

## THE MEANING OF "VALUES"

MOVED, no doubt, by the claims and counter-claims of the controversy about religion in the public schools—should religion be "taught"?—and spurred by condemnations of the schools as "Godless," the National Education Association has this year published a paperbound volume, *Moral and Spiritual Values in the Public Schools*, presenting the fruit of some two years of research by its Education Policies Commission. The book sets out to define the moral and spiritual values accepted and cherished by the people of the United States, and it is not too much to say that this volume—which has only 100 pages—ought to be read carefully by those who have the habit of using terms like "values" or "spiritual."

The scope of the book, of course, is limited. It is limited by the Constitution, if by nothing else, for the public schools of the United States are prevented by law from serving or furthering the interests of any particular religious doctrine or group. Accordingly, the "moral and spiritual values" discussed in this manual are traced to the great political principles upon which this country is founded and to the common ideas of morality and ethics which arise almost spontaneously in human intercourse and which seem quite independent of specifically "religious" ideas. They are also treated as independent of any sort of "metaphysical" doctrine, and this, again, is a practical necessity for the authors, if not their natural inclination.

The only actual weakness of this book, perhaps (except for some vague references to "God"), is its failure to point out that the reader will need to pursue the question of "spiritual values" much further than the authors take it, if any really vital conclusion is to be reached. Values, if they are to be *living* values, can never be accepted simply as "given." The following ten "moral and spiritual values" listed by the

Educational Policies Commission, for example, all need to have philosophical foundations built under them:

1. Human Personality—the basic value. .
2. Moral responsibility.
3. Institutions as the servants of men.
4. Common consent.
5. Devotion to truth.
6. Respect for excellence.
7. Moral equality.
8. Brotherhood.
9. The pursuit of happiness.
10. Spiritual enrichment.

These titles are practically self-explanatory, although a word on 3 and 4 may be added. The idea of institutions as the servants of men follows from the first value. Where human personality is the highest value, institutions should never be allowed to grow more important than people. "Common consent" means simply the way of persuasion rather than that of coercion.

Here, then, are the values proposed as crucial for the members of a democratic society. But *why*—to examine the first—should we affirm that human personality is the supreme value?

That human personality is not the highest value for everyone in the world is plain to see. It is not highest for all those who place the attainment of power above justice. It is not highest for fascists or totalitarians of any sort. It is not highest for racists or for religious bigots. It is highest only for those who regard the moral and intellectual intelligence of the human mind as something uniquely precious and inviolable.

But why should this intelligence be prized above all else ?

Because, perhaps, it is the only creative power in the universe of which we have *first hand* experience. There is a wonder and a glory in the capacity of the human being to turn the neutral

energy of nature into a force for good. Some heavenly alchemy hides its secret in the heart of man. No one can set down the formula for a Gandhi, nor, for that matter, for a Nero. What a man will do with his life-span and allotted powers remains a mystery until he does it.

How will he greet misfortune? No one knows, and no one can tell. Last week, in Review, some quotations from *Lights Out* by Baynard Kendrick described the psycho-moral transformation of a man whose eyesight was destroyed by the war. Blinded forever to physical light, he began to see as he had never seen before. All the senses but sight strained after the essences in people. Not, "How does this man look?" but, "What does he care about?"—this presence before me that I feel but cannot see—is the question the blinded sergeant asks himself.

If you peopled [the world] only with beauty and truth, then beauty and truth would remain. If you peopled it with falseness, you traveled for life with intolerance and your journey was long and wracked with pain.

You had to fight to show the world that a man or a woman possessed a soul, regardless of creed or color. You had to strive to prove to others that the only blackness was not of the eyes, but blackness of the brain.

Perhaps there was no real-life model for Mr. Kendrick to write about—no blinded soldier, that is, quite as remarkable as Larry Nevin. But there was that in the blinded soldiers Kendrick did know which made it possible for him to imagine his Larry Nevin and to make him real for the readers of *Lights Out*.

To be moved and uplifted by such a tale of courage—inner courage—is to experience directly the meaning of *value*. We want so terribly to believe there are blinded men like Larry, and as terribly we want them to be not blind. This conflict of emotional values is of the essence of tragedy, and out of it comes the catharsis which by a mysterious inner persuasion makes us feel that the beginning of some great atonement for the wrong of Larry's blindness has taken place. We

are ready to admit to ourselves that, somehow, the universe makes sense. *How* it makes sense is another, larger question, and to answer it we shall need much more than the flash of intuition which the author's genius has evoked.

*There is something transcendent in man.* This is the first value. Whatever happens, we can go on, we can hold up our heads, so long as we believe it, are able to live by it, if only some of the time.

The truly great books always help us to increase our faith in this transcendental reality. Why do we like adventure stories? Because victory against odds is evidence of an incommensurable factor in human beings. Every ancient myth and every modern Utopia records the image of man outreaching himself, accomplishing the well-nigh impossible.: What magic belongs to the writer who is able to make heroism familiar for us—an ever present possibility? This capacity to shift the scenes suddenly, to strip away from the apparently ordinary man of the story the outer coatings of the commonplace and superficial—the coatings we all of us wear—and show him in his inward nobility: this, surely, is the meaning of literary genius. Or to expose a common human weakness so that we feel only compassion, compassion bred of understanding—this is the same genius turned about.

Let us acknowledge and accept the first value. Man does have the potentialities of measureless greatness. His high schemes breathe the atmosphere of eternity, as though that in him which cleaves to nobility—as guilelessly and unself-consciously as a child smiles—cannot possibly die out of the world. Let us say that each one of us has a token of the Infinite within him, and that there are moments when we know it full well.

And so we come to try to explore the anatomy of the subjective universe—to rationalize our faith—an undertaking for which we have little precedent and almost no practice. For centuries,

now, we have refused to be conscious metaphysicians. For information about the soul, we have said impatiently, go to poets or pulpits; meanwhile, do not bother us; we are busy with practical matters. We are looting a continent, spanning an ocean, harnessing a Niagara. We are also erecting a scientific tower that will surely reach to Reality, because we are building it out of facts, all *facts*.

Of late, however, a growing sense of the inapplicability of all these facts to the major issues of life has opened the way to independent wondering about the nature of man. Scientific method may be founded upon deterministic assumptions, but human choice is founded on the feeling of freedom, and all the while we have been theorizing in terms of Determinism, we have been acting in terms of Freedom—relative freedom, at least.

An amusing instance of this sort of realization occurred some years ago at Yale University. A graduate student who was working for his doctoral degree in philosophy submitted to his examiners a thesis on the problem of free will, in which he concluded that there is no rational basis for responsibility in human action. Whereupon, one of the examiners composed the following lines, addressed to the would-be "doctor of philosophy":

Here's a question; if you can, sir,  
Please supply a simple answer.  
Was your novel dissertation  
Product of predestination,  
Result of native drive and knowledge,  
Effect of home and school and college?  
Why, if so, should you have credit,  
Even though your name may head it?  
Why not graduate some actor  
Who died ere you became a factor?  
If, however, no causation  
Accounts in full for its creation,  
Why should you be made a doctor,  
And not some other don or proctor?

For a generation or more, academic science has declared for Determinism, while all the older institutions of our society have continued on the

assumption of the responsibility of individuals for their behavior—their excellences as well as their weaknesses or crimes. But today, the fascination of determinism is no longer so powerful, and the idea of freedom has regained a *working* value in modern thought. Remains the question, *How* does freedom work? *Who* or *what* is responsible?

Manifestly, these questions are going to get us into trouble. The questions themselves are natural enough. The whole mass of deterministic theories about human behavior—all of them, doubtless, having a relative validity—is in terms of answers to *how* questions. The deterministic theories marshal facts for our attention and study. The facts are undeniable, but now we find the theories based upon them inadequate. So we make another theory, a theory founded upon a *subjective* conviction or realization. Man, we say, must be in some sense *free*.

And then, if only by natural and admirable habit carried over from the methods of scientific analysis, we are constrained to ask all the "how" questions in connection with this new proposition. This is where the trouble comes in, for "how" questions require technical answers, and the only technology of subjective experience available to us belongs to the forbidden—or at least scientifically taboo—discipline of metaphysics. If we want a theory of freedom, we are eventually obliged to adopt a theory of the soul. If we wish to use the word "spiritual" with any rigor, we must devise some reasoned account of "spirit." And, almost before we quite realize what is happening, we are in danger of rediscovering the intellectual thrill of metaphysical inquiry—of reading, enjoying, and being impressed by Plotinus and Leibniz, and other philosophers of the classical and European tradition who afford a foundation for what the classifiers of concepts call "objective idealism."

At this point it is necessary to admit that metaphysics is always dangerous. It is dangerous because it so easily lapses into theology, and when this happens, we are right back at the beginning of things, so far as the liberation of the mind is

concerned. For theology is that brand of metaphysics which has lost its license to practice among free men. Theology always claims acceptance on the ground that the innate deficiencies of the mind require some help from on High. Theology begins by telling us we are weak, and ends by manacling our strength.

Metaphysics is unpopular for other reasons. To begin with, it is abstract. It deals with concepts of vast generality. We want a Comforter, and the metaphysician confronts us with a Principle of Integration. We want a more equitable system of distribution of this world's goods, and Emerson unrolls his Law of Compensation.

But the great philosophers and metaphysicians of the past have never claimed that theirs is an easy life; only that their life offers unique values, and it is values, after all, that we are seeking. Good philosophers have never been known to approach either the soured or the complacent man and to lure him on to high endeavor with honeyed words. The man who sits back and says, "Show me," is not a candidate for initiation into the Mysteries. Blood, sweat, and tears seem to be as indispensable ingredients of Values as they are of Mr. Churchill's victories.

Meanwhile, the NEA report on moral and spiritual values stakes out some of the major starting points for the investigation of the subject. If the public schools of the United States are moved to greater effort by this report, along the lines of the program suggested, the cultural life of the coming generations cannot help but be enriched. Even the compilation and publication of the report is evidence of major accomplishment.

## *Letter from* **CENTRAL EUROPE**

INNSBRUCK.—A recent discussion of the divided responsibilities of authors and publishers, introduced by an Austrian magazine, has brought some interesting facts to light. It disclosed, for example, that Austrian literature (scientific books excluded) offers in reality only a faint transverse section of the manuscripts which actually have been written—most of them being doomed to be locked up in some file, and, probably, to be thrown into a wastepaper basket or sold to a ragman, after the author has left this world. A number of readers were of the opinion that nowadays an author ought to be gifted with a commercial spirit rather than with literary genius, as otherwise he will never see his creations in print. Others alleged that the decline of literature has its root in the circumstance that idealists would rather leave their manuscripts unprinted, than bargain with shrewd publishing firms. The idea that a writer, so long as he has faith in his ideas, will usually succeed in finding a publisher, did not find wide support. The majority expressed the view that many publishers will now issue only works promising an immediate sale, thus renouncing the better quality.

But the answer of the publishers has some foundation. Today's Austrian population, they emphasized, is no more than seven millions, for which reason recognized authors prefer to publish in Germany, where the number of potential buyers is nearly ten times as large. Thus, only young authors seek Austrian publishers, and although these undoubtedly include writers of talent, the slow response of readers to unknown authors creates serious risks for their publishers. There is the further fact that the Occupation authorities have restricted free export to Germany, so that the present situation of the Austrian publishers cannot be compared with that of twenty or fifty years ago.

Notwithstanding these facts, some Austrian publishing firms are still endeavoring not only to promote young authors, but to produce books in bindings of artistic style. The Osterreichische Verlagsanstalt, Innsbruck, has lately published *Ruhe auf der Flucht* (*A Rest During Flight*) by Lilli Sauter, continuing with this edition its tradition of the last five years, namely, to offer new talent a chance to be known. The story deals with the sufferings of a small refugee family after World War II, becoming allegorical when this family—in course of some coincidences and unforeseen circumstances—is thought to be the Holy Family, returned to earth.

Another contemporary author, Maria Steurer, is being published by Verlag Kremayr & Scheriau, of Vienna. Her books, *Eva Faschaunerin* and *Herr auf Schloss Porzia*, are drawn against an historical background and the facts derive from chronicles and documents. Eva Faschaunerin is the daughter of a Carinthian mountain-farmer in the days of the Empress Maria Theresa, while the Master of the Castle Porzia lived during the reign of Emperor Joseph II. Both stories are filled with the breath of those times, with love and renunciation, intrigues and passion, but the author has succeeded in laying a fine, psychological net and writing with the fervour of a proud and humble heart.

It seems that Austrian literature, in spite of great obstacles, may develop into a new period of blossoming.

CENTRAL EUROPEAN CORRESPONDENT

## *REVIEW*

### RARE LAND, RARE MAN

ONCE-in a while—once in a very great while we find the temerity to comment upon what is commonly called the "artistic value" of a novel or drama. Having so long championed the view that ideas and ideals are always the Real, and that even the most impassioned recounting of experiences is valueless unless it points a way toward realization of an ideal, a reviewer cannot help but feel a bit of a turncoat if he first stakes out claims for a piece of writing chiefly because he warms to the way it is written. Yet H. L. Davis' *Winds of Morning* tempts such extravagance, despite the fact that it is a Book of the Month selection and that BoM reviewers have praised it for much the same reasons.

Davis does have a marked sort of idealism, however, even though it is not addressed to any particular social or psychological problem. It is *felt*, for instance, in attitudes toward the creatures of nature and the beautiful land which supports them. It is present in the form of compassion and understanding when the subject is crime and criminals, and it emerges most of all in the respect shown for those who are courageously independent. Perhaps good writing always does something of this nature, if it is really good writing, at all.

*Winds of Morning* is not, in the usual meaning of the word, an "exciting" book. Being so well done it needs none of those emotional injections which often are made to reinforce the efforts of even skillful writers to convey a point of view or an interpretation of experience. Instead, without in the least giving the impression of trying, Mr. Davis helps the reader to feel that each moment of common, everyday life may hold a further awakening of the mind. He is aided by his setting, of course, which is that of the American Northwest in the 1920's, but he might have selected a more conveniently dramatic era, as have most Western authors. Primitive frontier life

naturally makes adventure telling comparatively easy, but Davis makes each experience an adventure *without* radically changing the tempo of life in our own times.

Before carrying our praises any further, we should offer a sample of Davis' reflective mood, as infused throughout the book by his leading character and spokesman, a young Deputy Sheriff:

Exploring into the real ins and outs of a community like that is something like taking a deep look into a waterhole out in the desert. You can ride within a few feet of a desert waterhole every day for a year without ever actually seeing the water at all, only the things it reflects: sky, willows, snakeweed, tules, rye grass, maybe a few circling snake doctors and a bird or two. But when you get down to drink from it and lean close, the reflections disappear and the life under the surface becomes visible: water bugs, tadpoles, minnows, dwarf crawfish, pin-point molluscs, naked roots, red water weeds, thread grasses. The mere shadowing out of some surface images that never really existed opens up a whole new world as active and populous as your own, different from anything in it and still part of it.

The small-town county in which the events of *Winds of Morning* take place is located in the upper Columbia River country. The young Deputy is dispatched to transfer a nondescript herd of horses and their elderly owner to free grazing land. This promises to be a boring and perhaps difficult project, but the "old man," a once propertied citizen of the county who has returned without notifying any of his numerous uncongenial relatives, turns out to be a man to be respected, and from whom a great deal can be learned. The Deputy finds that old Hendricks is very like this north country community—with much to be discovered under surface appearances. All the qualities of the best of the old West still live in this man, whose misfortunes and heartaches would have made lesser men throw up their hands, and his strength is more than enough to bring him back to help less admirable members of his family, and to enable him to master complications not properly belonging to his own era at all.

Old Hendricks can never completely escape his compulsion to be helpful, and it is this in him that finally plagues him into turning his hand to straightening out his family, which needs quite some straightening. But long before he takes up this burden, the reader can see the way the wind is blowing. So can the young Deputy, who at times wishes he knew how to stop it. As a man who respects another man of honor and good intentions, he doesn't have the heart to use his authority and move Hendricks away from some or another good deed, yet he is supposed to get both the man and his horses out of the county. The following is a fine example of Davis' gentle and natural humor, as he recounts one of Hendrick's "notions," then in the process of spurring the old gentleman on to a very practical knightly deed of rescue after hearing about a young girl and a truck stuck in the mud in a storm. One gets the impression that neither Hendricks nor the Deputy take the law too seriously whenever doing so might interfere with benefiting somebody—which is certainly a welcome change from Frontier-Justice, Shoot-'em-All-Dead Marshals and Deputies of more stereotyped legend:

You can't do it!" I said. "You don't know how much of a job it'll be, or how long it'll take. I'm not supposed to let you go augering around the country with these horses like that. They're in my custody. So are you, as far as that goes; How did you take such an idea into your head, anyway?"

He coiled the other rope, and said it was one of the notions that struck him sometimes. He never knew where they came from, exactly. "It was the way that little fizzle-ended squirt told about it that gouged me, I guess. That girl settin' up there on a truck that's droppin' into a mud wash with everything she owns on it, and he acted like it wasn't any more concern of his than two stray dogs a-courtin'. His grandfather was the stingiest old pop that ever went dirty to save soap, but there wouldn't have been anything like that in his time. He'd have had everybody on the place up there helpin' to unload things, and a big fire goin' to dry 'em out, and a hot meal ready, and a couple of teams harnessed to pull the truck out, and anything else he could think of. I've seen him do it. He ain't here to do it now, so I thought I'd do as much of it as I could for him. You're welcome to come along if you

want to, but that's the most I can do for you. I can't help you any with this custody business of yours. Not till tonight, anyway. I'll be back then."

There wasn't much that I could do about the custody business, either. It would be idiotic to threaten him with a gun when we both knew I wouldn't use it on him.

Perhaps we have now skirted around the problem of whether *Winds of Morning* has social or philosophical "significance." Either way, we can add that the book is one of the best Western stories we have ever encountered. The enjoyment of "Westerns" is, we think, quite legitimate, because of the exhilarating change offered in both geographical and psychological scenery. It is surprising, by the way, to find out from *Winds of Morning* that philosophy—even a good deal of it—doesn't spoil a Western, but only sets intriguing action off in bolder relief.

Old Hendricks thinks about and talks about everything before he does it, which furnishes readers a source of delight rather than the boredom which might be expected if the writing were below par.

The "action-climax" builds up from a decision Hendricks ponders long, for in making it he must unravel the most painful knots in his past and decide not to forsake a daughter who has rather nastily forsaken him. There is more philosophy of the sort one reviewer describes as making possible "the sympathy of two men meeting at opposite ends of life, respecting each other and learning from each other":

I had it in my head when we started out with the horses that it wouldn't matter where we went, that we could go about our own business and let people git themselves out of their trouble the same way they got in. Then I thought maybe we could straighten 'em out a little with money and what help we could give 'em at long range, and then ride on and not have any more to do with 'em. A man could do it that way back in the old days. That was what fooled me; not a hell of a lot, I guess, but some. Now I know there wasn't anything to it. There's things you can't buy out of with money, no matter how much of it you've got. There's things you can't ride away from and be shut

of, no matter how hard you whip. You've got to face 'em out for yourself, all the way to the end. Then you're done with 'em, and you can go on to something new. If you try to dodge or buy your way around one of 'em you'll have it gougin' into you all the rest of your life. You can't take the pretty part of anything and leave the bad. If you do, it'll dog you clear to the middle of hell. I've tried it now, and enough's plenty.

We especially like the last conversation, revealing the glow of the real friendship between our Deputy and the man in his custody—an unpretentious plea for recognition of the fact that respect is a primary factor in all worthwhile human relationships. Respect always encourages us to refuse anything but the best from the other:

"We might see each other again somewhere," I said, to fill in. "People do sometimes."

"We might," he agreed, and blew on the sunflower pith to keep it smoldering. "I'd be halfway uneasy if I thought we would. It might turn out that you hadn't amounted to as much as you ought to. I don't know whether I could stand that or not."



## *COMMENTARY*

### THE ARGUMENT WITH CONVENTION

BEING among those who continually find or make occasion for deprecating the "conventional" and the "orthodox," the editors feel a certain obligation to admit that large responsibilities are involved in this activity. Disputes with convention need to be maintained, if only to preserve a wider horizon than the conventionally-minded will recognize, but those who dispute conventional attitudes ought to dispute them for the right reasons.

In any cosmopolitan culture, a number of the young grow up in an atmosphere of contempt for conventionality. Artistic households often generate this atmosphere, likewise the homes where "radical" attitudes are fostered, and the gatherings and forums of the various intellectual coteries. Contempt for conventionality may, however, arise from a mere case of sour grapes, or from laziness or incompetence.

Just to keep up to the level of average human achievement according to conventional standards requires *some* consistent effort and regularity of life. It is needful, in deploring conventionality, to recognize that the effort and the regularity are not at fault, but only the goals at which they aim; and that apparent disdain for the ends of a conventional existence—home, car, a living room suite, and a circle of amiable acquaintances—is often little more than an excuse for failing to work for them.

We have always had a special respect for the occasional millionaire's son who uses his patrimony to finance a socialist community—however great the disappointments he may experience—for here, in somewhat quixotic terms, is interesting evidence that ideals may determine economic situations, instead of the other way around.

Such benefactors, however, usually discover that the "ideals" of their associates are tethered to tiresome bourgeois notions of private advantage,

and he may conclude, in the end, that all avowed "revolutionists" ought first to prove themselves able to maintain themselves in a "capitalist" society. We would agree that they ought at least to show that they are able to master the personal disciplines so much admired in a competitive economy, before demanding special consideration from their friends because of their advanced opinions.

The argument with convention, in other words, to have validity, must be conducted from a higher ground. Or, as Heywood Broun put it, somewhat obliquely, years ago; "The children of light have to learn to be at least half as smart as the children of darkness."

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

A PUBLIC school teacher, who has from the first issue been one of MANAS' subscribers, recently recommended a short History of Education, and it seems to us that the recommendation needs to be passed on. Frequently requests are made for just such a work. *History of Educational Thought*, by Robert Ulich of Harvard (American Book Co., 1945), makes a very praiseworthy effort to avoid oversimplified generalizations on the "great educators," whose contributions are quoted and discussed, and this feature will be particularly appreciated by all who have suffered either boredom or annoyance at the banalities of many authors of "histories of philosophy," "histories of psychology," etc. Ulich, whether or not he is able to place his finger upon the most important elements in the contributions to education of great and famous teachers, at least makes sure the reader will know that the search for these elements is a task to be accomplished only by persistent and deep reflection. *History of Educational Thought* begins with Plato and Aristotle, works through the medieval period of Church education, includes the famous thinkers of the humanist era such as Erasmus and Montaigne, discusses Rousseau, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, and concludes with Pestalozzi, Froebel and Dewey.

Ulich's point of view reflects throughout an attitude of philosophical inquiry. He has great respect for Plato and all his descendants. Concluding his chapter on the ancient Greeks, he writes:

If one understands the influence of Plato's educational thought on posterity in the broadest sense of the word, namely, as the radiation of Plato's ideas on the culture of mankind, then dealing with this influence is almost the same as dealing with the development of philosophical thought in its various ramifications. For even in periods when most of Plato's works were rather unknown, as in the Middle Ages, his role could be compared to that of the builders of our old cathedrals. People live in their

shades, enjoy their beauty, and draw comfort and inspiration from their silent solemnity; but the name of the architect himself is hidden behind the veil of history.

During the Renaissance he inspired the humanist teachers in their fight against monkish schoolmasters, as he inspired the humanist philosophers in their fight against monkish Aristotelianism. Since then all humanist or neo-humanist movements in education have started with the battle cry: "Back to Plato!"

Plato was concerned with both a *transcendental* and a *practical* idealism at the same time. In years past Plato has been derided for being "unscientific"—many parents will recall this tone in college lectures on philosophy—but Ulich helps his readers to see that the real meaning of Plato's "metaphysics" is his capacity to hold a broad and deep vision of the highest potentialities of human nature. By clearing Plato of the charge that he was a "world-escapist," believing in ascetical "self-annihilation," Ulich opens the way to reevaluation of our entire Western heritage.

The familiar restriction of the history of education to what has occurred in the West is accompanied by the author's regrets on the unfortunate insularity of such an approach. Here, again, we see an excellent example of the attitude of mind maintained by Dr. Ulich:

It is regrettable that this book had to be restricted to our Western civilization, for the time is ripe for a history of educational thought which conceives of our Western world as only a part of the total civilization of mankind. Particularly in the thought of Asia could we find sources of profound wisdom. We sometimes forget in our Western conceit that, in spite of all their philosophical richness, Europe and the countries with typical European civilization have failed to produce anything which deserves to be called a world religion. Confucius, Lao-tse, Buddha, Isaiah, Christ—all have sprung from Asiatic soil. And, whether or not we like to admit it, they have done more for the education of mankind than all other great men together.

While attempting to promote Dr. Ulich as something of a philosopher, it is also pertinent to remark that *no* condensed history of education can

ever possibly be philosophical enough. Yet since Ulich tells us this himself, and since he restricts himself to the positive or affirmative contributions made by the great thinkers of the past, he can be criticized neither for omissions nor for summary judgments. Almost every textbook writer goes through the formality of expressing his belief in the need for study of great writings in the original. In *History of Educational Thought*, however, we are provided with a great number of key quotations which are truly crucial to the thoughts of the men they represent, and these have *not* been selected to prove some general position on the part of the author. Also, references to original writings are conveniently supplied.

Dr. Ulich believes that we need a genuine synthesis of all methods and approaches to education in order to meet the challenge of present times. His only pointed criticisms of the various schools of educational thought stem from his conviction that the "break between the older and the younger tradition in education could have been avoided" along with "much heated controversy." Thus, in summarizing the contributions of such a dominant figure as John Dewey, he gives particular attention to those statements of the famous "Pragmatist" which show appreciation of the need of synthesis between opposing attitudes. For example:

Nothing could be more helpful to present philosophizing than a "Back to Plato" movement; but it would have to be back to the dramatic, restless, co-operatively inquiring Plato of the Dialogues, trying one mode of attack after another to see what it might yield; back to the Plato whose highest flight of metaphysics always terminated with a social and practical turn, and not to the artificial Plato constructed by unimaginative commentators who treat him as the original university professor.

This excerpt from Dewey's *From Absolutism to Experimentalism* will doubtless surprise many readers, as will some passages from the writings of other famous men who have been misleadingly "typed."

The conclusion of a review of a worthwhile book is often fittingly the author's own:

We discover everywhere the need for a new and total conception of man: in his relation to science and faith, in his relation to state and government, and finally in his relation to self and society. If we do not succeed in creating such a new conception and applying it to reality, our time may not be different from the end of Antiquity, with all its melancholy, chaos, and final decay. If, on the other hand, we succeed—and we can succeed if we are really determined and ready to submit to sacrifices—then we may hope that this greatest crisis of western civilization is but the stormy overture of a new era of humanity, greater than any seen before.

For this effort to turn chaos into progress we need as companions the great educational prophets who, in earlier crises of civilization, helped their fellow men to strive for new horizons. It is not because these leaders of humanity belong to the past that we have to acquaint ourselves with their ideas. We need their advice because they were the men with the courage and the vision to protest against false traditions and complacencies. They show the brave what mankind can achieve if it realizes the strength that comes from devotion to great purposes.

## *FRONTIERS*

### The Age of Indifference

A PASSAGE in a current review—by Dwight Macdonald in *Partisan Review* on C. Wright Mills' *White Collar: The American Middle Classes*—so well sums up the predicament of so many Americans that it ought to be quoted and spread around before it is forgotten:

The masses today are indifferent for the same reason so many of us intellectuals are: you can't work up much interest—politically, at least—in a process you feel you can't affect. Almost everybody, masses and intellectuals alike, feel ineffectual in politics (which is why half the eligible voters don't even vote in presidential elections), but we intellectuals suffer a further frustration: can we understand politics and history any more, can we fit them into any conceptual frame, can we still believe that we can find the theoretical key that will lay bare the real forces that shape history—indeed, can we believe there is such a key at all?

To understand this situation—it seems fair to assume that this is the situation—it is necessary to consider the various approaches to the problem. Some may say—are saying—that the key exists, but only in the incomprehensible mystery of "God's will," so that the best we can do is to be sure to be on "God's side." Of course, the historically self-conscious viewpoint which proposes that a "situation" exists, and which examines it in the hope of greater comprehension, is a distinctively modern idea. It exhibits a certain independence of mind which is part of the secular or heretical tradition. Until the great wavering of "the faith" at the close of the Middle Ages, no one could even think of the complexities of human life as constituting a "problem" for investigation. There are hints of this outlook, perhaps, in Montaigne, but the ponderings of a single, urbane skeptic can hardly create an entire climate of opinion.

The difference, then, between the Middle Ages and the present is that, seven or eight hundred years ago, the "conceptual frame" to which all large questions were referred had never

been questioned. Today, all the conceptual frames we know of have been not only questioned, but subjected to third-degree treatments.

"Conceptual frame," of course, is a way of saying "key" to the problems we face. When the attitudes of large numbers of people become critical toward any or all proposed "frames" or "keys," the unsolved problems begin to take on a shape of their own. As they grow, and as people regard and discuss them, they create various psychic stresses and strains, and these are met by human enterprises such as the divisions of modern science, political and social movements, and other cultural formations and institutions, each intent upon working out an appropriate frame or key of its own. Rejecting the One Great Solution, we adopt a pluralistic approach to existence. The specialist, we say and hope, will find the answers.

Then, after some of the specialists have had opportunity to expand their theories into an all-inclusive frame, and have failed; and after it is admitted that the doctrines of the various specialists are both inadequate and often in conflict one with the other, we reach that state of relative disgust and indifference of which Macdonald speaks. While the affirmative aspect of human nature still wants and vaguely hopes to find a wonderful new "key" to personal and social problems, the critic in us—so effectively developed during the past two or three centuries—has reached a cynical state of mind: "can we believe there is a key at all?"

What further, then, can be said—not about "the situation," but about human attitudes toward it?

There is, first, the practically self-evident and probably irrepressible need in human beings to embrace some frame of explanation, whether true or illusory. From this it follows that the future—the near future, perhaps—will disclose the beginnings of a choice of some direction of faith. The only impossibility is for large masses of people to live perpetually in a state of conscious impotence, with the feeling that major events

affecting their lives are happening over their heads.

In the early days of World War II, Dr. Edward A. Strecker wrote of the drive to simple explanation as manifested in abnormal psychology:

I know a patient who in the early years of a mental illness would consume many days in relating the almost convincing tale of the plotting of the government against his life and property. Now, after many years, he scarcely speaks at all. When questioned, he merely points to a bit of coiled ribbon affixed to the lapel of his coat. It symbolizes that he is the "Highest Potency."

Unscrupulous propaganda quickly learned the value of the symbol in leading masses by the nose. There is the dramatic pause . . . the shrill note of the trumpet . . . the muffled roll of the drum . . . the hushed, expectant silence . . . the reverent presentation of the symbol by one of its high priests . . . and then . . .

The environment is blood thick with emotion; intelligent thought is abolished. A few generalities and platitudes will suffice and a homicidal orgy, be it a lynching or a war, is in the making.

I am afraid that propaganda, with its destructive symbols, will not save our civilization. . . .

The measure of our confusion and of our vulnerability to "simple" answers and solutions is found in the fact that only two years later, after America had become involved in the war, this same Dr. Strecker told a meeting of the members of the American Psychiatric Association that "The forces of fear, anger and aggression must be mobilized and organized into the will to fight." Ideas, he said, are but pallid weapons. He called for "pageantry, patriotic displays and festivals" as the means of disseminating "truthful propaganda and for the strengthening of morale," (*New York Times*, May 21, 1942.)

We do not know what Dr. Strecker is saying, today, but we hope it is more like the 1940 than the 1942 Strecker. But whatever he is saying, the moral is clear. Peoples who dwell in a philosophical vacuum are easy prey to the emotionalisms of the hour, to the expedient

appeals of politicians pretending to be statesmen, and to the fickle theories of human welfare proposed by psychiatrists who are intellectually impressive, but lacking in the allegiance to principles which grows out of deep philosophical conviction.

It is relatively easy, of course, to reveal the almost omnipresent weaknesses of this sort. They are natural expressions of the indifference which Macdonald calls to our attention. Granted that we are vulnerable, that it is later than we think: the question of whether there may be a "key" is still insistent. But are we willing, in order to find the answer—or *an* answer—to go back over the ground of the past; to examine painstakingly the "frames" and "keys" of other times for elements that may be missing in our own? Are we willing to admit that the missing frame may be far more subtle, and more complex, than the schemes of any of the great system-builders since Hegel or before, with which we are familiar? Are we willing to postulate, to adopt as a working hypothesis, that the lost key may be hidden by some inner moral obliquity such as Tolstoy discovered in himself and described with a luminous power in his *Confession*?

While the role of a Jeremiah holds no special attractions for us, we need no crystal ball to say that some kind of "wave of the future" is on the way, and to say that its present aspect on the horizon is more than ominous requires no gift for over-statement. The alternatives to such unpleasant prediction seem equally clear. They involve a new sort of inquiry into the meaning of our lives—an inquiry that may possibly relate our being to the positive and constructive energies of nature, and give us the faith we need to live by.

At the risk of becoming tiresome, we feel obliged to repeat what has been said many times before in these pages. The idea of man as a spiritual being with a transcendental destiny is the only idea we know of which is capable of providing the resolution to withstand the delusions and manipulations which threaten the human race.

Distinguished individuals may seem to be able to do without this idea—but such men invariably cherish some secret and undefined idealism which takes its place—and we are concerned, here, with the problem of *culture*, of civilization and its millions of malcontents. A civilization—any civilization—needs great themes of challenge to the individual, *as* individual, lest the civilization lose its inner withes, its muscular tendons and structure, and lapse into the formless neoplasm of the crowd, the socially inorganic *fellaheen* of Spengler's theory of social decay. Men without ideals, without vision, in short, turn into a mob. And then, to prevent utter disintegration, they are mobilized by the compensating force of the externally organized State—the Military State, the Garrison State—the kind of a State we are getting, today, all over the world.