VOLUME VII, NO. 27
JULY 7, 1954

FAITH IN UNCOERCED MAN

AS the months go by, it becomes increasingly plain that world peace, so far as the West is concerned, and what the West can do in behalf of peace, depend very largely on Western leaders—and peoples—becoming willing to put into practice the faith in Man that the democratic tradition proclaims. The assumption of all successful self-government is that, given freedom, men will choose to continue to be free and will devise for themselves a government that perpetuates their freedom in institutional terms. The founders of the American Republic made that assumption and then, with the help of the people, devised that sort of government. The Constitution of the United States and the freedom under it practiced by Americans eventually became a sort of ninth wonder of the world.

The rest of the world is now in the process of catching up. Writing in *World* for June, 1954, Chester Bowles, former U.S. Ambassador to India, quotes from General George Marshall in respect to Asia:

> General George Marshall gave us an overall key to Asian policy in 1947 when on his return from Asia he told an audience in Honolulu that he no longer had any doubt "that we are in the middle of a world revolution—and I don't mean communism" It was instead a revolution "of the little people all over the world" who were beginning "to learn what they are missing." "The Communists," General Marshall said, "are like your surf riders here in Hawaii; they're just moving in on the crest of the wave."

Americans fear that, enjoying preferred position on the crest of the wave, the communists may "take over" permanently, with disastrous results not only for Asia but for the West as well. Yet, all around, the evidence is that one thing that the Asians still "on the fence" will not tolerate is more "protection" than they ask for against Communism. This amounts to saying, in effect, that the best way to make communists out of Asians is to send troops and money and munitions to fight the communists in Asia. Many Asians want no part of communism, but even more they want the privilege of rejecting it for themselves, without any officious or paternal interference from the United States. This makes it tough on the Americans, who are afraid that the Asians won't decide to do what is best for them, and for Americans, incidentally. But it begins to appear that there really isn't much choice in the matter.

Some Americans have been puzzled as to why the Indians have been so troubled by the plan of the United States to give military aid to Pakistan. Surprisingly enough, the Indians would have nothing at all against *economic* aid to Pakistan. Such economic aid as we have given to Pakistan pleased the Indians very much, according to George V. Allen, present U.S. Ambassador to India (see U.S. *News and World Report* for June 11). What India doesn't like for Pakistan, and what India won't accept for herself, is *military* aid. India's policy involves a determination to be self-reliant, to refuse any gift or assistance which would undermine Indian independence. Other independent Asian nations feel the same way. As Mr. Bowles remarks:

> If Point Four in India had been in any way tied into a military program, let alone subordinated to the military, it would have been turned down flat. In Indonesia, this is exactly what happened: a friendly Indonesian government agreed to accept aid under the Mutual Security Program with a clause vaguely implying support to the West in the cold war. The popular uproar which promptly followed brought about the fall of that government and it took months of patient negotiation to make a fresh start.

The interesting thing, here, is that India will pay hard cash to *buy* arms from the United States; probably Indonesia would do or is doing the same; but neither country will accept the tools of war in exchange for a commitment on policy. They don't want any strings tied to their acquisitions from the United States. (They will have "no entangling alliances," as a man named George Washington once declared in respect to another young country.)

Should this be discouraging? We don't think so. We think it means that the Indians and the Indonesians are very much like the Americans. They want to make up their own minds about international affairs, without any "Big Brother" to help them. This seems to us the best possible augury for democracy in Asia. Americans claim that democracy means winning and maintaining the right to make up your own mind. The communists have a very different theory of progress. If, then, an Asian nation declares for the right to make up its own mind, this is excellent evidence that the people want a democratic government and are willing to undergo some risks in order to get it.

Mr. Bowles calls the new, non-communist nations of Asia "Third Camp" nations, indicating that they refuse to shape their policies to suit either the Soviets or the Americans. He proposes that—

> we must respect Asia's independence and try to join hands in the positive projects on which the Third Camp nations are *willing* to work with us. If we try to make them jump through hoops, we shall fail dismally and dramatically. At present they will cheerfully commit suicide rather than abandon the nationalism and the neutralism to which they are committed. If their suicide might not also prove to be our own, there would be some case for letting them fry for a while in their own pride. But whether we like it or not, and whether they understand it or not, our futures as democratic countries are tied together.
>
> Actually, once we decide to relax and enjoy their independent-style foreign policy, we may find that its value in unleashing the power of Asian nationalism against Communist encroachments will outweigh the frustrations. It is no coincidence that the Communist rebellions in Burma, Indonesia, the Philippines, and India were all promptly put down by these democratic and newly independent governments, and that only in Indo-China and Malaya, where there was no post-war independence, did communism make real headway.

We don't know how others will read the articles we have referred to and quoted from—Chester Bowles in *World* and Ambassador Allen in U.S; *News and World Report*—but to us they say one thing very clearly: Asians are determined to be free human beings, and freedom includes the right to be wrong in practical decisions. But this, incidentally, is no more than any other free nation or people has claimed. And if, as Mr. Bowles points out, the Asian nations which succeed in being free are the ones who succeeded in putting down communist uprisings all by themselves, then these nations, at least, haven't as yet made the one mistake Americans fear the most.

What are the legitimate apprehensions of which American foreign policy should take note? Is the adoption of a communist form of government the real menace? Jugoslavia is a communist country, a full-bodied application of Marxist theory, yet it is hard to remember one article, editorial, or book which singles out Tito as a threat to the peace of the world or a danger to the freedom of other countries. On the contrary, Tito has a rather good popular press in the United States. Is it friendly relations with Russia on the part of other countries which should disturb our calm? Finland, Sweden, and Switzerland not only deal on a friendly basis with Soviet Russia, but have recognized Communist China, too, yet no one, as Mr. Bowles notes, has named these European countries as pro-Communist "soft spots."

Obviously, the one thing which Americans may legitimately fear is the formation of a single, monolithic power-bloc in Asia, controlled from the Kremlin, with endless expansion of its influence and control the prime objective. But if this be admitted, it must also be said that about the only conceivable force that could drive an Asian people with aspirations for political freedom into the arms of the Soviets is the hope that by such an alliance they can gain the power to drive from Asia the last vestige of old-style colonialism. American military force, in other words, is absolutely useless to stop communism, unless it is invited to participate, and we suspect that the communists themselves realize that if a young Asian republic ever gets to the point where it asks for military assistance against communism, there would not be much hope of engineering a red revolution in that land.

Over and above these considerations, however, is the question of the general futility of another war of any sort, to say nothing of a full-scale World War III. The battlegrounds of the fight against communism, since 1945, have been small countries whose hopes for a time of free development have been tragically set back for generations, regardless of

which side "won," or is "winning." Wars are in principle on the side of totalitarian methods and dictatorships, for they leave behind them the habits of violence, hatred, and, finally, passive acceptance of suffering, so that many years will be needed for the recovery of the people to the confidence and independence needed for self-government.

There is still another way to look at the entire matter. Suppose the worst to happen: that by guile, propaganda, and the infiltration of agents, other countries besides China were wooed into the Soviet fold. The chief psychological attribute of all these countries is an aggressive and often immature and irresponsible nationalism. Do we suppose, if the Soviets always institute the dread reign of terror that we say they do, that these Asian peoples will accept outside control and dictatorship without a murmur? If, as observers point out, the Chinese are showing distinct signs of independence, even with their great reliance upon Soviet arms and manufactures, how can all these vociferously freedom-demanding peoples be held in the rigid pattern of Soviet control?

We also hear that the tightly disciplined peoples at home in the Soviet Union are longing for a change. What other good reason is there, actually, for the maintenance of the iron curtain, if not to prevent the people of Russia from making a fair comparison of their "ideal" way of life with the admittedly "imperfect" order the rest of the world enjoys?

So long as the West continues its aggressive military policy, the natural restlessness of a population held in check by intensive propaganda has no opportunity for expression. It is even possible that the aggressiveness of the West is the one thing which provides Communism with "security," both at home and abroad. While democracy is hurt and hindered by war and rumors and preparations for war, communism thrives in this atmosphere.

It comes to this, that the chips are really down for those who say they believe in democracy. For faith in democracy means faith in Man—in *uncoerced* Man. And support of democracy in Asia means, primarily, *moral* support—showing confidence in Asians and their capacity to choose freedom and stand by it, in their terms, not ours. Asia's past is very different from our own. Millions of Asians have only lately discovered the meaning of Western concepts of political freedom. For those millions, contact with the West has meant very largely contact with an arrogant racism and an exploiting imperialism. Communism claims to make no distinctions of race and to be the inveterate enemy of imperialism. The question is: Will the Asians be able to see the difference between the ideals behind the Western past, and the tyranny of the future behind the communist present? Faith in man means a policy which recognizes that guns and bombs will not help to produce the right answer to that question.

If we could let the Asians choose for themselves, without fear and without reproach, we might find them knocking on our door in a matter of months. Everybody wants to be on the side of those who have high confidence and are unafraid. Blustering militarism and atom bomb explosion exhibits are not marks of people who are unafraid. To be unafraid, in democratic terms, is to go about one's affairs in full confidence that other people will soon see what it means to be free and will want to enjoy the same confidence. *Everybody wants peace*, these days. Acts of peace would exercise an almost incredible moral force over the troubled areas of the world. It would penetrate even the frontiers of the Soviet orbit and create wondering attitudes which would eventually become uncontrollable. It is even conceivable that the initiative of war would be taken away from governments, if one powerful government, urged on by its people, began to set an insistent example of peaceful policies. All this, we think, could grow out of genuine faith in man.

THE ARTS OF PEACE

AT the annual meeting of the British Medical Association for the Prevention of War, held recently in London, a Dr. Penrose presented facts in relation to the differences among races. Since the British are presently somewhat concerned over the unrest in Africa, the speaker gave attention to the anomalies of statistics:

> Dealing with the mental aspects of the subject, Dr. Penrose warned the audience against accepting statistics at their face value. In South Africa, for example, it was said that mental illness was most frequent among white people, but that more coloured people were in prison. Might it not be that the proportion of mental illness was roughly the same, but that "in one case you landed in prison, and in the other the hospital"?
>
> American army tests showed that British born people came near the top in intelligence, the Eastern Europeans lower down, and the Negroes lower still. Yet so great was the variation from state to state that the Negroes in New York and Pennsylvania came higher than the whites in Kentucky and Alabama, a fact which can only be explained by acknowledging the relation between environment and mental efficiency.
>
> In Jamaica where blacks and whites are taught in the same school, tests showed that the blacks came out best in regard to discrimination of pitch and rhythm, and at arithmetic, but worse at common sense and verbal tests. Yet if one examined the questions in the commonsense examination one realized that blacks and whites might differ in regard to the answers they gave without this in any way indicating inferiority in either case. *(Peace News,* May 28.)

By the spread of such facts as these, the old myth of racial inferiority is slowly worn away. Since it may take even generations to get rid of the stiff self-consciousness of people who are trying to forget the habit-patterns developed during centuries of racial injustice, there is no time to lose.

From *Iberica* for June 15, we learn that a new, "unofficial" culture is gaining birth in Spain, in quiet defiance of the Franco regime. *(Iberica* is a new monthly bulletin published in New York, devoted to free Spanish culture and affairs.) The thrilling thing about any "unofficial" culture is that it is bound to be an authentic expression of the arts and literature (not for profit), for only the official culture is legal in Spain. Victor Alba, a voluntary exile from Spain, writes to describe this underground ferment of the mind. The modern painters, poets, musicians, must work in secrecy, for "where can they show their works, where make their music heard? If they find a patron and quarters—which is next to impossible—they are greeted by an outcry of Falangist periodicals which censures their innovations as 'anti-Spanish'. . . . Since 1939, not a single case can be cited in any field—neither poetry, nor drama, nor painting, nor music, nor novels—of a courageous innovator."

Yet there are groups in Barcelona, Valencia, and Mallorca practicing the arts, and in Madrid are study groups in economics, history, and philosophy conducted by veteran professors and attended by eager students who cannot get the education they want in the universities. This goes on in private homes, which are thus becoming the centers of tomorrow's culture, the springs of tomorrow's freedom, for Spain.

These are indeed the arts of peace, for they rise from the natural determination of human beings to gain knowledge and understanding, and they grow without institutional support. Alba appeals in behalf of this new generation of Spanish students and intellectuals for books and periodicals from other countries, to be sent in clandestine shipments to Spain to nourish this hunger for world culture. (Address inquiries to *Ilherica,*112 East 19th Street, New York 3, N.Y.)

REVIEW
THE RETURN OF THE EGGHEAD

MCCARTHYISM is by no means a novel anti-intellectual phenomenon. The down-to-earth, hard-hitting man of the people who doesn't mess around with fancy phrases has long been in vogue as a political ideal among substantial numbers of the populace, while escapist reading heavily endorses the same personality ingredients. However, and despite McCarthy, this is a time in which more and more people may be interested in what the intellectuals have to say. Even *Life* magazine, with its watered-down "cultural" offerings, *does* sell the notion of cultural improvement to the current mass man, as Jacques Barzun has pointed out.

In the *Saturday Review* for May 1, Franklin Baumer of Yale, editor of "Main Currents in Western Thought," wonders if a new age of popular inquiry into serious matters is in the offing. He writes:

> Interest in intellectual history—some prefer to call it the history of ideas or the history of thought—has increased enormously in this country since World War II. New courses have sprouted up on the campuses, and new textbooks have been written for them. Crane Brinton's "Ideas and Men" is one such book, and J. H. Randall's "The Making of the Modern Mind" continues to be widely used. My own anthology, "Main Currents of Western Thought," attempts to provide representative documents, together with essays on methodology and interpretation. For the scholar there is the quarterly *Journal of the History of Ideas*, founded in 1940, the History of Ideas Series recently inaugurated by the Princeton University Press, and Yale University Press's Studies in Modern European Literature and Thought, of which fifteen volumes have thus far appeared dealing with such figures as Baudelaire, Croce, Sartre, and Unamuno.
>
> Doubleday's Anchor Books now includes reprints of Edmund Wilson's "To the Finland Station" and Basil Willey's "The Seventeenth Century Background," both excellent works of intellectual history, and Mentor Books lists titles like R. N. Tawney's "Religion and the Rise of Capitalism" and Alfred North Whitehead's "Science and the Modern World."
>
> When one considers the attack currently being made on the so-called "eggheads" in the United States, this is a significant phenomenon. It argues, I think, a real and widespread respect for "the intellectual class" and a recognition of the contributions it has been and is making to civilization. It also argues a revulsion against the extreme version of the Marxist interpretation of history, in which ideas are read down as "ideology" or the mere product of class interests.

Illustrating this trend is the popular reception accorded the first three numbers of *Discovery*, a Pocket Book series compiled by a board of young "intellectual" editors who are convinced that new and original literary work with serious overtones can find—because it should find—an audience. (The present chief editor of *Discovery*, Vance Bourjaily, is an accomplished novelist in his own right.) So far as we can determine, *Discovery* began more as a labor of love than as a commercial venture, the staff being surprised as well as overjoyed at the quantity of mail and manuscripts received in response to the first edition. For whoever buys *Discovery* shows a different sort of taste from that which gives Mickey Spillane top billing in the drug and liquor store book marts. Bourjaily now hopes that this unexplored interest can be turned to real account in time. Not satisfied with the excellent record of the collections published so far, he has called upon potential writers to become even "more serious" in subject matter, to get away from the fear that expression of cherished conviction will fail to sell. Perhaps we are in a kind of transition state as far as the constructive influence of "the intellectuals" upon the fiction-reading public is concerned; in any case, it is something to know of the purpose behind *Discovery* and of the initial success of the venture.

Bourjaily is troubled by the lack of genuinely controversial material:

> It is disappointing to report that nothing has turned up which we might have published under the general subject-heading of controversy.

The implications, of course, of some of the fiction and essays (even of some of the poems) have been controversial, and we did, last issue, go a couple of rounds of critical dub fighting; but there has been hardly anything submitted—much less accepted—in the nature of direct assault on, or defense of, an idea or situation of general interest.

An informal canvass of our staff brings, out of our group recollection, specific memories of only three pieces, in a year and a half of reading, which were anything like attempts to start or enter an argument in good literary form, which were, that is, direct controversy. Perhaps there were one or two more we don't remember; certainly they were rare.

The few that did come in fell pretty far short of being usable; either the situation or idea dealt with tended toward a special-interest category, or the writing and thinking were pedestrian. The gifted writer, apparently, was unwilling to commit his talent to the upholding or devastation of one side or the other of the great public issues, assumptions or institutions. If he had convictions—ethical, political, religious or sociological—he was not exposing them to the hazards of print. It seemed, as we were told in the liberal press, to be one of the depressing truths of the early fifties, as true for literature as it was for public life, that there was an unexhilarating caginess about exercising the freedom of expression to which, for the time at least, we were still entitled. It would be a shameful thing if, in these days of debilitating pressure to which the old freedom is being subjected by Congressional Committees, vigilante groups, and a generally baneful atmosphere, it should be allowed to grow flabbily incapable of self-defense through lack of exercise.

Alan Harrington's "The Revelations of Dr. Modesto," included in *Discovery No. 3*, may be explanatory of the hesitation of writers to express their views without reservation. Dr. Modesto, in the Harrington novel from which *Discovery's* excerpts are taken, proposes the doctrine of "centralism" as the best cure for a troubled mind. "Centralism" includes these precepts:

Since your self grates on others, and makes you miserable, get rid of it.

In our society, in our time, it does not pay to be yourself.

People laugh at you and call you strange—even if it was your father's fault.

Look around you, and see who is the happy man. He is the one Just Like Everybody Else. "Oh, so that is the way to be?" you ask, and I say, yes, that is the way you and I must be.

You are a sensitive person in a world of Brutes. Like a feeble animal, you need protective coloration. You must hide.

The only place to hide is in the center of their culture. Be more average than anyone!

From this moment on HAVE NO SELF.

Have no mind of your own. Have no thought, opinion, habit, no desire or preference, no enthusiasm, love or fear of your own. *Be* the composite of your neighbors.

Drifting along in the center of the crowd, you are utterly happy. Peace radiates from you, making others happy. And this gives you practically limitless power over others!

It is the power of averageness. Nobody can resist you. How could they? You are the Norm around which their own lives are arranged. They are completely centralized by you. Without knowing it, they want to yield to you, because each one sees himself in your image, and they all love you as they love themselves.

One rule will protect you—make the idea of Centrality a fixation. Maintain a fanatic devotion to the center of everything. LIVE CENTRALLY. Even this. Live as close as possible to the geographical center of town. There is no joking. The idea should permeate everything you do. Pursue it to any lengths—the middle row in a group photograph, the middle seat in a bus. Such apparently meaningless acts add up to one dominating reflex, so that eventually—even when there is no pleasure or point in doing so—you will take your place in the center, where no harm can come to you.

I also tell you BELIEVE and THINK CENTRALLY, which is to say believe in nothing, but give your loyalty to any popular cause in the vicinity. And give it precisely in half-measure, depending on what your neighbors believe. If they despise a certain race, join moderately in the pleasures of contempt. But then, supposing a liberal element comes to town, trim your position. You have to adjust, like the wire-walker carrying a long pole, who keeps his eyes on the dips and lifts of the pole ends, and takes warning from them in time to maintain his balance. So, when the liberals come, your old position is slightly

> unbalanced, and you change your beliefs. Say, perhaps, "There are some good ones."
>
> With the arrival of more leftists, cite scientific evidence of the equality of races.
>
> Now you are beginning to see the conditions of your happiness, and the power you will have. You will think in the center, and be ready to delight in the trivialities. Care which team wins. Spend hours comparing the kinds of gasoline that all come from the same pipeline. Every time you wash your car it always rains. To see that it doesn't, throw salt over your shoulder. Knock on wood.
>
> Listen. Modest, safe and sure. That's the way to power. Are you afraid of obscurity? But, my boy, my son, ye will be everywhere. All of us, running things. Only give your *self* up. Come with me, and together we will infiltrate back into the world that rejected us.

The meaning of Harrington's satire is obvious, and Bourjaily has already explained why he feels that Dr. Modesto's "revelations" should interest the readers of *Discovery*.

Insofar as respect for the contributions of "Intellectuals" seems to be increasing, we may hope that this is not because men are anxious to turn to some sort of higher echelon authority for their opinions, but because they are interested in *ideas*, and only the "eggheads" produce them. "Intellectuals" as a class may still be suspect—rightly so, perhaps, on the basis of much past experience—but this does not mean that the average man is not aware of the need for authentic food for the mind.

Incidentally, *Discovery No. 3* is a worth-while purchase, especially at 35 cents. MANAS readers will particularly delight in a beautifully written essay, "A Journal for Henry Beston," and may also enjoy Milton Klonsky's "Selected Spooks, Stars, Gods and Celebrities," as well as "Meat," a deft commentary on conventions.

COMMENTARY
QUEST FOR BALANCE

ERICH FROMM'S questioning of the popular Relativist philosophy (see Frontiers) and his implied defense of absolute values in respect to human life marks a kind of return to the beginnings of Western civilization in ancient Greek thought. Thus we have come full circle since the days of Plato, and, looking back, each step of the way, save for the first departure from Platonic rationalism, has seemed at the time to be the course of wisdom.

Absolute values first began to be regarded with suspicion when they were identified with dogmatic theology's pronouncements about them. No absolute, however sound theoretically, can stand association with the methods of compulsion, reinforced by the faggot and the rack. A blow for Relativism becomes a blow for freedom of thought and the scientific method when owl-eyed clericals demand that they and only they have the truth.

What the theologians did, finally, was to pontificate about physical matters just as they had about "spiritual" matters, a policy which, after the discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo, made their presumptions absolutely ridiculous. It was this, more than anything else, which turned the new spirit of science against not only theology, but any sort of transcendentalism as well.

Then, as science began to move into the region of psychology, ethics, and morals, its practitioners maintained their habit of a relativist outlook, gained in other fields where it was appropriate. This, as Fromm points out, brought them trouble. They found themselves obliged to smuggle in their values, pretending to have derived them from scientific observation, or they boldly declared all ethics out of bounds for the practice of science. The one course produced bad science, the other sterile science, so far as the good of man is concerned.

Now we are back at the beginning, as was suggested, having learned, perhaps, that as human beings we cannot do without absolutes, but also recognizing that the absolutes we need are no good at all without voluntary assent. It is a bad day, therefore, for the dogmatist, but a great day for free-thinking human beings.

This sort of circling around seems characteristic of the history of ideas. In the eighteenth century, the vast potentialities of nature led the French materialist, Lamettrie, to maintain that the notion of "God" is entirely unnecessary, since Nature and Matter can by themselves accomplish manifold "miracles" without supernatural direction. Lamettrie pointed to the ability of a species of worm to regenerate into several complete organisms from the fragments into which it had been cut. This, for Lamettrie, was proof positive of the sufficiency of Materialism. Then, in the twentieth century, the German thinker, Hans Driesch, assembled the same sort of evidence the mystery of organic development—*against* Materialism, hoping to prove that some sort of "vital intelligence" is active within living things. Materialism, or Mechanism, Driesch said, is unable to account for the processes of growth in living things.

Such a circling of thought, some might say, is an argument for the Relativist. But is it? It seems to us rather to be an argument for a profound sense of balance in the human mind, and the capacity to turn the modes of human experience, whatever they may be, into evidence for a rational explanation of things—an absolute, perhaps, in all serious human endeavor.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

WHEN the *New Yorker* devotes the talents of Wolcott Gibbs to a discussion of the evils of crime comics, we can be sure that the subject has become too important to ignore, even for sophisticates. In the issue for May 8, Mr. Gibbs reviews Dr. Fredric Wertham's book, *Seduction of the Innocent*, and credits the prolific mental hygienist with an excellent analysis. The chief charge is that a substantial proportion of the 90 million comic books circulated each month among early teen-agers "fosters the idea of violence. Nor does this violence fit into the comparatively pure stereotype of Western six-gun action. Robbery, torture, murder, rape, homosexuality are all furnished with pictures. Many civic groups are now endeavoring to secure legal bans on the distribution of this type of 'literature' and are encouraged by the restrictions which already exist against our American comic production in England, France, Canada, Sweden, Holland, Italy, Belgium, Germany, South America, and Russia. So many articles have been written exposing the pernicious nature of the worst of the comics that we assume every reader is fully cognizant of the incredible depth to which the comic purveyors have sunk, but if by chance you are uninformed Dr. Wertham's book will sophisticate you in a hurry."

We are here chiefly interested in the psychological tendencies to which these comics pander and the question of why the market is presently so good. Banning comics of the nature described would probably be a good idea, but it seems even more necessary to understand the psychological background of the problem. Wolcott Gibbs adds a familiar *New Yorker* touch to his comments on Dr. Wertham's vehement approach, writing that "in many ways *Seduction of the Innocent* is absurd and alarmful, full of examples of the psychiatrist's peculiar gift for referring all abnormal behavior to one special stimulus," but goes on to admit that "the concrete evidence it offers of a real crime against the children seems to be practically unanswerable. I like to think that Superman and his pals are up against the battle of their perverse, fantastic, and foolish lives." Psychiatric diagnosis is apt to refer the childhood penchant for perverted violence to the essential "animal" nature of every newborn child, but one might, if only for the sake of originality, suggest a different explanation. Why may it not be simply that every youngster is intrigued by unusual forms of danger because the experience of hazard has always symbolized passage into manhood? Danger, fear, and a subtle attraction to flirting with the things one fears all play their part in the seating of self-confidence.

At this point we are again drawn to the unfortunately hackneyed theme of "frontier days" vigor. The child who learned to ride and hunt, like the plains Indian boy who must prove his right to become a "brave," had ample opportunity for savoring the thrill of danger. A youth needs physical challenge, and if he lives in an indolent culture surfeited with pleasures and easy living, he runs the great risk of suffering psychic harm because no forms of physical testing are available. Children need excitement, at least part of the time, because excitement, in its turn, is the simplest source of intensity. Perverted excitement, on this view, grows out of the nature of our culture, and does not originate in the comic books.

The Los Angeles *Daily News* for May 27 reports that a recent police shakedown of youths attending a night track meet unearthed 175 dangerous weapons carried by these adolescents. Seventy-five persons, including twelve girls, were arrested. The juxtaposition of events is of interest. The same blind feeling for excitement which took these youths to the Coliseum track meet also inspired them to conceal knives, brass knuckles, blackjacks, etc. If they had been *performing* in the track meet, their attention would have been otherwise focussed, yet upon an activity that would help to fulfill the same psychological craving.

We return, therefore, to our familiar plea for further encouragement of athleticism among the young. Increased playground facilities and additional coaches in our high schools are not enough. Parents and teachers will have to promote an atmosphere in which every sort of physical exertion is appreciated for the virtues it possesses. Commercialized culture means not only that mass entertainment is reduced to a rather low common denominator, but also that the thrills of "sports" are now available at second-hand through television, radio broadcasts, etc. Unfortunately, the child whose parents spend hours each day in front of the television screen will be simply encouraged to *watch* events from the shelter of a darkened living-room. Subsequently—and we imagine psychologists will agree—the youth with this background is little likely to engage personally in any particular field of sport; the habit of spectatorship easily becomes deeply ingrained, while the whole gamut of psycho-physical feelings to which athletic endeavors give expression is still without an adequate outlet. Television provides excitement, but not the sort of excitement that inspires real intensity.

Numerous articles deploring the effects of television on youngsters have appeared in the past two years, and it seems a waste of space to echo disparaging sentiments by now so well known. However, television watching and crime comics reading seem to us to evidence a kinship which should be noted and pondered. Actually, the fact of the matter seems to be that the American people are "ready" for television in about the same way that they are ready for atomic bombs. A medium of entertainment which can so easily become an obsession need not be prohibited—nor even attacked, *per se*—but those who are to be exposed should previously receive adequate training for the development of independent sources for entertainment. For the youth, there should always be a *choice* between television watching and something else of a more active nature he has learned to enjoy doing. If no such experiences have existed in his earlier years, if he has never been helped to enjoy physical or cultural activities, he may automatically fall into the role of an habitual spectator—and probably a neurotic one.

Dr. Wertham's diatribe on the crime comics applies in some degree, we think, to many television programs. In both cases an escape from reality is sought, and the sense of excitement artificially induced by images. As Dr. Wertham remarked in an article published while he was doing research on *Seduction of the Innocent*, "many children who have never become delinquent or conspicuously disturbed have been adversely affected." He also found that the natural "search for risk and excitement" is abnormally focussed by comics, leading in the direction of an aggressiveness and destructiveness—reactions entirely different from those developed by athletics. Small wonder, then, if the habitual television watcher or the crime comics reader never learns to *earn* the excitement and challenge he craves! It seems necessary, therefore, for parents to undertake the difficult task of preparing the young for encounters with these abnormal forms of exciting entertainment, and even be willing to keep television sets out of their own homes until they feel the children have developed personal resources for less passive "amusement" and "excitement."

FRONTIER

Toward Positive Human Values

THE progressive abandonment of "relativism" by workers in scientific fields relating directly or indirectly to human welfare may seem to the non-technical reader to be just another transition in academic opinion, but the interesting thing about this change in orientation is that it also implies an abandonment of the familiar scientific disregard for moral issues and a renewal of the enthusiasm and generous, humanitarian spirit which characterized the early period of scientific discovery in the West. During the past week or two we have encountered at least three books and articles which reflect this new view expressed with such clarity and determination that it may already constitute the beginning of a wave of transcendentalism in the sciences.

"Relativism" is the doctrine that every worker in research—indeed, every man—is confined in a closed system of time and place; that "truth," in any final sense, is either non-existent or unknowable. According to this theory, whatever a man may say or conclude, it is absolutely limited by the influences of his environment, the range of his experience, and the "conditionings" which have shaped his mind and life. Relativism is a superficially plausible doctrine, especially when regarded against the historical background of Western dogmatism. On the other hand, as a qualifying criticism of all forms of human certainty Relativism has a relative role in the determination of truth, and this role of relative criticism has *absolute* importance, perhaps, but Relativism cannot be given absolute authority without complete disaster to the human enterprise. This argument against absolute Relativism is well put by Erich Fromm in the Spring 1954 number of the new quarterly, *Dissent:*

> . . . the liberals, since the 18th century, have stressed the malleability of human nature and the decisive influence of environmental factors. True and important as such emphasis is, it has led many social scientists to an assumption that man's mental constitution *is* like a blank piece of paper, on which society and culture write their text, and which has no intrinsic quality of its own. This assumption is equally untenable and equally destructive of human progress: The real problem is to infer the *core* common to all the human race from the innumerable *manifestations* of human nature, the normal as well as the pathological ones, as we can observe them in different individuals and cultures. The task is furthermore to recognize the laws inherent in human nature and the inherent goals for its development and unfolding. Just as the infant is born with all human potentialities which are to develop under favorable social and cultural conditions, so the human race, in the process of history, develops into what it potentially is.

Fromm contends for what he calls *normative humanism,* which assumes that "there are universal criteria for mental health which are valid for the human race as such, and according to which the state of health of each society can be judged." The obvious task, from this point of view, is to supply "a correct definition of what deserves to be called human nature." He admits that psychological science now lacks the knowledge to provide such a definition, but proposes that the formulation of "a concept of man, his nature, and the laws which govern his development," should be recognized as the goal of psychological and sociological research.

The clinical notion of "adjustment" has a part in Fromm's discussion. He shows that, without "universal criteria for mental health," adjustment becomes little more than trying to fit a man into his society, without attempting to judge whether or not the society is "sane" or healthy in mind. As he says:

> If a person fails to attain freedom, spontaneity, a genuine expression of self, he may be considered to have a severe defect, provided we assume that freedom and spontaneity are the objective goals to be attained by every human being. If such a goal is not attained by the majority of members of any given society, we deal with the phenomenon of a *socially patterned* defect. The individual shares it with many others; he is not aware of it as a defect, and his security is not threatened by the experience of being different, of being an outcast, as it were. What he

> may have lost in richness and in a genuine feeling of happiness is made up by the security of fitting in with the rest of mankind—as he knows them. As a matter of fact, his very defect may have been raised to a virtue of his culture, and thus may give him an enhanced feeling of achievement.

Normative humanism provides a view of man and society which will not tolerate such notions of adjustment. It insists that "the criterion of mental health is not that of adjustment of the individual to a given social order, but a universal one, valid for all men, of giving a satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence." Fromm argues that the socially patterned defects of a society enable individuals to hide their own inadequacies or even mental illnesses. The failure, then, to examine critically any society from some general, ideal viewpoint results in collective social and mental decay. Fromm illustrates this effect by suggesting what would happen if a particular set of "social defects" were removed from our society:

> Suppose that in our western culture movies, radios, television, sports events, and newspapers ceased to function for only four weeks. With these main avenues of escape dosed, what would be the consequences for people thrown upon their own resources? I have no doubt that even in this short time thousands of nervous breakdowns would occur, and many more thousands of people would be thrown into a state of acute anxiety, not being different from the picture which is diagnosed clinically as "neurosis." If the opiate against the socially patterned defect were withdrawn, the manifest illness would make its appearance.
>
> I have made the following experiment with various classes of undergraduate college students: they were told to imagine that they were to stay for three days alone in their room, without a radio, escapist literature, although provided with "good" literature, normal food and all other physical comforts. They were asked to imagine what their reaction to this experience would be. The response of about 90 per cent in each group ranged from the feeling of acute panic, to that of an exceedingly trying experience, which they might overcome by sleeping long, doing all kinds of little chores, eagerly awaiting the end of the period. Only a small minority felt that they would be at ease and enjoy the time when they are with themselves.

The difficulty, of course, in a diagnosis of this sort, arises from the fact that human beings are amazingly adaptable. They are able to adjust to stultifying and even degrading conditions, so that a "smooth" adjustment may be exceedingly misleading in any attempt to define normality or the "good" society. Fromm sets this phase of the problem by an acute analysis which draws on his psychiatric background:

> Today we come across a person who acts and feels like an automaton; who never experiences anything which is really his; who experiences himself entirely as the person he thinks he is supposed to be; whose smiles have replaced laughter; whose dulled despair has taken the place of genuine pain. Two statements can be made about this person. One is that he suffers from a defect of spontaneity and individuality which may seem incurable. At the same time, it may be said that he does not differ essentially from millions of others who are in the same position. For most of them, the culture provides patterns which enable them *to live with a defect without becoming ill.* It is as if each culture provided the remedy against the outbreak of manifest neurotic symptoms which would result from the defect produced by it.

It now becomes plain that Relativism as a critical absolute would destroy the perspective which makes these searching observations possible. The judgments which they involve depend upon the assumption that spontaneity and individuality are ultimate values for human beings. This the relativist might deny, arguing that there have been societies—*are* societies—in which these qualities are likely to bring personal disaster to their possessors. The society which places a high value on conformity—either political or religious conformity—usually punishes severely anyone who deviates from the prescribed behavior. In a totalitarian order, the punishments are applied by law; in a society ruled by petty conventions and prejudices, it is the social community itself which makes the deviant suffer, either by ostracism or by some other form of social pressure.

To this, Fromm replies:

> Yet, in spite of all this evidence, the history of man shows that we have omitted one fact. Despots and ruling cliques can succeed in dominating and exploiting their fellow-man, but they cannot prevent *reactions* to this inhuman treatment. Their subjects become frightened, suspicious, lonely, and if not due to external reasons, their systems collapse at one point because fears, suspicions and loneliness eventually incapacitate the majority to function effectively and intelligently. Whole nations, or social groups within them, can be subjugated and exploited for a long time, but *they react.* They react with apathy or such impairment of intelligence, initiative, and skills that they gradually fail to perform the functions which should serve their rulers. Or they react by the accumulation of such hate and destructiveness as to bring about an end to themselves, their rulers, and their system. Again, their reaction may be such inflows of independence and a longing for freedom that a better society is built upon the creative impulses. Whichever reaction occurs depends upon many factors; on economic and political ones, and on the spiritual climate in which people live. But whatever the reactions are, the statement that man can live under almost any condition is only half true; it must be supplemented by the other statement, that if he lives under conditions which are contrary to his nature and to the basic requirements for human growth and sanity, he cannot help reacting; he must either deteriorate and perish, or bring about conditions which are more in accordance with his needs.

So, from inspection of what happens when the adjustment of human beings is to systems based upon a low estimate of man, Fromm in effect proposes the alternative of a conception of man declaring that qualities of originality, self-dependence, and the courage naturally allied with them are intrinsic to human beings. These are the universal criteria on which all judgments of both society and individuals should be based. And the demonstration and support of this conception with evidence should be, Fromm implies, the primary task of psychological and sociological science.