dishonorable nor of his making, and to stigmatize him with a court martial and imprisonment on top of the punishment he has already suffered from the enemy and from his own conscience is not only unjust, but calculated to reduce him to the state of a jackal with almost no hope of rehabilitation. By honoring men whose fortitude and strength of spirit enabled them to withstand the rigors of prison camps without losing their integrity, the government would provide a standard toward which men would aspire, rather than a condition in which fear would dominate—and I think it is safe to say that it is men's aspirations, rather than their fears, that have created whatever is good in this world. It would put government in the business of being human as well as efficient.

This play, apparently, presents a genuine dilemma, and while the solution offered by our reader is a partial one—since it would afford help only to those who are responsive to a standard of excellence set by the government—within the circle of assumptions where the action is laid, no other solution seems possible.

But suppose, as we may, that we find the dilemma intolerable: in this case it is necessary to break out of the circle of assumptions and ask certain questions. For example, our correspondent speaks of the government which feels obliged to punish this man as having been led into "the position of upholding not only strict standards of discipline, but a strict morality, in the face of adversity and suffering." Ought we, actually, to call the demand for heroism placed upon this soldier a matter of "strict morality"?

The sanctions of morality are generally admitted to be inner sanctions, deriving from conscience and the human perception of right and wrong. The

region of human affairs controlled by the State or the Government—a secular government, at any rate—is somewhat differently defined. The State is concerned only with those acts which affect the order and security of the nation. If a man lies in behalf of his State, he is not punished; he may even be admired. The State concerns itself with "morality" only when, by coincidence, the traditional notions of righteousness happen to have parallel application with the needs and necessities of the State. The State itself is not above extensive acts of deception, in the form of what is called "propaganda," for the purpose of gaining support from other countries or for strengthening "morale" in its own population.

In fact, the whole question of whether a State ought to be regarded as a Moral Entity is before the world at the present time. The State is the bearer of a powerful symbolism which is easily turned into justification of actions which would otherwise be abhorred—as for example the incineration of civilian populations of large cities by atomic bombings. If the State is a moral entity, then it is accountable to impartial ethical judgment for what it does; but if the State is not a moral entity, then it has no right to claim authority over the moral decisions of the people—even when, as sometimes happens, those decisions may run counter to the policies and interests of the State.

There are three broad views of the State to choose from: The anarchist view, the totalitarian view, and the Socratic view. The anarchist view is that the State is an unmitigated evil—that centralized governmental power tends to elevate public authority into an end in itself instead of an instrument for the public good. Anarchism denies that there can be any morality in government, regarding it as solely a restraining or exploiting power.

The totalitarian view absorbs the values of individual life into the symbolic value of the State. The individual is nothing, except as he serves the State, which is Everything. As a faithful servant of the State, he may regain an element of his being, but only so long as that service continues.

The Socratic view is contained in the *Apology* and the *Crito,* two books in which Plato argues, first, for freedom, second, for order. The individual, Plato maintains, must preserve his moral freedom, whatever the cost; but he must suffer the consequences of defying the State whenever his freedom seems to demand such action. Plato implies that a State peopled by good men—men like Socrates—will create a government which good men will never feel it necessary to defy; but since such a State does not yet exist, men of principle will have to suffer for their principles and bear their pains with fortitude.

The Socratic view, it seems to us, approximates what might be called the "democratic" view of government.

But if we are to make this discussion reach some sort of conclusion, it will be necessary to pursue further the "summing up" offered by the priest in *The Rack.* The soldier, the priest said, "was guilty of failing to sustain his morality in the face of an alien morality," adding, however, that "we were all guilty in being part of a world in which prison camps existed."

What is an "alien morality"? Is it a genuine morality, founded on universal ethical principles, or is it a system of expedient requirements established by a rival State to guarantee *its* survival? Now we may argue that *our* morality (our "State" morality) is the true morality, and the alien morality is a false one, representative of wickedness and destruction. In these terms, then, either our morality is absolutely good and that of our enemy absolutely evil, or, which seems more likely, we judge that in our system there is a preponderance of good—more good, at least, than in the enemy system. But do we dare announce this opinion?

Here we come to the critical distinction between State morality and individual morality. When we judge the acts of men, we try to understand them—to determine what measure of misguided good lies behind the mistaken acts. But when we, as corporately organized into States, judge enemy nations, we take no account of their relative righteousness, their relative but insufficient good. When you have to kill people in war, you do not discuss even their minor virtues. You set out to

purge the world of their evil presence. In fact, if you do not approach war in this mood, you will have very little company on your side and will probably suffer a terrible defeat.

State morality, in short, is monolithic morality. It chooses its objectives, determines the policies calculated to gain them, then defines as moral what serves those policies and brands as immoral whatever stands in their way.

An alien morality, then, is a system of belief and behavior which, as moral men, we *hope* is evil enough to justify our effort to destroy the people who support it. For if it is not, then *we* are wrong, and *we* are aliens to the general ethical principles from which all morality is derived.

But since we cannot be sure of these things, we tend to argue that we are probably right, but anyway our survival is at stake, and if we do not survive, who will be left to establish righteousness in the world after the war is over?

It is this association of sheer survival with righteousness and morality which confuses the "moral" issues in all such questions. Even to permit in theory the separation of the means to survival from the means to morality would be to deny, in principle, the sovereignty of States and to question the use of military force.

What, then, of our common responsibility for a world in which prison camps exist?

Prison camps are necessary adjuncts of war. If they are evidence of guilt, then war is still greater evidence. It is certainly suitable to say that we are "all" guilty of causing modern wars, since no nation will confess to responsibility for war save the nations who suffer defeat, and they admit it only to protect their populations from severe punishment. An effort was made at Nuremberg to eliminate the scapegoat of the "nation" and "national security" from the equation of responsibility for war. There it was decided that no man can plead the excuse of "obeying orders" for actions which are adjudged criminal.

This, obviously, is a denial of the principle of national sovereignty. If a German ought to refuse to obey a superior officer when his moral sense tells him what he is ordered to do is wrong, then the nationals of all other countries have the same moral responsibility. And if they all have the same moral responsibility, then they all have the obligation to question the morality of what they are told to do. The government, in short—*no* government—is an infallible moral authority.

But to question one's government in time of crisis is to unsettle the minds of other people. National unity is imperilled by searching inquiries into the national morality. And a weakening of national unity amounts to a weakening of the national capacity to survive. Who threatens survival but subversive persons and enemies of the State?

And that is the end of the line. So it is just to say that we are all guilty, for we all, as we fail to question, fail to debate, fail, on some occasions to resist, contribute to the delusion that the State can do no wrong, that the State is capable of defining "Morality," that survival is more important than genuine righteousness.

The priest's half-truth is not enough. *Mea culpa* is only a confession of sin; it is not the determination to sin no more.