

ALONZO AND THE GENDARMES

HE was watering the geraniums when they came. The large one, who did not look at all the way a member of the secret police is supposed to look, walked across the driveway to the bank of pink geraniums which Alonzo was tending and asked, "Mr. Desiderio?" Alonzo smiled a little—the way you smile when you want to be friendly, but not effusive. "I am Alonzo Desiderio," he said.

"Could we go in the house and talk?" McCracken asked, introducing himself and showing his credentials. As they moved toward the door, the other man got out of the car and joined them. Alonzo seated his visitors in a small living room, offered them tobacco, and then sat down himself, waiting expectantly.

McCracken started right in. "As you know, Mr. Desiderio," he said, "our Department conducts investigations for the Government of the United States. It is our job to get facts and turn them over to our superiors. Things like this are simply routine for us. We have a job to do and we try to do it as well as we can. I assume that you want to help us, and if you will, we can get this thing over very quickly."

"What is it you want?" asked Alonzo.

Apparently, McCracken wasn't quite ready to begin his questioning. He went on in an introductory way. "Well, Mr. Desiderio," he said, "during the past few years the officials concerned with safeguarding the long-term security of our country have been giving pretty close attention to what you might call the psychology of national security. They've had the advice of experts and have reached the conclusion that true security depends more on mental attitude than on anything else. As a matter of fact, in the courses they gave us investigators in preparation for this particular program of inquiry, Dr. Gottschalk of the Institute of Advanced Studies told us that this is what the philosophers have been trying to make people understand for centuries—that

safety lies in mental attitudes much more than in bombs and armies."

McCracken paused. "In your work, Mr. Desiderio, you ought to appreciate that. You have a school, haven't you?"

"Yes," said Alonzo.

"To come to the point, Mr. Desiderio," McCracken went on, "our investigation is an attempt to get the picture of the country in terms of how mental attitudes are being formed. Hundreds of men like me are going around, talking to teachers and other people in an effort to shape up a report for the psychologists who are going to draw up recommendations for what they call basic orientation in psychological security."

Now McCracken looked directly at Alonzo. "This call is a little on the special side. You see, we have sources of information to help us locate people who might possibly—without knowing it—be upsetting the psychological apple cart for the United States. . . . You know, spreading attitudes which, while innocent enough on the surface, contribute to a feeling of indifference toward the national welfare. I think you'll agree this might be easy to do, especially in the case of men who are really 'idealists' at heart—people who don't quite understand the international situation."

"Well," said Alonzo, "a lot depends upon what you mean by national welfare, doesn't it?"

McCracken laughed a little. "Could be," he said. "I won't debate that with a man of your background, Mr. Desiderio. What chance would I have? Besides, it's not my job." He leaned forward in his chair and went on. "We are informed," he said heavily, "that you sometimes talk to your students as though the United States was just another country, and not *their* country—as though effective defense against the enemies of the United States is not the most important single thing in the life of every

American, man, woman, or child." McCracken waited.

"You might say that," Alonzo replied slowly, "although it seems to me important to go a little into what you mean by 'defense' and what you mean by 'enemies'."

McCracken laughed again—a little less amiably. "I can't let you get me into a philosophical argument, Mr. Desiderio. It might last all night. I suppose 'enemies,' for you, involves things like moral problems, and I can surely agree with you that they are very real. But my Department serves the officials of the Government concerned with practical considerations of national security. They have to leave the moral problems to the churches, don't they?"

"Do they?" Alonzo asked. "I'm afraid, Mr. McCracken, that my views are a little different from the ideas of the men to whom you are going to report. You see, I don't think that moral problems can be left to the churches. And I don't think that definitions of national security or psychological security ought to be left to experts, whether in the employ of the government or not. It happens I have some deep convictions on these points, Mr. McCracken."

Alonzo went on, explaining how he felt about matters like "nationality" and "security" and "morality," until Mr. McCracken became very, very dissatisfied and a little bored. Finally, McCracken and his associate went away. "I regret very much," he said as he left, "that you have this attitude, Mr. Desiderio, and I think that you may regret it, too, after a while." McCracken didn't mean this remark to be menacing. He was just giving Alonzo the benefit of his opinion.

McCracken came back, of course. He came back several times, bringing other men with him—more important men who did most of the talking. Alonzo didn't change at all. He was friendly, but firm. Even after they managed to get his school disqualified by the State Board of Education, he was friendly. And he was friendly after they put his name on the list of "persons of undesirable psychological

influence" circulated among the heads of other schools.

Some might say that Alonzo was a bit mysterious as a man. No one knew exactly where he came from, although it was said that he was of aristocratic Mexican origin. He was born in the United States, however, and couldn't be deported anywhere. There was nothing in his past that seemed suspicious. He had never married and seemed to care only about his ideas. He cared so much that he kept on spreading them through little meetings with young people—and a few older people, too—in his small home. The secret police kept track of such things and even planted an observer among the persons who attended these informal gatherings. In one confidential report it was noted that Alonzo lived so simply that his savings, while not large, would probably enable him to go on like this for years. Then he worked a little as a gardener. He was good at it, and people appreciated his quiet ways around the garden.

Meanwhile, the importance of psychological security was becoming better understood. The preliminary reports to the President by the committee on basic psychological orientation made it clear that these psychologists, having completed their initial research, were now convinced that nothing less than an intensive re-education program, directed at persons of all ages, and through every available channel, could accomplish the minimum security necessary to the nation. They proclaimed their convictions with a zeal typical of scientists who have made a crucially important discovery, and their eagerness to implement the far-reaching program they envisioned received a special stimulus from the fact that their science, so long sneered at by physicists and chemists as "academic" and "inexact," was now being practically applied at a level at which the older physical and even life sciences could never hope to serve. Psychology, they felt, was to create a national discipline, and activate the intangible forces of *morale*. It might even prove the salvation of civilization. The psychologists found themselves using "mystical" expressions and words like "soul," to characterize the aims of their work. At first they

wondered about this, but after a while it seemed to be one of the best aspects of the program.

It was natural, therefore, that as officials in Washington listened more closely to the psychologists, people like Alonzo seemed more and more dangerous to them. Finally, two new men called at Alonzo's home. They weren't exactly "roughnecks," but they certainly weren't as pleasant as Mr. McCracken. Looking at them, you would probably decide that they were men who got the really tough assignments of the secret police. They walked right over to where Alonzo was watering his geraniums and showed him a federal warrant for his arrest.

Alonzo read the warrant. Then he said, almost to himself, "I've been expecting this." "We'd like you to come now," said one of the officers.

Ordinarily, we suppose, in an imaginative tale about a thing like this, it would be customary to say that a curious change came over Alonzo. Actually, nothing happened to him at all. He just looked up and said, "I'm sorry, gentlemen, but I won't go." Then, when one of the officers reached for his arm, he couldn't seem to touch Alonzo. He just grabbed at air, which seemed to resist a little, and then to relax, leaving nothing in his hands. Alonzo didn't move. It seemed that some odd sort of silent atmospheric turbulence barred the way to him, for a few inches or a foot around his body. "Hypnosis," grunted the officer, standing back. "Yeah?" said the other officer, reaching for Alonzo. Alonzo stood still while the man clawed at him, never getting quite close enough. They didn't say much after that. They seemed a little pale and bewildered when they went away.

They came back the next evening, bringing with them a platoon of infantry. One of the soldiers had a sub-machine gun. They walked right into Alonzo's house and found him reading a book. The officer waved the warrant again and told the soldiers to take Alonzo away. Then a funny thing happened. Alonzo was at one end of the room, sitting by a table lamp, and the soldiers were at the other end, standing in a group. They started down the room, but could get only half way. Something stopped them. The

soldier with the machine gun began to point it at Alonzo, and then he dropped it on the floor. When the others saw this they started crowding for the door. They ran to the jeep and drove away rapidly. Alonzo went back to his book.

Two days passed without anything more happening. Then a man with a brief case—a pretty distinguished looking fellow—came to see Alonzo. He said he was from the State Department and he was very polite. Alonzo didn't say much—he confirmed what the secret police had reported as to what happened, but didn't offer any explanation. The man from the State Department went into great detail about the problems of psychological security. He wasn't worried any more about Alonzo's "internationalism." That, he supposed, was natural in a "philosopher." But the inability of policemen to arrest Alonzo—this was serious. What if people heard about it? Alonzo knew, didn't he, how superstitious the average person is? He realized, didn't he, that the situation contained all the elements of a wave of nation-wide hysteria?

Alonzo just raised his eyebrows a bit, and said something like, "Think of that!"

Then the doorbell rang. It was a reporter. The State Department official elbowed himself in front of Alonzo—somehow he was able to do this without any interference—and gave his card to the reporter. "Come to see me tomorrow," he said, and he scribbled the name of a hotel on the back of the card.

Then he went back to talking to Alonzo. He tried to make things clear. He didn't ever threaten Alonzo. This didn't seem a good idea, but he did talk about how tense the international situation was, just then, and made Alonzo seem a pretty important man. Alonzo didn't say very much, but he looked impressed, and he was so friendly that the State Department man began to wonder if the whole thing could be some fantastic sort of hoax. He told Alonzo he would be back the next day to talk some more, and went off to his hotel to telephone a report to Washington.

What neither Alonzo nor the man from the State Department knew was that the reporter didn't really go away. He had sneaked around the back, to the

window near Alonzo's table, which was open, and had listened to every last word both of them had said. The story broke, of course. There was an all-night conference in the city room, first, but finally the publisher decided to print the story about Alonzo and the secret police. In another day the story had been printed everywhere in the world. Almost nobody who had anything to do with printing it believed it, but a lot of the people who read it believed it, and Washington became frantic. A military cordon was maintained around Alonzo's house twenty-four hours a day. Armed guards held back the crowds when Alonzo went to the store to buy his groceries. He looked at the people a little sorrowfully, but he didn't say anything.

While the President was holding a special cabinet meeting, trying to decide what to do about the wave of national hysteria—it took the form of religious enthusiasm and doomsday prophecy in some back-country regions—a neurotic superpatriot (not connected with government in any way) threw a bomb at Alonzo's house just after he got home from the store. The explosion shattered half the house next door, but Alonzo's house was strangely untouched. Not even his windows were broken.

This just about finished off everything. Terror gripped the nation's capital. There was no hope, now, of suppressing the news, or of convincing people that Alonzo's invulnerability had an ordinary explanation. The newspapers began to invent all sorts of weird theories, and awful possibilities. Finally the terrible truth gripped legislators and department heads. Never before in history had men of power felt so impotent; never had men of courage been so afraid. *This man cannot be harmed*, they said to one another. *We can't kill Desiderio, and we can't make him do what we say. What will become of us? What will happen next?*

A deputation of the country's greatest men came to see Alonzo. They stormed a little, but mostly they were anxious and pleading. Finally, Alonzo said, "But gentlemen, *what do you want?*?"

They didn't seem very sure of what they wanted. They all talked at once and grew quite excited. In general, they seemed troubled because Alonzo

couldn't be arrested, couldn't be shot, and couldn't be blown up. (Nobody mentioned trying an atom bomb on him. While the idea occurred to some, it seemed a little tactless at the time.)

After listening a while, Alonzo said: "Well, it seems to me that the only thing that will put your minds at rest would be for me to die." Alonzo looked quite serious. "I'll think about it, gentlemen, I really will think about it. I don't like to see you all so upset. But then, as Mr. McCracken—your first representative to call on me—said, security is really a state of mind. Why don't you work along that line, gentlemen?" He smiled a little, without even a hint of being playful with them, and went on:

"Meanwhile, I'll give some consideration to the idea of dying. I can't promise anything, of course. It might be difficult, if what has happened in the past few weeks is any indication. But I do assure you of my best intentions."

Ever courteous, Alonzo saw them to the door. As they walked toward their cars, he called after them: "Do you think, gentlemen, that if I am able to oblige you, I could have my school back again?" Then he chuckled. "How silly," he said. "If I were to oblige you I wouldn't be here at all, would I?" His gentle, friendly laughter echoed in their ears as they drove away.

Letter from **AMERICA**

FOR some time now I've been listening to an amazing series of programs over NBC on the cause of prison riots. They are frank, detailed, and show every side of the problem. Not only are prison officials interviewed, but guards, prisoners, trustees, psychologists, and the large entourage that goes to make up the complicated microcosm that is a prison. The program was called "The Challenge of Our Prisons," and was handled in such an adult way that it was almost shocking that the radio could produce such superior discussions. They highlighted the issue of public apathy and pointed out the significance of (1) the Food Problem, (2) the Personnel Problem, and (3) the Parole Problem under 48 different jurisdictions.

There were no qualms about discussing the repression of normal sex drives and they spoke frankly and emphatically to point out that riots quite often covered up sex orgies. This was, as announced, a program for adults, and so far-reaching in content that one could almost believe a Golden Era was on its way.

My only personal criticism was that they discussed no quick solution for the immediate solving of problems. I would have liked to hear an opinion expressed on the policy of the Mexican prisons, which allows the wives of prisoners to visit them in privacy for two or three hours, thereby removing the appalling tension and strain which must arise wherever men are kept from contact with women. Also, I would like to have heard some pros and cons on the solution that Joseph E. Fishman proposed in his book, *Sex in Prison*—of sending the about-to-be-released prisoner home for a day or two (in the form of a vacation) for adjustment and eventual rehabilitation. Naturally, I understand that these methods might be too advanced for present-day thinking, but it would have been interesting to hear what the authorities had to say.

There was a particularly impressive man on the program by the name of Teeters, who wasted no time. He pointed out that prison is an experiment which has failed. He succinctly stated that parole stipulations are ridiculous and implausible, the lack of segregation unintelligent, and the over-crowding ruinous for the morale of the inmates. Mr. Teeters summed the whole issue up and threw it at the citizen for solution.

The program was prepared by Walter and Peg McGraw. It went into messy issues with a sharp knife. They made an extensive study of penology and let you see what exactly they found. It was a spirited public service and deserves all the bells, stars, gongs, and orchids usually so easily come by.

At the end of the series, the listeners were asked what sort of challenge they would like to hear about next. Would they like to know about drugs, or what went on behind the Iron Curtain? With questions like these, the listener naturally wonders if they can keep it up—can they show the people behind the Iron Curtain as human beings, following an almost identical pattern of life as people anywhere else? Can they sift through the wild rumors one hears about marijuana and hashish and heroin and youth going roaring wild through endless generations? Can they handle other issues as well as their splendid job on prisons, which is bound to have a far-reaching effect?

All you can do is watch for a new Challenge Series, hope, and write letters of congratulations. And take more of an interest in Prison Reform. But it certainly is exciting and encouraging to realize that a national network is trying to spread the truth.

ROVING CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW

A THEORY OF "ART"

HAVING belonged for years among those who on occasion strain to understand the meanings alleged to reside in "modern art," yet are seldom successful in the attempt, we take considerable pleasure in reporting that an article in *Partisan Review* for March-April, "The Eye Is a Part of the Mind," by Leo Steinberg, supplies, to our way of thinking, just about all that can be said in brief compass on the subject. Mr. Steinberg is generous. He does not discuss only modern art, but art in all times—as, indeed, he must, to win acceptance for what he has to say.

An attempt to "review" this article is frustrating at best, for there are no "dead" spots in Steinberg's discussion. Every sentence is heavily freighted. Here, we can attempt only a sketchy version of his thesis and offer a sample or two of his excellent prose.

He starts off by reminding us of the revolt of modern artists and critics against mere "pictures" of natural scenes or objects. "Creating a work of art is so tremendous a business that it leaves no leisure for catching likenesses," declared Clive Bell, long ago. "It can hardly be too often repeated," insists Sheldon Cheney, "that the modernist repudiates the Aristotelian principle 'Art is Imitation'." It is Mr. Steinberg's contention that these claims badly miss the point. The modern artist has not abandoned representation—not at all; he has simply adopted a different theory of reality. It was not the mere appearance of a landscape which interested Cezanne, "but the causes of appearance in structure." Steinberg says:

Today's fashionable cant represses Cezanne's deep obsession with reality, "the spectacle that the Pater Omnipotens spreads before our eyes." When he warns his friend, Emile Bernard, to "beware of the literary spirit which so often causes painting to deviate from its true path—the concrete study of nature—to lose itself all too long in intangible speculations," he seems to be speaking not so much of

the critics he knew, as of those more recent who profess to know him. The truth is that Cezanne's work embodies profound insights into nature. And the inner logic of his form is unthinkable without his ardent apprehension of natural fact.

The important question now becomes, *What is natural fact?* It is the artist's conception of this that determines how or what he paints. The living quality of art springs from strenuous pursuit of the fact, and effort to denote it. Men paint what they think to be real. Steinberg notes that medieval art obtained its notion of reality or "natural fact" from Plotinus, as filtered through the pseudo-Dionysius and Augustine. Thus, for centuries, painters reflected the conventions of Neoplatonic aesthetics:

Do Byzantine images seem incorporeal? How else should they represent the truly real? "The body is brute," says Plotinus; "the true man is the other, going pure of body." And he proceeds to reprove them who on the evidence of thrust and resistance identify the body with the real.

Do Early Christian figures seem monotonously like, immobile and unchanging? We are forewarned by Plotinus that "bodies live in the species, and the individual in the whole class; from them they derive their life and maintenance, for life here is a thing of change, but in that prior realm it is unmoving."

Eyes have a peculiar prominence in the art of this period, since the eyes are the "windows of the soul." Should not the eyes, as representative of the soul, enjoy a role which evidences the unseen reality within—or is art mere "photography"?

We may not like these pallid versions of Plotinian ethics and metaphysics, but we can at least recognize what the artists were about. And, as Steinberg observes, "There is indeed a striking resemblance between the repudiation of naturalism in our time and in Plotinus' day." But while the followers of the canon of Plotinus sought to suggest a transcendental reality, as systematically taught, the moderns have no such explicit guide. Steinberg thinks they have been profoundly influenced by modern physics:

Form in the sense of solid substance melts away and resolves itself into dynamic process. Instead of

bodies powered by muscle, or by gravity, we get energy propagating itself in the void. If, to the scientist, solidity and simple location are illusions born of the grossness of our senses, they are so also to the modern painter. His canvases are fields of force, his shapes the transient aggregates of energies that seem impatient to be on their way. In the imagery of modern art waves of matter have usurped the place of the tangible, visible things. And the perpetual form, whether in motion or at rest, is dispossessed by forms of transition.

One is not obliged by Mr. Steinberg's persuasions to hang a portrait of an electron in an indeterminate position upon the wall, nor to concede that modern art is "significant" in its own right. But to see this form of representation as part of a great movement through centuries of human expression—this is the realization to which we are helped by his discussion.

But why the "revolt"? On this point Mr. Steinberg is especially lucid. The true revolt, he says, is not against "copying nature," but against copying *copies*. Every real artist copies nature, in that he reproduces with one or another emphasis what he thinks is real. As Steinberg puts it:

The mechanical, the uncreative element lies not therefore in imitating nature, but in academicism, which is the passionless employment of preformed devices. Representation in art is the fashioning of graphic symbols to act as analogues for certain areas of visual experience. There is a mighty difference between this fashioning of symbols, this transmutation and reduction of experience to symbolic pattern, and the use of symbols ready-made. In works that seem to duplicate a visible aspect of nature we must therefore distinguish between the recitation of a known fact and the discovery thereof, between the dexterous use of tools and their invention.

Steinberg's psychological rendering of a comparison between two painters seems to nail his point to the wall for all time:

The gulf that separates a Pollainolo nude from one by Bougereau is not all a matter of significant design. The one was born of nature's union with an avid sensibility; the other makes a parade of a habitual skill. One says, pointing to the array of

anatomic facts "Here lies the mystery"; the other says—"Here lies no mystery, I know it all."

Art, in short, is search and discovery. When the search is ardent and the discovery worth looking at, the art is authentic. The genuine artist, like the genuine philosopher, is in quest of reality.

One last note. For the most part, it seems to us, the artist is captive of his culture. Great artists, however, are philosophers as well, and thus become innovators of new cultural forms. Otherwise, they only elaborate on the contemporary intellectual and moral *status quo*. And this accounts, we think, for the rather stern view of the artist (as poet) taken by Plato in the *Laws*.

COMMENTARY TOWARD WORLD CULTURE

OBSERVERS who attended the conference on Philosophy East and West held at the University of Hawaii a few years ago were much impressed by the representation of Eastern thought, as contrasted with Western expressions. Somehow, the Easterners seemed far ahead of the West, both in depth and in cogency of analysis. This, at any rate, was the report from a MANAS reader on the scene, and the quality of the quarterly, *Philosophy East and West*, which grew out of the conference (published at the University of Hawaii), seems evidence enough that the judgment was largely accurate.

We are not proposing, here, that Eastern students of philosophy are "brighter" than Westerns, but simply that the thought of men who are masters of two philosophical traditions, instead of one, is likely to exhibit the greater understanding. The educated Easterner is obliged to know the classics of both East and West, while, until quite recently, a Western student could ignore Oriental thought without suspecting that he had missed anything important.

The "discovery" of Eastern philosophy by the West has occupied some 150 years. It began, we suppose, with the invasion of India by the British, which started a flow of translations of Indian and Buddhist works. The Germans were leaders in the work of assimilation of the East. After discovering *The Bhagavad-Gita*, Schlegel swore always to "worship at the feet" of the author of this philosophical poem. Schopenhauer found in the *Upanishads* the basis for his doctoral thesis, the *Fourfold Root*, while in America, Emerson and Thoreau soaked in the "Wisdom of the East." Lafcadio Hearn hailed Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia* as premonitory of a new world religion.

World War II brought the West new accessions of Eastern knowledge. Gandhi, of course, was an incalculable and enduring influence, and the scholarship of the statesman,

Nehru, has won respect for the Eastern "man of action" as "thinker," also. Other influences of importance include the extensive employment of Eastern idiom in metaphysics and ethics by Theosophical writers.

Today, we have only to recall such books as Edmond Taylor's *Richer by Asia* and Elizabeth Seeger's *The Five Brothers* (story of the *Mahabharata* for young people) to realize that the day of *world* culture in philosophy and religion is rapidly approaching. The discussion in this week's *Frontiers*, prompted by the serious interest in the *Gita* shown by a group of U. of C. professors in Santa Barbara, is one more sign of this historic growth and transition in Western thinking.

One thing that Westerners, especially those trained in pragmatism, find attractive in Eastern philosophy is the traditional freedom allowed to the individual in formulating his version of "truth." Yet, paradoxically, no culture is as rich as the Oriental in metaphysical doctrines and elaborate systems of objective idealism. It is as though the Eastern mind has sought in diversity a protection from dogma, while at the same time insisting that every doctrine or system pretending to truth submit to all the rigors of intellectual criticism and analysis.

Meanwhile, as Eastern conceptions gradually penetrate the West, Western responsibilities—in the field of state-craft and international relations—are being shouldered by the East. By this double reciprocity, perhaps, the two cultures will grow even more rapidly toward mutual understanding.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

"Children" Editor:

I note from time to time references in MANAS to what you call "nature contacts." I myself derive a good deal of satisfaction from "Nature," and hope that for the most part I've managed to exist, day by day, in a manner which would find favor in the bosom of the great Mother. Nevertheless, I could not help but appreciate something said by Flaubert in a letter to the Russian writer, Turgenev (written in Switzerland on July 2, 1874):

"I am annoyed, too, and I have the advantage or disadvantage over you of getting stupendously exasperated. I have come here to perform an act of obedience, because I was told that the pure mountain air would reduce my high colour and calm my nerves. I hope it will. But till now I have only felt an immense boredom, due to my solitude and idleness; for, really, I am no Nature addict: her 'marvels' do not move me as much as the miracles of Art. She overwhelms me, but she affords me no 'great thoughts.' I feel like silently saying to her: 'Yes, it is lovely. I have only just left you, and in a few minutes I shall return to you. But let me alone, I need other amusement'."

I found this a good contrast to bear in mind.

WE suppose that our frequent praise of "nature-contact" occasionally makes us sound like some sort of Boy Scout recruiting service. People who become so emotionally charged in the presence of spectacular nature-phenomena that they must shout their appreciation to the world are not only often boring—they can also make one feel a little uncomfortable, as do all varieties of faddists. Our heart also beats as one with another communicant, who notes:

In the field of "Nature Writing," authors often intellectually relax and go rambling like amiable, self-charmed, chatty maiden-aunts. (That sort of mood tinctures Jefferies, too. See his *Story of my Heart*.) Why is this? Does too much of "Nature" appeal mainly to the emotions, thus throwing the intellect off guard? Perhaps a "tough" mind alone can retain possession of self when urged into subservience by the infiltration of vegetable and animal enchantments.

We should like to propose some distinctions, however. Our advocacy of "nature-contact" has never been as a substitute for appreciation of the arts, nor have we any special sympathy for leading another person by the hand, be he child or adult, pointing to something, and saying breathlessly, "*Isn't that wonderful!*" Perhaps Flaubert had been pestered by this approach. But perhaps, also, Flaubert did not remain long enough, nor alone enough, in the mountains to get over the "immense boredom" of which he speaks. We do know from experience that many children respond only gradually to woods, fields, streams, mountains, desert, and ocean. What they see and feel during the initial stages of such opportunity may be but a tiny portion of what they later come to feel and see.

But what do we keep expecting them to "feel and see"? As soon as one tries to express in definite terms what he imagines to be the advantages of "nature-contact," he risks defining the activities of a new cult. Perhaps all we can say is that it is our honest belief that many young persons' lives are enriched by having as much of this experience as possible, but that they need to decide how much or why they like the opportunity.

However, "Nature" is more than man's sentimental *tours de force* about field and stream. In the introduction to a recent volume of Gustave Flaubert's letters, Richard Rumbold writes of Flaubert's disinclination to "moralize":

For a writer to take up a moral standpoint is to do violence to the mystery: the morality of art should arise spontaneously from its association with the sublime. In one of these letters Flaubert relates how he was staying at Trouville, where he chatted with a former mayor of the place, who told him that in its population of sea-folk, numbering over 3,000 souls, there had been only two convictions for theft in forty years. Why? Is it not perhaps because the sailor (unlike the worker in cities) has his gaze constantly fixed on the limitless expanses of the sea and therefore acquires instinctively a disdain for the petty? In any case it is along these lines we must look for morality in art: through and because of its association with the Ocean, the eternities, and not in the minds of our fallible human moralists.

Flaubert recognized the importance of an impersonal perspective, and it is some equivalent of this breadth of detached vision which the calmness and solitude of "nature-contact" often encourages. In a letter to Louise Colet, Flaubert wrote:

Feeling does not make poetry; and the more personal you are, the poorer you will be. That has always been my sin; I have always put myself into everything I have done. There I am, for instance, in Saint Anthony's place; the *Temptation* was mine and not the reader's. *The less one feels a thing, the more fit one is to express it in its true nature* (as it always is, in itself, in its generic being and divorced from all ephemeral conditions). But one must have the faculty for *making oneself feel*. This faculty is neither more nor less than genius; *which is*, to have the object posed in front of one. . . .

It seems clear that this applies in some manner to all areas of aesthetic appreciation, of which "nature-loving" must be admitted to be one. In conclusion, we should like to submit the remarks of another subscriber:

I must admit that at times I have become a bit bored by your periodic references to the benefits of "nature-contact," but an incident has occurred in my own family which gives pause and a little reflection.

My sister has a fine family of two boys—aged eleven and twelve—and a girl of four. When the boys were about five and six their parents left the city and bought a ranch in Oregon, so that the children might enjoy the "natural life" of mountains and fields. On the ranch the boys could catch fish out of their own stream, and deer plus many other wild animals wandered over the hills. The children came to know the ways of domestic livestock, and raised calves themselves. They were gone all day long roaming the hills when they weren't in school, yet while in school were very cooperative and bright, learning with interest. (They were also very healthy and happy.)

About a year ago the family decided to sell the ranch and come to the city again. At first this seemed glamorous; things were new and the television set was an all-consuming fascination. Yet finally the parents made a sad discovery; the children became so apathetic that they have lost interest in almost everything. On Saturdays when the parents are off work and want to take the children somewhere, they encounter nothing but apathy on any subject beyond television, and there isn't *happy* enthusiasm about television either. Last week the oldest boy played

hooky from school for the first time. He didn't know why, he just didn't care about anything. He wandered aimlessly about, waiting for the time to go home.

I understand that next June the parents are taking off two weeks, after school is out, to hunt for another ranch.

FRONTIERS

Commentaries on The Bhagavad-Gita

Two weeks ago we suggested, here, that it is more than a bit unusual for a group of university professors to attempt, even experimentally, to view their own intellectual heritage in the light of so contrasting an "authority" as *The Bhagavad-Gita*. Equally unusual, perhaps, was the interest of these teachers in the psychology of the *Gita*, as leading away from Authority altogether. However, once this somewhat daring approach has been adopted, it should be possible to appreciate the reflections of other men of philosophic mind who have similarly pondered the same scripture—for perhaps a longer time. And a "long time" of thinking about this book is the only way to get very far with it.

Those interested in the philosophy of the Hindu classic may have noted that a recent CBS "Invitation to Learning" panel on the *Gita* bogged down on the issue of "pacifism versus lawful war." A cursory reading of the *Gita* often thus encourages westerners to become enthusiastic about the *Gita's* "activism," enabling them to reason that if the "passive" Hindus had paid more attention to the message delivered in the Song of Krishna, Asia would be a more progressive place generally. There is doubtless some validity in such a feeling, and the *Gita* may be regarded as more "activist" than Buddhist scriptures, but such over-simplifications of the content and setting of the *Mahabharata* obliterate the fact that this work may be best considered, in its entirety, as an extraordinarily mature development of symbolic psychology. Sarvapelli Radhakrishnan, perhaps India's most distinguished scholar, who was for years professor of Eastern Religions at Oxford University, in the introduction to his edition of the *Gita* (Harper, 1948), examines the point raised by the CBS panel.

"The *Gita*," writes Radhakrishnan, "advocates detachment from desires, meaning the acquisition of a state of mind capable of taking all events as they are found and regarding them with the calm gaze of the man who is a perpetual student of life." He continues:

When Krishna advises Arjuna to fight, it does not follow that he is supporting the validity of

warfare. War happens to be the occasion which the teacher uses to indicate the spirit in which all work including warfare will have to be performed. Arjuna takes up a pacifist attitude and declines to participate in a fight for truth and justice. He takes a human view of the situation and represents the extreme of nonviolence. He winds up:

"Better I deem it, if my kinsmen strike,
To face them weaponless, and bare my breast
To shaft and spear, than answer blow with
blow."

Arjuna does not raise the question of the right or wrong of war. He has faced many battles and fought many enemies. He declares against war and its horrors because he has to destroy his own friends and relations. It is not a question of violence or non-violence but of using violence against one's friends now turned enemies. His reluctance to fight is not the outcome of spiritual development or the predominance of *sattvaguna* but is the product of ignorance and passion. Arjuna admits that he is overcome by weakness and ignorance. The ideal which the *Gita* sets before us is ahimsa or nonviolence, and this is evident from the description of the perfect state of mind of the devotee in Chapter XII. Krishna advises Arjuna to fight without passion or ill-will, without anger or attachment, and if we develop such a frame of mind violence becomes impossible. We must fight against what is wrong but if we allow ourselves to hate, that ensures our spiritual defeat. It is not possible to kill people in a state of absolute serenity or absorption in God. War is taken as an illustration. We may be obliged to do painful work but it should be done in a way that does not develop the sense of a separate ego. Krishna tells Arjuna that one can attain perfection even while doing one's duties. Action done devotedly and wholeheartedly, without attachment to the results, makes for perfection. Our action must be the result of our nature. While Arjuna is a householder belonging to the warrior caste, he speaks like a *sannyasin* not because he has risen to the stage of utter dispassion and love for humanity but because he is overcome by false compassion. Everyone must grow upward from the point where he stands.

Returning for a moment to the "Invitation to Learning" broadcast, it is apparent that at least one of the members of the panel, Columbia's Mark Van Doren, similarly perceived that the *Gita* has many interpenetrating layers of meaning, and that its broad appeal to many types of men exists because this

work is *meant* to have a valid meaning of a slightly different nature, at each psychological level. When Pierre Szamek tried to localize the *Gita's* theme on the war and peace issue, Van Doren proposed:

Doesn't it go on from that point to become almost as abstract as it is possible to be? The question is generalized until it covers not merely this specific predicament in which Arjuna finds himself. It ultimately concerns the predicament of men in general in the world when they want to know why they should do anything.

Van Doren also takes polite exception to Moderator Bryson's reference to the *Gita* as an "example" of the "inscrutable oriental mind." "Well," interposed Van Doren, "the inscrutable Western, the inscrutable Occidental, they're all inscrutable."

The mind [he continued], when it is serious and when it is really trying to answer the most difficult of all questions, whether it's one question or several, becomes an inscrutable thing, because the questions are inscrutable. I had a very interesting experience when I was reading this book again. I kept thinking of western poets and philosophers who were not too different in their thought from whoever it was wrote this song. I don't mean to say that one copied the other or anything of that sort, but I suspect that the human mind, when it is at grips with one of the most difficult questions of all, is nothing more or less than the human mind.

One rendition of the *Gita* available to the Santa Barbara tutorial discussion group is the work of a theosophist of the last century, William Q. Judge, and was first published in 1890. Judge's *Gita* has lately risen from obscurity, due to a general increase of interest in Eastern psychology and a resulting comparison of various *Gita* translations. (The Judge volume, remarkably poetic in its philosophic phrasing, has been listed, for instance, as a source in a university text, *Reading in Philosophy*.) In one of Judge's notes, the point suggested by Van Doren receives specific attention. Explaining to the reader how the battlefield setting of the *Gita* may be regarded, Mr. Judge wrote:

This description of forces, and the first effect on Arjuna of his survey, show us that we are now to learn from Krishna, what is the duty of man in his warfare with all the forces and tendencies of his nature. Instead of the conflict being a blemish to the

poem, it is a necessary and valuable portion. We see that the fight is to be fought by every human being, whether he lives in India, or not, for it is raging on the sacred plain of our body. Each one of us, then, is Arjuna.

Every student of Occultism, Theosophy or true religion,—all being the one thing—will go through Arjuna's experiences. Attracted by the beauty or other seductive quality, for him, of this study, he enters upon the prosecution of it, and soon discovers that he arouses two sets of forces. One of them consists of all his friends and relations who do not view life as he does, who are wedded to the "established order," and think him a fool for devoting any attention to anything else, while the general mass of his acquaintances and those whom he meets in the world, instinctively array themselves against one who is thus starting upon a crusade that begins with his own follies and faults, but must end in a condemnation of theirs, if only by the force of example. The other opponents are far more difficult to meet, because they have their camp and base of action upon hidden planes; they are all his lower tendencies and faculties, that up to this time have been in the sole service of material life.

All of us are brought to this study by our own request made to our Higher Self, who is Krishna. Arjuna requested Krishna to be his charioteer, and to drive him forth between the two armies. It does not matter whether he now is consciously aware of having made the request, nor whether it was made as a specific act, in this life or in many another precedent one; *it was made and it is to be answered at the right time.*

These passages are here reproduced with the thought that they blend in nicely with the implications of Rollo May's *Man's Search For Himself*, Erich Fromm's *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, and Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Since psychological evaluation, as the Santa Barbara tutorial group felt, should be as far removed from "authorities" as possible, we may here point out that neither Radhakrishnan nor Judge presumed to set themselves up as final interpreters. Their comments are made in the form of suggestions.

One of the first conclusions to which a sympathetic reader of the *Gita* will probably come, as did Mr. Van Doren, is that its truly profound

meanings are identical with or complementary to the more penetrating insights of Western thought. During the Santa Barbara faculty discussion described two weeks ago, one of the professors "found" the ethics of Jesus in the *Gita*, whereas another saw the ascetic recommendations of Krishna as duplicated in Stoic tradition. But there is also an important distinction to be made in both these instances, for the "resignation" and the "acceptance" of the *Gita* are set off against philosophical assumptions rather different from those with which Westerners are familiar. As Lin Yutang pointed out some years ago, the idea of *Karma* is the backdrop for Eastern attitudes and ethics. Moreover, the doctrine of Karma—postulating the continuation of the nature of each human action in a cyclic pathway which ultimately returns to the initiator exact reward or punishment—has its own setting in the philosophy of soul evolution suggested by the term palingenesis—or reincarnation. So, while Krishna may sound like a Stoic preceptor, he only *sounds* that way—because he has taken for granted Arjuna's acceptance of reincarnation as well as Karma, and reincarnation implies the necessity for further action and soul progress in many lives ahead. Krishna counsels "resignation," not as a method of escape, nor, in fact, as a *value*, but rather as a method. It is simply that incidents of the passing moment are to be held trivial in comparison with the eternal duration of soul-pilgrimage.

Krishna's ideal disciple, it seems to us, would not be one who steels himself to shrug off all joys and sorrows, but rather one who strives to give these no more than their due, against the background of eternal evaluation. We find a similar dynamic of thought intriguing Thoreau and Emerson, particularly Emerson, who owned one of the first copies of *The Bhagavad-Gita* in America. Gandhi's way of thought and action would also seem in consonance with this view, and perhaps it is only with some such philosophical orientation in mind that we can understand why Gandhi seemed at one and the same time the most "resigned" of men and also the most revolutionary and active. Some kind of synthesis of philosophical points of emphasis, at any rate, is logically possible in terms of the reincarnation-karma

postulate, as C. J. Ducasse shows in *Nature, Mind, and Death*, and we have seen a number of less inspiring ideas given much more attention in Western philosophy.