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A MOOD IN SCIENTIFIC THOUGHT

ONE reason why the Relativists among the historians of ideas have seemed to possess such strong arguments is that the "search for truth" is seldom marked by psychological sophistication. As the decades and centuries go by, human thought is dominated by successive "moods," and these moods cause men to look in particular directions for the truth they long for. The Relativist historian, wanting to maintain that theories of "truth" are little more than cultural conditionings, has only to point to the mood of the time to explain away the bravest efforts of devoted men. Had these men lived elsewhere, or in another century, the Relativists argue, they would have had a very different notion of "truth." It follows that only by showing full awareness of the mood of the time in which we live can this claim of the Relativists be met by those of idealist persuasion.

With this sort of self-consciousness in mind, then, let us note that the present mood of scientific thought seems clearly to be a movement toward idealist attitudes. If one accepts this mood as good, he ought to do so for reasons more important than the fact that it happens to be "in the air." Similarly, if one expresses disdain for yesterday's "materialism" in scientific literature, he must be sure that this step of progress does not overlook the very important values in certain aspects of materialist argument—values which may turn out to be also behind present-day idealist contentions. In judging philosophy, the values which lead men to reach the opinions they adopt may be much more important than the arguments—drawn from the mood of the times—which they use to defend those opinions. It seems quite possible that the values do not change—or change very little while the arguments alter so radically as to seem absolutely opposed. Identification of these constant values in human thought should be, perhaps, a major objective of the historian of ideas.

Let us look, then, at the present-day mood of scientific thought. In the correspondence columns of *Science* for Oct. 15, Paul H. Kopper of the Chicago Medical School reflects the growing strength of the idealistic trend:

> To my mind, the fundamental problem before us today can be stated briefly as follows: Do we have to accept as true a materialistic interpretation of the universe and of man? Or can we recognize in the workings of nature a basic rationality that is akin to our own reasoning power? If in all sincerity we must reach the conclusion that the facts of nature all favor the materialistic theory, then we should be candid enough to admit it. It would mean, of course, that reason is only man's special tool in the struggle for existence, making this struggle between men and groups of men ever fiercer as our globe becomes more and more crowded. This in turn would lead inevitably to increasing regimentation, whether on the Soviet or any other model, and it seems quite possible that eventually a full-fledged dictatorship would be set up by the will of the majority. However, if there is reason behind the multitude of natural phenomena that we have been studying—and I personally believe that the evidence in support of this assumption, which cannot be given here, is overwhelming—then there is no cause for gloom, for then we shall be able to use the laws of nature to create health and order in men's minds, and not just in their bodies as we have done in the past.

Here is a forthright statement of attitude from a contemporary scientist. We think it not incorrect to say that numerous other scientists would be willing to subscribe to this view, which is substantially the same as that proposed by Marie Collins Swabey in *The Judgment of History,* and is found, elaborately argued, in the works of Alfred North Whitehead. For purposes of simple identification, it may be called the Platonic view of the nature of things.

Whether or not the *moral* argument expressed in this paragraph is or ought to be more important than the "overwhelming evidence" Mr. Kopper speaks of is a question we leave to another discussion. The moral argument simply illustrates the values regarded as being at stake.

Let us tum, now, to a clear argument in behalf of the philosophy of Materialism, which we find in Chapman Cohen's *Materialism Re-Stated:*

> One thing the history of science clearly discloses. This is, that whenever there has been a move towards a better understanding of natural processes, it has been based upon a tacit or avowed acceptance of the mechanistic principle. How could it be otherwise? An explanation must be in terms of the known. To offer an explanation in terms of the unknown, is not an explanation at all. Explanation involves the establishment of an equation, in such a way that given *a, b* and *c, d* follows. And how can one establish an equation if one or more of the factors are not mercy unknown, but inconceivable? To think of the unknown as like the known, is permissible, necessary, and helpful. To think of the unknown as utterly unlike the known, is neither permissible, necessary, nor helpful. That is why, in the history of man, supernaturalism has never enlightened, but always obstructed. In the light of its whole history it has never cast the slightest light upon any one of the problems with which the human mind has busied itself. It has not done this because it has lacked the very condition of providing an explanation. To introduce the word "God" is not to explain, but to confuse. "God" is not an explanation at all. It is a narcotic. It lulls enquiry with a phrase, as a dram-drinker lulls anxiety with a dose of his favorite liquid. But the old questions recur, the old problems present themselves, and no answer has yet been found to any of them save on the lines of scientific Materialism.
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> I agree with Dean Inge that, "If there are phenomena, whether biological, psychological, or religious, which cannot be made to fit into the framework of Naturalism, Naturalism as a philosophy is overthrown," with only a slight clarification of the sentence. For one cannot but admire the careful confusion of the passage. A given phenomenon may not be fitted into a particular Naturalistic formula, but that also may be, not because the principle of Naturalism is wrong, but only because the formula needs restating, just as many a scientific "law," in the light of additional knowledge needs recasting. Dean Inge's proposition should read: "If any phenomenon contradicts Naturalism, then Naturalism fails." What Dean Inge asks us to agree with—to have said it quite plainly would have so exposed the fallacy that even religious readers would have detected it—is that everything shall be explained by Naturalism before it can be accepted. And that is obviously absurd, since it assumes that our knowledge of nature is complete, which is, if possible, still more absurd. An hypothesis is never bound to explain everything before it can be accepted. The only fatal thing is if there can be found facts that contradict it. And it would puzzle Dean Inge or anyone else to produce a single fact that is clearly contrary to the Mechanistic hypothesis.

With how much of this statement would Mr. Kopper agree? It may be a bit presumptuous to say so, but we think he would agree about as far as we do. How far that is may be indicated by the revisions we would make in what Cohen says.

First, we should have to change the second sentence of the quotation. When Cohen argues that all progress toward a better understanding of natural processes has resulted from acceptance of the mechanistic principle, we would reply that this is not so—that following the mechanistic principle in respect to natural processes which are *not* mechanistic has created vast confusion, as much, perhaps, as can be laid at the door of "God" as an explanation of natural phenomena. Following the mechanistic principle has led to understanding of only the natural processes which are themselves mechanistic.

This leads to the second change we should require, which is that there is plenty of evidence—"overwhelming," according to Kopper—which contradicts the Mechanistic hypothesis. Plainly, Chapman Cohen did not inspect, or simply rejected the possibility of, such evidence. But he wrote twenty-seven years ago, when the mood of science was very different. The question, obviously, is*:* "What are the non-mechanistic natural phenomena?"

Probably hundreds of answers could be offered to this question, from as many sources, but the simplest one, and perhaps the least arguable one, is that mental energy, conceived as

independent of a material (mechanistic) cause, produces a whole range of non-mechanistic natural phenomena. J. B. Rhine of Duke University calls these events *psi* phenomena, psi being "a general term to identify personal factors or processes in nature which transcend accepted laws." This term approximates the popular use of the word "psychic" and the technical one, "parapsychical." *Psi* phenomena include telepathy or thought-transference, clairoyance, precognition (or prophecy), and psychokinesis (direct physical action as the result of mental energy). Concerning the acceptance of *psi,* Dr. Rhine writes (in the September *Journal of Parapsychology):*

> There is no real conflict between psi and the science of physics simply because physics has no franchise on the kind of phenomena with which parapsychology deals. Physicists, fortunately, have been the first to recognize this fact. That psi phenomena and physical phenomena are both part of a larger universe it is hardly necessary even to state. If there were not some larger unity, one could not conceive how there could be interaction and interconversion of causal influence that is involved in the subject-object reaction with which experiments in parapsychology deal.
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> It is entirely conceivable therefore that new and as yet unsuspected ways of looking at the relationship between physical and psi processes will have to be found. It is possible even that current ways of reasoning will have to be amended. It seems wise, in the meantime, to continue with the logical course that has been most useful in the study of nature, at least until it is clearly necessary to leave it; and thus far in dealing with psi phenomena it has been rationally possible to use the concept of causality most of the way. Doing so requires the assumption for the time being of a cause, an active principle or energy, operating between subject and object, even in the extremely puzzling case of precognition. The supposition of a psychic energy, however, has often been made by general psychologists before, but until parapsychology demonstrated the presence of an extra-physical function in man, the assumption of a mental energy has never been a *necessary* one. The materialist could always argue that perhaps some combination of the physical energies of the brain would suffice. Now it is known that the hypothesis of a mental energy is required.

Here, then, is suggestive evidence that there are phenomena which contradict the Mechanistic hypothesis in its role of *total* explanation.

The interesting thing about these developments is that the claim of non-mechanistic phenomena by present-day scientists—Kopper, Rhine, and others—has not led to a revival of the God-idea so feared by Chapman Cohen. It is plain from the latter's book that the chief reason for Cohen's dislike of "God" is that this sort of supernaturalism renders science and even rational investigation quite impossible. But now, from Dr. Rhine and others, we have non-mechanistic—non-materialistic—theory without the return of either a personal, interfering God or any other kind of supernaturalism. The endeavor is rather to show that there are *natural* foundations for idealism or transcendental philosophy.

Meanwhile, on the side of the Humanists and Freethinkers, a corresponding distinction is being made. While Cohen seemed to think that any kind of idealism or belief in superphysical reality is as subversive of human freedom of inquiry as the God-idea, the mood of the anti-dogmatists has now notably changed in this respect. In the *Humanist* for September-October, Millard Everett (in an article made up of extracts from his book, *Ideals of Life,* published this year by John Wiley & Sons, New York) is careful to observe that there is no necessary contradiction between the liberal spirit and a form of theism which "definitely precludes the possibility of any *direct and special* communication from God to any particular man, past, present, or future, about any matter of fact or morals." But, "liberalism can never feel entirely safe as long as there is anyone left in the world who regards himself or any of his contemporaries or ancestors as the spokesman of God."

Plainly, the historic scientific distrust of supernaturalism arises from the authoritarianism which is characteristic of most of its forms. The title of the extract from Mr. Everett's book is "Authoritarianism Is the Issue," and this, we think, is a proper identification of the value, Freedom,

which is pursued in one age by those of materialistic persuasion and by those of idealist persuasion in another. The argument is not really Materialism vs. Idealism, but Free Minds vs. Closed or Constrained Minds. If Idealism becomes Theology and hampers the free exercise of reason, it needs—and eventually obtains—the antidote of a "materialistic" theory which does not. And if Materialism turns into Mechanism, denying the reality of an entire range of human experience, then the counter force of an emancipating idealism will sooner or later appear.

The present state of balance, from the scientific viewpoint, seems fairly well stated in Mr. Everett's first paragraph:

> The scientific attitude . . . may be taken as including . . . a *positivistic, naturalistic rule of belief:* to believe *only* those things that are verihable or probable in terms of evidence available to any observer. This would exclude belief in the supernatural, which by definition means something contrary to the probabilities of science. It would also exclude belief in any metaphysical theories of the nature and origin of the universe which cannot be verified or which violate the rules of a good scientific hypothesis. Specifically this means believing that there is no scientific evidence that a personal god interferes with the operation of the laws of nature and gives to a few privileged persons special inspiration and knowledge which is not available to other men through natural experience.

Even though the language may seem prejudicial, this account of the scientific attitude is much more inclusive than Chapman Cohen's, who flatly excluded any theory of *intelligence* as a causal force in any part of the cosmic process. Thus the mood of science, or scientific thought, is definitely changing. A mystic or a transcendentalist can now qualify as having a scientific attitude, within the strict meaning of this definition.

THE ARTS OF PEACE

OKINAWA will be remembered by most Americans because a great, costly—and, some think, decisive battle of World War II was fought there. But there are at least a few Americans who, when they hear the name of this far-off island, will think of something else—an eight-room schoolhouse of modern construction, set on a knoll overlooking the China Sea, but without a human habitation or a living person within miles.

The story of this school, related in a recent Phi Beta Kappa *Key Reporter* by the wife of a visiting American official, is this:

> The Okinawans wish to build a new village adjacent to the school site, but they have such a firm belief in the importance of education that the school must come first! They sold their present rice lands to raise the money to build the school. Now, having built it, they are ready to go ahead and plan the village. They claim that a proposed village must first have a school, then, with education assured, people can bring children into the area. . . .
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> To those in the United States who take educational opportunity for granted, this story of how the natives of a remote Pacific island make education the core about which all life revolves should prove interesting. . . .

These are some of the people, we might also reflect, whose homeland we have thought it necessary to use as a battlefield to protect *our* homes and schools from ruin. Something, somewhere, is wrong with this picture.

REVIEW
"THE CAINE," AND POPULAR CULTURE

SITTING through Hollywood's version of Herman Wouk's best-selling novel was not, after all, too great a price to pay for an excuse to comment further on the story's theme. For the picture, like the book, looked good at first glance, and who and how often gives much more than this to a movie?

The most interesting thing about *The Caine Mutiny,* as either novel or motion picture, was for us its capacity to focus characteristic trends in popular taste, a fact brilliantly exploited by Harvey Swados in the March, 1953 *Partisan Review* (to which we shall later refer). A study of popular culture can be about as fascinating a study as anything can be, providing it be recognized that we nearly all share some of the prejudices and preferences which dictate the nature of currently approved "art." For the popular is almost always a curious puzzle, managing to compound into emotional unity a number of psychological contradictions. Since the thoughts of the majority in respect to political, military and moral matters are now in especially notable transition, the writer who is successful with the public will have to balance neatly both radical and conservative opinions in regard to all three; for few readers are really ready to let go of the old, and take on something new, even if they know what the "new" will be.

A lot of people now wish, for instance, to be assured that they are "progressive" and "liberal," but they also do not wish to be cut adrift from whatever security is afforded by the simple, rather comfortable beliefs of their forebears. Few in their time read and approve the radical. Centuries later, when what was once radical has become merely liberal, and when a new form of radicalism is finding expression in a new minority of creative men, the old radicalism becomes verbally popular—after it has lost its chief vitality.

These considerations, or something like them, must have inspired Mr. Swados' provocative comments in the *Partisan Review,* and it is with a view to sharing his speculations that we re-open discussion on *The Caine.* Briefly, Mr. Swados thinks that "any analysis of the most successful components of popular culture would compel us to refer to the ability of men like Mr. Wouk to let us have our cake and eat it, to stimulate us without unduly provoking us, to make us feel that we are thinking without really forcing us to think."

By this time the general plot of Herman Wouk's book is well enough known, for week after week, month after month, this volume, as Swados puts it, grew into "something of a phenomenon in the publishing business by climbing slowly to the top of the best seller lists"—and without the usual initial campaign of sales promotion. Swados believes that a new semi-intellectual class is gradually being formed of people who "want to feel that their intelligences are engaged by the programs they hear, the movies they see, the books they read; and they take it as an act of social piety and, by extension, of artistic integrity, when these media feature favorable stereotypes of minorities once represented by unfavorable caricatures. At the same time they participate in a kind of mass snobbery of which they are all but unaware, on the one hand rejecting in angry frustration those whom they instinctively fear and admire—aristocrats, millionaires and serious-minded intellectuals, and on the other hand patronizing the underlying population with pseudo-democratic verbiage about the 'average Joe' and the 'common man.' To a large extent they are responsible for the new trends in popular taste." Swados continues:

> We must be struck by the correspondence between what Mr. Wouk is saying and what the public wants to hear. It is his thesis that the Second World War was worthwhile if only because it put a stop to the enemy's slaughters; that it was won by a devoted and previously trained officer caste, despite the incompetence of individual members; and that the most insidious enemy is the man who works to destroy confidence in his country's military leadership.
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> It must be noted first that this is a thesis which can be—and has been—upheld by fascist as easily as by democratic theorists. Second, and perhaps even more important, is the identification of the intellectual as the villain of the piece, with his cowardice and his shameful sniping at the regular officer class. Here again it is necessary to point out that the middle-class reading public would almost certainly reject such a brutal assault on the intellectual (against which one might have expected intellectuals to rally, just as undertakers or chiropodists rally to meet unfair representations of their professions in the movies) if it were made by a

> boor or an obvious philistine. It is symptomatic of Mr. Wouk's shrewdness that he puts his assault on the intellectual in the mouth of Barney Greenwald, who speaks with the voice of authority, from the "inside." For in addition to embodying civic virtue as a wounded hero, he gained enormous financial success in the law, a field popularly associated with the regular exercise of the higher faculties; he is also a member and fighting representative of a minority group, and a passionate defender of an even smaller minority, the American Indian! And it follows, therefore, that Greenwald's opposite number, the cowardly intellectual who conceals his inadequacy beneath a surface of charm that temporarily captivates the susceptible Willie Keith, should not be a shabby Greenwich Village Jewish bohemian but a handsome and successful playwright named Thomas Keefer.
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> If we reverse the roles, conceiving of a clean-cut Tom Keefer charging a degenerate and decadent Barney Greenwald with being an irresponsible intellectual whose writing and preachings have had a devastating effect on American youth, we can imagine the justified protest that *The Caine* Matiny would have aroused.

A recent issue of the *Journal of Psychiatry* develops some of the social implications of Harry Stack Sullivan's "concept of selective inattention," and we may apply this tool of analysis to the plot twists of *The Caine Mutiny*. In both the novel and the movie, obvious discrepancies in the plot are overlooked, for reasons explainable by Mr. Swados. The fact that "Captain Queeg" is definitely unfit as a leader of his fellows, in either war or peace, is conveniently submerged by the Main Point—which is that a professional military caste is necessary, even though it may harbor a few incompetents. Queeg's commanding of the Caine makes no logical occasion for rejoicing in the existence of a peacetime army and navy, but rather amounts to a forthright admission that it is possible for psychologically unbalanced persons to reach positions of power in any tightly regimented society (during war) or regimented segment of society (an army or navy during peacetime) . In the motion picture version, the mutineers are castigated for failing to offer "help" to Queeg when, in a moment of confusion—and perhaps contrition—he is ready to ask for it. But all the help in the world of the sort his junior officers could provide would not have solved the problem. What was really needed was some means by which a paranoiac captain could rejoin the social community without the issue of the "dignity of naval officers" being raised at all. But Wouk's point is that the dignity of naval officers must be preserved, even if a few ships do go down. And, as Mr. Swados says, this same point has often been made by fascists and by those who believe that symbols of power and competence must be preserved at all costs:

> What the new middle class wanted—and found in *The Caine Mutiny*—was an assurance that its years of discomfort and hardship in the Second World War were not in vain, and that its sacrifices in a permanent war economy and its gradual accommodation to the emergence of the military as a dominant element in civil life have been not only necessary but praiseworthy. More than this, it requires such assurance in a sophisticated form, allowing it to feel that alternatives have been thoughtfully considered before being rejected: in *The Caine Mutiny* ample space is given over to consideration of "psychoanalytic" motivations in Queeg and in Keefer too, and even the Cain-Abel analogy is mentioned as evidence that the title is not an unmotivated slip of the pen.
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> The taste of the middle-class reading public is conditioned by an increasing prosperousness in a military economy, tending to reinforce conservative moral concepts and to strengthen a traditional envy and distrust of intellectuals and dissidents. But its taste is modified by an indebtedness to its European forebears, New Deal heritage, and continuously higher level of education. Thus it is inclined toward a sophisticated and hospitable acceptance of those entertainments of the vanished European aristocracy which have flowed into the mainstream of Western liberal culture through the channels of mass production and distribution. Witness the phenomenal increase of ballet audiences and the number of people buying "classical" records. Writers like Herman Wouk will inevitably arise directly from this class to verbalize its inchoate and often contradictory attitudes. Indeed Mr. Wouk's background—he has combined a faithful adherence to Orthodox Judaism and a career as a radio gag writer with no apparent discomfort—has prepared him admirably for his task as a practitioner of popular culture.

So what we like, and our neighbors like, may often be less a spontaneous preference than we think; it may be more the result of the conscientious art of some maker of popular culture—a careful effort to counterbalance prejudices and support irrational, if comforting, faiths.

COMMENTARY
THE MEANING OF "IDEALISM!'

To avoid any possible confusion that might result from the terms used in our lead article, we should say that "idealist," in this context, means what scholars call "objective idealist"—one who holds that there is a world of ideal reality which exists of itself, and not only in our minds.

However, since an *ideal* reality is perceptible only to minds, it stands to reason that this reality will itself be of the nature of mind; and since it is *real,* it will have the role of an independent cause of the phenomena of nature.

The objection of materialists like Cohen to this view is that they see in the idea of mind as a cause in nature some sort of interfering deity or "spirit," but the mind-principle suggested by these idealists is not a capricious invader of the natural world, but a power or factor responsive to its own laws—the laws of mind. If it be asked what those laws are, we can only reply that this is for future science to determine—a science of causality, perhaps, as well as of mechanistic effects.

The lore of psychic phenomena, much of it already collected in books on the subject, illustrates the large field of investigation to be entered. The value of all this material, from a philosophical viewpoint, lies in the fact that it lends support to an idealistic interpretation of nature, but can only be rejected as a record of delusion, hallucination, or outright deception by the mechanists and materialists.

One thing more. There is a clear connection between modern expressions of objective idealism and the ethical needs of the world. But, unlike the dogmatists of the past, the modern idealists make no attempt to blackmail an anxious world into believing in a personal deity who may be prayed to, placated, and implored to show his special favor to the sinners he created. This modern idealism seeks another sort of security—the security which springs from the conviction that the world of mind is a part of the natural world, and that therefore the natural world may be understood, and no longer feared, by beings of mind like ourselves.

This is an idealism free of the hazards from which the materialists sought relief—an idealism offering strength and hope to a world wearied of futile attempts to comprehend the rule of either an irrational God or irrational "Matter" and "Force."

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

NOTES IN PASSING

DESPITE our frequent appreciation of the insights contributed to an understanding of the confusions of childhood by psychiatrists, a statement for the case against too much reliance upon these specialists is occasionally in order. Dr. Walter Alvarez, prolific medical columnist, formerly a Mayo Clinic consultant, covers some of this ground under the title "Unfounded Psychiatry Upsets Child, Parents," in the Los Angeles *Times* for Oct. 31. He writes:

> I was pleased recently to find a report of a mental health congress in which several psychiatrists expressed doubt as to their ability to say, offhand, what should be the relationships between certain parents and their children. One of the worst features of modern psychiatry is that much of what is preached can never be backed up by proof. It is pure theory. . . .

Since psychiatric writers themselves express this becoming humility, there is reason to hope that the excessive zeal of early psychiatric theorists will be corrected by the scientific caution and human honesty of later workers. But to go on with Dr. Alvarez's criticisms: he complains that many parents, after devoting themselves to their children's welfare with the aid of every means at their disposal, have been brusquely told by consulting psychotherapists that they must personally shoulder the *whole* blame for a child's neurosis or psychosis. This familiar doctrine, expressed without qualification, Dr. Alvarez says, has led some parents to become "both broken-hearted" and "so ashamed that they could not face their friends and would no longer go out of the house."

While such cases hardly redound to the credit of the consultants, the blame must also be shouldered by all those who have encouraged people to accept as a matter of course the contentions and diagnoses of professionals—any professionals. Childhood is still, and will always be, a personal matter, requiring a different sort of touch for each complex situation developing in the home or community. Dr. Alvarez quotes from Dr. Hilde Bruch, who said recently *(Time)* that "it seems to me the time has come to leave mother and child alone . . . Parents are the persons they are and they cannot be dealt with in an abstract or dictatorial way like puppets. . . ." He also quotes Dr. Kenneth E. Priestly as saying that "parents might be better employed playing with their children in the back yard than attending lectures by a psychiatrist."

These points, are well taken, but unless one has read a book like Bruno Bettelheim's *Love is Not Enough,* it is easy to lean too far in the other direction, minimizing the value of professional training and experience. Many typical emotional difficulties of our age, causing frustration to educators, are brought to light by the work of research centers such as Bettelheim's Shankman School at Chicago. With the sort of knowledge thus supplied, a parent is in a better position to check his own habitual beliefs and attitudes concerning effective therapv

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In relation to the idea that parents should spend more time playing with their children and do less wondering about incipient neuroses, an unpretentious little book, *Let's Live at Home,* by Irvine and Rachel Millgate (Harpers, 1949), may be of interest. This is a simple account of how two parents transformed their house into a home, providing constructive activities which deepened the bonds between parents and children—largely by placing young and old together in educative situations. The remarkable thing about *Let's Live at Home* is that nearly any pair of parents *could* have written it, and could certainly have enjoyed pioneering the many activities devised by the Millgates. And they might also, we imagine, have enjoyed writing this sort of heart-warming diary—a simple recital of personal ideals achieved in the midst of an inhospitable, mechanized age. The

secret of the Millgate inspiration was apparently a desire to avoid the excessive specialization of our time—which, for the family, tends to subject most of the province of "home-making" to ingenious contrivances, and the rest of it to the schools, clinics and psychiatric consultations. The Millgates, incidentally, are inveterate experimenters, and the reader happily finds them under no pressure to make a *specific* blueprint of Utopia come true. And it may surprise some parents who read *Let's Live at Home* to discover that all the things attempted by the authors could easily have been tried by themselves, at some time or other, with their own families.

The publisher's description of the book says:

> Here is a book for the modern husband and wife who want to make a success of family life. It is packed with ideas and information on how to make the pattern of daily living more satisfactory for every member of the family.
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> The book comes out of the authors' own experience in meeting the high cost of living and increased family responsibilities by providing for themselves. Starting simply with a beehive and a backyard vegetable garden, their progress toward self-sufficiency snowballed with such projects as growing crops chemically without soil, raising fish in their own pond, and keeping poultry in the basement. Most important by-product of all these projects was the fresh sense of family unity and interest developed between parents and children.

To convey something of the mood which enabled these parents to bridge psychical gaps between adults and children, we quote a passage which, while nothing "startling," has a tone worth letting one's ear pick up, in the interests of coming to closer terms with the world of the young:

> Can you remember that mysterious childhood wonderworld of nearby wood-and-weed patch? I can remember being disappointed when going back to an old childhood home and finding the corner short-cut trail only about a hundred feet long, instead of the mile in my young dreams. When young, I really walked through jungles when taking that short cut through the vacant lot weed patch. What has happened that it is no longer a source of wonderment? I asked myself this question. Then one day the make-believe of our children helped us rediscover the world of "woods and weeds." Down low, about two feet off the ground, even in a city park, is a real jungle. It is not necessary to know the names of flora and fauna, it is only necessary to listen to the children—they will guide you.
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> No longer do we try to be efficient in the autumn and clean fallen leaves up at once. We have our fun with them first—then finally they are gathered to be used as compost for the garden. We learned that for children leaves fall on the ground for one purpose—to be piled in as big a pile as possible, then to be scattered as much as possible. They make a good jumping mattress, and a rolling hill. They chatter and swish when scuffing feet go through.

FRONTIERS

A Correspondent's Suggestion

IN MANAS for Sept. 15, under Two Views of Fear, you comment on the difference in attitude toward fear between Reinhold Niebuhr and Sanepalli Radhakrishnan. When I read the article, I had just finished the entire book of Matthew and of John and part of Luke, trying to get an impression of the general nature of Jesus' teaching and of the ideas and ideals that influenced his words and actions. I was impressed, not with the oddity of Niebuhr's view, but with the accuracy with which both his and Radhakrishnan's comments reflected their theological backgrounds.

The Christian doctrine, as I find it in the Gospels, contains not only the accents of the Sermon on the Mount but, in a voice equally loud, accents of threats of violent punishment for those who don't accept the teachings of Jesus or of his disciples, or who sin in other ways, and promises of reward for the chosen ones. The doctrine of either/or is repeatedly mentioned. We are to be judged and classified as sheep or goats, wheat or chaff, and are to be accordingly either saved or lost, taken into the Kingdom of God or cast into Gehenna or outer darkness, where will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Contrast such specific threats and promises and *prescription* of *the* Way, with the passage in the *Bhagavad Gita,* given in one version as: "Whatever path men travel is my path. No matter where they walk, it leads to Me," and in another: "No matter by what path men approach Me, they are made welcome. For all paths, no matter how diverse, lead straight to Me. All paths are mine, notwithstanding by what name they may be called."

Such ideas are not compatible with the Christian teaching of judgment based on one lifetime, but they do fit in with the concept of the journey of the soul as a long, slow process of growth or evolution, with the single lifetime as a relatively minor incident.

Radhakrishnan was recently quoted in the *Atlantic Monthly* in a discussion of the dangers of large national armaments, especially in the case of India at this time, as follows:

"It is not necessary that India or any country survive. What is important is the soul and heart and spirit of man. What is survival in an armed camp? Can this be life's meaning?"

I think that no man in a high national office in a Christian nation would either entertain or express such a thought. In fact, a man who did so would probably never find himself in a high political office in a Christian nation. Yet there is no evidence o£ weak submissiveness in Radhakrishnan's utterances. He said in one of his writings:

"All religions proclaim with one voice, though in many languages, that we are summoned, not to a light-hearted saunter or even to a journey where we can always walk with clasped hands of friendship, but to a battle, where we have to fight the forces of stupidity and selfishness." Not evil and sin, but stupidity and selfishness.

As for the Christian view, if to the threats of the New Testament we add the destructive vengeance of the Old Testament Jehovah, it might seem odd if a Christian theologian expressed a concern because of the use of threats and fear, or an understanding of the harm that lies therein. He is thoroughly accustomed to it and takes it for granted.

Of course there are many Christian leaders who, I feel sure, would hold and express the ideas expressed by Radhakrishnan, but they would do so only because they have rejected those parts of the Bible which conflict with such an understanding.

It seems, however, that because such rejection is essential to a normal progress in any religious understanding, and because many, perhaps a majority, of Christian pastors have apparently made very few such rejections, the time may be near when we may have a religious group

which rejects entirely the Christian religion and all other religions as authorities to which they owe any loyalty or allegiance, but will be free to use them all as the rich storehouses of inspiration and understanding that they are, rejecting and selecting as seems right at the time.

I mean an organized group, as our churches are organized, with well-qualified and well-paid leaders, and eventually with adequate schools or courses of study to train and equip the leaders, to the end that they may present to lay members the best thinking of all times in religious, philosophical and mystical fields, and give such assistance as they can in synthesizing that which is acceptable, with current knowledge and ideas in other fields. It would need to be presented with full understanding that there is complete freedom on the part of each individual hearer or student to accept or reject as he sees fit.

"Hear thou even the little child, and from his words, accept thou that Truth that goeth straight to thy heart. But reject all that doth not so go to thy heart as Truth—no matter how high the authority—yea, even though the lotus-born creator, Brahma, himself, be the speaker," says a *Upanishad*, and I believe firmly in the wisdom of that injunction.

Is this idea entirely impractical or naive? Or, is it undesirable at this time? Or in the near future or distant future? If it is impracticable, what then can be done to bring a more mature concept to the religious layman? He needs better than he is getting. I feel that the number of religious people who can't accept any existing church type of religion is quite large and that eventually they will be heard.

A READER

EDITORS REPLY

With the general view expressed by this correspondent, we can hardly disagree. However, it probably should be noted that he, like other Westerners, has doubtless had fairly intimate contact with the practice of orthodox Christianity, while his knowledge of Eastern religion is from reading of scriptures of unparalleled excellence and beauty. While the comparison he makes is, we think, a just one, it is entirely possible that a man with equal experience of both Christian and non-Christian orthodoxies might have raised the same questions with more appearance of impartiality.

As for the idea of an organized religious group devoted to the study of all religions, accepting none as "authoritative," but welcoming and profiting by the insights and wisdom of all—to this proposal we feel an ambivalent reaction. We naturally share the writer's enthusiasm for study of "the best thinking of all times in religious, philosophical and mystical fields," and for the attempt to synthesize the values there discovered with "current knowledge and ideas in other fields." These are already MANAS projects, pursued, however inadequately, from week to week.

But the idea of "an organized group" for this purpose—organized "as our churches are organized, with well-qualified and well-paid leaders"—we regard with profound skepticism. Our conviction is that the less formidable the institution, the better the chance for truth. You cannot organize like a "church" without becoming something like a church. And orthodox church organization grows out of the assumptions maintained by church doctrines—which are authoritarian. If you do not share those or similar assumptions, you will do better with another kind of an organization. We would vigorously oppose, in short, any attempt at all to institutionalize the study of philosophy and the pursuit of religious truth.

There are several reasons why organization of the familiar sort would at least be inappropriate for this purpose. First of all, the physical requirements of philosophical study are slight, compared to the needs of other forms of education. About all you need are people, books, and a place to get together. If the people won't

get together without being organized, their interest is superficial. The books, many of them, are easily obtainable, and once a market develops for books of this character, publishers will quickly be found for any others. People obtain places to meet for much less important enterprises, so why worry about this? Some years ago, in California, a grass-roots Great Books discussion movement sprang up in a matter of months. The participants had no trouble in gaining space in the public libraries and schools for their weekly meetings.

It may be argued that a movement like the one proposed needs "promotion" to get it going, and that this is the role of organization. Well, maybe. A loosely allied group of people might ally themselves simply for the purpose of informing the public of an opportunity for study, together, of such matters. But an organization in which "status" may become a personal objective would, we think, tend to suffocate the original purposes of the movement. This, at any rate, is the lesson of history.

Then there is the question of whether or not this is a *new* idea. We can think of spree existing groups or movements which were established during the past century, and which approximate in some measure the sort of organization our correspondent has in mind: The Theosophical Movement, the Ethical Culture Movement, and the Humanist Movement. The first two were founded about 1875, while the Humanist Society began its existence early in this century.

Ethical Culture and Humanism have much in common. Both are avowedly altruistic and humanitarian in outlook; both reflect the mood of scientific skepticism; and both oppose religious dogmatism and claims to a supernatural source of religious truth. Both, finally, seem to have preserved to this day a non-sectarian spirit. The emphasis of the Ethical Culture movement has been felt particularly in education—there is an Ethical Culture secondary school in New York City—and in spreading ideas of tolerance and social intelligence. The Humanist Society seems primarily interested in working out an ethic which harmonizes with modern scientific knowledge, and in protecting society from the inroads of clerical domination.

The Theosophical Movement differs from these two groups in that it offers a theory of knowledge involving transcendental assumptions about the nature of things. Theosophy, according to its chief nineteenth-century exponent, Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, is characterized by belief in the eternal existence of the *Gnosis*—actual knowledge or wisdom concerning the nature of things. While Theosophy declared uncompromising opposition to the supernaturalism of a personal God, it proposed that all men were possessed of latent deific powers, and could ultimately become "Masters of Wisdom." This philosophical position, however, when sloganized by immature members, created extreme hazards for the Theosophical Society, since those who were to all appearance ordinary human beings eventually were found implying that they had attained to spiritual heights not yet reached by the common herd, and entitled, therefore, to special recognition as Theosophical authorities. In consequence of this development, splits occurred in the Society, until there were three schismatic groups, organized more or less like churches, each claiming to be the true channel of inspiration. It was inevitable that the educated public should show little respect for a movement displaying such self-discrediting behavior. What happened in this instance should hardly be regarded as surprising, since whenever transcendental ideas of great subtlety are promoted by *group* enthusiasm, the ideas tend to be vitiated into a creed by the very language of the "joiners." From this grows the authority of "group" beliefs. This record should be instructive, for there is little or no basis for any sort of religious authoritarianism in the writings of H. P. Blavatsky, which are rather a searching inquiry into ancient religions, much in the manner proposed by our correspondent. Thus the history of the Theosophical Movement should be a useful

"case-history" to refer to when contemplating the proposal of an organization devoted to the quest for philosophical truth. It is one thing to set up a principle of "no authority," but quite another to make it stand, especially when the goal is human development. At any rate, the continuing vigor of the Theosophical Movement seems to reside mostly in the efforts of relatively unorganized individuals who are pursuing their studies and work without interest in organizational authorities, or in spite of them.

We have no doubt but that both the Humanist Society and the Ethical Culture Society would suffer similar vicissitudes, were they to broaden their base of inquiry to include the investigation of the mystical, regenerative side of religion. And since this seems an essential part of our correspondent's proposal, the dangers of a religious type of organization should be easily apparent.

However, we have no hesitation in sharing with full enthusiasm our correspondent's desire to *study* ancient transcendentalisms; this seems to us, in fact, a great need of the present.

EDITORS