

THE WORLD OUTSIDE

PHILOSOPHERS have always exhibited a notable interest in the nature of the world about us, insisting, when questioned, that the kind of a world we live in is fully as important as the kind of beings we are—or more important, perhaps, if we have the inclination to let our idea of the world outside determine what we think of ourselves and our possibilities. If, for example, in harmony with the claims that materialists tell us are founded on science, we believe that the universe is the product of blind, mechanical laws, that man is the result of no more than a rather marvelous "accident," then we are drawn into the dispiriting pessimism that was so well described by William James many years ago:

That is the sting of it, that in the vast driftings of cosmic weather, though many an enchanted cloud-bank floats away, long lingering ere it can be dissolved—even as our world now lingers, for our joy—yet when these transient products are gone, nothing, absolutely nothing remains, to represent those particular qualities, those elements of preciousness which they may have enshrined. Dead and gone are they, gone utterly from the very sphere and room of being. Without an echo; without a memory; without an influence on aught that may come after, to make it care for similar ideals. This utter final wreck is of the essence of scientific materialism as at present understood. The lower and not the higher forces are the eternal forces, or the last surviving forces within the only cycle of evolution which we can definitely see.

Are you sure, the philosopher urges, that you are, that you want to be, an inhabitant of a universe of this sort? A philosopher is normally a man who seeks consistency in thought. He is deeply concerned, therefore, with the implications of ideas or doctrines about the world. If he can't prove an idea "true" or "false," he is likely to examine it in terms of its implications, deciding, perhaps, that he will live without accepting the idea because he discovers that its implications are intolerable.

This makes for different philosophies, for the reason that different men find different implications intolerable. The eighteenth-century materialists, to choose a group of one persuasion, found themselves unable to live with the traditional Christian idea of God as the maker of all. This "God," they observed, needed priests and an authoritarian church to get in touch with his "creatures." The customary worship of this God seemed invariably to lead to tyranny, persecutions, wars, and every imaginable disaster. Voltaire's reasoning went something like this: God is an all-wise Being who made the world and everything in it. Therefore, this is the best of all possible worlds (how could an all-wise, all-powerful, and all-loving God create anything but the best of all possible worlds?). However, even I, Voltaire, who am but an imperfect man, can with no effort imagine a much better world—a world, let us say, without the suffering which overtakes so many of its inhabitants. An all-wise, all-powerful God who would, in the name of "goodness and mercy," create the world that exists must either destroy my reason or my reason will destroy him. Voltaire's reason remaining unimpaired, he rejected the traditional God-idea after examining its implications.

Other men, whose reason operates in other directions, find the implications of Materialism as intolerable as Voltaire found the consequences of the God-idea. What! they say, no sense of larger meaning in the universe? No Friend behind the veil of matter to help us bear our woes? As soon as the materialists finish tearing down the God-idea, then other men, horrified by the implications of a universe ruled by blind, material forces, start to build it up again, either defying Science, or trying, as Lecomte du Noüy did recently, to reconcile Science and God.

These, at any rate, are some of the reasons why philosophers urge the rest of us to think about "cosmology"—to formulate to ourselves, however imperfectly, what we know of the world we live in, and what we feel able to believe about it.

Both the theological version of the universe and the materialistic version of the universe have one important feature in common, which makes them, we think, very much the same in moral quality. Both are insistently sure that they have, each one, the exclusive truth of the matter. The believer in Creation, for example, is compelled by his claim of divine revelation to demand agreement. If you reject his cosmology, you insult his God, by suggesting that this God, who selected "His" church to bear the glad tidings of salvation to mankind, is not infallible. This violates every theological definition, and, if theologians are able to exercise temporal power, requires condign punishment. The logic of the "Holy Inquisition" is inescapable, once you share its premises about God and God's Church.

Similarly, the materialist is a man who defines for you the ultimate nature of things, the absolute character of matter, force, and law. He defines them by asserting, as William James put it, that "the lower and not the higher forces are the eternal forces." He will admit that many things remain unknown—just as the theologian confesses that God has left many mysteries unsolved for man—but on the supremacy of the primary claim, that matter, or the complement of blind forces, is omnipotent, there can be no weakening or significant debate. The materialist will not, of course, burn you at the stake if you disagree with him; he will only ridicule you and try to isolate you from the coming generation of youth, which ought not to be exposed to superstitious nonsense, and in this way the rule of materialism is more "liberal" than the theological authority. (However, if Materialism develops into a political doctrine, as occurred with the theories of Karl Marx, a liquidation as firm as it is impersonal is

likely to overtake the steadfast heretic, so that, even here, the parallel between theology and anti-theology may be continued.)

Having witnessed the effects of belief in these two opposing cosmologies, the common man of today may decide that philosophizing about how the world came to be is not worth the risk. Further, what assurance is there that by "reason" we can reach any worth-while conclusion? Our common man, if he happened to go to college, is likely to have been exposed to a series of courses from which he learned that the reasoning about the universe which took place before Copernicus was so full of errors that it has interest only for antiquarians. The reasoning since Copernicus has left a general conception of the world in his mind—a conception much the same as that which the materialists argue from, but without the development of the implications which make a materialist a materialist. The reasoning about the universe since Einstein—which, for some philosophers, has seemed to open up the question for idealism—is probably over his head, or he *thinks* it is over his head, and he is not sufficiently convinced of the philosophical importance of cosmology to bother his head about it.

What has happened, actually, since the Copernican revolution in cosmology, is that astronomers and physicists have staked out certain "facts" about the Universe, and philosophers have at once tried to place them in some philosophical scheme. Whether or not this is a "good" procedure is not so much to the point as recognition that it seems to be an inevitable procedure. It may be worth noting, here, that Voltaire's objection to the God-idea, which was on ethical grounds, was not half so influential in dethroning the King of the Universe as was Galileo's attack on the cosmology of the Church. When the great masses of men finally realized that the world had not been made, and the heavens arranged, by God just as the Church had said, they lost a lot of their faith in God. Actually, so far as genuine religion is concerned, Voltaire's argument

ought to have been the more effective. The answer to this is probably that the religion of these men was not really a genuine religion, but a technique for getting into heaven. Therefore, the attack of the astronomers on God as an imperfect Technician was more devastating than Voltaire's attack on God as an imperfect Moralist.

But *ought* men to design their idea of the universe according to their moral or ethical feelings? How decisive should this aspect of human reason or opinion be? Perhaps we can say, provisionally, that a man ought not to accept any version of the universe which violates his moral sense, and that, given this condition, he is free to speculate all he likes on the data supplied by science.

A handy illustration of this kind of thinking or speculation comes to hand in an article, "The Evolution of Cosmologies," contributed by Dr. Oliver L. Reiser to the April issue of *Philosophy of Science*. Dr. Reiser begins with a workmanlike summary of the successive "cosmologies" of Western civilization, from the doctrines of Pythagoras and Plato to the theory of Fred Hoyle and his Cambridge associates (see *MANAS*, Feb. 20). He then offers for consideration a theory, the "Cyclic-Creative Universe," worked out by himself and a Dutch engineer, B. G. H. Vanderjagt, which takes off from Giordano Bruno, Einstein, and Fred Hoyle. This theory is neither theistic nor materialistic, but *pantheistic*. Readers brushed by the passing wing of science will all have heard of the "expanding universe." Dr. Reiser feels able to do without this conception—it makes most of us feel uncomfortable, anyway—and adopts Bruno's theory of an infinite universe filled with innumerable worlds, all in varying stages of cosmic evolution. The idea of a universal field of cosmic or electrical energy is borrowed from Einstein—or perhaps it is the ancient *Æther* come to life again—and a great circle is established: the circle of the passage of energy from its undifferentiated source (termed the unmanifest

world) through the "Cosmic Lens" (Supreme Imagination, an impersonal formative power which operates throughout nature), and then on up the evolutionary scheme, from sub-atomic particles to mankind. At "the end of the line," there is a feed-back of matter and energy into the world of undifferentiated energy, which completes the process and begins the cycle anew. In Dr. Reiser's words:

The physical universe, therefore, is the actualized body of the Supreme Imagination, being composed of the cosmic forms that have been crystallized as visions of reality as these have been structuralized in the ever-evolving patterns which are in fact the story of creation, the history of the universe. *Cosmic evolution, in a word, is a never-ending and creative advance as revealed by the manifest universe. . . . The god-in-man is nothing other than cosmic energy become aware of itself as imaginative foresight.*

What is this "Supreme Imagination"? Dr. Reiser does not say, and perhaps it is unfair to ask. The Greek philosophers spoke of the "matter-moving *Nous*," and if Dr. Reiser chooses to term it "Imagination," the name does not matter very much. What matters is that, in Dr. Reiser's cosmology, the higher and not the lower forces are the eternal forces, and, so far as we can see, this view is as consistent with the facts disclosed by science as the view declaring the reverse, and much more desirable.

Whether or not Dr. Reiser can make Bruno's "infinite universe" satisfy the equations of Dr. Einstein's field theory is a question far over our heads. But we have always felt that the "finiteness" of Dr. Einstein's universe is a mathematical rather than a philosophical limitation, involved in the proposition that matter "creates" space; and, as matter is ponderable, so also must be space. But this is the "space" of extension, and not the absolute infinity of abstract thought. Why not a "finite" space within a dimensionless continuum of infinity? This seems not alien to Bruno's idea.

Letter from **GERMANY**

BERLIN.—Under Hitler we Germans had barbarism with top boots; we now have a more complete barbarism without them. The spiritual situation in Eastern Germany of today may be illustrated by two examples taken from life at Humboldt "University," showing the covert terrorism and the depletion of the qualities of life, the alienation of man, and wholesale psychological pressure.

When sitting in the philosophy library (perhaps occupied with the study of the Age of Rationalism, the so-called *Aufklärung*), you wonder at the empty rooms, the many books collecting dust, and the rarity of visitors who pick them up. Meanwhile, the shelves are more and more invaded by the "philosophic" works of Lenin and Stalin. Several times during the week the library is also invaded by students in the blue shirts of the FDJ (Free German Youth) who have their political meetings and "schooling" (*i.e.*, briefing) in the *reading* rooms.

Looking back into history, one remembers that the genius, Hegel, was eminent at Berlin university until 1831; that even under the Nazis, Nicolai Hartmann and Eduard Spranger taught until 1945. But now complete emptiness of mind reigns under unknown and insignificant names. What an abyss! The dogmatic Marxist school which proclaimed the end of all classic idealistic philosophy has brought about the true *Nihilism* in philosophic life—although, as a matter of fact, after having interrupted philosophic activity for six years, the authorities have now proposed a new training plan for students of philosophy, covering a term of five years.

Meanwhile, in the "West"—to make a comparison—Positivism proclaims its ascendancy over "metaphysic philosophy"; it thinks philosophy rather useless. Fortunately, philosophy has its roots deep in history, in society, and in mind, and where State power does not support Nihilism toward all philosophy—as it does in the "Eastern" part of the world—philosophy is bound to survive. Yet it seems quite clear that the more the process of ruthless

industrialization controls all regions of the world, the more complete will be the attack on philosophy.

The other example of spreading barbarism is found in the examinations given to students in the Soviet zone of Germany. The emphasis is not on the student's performance in his special field, but on the correctness of his "*Weltanschauung*"—his ability to express himself and to think in Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist terms. It is quite a comedy—the eager efforts of students to swallow the "modern terminology" and to reproduce it without being in the least persuaded of its real validity. On the other hand, the examiners, who realize this, press more and more for genuine conviction—and here the picture changes from the comic to the tragic. It is a bitter struggle, accompanied perhaps with smiling faces in which the "superior," *i.e.*, the cleverer mind, wins the race. Thus cleverness and opportunism flourish and a new generation of "adaptable" people is generated—with the loss of truthfulness, self-respect, and other essential qualities.

Both the Nihilism and the psychological pressure have a common basis in fear of the political system, in the danger of asking questions instead of repeating slogans. There is, however, a general resistance—although silent—in the population in every social field. Outwardly, the strict and absolute power of the State hides widening rifts in the social structure. We shall see, in time, how the political picture will change, when the chains of the spirit and mind are broken and the domination of technics over man and human mind is finally destroyed.

GERMAN CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW

BROKEN CONTACT

BOOKS dealing with the problems of insanity, when they seem good, are always welcome for the light they throw on the mystery of the human mind. The thing that is so formidable, to us supposedly "sane" people, in mental disturbance is our inability to "make contact" with the disturbed persons in rational terms. To find what we think to be "reason" completely irrelevant is not merely frightening—it shakes the ground of human intercourse.

The fear of Communism, or communists, is very like the fear of insanity, for Communism rejects the commonly accepted norms of human relationships—the traditional values of Western civilization. Moral contact is broken. The communists claim, of course, that these values are no more than hypocrisy—tools of astute exploiters—and propose a counter-morality which takes absolute guidance, in theory, from what is called "Class Interest," but which works out, in practice, to be the interest of the State, or the Party. Further, Communist policies are almost boastfully Machiavellian, and this, again, is a source of terror to the West. Consistent *pretense* to traditional values we more or less expect—more or less accept, unfortunately—as a familiar method of the politician. Pretense to morality we can understand, allow for. The pretense is a back-handed acknowledgement that morality is important, and we take reassurance in this.

The pretender's use of morality seems at least half convinced that morality is a good thing—or would be, if it could be made "practical." Not so the Machiavellian, who regards the psychological influence of a moral idea simply as a weapon. He is not interested in the *content* of the idea, but only in its influence. Not the vindication of moral ideas, but the attainment of historical ends—ends to be reached by political power—this is what the communist seeks. His methods, therefore, strike terror into the hearts of those who, for good or

bad reasons, do not wish to abandon the canons of traditional morality.

A century or so ago, the insane were locked up in prisons and treated like wild animals. Naturally, they became wilder and wilder. Then, through the efforts of a handful of courageous reformers, a beginning was made toward establishing human contact with the insane. Eventually, the principle was formulated that an important part of the treatment of the mentally ill is to regard them *as if* they were sane—or, more accurately, really *human*. Let them feel that the human contact is there, always there, patiently waiting for a new connection.

Students of the mind pursued explanations of how the contact came to be broken. What are the weak points in the armor of sanity? The entire psychiatric vocabulary is one result of attempts to answer this question. Sometimes the answers emphasize the personal situation, sometimes the social situation. Ordinarily, one would not expect a study of mental aberration to end in scathing indictment of our civilization, yet this is often the case. It is necessary, perhaps, for a man to experience confinement in a mental institution in order to understand the terrible although "impersonal" role of society in the perpetuation, if not the creation, of insanity. Harold Maine's *If a Man Be Mad* (now available as a 25-cent Permabook) records the vision of a man who regained his sanity in spite of society, although with the help of one or two of those rare doctors of the mind who try to deal with the sane element in their patients.

But to what world shall the disturbed individual return? What, really, is recovery for the man whose sickness was in some measure only a flight from ugliness, cruelty, and hate? Fritz Peters, in *The World Next Door*, presents the inward soliloquy of a patient—an unusual patient, to be sure—in a mental institution:

Was I now beginning to believe in my delusions? Retreating into a world which did not really exist as an escape from the real world of society

which I hated, feared, distrusted and condemned? Or was this a fight against that corrupt and seemingly insane society . . . a society in which wars, insane asylums, prisons, electric chairs, concentration camps, courts of law, were accepted as logically and humanly inevitable?

The questions seemed to take a physical shape, spinning around in my brain. . . but the whirlpool in which they were contained was a separate and special compartment, not my mind. . . not the mind or heart which had been mine before I had ever come here. Now I had a second self, intruding upon whatever it was that had been me, contained in the terrible, chilling shadow of this illness—for it was that which ate into everything, corroding and rotting. Whatever you knew, whatever you felt, whatever you were. . . once you were there. . . was suspect, unreliable.

The really desperate test of modern psychiatry, surely, is in its efforts to help men of this sort—to whom, in lucid moments, such reflections come. With what, in the world, are such men to regain contact? Should doctors of the mind become apologists for asylums, prisons, electric chairs, wars—the entire bill of particulars in the indictment of our time? It seems obvious that such a patient has to regain contact with his own vision of human and social possibility; he cannot be "sanely" reconciled with the world as it is.

Quite evidently, genuine sanity means the ability to walk the razor's edge between cultural and personal delusions. True adjustment is not adjustment to the *status quo*, but adjustment to one's own ideals—adjustment, even, to the charge of being "crazy."

It is no wonder that, in a world where asylums, prisons, electric chairs and wars are tolerated and even approved as necessary by all but the very few, there should be practically no effort to regain contact with those whom we regard as subject to political delusions—men such as the communists. To regain contact with a man, you have to assume that he is human, that he is *like yourself*, and this, for most people, is a wholly repugnant idea so far as "communists" are concerned. Further, there is the assumption of

"incurability" to contend with, and the complicating fact, seldom admitted, that the non-communist world has some rather monumental cultural delusions of its own. The Communist delusion has become rigid through institutional definition and support; it is not just a materialistic social philosophy, but a brutally enforced Party Line. This, we say, makes the situation entirely hopeless, so we hunt out communists as though they were wild beasts. To try to "make contact" with the communists would of course be both discouraging and extremely unpopular. It would mean patient, rational analysis of Communist doctrines in their least delusional form, admitting facts when they are encountered, disputing misstatements without emotion, and, finally, in all ways exhibiting a high regard for the moral standards which the communists reject as hypocritical. Are we ready to adopt this program, or to tolerate those who do? Yet to follow any other course is to make tacit admission that the communists have some "right" on their side.

It takes years, sometimes, the psychiatrists tell us, for personal delusions to exhaust themselves—for the individual to recover the management of his life and to stop being jerked hither and yon by distorting compulsions. How much longer, how much more difficult, in the case of cultural delusions which afflict entire populations? Some superhuman breed of psychiatrists is required for a treatment of this sort! And we have hardly begun with a diagnosis, much less moved toward a cure.

What *are* cultural delusions? On this subject, we suggest a reading of *The Devil in Massachusetts* (Knopf, 1949) by Marion L. Starkey. Here is a collective "case history" of the Salem Witch Trials which came at the close of the seventeenth century. It is a nightmare tale of righteousness run amok. The two daughters of the Puritan pastor of Salem, Massachusetts, nine and eleven years of age, together with some of their companions, suddenly fell ill in a way that left no doubt to the Devil-fearing as well as God-

fearing villagers that these children were victims of witchcraft. The girls succumbed to convulsions during family prayers, brayed like donkeys and barked like dogs. Importuned to name their unnatural persecutors, they accused a Barbados slave of the pastor, who, apparently, had been telling the fortunes of children in nightly sessions in the kitchen—a strictly forbidden pastime. Finding themselves grown "important," the children charged other members of the community with sending their "shapes" to obsess and torment them. Meanwhile the infection of the children spread to other households until nearly every quarter of the village had its juvenile victims of the "black arts." Salem became a spectacle of bewildered and terrified piety. Testaments were examined, learned accounts of similar bewitchings pored over. Then the Puritan elders planned a course of action, their resolve to do impartial justice equalled only by their conviction of the reality of such diabolism. God himself had made their duty plain: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." As Miss Starkey says:

. . . however reticent the Bible might be about the details, there could be no doubt about God's will on the subject, nor was there any doubt in the minds of most intelligent people in Massachusetts as to the reality of witchcraft. Their belief, rooted in the folkways of old England, was powerfully reinforced by the conspicuous place occupied by the Miltonic devil in the Puritan cosmology. To doubt the devil was a blasphemy on par with doubting God Himself, and to deny acts of malefic witchcraft was to deny the devil.

Even the accused believed thoroughly in witchcraft, but did not believe it of themselves. One curious thing, however, about the Puritan approach to "sin" even the extreme sin of witchcraft—was its tolerance of the *confessed* sinner. Unlike some European witch hunts, the New England hunters forgave the confessed witches. The ultimate wrath of the Lord was reserved for those who insisted upon their innocence, and many did insist upon it, even when it meant almost certain death.

How do you tell a witch? The Salem experts developed startling infallibility in this department. A witch, they explained, may have a "devil's mark" on her body—making any natural excrescence or growth ground for suspicion. Then, if a person had at some time suffered misfortune after a quarrel with the accused, this, too, was regarded as evidence. The villagers racked their memories to compile histories of spiteful differences among their neighbors, and the odd "coincidences" of disaster that might have followed. Charges, after all, must be supported by "facts." But what really sealed the fate of the "witches" was this:

. . . by far the most important principle accepted by the magistrates was the premise that the devil cannot assume the "shape" of an innocent person, the admission of so-called "spectral evidence." Thanks to this arrangement, hallucinations, dreams, and mere fancies would be accepted in court as factual proof not of the psychological condition of the accuser but of the behavior of the accused. This was, as many good men and women were to discover, the sort of "proof" against which there is no disproof. Let an accuser say, "Your shape came to my room last midnight," and the accused had no defense at all; no conceivable alibi can be furnished for a "shape," one's airy substance.

A final test brought accuser and accused face to face, obliging the latter to place his hand on the demented child. If the child quieted, this was "proof" that the obsessing devils had been "recalled" by the "witch."

The persons, mostly women, charged with witchcraft—many of them respected members of the community—were at first amazed and indignant. Gradually, they came to see their doom, unless *they would confess*. A jury which in one case exonerated a "witch" was sent back by the judge to "reconsider." First accused, then feared and hated, then condemned, they died in dignity and courage on gallows hill, nineteen in all, a few men among them as "wizards," protesting their innocence to the end.

There is a distinction to be made between the Salem Witchcraft Trials and similar trials conducted in Europe. In New England, among

the dissenters, Doctrine and Conscience were the rulers, rather than a powerful church institution. It was the people themselves who started the witch hunt, and eventually they realized that they had started something they could not stop. No one knew who would be next accused by the hysterical children.

As the logic of the trials matured, its consequences became unbearable. Finally, the governor took a hand, releasing all the suspects, who then numbered 150. In later years, most of the main figures of the trials, unlike an infallible Church, acknowledged their mistake. Even the little girls, grown to women, asked forgiveness, and the relatives of the executed women forgave. An important witness for the prosecution confessed:

"We walked in clouds and could not see our way. And we have most cause to be humbled for error. . . which can not be retrieved."

The delusion had passed, or at least lost its virulence. Were these most righteous and respected leaders of Salem Town *sane*? They were sane enough by the reference-points of sanity in their time. Is there a parallel here with Edmund Burke's rhetorical admission: "I do not know the method of drawing up an indictment against a whole people" ?

We need, perhaps, instead of revelling in our superiority over the deluded Puritans, to study the assumptions which made their fear so great. They were assumptions about God, about man, about the way to good and the elimination of evil. They were assumptions which forced an entire community to *break contact* with an unhappy few of its members. Can we not say that the religion of these people drove them mad; that any like assumptions—like in exclusion and condemnation—will, when put to final testing, drive other men mad with equal appearance of service to the Most High ?

COMMENTARY THE PSYCHIC FACTOR

R. L. MEGROZ, in his book, *The Dream World*, makes the interesting comment on Freudian psychologists that they tend to ignore evidences of supposedly supernormal faculties when they encounter such things in clinical experience or research. He gives the instance of a group of American Indians who had distinctly prophetic dreams—events predicted in the dreams later happened—yet the Freudian who studied this series of dreams did not even mention the prophetic element in his analysis.

Lest we be guilty of similar neglect, it should be noted that Miss Starkey, in describing the behavior of the little girls who precipitated the witchcraft "craze" on Salem, Mass. (see Review), remarks that some of their reports to the prosecutors could be explained only by the hypothesis of "second sight." She does not enlarge on this suggestion, being herself mainly interested in a psychiatric interpretation of the whole affair; nevertheless, to know that apparently supernormal phenomena is any way accompanied the disturbance at least helps to explain the bewilderment of the orthodox New Englanders.

It seems natural enough that "psychic phenomena" should occur in connection with what the ancients and the people of the Middle Ages regarded as "magical" happenings but which present-day psychologists have renamed extra-sensory perception, precognition, telekinesis, and the like.

Should this prove to have been the case, the entire history of witchcraft, from ancient times until the eighteenth century, will have to be rewritten with consideration of the supernormal factor. A vast mass of source-material will have to be re-examined, and a number of excellent books, so far ignored by conventional historians, will receive special attention. First of all, the works of Iamblichus, the Neoplatonist philosopher and writer on theurgy, will no longer

be classed as metaphysical nonsense and a superstitious drag on the development of Western civilization. Ennemoser's *History of Magic*, a treatise based on Anton Mesmer's discoveries, William Howitt's *History of the Supernatural*, and H. P. Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled*—the two latter works including discussion of the phenomena of nineteenth-century Spiritualism—all dealing with psychic manifestations in terms of an underlying reality not then admitted by modern science, are among the studies which may be used to gain a new understanding of "psychic" events, both past and present.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

A. GORDON MELVIN'S *Education, A History* (John Day, 1946), has so many excellent features that it may be considered worth the attention of every teacher, especially if it be recognized that any abbreviated summary of the contributions of great educators must be intended by a conscientious author as the basis for further study. We have come to the conclusion that the more histories of education the better, providing the author is not an apologist for one or another sectarian viewpoint, for educators are usually men of aspiration, men who seek to utilize whatever "truth" they can find, regardless of its pedigree. Education, it may be said, is a field that is not a field; that is, education is not really a specialized calling. The philosopher, the psychologist, the sociologist, and the religionist may be "specialized," but the educator cannot limit his horizons to any single region of ideas.

Dr. Melvin is but one of the thousands of teachers concerned with "moral education," yet, unlike an apologist for one or another form of traditional Christianity, he sees moral education as the exercise of reason in respect to ultimate issues, or, in other words, as the practice of philosophy. He begins with a consideration of the elements of educational greatness to be found in cultures radically different from our own. The book's keynote is contained in a single sentence: "The thoughts and writings of ancient teachers are in the background of every great civilization."

Dr. Melvin first takes us back to China of the seventh century B.C., examining the implications of the teachings of Lao-tzu. He selects for quotation this passage from the great book of Taoism, the *Tao Teh King*:

Says Lao-tzu, "The holy man abides by nonassertion in his affairs and conveys by silence his instructions. . . . He quickens but owns not. He works but claims not. Merit he accomplishes, but he does

not dwell on it. Since he does not dwell on it, it will never leave him."

"When one acts with nonassertion there is nothing ungoverned."

"The holy man puts himself behind and he comes to the front. He surrenders himself and he is preserved."

"To accomplish merit and fame, then to withdraw oneself, this is the Tao of Heaven."

"He that makes, mars. He that grasps, loses. The holy man does not make, therefore he mars not. He does not grasp, therefore he loses not. . . . He assists ten thousand things in their natural development, but he does not venture to interfere."

Dr. Melvin apparently has a particular appreciation for the Chinese philosophy. He turns to Confucius for more on the subtle morality of "non-interference":

To understand and appreciate Confucius we must realize that he was not so much a systematic philosopher as a systematic liver. Although he had codified existence in general terms, yet he had the amazing gift, almost entirely missing among Western sages, of taking into consideration in his judgments the special time of an event and the unique circumstances of the moment.

For example, on one occasion he asked a group of his disciples this question: "If you were given a position of authority or were free to do exactly as you liked, what would you do?" Two students wished to get some disturbed state in order. A third wished to be letter-perfect in rites and ceremonies. The fourth student looked pensive as he sat on the grass in the sun, idly playing his lute. When his turn came he said, "It is the beginning of spring. I want to get rid of my heavy winter clothes, run with a crowd of boys and men, bathe in the river Yi, and come home singing." The expected rebuke from the master did not follow. Instead Confucius sighed and said, "That's just the way I feel."

This, as those familiar with the Chinese tradition know, is not an emphasis on hedonism, but rather an urging that the aspirations for power and popular esteem, so common in the Western world, should be supplanted by the ideal counsel that no one should seek what is not really "necessary." Confucius might himself have served

to get some "disturbed state in order" and have been wise and just in a position of high authority. *But these things he did not seek.* This, perhaps, is at the very heart of moral education. For a genuine concern for one's fellows is not expressed by an ambition to manage or improve their lives according to an egotistically evolved plan. Rather, Confucius says, depart from one's own simple and reflective life only in response to a pressing need. Another point of emphasis worth noting occurs in the section, "Education of Athenian Youth." Dr. Melvin feels that "Athens could guide America" in respect to the discipline of the body, with a type of training that fits perfectly with the Taoist ideal:

It is tempting to believe that the Athenians had a dearer knowledge of the true approach to character and learning through the body than we possess today. With our inheritance of over-intellectualized Greek culture, coming to us weighted with medieval scholarship, we have lost what is probably an important key to education. This is the awakening of the young through physical and spiritual alertness, through a fairly developed body, and the foundation of character development in the wisdom of great men. The Greeks had a glimpse of what Emerson beheld in clear vision—men like gods.

To attain such unity in a public school in America, the melting pot of so many peoples with conflicting customs and beliefs, is impossible. What a great contribution could be made toward unity if an experimental school could be established by some group, supported by a foundation, to work out a program which would secure the best values of the Athenian school.

Health and grace of body would become then means to normal emotional life and the development of personal talents through creative expression. The goal would be the person, fully developed in body, soul, and spirit.

Such was the education which preceded the Periclean Age. We are prone to think of the greatness of Greece as a product of the teachings of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. This is incorrect. These philosophers have taught every civilization from the time of the Greeks till now, but the Periclean Age was their source, not their product. They were too late to prevent the downfall of their own civilization.

For those who would like information as to the specific content of Dr. Melvin's survey of education, we should mention that he offers excerpts from and commentaries upon Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Martin Luther, Comenius, Pestalozzi, Herbart, Froebel, Herbert Spencer, Francis W. Parker, A. Hornbook, Carleton Washburne, Flora Cooke, Marietta Johnson, and John Dewey. This author attempts to synthesize rather than to argue for a single line of educational theory.

FRONTIERS Concerning the Arts

FROM time to time, readers ask why *MANAS* does not give more attention to the arts. It is true that the arts receive little discussion in these pages, save for occasional references of a general character. The difficulty is this: except for a very small number of people, the fine arts of today are "specialties" requiring a particular background and vocabulary in even an attempt to understand them. The arts, as currently practiced, are not universal forms of expression, but undertakings which tend to reflect the whim of the coterie, and, as often as not, delineate the frustrations of the creative spirit rather than its positive affirmations. It is possible, perhaps, for there to be a Walt Whitman of the pencil and the brush, but so far as we can see, the "raw materials" for this sort of artistic interpretation are simply not available in the present-day world.

Our theory—obviously, there is a theory involved, here—is that the arts are dependent upon the flowering of a culture or civilization. The artist is not a distinct and "separate" individual, but a social person who needs both tangible and intangible forms of nourishment from his contemporaries, if his abilities are to gain worthy fulfillment. The artistic cult or coterie and the patronage of the wealthy and sophisticated are poor substitutes for a genuine cultural environment to support the artist. The rich, when they are only rich, have even less understanding of life than the poor, causing them to pursue merely imitative modes of behavior in the name of "culture." This brings to the artist, if he would "please" the rich, an economic compulsion to hypocrisy, and nothing is more destructive of the creative impulse than the practice of insincerity.

There are of course exceptions to this pattern. Even in a decadent society there are always artists whose talents are great enough to ignore "styles" and "fads," and whose private integrity breaks into people's hearts, establishing a flow of true

appreciation. Nicolai Fechin, it seems to us, is such an artist (see *MANAS* for March 26), and there are doubtless a number of others with whose work we, not being specialists in the field, are not acquainted. But the "right" situation for the arts, surely, would be one in which this kind of relationship is the rule rather than the exception. Meanwhile, in our civilization, the almost instinctive rejoinder to a young man or woman who wants to be an artist is, "You'll have a hard time making a living that way." The comment is accurate enough, but irrelevant to the meaning of being a real artist. It is a judgment, therefore, not of the arts, but of our time.

What is the function of the artist? His highest calling, it seems to us, is to suggest through form and color those relationships in life which need to be understood. A picture, we say, is more than a photograph. A photograph lays siege to some fragment of reality, but a picture somehow connects the part with the whole. Meaning has to do with the "wholes" which are implied by parts, and the painter, the artist, has opportunity to provoke the imagination in the direction of wholes by the way in which he portrays the fragments of life.

The artist, therefore, is a man with a theory of meaning, and a man with a particular kind of skill in representing his theory. An angry, contemptuous theory of meaning produces angry, contemptuous art, and when the artist is very skillful, a certain fascination attaches to his work, however limited or "negative" his inspiration. Further, the artist who works in a culture which is filled with disappointments, frustrations, and self-pity may easily gain a following for dramatic portrayals of these familiar emotions. Some artists feel that their duty lies in this direction. We give back, they say, what is given to us. They do not try to break out of the vicious circle, but only to reveal the miserable meaning of the circle. This could be called the doctrine of reform by self-conscious revulsion. For at least a generation, entire "schools" of art have been forming around

ideas of this sort. (See *Axel's Castle*, by Edmund Wilson.)

There is also the view of the artist as liberator. The great Renaissance painters sought the rediscovery of man. Their paintings, often of "religious" subjects, betray an ineradicable tendency to schism. The outer, "formal" symbolism of religious paintings is other-worldly, mournful, frequently announcing the weakness and dependence of man. But the robust, buxom, and earthy figures of Renaissance art proclaim the goodness of life and the fertility of earth. The art of the Renaissance broke out of the effete symbolism of the Church as a vigorous athlete might burst through the restricting conventions of the ballet, making his muscular splendor riot all over the stage.

This bouncing Romanticism eventually wore itself out, for as the world became surfeited with individualism—as the "soft, round flesh" of peasant girls dressed up like angels ceased to declare any new meaning—deeper or more abstract significances were sought by the artist. This, incidentally, is the burden of Ortega y Gasset's brief essay, *The Dehumanization of Art*. But to what scheme of symbolism, what new theory of meaning, could the artist turn? Some found satisfaction in experiments with technique—in the manipulation of "light" in their pictures. Others reflected upon the idea of "form," and attempted to introduce non-objective dimensions into their paintings. It was as though some secret of life, some alchemical mystery, lay hidden in the artist's soul. He wanted to square the circle, to unveil the perpetual motion that is lost whenever anything concrete comes into being.

Unlike his Eastern brother, the artist of the West had no sacred tradition to draw upon. The seven hells and seven heavens of Buddhism afforded the Western painter no traditional form of inspiration. It was as though a heavy destiny, a herculean labor, had been given the Western artist by his time. He was to forge the forms of his inspiration for himself, from the chaotic, ununified

culture of Europe and America. The West had found unity only in clots, in brash *tours de force*, and sundry imperialisms.

Only architecture, perhaps, in the United States, has had craftsmen equal to representation of the temper of the age, for architecture is close enough in practical function to the lives of human beings to reflect their spirit directly. The more abstract channels of artistic expression turned inward, exploring a "subconscious" that needed, more than anything else, replenishment from the conscious, for the inner life of man has been starved for centuries.

What, then, shall the artist do? We have no answer to this question. The artist, like the rest of us, is a captive of the collective impoverishment. All he can do, like the rest of us, is to work for the enrichment of the world in the broad terms of human understanding. Great art, it seems to us, requires the evolution of a generous and articulate vocabulary relating to common human feelings and aspirations. The artist is not an island unto himself, he is no persecuted initiate, but a victim—more sensitive, perhaps, than the rest of us—of the general malnutrition of the spirit.

The artist, however, should be one equipped to understand, a little better than the rest of us, our extraordinary need for profound psychological philosophy, for works of the imagination which will fill the void left by the dying out of ancient myths, and for a serene faith—a faith like Tolstoy's—in the spirit and dignity of man. It is the artist who, with the help of the rest of us, must resolve, as Shelley said,

To love and bear, to hope till hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates.