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PATTERN THINKING

AN amiable critic—amiable because he shares our ideal of a free society; critic, because he does not share our way of pursuing it—chides us for our championship of "metaphysics." The trouble with metaphysics, he says in effect, is that it allows all manner of engaging self-deceptions. Metaphysics performs the miracle of multiplying the loaves and fishes by reflecting them in mirrors—they look appetizing, but you can't eat them. And, our correspondent points out, we're really *hungry*, these days. A diet of mere "reflections," however grandiose, will nourish no one.

Hegel, for example, was a metaphysician. Hegel held that Spirit, the driving force in the universe, is in eternal grips with matter—recalcitrant, lethargic matter. But Spirit is strong, and it succeeds in modelling, regulating and controlling the raw "stuff" of existence. The bout between Spirit and Matter takes place in rounds, or cycles. Spirit is the "thesis," the positive, shaping energy; Matter is the "antithesis," the rebellious and sometimes plastic medium; and the climactic stage of a round of struggle is the "synthesis" or high noon of dynamic balance between Spirit and Matter. Accordingly, pious German Christian that he was, Hegel taught his docile contemporaries that the German constitutional monarchy was the perfect political synthesis of the nineteenth century—and perhaps for considerably longer; that Protestant Christianity was a religious realization of opposites nothing short of cosmic in significance; and that Hegel himself, "in all modesty," embodied the height of philosophical synthesis and understanding.

Needless to say, Hegel is now *the* unpopular philosopher. The German constitutional monarchy turned into the Mr. Hyde of Hitler's "Organic State." Those worthy Protestant Christians left six million Jews to perish at the hands of Nazi butchers; and Hegel—Hegel committed the unforgivable crime of bequeathing to Karl Marx a technique of intellectual analysis of history which has shackled the intellects of two or three generations all over the world. Modern Communism is a closed intellectual system because of the "dialectic"—and the dialectic, originally, was Hegel's.

We haven't space to explore other crimes of the pattern thinkers or, as we would name them, the "bad" metaphysicians. In principle, the sin of the pattern thinkers is that they are blind to all facts and processes which live and move outside the pattern they have adopted. If they remain cloistered in universities, spinning out theories for a few chosen disciples, the harm is little. But when they go into politics, or offer to lead men on crusades, the Procrustean requirements of their patterns become instruments of the Terror. (See Lea's *History of the Inquisition of Spain*, Zweig's *The Right to Heresy*, and Tchernavin's *I Speak for the Silent Prisoners of the U.S.S.R.*, for illustrations.) By habit, the pattern thinkers are as rigid as orthodox Calvinists or orthodox Freudians in their adherence to dogma. They each have their ashcans for damned facts—facts that will not Fit the Pattern. If it isn't mentioned in the Ten Commandments, it isn't Evil. If it isn't listed among the Beatitudes, it isn't Good.

Thus the case against the pattern thinkers.

We come now to the charge that MANAS indulges in metaphysics, which is identified as a species of "pattern thinking." MANAS, like Hegel, uses those high-sounding honorifics, Spirit and Matter. MANAS argues for "something transcendent in man." By the terms, "subjective" and "objective," MANAS distinguishes between an inside world and an outside world, creating a schism in the order of human experience. These

tendencies, it is suggested by our critic, "lead only to insuperable difficulties."

The long and short of it, in his view, is that modern man has no need of a ghostly metaphysical world inhabited by beautiful metaphysical syllogisms. If you borrow, inherit, or invent such a world, the temptation is great to visit its awesome precincts, perform the appropriate thought-evolutions, and return to this vale of tears well supplied with answers to all human problems. The only trouble is, you can't put the answers to work. Metaphysics is like the musical banks of Samuel Butler's *Erewhon.* They make a pretty noise but they cash no checks.

Here, obviously, the issue between the metaphysicians and the anti-metaphysicians turns on whether or not our critic is right in implying that metaphysical answers "don't work." He can hardly care, unless they work, whether or not they are "true," for if they don't work they can't possibly be true, for a Positivist. On the other hand, if, somehow, they "work," the question then becomes a matter of how well they work, and to what end.

Our correspondent proposes a "way out of metaphysics" which consists—

> in giving up the pattern type of thinking. Each problem must be met on its own grounds. Science did not progress until it freed itself from patterned and stereotyped ways of thinking. Nor will the solution of pressing problems such as the justification of our values progress until we approach the problem on its own merits, free from the crippling patterns of traditional thought.

Fairly put, then, metaphysical or "pattern thinking" involves the interpretation of experience according to some broad and inclusive theory of the nature of things. Against this is set the scientific method, which rejects any over-all view, preferring the limited approach afforded by particular scientific disciplines to particular problems, each "on its own grounds."

We now have definite questions for discussion. (1) What are the problems with which metaphysics attempts to deal? (2) How competent is scientific method to deal with the same problems? (3) Can "science" consider these problems without making any metaphysical assumptions? (4) Is science free of the system-building propensities of which metaphysics has been convicted? (5) Can we say, categorically, that metaphysical propositions are necessarily either false or meaningless? If they are not necessarily false or meaningless, then they must have an independent value, for metaphysics affirms things which science (so far) does not affirm, and if these affirmations are possibly true, should we not elucidate their implications?

(1) *What are the problems with which metaphysics attempts to deal?* Our correspondent speaks of the need to justify our values. Why, in short, should we want or try to be good men? Why is integrity a good? Why should we support justice, no matter what? Obviously, there are springs to both moral and immoral behavior in man: Why should moral behavior be preferred?

The metaphysician has two arguments, here. First, he says that a transcendental conception of the nature of man seems better able to draw upon those hidden resources of moral determination which strengthen the resolve to become better and wiser. The metaphysician urges that it may be *natural* for men to want to know whether they are immortal or not, whether there is a moral law, and what, conceivably, are their relationships with the rest of life—with the rest of the universe, even. He argues that a peculiar kind of psycho-moral malnutrition will afflict the civilization which neglects these great questions—which leaves them either to agnostic denials or to theological oversimplifications, or both.

This is the pragmatic justification for metaphysics. Naturally, it is open to question.

Then there is the metaphysician's epistemological argument, which claims that some theory of transcendental reality may be *true;* that, in a universe which, *ex hypothesi,* is rooted in some larger scheme of meaning, one might expect

that the metaphysically true would be confirmed by pragmatic justification. The metaphysician, in brief, makes a reasonable use of Anselm's "proof of God" without inviting belief in any sort of extra-cosmic deity.

This argument, too, is obviously open to question.

However, it cannot be denied that great convictions, spiritual or metaphysical convictions, have inspired great deeds, all through history—deeds of profound morality and practical utility in behalf of freedom. Socrates and Gandhi proclaimed metaphysical credos—which proves nothing, of course, except that their metaphysics may be worthy of consideration. How, at any rate, can we ignore metaphysics so long as men of this stature are inspired by transcendental ideas? The mystery of human greatness is certainly involved in this general problem.

Subordinate questions in which the metaphysician may be interested, but which the Positivist will usually neglect on principle, deal with the nature of good and evil, the matter of continuity of consciousness and being after the death of the body, and all parapsychological phenomena which might have a bearing on the nature of being—being in consciousness, as distinguished from being which is subject to the limitations of physical existence and to known and acknowledged physical laws. And, just as, centuries ago, the theologians refused to look through Galileo's telescope to view the spots on the sun, arguing that, since Aristotle had not mentioned them, they could not possibly be there, so the modern Positivist tends to superciliousness toward the metaphysician's interest in such "fringe" activities as psychic research. What, they ask, can serious men like ourselves have to do with spook-chasers, astrologers, and the whole clairvoyant breed? While the science of William Crookes and William James was catholic enough to include the unorthodoxies of psychic research, few modern Positivists can be troubled by these idiosyncrasies of otherwise great men. Even modest hints at dualistic possibilities are regarded as slightly indecent—an attitude which, we submit, bears comparison with the rigorous limits surrounding every orthodoxy in order to discourage unsettling sorties into the Great Unknown.

(2) *How competent is scientific method to deal with the same problems?* It all depends—depends upon what you mean by scientific method. The duty of the scientifically trained philosopher, it has been said, is to determine the appropriate scientific discipline to be applied to a given region of investigation. There are scientists who hold that the use of scientific method in metaphysical inquiry would be a contradiction in terms. They would say that science is the negation of metaphysics. Others might propose that, just as Newtonian physics breaks down in the study of electrons, so, also, we may need a new or, at any rate, different technique of study to examine the problems proposed by metaphysics.

This returns us to our correspondent's "way out of metaphysics." He proposes an imitation of science in relation to philosophical issues—an inquiry scaled to the peculiar traits of each problem. But what if the problem cannot really be isolated in terms of any familiar methodology? Dr. Einstein, it will be recalled, succeeded by drawing bigger and bigger theoretical circles, until he was able to include diverse and apparently contradictory phenomena within a single hypothesis. But *his* theories, people will say, have been *verified.* We are justified in calling them "public" truths, even if only twelve men in the world really understand them. (Probably more can understand them, now, but still very few.)

But by what right do we insist that only "public" truths are really true? Is it that we want the universe to conform to our sense of certainty? Are only the caged and forever after tamed truths worth striving after? It seems quite possible that Nature will never submit to this candid intellectual imperialism. That there may be other truths which become apparent only to men ready to break their

hearts to find them is a not impossible idea. And if the Positivists can claim a pluralistic license in the studies of the world around us, what is to prevent the metaphysician from claiming a plurality—not merely a duality—of orders of Reality? Some realities are easy, no doubt, to contain, but others are more difficult, and they, as Spinoza intimated, may be the most important to behold.

(3) *Can "science" consider these problems without making any metaphysical assumptions?* The modern physicist, as more than one historian of ideas has shown, moves in a vast sea of metaphysical doctrine. Newton's metaphysics was moderately explicit, and the modern physicist is a neo-Pythagorean who claims (behavioristically) that the universe is patterned according to endlessly elaborate equations. Eddington consciously crossed the line of prohibition and openly declared the universe to be fabricated of "mind-stuff"—a thumpingly metaphysical assertion. The Positivists are more cautious—they stick to pointer-readings. Meanwhile the man in the street keeps on asking, "What does it all mean?" The Positivist finds this question annoying—what, after all, has he to do with *big* meanings? In time, the man-in-the-street becomes annoyed with the Positivist, and this gives the Stalins and the Hitlers their chance. They *tell* the man in the street what it all means, and then all but Proletarian and Aryan Positivists are sent to Siberia and Buchenwald.

This, of course, is the *argumentum ad hominem*, but it is worth thinking over. And to say that the Positivist is that brand of metaphysician who declares that the quest for big meanings is meaningless is very much to the point.

(4) *Is science free of the system-building propensities of which metaphysics has been convicted?* There are systems erected upon the denials of metaphysics as well as systems founded upon metaphysical affirmation. Insofar as there is a "naturalistic" philosophy, it is based upon the rejection of theological and metaphysical propositions.

Need it be said that the problems of Naturalism are at least as formidable as the problems of Idealism?

The fifth question is too long to repeat. Besides, it answers itself. What our correspondent is really wary of, it seems to us—and we share his feeling completely, although expressing it in other ways—is *bad* metaphysics, metaphysics which serves as some sort of vicarious atonement for our ignorance, permitting us to pretend to knowledge we do not really possess. He would avoid bad metaphysics by declaring it out of bounds. We, on the other hand, choose to escape from the same pitfalls by cautious advances and by a somewhat enthusiastic search for metaphysical ideas which are insured by the spirit of self-criticism.

Neither of us, we suspect, is wholly successful.

Letter from
ENGLAND

LONDON.—Man, the Thinking Reed, does not always think to good purpose. We are all apt to accept the slogan, the key-word, that is clothed for us with emotional value or which stands for a long-unexamined idea. Perhaps we of the West to-day are prone to this vice of mental sloth just as much as those behind the Iron Curtain. Institutions and forms whose real character and whose actual activities are masked by false labels, like spurious merchandise, may ostensibly exist and work for the benefit of the masses, while, in fact, they exercise a tyranny. In England, Freedom is an operative word of tremendous power. It is only necessary to utter the word to secure an emotional response whose roots go back a thousand years in the racial memory. Was it not for freedom that our forefathers suffered and died?—and so forth. Hence our loyalty to the parliamentary form of government, composed of freely-elected Members. That, once elected, a Party acquires powers limited and conditioned only by a parliamentary Opposition; that a vote cast is an assignment of political function, is not so commonly realized.

This writer has no panacea for this flaw in so-called Democracy, though the Referendum does seem a possible check on unbridled misuse of political power or its exercise under cover of secrecy. These thoughts come to mind at this moment when people are beginning to notice, with mixed feelings, increasing numbers of American soldiers and airmen on the city streets. These were never unpopular. On the contrary, the GI made himself liked during the last War. But, even so, he is, in a sense, a bird of ill-omen, since his presence is another reminder that war may be just round the corner. And this leads the politically supine citizen to think. What, then, may be the fate of these Isles should war come? He has heard whispers that Britain, in the view of American staff officers, is "expendable." Where, then, he is beginning to ask himself, is our exposed flank? Before Churchill mentioned the fact in Parliament, the mass of people in Great Britain did not know that East Anglia is now a vast American Air Force base; that it is earmarked as the base for craft carrying the atom bomb, and that, hence, it has become Number One target.

The question these circumstances lead to is this: Would the people of these Isles, had the issue been plainly put to them: Should East Anglia be assigned to the United States as an atom-bomb air base? have answered affirmatively? Personally, had all the pros and cons been plainly put to them, I think not. Yet such radical decisions may be freely made by the Government in power in a Democracy without the people having any knowledge; all being done *sub rosa* and with an unpleasant look of underhandedness—in the interests of so-called security. There are many who begin to regard the parliamentary machine as an instrument which has outlived its usefulness. It was certainly never designed to cope with the contingencies of this age, and the creaking of its joints and the groaning of its timbers are becoming more distinct with every new strain.

I do not believe it is untrue to say that if the British people were asked to vote on the question of the abolition of Harwell, our atom-bomb research station, it would be closed down to-morrow. There is nothing, anywhere, but detestation of this new weapon, first launched, to her eternal dishonour, by the United States. There is nothing but growing fear.

Does this account for another discernible tendency, namely, a spate of special pleading by leading physicists for the retention of fission research? One of the latest in this field is C. A. Coulson, a Fellow of the Royal Society. He does not see the atom bomb, and the unfettered use of the vast forces of modern science by spiritually adolescent man, as does General Omar Bradley, as a trap which may destroy humanity. He joins issue with the American soldier on this. On balance, it is claimed, the atom-bomb is a good thing. Against Hiroshima and Nagasaki, are set the hundred or more distinct radio isotypes now being turned out by the atomic plants. Against the stark central facts that the activities of Science today are endangering the very existence of human life on this Planet, are set benefits that are, at present, mainly speculative. Concerning the H-bomb, this apologist for atom-bomb research remained discreetly silent.

ENGLISH CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
MISCELLANY

OFTEN, as the weeks go by, we accumulate a variety of material needing no extensive notice, yet seeming worthy of the attention of readers. For example, there is the February number of *Arizona Highways,* containing a portfolio of the paintings and drawings of Nicolai Fechin. This seventy-year-old painter of the American Southwest received his training at the Imperial Academy of Art in St. Petersburg, coming to the United States in 1923. After living in New York and Pennsylvania, Fechin finally felt at home in New Mexico, at Taos, where he designed and built himself a home on land adjoining the Indian reservation. Already known to connoisseurs and critics, the work of Fechin now blossomed into rich maturity

Even for those who conceive themselves as "knowing about art," a look at Fechin's paintings and drawings in *Arizona Highways* is a salutary experience. The rest of us find no need to wonder about whether or not these pictures should be called "good." There is a kind of expression which requires neither compliments nor explanations, which comes very close to doing away with "theories" of art, and Fechin's is this kind of expression. The comment of Frank Waters, who writes the accompanying text, seems to cover about all that need be said about this work:

> Just what is it in them [Fechin's pictures] that already has spanned the world and half a century, and continues to speak to an increasingly appreciative audience with an authoritative voice which trumpets into the future? What do his paintings say? Fechin's work is divided into no periods. It recognizes no national boundaries, favors no caste. Fechin does not paint his own moods and fancies. He paints people. . . . That is what they say: the truth of our common humanity speaking from the hidden realm of character revealed in the tilt of a nose, the flicker of an eyelid. Portraiture is the keynote of Fechin's art. Even his still-lifes and landscapes are portraits too—portraits of a land inseparable from its children, in the eyes of a child of the soul.

While Fechin's canvases are emphatically pictures of "individuals," each portrait contains unmistakable reference to what Waters calls "the truth of our common humanity"—Fechin paints humans rather than persons, lives and characters rather than names and places. One gets the impression that Fechin himself is very unpreoccupied by matters which engross the time and energies of the great majority of his contemporaries. To see and reproduce the values his pictures reveal must require a special sort of observation, and the kind of perception which regards each man, woman, or child as hiding a private and inviolate mystery of being. Something of this feeling, surely, gets into his work. If one were to urge that a factor of infinity is somehow included in the vocabulary of every great artist—whether painter, musician, or poet—and then pointed to Fechin for proof, there could hardly be debate.

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Through the generosity of a friend, we have from England a small book, *The Disciple,* by George Godwin, first published in 1936. It is a play about Leonardo da Vinci and some young men who studied and worked under him. Courage is needed to write about a very great man. Even greater courage—or folly—is needed to put a great man into a play and words into his mouth, for terrible indignities may be thrust upon the illustrious dead in this way. But Mr. Godwin succeeds in showing us a da Vinci who is a symbol of the goal which young men long to reach, while his students represent the varied human nature which is sometimes bewildered, sometimes tortured, and sometimes transfigured by the quest. Finally, the play is about the Judas-instinct in man, and how it is understood by the Christ in man. It is a tragedy of lesser loyalties which betray the greater, and of the levels of feeling experienced by men in the process of betrayal. In this sense, *The Disciple* is a true Morality Play, ancl like Silone's sequence of

betrayal in *Bread and Wine,* its theme belongs to every age and Every Man.

What is the crime of the betrayed? Mr. Godwin has Leonardo say:

> There are many who attack me in this and in other ways.
>
> But when I hear of it I ask myself: Do they attack Leonardo, or do they defend themselves? . . .

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Mr. Aldous Huxley is a writer of such complicated talent that assays of his work are rarely satisfying to either critic or reader. A glance at a volume of his early essays (*Music at Night,* 1931) quickly recalls the sources of the critic's confusion in other volumes—the admirable portions of *Ends and Means,* for example, as contrasted with the unattractive motifs of certain of his widely-selling novels; his ever-recurring preoccupation with the sins of the Puritans, without any attention to the possibility that some ancient verity hides behind the warped and disfigured image of "morality" to which the guilt-haunted give their angry and self-righteous allegiance.

It is as a craftsman of words that Mr. Huxley often gains our sympathy. His final essay in *Music at Night,* "Vulgarity in Literature," after paying the usual respects to Mrs. Grundy, launches into an analysis of "word-magic" which brings notable objectivity to the bad habits of poets and other manipulators of language. In this essay, Edgar Allen Poe is a major target for Mr. Huxley, and everyone familiar with Poe's excesses in "tintinnabulation" will appreciate the following exploration of what actually happens in such lines:

> Poetry ought to be musical, but music with tact, subtly and variously. Metres whose rhythms, as in this case, are strong, insistent and practically invariable offer the poet a kind of short cut to musicality. They provide him (my subject calls for a mixture of metaphors) with a ready-made, hand-me-down music. He does not have to create a music appropriately modulated to his meaning; all he has to do is to shovel the meaning into the moving stream of the metre and allow the current to carry it along on waves that, like those of the best hairdressers, are guaranteed permanent.

To illustrate, Huxley borrows some lines from Milton, then parodies them as Poe might have versified the same ideas. From Milton:

> Like that fair field
> Of Enna, where Proserpine gathering flowers,
> Herself a fairer flower, by gloomy Dis
> Was gathered, which cost Ceres all that pain
> To seek her through the world.

Now Huxley, imitating Poe, echoing Milton:

> It was noon in the fair field of Enna
> When Proserpina gathering flowers—
> Herself the most fragrant of flowers,
> Was gathered away to Gehenna
> By the Prince of Plutonian powers
> Was borne down the windings of Brenner
> To the gloom of his amorous bowers—
> Down the tortuous highway of Brenner
> To the god's agapenonous bowers.

The parody is not too outrageous to be critically beside the point; and anyhow the music is genuine Poe. That permanent wave is unquestionably an *ondulation de chez Edgar*. The much too musical metre is (to change the metaphor once more) like a rich chasuble, so stiff with gold and gems that it stands unsupported, a carapace of jewelled sound, into which the sense . . . irrelevantly creeps and is lost. This music of Poe's—how much less really musical it is than that which, out of his nearly neutral decasyllables, Milton fashioned on purpose to fit the slender beauty of Proserpine, the strength and swiftness of the ravisher and her mother's heavy, despairing sorrow!

Another of Huxley's comments seems just:

> The substance of Poe is refined; it is his form that is vulgar. He is, as it were, one of Nature's Gentlemen, unhappily cursed with incorrigible bad taste. To the most sensitive and high-souled man in the world we should find it hard to forgive, shall we say, the wearing of a diamond ring on every finger; Poe does the equivalent of this in his poetry; we notice the solecism and shudder.

The point of all this, so far as we are concerned, is that it covers by analogy a seldom-discussed aspect of the fascinations of religion. The kind of "vulgarity" Mr. Huxley is talking about is especially common in every sort of

religious tract, the lack being of "good taste" in philosophy rather than in poetry. Just as our adolescent feelings are vulnerable to clamorous rhythms, so our religious feelings, if never matured by disciplined reflection, can be engaged and drugged by the intoxications of pseudo-"spiritual" claims and assertions. There is the further consideration of the intellectual integrity of the writer, his sense of fitness, and his willingness to practice the art of emotional cozening. No ordinances of either Church or State can govern the performance of the artist in this field, yet here, indeed, is the origin of all major crimes of the spirit, as, also, of moral greatness and esthetic inspiration.

COMMENTARY
THE FEAR OF REASON

"CASES-IN-POINT" to illustrate the sort of generalized criticism this week's Frontiers provides can never be too numerous. From a recent liberal monthly, then, we cite the banning from the Denver public schools of Arthur M. Schlesinger's pamphlet, *What about Communism?*

This pamphlet was banned, despite the fact that in it Schlesinger says: "It is the central and habitual dishonesty—the belief that the end justifies the means—which has in great part created the Communist problem."

Why was this pamphlet banned? Apparently, because of its dispassionate analysis—because it feeds no emotional, anti-Communist fires, but observes:

> . . . in the long run, . . . we can defeat Communism in our midst only by removing the internal sources of its appeal. This means constructing a society of our own in which people will feel free, secure and strong. . . .

Rational criticism of Communism, it seems, amounts to a "pro-Communist" slant—which is the same as claiming that the rational individual is in danger of *becoming* Communist. The book-banning authorities could hardly pay a higher or less deserved compliment to the political theory and system of modern Communism!

Today, as Archibald MacLeish puts it, our freedom is under "pressure from those who have never really accepted or wholly understood the meaning of the word in its American use."

Neither of the two writers quoted in Frontiers offers positive counsel, their remarks being largely given to defining what freedom is *not.* Here, we should like to recall the contemporary work of three writers who, independently of one another, came to approximately the same conclusion as to what freedom is, or how it may possibly be won. These writers are Dwight Macdonald ("The Root Is Man," *Politics,* April and July, 1946), Albert Camus ("Neither Victims nor Executioners," *Politics,* July-August, 1947), and Ignazio Silone (*Seed Beneath the Snow*—third volume of Silone's trilogy, in which *Fontamara* and *Bread and Wine* are the first two.) All three describe a fundamental dividing line between the dishonest, self-deceived world of today, and the kind of a world they want—that all of us want. Silone's book was reviewed in the first issue of MANAS (Jan. 7, 1948), Macdonald's essay in MANAS for Aug. 8, 1950, and the following sets the tone of Camus' searching manifesto. Camus asks

> only that we reflect and then decide, clearly, whether humanity's lot must be made still more miserable in order to achieve far-off and shadowy ends, whether we should accept a world bristling with arms where brother kills brother; or whether, on the contrary we should avoid bloodshed and misery as much as possible so that we give a chance for survival to later generations better equipped than we are.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

ONE of our favorite authors, W. Macneile Dixon, habitually dropped disparaging remarks on what he called the "system-builders." And though Dr. Dixon's contact with education was exclusively at the university level, it seems to us that his basic concern in respect to System-enthusiasts is applicable to many aspects of pre-school and elementary education. A "system-builder," in Dr. Dixon's terms, is one who allows himself to be carried away by his particular blueprint for the perfect human being, the perfect religion, or the perfect society. Dixon's objection is that all systematized approaches to supposed improvement of the human being, of religion, or of society, are bound to be over-simplifications; and, also, that they will inevitably tend to suppress that individual spontaneity which has been the source of all genuine inspiration. The most rigid systems of thought in the world today are probably those called Catholicism and Communism, and the uncompromising dogmas of both need to be deplored. But the stuff out of which such rigidities have been fashioned is a common weakness of the human mind—the result of a desire to find a short cut to guaranteed "solutions of problems" by formula.

A reader recently mailed us an ancient but valuable number of the *Atlantic Monthly* (August, 1931) containing an article, "Conscripted Children," by Maude Dutton Lynch. Like Dixon, this writer contends that we can easily ruin human beings by over-planning their lives and their thoughts. Her title, "Conscripted Children," refers to the prevailing practice of starting children, especially the progeny of well-to-do parents, with a highly supervised group-training program in their earliest years. Mrs. Lynch writes:

> There seems to be some danger that the present system of long hours and accumulated years required in formal schooling may thwart the real mental and spiritual growth of children just as surely as long days in mines, factories, and sweatshops once thwarted the physical growth of the children of the poor. . . . To be sure that no child of ours shall miss any of his chances, we have joined eagerly with educators, psychologists, and other parents to organize and develop a standardized programme of living from which, almost from birth to adulthood, our children have no escape. . . . At fifteen months of age, about the time the average child walks alone, we find this small individual entering school life—brought at nine or ten in the morning to a pre-school.
>
> When he is six years old he enters the first grade, which is usually a half-day session. . . . By the time he has reached the fourth or fifth grade his school day has been extended into the afternoons, and this is followed by an hour or two of organized play. Saturday—or what is left of it after the barber, the dentist, and the orthopaedic surgeon have deducted their dues—is usually unscheduled up to this age, but then on it falls more and more into the hands of boys' and girls' clubs, Scout organizations, music teachers, and dancing masters. In short, by the time the child has reached his teens he is likely to be carrying an eight- or nine-hour job practically six days a week.
>
> This, in brief, is the system which has been laid out for us by child experts and educators generally, and the well to-do parents of America have accepted it without question as the normal and natural procedure in the upbringing of their children. Thus, in an era of peace, we are conscripting our children for education just as deliberately as, in time of war, the government conscripted our sons for the army.

Mrs. Lynch quotes a college Dean of her day to the effect that many high-school subjects could be learned much more quickly at the age of twenty-five. This Dean asked an assemblage of "progressive parents" whether they thought it might not be a mistake to give so little leisure to children and promise so much leisure to adults. Concluding, Mrs. Lynch comments on the endless complaints about the restlessness of the "younger generation"—these have certainly not diminished since 1931—and asks: "May not all this be a hangover from the heavy program day we have set up for the young as a criterion of correct living?"

> Should we not ask ourselves where our young people learned to depend entirely on artificial stimulation? Possibly such bad habits as they have are intimately connected with the fact that, from earliest childhood, their recreation has always been

> prescribed for them, has been something brought in to them from the outside, has never been a genuine cultivation of their own natural interests. For we have never helped them develop their own resources, never left them undisturbed long enough for their inner urges to break through the armor of purely external discipline in which we have encased them. We complain that our boys and girls are too sophisticated, forgetting that it was we—their parents—who pushed them prematurely out of babyhood, out of childhood into youth, out of youth into adulthood.
>
> It may also be that by demanding conformity to a group at a tender age we shall establish in a child's mind the patterns of mob thinking, making it forever impossible for him to become a self-reliant, individual appraiser of life.

Mrs. Lynch is speaking, at least in part, from firsthand experience, for she was driven to these reflections by trying to puzzle out the meaning of a request from her own children, who begged, "Please don't send us to camp this summer. We want some free time." Mrs. Lynch does not claim to know exactly why children want free time, nor to be able to predict what they will do with it, but she calls attention to the fact that our psychologists and teachers don't really know, either, and had best not think that they do. The following may seem to neglect consideration of the child's actual need for guidance and for *some* programs of discipline, yet there certainly is "justice" in leaving children to themselves at least part of the time:

> How little we know, in spite of our experts, about the real wants and needs of children; how often the child, given the chance, does know—immediately and accurately. And in many instances what he wants to do is just what he ought to do at that particular moment. But he must have time—free time, limitless time, unhurried time for his exploring. Many years ago my father told me about his boyhood on a New England farm and I can remember the tone of deep gratitude with which he said, "My father was too poor to give me anything toward a college education, and too ignorant of its worth to give me even sympathy; but he was just enough to give me my own time, although he needed it desperately on the farm." We give our children money, we try to give them sympathy, we give them liberally of education; but we are not just enough to give them their time.

FRONTIERS

Dangerous Definitions

IT is easy to develop a distaste for criticism, even brilliant criticism. For one thing, we have had so much of it. Recent centuries have seen the "Age of Iconoclasm" blend into the "Age of Analysis" and, as the average reader as well as most intellectuals know, much of our serious writing has been potently discouraging on our religious, political and societal failings, while remaining all but silent on contemporary signs of "progress." Yet a natural dislike for what appears to be "negativism" should not blind us to the fact that it is sometimes quite as important to know what a thing is not, as to know what it is, and our brilliant critics often tell us what progress is not.

If we contemplate reforming or even reformulating cultural values, it is valuable to gain perspective on how and when men missed the mark in earlier attempts. The critical analyst does not, of course, give us a foundation for reformation, but he supplies a great deal of information about the sorts of building blocks that must be discarded because of structural weakness, and he launches instructive "protest movements." So, at times, a survey of the latest criticisms of ourselves and our society can at least provide orientation, if not salvation.

The last meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Philadelphia focussed on what *Science News Letter* calls a "militant protest against world-wide attacks on intellectual freedom." A famous biologist, Dr. Edwin G. Conklin of Princeton, figured prominently in "spearpointing the mobilization of scientists to resist special loyalty oaths, hampering special regulations, and control of campus speakers." Dr. Conklin was joined in this undertaking by Owen J. Roberts, former associate Justice of the U. S. Supreme Court, who condemned as "compurgatorial" all loyalty oaths that require government employees and teachers to guarantee that they have never had any "sinful" alliance with unholy political parties. His point was that since the definition of political and ideological sin "is subject to change by administrative whim without notice," such oaths are a complete betrayal of basic constitutional principles. *Science News Letter* summarizes the Association's stand, through the years, on this issue:

> In 1933 the AAAS protested the Nazis and the Fascists by declaring the commonwealth of learning can not endure half slave and half free.
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> This was reaffirmed in Philadelphia. The targets now are state legislatures that require special loyalty oaths of professors, as in California, universities that censor speakers on their campuses, and national laws that deny on hearsay evidence visas and passports to scientific world authorities.
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> Even teachers accused of advocating the overthrow of government by force and violence are entitled to an impartial hearing and should not be dismissed until the truth of the accusations is established. This is urged in resolutions adopted formally by the American Philosophical Society, the venerable academy of scientists which dates back to the days of Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson.
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> Abroad today in the former enemy lands of Germany and Japan, America is officially sanctioning the return of illiberal restraints on science and knowledge. Scientists view this with apprehension.

Turning to what might be called a critique of current thought-control trends from a "literary quarter," we find valuable correlative thinking by Archibald MacLeish in the *Atlantic Monthly* (November, 1951). A former Assistant Secretary of State and a Chairman of the American delegation to United Nations conferences, Mr. MacLeish argues that we are, by political usage, dangerously redefining the word Freedom. As he puts it: "Freedom is becoming freedom to be like everybody else, to think as the majority in the town or state or country thinks, to teach what the legislature or the dominant political or religious opinion wants taught, to conform." He continues:

> The pressure which the word freedom has been under in the past few years is a pressure of this character: a pressure from those who have never

really accepted or wholly understood the meaning of the word in its American use.

Our faith, in simple, sober truth, is in the human Being, the human spirit, the hungers and the longings that lead it toward its images of truth, its perceptions of the beauty of the world.

Those who launched the great human adventure which this Republic is, dared to put their trust in the individual man, the man alone, the man thinking for himself. They dared to believe in a *people*, which is a nation of individual men constituting among themselves a society: for a people is not what the totalitarians call "the masses"; a people is an agreement of many alone to make together a world in which each one of them can live as himself. The founders of the American Republic believed in a people. They not only provided no censors for the thoughts of those who were to come after them: they prohibited censors. They not only provided no moral or intellectual or religious authority to govern the beliefs of their successors: they rejected forever the establishment of any such authority. They trusted men.

It is in that trust that the Republic can still be defended. Indeed it is only in that trust that it can be defended as the kind of country it is. To attempt to defend it otherwise—to attempt, above all, to defend it by debasing the coinage of meaning in which its nature is expressed—is to lose both the country itself and the struggle against Communism which is cited as justification of the fraud. If freedom can come to mean something less than freedom in the general mind, it can come to mean the opposite of freedom. If freedom ceases to express the American faith in man and in man's unqualified right to find the truth for himself, it will shortly express a faith in established truth, in the rightness of official opinion. When that happens we shall have lost the American Proposition and the fight against Communism. For the one idea that can triumph over the police-state notion that the truth is already known, once for all, and that the truth is therefore entitled to impose itself by force, is the American Proposition that a man is free to find the truth for himself. It is the one idea that can triumph because, as long as it is held, man himself is the cause of those who hold it. And against that cause no enemy has prevailed for long.

These redefinitions of "freedom" result from political pressure, yet their wholesale acceptance is obviously eased by habitual attitudes of the average citizen. Louis Kronenberger, writing for the current *American Scholar*, borrows from W. H. Auden's characterization of the present as "the age of anxiety," but attempts a further distinction of importance. Seeking release from anxiety, he suggests, we have come to rely increasingly upon specialists for reassurance. And when our "leaders" are competing specialists, informing us of what we should think and how we should behave, the public is forced to judge opinions on the strength of the claims or publicity which "advertises" the leaders:

> But the very publicity that dictates our habits destroys our thinking. For the great conspiracy of our time, the great bane that pretends to be the great blessing, is that nobody shall be forced, shall even be permitted, to learn the truth about anything, or the beauty or value of anything, *at first hand:* that we shall all be veritable kings in the sense that we have tasters, and veritable princelings in the sense that we have whipping boys; and that people couldn't be more willing to do our reading for us if we were blind; or more eager to cut up our culture into little pieces for us if we were babies. The directions for becoming cultured are, as it were, right on the box, and are as simple and plain as the directions for baking a cake. The wonder of our age is that everything is labeled and spotlighted, pre-shrunk, pre-digested, passed on by experts. The trouble with our age is that it is all signposts and no destination.

Such instruction as to what freedom is not seems preferable by far to orthodox versions of what it is. Attention to these critics may help us to get around to the matter of what would be worth-while to do with freedom, if we had it, or more of it.