

## TESTING "ABSOLUTES"

A READER with a background of positivist interests has raised so fundamental a series of questions that we plan to discuss them at length—for at least the space available here. He starts out with some observations on an article in an early issue of MANAS:

. . . the last three paragraphs of this article point out some of the hazards of what you call "false certainty." And there, precisely, is the problem: how is a man to know whether his own certainty is true or false? The truth or falsity of a belief is open to question by the man who holds it, but one doesn't look with skepticism upon his own certainties—of whatever sort. Reading these paragraphs, I understood for the first time that there is a positive value in uncertainty: no man can progress beyond his own certainties. Yet elsewhere you speak repeatedly, and—it seems to me—incongruously—of "universal principles of human behavior," of "principles which do not change with the centuries," etc. You don't use the word "absolute," yet you seem to be referring to principles which are in some sense absolutely dependable—upon which we can rely with a feeling of certainty. . . . it appears to my unpracticed perception that you simultaneously believe and disbelieve that one may reasonably accept some values as absolute. . . .

If the truth were known, it sounds that way to us, too. Except that we do not believe that they are the *same* values! Take the man who remains everlastingly skeptical of his "certainties." There is something of a paradox in this man, for he, because of his constant re-examination of his own views, is continually obtaining better ones. If he stops this re-examination, he becomes of static mind, and his certainties turn into provincialisms of time and place. But what is it that drives him to continual self-criticism? Is it not the certainty that there is no end to growth of mind? That always, in *principle*, a man can learn more, see with greater clarity?

We do not see how this conclusion can be avoided, nor why it should not be termed an absolute condition of human progress. And if we say that this conclusion is a suitable one to be drawn from human

experience, then it follows that with it we can form a generalization about human beings, namely, that they are the kind of being whose nature it is to develop or "evolve" by means of the eternal quest for greater understanding.

This, then, is a postulate concerning man. Other conclusions shaping the portrait of the human being may be arrived at by similar means—conclusions involving human feelings about justice, human solidarity, goodness, beauty, and truth. Suppose we say that these ideas are "absolutes": are we then in a hazardous position? What are the consequences of denying these ideas?

To take the first conception, that of self-criticism: if a man denies that he needs to reconsider his opinions, he is surely in trouble, for he has all of human history to declare the likelihood that he is wrong. This denial, indeed, is an attack on the idea of impartiality—for whatever reason, he refuses to compare his opinions with others. He says, in effect, that his opinions are best, or even perfect, and need not be submitted to rational examination. But such a man rejects the canons of reason, and while he may claim a private security of belief, he has no business telling other people that he knows "the truth," for the reason that truth, by all intelligible definitions, is a matter of *correspondence*: it is a statement about some thing or fact which may itself be studied either with ease or with, perhaps, great difficulty—in comparison with the statement about it. Truth is not a "thing"—it is a statement about a thing. The trouble with the man who refuses comparison of his ideas of truth with the elements of experience is that he, like all other dogmatists, has a purely circular definition of truth: truth is what he says, and what he says is truth.

So, then, we maintain that the rational approach to what is true, useful, good, and possibly beautiful, as well, is an absolute and needs to be held as such. For if the comparative, rational approach be abandoned, even the words "truth," "usefulness,"

"goodness" and "beauty" lose their meaning. This enables us to make a definition: Absolutes are those ideas upon which meaningful intercourse of mind with mind depends.

Returning to our correspondent, he says further:

I like the word "belief" and also the word "principle," provided we don't say that principles do not change with the centuries. How do we know? They may not have changed for us for some thousands of years, but aren't we yet quite primitive? Might there not be a dimension of understanding as superior to ours as ours is to that of the Zunis?

One may doubt that we are so superior to the Zunis, and still cherish the hope that there are dimensions of understanding beyond the present level of civilization. Yet if principles change with the centuries, either we are potentially able to recognize their change or we are not. If we are not, then the change is non-existent for us and we shall, in the course of time, be presented with practical results of the change which will completely baffle our understanding. We say *completely*, because a cause that is entirely beyond human perception is by definition wholly irrational and unknowable. Thus, from the hopeful viewpoint of man as a being who wants to grow in knowledge, to say that we cannot know about such changes in principles would amount to unconditional surrender. It becomes unprofitable to pursue the question.

On the other hand, suppose that we *can* perceive such changes. In this case, there is some constant perceptive power in man which is able to compare one phase of a changing principle with another and to declare the fact that the change has occurred. But then this perceptive power is itself a kind of principle which has *not* changed—it is, for practical purposes, an absolute stance from which certain relativities have been observed.

As a condition of all human aspiration, therefore, we have adopted the view that there are principles which do not change which is the same as saying, we think, that progress is a possibility for mankind. We should take this view even while admitting abstractly that we may be completely wrong, since the consequences of denying the view amount to intellectual suicide.

Our correspondent reaches a not dissimilar conclusion, although he uses other words:

I wonder if the feeling that beliefs and principles have absolute validity may not be an unavoidable consequence of our putting them to practical use? When we use a belief as the basis for some action whose complexities and ramifications we cannot foresee, as we are constantly required to do, we are, for the moment, proceeding as though we *knew* the belief to have absolute validity—as though we were *certain* of its applicability and effectiveness. We must do this—we must act on the basis of our beliefs; there is no alternative. Willingness to do this is, possibly, one of the meanings of faith. If the same belief proves dependable in repeated usage, we naturally begin to *feel*—though this may not be justified—that it will always and under all conditions be dependable. After a belief has served well for centuries, it may be almost impossible to avoid thinking of it as an absolute.

As we were bound to say, there are "certainties" and "certainties." Herodotus was familiar with the rivers of Greece and was led by his past experience to believe that rivers have sources somewhere. Upon going to Africa, he speculated concerning the sources of the Nile. His observations were so well put that Cohen and Nagel, when compiling their well-known text, *Logic and the Scientific Method*, gave as an illustration of proper scientific inquiry this essay by Herodotus. Stripped to essentials, Herodotus' belief was that the phenomena of nature occur according to basic similarities. He formed an hypothesis about the source of the Nile with some confidence because of that belief. He might have erred here and there, in particular details, but his basic belief, we may say, had to do with how to go about arriving at certainty concerning the source of the Nile. He believed, in short, in the method of investigation, guided by the analogies of past experience. Actually, all we know or profess to know concerning natural law has proceeded from such investigations and the tested generalizations which have resulted. Is it, then, a "belief" that nature presents similarities in phenomena, or does the conviction that these similarities exist deserve a somewhat more honorific title?

Suppose, then, we say that the idea that nature performs in patterns which are capable of being

defined with exactitude is in truth an "absolute." We may even agree with our correspondent that it is "almost impossible to avoid thinking of it as an absolute." But may we not add that it is also *impossible to think* without regarding it as an absolute? Was Kant so terribly wrong when he declared that Time, Space, and Causality are the categories of thought?

We have one more passage from our correspondent:

In acting on a belief, it may sometimes be necessary to make grave personal commitments—even, as in the case of Socrates, to give up life itself. This most extreme commitment would unquestionably demonstrate the deepest possible faith in the belief to have absolute validity. I can imagine that a man might die for a principle and, at the moment of death, reach some new vantage-point from which he could see that his principle was in error. And I can imagine that his fellow-believers, left behind, might, in response to their own emotional needs, come to think of his supreme act of faith as being something entirely different—a sort of objective proof of the eternal truth of the belief for which the ultimate commitment was made. But the thing we *know* to be ultimate, absolute and certain here is the personal commitment—not the belief. Is it not always in the behavior of people using principles, rather than in the principles themselves that we find the characteristics of absoluteness, certainty, and conviction? And is it not this sort of behavior which is always *potentially* dangerous, no matter what the principles upon which it is based may be? Do not inhuman acts become possible for gentle people only because they are so sure they are right—because they are convinced that what they are doing to their benighted fellows is, though unpleasant, for "their own good"—or for the good of the group, or the world?

We can think of one historical character who may perhaps serve to illustrate the case of a man who, it could be argued, at the moment of death might have seen a flaw in his principle or faith. This is Thomas More, who preferred death by the headsman to acknowledging that Henry VIII was the supreme authority of the English church. From the time of Henry's divorce from Catherine of Aragon, it is said, More realized that his days of royal favor were numbered. He refused to approve the divorce,

resigning from the chancellorship of England, and declined to take the oath sanctioning the legality of Henry's marriage to Anne Boleyn. He had already been imprisoned in the Tower for these offenses when he was charged with treason for denying that Henry could replace the Pope as the head of the Church. Henry's efforts to gain the approbation of his distinguished subject were a complete failure. Like Socrates, More literally chose to die for what he believed right.

Well, what vision might have been vouchsafed to More, supposing this to be possible at the time of death? He was, one may say, a "loyal Catholic," although the corruptions of the priesthood kept him from taking monastic orders—as Erasmus said: "He preferred to be a chaste husband rather than an impure priest." Would he, perhaps, have realized that the Pope had no more authentic religious authority than Henry? And would this have meant that he died in vain?

Actually, even though More was canonized as a saint by the Church, it is difficult to think of him as an orthodox religious person. The author of *Utopia* set down convictions concerning the nature of deity which were a far cry from the dogmas of the Church. He was, perhaps, more of a philosopher than anything else, for as, again, Erasmus says, "With him, you might imagine yourself in the Academy of Plato." In his *Apology*, he denies that as lord chancellor he ever imposed cruel measures on those accused of heresy, and no contemporary ever contradicted him.

We can hardly, therefore, measure More's beliefs by the typical religious beliefs of his time. In fact, *we do not know* the real ground of his convictions, although it is fair to say that Henry was obviously misusing his royal and priestly authority to obtain his own ends, and that More regarded this as a betrayal of kingly office.

Beliefs aside, then, More's act of choosing death is a testament to the integrity of the human spirit. Neither as chancellor nor as private individual would he appear to approve what Henry did. So, as our correspondent says, "the thing we know to be

ultimate, absolute, and certain, here, is the personal commitment—not the belief."

But is this sort of behavior "potentially dangerous?" The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church, and if we come to regard the Church in the light, say, of Dostoevsky's analysis in "The Grand Inquisitor," may it not be argued that More unwittingly strengthened the prestige of an enslaving institution by his heroic act? This can, we think, be argued.

Here we get to what seems to us an extremely important conclusion. It is that there are inescapable hazards in being human. So long as there are people who accept some outside authority as the source of their moral views, so long will religious institutions be able to make capital of heroes and martyrs who, nominally or actually, have been associated with such institutions. But if More's own example were followed by his admirers; if, instead of basking in the glory of his nobility, those who regard him as a saint would separate themselves from institutions which have become morally intolerable, then More's life—and death—would find the highest fulfillment. So, in his case, at least, his behavior, while potentially dangerous, was also potentially beneficent.

The point, here, is whether or not the world can do without men who have convictions of the sort displayed by More, despite their "potential danger." Is the problem not rather a question of examining instead of necessarily abandoning the views we hold with absolute conviction?

Why not, in this case, apply the pragmatic sanction? Where do the convictions we hold lead? How do they affect our relations with other men? Some men, as their convictions grow stronger, become increasingly careful not to impose their opinions on others. This is true, we think, of genuine philosophers and genuine educators. If, for example, a man believes with something approaching absolute certainty that the supreme values in human life involve thinking and choosing for oneself, he will cherish the independence of *other men's* minds, as well as his own. He will despise coercion and propaganda and all forms of non-rational persuasion as unmitigated evils. All his decisions in relation to

others will be governed by the ideal purpose of assisting men to take the position of deciding all important questions for themselves. How could this attitude become a "dangerous absolute"?

It could, of course, be linked with folly. A man could press responsibilities of decision upon children long before they are able to comprehend the issues which are involved. Such behavior would ignore the patent fact that human beings are in process of *growing into* the capacity for responsibility. The other extreme is that of unqualified indoctrination—which attempts to prevent children or people from gaining independence of mind.

How should the balance be struck? The point, here, is that no formula exists to take the place of practical wisdom in human relations. The development of understanding, the growth of self-reliance, the blossoming of integrity—these are matters of infinite subtlety. *No one knows*, really, how these things come about, save that they do, and that we witness their emergence with an awe which restores our faith in the human spirit.

Who knows, finally, what another man knows or does not know, in his heart? Who knows completely what he knows within himself? An apparently humdrum individual may experience an hour of unqualified greatness, which cannot be explained away. We are greater than our explanations of ourselves, just as, frequently, we are worse than our self-justifications would allow. There is a sense in which we move through life as in a maze of compounded mysteries, pressed on by a restless energy which leaves behind a wreck of inadequate explanations and shattered definitions. It is the movement which cannot be denied, and it is the fire of inspiration which is the prior reality, on which all other things depend. There is indeed an ultimate commitment in human beings, the very grain of our character and the stuff of our lives. It is an order of nature which cannot be repealed. It is the role of mind to give that commitment direction.

## REVIEW

### "THE SPECTER OF PREDICTABLE MAN"

UNDER this provocative title an as-yet-un-Ph.D.'d student of political philosophy, Andrew Hacker, contributes an excellent article to the summer *Antioch Review*. Mr. Hacker is also a Fellow of the Social Science Research Council and thus, as one familiar with the psychological content of current sociological thought, contributes an informed critique of prevailing trends within the "new science." His thesis, briefly, is that when the sociologist forces a role for himself in industrial relations, he is apt to become preoccupied with adjustment of human personalities to the status quo of productive efficiency. This, of course, is understandable. If he makes people happy at their work and diminishes receptivity to the appeal of other and more interesting jobs, he unquestionably makes the gears of industry mesh smoothly. Also, by "solving the social problems of the factory," he tends to believe that he "has answers to many of society's most pressing problems." But, though "he is sincere in his desire to bring about what he considers to be an improvement," he also tends, by use of gentle psychological pressure, to reduce the areas of initiative. This, Mr. Hacker thinks, is, or may ultimately become, dangerous in the political sphere:

As the invited social scientist enters a factory or a prison or even a home for unmarried mothers, he has a set of *idées fixes* at the forefront of his mind. He must, he believes, adjust the maladjusted, he must make the unsociable sociable; he must redirect emotions from irrational to rational channels. However, one cannot speak of adjusting, socializing, and rationalizing in a vacuum. One is adjusted *to* a particular state of affairs; one is socialized *in* the context of a certain environment; and one's emotions are channelled according *to* a selected rationale. Hence, these processes which the social scientist undertakes must, of necessity, be based on predetermined ideas of what is a desirable state of affairs, social

environment, or rationale. In this realm the social scientist is not free to pick up and choose as he likes. The assumptions that he will adopt will be those of the factory managers or the wardens or whoever it was that invited his aid. But once having accepted the frame of reference of his host, he is at liberty to use his own techniques in making a social order out of an unsocial chaos. The notion of "order" or, as it is often called, "harmony" has profoundly significant consequences. For insofar as the social scientist succeeds at his job, the factory workers, the convicts or the unmarried mothers will have become adjusted to their social situations. But, we must now ask, just what has he adjusted these people to? How is their behavior, as individuals, any different from what it was before?

At this point we must take note of the fact that the social scientist's work may be judged from two points of view: on the one hand, we can regard it from the vantage point of the person who hired the social scientist to perform a specific task; on the other, we can look at it from the viewpoint of the person upon whom the social scientist is applying his techniques.

In other words, the social scientist who practices psychology aims at creating "Predictable Man"—the man who, whether in the factory or out of it, acquires the habit of responding in "the way that those who stimulate him expect he will respond." Mr. Hacker continues:

Predictable Man cannot be a troublemaker because his troublemaking can be known beforehand, and measures to deal with it can be concocted. He is happy, loyal, cooperative, and respectful of authority. But above all else, he is socialized. It is not by chance that he is that way: it is only because social scientists have studied his personality sufficiently to determine how best to fit him into his surroundings.

There are three steps in the predictabilizing process. The individual must be transformed first into Adjusted Man, then into Socialized Man, and finally into Predictable Man. In reality, the first and second stages are so intertwined that it is hard to distinguish them. For to be adjusted a man must be socialized. And if he is socialized, then he is *ipso*

*facto* adjusted. The modern social scientist is true to the cardinal dictum of the founder of his discipline. But, unlike Aristotle he does not grant that man is *naturally* a social animal. Indeed, one of the great difficulties in the way of the social scientist's task is that all too many men are eminently unsocial. They are eccentric; they have quirks; they disagree, dissent, and harbor unorthodox views. Therefore, when the social scientist seeks to adjust an individual, he does not at all try to reconcile that person to living with *his own* personality. Rather he seeks to denude such a person of his unsociable characteristics so that he will fit into his proper social group. The Socialized Man, then, is less an individual than he is an integral unit in an operating group. He is a good team member. He probably prefers basketball to chess. And he certainly prefers both to solitaire.

The logic of the foregoing is directly parallel to the central thesis of David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*. Hacker continues, pointing out that these labors to produce "predictable man" become a cause of serious concern if and when the social scientist allies himself with those individuals in our society who wield the instruments of power:

The social scientist, without his political or economic collaborators, is as harmless as an atomic physicist who knows how to make a bomb, but who has no assistance from the Atomic Energy Commission. For until the social scientist has gained access to the factory, the advertising agency, the government bureau, or the political party, he can only predict everyday behavior. In a word, he can predict; but he cannot control. But once he gains the cooperation of the factory manager, the television producer, the bureaucrat, or the politician, he is in a position to adjust the factory workers, television viewers, etc. It is only, as I have pointed out, at such time as an individual has been adjusted to his social environment that his behavior becomes scientifically predictable. I am not claiming that a *coap d'e'tat* by the social scientists is looming on the horizon. For most of these men are mild-mannered scholars who are trying to apply scientific methods to a chaotic and unwieldy subject matter. They have neither the desire nor the ability to become industrial managers or politicians. But, this said, it must be noted that they are eager to try their skills in practical social situations.

In prisons, relocation centers, new housing communities or factory towns, the sociologist, then, is becoming quite a shaman! According to Mr. Hacker, he is paving the road to that state of mental inertia upon which totalitarianisms thrive:

We have a situation where the social scientist is actually wielding the power even though the orders are issued through the authority of someone else.

The social scientist, *qua* scientist, claims to be an impartial pedlar of his wares. But despite this claim, he unquestioningly accepts the rationale for adjustment or harmony laid down by those who commissioned him to utilize his techniques. Of course the researcher in social science is impartial insofar as he advises an advertising agency aiding a company on one day and a trade union which wants to increase membership participation on the next. But over how wide a partisan compass the social scientists do, in fact, spread out their activities is open to question. Acting alone and without authoritative sponsorship, professors can effect no changes in a non-academic setting. They require the symbols of authority to stand behind them if their prescriptions are to have an influence over behavior. This means that they must work for the officially constituted leaders of organizations. And the corollary is that they will accept the rationale of the *status-quo* of those organizations.

Of course the social scientist, in answering such an indictment, may ask his critics, "What in the world is wrong with curing maladjustments or bringing harmony out of disharmony?" The simple answer is to assert that there cannot be—or ought not to be—a single rationale for running a factory, or framing a legislative program, or using soap. And insofar as the adjustment process means that the individual will be led, in succession, to accept without thinking a particular management policy, or a series of bills before Congress, or a box of soapflakes, then we cannot call him adjusted to his social environment in the larger, democratic sense. Rather he is adjusted to that particular policy which is being promoted by the social scientist's employer or host.

Predictable Man, then, cannot be a democratic man. For democracy presupposes that the individual examines various alternatives and then makes *his own* choice. Predictable Man is so adjusted that there is only one natural or logical choice that he will make in any given decisional situation. If democracy is to be maintained, then the individual must remain unpredictable—and, if needs be, maladjusted—in as

many ways as possible. But this will not be brought about by wishing away the techniques of manipulating minds. Manipulation is here to stay, and we must make the best of it.

In the same issue of the *Antioch Review*, George J. Becker suggests similar considerations in a discussion of Edward Bellamy. While pointing out that Bellamy's dream of a socialized society has been approached in many ways during the twentieth century, Becker notes that whatever "human solidarity" is achieved by a scientifically controlled social system leaves out of account Bellamy's original inspiration, arising from his "mystical sense of human solidarity, his religion of humanity." Mr. Becker feels that the thought-tone of the present social sciences is inclined to be "somewhat cynical of the perfectibility of human nature," which means that the man whom the sociologist "adjusts" is merely being expediently maneuvered. Thus Becker, like Hacker, vaguely hopes that there is something in the human being besides greed and the will-to-power, that "the heavenly hues of altruism" are natural colors. For there is, after all, something in man which makes it possible for him to respect his brother's vision and beliefs. While those who refuse to believe that the intellect is to be measured by its capacity to "condition" and "adjust" others may be few in number, yet there are and will always be philosophers who cherish "unpredictability." This sort of philosopher believes himself to be on an independent journey of soul evolution, and is therefore less concerned with influencing other people than in directing his own mind toward an ever greater cosmopolitanism of outlook.

## *COMMENTARY*

### PLENARY INDULGENCE

THE modern Christian theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, comes very close to being among the most lucid writers of our time. There is a shrewd sagacity in his comments on international affairs, as for example, in the following, which appears in the *Christian Century* for Aug. 18:

. . . isolationism and "imperialism" are but two versions of the same pride and self-centeredness. Isolationism is the selfishness of the weak, and imperialism is the selfishness of the strong. We were some decades in discovering that we were not weak but very strong. Having discovered that, we entered the world community in full force. But we announce that we will stay in it only if our will is obeyed.

In this article, Niebuhr sides with European critics of American foreign policy. He agrees that "coexistence" with communism ought to be attempted, and notes indications that "John Foster Dulles, at least, knows that Red China must ultimately be accepted. He sent up trial balloons on that issue periodically. But the winds were not propitious and the administration bowed to what is supposed to be the popular temper."

Niebuhr is also, however, the philosopher of compromise. He writes pityingly of those who "are blind to the endless complexities in the moral issues in politics, whether on the national or the international level." Now comes the significant passage:

They do not understand that it is not possible to be both pure and responsible. If we define purity as being untainted by conflict, we deliver our fellow men into the hands of tyrants for lack of resistance to their power. If we define purity as being untainted with comradeship with tyranny, we reject every form of coexistence, and are in peril of falling into the abyss of total war.

Here, we suppose, Mr. Niebuhr is exposing us to a modern version of "original sin," which, by this account, is absolutely inescapable. So far as we can see, it provides a license to do almost anything, so long as some justifying reason can be

produced. Niebuhr himself, for example, is able to say:

The Communists are unscrupulous foes and they press every advantage. It is not possible, for instance, to relieve tension by refusing to go ahead with the development of atomic weapons. Peace is preserved by the fear of these atomic weapons.

What sort of peace that is, and whether it is worth having, Mr. Niebuhr does not discuss. Apparently, not only the pacifists can be charged with wanting "peace at any price."

## CHILDREN ...and Ourselves

THERE ought to be, we have been thinking, some tricky way of attacking television-viewing by children without sounding square, crotchety, or octogenarian! And a foursquare attack is what the mood calls for.

One might, of course, follow in the brisk footsteps of Dr. Frederic Wertham, whose expose of crime comics managed to get even the *New Yorker* to sit up and view with alarm. But television is tame in comparison with crime comics. Besides, we can hardly pretend to the detailed factual approach, since MANAS editors' time and facilities leave much to be desired when the laboratory method is called for. We have, then, in our arsenal, few weapons save the tools of philosophy. This being the case, we think of the ancient Athenians, who were very good at philosophy, and of what one of them might have said about children sitting before television screens.

A Greek like Socrates quite possibly would ask, What is the most rewarding way of spending leisure time—time when we are not engaged in the pursuit of livelihood, in fighting a war, or whatever? Isn't it clear that the most worthy pursuit for man is the further development of rational intelligence, since this is really all that distinguishes man from animal, and thus constitutes his chief claim to relationship with the Gods?

But how, we must ask, is "rational intelligence" developed? Does it grow in our brains like fungus in a damp climate, or does it require nurture? Since it is evident that the rational mind, even as the musculature of the body, will not improve itself without discipline and use, we must devise appropriate disciplines for this purpose. And here, friend Glaucon, we are compelled to notice that although a man can develop his musculature in his own private gymnasium, alone and unaided, in the training of his mind he requires the help of others. Why should this be so? Is it not that any single mind will reflect the wisdom of the Gods but partially, and according to personal biases and predilections, so that man must strive to see more largely through

converse with others? And are not conversation and debate the very ways by which the mind fulfills itself?

Now tell me, Glaucon, do your vigils in front of the television screen inspire you to thought, or do they merely evoke your feelings? Emotions are all well and good, and men undoubtedly have a far more interesting range of them than the lower creatures, but unless these feelings and emotions are controlled and comprehended by the mind, have we any right to claim a qualitative superiority to the animals? And you, Glaucon, you have had a number of years in which to learn how to judge whether or not you have availed yourself of opportunity. Your children, now, are just beginning to teeter on the verge of mental experience, just commencing to know that thoughts are things and that the life of the mind is a real life of itself. Yet they, like all others, have only so much energy to expend, and if this energy is allowed to run out upon the ground, as it were, through the channels of untrained and uncomprehended emotions, how are they ever to find their true birth right? Surely the Gods will disown them in later life, or at the very least find it impossible to favor them with visions.

Yes, you can say that, according to many of my own precepts, one must, as a true philosopher, make the most and the best of conditions as they are. This television is indeed here, and here to stay. You may further claim that a number of well-meaning enthusiasts labor to bring what they call "educational content" to the programs which flicker on your walls. But, Glaucon, these arguments would only be compelling if one had no choice in the matter, as in the case of war, fire, flood or famine. And while we cannot banish a flood or a famine from our homes, no law yet compels us to install video. The choice is a free one, and depends solely upon what we think men—and children—should be about during their leisure hours. You say that you consider me a wise man, Glaucon, and this may or may not be true—I cannot myself say, save that it seems to me the part of wisdom never to consider it certain that you are either right or wrong. But I say that whatever wisdom I do possess would never have been mine if as a youth I had watched Howdy Doody, The Lone Ranger, and Space Patrol on alternate evenings. I

would certainly have been so full of feelings and impressions that it never would have occurred to me to wonder why I had them, whether some were better than others, or whether there was something more to life than teasing my excitabilities.

And you say, but Socrates, after all, we've always had a radio in the house, and what is video but a further development of this great invention? But Glaucon, you have never asked me what I thought of radio entertainment for children. You broach the subject of video only now, when your children's eyes water, when the reports of their tutors steadily worsen, and they become fatter and noisier at the same time. Had you asked me about radio years ago, I would have said substantially what I say to you now in regard to the new mechanical monstrosity, for the same criticisms apply. And I remind you that if one is surrounded by people who have regular colds in the head each winter, this is no cause to consider the onslaught of the plague inevitable—nor even a reason for catching cold oneself. Yet the comparison, I think, is fair, since radio ruined less than half the children, while video makes a bold bid for a clean sweep. Have you not noticed, Glaucon, that the children who spend the most time viewing television seem, when TV is not available, even more dependent upon radio than they used to be, demanding the screech of a loudspeaker when they ride forth with their parents in carts or chariots? A nauseous habit is apparently developed, leading its addicts to prefer noise to quiet at all times, and professional entertainment to simple conversation. Even when a youth does have something to say, he seemingly prefers to say it against the background of strident sound, dramatic fury—or commercials praising sandal deodorants in rhyme. Why these discordant irrelevancies should prove reassuring to the young I do not know; perhaps it is that, being quite certain that no one will inspect their remarks very carefully, anyway, with so much going on, the voicing of a comment occasions less responsibility.

Now, Glaucon, in previous discourse you have been very thorough in your denunciation of the theories of young Plato, who advises censorship of the arts. And while I am inclined to agree that social

laws are a poor way of attempting to improve the caliber of the Athenian population, is it not possible to sympathize with a man who favors tossing worthless "entertainers" over the borders of the state? If there is any way in which the argument for censorship can be made virtuous, certainly the plight of our youthful television addicts will call it forth, for if these children grow up without thought, Athens will have no way of renewing itself when crotchety old men are gone. Even this most imperfect state has its virtues, not to be taken lightly, since they were so painstakingly gained. And not one of them grew from entertainment. The laws, the philosophy upon which you yourself have been nurtured, were created through the travail of thought, and it is my opinion that those who never experience the struggle entailed in finding and holding a great idea have missed much of both the joy and the art of living. Sometimes it appears that the secret soul of youth knows this, grows dissatisfied with a life in which tempered conversation and thought are alike strangers, and reveal their dissatisfaction by vacant stares, raucous voices, and aimless rebellion.

You say that there is little use in dropping your own radio and video down the city well? That whatever you do, others will go on just as before? What of that? We are discussing your children, Glaucon, not theirs, and since when does a wise man wait for others before putting his principles into effect?

## *FRONTIERS* Indian Social Philosophy

Two weeks ago, in the MANAS lead article ("India's Great Project"), it was said or implied that until recent years, there was little in Indian literature that could be regarded as "social criticism," and that "the idea of the social contract is a distinctly modern idea." We are now obliged to retract these statements, or at least offer some strong qualifications. Once again, we are impressed by the difficulty of making big historical generalizations, for even if what is said seems substantially Correct, some sort of exception is almost inevitably found, if one looks long enough.

The present exception, however, was discovered more or less by accident. We have for review a copy of *New India* (IV, I), published by The India Students Association of America, in which are printed articles by Indian students attending universities in the United States. The first paper in this issue is entitled "East, West, and Professor Northrop." It is by John G. Arapura and is a serious (and rather devastating) criticism of the central contentions of the well-known author of *The Meeting of East and West* and *The Taming of the Nations*. While Mr. Arapura finds momentary fault with Dr. Northrop for objecting to India's "neutralism" in the cold war, this is really only a detail and a consequence of the larger criticism offered—that Northrop has not understood Indian thought at all.

The matter pertinent to our "retraction" occurs in a passage in which Arapura challenges Northrop's claim that India has been indifferent to social issues. The Indian student writes:

The charge of lack of interest in the minds of ancient people for matters political, and contentment in leaving them to the will of despots is not original with Northrop, he has simply borrowed it from a common stock of notions that has prevailed in the West for a long time. We have no need to take such fortuitous charges without corrective criticism any more. Several great authorities like Professor U. Ghosal (*History of Hindu Political Theories*) and Dr.

N. C. Bandopadhyaya (*Development of Hindu Polity and Political Theories*) for example have done enough sound research and brought to light their results in order to dispel the darkness of ignorance, as well as the moonlight of presumption surrounding this matter. Study will show how absurd are the common misconceptions entertained by the uninformed that democratic social and political ideals are entirely western inventions, and that the traditional form of government in the Orient is tyranny, as men like Northrop tell us. Chanakya, the great political scientist of ancient India, lived long before the Stoics, and the Christian theologian, St. Augustine, people from whom western democracy takes its rise. We have a story of Chanakya challenging the despotic king Sukalpa of Magadha and debating with him, saying, "We have to disobey unjust commands, even if they come from the king." . . . The basis of political theory in ancient India was contract as was also the case with most of the political theory of the West. But contract itself was rooted in the concept of Dharma, which in turn was rooted in Rta, the primordial principle of moral order running through the universal system and evolving the right line of conduct in the individual man. . . . There were not only monarchies, but also Republics, a rather startling piece of information for many western people. The function of the state was to protect Dharma and make it possible for individuals and society so to live as to fulfill its requirements as well as realize its possibilities.

But there was one thing which Indian democracy successfully avoided in contrast to Western. In the West, right from the origins of political thought in the early Greek times to this day, there has been a tendency to make the state or its symbol, whether Emperor or King (as in the case of the Caesar-Gods of Rome) or dictator (as in some modern dictatorships) something absolute. For the Greek summum bonum of his existence was the ideal state. Everything was merged into it—the citizen's life, his social existence and his political activity. But in India neither state nor society was turned into an end, because of the transcendental aspects of its doctrine. No King was ever allowed to become a god (as in ancient Rome) or even a symbol of divinity (as in most mediaeval monarchies, especially England). Kings and rulers were equally subject to Dharma and they were regarded as equal partners with their subjects in its fulfilment.

We have quoted this passage at some length, not only for its contrast with familiar Western

views on India, but also to illustrate the vigor of the critical thought of the rising generation of Indian scholars. However, since Arapura's writing is polemical, mainly concerned with correcting misconceptions, and with standing out against what he regards as distortion and over-simplification on the part of Northrop in interpreting the "Authentic East," the impression is somehow created that India's performance has been a flawless record of social progress in harmony with the transcendental guidance of her ancestral philosophy. Some notes along the way, admitting that there have been gaps between India's theory and her practice, would be of considerable help to the friendly reader.

Our point, two weeks ago, was really that the provocations to social revolution were so great in the West that they led to abandonment of the *hierarchical* idea of the relationships of beings (the version of "hierarchy" in Western religion had become largely a rationalization of exploitation of the under-privileged classes or "castes"), and to the adoption of the contract theory of social relations as a wholly *empirical* notion. While no scholars of Indian history and religion, we think that the conception of the social order in the *Institutes of Manu* is also hierarchical, but with this difference: the hierarchies of Indian cosmology and anthropology are part of a scheme of universal psychic evolution, a scheme fulfilled by the realization of Dharma—duty, role, of function—and therefore, as Arapura points out, the social systems of India were at least theoretically controlled by an over-riding conception of order or measure, and, in consequence, less vulnerable to the rapid disintegrations of political absolutism.

We greatly suspect that "contract" theories of social relations in ancient India took rather the form of doctrines of reciprocity or interdependence, which is really a different idea. There is the flavor, if not the substance, of mutual distrust in all contract theories of government. Contract theories usually emerge in an epoch of

revolt against paternalism, which is the abuse characterizing the decay of an organic or hierarchical society. The assumptions and the mood of contract theories seem quite different from the temper of acceptance of a web of reciprocal relationships, represented by the idea of caste at its logical best.

Our point, again, was that India, unlike Western cultures, never lost the background of transcendental idealism which once supplied the principle of measure to her social systems, and while those systems grew static and loaded with formalism, the universalism of Indian thought was capable of being renewed by great reformers like Gandhi, making possible a bloodless social revolution which seems to be avoiding the iconoclasm and philosophic nihilism of Western revolutions.

The thing that we should hate to see in India, as a kind of camp-follower in the long, uphill struggle of modern India to become a self-disciplined, even a *philosophic* society, is a revival of Brahminical pride in all things Indian. It would be a pity for modern Indians to repeat the mistake of Westerners in supposing that they have the wisdom the world needs, and that other peoples had best recognize it. Even if there are elements of truth in the claim, the value of India's wisdom would be blighted and stunted by this subtler form of cultural nationalism. Quite possibly, the pride of Indians in their noble traditions played a part in the humiliation imposed upon them by Western barbarians. As Radhakrishnan has put it: "If in this human history of ours we have suffered many defeats, may I say that it is not a crucifixion that we have had; we have suffered for the sins we have committed."

Some notice should be taken of Arapura's chief criticism of Northrop's analysis. It is that Northrop errs in identifying Eastern or Indian culture as naïvely intuitive, as compared with the West's theoretical approach to experience through the disciplines of science. The writer in *New India*

points out, justly we think, that Indian thought is rather *metaphysical* in character:

One has to affirm with all conviction that what Northrop calls intuition, a purely instinctive and vital faculty such as it is, that is, beneath reason and not above it, which not only the East but also the West and the primitive cultures know . . . is not by any means to be identified with the *intellectual* intuition in the metaphysical cultures of Authentic Orient. It is this grave confusion that has led Northrop to assert that the cultures of the Orient possess only knowledge of the particular, and left to themselves would be incapable of advancing towards knowledge of the Universal. For one who is acquainted with the metaphysical doctrines of Authentic Orient as well as Western philosophical theories, this assertion of Mr. Northrop would appear to be nothing short of fantastic. The truth is that in Western philosophy, as a rule there is no recognition of the Universal, the notion of the General having taken its place. Even a distinction between the Universal and the General is not possible within the independent framework of the logic that Mr. Northrop adopts. . . . In all fairness, we must declare nevertheless, that although it is the East alone that has had a sustained and continuous knowledge of universal principles, they have been in sundry times and in diverse manners vouchsafed to the West also, of which Plato's *Ideas*, Aristotle's *First Principles*, and Kant's *Things-in-themselves* are instances. The above observations will show how terribly mistaken Northrop is in regarding the cultures of the Orient as based on aesthetic immediacy and indeterminacy of perception. And since his whole approach is based on this untenable hypothesis it is difficult to see how the theories built on it could ever be expected to bear fruit in the direction of intercultural understanding, to which his books are professedly dedicated.

Arapura continues with effective criticism of the West and of Northrop's version of the role of the West in universal history. We have no notion of what attention will be paid to this article in learned circles; very little, unfortunately, we suspect, since Northrop is such a "big gun" in the world of modern scholarship. And since Arapura obviously suffers some irritation at the sweeping presumptions of the American writer, his article is not exactly calculated to win friends and influence people in the West, where, except for Plato, Aristotle, and Kant, live unconscionable millions

of also-rans in the race toward civilization and culture.

Here, perhaps, is the kernel that needs to be isolated. It is time for East and West to stop competing with and preaching at each other, except on the basis of absolute equality. The West of today enjoys a mature intellectuality that is quite capable of appreciating the philosophic riches of the Orient. It is even conceivable that the time will come when the profundities of Indian philosophy will become so well known that they will no longer be "Indian," but will belong to the world. Is this not the character of "universals," that they bear no inherent stamp of creed or race, but are accessible to all who possess the qualities of mind which can embrace them? The ultimate glory that men need to cherish is the glory of *human* achievement, in which the peoples of all nations and races may take equal pride. And surely the first to achieve this point of view will be the best and wisest of men on earth.