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TWO TRADITIONS

WITH what some readers may regard as clear provocation, a subscriber has singled out a sentence from the Review article for Sept. 15—devoted to the current interest of psychiatric writers in ancient philosophy and mysticism—and asks what it means, or what the reviewer meant by it. This is the passage:

> Perhaps it is the fate of man in his present stage of quasi-maturity to founder upon sandbank after sandbank of prejudice before he discovers that flow of genuine knowledge pertaining to the soul, a flow which may run from antiquity to the future, and reveal the meaning of the human odyssey.

Our subscriber says:

> It is the use of the word "knowledge" that puzzles me here. I wouldn't have been puzzled—or stimulated—if some such word as "thought" or "speculation" had been used in place of "knowledge." . . . Whatever the cause, I am more than a little uncomfortable.

We shall have to admit what is obvious to all regular readers of MANAS—that such words as "knowledge," or "knowledge of the soul," are often found in MANAS articles, and that a comment of this sort is entirely in order, unless the editors expect readers to accept these expressions without question as a kind of hallmark of High Purposes, needing, therefore, no further explanation. The fact is, however, that two differing traditions of thinking and writing are often joined in the pages of MANAS. Sometimes these traditions meet and are blended quite consciously by the writer, but on other occasions no special effort is made at synthesizing them.

The first and older of these traditions is the tradition of transcendental philosophy or philosophic religion. It is fundamentally idealist and, for the West, Platonic in origin. It is gnostic in its theory of knowledge and mystical as well as rational in its theory of progress. It is a tradition which, for all practical purposes, was abandoned by Western culture as a result of the birth of modern science and the redefinition of "knowledge" in scientific and skeptical terms.

The second tradition is born of the experimental and instrumentalist approach to human experience. This tradition is broadly pragmatic in its conception of knowledge and somewhat vaguely experimental in its conception of progress. We say "vaguely" for the reason that the nature of "knowledge," except for the physical and biological sciences, is far from having clear definition in the pragmatist tradition. Scientific psychology is very much in flux, these days, making terms like "knowledge" and "truth," to say nothing of "soul," unpopular and suspect.

The supremacy of the second tradition, which may be termed "scientific," has been practically unquestioned by educated Westerners for several generations past. Only within recent years has there emerged a sense that something vital or crucially important may be missing from the conventional scientific account of things. It is this "sense" on the part of a number of eminent scientists, psychologists, and writers that supplies MANAS with a great deal of material for discussion and review. For example, there is this passage, quoted from Pierre Duhem, the theoretical physicist, two weeks ago in MANAS (while Duhem wrote this many years ago, only now is such thinking reaching the foreground of modern thought):

> . . . the physicist is compelled to recognize that it would be unreasonable to work for the progress of physical theory if this theory were not the increasingly better defined and more precise reflection of a metaphysics; the belief in an order transcending physics is the sole justification of physical theory.

It is fair to conclude from such statements, of which a number might be assembled from modern thinkers, that the experimental-skeptical approach to knowledge is now being questioned as affording the sole theory of knowledge, although, fortunately, it is retained as a method in the testing of hypothesis.

Now, then, let us return to the first great tradition. To embrace it is a big step. We should not want to take that step if it seemed to require an abandonment of the experimental-skeptical approach. *But*, so far as we can see, intelligent philosophy and mysticism are not possible without experiment and a kind of skepticism. This being the case, one may accept the philosophic tradition without essential hazard. And accepting it seems to us to be almost a practical necessity, for nothing else will supply the sort of postulates or assumptions that give at least the *promise* of the sort of world in which man aspires to live. There is further justification for accepting the philosophical tradition in the fact that its integral or integrating conceptions seem to give secure anchorage to at least some of the dynamics of modern psychotherapy. If we conceive the human being as a unitary individual, the term "soul" is a useful designation of this aspect of man, and ancient ideas about the soul sometimes reveal a working kinship with psychotherapeutic measures for emotional and mental health.

What sources have provided, what forces have shaped, the philosophical tradition? The sources are virtually beyond numbering. Most familiar to us among the ancients are such scriptures as *The Bhagavad-Gita*, the *Upanishads*, the *Tao Te-King*, the *Dhammapada*, certain writings of Plato, the *Enneads* of Plotinus, the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, the New Testament; and to these may be added the writings of many mystics and enthusiastic philosophers. There is a dialogue between father and son in the *Chbandogya Upanishad* which gives simple illustration of the *idea* of the philosophical or transcendental tradition. The youth had been away to school for twelve years; and now, returning at the age of twenty-four, "he had learned all the teachings, but was conceited, vain of his learning, and proud." His father addressed him:

> Shvetaketu, you are conceited, vain of your learning, and proud, dear, but have you asked for that teaching through which the unheard is heard, the unthought is thought, the unknown is known?
>
> What sort of teaching is that, Master? said he.
>
> Just as, dear, by a single piece of clay anything made of clay is known, for the difference is only one of words and names, and the real thing is that it is of clay. . . ; just like this is the teaching that makes the unknown known.
>
> But I am sure that those teachers did not know this themselves; for if they had known it, how would they not have taught it to me? said he; but now let my Master tell it to me.
>
> Let it be so, dear; said he.
>
> In the beginning, dear, there was . . . .

So begins the immemorial teaching, bringing subtlety to reveal subtlety, mystery to disclose mystery. And all that may come to the reader is a wonderment that so many men through so many millennia have found the deepest of truths in such utterances. Admittedly, an alchemy of some sort is involved. There is much beyond comprehension, but not all. The philosophic scripture is like the art-forms of the East, of which Norman Brown has said: "Sculpture was not meant to be a reminder of a human being or of an apotheosis of man, but of something abstract, spiritual in its reality beyond comprehension of the senses, an ocular reference to universal knowledge that might somehow become comprehensible to humanity."

In these scriptures, there is no mood of dogma, no vain contentiousness nor imposition. It is rather a great affirmation of the intuitions of the heart of Everyman—it speaks for no one and no thing else:

> Who knows the secret? who proclaimed it here?
> Whence, whence this manifold creation sprang?

The Gods themselves came later into being—
Who knows from whence this great creation sprang?
That, whence all this great creation came,
Whether Its will created or was mute,
The Most High Seer that is in highest heaven,
He knows it—or perchance even he knows it not.

Gazing into eternity. . .
Ere the foundations of the earth were laid,

. . . . . .

Thou wert. And when the subterranean flame
Shall burst its prison and devour the flame . . .
Thou shalt still be as Thou wert before
And knew no change, when time shall be no more.
Oh! endless thought, divine ETERNITY.

The transcendental tradition, in our time, implies a tremendous effort to find the rational ground for the ancient claim to religious truth. The assumption of that tradition is that the truth exists, and that it may be supported, if not discovered, by reason. It seeks intellectual vindication of ancient ideas, in the fresh terms and by the modern rigors and disciplines of our time. The body of these ancient ideas is typified in a passage from Ernst Cassirir, recently quoted in these pages:

> . . . myth and primitive religion . . . emphatically deny the possibility of death. In a certain sense the whole of mythical thought may be interpreted as a constant and obstinate negation of the phenomenon of death. By virtue of this conviction of the unbroken unity and continuity of life, myth has to clear away this phenomenon. Primitive religion is perhaps the strongest and most energetic affirmation of life that we find in human culture.

There is no need to equate the idea of "knowledge of the soul" with satisfaction of the simple longing for personal immortality. While the idea of immortality may result from a spiritual interpretation of life, what is of first importance in the transcendental tradition is the idea of the self as rooted in consciousness—consciousness as self-existent reality and both universal and individual. This—as we read them, at any rate—is the meaning of the ancient scriptures and of the mystical philosophers.

As we said before, the quest for understanding as a pursuit which is guided and inspired by such ancient conceptions does not seem to oblige us to take leave of what we know—or think we know—of the world of sense experience, nor to jettison the caution of the scientific spirit.. So far as we can see, the mystics and philosophers reach toward the same reality as the scientists, although from another shore, and with open acknowledgement of hopes that are either quiescent or more timidly expressed in the modern world.

Letter from **ENGLAND**

LONDON.—Witch-hunting is not, as might be supposed, as national sport, the close preserve of the United States. Just now we are having a demonstration of it in England. With us it is taking the form of a hunt for the authors and publishers of obscene books, and as in the United States, zeal begets fanaticism in this pursuit. Here, in England, we are tending to become slightly ridiculous—that is, those who are engaged on this so-called campaign of righteousness against the lewd and the perverse in literature.

There were recently hauled up before the criminal courts in London the directors of three of the leading publishing houses for the offence of publishing books held to be obscene in Law. In several cases convictions have been secured, though, in others, appeals are pending, so that the last word is not yet spoken. In England the law on this subject flows from the decisions of the courts in leading cases, that is, case law. There are many such decisions. For example, a poet has been convicted and sent to prison for using a word that was, in Saxon days, quite respectable. This word, with "m" substituted for another letter, has passed unprosecuted ever since the first of the First World War novels appeared. (Aldington was, I think, one of the first to make it "respectable.") Certain other words hitherto taboo, have been coming steadily into general use, both in the spoken word and in current literature; for words, like families, go up and down in the social scale, and just now some deemed completely foul fifty years ago are often heard on the lips of even women. A language gives hospitality to those words which are acceptable at any given period of history to those who use it. Therefore, at this moment, it seems curious that there is an official move to stop the use in print of words that have been so used for several decades, notably, in recent years, by writers of books dealing with the last war, many of whom have been Americans.

Just now juries are being asked to pass upon recently-published fiction for obscenity; but they are also having their attention drawn to books that have been freely sold in these Isles for centuries. And it is here that what began as something vexatious becomes finally absurd. For last week a bench of magistrates decided that Boccaccio's *Decameron* was obscene, having, apparently, only just heard of it, and ordered the local police to destroy a number of copies seized from the shop of a local bookseller. Such zeal begets reaction, and voices are now being raised to point out that few books have more obscene passages than the Bible itself. Then there is Chaucer, surely a prince among pornographers—vide *The Canterbury Tales*. Then, again, much of the work of Skelton, Shakespeare, of course, Suckling, Dryden and many more, contain passages that one would not choose to read to a class of just-teen-agers, but which have not as yet been prosecuted as obscene.

But it is the decisions of the courts that matter here, for thereafter there is precedent for quotation, and henceforth, anybody telling tales somewhat bawdily, in the vein of Boccaccio, is open to prosecution. If in the United States this type of witch-hunting was scotched by a judicial finding—that of Judge John M. Woolsey, in 1933, in the matter of Joyce's *Ulysses*—recent convictions in the England courts are likely to make further prosecutions more numerous, not less.

A peculiar aspect of the present outbreak of puritanism in high places here is its preoccupation with writing deemed to be obscene by reason of the character of descriptive passages relating to sex, or to the use of the "forbidden" words. Upon another type of literature which has increased in popularity since the War, the Law remains indifferent. I refer to what might fairly be styled the Sadist School. There are many books openly sold now that deal exclusively with this perversion, and such books, undoubtedly,

stimulate the psychologically inclined towards that perversion. Whether they should be seized and burnt the writer does not know. That such books stimulate crime is certain; whereas even literature truly scatological only serves to titillate an appetite for smut, and to do that only among the psychologically adolescent of all ages.

History shows very clearly that fashion in this matter swings both ways, and generally too far: we are prone either to prudishness or to an access of license. Just now in England numerous prosecutions, such as those indicated, suggest that we are about to turn back towards Victorian standards. But only so far as the criminal courts are concerned. There never was more freedom in the use of language in England than there is today, nor a more liberal attitude towards freedom in art. Can the courts continue to burn Classics and harass genuine writers striving to set down their view of life without degenerating into the instruments of the official witch-hunters? That is a difficult question to answer. We need now, perhaps, a statutory definition of what is obscene. It had best be skilfully drafted or else much that is now in honoured places on our bookshelves will go into the bonfire.

ENGLISH CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
THE NEW PACIFISM

TROUBLING OF A STAR, a Korean war novel by Walt Sheldon, enables us to pursue again the idea of last week's Review—that new forms of "pacifist" conviction are finding expression in current literature. This book was first published by Lippincott in 1953, and now appears in a Bantam paper-bound edition.

Bantam proclaims it "*the* novel of the Korean War," and we find no reason to object, for Mr. Sheldon's novel is, indeed, ingenious and remarkable in psychological content. Before supplying evidence in quotation it may be helpful to describe the plot: Sheldon's leading character, back from a "forward control" mission to the front, and ready to resume his occupation as a jet pilot, suddenly realizes that he wishes to have no more part in killing defenseless civilians, or even in dropping napalm on troop concentrations. Moreover, he seriously contemplates a flat refusal to fly further missions. "Captain Tindle" does, indeed, eventually compromise, for he is a man in dire confusion, and when the joys of life have been increased by the affections of a beautiful Japanese girl, he discovers that his qualms are vanishing and he is nearly back to "normalcy." Again he sees the war in terms of abstract issues which seem to make it necessary—but here Mr. Sheldon throws in his reverse twist. Just when the reader is beginning to suspect that this conventional solution of a troubled conscience was what was in mind all the time, Tindle suddenly realizes that he was on the right track in the first place, and that his subsequent readjustment was really a betrayal of his own conscience. He disobeys a radioed instruction to shoot down a parachutist (who *may* be Russian, and whose possible escape on the ground, therefore, must be prevented), and emerges as his own hero, if no one else's. Only after he has followed through on this impulse to spare a life does Tindle feel that he has found himself and become a happy man. In semi-disgrace, grounded from further flying, he gains a sense of well-being never before experienced.

A further excellence in *Troubling of a Star* is Sheldon's portrayal of the robust, efficient and righteous officer who is Tindle's commanding officer. "Colonel Straker" is a good fighter and a good leader. He believes in the war just as he believes in his Bible—and Straker is a sophisticated type Bible-pounder. But through Tindle's awakening perception we see the blind side of the Model Officer—someone who goes by a set of simple rules and, therefore, never has to trouble his own conscience about anything. Revealing dialogues between Tindle and Straker are distributed throughout the novel, the first coming when they meet, with Tindle describing the terrible carnage of napalm as he had observed it personally at the front:

> Straker said, "I'm aware of the horrors of war, Tindle. No one could be more shocked and dismayed at war than myself. But I'm also aware that we have a job to do."
>
> "Yes, sir," said Tindle in a blank voice, and with a blank look.
>
> Straker rose and began to pace back and forth behind the desk. "Our Wing has been particularly effective against troops," he said. "I'm going to see that we're used to attack troops as much as possible. It may mean a longer trip to the target sometimes, but it will also mean more damage to that target."
>
> Simple, thought Tindle. If you wanted to be deeply against war, and at the same time wage it well, all you had to do was change the words you used. Not a mass of huddled, terrified human beings—just a target. Not a bewildered poor slob of a man who never wanted anything but a few meals and a woman to sleep with, and maybe a beer now and then, but instead got trapped without willing it into the whole mess, into the nightmare—no, not a man. Call him a troop. So many troops comprised a target. A target wasn't a social entity, and a troop didn't have nerve-ends and a mortal soul.
>
> "So from now on," continued the colonel, "you'll do well to concentrate on your gunnery and low altitude bombing. After this the 66th is going to be known as 'The Manhunters.' "

Tindle raised his eyebrows slowly. "The—what, sir?"

"'The Manhunters.' Captain Gorgas, the P.I.O., cooked it up. Catchy, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. Catchy," Tindle said.

A passage from one of the closing chapters gives a later development of the relationship between the two men:

Tindle could feel the dry whiteness of his face. "You're a religious man, aren't you, Colonel? You probably think of yourself as a good Christian, and a fine, compassionate soul. An understanding soul. But let me tell you this, Colonel, you don't even begin to understand what goes on in a man's mind and in his guts. You don't know what it's like because you've anesthetized yourself with all the surface techniques of goodness. You're a technician, like all the rest: you're very clever and skillful at what you do, but you don't do anything worth being clever and skillful at."

Tindle was wound up now. He went on: "I'll bet you can quote a dozen passages on forgiveness from the Bible—but can you bring yourself to forgive an enemy shooting at you from a hillside? You can lead a whole wing of jet pilots in battle—but can you lead them in real morality? In absolute integrity? Could you be clever and skillful at that? Could you—oh, hell, forget it."

In the background of conflict between Tindle and his own conscience, and between Tindle and Straker, lies the author's general philosophy. The Sheldon evaluation of present currents in world history both repeats and beautifully illustrates Dwight Macdonald's *Responsibility of Peoples*. For the Captain discovers that ever since childhood he had been moving around, circular-fashion, in predetermined confines of specialization. Never has he had a chance to discover what he would *really* desire to do with his life, or to choose standards of evaluation for a worthy life. He could do only one thing well—fly a fighter plane:

They were wonderfully skilled men, these pilots, Tindle reflected: and so, for the most part, were the men who backed them up. There were even more of these specialists behind each pilot than in the last war, the big one only five years ago. There had to be. Long, long ago there must have been a time when every man in an army fought, and was a combat soldier in the strictest sense of the word. But as new gadgets appeared, and as the weapons of war became more and more machines, specialists were required for them. By the time of the Roman Empire there were already soldiers who were experts in transportation or administration, and seldom fought. With each new development the ranks of the second echelon swelled . . . the tank, the airplane, the submarine . . . electronics, engineering, transportation, weather, psychological warfare, special services, public information, finance. . . now a man could make a career of any of these. A man could become mighty good at his job. He could spend most of the waking hours of his lifetime mastering it—it had to be that way, for these jobs were that intricate.

But when, then, could a man find time to study himself and his own soul (if men indeed had souls) and thus have glimpses into the souls of others, and thus look briefly and occasionally upon fragments of the truth, and thus know moments of beauty, and thus touch ever so lightly, every once in a long while, upon utter exaltation?

The struggle going on in the inner reaches of Captain Tindle's mind made him an unhappy and confused person, yet when he passed through this confusion and emerged with a clear-cut decision which fitted his own character, he discovered a sense of "belonging" to life which more than repaid his partial psychological isolation from his fellows. The point, here, is not that everyone needs to become a pacifist, but rather that everyone must discover a way by which to measure his own integrity—and if that way leads to the extreme represented by Tindle's decision he should not shirk the consequences. So, in all, *Troubling of a Star* is a convincing study of moral decision, besides which it includes the essential ingredients of a first-rate adventure story.

COMMENTARY
MORE THAN A MATTER OF WORDS

THERE will always be, we suppose, some sort of "regulation" of printed matter intended for public distribution (see Letter from England). It seems likely, however, that such regulation becomes stupid or oppressive only when protectors of the public morals assume that the morality or "purity" of literature depends upon filtering out particular words which are held to be obscene.

So far as we can see, this assumption is far more convincing evidence of decadence than the tendency of writers to express themselves in certain unlovely Anglo-Saxon verbs and nouns. The really important qualities of human expression can never be controlled by law, while the trouble with taboos—verbal or otherwise ----is that they permit people to imagine that they achieve morality by observing them, when, actually, there may not be the slightest shadow of moral decision involved. Meanwhile, as our English correspondent points out, the law does not—indeed, cannot—touch works whose offense is in mood, as with attitudes of cruelty. Then there is the whole gamut of writings which have concealed purposes. Only the integrity of the writer has control in such matters.

Censorship does another disservice by giving writers a rather unimportant opportunity to defend their "freedom." Banning certain words obscures the essential problem—it makes vocabulary a civil-liberties issue instead of a question of art. Writers, like the rest of us, have a "small-boy" component in them, and to tell them they *can't* say certain things amounts to daring them to do it. There have been times when the "artistic" and the "illegal" came close to being the same, and whatever else we may think of such interludes, one thing is certain: they contribute nothing to public taste and public elevation.

Writers may be a little like the group of children described in Children . . . and Ourselves this week. Given free access to indigestible sweets, the children soon discovered what was good for them. And that discovery was precious because it was their own. It seems to us that most writers, once they have passed through a cycle of "free" expression, will grow tired of the unnecessary epithet, the tiresome vulgarity, and gain that sense of proportion which can never offend genuine sensibility.

As for censorship, it is difficult to get rid of the notion that what its supporters want to control in others they fear above all in themselves.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

I am wondering about the learning process. This is what I would like to understand: Is learning always indirect? Is it that one must take a broad philosophical position—really an attitude of mind rather than an outline of specific objectives—and that the daily application of this high motive or ideal in every new set of circumstances will gradually bring one to epitomize the virtues? We know by experience that those who set out to cultivate the virtues usually fall short of their end. They gain the form rather than the essence of virtue. To put the question another way, is it that one's real purpose is on a higher plane than his practical growth?

Actually, I have always been a little troubled by the indirect method of approach. For example, the *real issue* may be that the baby gets his food, but the apparent focus of attention is the little article that his mother (or father!) gives him to hold while the spoon is making its rapid circuit from dish to mouth. *Voila!* the child is fed—and no commotion. This may not be "learning," but it illustrates an indirect method of getting something done. If you ask a child to open his eyes under water, he often finds it difficult. If you say—"When your head is under water, see if you can count how many fingers I hold out"—he forgets that he is opening his eyes under water (the real issue) and concentrates on fingers!

Now, why shouldn't we be able to approach learning more directly? How can the will enter into learning if we do not?

ONE suspects that much of the difficulty in arriving at a good definition of learning derives from our medieval heritage. The concept of human nature fundamental to orthodox theology was that virtue must be attained by subjecting oneself to categorical disciplines. These disciplines were not conceived as aids in drawing forth inherent virtues and capacities, but rather constituted frank indoctrination—to the effect that sin does not pay and that obedience does.

All of which was of course in sharp contrast to the Socratic and Platonic philosophy, which held that both virtue and wisdom are innate and need only to be drawn out by capable assistance. The Greek concept of learning, in other words, was a concept of awakening; the Greeks were, in a sense, mystics—they looked for inner revelation. The universities of the Western world, on the contrary, followed a categorical approach to knowledge. Facts, like dogmas, were to be implanted by repetition, and independent reasoning was valid only insofar as it moved within predetermined orbits. On the other hand, both Socrates and Plato—and Pythagoras before them—would indeed insist that learning is an "indirect" process.

As we can see, considerable of psychology becomes involved at this point, if the Greeks were right and the indoctrinators wrong. Even a child is not apt to put forth his best mental efforts when he is led to believe that *all the important answers are already known, and the important virtues already defined*. For this knowledge and these virtues belong to "other people," and, instead of embarking on a voyage of fascinating discovery, an exploration of meaning, he is to be adjusted to the *status quo*. But if we define learning as "awakening," we can help children—and other adults—to approach it "more directly." This is done by attempting to clarify the nature of the problem to be solved, and not by supplying the answers before the nature of the problem has been grasped. For imitation is certainly never a "direct" road towards the mastering of any power.

Of course, all of this pertains to the awakening of the mind, and, in its best sense, the matter of "virtue." The practical matter of seeing that a child receives enough food is really something different, for what holds true of the mind does not necessarily apply to the body. The "real issue" may indeed be that the child be fed—with as little commotion as possible—but "getting something done" in this case merely means to assure that the body will be able to function well enough to allow the eventual expansion of mind. Distractions offered the child at such time, however, as a number of child psychologists have realized, are not always desirable, for the parent cannot forever coax his offspring to do what is essential. Better by far to devise ways of bringing a youngster to the realization that some things, such as eating an adequate meal, *are* essential, and while this cannot be done by "dialectic" with the very young, it has been accomplished by more than one parent who steels himself to a child's temporary indifference as to whether proper food is consumed in proper quantities. For, barring organic malfunction, a disinclination to eat is indeed temporary, and, moreover, usually caused by too extravagant an abundance of food in the home.

This recalls an experiment wherein children were offered a wide variety of foodstuffs, including the unhealthy sweets for which they are supposed to pine. At first the results were horrendous, but the experimenters reported that before long the healthful foods were chosen by the children, who discovered that a greater sense of well-being was derived from them than from the original selections of sickly pastries, etc. There are, of course, children whose psychological unbalance makes such a happy consummation impossible, but such an experiment would afford a way of isolating these instances, so that one could tell when help is really needed, and when it is not.

The "will" enters learning as an adjunct of desire, and the first function of the parent, in "teaching" his child, may be to offer help, enthusiasm and further guidance when the desires manifested by the child seem to the parent to tend in a worth-while direction. The practice of genuine virtue depends upon free choice concerning one's *own* behavior, not the choices we make regarding someone else's conduct—even that of our children. The "direct" approach to learning, then, consists in devoting ourselves to clarification of our own standards of value in regard to philosophy, art, and culture generally. As for "influencing" our children, we can hardly escape doing it. Yet there is a great difference between *selecting* ideas for children and simply presenting ideas to them, for consideration. Our own ideas and standards should not be the only measure for our young, but they should at least provide a means by which they can evaluate *us*; further, once a connection is seen between professed values and daily conduct, even children begin to grasp something of the meaning of philosophy.

Whether the problem is that of feeding a temperamental child or one of teaching the meaning of honesty, the parent is effective only to the extent that he provides a clear-cut example of a person who eats sensibly, or is himself honest. Here, it seems, is the fundamental truth usually over-simplified by statements to the effect that "example" is the most important element in home training. But the "example" must not be concocted in order to impress the child, nor do we have a right to assume that the child, upon being shown the "example," will, or even should, decide to emulate. Our "example" simply provides the child with *one*—not *the*—illustration of how life may be regarded and lived. The "examples" of parents who have no spontaneous enthusiasm for the sort of conduct they desire to see emulated are entirely lacking in persuasiveness. This, in turn, is one fundamental weakness of conventional morality as a means of enticing children into well-regulated lives. As our correspondent says, "Those who set out to cultivate the virtues usually . . . gain the form rather than the essence."

Since spontaneity and enthusiasm cannot be manufactured all at once, the greatest aid many parents can render their young is to revaluate the patterns of their own lives.

All we can offer our children is one of many opportunities to learn—perhaps the best opportunity, but still only one of them—and that opportunity is wasted unless *w*e have a fairly good idea of what we are about and why.

All of which comes back, as do most of our brief essays, to the all-important role of philosophy in education. We can hardly settle on the best educational means for our children before we have reached some enthusiastic conclusions about the ends these means are to serve.

FRONTIERS
Guide to the Theater

To write about the arts, one ought himself to be an artist; but then, one ought to be an artist in order to write about anything: the presumption is initial and inescapable. To write about the arts, however, is to attempt the role of "critic," and this, as Eric Bentley, the writer and critic whose book we plan to examine, has said, creates special burdens: "There is something too godlike about criticism; it is a defiance of the injunction to men: 'Judge not, that ye be not judged'; it is a strain."

Mr. Bentley is a man who reveals quasi-omniscience about the theater. He seems to have lived in theaters all his life, in all parts of the Western world. His book, *In Search of Theater*, is a collection of numerous essays written during the past ten years or so, many of which have been published. He writes well about the theater, with criticism which suffers very little from "strain," and for those who have a smattering of familiarity with dramatic art, what he says will recall to life many past scenes and players. But to judge Mr. Bentley's particular opinions is practically impossible for anyone who has not gone where he went, read what he has read, and seen what he has seen. Why, then, take notice of his book, as *no one* can have seen as many plays as Mr. Bentley since he was born in 1916?

This, alas, is the problem of writing about the arts: intelligible comment on the arts—excepting, perhaps, the art of writing—requires that both writer and reader have familiarity with the materials discussed. The fine arts of today are practiced and enjoyed by specialists. Hence the inclination of the non-specialized individual to adopt the Tolstoyan theory of art—to urge that unless it is for the common man, universal in form, art has not much to recommend it. Lacking, however, the temerity to form a theory of the arts, we prefer to wonder a bit at the difficulties created by a form of human expression which is obviously of the greatest importance.

For text, a passage quoted by Bentley from Stark Young is as good as any: "That question of the relation of art to reality is the greatest of all the questions with regard to art." A play, surely, should carry its audience along toward the perception of a reality which is gradually disclosed, with the audience gaining from the development of the play a sense of participation in the disclosure. Dramatic art, then, ought to come very close to the Tolstoyan ideal, without even trying. For the theater offers a whole battery of the arts to accomplish its ends. The theater is multidimensional: the subtlety which escapes words may be conveyed by gesture; a changing light may give depth to a scene which, without this aid, would make too great a draft upon the imagination. Actually, the theater should be the easiest of all the arts to write about. But there is no universal theater. There has been no universal theater since the days of the mystery plays attended by the entire populace. It will be centuries, perhaps, before the drama in this cosmopolitan sense is restored to civilization. Meanwhile, we have the modern theater, the movies and television, the experimental theaters, and Eric Bentley.

One may enjoy Mr. Bentley, however, for what he says about life in general, in rather frequent asides. It is possible, therefore, to find value in this book without having the slightest notion of how accurate his judgments are regarding plays and actors. Here, for example, is a piece of criticism on Brecht, a German playwright, called by Bentley "the most original dramatist now writing":

> Brecht's bondage to the past takes the form of overstubborn allegiance to the Marxist philosophy he acquired in the twenties. A reconsideration of the Russian question in the light of twenty more years of history he would apparently regard as a betrayal, as if loyalty were more important than flexibility or even truth. He seems to have made himself so much the teacher that he has stopped learning. Because he is a genius, and genius is all fresh and flexible, there is a strange doubleness about his work. In the same play

> or the same poem, the flexibility and the inflexibility, the freshness and the staleness, co-exist.

Without knowing Brecht's plays at all, one is led to the reflection that genius which can find no profound faith is bound to turn sterile, and that here, perhaps, is a reason for the narrow partisanships which geniuses sometimes exhibit, to the puzzled condescension of lesser men.

When Bentley turns to Eugene O'Neill, we are on more familiar ground. This essay is titled, "Trying to Like O'Neill," and the discussion may evoke memory of similar efforts by the reader—or of a less sophisticated bewilderment at being unable to thrill to O'Neill's dramas in the way that one is expected to thrill. Bentley quotes from O'Neill himself concerning the dramatist's purpose, which, in his later plays especially, is to get at the Mystery of the human situation—"the mystery any one man or woman can feel but not understand as the meaning of any event—or accident—in any life on earth." It is impossible not to honor O'Neill's objective, which was—

> . . . to see the transfiguring nobility of tragedy, in as near the Greek sense as one can grasp it, in seemingly the most ignoble, debased lives. And just here is where I am most confirmed mystic, too, for I'm always trying to interpret Life in terms of lives, never just lives in terms of characters. I'm always acutely conscious of the Force behind (Fate, God, or biological past creating the present, whatever one calls it—Mystery certainly) and of the one eternal tragedy of Man in his glorious, self-destructive struggle to make the Force express him instead of being, as an animal is, an infinitesimal incident in its expression. And my profound conviction is that this is the only subject worth writing about and that it is possible—or can be—to develop a tragic expression in terms of transfigured modern values and symbols in the theatre which may to some degree bring home to members of a modern audience their ennobling identity with the tragic figures on the stage. . . .

Bentley now asks a heartless but pertinent question: "How could one be ennobled by identifying oneself with any of his characters?" He says of O'Neill in summation:

> . . . the more he attempts, the less he achieves. *Lazarus Laughed* and *The Great God Brown* and *Days without End* are inferior to *The Emperor Jones* and *Anna Christie* and *Ah, Wilderness!* O'Neill has never learned his lesson. The idea of "big work" lured him out into territory where his sensibility is entirely inoperative. Even his most ardent admirers have little to say in favor of *Dynamo*, the only play where he frontally assails the problem of "the death of an old God and the failure of science." A hundred novelists have dealt more subtly with hidden motives than O'Neill did in his famous essay in psychological subtlety, *Strange Interlude*, a play that is equally inferior as a study of upper-class Americans. Then there is his desire to re-create ancient tragedy. Although no one is more conscious than he that America is not an Athens, the "Greek dream"—the desire to be an Æschylus—has been his nightmare.
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> The classic and notorious problem about tragedy in modern dress has been that the characters, not being over life-size but rather below it, excite pity without admiration and therefore without terror. . . .
>
> If we ask what difference it makes that Orin and Lavinia are versions of Orestes and Electra [*in Mourning Becomes Electra*], the answer is that they thereby acquire an artificial prestige. They have become more important without any creative work on the author's part. We now associate them with the time-honored and sublime. They are inflated with cultural gas. It's like finding out that your girl friend is the daughter of a duke. If you are impressionable, you are impressed; she will seem different to you from now on, clad in all your illusions about nobility.

In other words, O'Neill felt the great hunger that we all feel, and tried to satisfy it with his art. But his time let him down, as it has let down the rest of us—it being what we have made it. This is possibly the more authentic tragedy, and, as Bentley says: "If one does not like O'Neill, it is not really he that one dislikes; it is our age—of which like the rest of us he is more the victim than the master."

Bentley begins his book with a chapter on the "Broadway intelligentsia," whom he entirely dislikes. In the matter of serving the Common Man, in a sense quite different from Tolstoy's, the arbiters of cultured opinion along Broadway win Mr. Bentley's bitterest remarks:

> The optimists of the Broadway intelligentsia are voluble democrats. "Never speak disrespectfully of

> the public," one New York designer tells his pupils; "they are, after all, our clients and our judges." Yet this attitude—even more popular (naturally!) in Hollywood than on Broadway—is in my view neither democratic nor undemocratic, but merely commercial. Losing sight of our common humanity, a thing that cannot lightly be ignored, we have stumbled into believing in something called the Common Man, which is most often either a pure abstraction or a symbol of our own mediocrity. By such phrases we exploit the ethics of Christianity and the philosophy of democracy to excuse our weaknesses. The view that the average, untrained mind is the best judge in æsthetic matters cannot seriously and in good faith be defended.
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> . . . the real situation is grossly oversimplified. When the audience is taken as something fixed and given in the theater, the problem of drama is simply one of adaptation to the audience: hence the whole theatricalist heresy. The audience is assumed to be the People, and the People is defined as everybody with less taste and education than yourself. Of course, it is true that the Broadway audience is *not* noted for taste and education. It is also not chiefly composed of Common Men. The New York Theater audience, so far from being a cross-section of the population, is a special group. Whether it was the characteristics of this group that gave us the Broadway play, or the Broadway play that brought this group into the theater, one cannot say. But one need not believe that in displeasing this crowd of late-coming, tattling, coughing snobs one is insulting the American people.

Later on, Bentley sets the problem in another way:

> I don't know that I want to relieve individuals of responsibility by blaming the whole situation on the society in which we live, but I will mention one thing about that society which makes life hard for the drama. It is the fundamental lack of real community. . . . one of the ugliest facts about this world is that it contains masses and not communities, and thus is given over to mass entertainment and not to communal imaginative experience. . . . Lack of community is a problem not of our arts but of our whole civilization.

We have space for a few scattered passages from *In Search of Theater*, illustrating the capacity of a man schooled in the drama and dramatic criticism to make memorable comments and definitions. Of "ham acting," Bentley says: "Ham acting implies the retention by the actor of an elevated style from which all the substance has departed." Of Ibsen's *Ghosts*:

> Ibsen does not have his people follow the track of any particular virtue. He shows Nora and Mrs. Alving trying to discover themselves and reach the threshold of morality, the point where virtues—and, of course, vices—begin. So much of our life is too meaningless or too infantile even to be called vicious.

When the Italian dramatist, Eduardo, presents the extreme individualism of a character who says, "If twelve wars broke out one after the other they'd make no impression on me," Bentley observes:

> To tell people to forget the newspapers and get on with their private lives, valid or not as a piece of advice to us all, has somewhat different meaning in a city that for so long has had to consider how to survive under different masters and amid recurrent conflagrations. Eduardo is true to this situation when he shows people . . . achieving dignity in their apartness. . . . it is the dignity of the plebs he is championing, the *urbanità* of the poor who throng the alleys and docksides of Naples while the aristocrats and their wars come and go.

Again, on the "Broadway intelligentsia":

> The dull, undiscriminating sentimental liberalism that has taken such a beating from writers like Lionel Trilling still persists on Broadway, which is not aware of Trilling's existence. If for Lee Shubert it is enough that a play make a lot of people laugh, for the Broadway liberal it is enough that it be in favor of Negroes, that it be against fascism and so forth. Morally, a more appalling spectacle than the simple commercialism of the big shots in Hollywood and Broadway is the easy virtue, the phony idealism, of their middle strata.

On Bernard Shaw:

> Was there ever a man who could be so devastating and yet manage never to be insulting? The combination indicates something more than tact: it presupposes an amazing and boundless kindness. Think of satire and polemics in general, think of the politicians and the literati in general, and then think of this polemicist, satirist, this man of politics and letters who, on his own confession, never learned to hate. In a world practically submerged in hatred for

> Communist or capitalist, Nazi or Jew, he never learned to hate. And then we wonder that, where he joined in a discussion, his words had a distinctive tone!

Something should be said of the publisher of this book. *In Search of Theater* was first issued by Alfred Knopf in 1953. It is now available (at 95 cents) in a legibly printed and attractively designed paper-back edition, also by Knopf, as one of the first nine volumes to appear in the Vintage series, a new venture in pocket-book publishing which recalls Doubleday's Anchor Books. We shall have something more to say of this new series when we have read a few more of the books (several of them are obviously worthy additions to the growing list of fine books available for little money, but some of them, like de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, are rather long!).