

THE THEORY OF CASTE-A CRITICISM

A CRITIC who feels considerably let down by "The Theory of Caste" (MANAS, June 29) fires both barrels in an attempt to show that this article is compounded of folly, ignorance, and probably some wickedness, too. Following is a filtered version of some of our correspondent's comments and statements of fact:

Why do you have to go crazy in the head as you did in your "Theory of Caste"? A recent subscriber, I have been reading your issues with not a little pleasure; and then you go nuts, like that! I'll bet a dollar to a doughnut that you are inundated with protest mail; and I cannot forbear to add my contribution. Argumentation is futile. It is simply a fact, as indeed your article half admits, that your theses are contrary to the underlying commonsense on which our culture operates. If you don't believe it, just keep up the Caste business and observe the results on your subscription list!

To the purpose of my letter, however, which is to confront you with some facts. The Hindu caste society is not very old, as caste societies go. The Hindu invasion of the Punjab, in 1500-1200 B.C., was the kind of thing that had been going on for thousands of years, and which continued to go on for over a thousand years more. The so-called "fall" of the Roman Empire (Western), and of the Eastern or Byzantine some thousand years later, were instances. The Hindus and Chinese are parvenus in the history of civilization. The Hamitic and Sumerian peoples started it and set the pattern as a caste division of labor. Naturally, each version of caste society feels that it is unique.

We interrupt the flow of this communication for a minor correction—concerning the idea that "the Hamitic and Sumerian peoples started it." This is at least an open question. The researches of Sir John Marshall at Mohenjo Daro and Harappa in the Indus Valley disclosed a number of similarities between the Indus Valley civilization and that of ancient Sumeria, with the evidence tending to show that, of the two, the Indus Valley culture is the older. Anyhow, the evidence is worth looking at in the books of John Marshall,

and, if memory serves correctly, in *Asia* for March, 1932. Our correspondent continues:

None of this, however, is likely to make sense to you, because you are spiritually pious about these things. My big point, therefore, is this: How could you fail to take account of the Buddhist *protest* against the caste system—or that which I call "traditionally civilized culture"? . . . so fanatically magical was the Hindu caste culture that it eventually ejected Buddhism altogether from the metropolitan operation of South Asiatic civilization, leaving it to the colonial fringes where something remained of barbarian flair for egalitarian values and meanings... I simply call your attention to the fact that the assumption (in your article) of a cosmic validity and inevitability for this asinine caste system is at variance with Buddha. . . .

The trouble with Asiatic and Levantine spirituality is that it is so damned primitive and moth

eaten. The West is something *new*. The foundations of that newness have been laid for the past few centuries. All I am saying is that it is now time to hoist the conscious superstructure. And you confounded *traditional* intellectuals stand around and say (if anything), "Wha? Huh?". . . But a self-sufficiency is involved. Buddha certainly had itBy the way, do you imagine that twenty, ten, or even five years from now such books as Lippmann or Niebuhr write could be read without a yawn? The old bones of traditionally civilized culture ever clothe themselves with new fashions.

First, the "big point." It may be that despite the many discussions of Buddha's thought and influence in these pages, we have omitted to take note of the fact that Buddhists are without caste. It certainly should have been mentioned, somewhere. As for Buddha's "protest" against the caste system, a passage from S. Radhakrishnan's *Indian Philosophy* (I, 437-9) should be of considerable interest:

There is a good deal of misconception about Buddha's attitude to caste. He does not oppose the institution, but adopts the Upanishad standpoint. The Brahmin or the leader of society is not so much a

Brahmin by birth as by character. In the time of Buddha the caste system was in a confused condition, where the distinctions were based upon birth rather than on qualities. "The Brahmin who has removed all sinfulness, who is free from haughtiness, from impurity, self-restrained, an accomplished master of knowledge, who has fulfilled the duties of holiness, such a Brahmin justly calls himself a Brahmin." "He that gives way to anger and feels hatred, a wicked man, a hypocrite, he that embraces wrong views, and is deceitful, such a one is an outcast, and he that has no compassion for living things." "Not by birth is one an outcast; by deeds is one a Brahmin, by deeds is one an outcast."

It is true, as Radhakrishnan points out, that the practical effect of the admission to the Buddhist *Sangha* of all castes was to undermine the caste system, but he also notes that, according to Brahmanical theory, the highest status is that of the *Sannyasi*, who is above all caste. He adds:

We cannot say that Buddha abolished caste, for the religion of Buddha is an aristocratic one. It is full of subtleties that only the learned could understand, and Buddha always has in view the Samanas and the Brahmanas. . . . Buddha was not a social reformer. He felt most intensively that suffering was bound up with selfishness, and he preached a moral and mental discipline designed to root out the conceit of self. . . . In the world of thought both Upanishads and Buddhism protested against rigours of caste. Both allowed the highest spiritual dignity to the poor and the humble, but neither rooted out the Vedic institutions and practices, though on this point Buddha was a little more successful than Brahminism. But the passion for social reform was practically unknown to even the best minds of those times. Democracy is a modern motive of social reform.

This may sound like an effort to imply that the caste system was and is a fine thing, since Buddha left it alone. We have no such purpose. The caste *system* undoubtedly became a mechanism of oppression and as such it had to go. Our article in the June 29 issue was concerned with the problem of human differences and the idea that it may be possible to show from experience that broad, lifetime motivations tend to fall into general categories, and that those categories reveal a measure of correspondence to

those in the *theory* of caste. We did not recommend reviving any sort of caste "system" integrated with political recognition. We said, instead:

Manifestly, the plan would not work at all, for the sole condition under which human excellence can really rise to the top of the social pyramid is that the best leaders shall have no desire for power, the best philosophers no longing for authority." . . . whatever the future holds, we shall probably be very lucky to get along without any revival of formal castes or classifications of men according to natural tendencies.

What, then, is the point of writing about the subject at all? Doing so certainly won't gain us any popularity, as our critic vigorously assures us, while accusing us of being "*traditional intellectuals*" and defenders of the static orthodoxies of "*traditional civilized culture*." What seems to bother our reader—and it bothers us, too—is that "*traditionally civilized culture*" almost invariably works out a system of repression which, at the outset, is in the interest of "*order*," but which, in the course of years or centuries, becomes the means for entrenching privilege, frustrating constructive change, and keeping people "*in their place*." Yet after this is admitted, have we the right to turn our backs on the *ideas* which have been turned to such ignominious purposes? This was the question raised by our article.

Why didn't Buddha make a head-on attack on the caste system? Instead, he proposed a way of life by means of which the labels of caste, except as descriptions of *dharma*, would become irrelevant. For argument's sake, let us assume that the Buddha had no more liking for the abuses of caste than our correspondent; and assume, further, that his ends included an ideal society in which formal caste would not exist, but only voluntarily accepted duties. It is just possible that he believed that so long as *people* are susceptible to the motives which bring castes into being—whether formal, as in ancient theocracies, or empirical, as in the *élites* of modern "*revolutionary*" societies—the castes would continue to exist. So, instead of

attacking them, he used the notions connected with caste for educational purposes, just as the Upanishadic writers had done before him. The Brahmin is the classical type of distinction in Hindu tradition. Buddha used it. The entire last chapter of the *Dhammapada* is addressed to the question of what it means to be a Brahmin.

Our correspondent says that "The West is something *new*." Well, what's new about the West? Technology? Democracy? A surging, restless, fearless spirit? We can agree on this. The absence of "traditionally civilized culture"? Perhaps we come closest to the truth here. Western culture may be the only culture which has been sufficiently self-conscious and self-sustaining to survive the loss of the regulatory forces which control traditional societies. This, we think, is what Walt Whitman may have been celebrating in *Democratic Vistas*.

It also seems true, as our correspondent implies, that the representatives of existing "traditionally civilized cultures" eagerly point to every flaw, every break-down, every neurotic symptom in the modern, non-traditional society, claiming that all these things are happening to us because we are "Godless," because we have turned our faces away from divine revelation and are stubbornly trying to be rational in our decisions. A large part of the "revival of religion" in our time is a response to such appeals.

Here, we think, is one good reason for a re-examination of the principles of traditional societies of the past. If we don't have any real understanding of them, and if we succumb to anxiety and huddle into the majestic havens of old religious and "traditional" methods of gaining security, we shall have thrown away the very genius of Western civilization. Our look at the theory of caste, therefore, was both a search and a precaution—a search for the philosophy of which the caste system was a mechanical perversion, and a precaution lest we, in desperation, take the form for the substance.

Our difference with our correspondent is now very plain. He is convinced that there is no substance to be found in the scheme behind these ancient systems. We think there may be and are willing to look at them in what is supposed to be an impartial spirit.

It is conceivable, for example, that the idea of caste might be useful in supplying categories for personal self-analysis. There is certainly nothing wrong with conceiving the world as a field for the exercise of the motives represented by the four castes and reflecting on the relationships between human motives and the varying functions involved. And it is as certainly a fact that most men are in some measure the captives of the motives so defined.

As for the matter of "cosmic validity," it seems fair enough to say that the expression is itself a red herring. Any claim, or even suggestion of the possibility, of "cosmic validity" is sure to earn the contempt of a modern pragmatist. But we shall persist in raising questions of cosmic validity because we think that such inquiries have meaning. We refuse to let a thousand years of intolerable religious dogma prevent us from speculating on matters which religious dogmas have unfortunately made unpopular.

So, we propose the possibility that a graduation of human motives may be *natural* in human evolution, and that the experience of statesmen, educators, psychologists and philosophical religious teachers is not without a measure of confirmation of this idea. We do not argue that the theory of caste is "the" solution to the mystery or problem of human differences, but we do say that issues of reform, the possible "rate" of progress, the resistance to change and to new ideas, are matters concerning which we have very little knowledge from the rational point of view. Yet, ever since the eighteenth century, we have made sweeping assumptions which disregard the fact of our ignorance of these matters. It is barely possible that ancient teachers and reformers understood them better than we do.

REVIEW

SOUTH AFRICAN SCENE

THROUGH MALAN'S AFRICA (Doubleday, 1954) by Robert St. John is a difficult book to review. While it is interesting and easy reading, the contents are so filled with factual accounts of injustice that rising indignation becomes a routine response. It would be simple enough—too simple—to transfer the emotions of this reaction to a few paragraphs of review, but the haunting question of what can be done about South Africa would be unanswered. And although this question will doubtless remain unanswered no matter what sort of review gets written, there may be value in attempting to understand a situation which creates unanswerable questions.

The author, Robert St. John, is an American journalist who graduated to writing excellent travel books a few years ago. His *The Silent People Speak*, product of a stay in Yugoslavia in 1946, was reviewed in MANAS for May 19, 1948. The present volume is a sprightly report of a visit to the Union of South Africa about three years ago, made up mostly of recitals of personal experience, to which are added sufficient statistics and background for a general picture. Mr. St. John spent some time with each ethnic group in South Africa and attempts—with some success—to write without prejudice.

The Union of South Africa is populated by well over twelve million people, including about eight and a half million Africans, two and a half million whites, a million colored people (persons of mixed heredity), a third of a million Indians, and sixty-three thousand Malays. A little over half the white population is of Dutch origin, with the rest predominantly British.

Economic and political power is firmly in the hands of the white population and is now maintained by what seem to the Western, liberal world incredibly ruthless and brutal methods, animated by arrogance and fear. The tensions which have resulted have made South Africa a

constant source of sensational news, and also, interestingly enough, of a succession of unusual novels dealing with the conflict and tragedy of the human beings who are caught between forces which are almost impossible to understand.

There are several approaches to this great and complex problem. The most obvious is the historical approach. The Boer-dominated Nationalist government and the supporters of its policies maintain that the original Dutch settlers arrived in South Africa at about the same time that the Africans began moving southward to displace the Hottentots and the Bushmen, so that it ought not to be argued (on the basis of Africa for Africans) that the Natives were "there first." To this, Mr. St. John says:

The truth is that the African continent has always belonged to the dark-skinned races. The South African Natives left their place of origin in Central Africa about a thousand years ago and started moving south. They were in northern and eastern parts of what is now South Africa hundreds of years before the whites.

Probably of greater importance, historically, is what may be called the "religious" approach. The religion of the Afrikaner section of the South African population is Calvinist, administered by the Dutch Reformed Church. While there is no official connection between the Government and the Dutch Reformed Church, the views and policies of the Nationalist Party are almost indistinguishable from the claims of the religious institution which has shaped the attitudes and energized the motives of at least half the white population. This group, Mr. St. John reports, "has supplied every Prime Minister the country has ever had, a vast majority of her Cabinet members, 70 to 80 per cent of the members of Parliament, many of her judges, and nearly all her policemen." It raised Dr. Malan to power, and supports his successor, J. G. Strydom.

This form of Calvinism, like all others, teaches that man is born depraved and has strenuous need of salvation. It holds that its

members are "the Chosen People, with a special destiny decided in advance by God." Further:

The Church Commission for Combating Social Evils recently called on predikants [ministers] to preach against the theory of evolution.

At its 1952 synod the church condemned Freemasonry, equality of the sexes, and the United Nations' Declaration on Human Rights because it "defies the pattern of inequality which God created."

These are some of the views which, armed with political power and an energetic police force, determine the pattern of social and economic relations in South Africa.

There are certain parallels between the treatment accorded to the American Indians by the people of the United States and the policies followed in respect to the Africans by the white settlers in South Africa. The American Indians—those who survived the Indian wars—were put on reservations, allowing, Mr. St. John informs us, "160 acres of reservation for each man, woman, and child of them." The South African whites set apart areas called "Native reserves" for the Africans. The land, of course, was not the best. No African can leave his reserve without a pass, and, with a few unimportant exceptions, no African can own land anywhere except on a reserve. If he is caught without a pass, or the right *kind* of a pass (the pass laws are so complicated even attorneys have trouble keeping up with this legislation), he will be given a jail sentence. Forever after he must admit, when questioned, to having a "criminal record."

But after the Africans had been restricted to reserves, a sudden need for cheap labor arose. Gold had been discovered in South Africa. Now the problem was to persuade the Africans to desert their poor land, on which they lived, however, with relative freedom. Cecil Rhodes, the "empire builder," is credited with proposing the "hut tax" on Africans, to be collected in cash from people who had none.

In time, the tribes were decimated as the need for money drove the men to work in the mines.

Others went to work on white men's farms. There was, however, an element of "good fortune" in this turn of events, for the reserves could not possibly accommodate the present African population:

... if all eight and a half million Africans in the country were living on the reserves today, as some people are constantly insisting they should be, there would be only about three acres per African, compared to the 160 for each American Indian.

It may be possible, in some parts of the world, if the land is rich enough and flat enough and well enough irrigated, for three acres per man to sustain human life, but not in the South African Native reserves. Not when much of the three acres is mountains too steep for any cow to climb, and *congas* [eroded ravines].

Today, only about three million Africans live on the reserves, which are nevertheless, St. John says, "crowded beyond their endurance to support the load."

Meanwhile, besides the men who labor in the mines, hundreds of thousands of Africans are housed ("housed" is hardly the word) in slums from a few to twenty miles away from the "white" cities where they are employed. The conditions in these areas beggar description. They are seedbeds of crime and degradation such as Alan Paton portrays in *Cry, the Beloved Country*.

Robert St. John reports a conversation he had with a young African, Augustine Maquina, who had the good luck to have a job as a driver of the automobiles operated by an Anglican mission in the hills of Pondoland. Augustine has three children, and the most he has ever made is \$6.62 a week. At present he makes less:

The mission pays him \$17.87 a month. Despite the extra children and the fact that she now has to feed her husband too, Mrs. Maquina still does it on the \$13.75. After taxes, Augustine has \$38.50 per year left for clothing for five people, tobacco and cigarettes, medicine, schooling for the children, and miscellaneous items.

There is practically no income from farming, for they have only four beasts and six sheep, hardly enough to count.

"I am thirty-five years old. I am a Christian African. I've had some education. I want to give my children more education than I had. I like to smoke cigarettes. I like many things I learned from you people. I'd like to become more 'civilized' than I am, but how can I?"

"I would like to own several books and read them. I would like to have a machine so I could listen to music. I would like to be able to get a pretty dress for my wife. But don't you see what you people have done to us?"

"You take the bandages off our eyes and make us see a life which we never knew existed. You tell us that is the way we should live—like you do. You make us take off our blankets. You tell us we should wear shoes. But then you fix it so that it is impossible for us to do any of those things."

"How can I educate my children on the money I get? How can I buy good cattle? How can I even dress in clothes like you do? Sometimes I think I shall have to go back to the blanket!"

"I can't go to Johannesburg, where the good jobs are, because I promised my father when he was dying that I would never go there again."

"I can't work any harder than I do, because the law says I should work only eight or nine hours a day, but I work sometimes—well, I started at six this morning and now what time is it by your watch?"

I told him it was nearly seven.

"There you are! It will be eight by the time I get home. Then I must have supper. Then I have work to do at home. Then I must get up at five o'clock in the morning. How much harder can a man be expected to work?"

"So what I want to know is, how would you feel if you were a detribalized African, as they like to call us?"

Augustine is of course one of the more comfortably situated Africans. He is not an exceptional man, probably there are millions like him who live in limbo, between two worlds, unable to go forward, unable to go back.

After some effort, Mr. St. John was able to meet a group of African intellectuals in Johannesburg. Some have finished high school, others have university degrees, and some are professionals. After great hesitation, they talked

freely with him. The fundamental fact he discovered is that the men of this group, most of them between twenty and forty, no longer trust white people. They are surfeited with the sentiment of do-gooders, care little for missionaries, "are weary of being done *to* and *for*." St. John summarizes their views:

They believe that the only salvation of the Africans is in their own hands. That it lies in developing their strength. They question whether there exists in South Africa any group of whites with more than a casual interest in their ultimate fate. They trust neither Russian Communists nor American missionaries nor British trade-union leaders.

One reason they have so little use for liberals is that they know that reaction is in the saddle in at least several of the most important world capitals, as well as in their own. But, they argue, reactionaries, being realists, are always impressed with strength and often will come to terms with power, whoever holds it. Therefore, they are bent on developing their own people into an articulate, well-organized majority which will not dissipate itself in idle and premature gestures. There is one word these young Africans never use and do not like to hear white people use. "Tolerance" to them means the willingness to put up with something inferior, and they do not consider themselves inferior.

If white people wish to meet them on an equal level, it is up to the white people to make the effort. . .

This is the attitude of mature, well-informed Africans. Against it is set the opposition of the Africaner Nationalist Party, determined to rule in the name of "civilization" and legalized white supremacy. *Apartheid*, the South African version of segregation, supplies the slogan of the Nationalists, who piously claim that it will be good for Africans as well as whites. *Apartheid*, it seems clear, is the rhetorical and practical weapon of a self-righteous but flexible tyranny of race. The ideologists of the Nationalist and Dutch Reformed Church viewpoint talk about absolute separation—separate living, separate politics, separate economies. The fact of the matter is that the economy of South Africa, as presently

organized, would collapse without the labor-force of the Africans. Then there is the dependence of the whites upon African servants. There are 603,000 African domestic servants employed by white families in South Africa, and if you add the Colored and Indian servants, there are nearly a million, making a total of about two servants for every white family in the Union! Learned *predikants* may talk of white labor to take the place of the Africans, but this hope seems no more than ignorant nonsense. But fundamentally, the multicolored population of South Africa is welded into economic unity by the industrial development of the country, and by the practical needs and interests of all the races.

Meanwhile, the Nationalists are fighting bitterly to entrench their power and to reduce the few remaining rights of the non-European races—Africans, Colored people, and Indians and other Asians—to a virtual zero. Under the Suppression of Communism Act, for example, the Government has the power to list as communists persons who make almost any sort of criticism of the Nationalist policies and to apply to them the penalties of the act. One Afrikaner declared in an official hearing that he was sure Abraham Lincoln had been a Communist!

Fortunately, Mr. St. John includes in his report an account of conversations with some of the Nationalists. They are, apparently, people who have been driven by the reproaches of a large part of the rest of the world to such extremes of self-justification that a retreat from the position they have adopted seems psychologically impossible. To ask a Nationalist to abandon *Apartheid* or to contemplate living in economic and political equality with native Africans would be like inviting a fanatical fundamentalist to become an atheist, so deeply allied have grown the political and social beliefs of these people. St. John calls them eighteenth-century men living in the twentieth century, and this seems accurate enough. One way to get perspective on their attitude is to imagine oneself a guest in a

nationalist home and to hear repeated the feelings and justifications that have been echoed among them for generations. They do not really understand the mutilations their beliefs have wrought in the lives of others because they have never felt in any way identified with them.

How will it end? Every book on South Africa tells the story of extraordinary individuals who work night and day to undo a little of the wrongs committed by the white peoples against those of another color. *Through Malan's Africa* is no exception. There are heroes—a very few—from every segment of the South African population who stand as tokens, but only tokens, of the common humanity of all the races. But whether the awakening of the Nationalists from their dark Calvinist dream will come in time—before the militance of the slowly strengthening Africans reaches the breaking-point—no one can tell. It is not the business of any white person to tell the Africans to be "patient." No white man in the world has any ground for preaching or moralizing at the people of Africa, telling them to bear their wrongs for another generation or so. Perhaps the presence of Manilal Gandhi, Mahatma Gandhi's son, in South Africa, will help to stay the tide of violence, as has already occurred in the nonviolent resistance practiced by some of the Africans against unjust Nationalist laws. Perhaps the maturity of the African leaders will enable them to control the bursting emotions of their people. But whatever happens, the white races of the world will probably have reason to be grateful that it is not far worse.

COMMENTARY

THE FEAR OF DECISION

THIS is a week for meeting objections. A subscriber finds oversimplification in our editorial in the June 29 issue, which suggested that there is a "polarity which divides the people who want to think for themselves from those who anxiously seek the opinions of others in all important decisions." Our reader feels that "many men are in both categories." Further:

Aren't most people's actions, attitudes and decisions a result of their basic ideas, consciously formulated or not, plus their sometimes irrational reaction to some personal experience, plus some occasional sudden reversal of their customary course of thought? For instance, a man might be all in favor of the particular concepts of law and order he has been brought up to consider necessary until an experience of personal injustice or glaring injustice to another jolts him out of his complacency. This "awakening" need not be fundamentally far-reaching, or at all rational. Still, it opens the door to a crack, and this is enough to put him in both categories at once.

We are not clear on how these observations affect the question of whether a man has a natural inclination to think for himself, or tries to rely on others in making an important personal decision. We think that the polarity we spoke of is real, and that it operates according to whether or not the individual fears the responsibility of choice—a fairly basic trait in human character.

Some people flee from difficult decisions, and anxiously solicit the advice of others, hoping to obtain the security which comes from obeying authority. A man who has the capacity for obedience, but feels weak and rudderless when obliged to choose between alternatives, is the opposite of one who feels subdivided in his individuality when prevented from thinking a difficult problem through to a decision. While the latter may take counsel and be helped by it, he is unable to agree to a course of action until he has *convinced himself* that it is the thing to do.

Even if the two tendencies, as our reader suggests, are present in us all, the fear of choice is an easily identifiable emotion and it is nothing like the stable element of maturity which works on a problem until it is solved, in part or altogether. That is why we spoke of the difference as a *polarity*, although distinct classes of men may result from its operation. Riesman, we might recall, became famous for his classification of people in various "directed" groups, to distinguish them from the very rare "autonomous" men.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

NOTES IN PASSING

JUST as they passed on the street—it was early in the morning and the destination was school—the thirteen-year-old girl asked the six-year-old boy, "Do you believe everything people tell you?" "Yes," he said, deliberate in his emphasis.

This boy may turn out to be a wise man. Perhaps the chances of his doing so are considerably better than the chances of most boys. He is aware of his ignorance—not fearfully or grudgingly aware, but dispassionately aware, and that, we have been told by Socrates, is the first requisite for the philosopher.

Yet we also have encountered the historic saying attributed to Peter Abelard—showing how men defended their right to reason for themselves in the twelfth century: "It is through doubt that we come to investigation," he said, "and through investigation that we come to truth." But this useful and constructive doubt of which Abelard spoke really relates to institutions. When a child hears the opinion of an institution, as for instance in early religious indoctrination, it does not really occur to him either to doubt or to believe. He is being asked to recite certain words, repeat descriptions of various mental images representative of "the faith." But he has no equipment with which to turn these images into *his own* faith, and they have little to do with what he "believes." Conditioning is not belief, for belief is a personal matter and conditioning is simply conditioning—a fact we have long wished staunch creedal adherents would give some indication of realizing.

But a boy, until he learns to mistrust the motives of others—and what a shame that he usually needs to learn this very soon—will believe that all utterances directed to him are sincere. This is very close to being the only sort of belief of which he is capable, and it merits respect, just

as his "believing" shows his respect for others. Almost *all others*. A man we call "crazy" is often not crazy to the child, because the child in those instances wherein sympathetic rapport exists, sees through that other's eyes, hears with his ears. Therefore it is that children are able to learn from many odd characters whom we pass by with smug superiority, missing, with our own childhood so far away, the realization that the genius and the psychoneurotic may, at certain moments and in respect to certain special things, be indistinguishable.

Above all, what we like about the boy who "believes everything he is told" is that his ears are open, fully open, to everything he hears. Ideas and opinions are not yet ranged against one another, and his championship of a group of them proclaimed. Someday, of course, he will have to begin to view all that he is told in relation to that which he inwardly *knows* to be true. But he will not, even then, be taking sides; he will simply be being himself. Until such time, too much suspicion, too many negative prejudices—against either ideas or persons—will narrow down his horizons, make it difficult for him to give a new thought full rein. Therefore the six-year-old may have been instinctively wise beyond his years, trusting because it is his proper role to be trusting.

On the other hand, such reflections remind us how great is the responsibility which the presence of every child places upon our own shoulders. Believe, they will. They are helpless, if only temporarily, and thus deserve something better than prejudiced opinions. These we can reserve for our peers. In fact, do not even the most crabbed of men often speak from a better and higher selfhood when they pass words with the very young? Since children have nothing to give them expect trust in their sincerity, little is gained by distortion.

It was once thought that children "told lies" because, simply because, all mortals were afflicted with the propensity toward "sin." The young had to learn the penalties for flouting God's laws

before they could be expected to have honor. But, and this is fortunate indeed, wise observers who were unaffected by theological pessimism came upon the truth—that the "lies" of our children are often simply the dreams of perfection, results of the wish to become more than they presently are. A child's untruths reveal his wish to be accepted as the sort of person he would grow to be—and could become, if given the right encouragement and help when needed. Children do not defend ordained positions, do not innately hunger for the sort of status their parents crave, until they begin to imitate that attitude. But the reflection of elders' claims to worthiness does affect them, makes them wish to be accepted by older people in established terms, after which they may proceed to the further task of discovering themselves. This is the real reason, we think, why a child will "believe everything he is told." It is not because he is unintelligent, but because he is intelligent enough to realize that he must understand the ways and ideas of people who have been here longer, before he is able to create his own true domain of faith.

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The Blackboard Jungle is, as the MANAS reviewer noted, a long way from being a great book, but it is a book about an important subject, and also has its moments of inspiration. The motion picture version, significantly, we fear, thoroughly mangled the brightest moment of a tormented teacher's struggles to touch the imagination of wayward pupils: that time when, by stroke of fortuitous circumstance combining with the young instructor's literary background, a well-read allegory made momentary philosophers out of Dead-end Kids.

Perhaps some readers thought this sequence in the novel a bit incredible, that the author's imagination, rather than that of the "imaginary" pupils, came strongly into play. Perhaps the motion picture producers reasoned similarly, or, even more likely, reasoned that movie audiences never want anything "over their heads." In any

case, the Heywood Broun fairy tale with a message—"The Fifty-first Dragon"—was exchanged for an animated cartoon, depicting a fairy tale without a message: Jack and the Beanstalk—everybody's heard that one, even if it doesn't mean anything.

So a whole assemblage of generalizations are invited on the subject of the time-honored habit, in motion pictures, of writing down and talking down to audiences. Ranting and raving about one such example, or a dozen, will not, of course, do anyone much good, but an occasion for noting is still an occasion for noting. One practical suggestion to readers who have seen the picture is to leaf through Evan Hunter's original novel on the next convenient trip to the library, find and read the heart-warming incident which was to us both the most credible and most instructive treatment of the entire novel.

The best evidence we have yet seen to support the argument that many, many people want more than easy-to-read pabulum comes from the pocket-book publishers. As before noted in MANAS, the sale of classics such as *The Iliad* and serious works such as James Conant's *Understanding Science*, in areas supposedly populated by "non-readers," has been surprising. As a result, publishers who conceived paper-backs of this nature simply as prestige items, never calculating on a profit, began to turn a truly mercenary eye upon further possibilities. Perhaps good "long-hair" films would also sell themselves in time. A better educated movie-going public would join, we think, in resisting the emasculation applied to the allegory scene of *Blackboard Jungle*.

FRONTIERS

Immortality Again—without Apologies

SINCE it is likely that most MANAS readers answer more readily to the name agnostic than to any label or creed, no wonder we receive occasional criticisms from people who hate to see us "wasting time" on such speculative matters as the question of human immortality. Our best answer is that, until recently, practically no one was attempting honest speculation in this direction. After all, the religious devotee does not regard his beliefs as "speculation," but rather as knowing, through revelation and faith. The agnostic usually declines to speculate, himself, because he feels that this is really what the religionists are doing. So they are. But there is an enormous difference between speculating in fair philosophical fashion and calling one's guesswork and blind faith "knowledge." So, until people have actually tried *free* philosophizing for a while on the subject of immortality, how can it possibly be determined that the quest of "pure reason" is fruitless? Finally, since MANAS readers—and this often seems to go along with honest agnosticism—like to defend minority opinions, or at least probe them for value, here is another neglected minority opinion. To talk about the possibility of immortality in terms of logic and philosophy is *not* to talk religion, and there is little doubt that only a minority attempts it.

One of the things about enthusiastic membership in minorities, however, is that one sometimes becomes a bit factional without knowing it. The mere fact that most modern scholars and philosophers have decried the possibility of immortality is no true reason for defending its likelihood, nor for automatically approving the few who do on philosophic grounds. This is, after all, just about the silliest of all subjects to become factional about, for factionalism spoils analysis, and close analysis is, we suspect, what the topic of immortality most needs.

A leisurely reading of the new Cunningham Press edition of Buddha's *Dhammapada* suggests a lot on the subject by indirection. Buddha, it appears, refused to argue the question of immortality. He did concern himself, however with the *kind* of immortality that might be philosophically possible. Reading between the lines, even in this preeminently ethical treatise, one gains the impression that Buddha took one sort of

immortality for granted, and saw no point in arguing about it. Those who listened to his words, and who similarly took the credible sort of immortality for granted, knew what he was talking about without need of any explanation. But in other of Buddha's scriptures he did go to some pains to disallow belief in *personal* immortality. For this reason, among others, he was not too popular among the orthodox of his time. "All compounds are perishable," said Buddha, and proceeded to show that the personality of man is in every sense but another compound. But he also taught The Law—Karma, which means the continuation of the nature of every action and thus every form of intelligence. Was this a contradiction? Is the essence of the man—which corresponds to "the nature of the act"—continuous? That is the question.

Buddha apparently thought that the question could be better understood after determining by reason what it is about man that is plainly *not* immortal. The vanities of the mere person, he instructed, are changing all the time, and any particular construct among them is but a compound. Do not our desires change, our ideas and opinions? Yet of these the personality of man largely consists. So, when death arrives, when the body is no longer able to hold together these complicated and often warring impulses, what can we expect but that the whole will separate into its original elements? What vanity, then, to think that a moment's vision of the phantasmagoria would persist for all eternity.

Here we meet with the instinctive suspicions that rightfully hard-headed philosophers have always felt when somebody announces a doctrine about the heaven of an after-world—in Christian terms, a heaven wherein the bundle of psychic and mental impressions we call the person lives on, blessed with an undying integrity it never managed to achieve during life on earth. So Buddha anticipated the skeptics—the Western skeptics—and agreed with them beforehand. Until this knotty problem of vain personality was settled, why bother to wonder if some other sort of immortality might be true? Further, he, the Buddha, had proclaimed definitely that if any sort of immortality were true, those who repeated his words would assuredly fill in the description of what it was that lived beyond death according to their own liking. Thus, when his disciples came to him in anguish, pleading with him to tell them surely whether man lives

after death, he replied "No comment." Apparently Gotama wasn't especially eager to make people "happy," to give them that false sense of security men gain when someone of apparent spiritual stature tells them what they want to hear. He wanted to help people to think for themselves, which is quite different.

So, many have believed in immortality because they wanted to believe it for purely personal reasons, because, during whatever years had passed, they had never been able to come to terms with life, and therefore desired unnatural external assurance that they amounted to something after all. There is something craven about this approach, and Buddha probably sensed it, just as have so many in the West who have been annoyed by the mixture of wish-fulfillment with the problems of philosophy—which are, after all, not problems in how a man can make the cosmos fit his imaginings, but only problems in what the truth *actually* is, even if it destroy all imaginings of man and all personal wishes.

But to argue against false assumptions is not to argue against the question itself. This has been aptly pointed out by Professor C. J. Ducasse, in his *Philosophical Scrutiny of Religion*, lately reviewed in MANAS. Ducasse admits that the phenomena of spiritualism evidence that *something* survives beyond the dissolution of the physical frame, but he points out that what remains can only be considered as still *living* if it shows promise of further growth with each passing moment. During life, the personality is not all, for the personality always changes. *Something*, during life, evidences growth through change, yet does not itself change essentially. The "spirits" contacted by mediums are evidence, but evidence of what? Simply that some portion of that complex entity which held the body together still remains with some measure of coherence. And what does this mean? It may mean two things, one rather surely, and the other, problematically. The first is that portions of vivid memory, stored in some form of substance still resisting the big-chemists, outlast the destruction of the physical man. And why should this be such a weird hypothesis? Parts of the body go on "living" after death, when motion in other portions has ceased. Why not the same with an inner sheath of man, his memories and mind impressions? But there may be even more than this. What of a more subtle inner self, whose presence is usually symbolized by the word "soul"—

now coming back into usage among unusual psychotherapists like Erich Fromm? Part of man, in other words, lives shortly, part lives for a greater time but still must die into dust—this seems to be the law of life, which sees the tree fall, the wood finally disintegrate—while its seeds continue. The second meaning may lie in the seeds.

What are they? What is the seed of man? Is there, as some have felt, an individuality as well as a personality, a something which can express itself through personalities, but never fully and finally in any one of them? Is the seed of man the mind, that dispassionate portion of mind able to separate truth from personal bias, even able to follow the lead of philosophical assumptions inimical to prevailing personality? It may be. In any case, that is what we believe Buddha either suspected or knew. And because he knew also that the whole question of immortality is infinitely complicated, not simple at all, he left a path across the no-man's land separating the believers from the skeptics. Of course, there are the "Buddhists," fine people, but people who have made a religion of what Gotama said, in a way not altogether, we think, to his liking. But Buddha did not think for the religionists any more than he thought for the doubters of years so far away. He was devoted to reason, to psychology, and to research.

So his platform is a good one. We adopt it, not because it is his but because it is good. This we think we know. Or cannot a man know anything, until it has been agreed upon by everyone else? In any case, we suspect that the many realignments between men of religion and men of science will increase the number of those who incline to this "middle way"—not "middle" because of compromise, but "middle" because of the effort for just balance between opposing personal views and preferences.