

CAN SCIENCE AND RELIGION COOPERATE?

A READER who gives evidence of having personally attended the Conference on Religion in the Age of Science, discussed in MANAS for Nov. 10 under the title, "The Great Temptation," writes to protest the conclusions drawn in our article from Ralph Burhoe's report of the Conference, which appeared in *Science* for Oct. 1. Since this reader's letter suggests that the MANAS writer made mistakes in interpreting the report, and since it also raises points worthy of discussion, we print the letter in full:

"The Great Temptation" does a needless disservice to the group which conducted the Conference on Religion in the Age of Science and particularly to Ralph W. Burhoe, who competently directed the conference program.

The approach of the conference was not institutional; delegates did not come as representatives of particular groups or sects. Persons attending brought with them a variety of religious attitudes, but no one was there to speak for the religious organization to which he belonged. Each came only as an interested *individual*.

Your writer misjudges the guest list when he doubts that men like Albert Einstein and Oliver Reiser could have expected invitations. Philipp G. Frank, whose views are discussed in your Oct. 20 issue, was among the invited and heartily received guests, as were Harlow Shapley, Henry Margenau, and George Wald (see *Scientific American*, August, p. 44). None of these men of science would have allowed an objective of harmony among the conferees to displace integrity of thought on the question of the God-idea; and the men of religion were quite prepared to welcome clear and fresh thinking on the subject.

The conferees did not from lack of courage pass over the issue which your writer considers the crucial one: whether or not there exists a personal God. Rather the question was neglected as being meaningless or certainly fruitless in that it involves testing a postulation which is incapable of verification. The approach of the conferees was operational, rather than dogmatic, and their interest

was more in methods of arriving at knowledge or belief, both scientific and religious, than in content.

Scientists acknowledged the restrictiveness of their operations, and they recognized that ideas of things as they ought to be depend on more than the discoveries of science. Religionists conceded that their common modes of inquiry were not valid ways for learning how the universe and life in it has evolved and that traditional speculation on meaning and purpose in life are fraught with unscientific anthropomorphism. Yet there was no general conclusion that science and religion are disharmonious fields which can serve mankind only in separate ways. How science and religion can work together, each to nourish the other, was the crucial question of the conference.

The last of your writer's three objections to the conference comes from his misrepresentation of a brief quotation from George Wald. Neither Dr. Wald nor any other participant presumed that this or any other body of experts could supply religious truth. Wald used the expression "organize human experience" not in the sense of organizing in an institutional form but in helping to orient individuals to the universe by adding to their knowledge and understanding of nature. In this manner he thought we may increase people's sensitivity and awareness by which they evolve "some sense of direction in their daily lives, some hope for the future, some purpose in their lives."

The conference is planning to resume its sessions next summer. Your readers will be better served if *Manas* reports a first-hand impression of the next gathering.

Apparently, our article suffered from a confusion that was free from the mitigation of even minor inaccuracies! Let us at once concede the pertinence of two of this correspondent's comments. First, there is the matter of the scientists who attended: perhaps it is merely coincidence that no scientist present felt it necessary to speak in uncompromising terms against the personal-God idea, as Dr. Einstein did in 1940. We can only hope that someone

representing this point of view will be invited to attend the conference scheduled for next summer.

Second, perhaps the writer of "The Great Temptation" read too much into Dr. Wald's way of referring to the idea of "organizing human experience so that people can feel at home in the universe. . . ." Perhaps the selection of these words was without ominous implications of institutional authority, and did no more than reflect a common cultural attitude. After all, the idea of a unified scheme of interpretation of human experience has been in the air for some time. Eighteen years ago, at the celebration of the tercentenary of Harvard University (1936), some 2,500 scholars and scientists gathered at Cambridge, and the theme which gained the most headlines in the newspapers was the proposal of a "world court" of ideas, presided over by "savants" who would help the civilized world to order its affairs. At that great convocation of learned men, Dr. Etienne Gilson, French authority on the history of philosophy and eminent Catholic layman, sounded the keynote. He blamed the decline of political freedom in Europe on the scientists and philosophers, who, he said, had failed to provide their people with a philosophy of government. He charged:

Instead of seeking and adhering to universal truths, or the closest approaches to them of which they were capable, and presenting these with a positive emphasis, they would adhere to a variegated array of personal theories and opinions and individual findings from which they would fail to filter out the universal truths they contained.

We may admit the charge, yet wonder about the identification of the "universal truths." Unlike some critics who find in the simple expression, "universal truths," a source of deep suspicion, we want only some account of how those truths are to be recognized or determined. If their ultimate source is some particular religious revelation, then, as members of a civilization which has survived a period presided over by such "truths" only by means of bloody revolutions, debasing reactions of materialism, and the eventual

repudiation of all "spiritual" ideas, we are entitled to view an advocacy of this sort with some misgivings.

Such wariness is neither unjustified nor uncommon. Consider the almost bitter attacks directed against Robert M. Hutchins for his defense of the idea of "universal truths" as found, not in Revelation, but in the Great Books of Western civilization. However, these attacks, we think, were ill-founded, because they ignored Hutchins' further advocacy of the study of metaphysics as the means of defining acceptable first principles.

We come, then, to the idea of first principles, propounded in philosophical terms, and clarified and defended by metaphysical discipline, as the basis for any and all attempts to "organize" our knowledge or understanding of the world, preparatory to formulating a conception of the universe in which we may hope to "feel at home."

What do we mean by "metaphysics"? We mean those larger conceptions of the nature of man and the universe, by means of which a man formulates to himself a sense of meaning and purpose in life. We would argue that every man entertains such conceptions, with or without clarity and conscious critical reflection, and that a metaphysical attitude toward life, either carefully developed or rudimentary and defective, is absolutely inescapable. (For careful presentation of this view, see F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, Introduction, Macmillan, 1925.)

The basis of human convictions concerning the nature of things is far too important to be passed over without serious questioning. The theocratic systems of the past arose from theological assumptions about the nature of things. The tyrannical political systems of Nazism, Fascism, and Communism all involved metaphysical assumptions. The doctrines developed from Dialectical Materialism rest upon far-reaching metaphysical claims about the nature of man. The Declaration of Independence of the United States is rooted in metaphysics. In fact,

modern science itself is honeycombed with a wide variety of metaphysical conceptions, as Prof. Edwin H. Burt shows in his book, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science*.

We are arguing, here, that whenever a man proposes the organization of human knowledge according to some scheme of meaning which, he hopes, will bring some satisfaction to the longings of the human heart, it is necessary, first, to inquire into that man's first principles and to examine the consequences to which they may lead.

It is not enough to say that we shall study "facts." Which facts, and in what relation? The weight of facts already accumulated by scientific research is now a notorious burden to the scientists themselves. Surely it is in order to turn our attention to the matter of integrating principles. This is not, of course, a popular or widely accepted approach to the problem of human knowledge. As our correspondent implies, metaphysics has practically no standing with the majority of scientific thinkers. This is probably the case with respect to our critic, for he seems to agree with the reason given for the Conference's neglect of whether or not there exists a personal God, saying: ". . . the question was neglected as being meaningless or certainly fruitless in that it involves testing a postulation which is incapable of verification. The approach of the conferees was operational rather than dogmatic, and their interest was more in methods of arriving at knowledge or belief, both scientific and religious, than in content."

While the postulate of a personal God may be "incapable of verification," it is certainly not beyond criticism, and since the religion most familiar to the West is widely presented as the "word of God," the idea of God can hardly be irrelevant to a consideration of how Christian belief was arrived at. It seems wholly reasonable to say that the *content* of Christianity is quite indispensable to an inquiry into the origins of Christian dogma and doctrine. Is it really feasible

for science and religion to "work together" so long as such questions are set aside as "meaningless" or "fruitless"? If men are to work together, it is necessary for them to respect one another, not only in the abstract, as human beings, but also as holders of certain convictions and attitudes concerning the nature of things. As was implied in the article, "The Great Temptation," a conscientious scientist can hardly respect claims concerning man and nature which derive from supernatural revelation—and least of all when he is regarding the method of acquiring such beliefs and not their content. It is conceivable that a belief, for which a supernatural authority is claimed, may acquire an independent validity when examined in the light of reason. Consideration of the belief may then proceed without embroiling the discussion in issues of authority. But if only the means to belief are examined, we are unable to see how the investigation can fail to be itself impoverished of meaning.

There are three historically familiar sources of orthodox religious belief. The first is the revelation from God. The second is the writings of commentators on the revelation, and the third is the decisions of church councils at which creeds are defined.

A fourth source might be added, that of the independent intuitions of individuals, or the perceptions of mystics, but since this aspect of religious conviction is highly personal and ought not to be confused with the codified teachings of the churches, we refer to it by itself. By interesting coincidence, however, this fourth source is the only one which both religion and science may be said to possess in common. Within the past ten or fifteen years, a number of scientists have written of the way in which intuition or "hunches" operate in scientific discovery. Dr. Einstein has spoken of the role of intuition in the formation of hypothesis, and Cohen and Nagel, authors of *Logic and the*

Scientific Method, devote much of their chapter on Hypothesis to the mystery of "inspiration."

It is at this level, then, that a sympathetic meeting of minds can take place between the scientific and the religious points of view. But since, from the scientific outlook, the nature of inspiration remains completely speculative, other than that it may lead to great things; and since, from the religious point of view, inspiration is more in the nature of original "religious experience" than a confirmation of orthodox belief, it follows that the scientists and the religionists who join to consider a possible merger or mutual nourishment of viewpoints ought to come together simply as men, and not as two kinds of specialists. If their specialties happen to enrich the intercourse of thought, well and good; but if they come together more as specialists than as freely inquiring minds, it is difficult to see how the meeting can be fruitful.

We take, in short, a rather radical view of such gatherings. We have an idea that Emerson has been of considerable inspiration to men of scientific mind—directly in proportion, perhaps, to the impartiality he achieved as a thinker. Emerson, it will be recalled, began his adult life as a Unitarian preacher, but he found that even the mild creedal requirements of Unitarianism interfered with his integrity as a man. Accordingly, he abandoned this last shred of orthodox opinion for the free-ranging attitude so lucidly embodied in his writings. But Emerson, let us note, did not thereupon cease to be religious. In his own view, his emancipation from any creed enabled him to be truly religious.

How are religious convictions obtained? We left out one important source. Some of the most inspiring beliefs have grown out of the thought of men who abandoned an earlier orthodoxy. Gautama Buddha broke with the institutional religion of his day and sought an inspiration of his own. Buddhism, despite the overlay of religiosity left by many generations of Buddhists since his time, remains a fundamentally rational religion—

the only one we know of. It has no personal God, no source of spiritual authority outside the individual man himself. Jesus Christ broke with Hebrew orthodoxy and began teaching the inward, ethical religion of the New Testament. Martin Luther attacked the authority of Rome, and while the Protestant movement which followed split into scores of orthodoxies to replace the Roman faith, Luther's inspiration is best understood by reference to the mystical teachings of pre-Reformation groups which were more pantheist in character than anything else.

The point, here, is that as religious ideas obtain the immediacy of independent conviction, regardless of church or traditional teaching, they move along a path which runs at least parallel to the course of scientific investigation, if not at the same level. As Josiah Royce pointed out years ago, the mystic is the most thorough empiricist of all, for he is concerned with the immediate contents of consciousness. If science and religion are to get together, and especially if they are to get together on method, with mutual esteem, it will have to be on the testing ground of immediate experience. This may not sound very "practical," but we have not argued in behalf of the practical. We are concerned with the logically possible.

The only intermediate area between science and religion is the area of metaphysics. Metaphysics does not presume to define what is, but only what is rationally possible. Metaphysics might be thought of as the application of scientific method to the field of conceptual experience. It is a proper critic of both religion and those assumptions about the nature of things which are inevitably declared or implied by all scientists who try to philosophize excepting, perhaps, the Positivists, who, when all is said and done, seem to tell us only that science can be of no help at all in the effort to penetrate the veil of matter.

REVIEW

NOTES ON NOVELS

IT has always seemed to us that the pleasure gained from reading novels can be considerably increased by adding a little mental exertion—by trying to determine what is the author's philosophy of life, and delving into his reasons for selecting points of emphasis. In this sort of reading, each novel, if it is worth anything, becomes a sort of puzzle, the keys to which must be sought with a fair amount of diligence. Moreover, the reader who develops this approach stands to gain something from even poor books, for his thinking need not stop simply because the story fails to move in any significant direction.

Browsing among the pocket editions, we found in Leon Uris' *Battle Cry* a suggestion that humanitarian considerations may occur even to pridefully bloodthirsty marines. Uris served with the Marine Corps in the Pacific during World War II, and while his writing often seems amateurish, an authentic feeling of the mood of men in battle seems communicated. The heroes of *Battle Cry* hate and lust in their killing a good deal of the time, but they do not escape sorrow at suffering—even, occasionally, at the sufferings of the enemy. "Danny," for instance, at the scene of his first kill, finds himself caught in the grip of two contradictory emotions:

They fell to the deck and lay quietly. A hunched figure sprinted through the tall grass a hundred yards from them. Danny felt a weird tingle in his body . . . a live Jap, not dead and rotten. This one was moving, moving at him and Ski. The sweat gushed into his eyes as the man weaved closer . . . two arms, two legs . . . why does he want to kill me? Maybe he has a girl, a Jap girl like Kathy. I'm not mad at him. They raised their rifles . . . fifteen yards . . . got him zero'd in, easy, this will be easy. . . sitting duck, right through the heart. . . Suppose my rifle won't fire? *Crack! Crack! Crack!* The Jap dropped in his tracks.

"You got him," Ski said. "Did you see that bastard fall?"

Danny sprang to his feet and put his bayonet on his rifle. . . . He moved over to the body of the fallen

soldier. A stream of blood was pouring from the man's mouth. Danny shuddered. His eyes were open. The Jap's hand made a last feeble gesture. Danny plunged the steel into the Jap's belly. . . .

The firing on the ridge stopped. Andy went to Danny. "I guess this belongs to you," he said, handing him a Japanese battle flag. "He had it in his helmet. Nice going, Danny."

He took the token without words, his eyes glued to the flag. . . .

This sort of reaction to killing appears briefly in only one other passage, but the very brutality of so much of Mr. Uris' recital makes the two instances stand out sharply. Many of the World War II books devote agonized attention to the same considerations. It now seems that practically no one is likely to write war books in which the possibility of a common humanity is denied to the enemy.

Fritz Peters' *Descent* continues this unusual writer's exploration of uncommon subjects. His *World Next Door*, a story of insanity and recovery, received considerable attention in MANAS, since the philosophic overtones of the book were so striking. Later, Peters undertook a story of homosexuality, *Finistère*, which departed from the norm of the few books dealing with that topic in several respects—principally by neglecting no psychological dimension, and avoiding a thesis or theory. *Descent* is a novel about an automobile accident, in which each one injured or killed is shown to have created the conditions drawing him toward the tangled wreckage, months even years—before the crash actually occurred. Those who have read J. W. Dunne's *Experiment with Time* may suspect that Mr. Peters has read it, too, and has for some time been wondering about the psychological meaning of such terms as "fate," "nemesiis," "karma," etc. The fatalism implied by the sequence of events in *Descent*, however, is conditional, since some persons only come close to the tragedy, being warned by strong premonitions in sufficient time to avoid death or serious injury. After the accident happens—the reader somehow knows all

through the book that in a sense it is "real" before it takes place, and that each sufferer has contributed to its occurrence—one who escapes muses about the subconscious warning which was his own salvation:

He could understand, somehow, that nature required death of every living organism. It demanded its quota through sickness, disease, old age, manifestations of violence, volcanoes, floods, storms . . . but in all of these things there was a curious logic; creation and destruction were nature's prerogatives, they could not be questioned. What made no sense to him, what robbed life of any apparent purpose and design, was man's own war against man. Not only armies of men fighting each other, but the so-called accidents, the murders, the suicides . . .

Why had it had to happen? Why to those people? It could not, in his mind, be resolved—as it would be for the police with their facts and reports—by finding out who had caused it. There was something more than any human action involved. Why had Dorothy Simms tried to pass that truck then? Why had Stephen Williams passed him? What series of coincidences, what acts of fate, had selected this group of people? What was it that had protected him?

The warning—and his feeling of alarm was unmistakably that—had stopped him just in time. He had felt the approach of death—even if he had not known at the moment what it was—reaching out for him, like a huge hand with fingers outspread, for all of them. Had it been just for him, then, or had it come too late for the others? Either it had not been quite big enough to get them all, or else it had not been intended to reach them . . . yet.

Elliott Arnold has been a writer to watch with some interest ever since *Blood Brother* (*Broken Arrow* in the movie version). Mr. Arnold served in Italy during the war, and has drawn on this background for portions of two novels. One of these, *Everybody Slept Here*, with action chiefly in Washington, D.C., also conveys the feeling that the "enemy" is never very different from ourselves, while furnishing a most unflattering portrayal of rear-echelon politics and policies. Arnold's own military career was apparently successful enough, so that his attitude toward war and the managers of war-making cannot be

explained as the disappointment of an angry man; Arnold is just an other writer impelled to look behind facades to see what holds the human race back from becoming what it might be. Again, it is not war itself which affronts him the most, but the callous indifference, the acceptance of depersonalized routine, which follow in the wake of battle:

Now Casa was rear echelon.

During an advance, he thought, wandering around the streets, looking at the buildings which somehow had a resort appearance, cities and towns had a life of their own. They absorbed it from what was happening around them, and then the motion passed them by, and then something else, quite different, followed in the wake. The town was discarded, the way a woman might be discarded, and what the town did and what it had during its time of dignity was taken from it, and what was left was always something cheaper. The soldiers disappeared, the true soldiers, and the rear-echelon boys appeared.

Rules and regulations were established by officials who seemed to have no function in the war other than to appear suddenly, as though they were untied from packages, at a place where only yesterday there was fighting, and set up their paper rules. The rules were ready-made, for conduct and dress and living and eating. The cities and towns were never recovered from their ordeal at that time and the regulations were draped on them the way evening dress might be draped on a wounded and hungry woman and then whatever it was that war and death gave to a community was taken away and all that was left was the manifest dirt and disorder which the rear-echelon personnel contemplated with the eyes of a superior department of sanitation. And the cities always appeared to look shamed, the way they never had when the fighting was going on.

Brent had often wondered, watching these and other strange and wonderful operations of higher echelons, whether similar conditions obtained in the ranks of the enemy, and he had decided it must, that it must be worse, that the only thing that saved us was that the other side had it, too. It couldn't be otherwise. . . .

The generals always got along with each other because most of them were professionals and those who weren't were more professional than those who were. They were a level by themselves and they were closer in spirit to their own enemy opposite numbers

than they were with men in their own ranks. There were exceptions there, too, but again, not enough to matter. Apart from the fact that they were fighting on opposite sides there was a kinship with the ranking enemy officers. They had a professional relationship with each other, so that an American general, witnessing an operation performed by an enemy general, judged it dispassionately, with a kind of objective criticism. Rivals, perhaps, but rivals in their own private world. They could feel an honest admiration for a successful enemy thrust even though it was against them, because it was a sign that the enemy leader knew his business and they could appreciate that. It was not what they did, but how they did it that counted, and this respect, a clique respect, was sometimes above the number of lives lost, ground gained, battles won.

It was necessary to have this attitude because once the initial outrage of war was admitted then everything else became minor and it could be regarded as a vast, complicated game. The general who bore in mind that his soldiers were individual men, with personalities and lives, could not use them properly.

Peter Viertel's *White Hunter, Black Heart* is the story of an unscrupulous motion picture director, a deliberately insensitive wanton in his dealings with all his associates and hangers-on, who nonetheless maintains a "strange sort of integrity" in his productions. The most "antisocial" man imaginable, his character gains compensation from the fact that he is completely immune to the common social prejudices. Having no personal stake, no emotional investment, in any phase of the *status quo*, he always shows up as an angry and effective fighter against abuses of caste or race privilege. There is something about this story to ponder—the strange suggestion that the most unlovely and egotistical of men may be able to see social crimes with the clearest eyes. The Africa background of the story probably comes from Mr. Viertel's work under Director John Huston in the production of *African Queen*.

COMMENTARY GROUNDS FOR HOPE

READING over what is said in *Frontiers* about Eric Hoffer, we wonder if the writer has not been unduly critical of *The True Believer* and the *Harper's* quotations from *The Passionate State of Mind*. The *Frontiers* article is a cry for a more "positive" account of the potentialities of human beings, and yet, when we reflect upon the labors of MANAS writers, the fruit of their efforts in this direction, in comparison to the volume of words printed here each week, seems slight enough.

"Ancient morality," it is said in *Frontiers*, "was suffused with deep convictions relating to the potentialities of human beings, but Mr. Hoffer is without any such foundation." Suppose he had attempted to be more positive—had unveiled an eagerness to urge men on to better things—would we like or enjoy him as much?

Why is it so difficult to be "positive" with convincing effect? While much of deliberately "positive" writing is heavy with moralizing intentions, there remains the fact that the modern world is still saturated with two kinds of pessimism—the pessimism of religion, which holds man to be a sinner, redeemable only by the miracle of grace; and the pessimism of science, which, so far as man is concerned, lays its greatest emphasis upon the animal heritage which is always with us. The religious writer can become positive only by borrowing his enthusiasm from Jesus, and the best of the scientific writers invite us to a stoic bravery in the teeth of immutable cosmic decay.

What grounds, then, are there, beyond some sort of existentialist desperation, either scientific or religious, for a positive point of view?

The grounds have existed for other men, and they have not seemed to them fanciful or absurd. The project of MANAS is to seek out the grounds that are available, or are becoming available, in our time, and to review them for their stability and the strength they offer to human hope. Hence, for

example, our attention to the modern novel as found in this week's *Review*—the interest we have in a soldier's simple perception of common humanity in his "enemy." We are convinced that many men feel as we do, that grounds for faith in man—in man as he is, because of what he may become—may be discovered by those who keep on searching.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

NOTES IN PASSING

READERS who did not notice *Time's* (Sept. 27) report on a program sponsored by the Whitney Foundation may be interested in this plan for unretiring retired professors. The idea is that teachers who have retired from full-time work constitute a large reservoir of ability—sometimes ability eager to be usefully employed. By providing grants of moderate salaries and arranging easy schedules for once weary professors and teachers, the Foundation enables them to bring their renewed enthusiasm back to the campuses of the nation. Initial efforts along this line were regarded as purely experimental, but it soon became apparent that tired and retired instructors are not apt to stay tired forever, providing they are in reasonably good health. A teacher *likes* to teach, perhaps feels most fully alive when engaged in teaching.

A typical example of the success of the program is found at Maryland's Goucher College for women. A 73-year-old former Yale professor of Greek, starting out his year at Goucher with six students, ended up with a record 40. At North Carolina's Davidson College, James Wilson, a retired dean of the University of Virginia, enjoyed himself so much teaching Shakespeare that he immediately accepted another professorship. At the University of the South in Tennessee, a former Oberlin professor of the history and appreciation of art made his subject so popular that the University set up a full-fledged department of fine arts and invited the elderly but vital instructor to return as a charter member.

The concluding paragraph of *Time's* report makes the whole enterprise a rather heart-warming affair:

With such samples of success, the New York and Whitney Foundations hope to inspire the hiring of other retired professors. The Whitney Foundation has a list of 350 scholars willing and able to return to

work. All in all, says former Columbia College Dean Harry J. Carman, chairman of the foundation's Division of Humanities, it is quite a reservoir—"which too often goes unused."

Such results bring to mind the fact that in older and in some ways wiser cultures than our own, aged instructors were given special deference, and waning physical energies regarded as more than balanced by a likely mellowness of assimilated understanding. Not all professors, of course, improve with age, but if students thus appreciate the men selected by the Whitney Foundation, we have abundant evidence that the conventional age of retirement means very little—other than that a full program of hours and courses is not always feasible for older men and women.

Had we managed to read it sooner, we might have recommended Mary Ellen Chase's simple and beautiful biographical essay on children's reading as an excellent gift for teachers and parents. Originally printed as an article in the *Ladies' Home Journal*, "Recipe for a Magic Childhood" now appears, by courtesy of Macmillan, in an attractive, nominally priced, hard-cover edition of but twenty-two pages. Though unassuming in her manner of writing, Miss Chase may, we think, be regarded as one of our most distinguished women of letters; a successful novelist, she also contributes reviews to a number of literary journals. In this article she tells how her own parents encouraged reading, and she recaptures the mood of wonder and awe which made this new experience the beginning of a far-reaching life of the mind. Her asides on the lack of emphasis on reading in most modern homes ring true, and they also have practical value in that they seem apt to stimulate more constructive response than will ever result from the tirades of the literati. She does not, moreover, make generalizations about "the responsibility of the parent as educator," yet shows how easy it actually can be for a parent to become a teacher in the home.

The following, which begins by supporting the arguments of the traditionalists against current practices in the public schools, veers away in recognition of the fact that, as often contended here, it is impossible for the schools to do the parents' job, no matter how excellent the teachers. Miss Chase writes:

I am convinced that many of the girls whom I teach, or try to teach, have received a better preparation for college in their homes—yes, even in their mothers' kitchens—than they have received at school, provided always that their parents have known how to lift them above what Wordsworth calls "the dreary intercourse of daily life" by leading them early into the paths of books. For through their reading in those most formative years from seven to seventeen they have become all unconsciously the dwellers in many lands, the intelligent and eager associates of all manner of people. Through their early familiarity with words they have gained a facility in speech and in writing which no other source can give.

It is indeed possible for young readers to become "eager and intelligent associates of all manner of people." But unless parents have themselves felt the need to broaden and deepen their understanding of human nature, and have learned *how* to read, it will be impossible for them to serve as effective agents in bringing about the desired result. Granting that the age of super-radios and television makes a life of the mind more difficult, we think Miss Chase is correct when she takes the position that these instruments, of themselves, need not threaten the pleasures of reading in every home. Recalling the proclivities of her own mother and father, she recognizes that her parents would, if television had then been available, certainly have wanted a set installed in the home. But, she feels, since they also knew what richness books could bring to daily thought and family conversation, the substitute would never have been allowed to displace the original.

The following paragraphs embody a sensible recommendation to modern parents:

Had my parents been besieged by pleadings for a television set in the living room or seen The Lone

Ranger, or Hopalong Cassidy, or Superman in the process of winning the day over the family reading circle, I rather think they would have met these claimants to our attention and devotion with the only possible weapon then as now—the clear and uncompromising example of their own enthusiasm and values.

They were only in their late twenties when we four children were learning, or had learned, to read; and like most young parents today they loved excitement and were eager after all things new and strange, even in their relatively stable world. I am sure that they would have bought a television set. But I am even more certain that hours for the enjoyment of each would have been strictly defined and dearly understood and that neither would ever have been allowed to usurp the place of books and reading in our common life.

For there is no substitute for books in the life of a child; and the first understanding of this simple and irrefutable truth must come from his early perception of his parents' faith in it. They alone can give him this knowledge just as they alone are responsible for the practice of their faith. If they themselves look upon radio programs and the television screen, valuable as certain of their offerings may be, as clearly secondary to the chapter from the bedtime book, and if they good-humoredly insist that neither takes the place of hours spent in quiet reading, the battle for the books is won.

There are many ways in which parents can make clear to children their own respect and love for good reading. The gift of a book or the buying of one from the family budget can easily be made an event in the life of a child. He should be taken to the bookshop on the momentous day of the purchase and allowed to look about on its bright offerings. Taught by example as well as by precept, he will learn the careful handling of such treasures. Once at home and his hands carefully washed before the parcel is opened, the binding of the new book, its illustrations, even its print should be shared with him and the time for its reading discussed.

For practical suggestions as to how reading can be encouraged, Miss Chase draws upon the experience of friends:

Two young parents whom I now know allow their son and daughter, aged eight and ten, to read for an hour every night in bed after they are sent there promptly at eight o'clock. I know of no wiser plan to

ensure a love of books and a dependence upon them. The very sight of a book upon his bedside table widens the horizons of a child and affords a spur to his imagination. And a shelf of them of his own, however small in number, kept within reach of his hands, is a possession no child should be without.

It would be splendid if all the Parent-Teacher Associations would supply copies of *Recipe for a Magic Childhood* for their entire memberships. Every parent can easily read its twenty-two pages and, once its content becomes the common property of groups concerned with the constructive stimulation of parents' imagination, a natural focus would emerge for the exchange of information in regard to worthwhile reading. Miss Chase found "magic" in books because her parents provided a happy, quiet occasion for their sharing, and to the extent that any of us duplicate these conditions of giving, we may have confidence that the gift will be appreciated.

FRONTIERS The Bystander

HARPER'S has discovered Eric Hoffer, San Francisco longshoreman author of *The True Believer*, and in the December issue prints a selection of pithy paragraphs from his forthcoming volume, *The Passionate State of Mind*. This book promises to be notable not only for its searching if somewhat bitter intelligence—*Harper's* calls Hoffer "the master of the polished moral maxim"—but also because of certain differences between Mr. Hoffer and his predecessors in the study of human nature.

Most of all, Mr. Hoffer is a bystander. Ancient moralists—indeed, all moralists from Lao-tze and Confucius to Machiavelli—wrote with action as an end in view, as well as understanding. A part of Hoffer's insidious charm, perhaps, lies in the fact that the reader may delight in this exposure of the anatomy of human behavior without feeling an obligation to change his own life. We say this without meaning to decry or minimize Mr. Hoffer's impressive talent for disillusioning criticism. The point is rather that a moralist who wants to really affect human behavior must have available certain broad assumptions which his readers share with him concerning the nature of man. It is these assumptions which give him the *leverage* he needs in order to be taken seriously concerning the desired changes in behavior. Ancient morality was suffused with deep convictions relating to the potentialities of human beings, but Mr. Hoffer is without any such foundation. He cannot, therefore, supply the same sort of stimulus to moral striving. One may regret, moreover, that he does not seem to recognize this problem, or to consider it of genuine importance—not, at any rate, in his previous book, *The True Believer*, nor in the passages quoted by *Harper's* from *The Passionate State of Mind*.

Lao-tze, for example, is able to make gentle but insistent demands upon his readers because of

his teaching that *Tao*, the source of good, may become the ruling principle in a man's life. He counsels:

Temper your sharpness, disentangle your ideas, moderate your brilliancy, live in harmony with your age. This is being in conformity with the principle of *Tao*. Such a man is impervious alike to favor and disgrace, to benefits and injuries, to honor and contempt. And therefore he is esteemed above all mankind.

Hoffer finds no sublime element in human nature to appeal to. His is a dark, depressing sort of wisdom. Even his best seems somehow only a shadow of the good. He writes:

It is strange how the moment we have reason to be dissatisfied with ourselves we are set upon by a pack of insistent, clamorous desires. Is desire somehow an expression of the centrifugal force that tears and pulls us away from an undesirable self? A gain in self-esteem reduces considerably the pull of the appetites, while a crisis in self-esteem is likely to cause a weakening or a complete break-down of self-discipline.

Asceticism is sometimes a deliberate effort to reverse a reaction in the chemistry of our soul by suppressing desire we try to rebuild and bolster self-esteem.

Hoffer hits the mark, all right—but what mark is it that he hits? Is there no asceticism which is not an attempt to rally our good opinion of ourselves? This book would doubtless be an excellent manual for the religious devotee to have on hand when examining his conscience, but a treatise on the psychopathology of self-deception is not enough to live by. We need also to have defined the sort of motive for "asceticism" or self-discipline which is not merely the drive for self-esteem in one of its various disguises.

Hoffer's alternatives seem always to be between two evils—a situation in which only bystanding pessimists can enjoy a triumph. For example:

In this godless age, as much as in any preceding age, man is still preoccupied with the saving of the soul. The discrediting of established religions by enlightenment did not result in a weakening of the

religious impulse. A traditional religion canalizes and routinizes the quest for salvation. When such a religion is discredited, the individual must do his own soul-saving, and he is at it twenty-four hours a day.

There is an eruption of fanaticism in all departments of life—business, politics, literature, art, science, and even in love-making and sport. The elimination of the sacerdotal outlet results thus in a general infection and inflammation of the social body.

Again, a bull's eye. But is there no escape from this dilemma? Must we be either routinized by orthodoxy or riddled by fanaticism? Here is a tired disdain for both individual and collective soul-saving.

Without knowing anything about Mr. Hoffer, we suspect that he has had painful acquaintance with some lately patented brand of soul-saving, and that it has left him with a very bad taste. Perhaps people he knows have been drawn into some of the more bizarre sects of the twentieth century—not he, for he seems too sophisticated for this—and have supplied prime exhibits of the gullibilities of belief and the fallibilities of religious escapism. And yet, we can't avoid the notion that he somehow suspects a deeply hidden root of truth beneath all this folly—a suspicion which never really becomes articulate, but has the effect of giving his tools of analysis a razor's edge.

Hoffer's sort of wisdom has another kind of interest. His first book, *The True Believer*, Harper's reports, "is still being reviewed—with shouts of delight and astonishment—four years after publication." Why? Twenty years ago, we think, it could not have caused this flurry. In those days, the people who occupy the world of books were still entranced by collectivist formulas for the good life not only Marxist or socialist programs, but all accounts of the good of man which rely on the reconstruction of the environment to achieve their ends. Hoffer, it might be argued, is taking off along the road back to the vineyards cultivated by ancient moralists—to the problem of the individual—and since the world of letters and serious thought now seems ready for this retracing of steps, Hoffer enjoys the

popularity of one who has called the turn. If we had to estimate how far back Hoffer has gone, we should say that he has reached the way-station represented by Machiavelli. All you can find in Machiavelli about the possible goodness of man is a sneaking suspicion; and this is about what may be discovered in Hoffer. In the latter's defense, however, it should be pointed out that, unlike Machiavelli, he has no interest in the instruction of demagogues, who are the modern "princes." Hoffer's pessimism is for the instruction of all of us, not for a special breed of rulers.

The total effect of reading Hoffer, so far as we can see, is that one is helped to make an existentialist's sort of peace with modern "reality"—which appears to be a very sad state of affairs. From the social point of view:

If it be true that the vigor of a society is proportionate to its capacity for enthusiasm, then the habit of insatiable desire can be as much a factor in maintaining social vigor as the dedication to ideals and holy causes.

A nation is "tired" when it ceases to want things fervently. It makes no difference whether this blunting of desire is due to satiety, reasonableness, or disillusion. To a tired nation the future seems barren, offering nothing which would surpass that which is and has been. The main effect of a real revolution is perhaps that it sweeps away those who do not know how to wish, and brings to the front men with insatiable appetites for action, power, and all that the world has to offer.

Suppose we say that here Hoffer throws out a line as far back as Lao-tze. But how different the mood! Lao-tze is a philosopher for "tired nations," just as Plato is a philosopher for those who have great dreams of an ideal social order. For Lao-tze, the people who "do not know how to wish" are not to be regarded with contempt (Hoffer, of course, is not exactly contemptuous—but rather tells what he sees, leaving it to his hearers to supply the emotional reactions; but he can't help knowing something of the feelings of his audience, so that a measure of contempt is at least implied). The old Chinese sage wrote:

Were I ruler of a little State with a small population, and only ten or a hundred men available as soldiers, I would not use them. I would have the people look on death as a grievous thing, and they should not travel to distant countries. Though they might possess boats and carriages, they should on no occasion ride in them. Though they might own weapons and armor, they should have no need to use them. I would have the people return to the use of knotted cords. They should find their plain food sweet, their rough garments fine. They should be content with their homes, and happy in their simple ways. If a neighboring State was within sight of mine—nay, if we were close enough to hear the crowing of each other's cocks and the barking of each other's dogs—the two peoples should grow old and die without there ever having been any mutual intercourse.

Perhaps there are truths for a "tired society" as important to be understood as those for a vigorous society, and things to be gained in each. The Stoics, like Hoffer, lived in a tired society, yet from their return to philosophy for the individual were born principles which enlightened the lives of men who lived a thousand years and more later. Marcus Aurelius wrote:

Everything harmonizes with me, which is harmonious to thee, O Universe. Nothing for me is too early nor too late which is due in time for thee. . . . Either it is a well arranged universe or a chaos huddled together, but still a universe. But can a certain order subsist in thee, and disorder in All? . . . This is a fine saying of Plato: That he who is discoursing about men should look also at earthly things as if he viewed them from some higher place; should look at them in their assemblies, armies, agricultural labors, marriages, treaties, births, deaths, noise of the courts of justice desert places, various nations of barbarians, feasts, lamentations, markets, a mixture of all things and an orderly combination of contraries.

Consider the past, such great changes of political supremacies. Thou mayest foresee also the things which will be. For they will certainly be of like form, and it is not possible that they should deviate from the order of things which take place now; accordingly to have contemplated human life for forty years is the same as to have contemplated it for ten thousand years. For what more wilt thou see?

What one longs for in reading Hoffer is that view "from some higher place." While we may miss in the ancients the subtle touch of contemporary observation—the feeling of an insight which makes the present the present, and not the past, it ought to be possible to combine the elevation of a Lao-tze or a Marcus Aurelius with our present knowledge of reality. We say "possible," for it certainly would not be easy. It seems likely that modern thought will have to accumulate a great wealth of reflections about the nature of things, about man and society, and man in society, before the dim outline of a "higher place" will emerge. It is not that we think the truth does not yet exist; it may, and probably does; but the *grasp* of any truth has to be created anew by each generation. It has to be felt and experienced many times over before it can become articulate and widely acceptable in the contemporary idiom. So we do not really ask all this of Mr. Hoffer. What we ask is that his readers, in responding to his acute perceptions, take note that he is only a bystander, not an authentic participant, in today's moral engagements.