

## WHAT IS MAN?

THIS one query, this single focal point of ignorance, is the basis of every facet of man's life which is not purely a matter of physical necessity. Metaphysics, religion, ethics, politics, science, speculative philosophy, creative work in any of the arts, and, as a matter of fact, all other things not directly concerned with food, shelter, or security of species, have been motivated by a basic quest for identity, for a standard of consciousness, for an affirmation of being, and for a defining and a re-defining of the terms of that being.

This quest is a very important, even a necessary, thing to mankind; it is a thing deeply and inevitably ingrained in his consciousness. The quest for identity and definition seems to be an almost simultaneous consequence of the peculiar "awareness" or "consciousness of being" which man feels, collectively and individually.

Just what is this awareness? Where does it come from? Why is it necessary, once the hypothesis of awareness is granted, that the quests for definition and identity must follow?

Rocks have no awareness; at least we cannot conceive of any non-living thing as being conscious of itself. Among living things, we find it difficult to believe that a tree is aware of itself. Then where, along the evolutionary scale, does awareness creep in? Does a paramecium "know" it exists? Is man unique in this respect, or has awareness been felt among other animals for ages? Or, more fundamentally, *was* the appearance of awareness a sudden change, or was it a gradual process? If it was gradual, what can we imagine "half-awareness" to be? Or, for that matter, a "one-and-a-half-awareness" of some future age? None of these questions can be answered, for we can only know what this awareness feels like to ourselves; we cannot even start to define awareness in terms of paramecia, or trees, or

other animals. We can consider our perceptions of awareness, but we cannot consider abstract awareness.

Yet these questions, though unanswerable, must be encountered in any study of man, for it is only man's consciousness, of himself and his world, that permits anything further. Mountains wrinkle in earthquakes, not in laughter or thought. Yet philosophically and scientifically the questions remain unanswered. Biologically, the distinction between living and non-living cannot be drawn with certainty. And we have also the problem of just what we mean by "awareness"; we can define it verbally: we can identify it with "consciousness" or a "feeling of being or existence," but this is no help. Just what do we mean by these words? Can we imagine ourselves without an awareness of ourselves? Can we ever really satisfy ourselves as to just what and why and how this awareness is? It seems rather doubtful that we can do anything more with our feeling of awareness than experience and name it, although it is the most basic feature of our human mentality.

If these elemental problems of human psychology are unsolvable, what is to be the attitude of the investigator confronted with them? He cannot compare his individual feeling of awareness with that of any human except himself, let alone animals, or perhaps plants and inanimate objects. He feels an individual awareness, but he cannot put himself in a condition of non-awareness; he cannot compare his feeling with any contrasting idea. His role would seem to be, then, merely to restate the problem, with a certain view toward possible future development, and to use the observed aspects of these facets of the human mentality as "unexplained explanations" for more extended problems.

Thus he can show that, given the human psychology (even in the limited and partial form in which we know it), awareness implies immediately the quest for definition, for standards, for identity, for values, for ideas, for knowledge; a fundamental feeling of "I exist!" or "I am here!" demands immediately, "*What am I?*" And this problem is rephrased in many ways: "Where am I? Why? How do I know this? *What is this feeling of existence?*"

Or, in other words: "What is man?"

Given the mentality of our species, with some awareness of itself, the quest is invariably toward new spheres of knowledge and consciousness; human awareness involves the drive toward greater and greater awareness. At the same time, we feel a need to know more about this awareness: its origins, its significance, its potential, its nature, its essence. We are eternally involved, and consciously so, in the attempt to define and re-define ourselves and our position. This in itself is an important notion in a discussion of the nature of man: man is an "aware" or conscious being, forced by this fact to explore eternally areas of increased awareness. Man is essentially a questing being, aware of something and therefore looking for more. This gives man a direction, something beyond the static aim of continued existence.

And this hints at a further factor in man's nature: man forever asks himself just what he is, and he is never quite able to answer. But man *is* able, however, to reformulate the question; to reconsider the implications of his awareness, his being; to challenge the gods who give him no peace and no answer. This is the Promethean struggle of life; this is the plight of Sisyphus. We are continually involved in pushing the heavy stone of awareness and questioning up the steep hill of eternal silence; when it gets near the top, it rolls down, and yet it demands to be pushed back up, promising at the same time to roll down again. We seem to get forever closer to whatever it is we're chasing, but, at the same time, we never

quite get there. The fool points to the futility of this paradox and runs away to hide in his self-pitying despair; the philosopher denies the significance of the futility and delights in helping to push the stone to new heights, although he knows that he must some day watch it roll.

But since man has always asked these questions of himself, we might perhaps examine a few of the ways in which approaches to answers (or reformulations of the problems of definition) have been attempted. We have a wide scope here: it is not only philosophy and religion that have taken the dilemma of man's identity as their focus of interest and development. In the arts, too, we find an attempt at fresh delineation of mankind—and in politics, in science, in sociology. Wherever there are men who have even a minute to themselves to look about, and think about what they see, we have a reformulation of the problems, and perhaps certain inclinations toward answers. We ask, "*So what is man?*"

Throughout history, groups have tried to solve this problem by dogma: by an all-encompassing philosophy designed to provide useful and meaningful answers to be readily accepted by a large public. It is this urge toward universal solutions to the problems of meaning which can logically be postulated as the attraction of the religious dogmas, and the reason for their existence and power. Even the Eastern religions are dependent on this human urge for complete answers; although at a quick glance they seem to transcend the problem of the nature of man with considerations of more directly universal matters, the deepest and most profound consideration of the *human* problem in reality constitutes their essence. And although mysticism tends to be far less dogmatic, here, too, is a strong connection with the urge for universal answers to the human problem.

In most periods of history, large groups of people have accepted the particular dogma in question as the definition of the problem which they seek; it is only through acceptance that the

dogma remains dogma. The acceptance of a prevailing dogma in itself means nothing. But the consequence of the acceptance of such a dogma, whether a true or false one at the time, is serious: it involves a growing uninterest in the active frontiers of inquiry. During the European middle ages, the almost universal acceptance of the Christian dogma meant that active reconsideration of the problems of human definition was almost forgotten. Today, too, there seems to be a general lack of interest in problems of human identity, and today, too, we have our dogma. The twentieth-century dogma has two facets, which may, with the advantage of historical perspective, later appear as more one dogma than two.

The first dogma is that of materialism, modified by the excruciating experiences of two world-wide wars within a generation. In the United States, materialism has almost become a new religion. The political leaders of Communist China have apparently succeeded in inculcating a very strong materialist (communist) doctrine, although the emphasis is not yet placed on materialism *for the individual* (consumer goods). We have built in these ways a towering temple of materialism, and, from sheer height, it threatens to topple over and crush the "worshippers" below. Nevertheless, we remain huddled under our lovely temple; it protects us from so many cold winds, so many agonizing realities. Meanwhile, we begin to feel insecure—this is the influence of the world wars. The immeasurable human destruction of so many years of global conflict has had a shattering effect on our lives. We are tormented in a sea of anguished self-doubt. Politically, we have entered an age of instability, of indecision, of suspicion. We do not know where to turn; we are bewildered.

And what effect does all this have on our problem? First of all, materialistic insecurity leads to anti-intellectualism; we distrust the specific area of humanity where we can, justly or not, place the blame for our fears. Secondly, the mere acceptance of such a dogma which, instead of

proposing new "universal answers," declares the questions "null and void" and without point, means the retreat from the fields of active inquiry.

An important objection might be raised here: "Is our situation really so ominous as all that?" On a broad time-scale, probably not, but in relation to our psychic readjustment in the present century, probably so. Although the materialist idea is perhaps not quite the universal dogma that medieval Christianity was, it is of extreme importance in dealing with present-day attitudes.

Our second dogma is really more of an attitude—the attitude of unconscious conformity to an easy indifference. Here, too, we are concerned with a dogma which is far less powerful than the church once was, and it is also (perhaps, anyway) a far less satisfying dogma to most people. However, the people enabled by this attitude to find an easy escape from some rather disturbing realities *are* satisfied merely to be left out of the search, if they can be kept comfortable in the meantime. Because of this, the threat of such a dogma is greater than that of a universal church: in a very real sense we face here the denial of humanity, and the shrinking from the activity to which we are led by the very nature of the human consciousness. There is a potential threat of reversion to a pre-conscious, sub-human mediocrity implied in this new dogma.

And if dogmatic solutions to the problems we face can only result in the denial of the essence of the mentality which poses the problems, the institutions responsible for these dogmas must be rejected. Dogmatic solutions tend to become stifling; they offer a complete set of answers, and this is always dangerous. In their unfortunate attempts to formulate reality in a uniform manner for all mankind, they end by answering nothing for anyone, but, instead, in providing a comfortable ignorance which avoids the jarring discord of jagged truths, they "answer" the problem by falsifying its nature. In fact, it is not only the dogmatic solution which is guilty in this respect: *any* "solution" is dangerous, for it denies, by the

mere fact of claiming to end the necessity for further inquiry, the essential quality of the quest, which *is* human activity.

The quest for meaning and for awareness is then, fundamentally, an individual one. Philosophies which fail to take into account this subjective element are self-destroying in formulating an interpretation of meaning or being. When we puzzle ourselves with a question like "What is man?", we are not asking for scientific data which can be supplied on a mass scale, although scientific considerations must figure in our individual notions of answering ideas. We seek instead subjective value-judgments, poetic and philosophic expressions of belief, religious emotion, intellectual subtleties. And these are all basically individual matters (herein lies the failure of dogmatism). We feel a consciousness and we are impelled to seek progress, however we may see it, along that plane of individual consciousness. A universal impersonal dogma can never successfully fulfill our deepest cravings for meaning and identity.

And because the drive for philosophical identity is fundamentally an individual affair, each person necessarily frames his own standards of consciousness in terms of individual experience; in terms of his particular unique awareness. Awareness, as well as the quest for identity, can be reckoned with only on an individual basis, although both are characteristics of humanity as a whole, for it can be experienced by each human only in a unique and subjective manner. Thus Shakespeare says of man:

. . . All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players.

This relation of mode of definition to subjective and individual awareness can be traced also in a quotation from Socrates. In a speculation on the morality of suicide, he calls man "a prisoner who has no right to open the door of his prison and run away." Of course, neither this statement nor the lines from Shakespeare can be discussed as total philosophies of mankind.

Certainly Socrates would not have identified mankind with the limiting concept of imprisonment by fate or life. Nevertheless, the mere fact that the prisoner is the metaphor indicates something of the relationship between individual consciousness and the terms of the thought process. Socrates himself died a prisoner—and not just a political prisoner.

It might well be argued, though, that the terms found in any given "definition of identity" are dependent on the mentality of the age, the psychology of the era, rather than purely on the psychology of the individual. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for example, refers to man as "a bundle of relations, a knot of roots, whose flower and fruitage is the world." This can be as validly interpreted in relation to Emerson's *world* as in relation to Emerson. A better example would be Rousseau's, "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains." This certainly can be, and usually is, interpreted as a reflection of the essentially liberal (politically, philosophically) outlook of Rousseau's time, rather than as an expression of Rousseau as Rousseau. There is no denying that individual world outlooks tend to be affected by the general "temper of the times," although at the same time, they together *create* this "temper," or dominant outlook.

And besides claiming that era plays a part, many would argue that *space* factors also play a part; thus the work of Rousseau and Voltaire, for example, would not be called only "eighteenth-century in outlook," but "*French* eighteenth-century in outlook." Both these arguments would seem to necessitate an alteration in our hypothesis that development of terms of human definition is related only to individual human awareness.

However, influences of era and locale can manifest themselves only through an individual awareness; Rousseau, for example, reflects an awareness of *himself*, his times, and his country. It is true also that *particular* speculations will influence general outlooks of area and epoch more often and more directly than the other way

around; the individual consciousness remains the basic unit in the formulation of philosophies of meaning and identity. Factors of era and area affect man's awareness, but it is man's awareness, an individual thing, which shapes the terms of reformulation.

The fact that these influences affect man's consciousness points to another aspect of man's nature: his views on himself and the world are profoundly affected by external events and conditions. Dostoevsky, speaking of his life in a Siberian prison camp, says: "Man is a pliable animal, a being who gets accustomed to everything." Bertrand Russell, in a brilliant essay entitled "An Outline of Intellectual Rubbish," makes these statements: "In fact, adult 'human nature' is extremely variable, according to the circumstances of education. . . . There is no nonsense so arrant that it cannot be made the creed of the vast majority. . . there is no limit to the absurdities that can, by government action, come to be generally believed. . . . Give me an adequate army . . . and I will undertake, within thirty years, to make the vast majority of the population believe that 2 and 2 are 3, that water freezes when it gets hot and boils when it gets cold, or any other nonsense . . . . Or course, even when these beliefs had been generated, people would not put the kettle in the refrigerator when they wanted it to boil. That cold makes water boil would be a Sunday truth, sacred and mystical, to be professed in awed tones . . ." This analysis has tremendous relevance to our world, and reminds one of Orwell's *1984*, where the process of imposing on a man's mind the belief that 2 and 2 are 5 is suggested. (All we need do now is show that 3 equals 5 and get together our army!!)

The point of all this, though, is that man's mind, being a pliable and perhaps manipulatable instrument, is necessarily profoundly modified in its thinking by environmental factors, and that if we seek the sources of the terms in which any particular re-definition of the problem of human identity is phrased, we must consider not only the

purely personal factors of human consciousness, but also the changeable patterns of the historical context.

We have seen, then, that the direct basis of our problem is the individual awareness of the human mind. We tried also to indicate the role non-personal factors play in the search for answers, and the terms in which such answer-attempts would be formulated. Our questions, of course, remain unanswered.

What is our "awareness"? An individual, subjective feeling of "being"; beyond this we can say nothing.

"What is man?" A something; a feeling. And beyond this, once again, we can say nothing; and thus we continue to ask, in so many ways:

"What is man?"

## *REVIEW*

### MYTHOS AND ETHOS

DR. HENRY A. MURRAY'S Phi Beta Kappa address for 1959, reviewed and quoted in *MANAS* for Oct. 21, 1959, appeared as the lead article in the *Saturday Review* for Jan. 23, under the heading "A Mythology for Grownups." In this remarkably provocative discussion, Dr. Murray offers a springboard for endless questions concerning a kind of "social science" which has little in common with any contemporary studies. Our previous quotations and comments might be said to have merely scratched the surface.

One of Dr. Murray's points is that all human beings live according to some kind of mythology—are affected in some degree by the prevailing myths of their time—but that our own mythology, so largely unanalyzed, as well as unidealized, is a poor one indeed. For the purpose of the myth, and the root of any ennobling religion, is inspiration. The great nature myths and hero myths of the Greeks, for example, constituted essential elements of their "sociology," supplying an always-moving vision of heroism and creativity, shaping the structure of Hellenic civilization.

As for the present, in the very midst of what Dr. Murray calls "this American paradise of material prosperity," we notice a fundamental social alienation and disorientation, reflected in the works of artists, poets and writers. This is connected with the fact that our myths are fragmentary, divisive and petty. Dr. Murray writes:

The enormous claim of the sensitive, alienated portions of our society—artists, would-be artists, and their followers—comes from want of a kindling and heartening mythology to feel, think, live, and write by. Our eyes and ears are incessantly bombarded by a mythology which breeds greed, envy, pride, lust, and violence, the mythology of our mass media. But a mythology that is sufficient to the claim of head and heart is as absent from the American scene as symbolism is absent from the new, straight-edged, bare-faced glass buildings of New York.

An emotional deficiency disease, a paralysis of the creative imagination, an addiction to superficials—this is the diagnosis I would offer to account for the greater part of the widespread desperation of our time.

Dr. Murray recommends exploration of the means by which a truly new "testament" of "myth" might be brought into being—a testament which would found itself in universal symbolism, on the stories of the human soul itself, rather than upon any of the formal religions:

This statement would differ radically from the Bible inasmuch as its mythology would be consonant with contemporary science: its personifications would all refer to forces and functions *within* nature, human nature.

Also, it would differ radically from previous testaments of the Near East and West—the Bible, the Koran, and the testament of Karl Marx—by describing and praising, with evenhanded justice, forms of excellence achieved by each and every culture. There would be no bowing to special claims, made by any single collectivity, or unique superiority, or divine election, of infallible truth, of salvation for its members and damnation for all others. There would be no ovation for the apocalyptic myth, either in its ancient form—Persian or Judaeo-Christian—or in its modern Communist form: the myth of the inevitable and final Great Encounter between the all-good and the all-evil, resulting in an eternity of bliss for chosen saints or comrades, and death or everlasting torments for the enemy. There would certainly be no acceptance of the need for inquisitions, persecutions, brainwashings, or concentration camps.

In a sense, the world testament would be a parable, a parable of parables, expressive of the universal need for peace, for interdependence, for fruitful reciprocations among those manifold units of mankind which are still proud and quarrelsome, still locked in clenched antagonisms. Its symbolisms would commemorate on all levels the settlement of hostilities between opposites, their synthesis or creative union: man and nature, male and female, reason and passion, understanding and imagination, enjoyable means and enjoyable ends, science and art, management and labor, West and East.

In Dr. Murray's view, there are two mythologies every human being needs—a

mythology which gives a structure to discipline and authority, and a mythology which gives justification for protest, rebellion and independence. No orthodox religion can embrace both myths, for obvious reasons. Necessary protest or rebellion may provide the initial impetus of an ethical idea, but when an idea becomes structured in a creed, the emphasis shifts to authority. Codified religion, then, does not lead to inspiration and is, in Dr. Murray's terms, only a stance of moral self-righteousness. As Murray puts it, a true religion should be "propagated by the alchemy of the aesthetic imagination, in striking parables and metaphors that solace, cheer, or channel our profoundest feelings. A code of morals, on the other hand can appeal only to our intellects and to a few of our more shallow sentiments."

All this provides the context for a "new" sociology—or, perhaps we should say, for an understanding of a kind of philosophical sociology which was distinctive with those ancients who revered myth more than religion. Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* provides, again and again, glimpses of the sort of psychological dynamic which must inhere in the beneficial "mythology"—without which our civilization will never find integration. We need to find "a vision of the Gods"—or the God-like—in human nature. In effect, Campbell provides an elaboration of Dr. Murray's explanation of what a "mythology" of the future should embody:

It is not only that there is no hiding place for the gods from the searching telescope and microscope; there is no such society any more as the gods once supported. The social unit is not a carrier of religious content, but an economic-political organization. Its ideals are not those of the hieratic pantomime, making visible on earth the forms of heaven, but of the secular state, in hard and unremitting competition for material supremacy and resources. Isolated societies, dream-bounded within a mythologically charged horizon, no longer exist except as areas to be exploited. And within the progressive societies themselves, every last vestige of the ancient human heritage of ritual, morality, and art is in full decay.

The problem of mankind today, therefore, is precisely the opposite to that of men in the comparatively stable periods of those great coordinating mythologies which now are known as lies. Then all meaning was in the group, in the great anonymous forms, none in the self-expressive individual; today no meaning is in the group—none in the world: all is in the individual. But there the meaning is absolutely unconscious. One does not know toward what one moves. One does not know by what one is propelled. The lines of communication between the conscious zones of the human psyche have all been cut, and we have been split in two. . . .

The community today is the planet, not the bounded nation; hence the patterns of projected aggression which formerly served to co-ordinate the in-group now can only break it into factions. The national idea, with the flag as totem, is today an aggrandizer of the nursery ego, not the annihilator of an infantile situation. Its parody-rituals of the parade ground serve the ends of Holdfast, the tyrant dragon, not the God in whom self-interest is annihilate. And the numerous saints of this anticult—namely the patriots whose ubiquitous photographs, draped with flags, serve as official icons—are precisely the local threshold guardians whom it is the first problem of the hero to surpass. . . .

But there is one thing we may know, namely, that as the new symbols become visible, they will not be identical in the various parts of the globe; the circumstances of local life, race, and tradition must all be compounded in the effective forms. Therefore, it is necessary for men to understand, and be able to see, that through various symbols the same redemption is revealed. "Truth is one," we read in the Vedas; "the sages call it by many names." A single song is being inflected through all the colorations of the human choir. General propaganda for one or another of the local solutions, therefore, is superfluous—or much rather, a menace. The way to become human is to learn to recognize the lineaments of God in all of the wonderful modulations of the face of man.

With this we come to the final point of what the specific orientation of the modern hero-task must be, and discover the real cause for the disintegration of all of our inherited religious formulae.

## *COMMENTARY*

### **MORALS AND PHILOSOPHY**

SOME readers, perhaps, like your editors, will find an element of anticlimax in the quotations from Marcus Aurelius in this week's *Frontiers*. But almost inevitably, with this reaction, will be mixed feelings. Marcus has a power. In the frame of his own thought, whatever he says glows with a certain moral magnificence.

What troubles us, no doubt, is the fact that no one—or almost no one—no one we know of—could write like that today. The example for an ideal sort of thinking is chosen from another age, and it is this which irritates a little; certainly not the excellence of Marcus Aurelius.

Marcus is a moralist. His values are fixed, his meanings clear. He moves in a world of familiar values and his genius lies in the manner of leading the reader on from association to association to some ennobling conclusion.

Since Marcus' time, we have had Christianity, Darwin, Freud, Marx, and nuclear fission—and all their ramifying effects. We have doubts which left Marcus untouched; and we have few of his calm certainties. We cannot help but honor the temper of his reflections; but for the destinations which he reaches, we may have only some envy, or a measure of historical nostalgia.

This is not a time in which moralists can flourish, unless they are partisans of single dramatic issues, like the issue of world peace, or the issue of the population explosion, or the issue of mass conformity.

The thorough-going moralist speaks out of the implications of some majestic world-view for which there is common assent. The modern world has no such world view, and is not likely to acquire one in the near future. Today, holistic moral expression is either presumptuous or partakes of actual genius.

The more constructive labor, today, is toward the primary philosophic end of creating a world-

view upon which acceptable moral judgments may be based. This is a time for questioning, for wondering, for seeking the means to the sort of conviction which made possible the high ethical temper of a Marcus Aurelius. Our lead article for this week might serve as an illustration of such inquiry. The foundations of morality are more important, after all, than any of the insights, however excellent, which issue from them. It is our sense of this truth, probably, which disturbs when we came upon the quotations in *Frontiers*.

# CHILDREN

## . . . and Ourselves

### THE BEST ON DELINQUENCY

BAD BOYS, BAD TIMES, by Irving Sarnoff (*New Republic*, Jan. 18), offers some of the most effective comments on "delinquency" that we have ever seen. Partly because of its brevity, the Yale psychologist's piece might be especially useful in high school "social studies" discussion.

Dr. Sarnoff moves directly to point out the hypocrisy of our professed devotion to Judeo-Christian ethics. In the following paragraphs he deals with the unresolved conflict between Christianity and the Freudian account of behavior:

Since, as compared with the past, our competitive strivings have fewer constructive and impersonal outlets, they are becoming an increasingly destructive force. Instead of using our strength and ingenuity to subdue intransigent nature, we stand pitted against each other. This interpersonal struggle pervades all aspects of our lives and fills us with restlessness. Whatever we have already earned or accomplished is insufficient. We feel that we must show constant increments, not only to express our own limitless notions of success but also to keep from being surpassed by our competitors. Even in the cloistered confines of our universities, the guiding principle for an academic career is "publish or perish!"

In spite of our renowned friendliness and sociability, the atmosphere of our work-a-day world is charged with envy, callousness and distrust. Of course, our conventional Judeo-Christian ethics still preclude too open a display of hatred and jealousy; and we make the adjustment by "selling" ourselves in terms of a genial cordiality. Yet, dissimulation only diverts our anger into such devious, but no less damaging, forms of expression as insanity and psychosomatic illness.

While our children are subject to the same competitive pressures, they have less guile, less patience, less resistance. When they aim to go forward someone is likely to get pushed out of their way. It is true that their games and their schools provide fairly safe methods of competing and of siphoning off the hostility which competition arouses. But even in the most genteel form of competition, it is

impossible, by definition, for the majority of children to be successful. And when successful competition is so universally cherished and encouraged, failure may appear intolerable.

It is a testimony to human endurance and flexibility that so many of our children do manage to "adjust" to this situation. That is, they evolve a repertoire of compromises which prevents them from becoming excessively defiant. Some children however, cannot achieve this delicate balance. They resort instead to extreme types of compensatory devices, one of which involves aggressive behavior.

This, we think, accurately describes one transformation that is taking place in the youth-psyche of the world. As Joseph Campbell has pointed out, the great world religions "as at present understood" offer little help, "for they have become associated with the causes of the factions, as instruments of propaganda and self-congratulation." Toward the end of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell says:

And this is not a work that consciousness itself can achieve. . . . The whole thing is being worked out on another level, through what is bound to be a long and very frightening process, not only in the depths of every living psyche in the modern world, but also on those titanic battlefields into which the whole planet has lately been converted.

Dr. Sarnoff maintains that we will never come to grips with the problem of "delinquency" until we have conquered our reluctance to deal with controversial social issues:

If my thesis is correct, there may be no significant reduction to the incidents of juvenile delinquency until the cultural ideals which give impetus are altered or counterbalanced. Unfortunately, the ethos of a society is slow to change. It is infinitely easier to tackle some of the blatant manifestations of our basic distress. For example, in passing laws which restrict or forbid the sale of switchblade knives we may feel satisfied that we have taken concrete, if tangential, action. Moreover, we are still recovering from an era characterized by intense fear of ideological unorthodoxy. In the wake of so stifling an intellectual climate, some of us may still wish to avoid coming to grips with controversial social issues. Instead, we may find it more comfortable to limit our discussions to such relatively non-controversial

determinants of juvenile delinquency as old houses and old schools. Finally, many specialists in the field of human relations—psychologists, psychiatrists, educators and social workers—have tended to obscure matters by giving undue weight to the vicissitudes in the emotional development and family background of individual delinquents.

Dr. Sarnoff believes that the American ethos needs some help from abroad, and the steadily increasing number of Americans who visit Europe and Asia with a genuine interest in cultural contrasts—and in the sustaining traditions occasionally encountered—is all to the good. There would also be value in a "reaching back" to the heroic image presented in classical literature, since there is little in our own ethos to sustain a child's natural yearning to transcend the values of a merely acquisitive life. It has often been pointed out that children alternate between naked selfishness and a whole-hearted and sincere generosity which easily embraces various forms of self-sacrifice. Encouragement of attitudes going beyond egocentrism is of importance in education—self-sacrifice not as penance, but as the means to a wider perspective on life. Mr. Sarnoff speaks directly to this point when he indicates that the notably human motivations of a child are frequently sidetracked by the behavior patterns of society:

Picture a child glowing with selfless enthusiasm, a child with a naïve sense of honor, right and goodwill. Such a child is hard pressed to maintain his integrity. Can we really be surprised if some children decide to strike out directly for the prize, to by-pass more complicated or arduous methods of making their fortune? Seen in this light, many of our youthful thieves and burglars are expressing, with a child's forthrightness, the values they see us pursuing. Indeed, we may be witnessing the emergence of a new type of criminal, the respectable racketeer. When brought to justice, he insists with sincerity, like Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux*, that he was only trying to make a living for his family.

## *FRONTIERS*

### Time for What?

MANAS endeavors to make itself a forum for the raising of far-reaching questions—if possible the sort of questions which many people are restrained from asking by the implicit assumptions and prohibitions of the common cultural background. MANAS tries to leave alone matters which gain adequate attention in other quarters and to devote itself to lines of investigation which today are typically neglected.

It is natural, therefore, that we should be reproached occasionally for "ivory tower" tendencies and for exploration of "irrelevancies." The following letter from a reader embodies such criticisms:

. . . the optimism I find in MANAS strikes me as pessimism. We as a civilization and man as a species have not, from all indications, the time to wait for the individual to make a better person of himself. Disaster, I fear, will fall upon us before we are able to arrive at a rational society by this means. Accordingly, I cannot accept as a solution to present problems this going to mysticisms, to abstract religious and philosophical systems, and to personal speculations as to the why and wherefore of it all. . . .

I believe in attending to first things first, leaving God's business to God, Who is well equipped to take care of it—the word "God" here being used quite liberally, equivalent to "evolution" or to whatever may signify energy and matter in the cosmos. Hence my interest in the political and economic set-ups in Russia and China. Perhaps something great may come out of these two experiments; certainly something new is coming, by reason of changes on so gigantic a scale.

I should not like to see MANAS devote too much space—or even any at all—to inform us concerning happenings inside communist (?) countries. Seekers after such information can find it in the *Nation*, the *New Republic*, the *Progressive*, even, sometimes, in the *Satevepost*, and, so help me! in *U.S. News & World Report*, and in the daily papers. I would much rather see MANAS speculate about where Man is headed in this new age of truth about the physical universe. What are we going to do

with this new, naked truth? Will man's ability to reason prove his salvation, or will it spell doom? . . .

At the moment the human race is committing genetic suicide. Can we put a halt to this? Religion is one of the great obstacles to employing reason to guide man's destiny. Can we educate the individuals who, by the power of the vote, control the political present and future of the democracies, to use their political emancipation with reason instead of prejudice? Do we not need a revolution (in total thinking, not violence) to accomplish such a total education in adult and child? . . .

Here I wish to protest the article by June Miller in the Jan. 20 issue. It is sheer nonsense to speculate upon the evil nature of communism as presently exhibited in a nation that only recently celebrated the tenth anniversary of its turning toward communism as a way of life. We must wait at least until the end of the next century before we can form a judgment, here, and even that may still be too early for correctly assessing its worth as a way of life; after all, capitalism has had several thousand years to develop its potentials. . . .

Perhaps we should begin our reply with a discussion of the article by June Miller. There was no pretense by Mrs. Miller that she is an "expert." What she wrote might be described as the result of an unspecialized human being thinking out loud. It is fairly plain that she was not, in this article, echoing any conventional view, but shaping her own conclusions from what she had read about contemporary China. It is evident, further, that she sought (1) to be fair, and (2) to arrive at a moral judgment.

It is important, it seems to us, for people to do this sort of thinking. That is why we published her article. There is no warrant of infallibility for such writing. Everyone who has attempted it knows this. No one ever has the "complete facts" for making a decision. You get as many facts as you can, make your decision, and hope you are right. Then, a while later, you may get a lot more facts. Then you revise your opinion and change your judgment or express it differently. This process goes on eternally and constitutes the flow of the life of the mind.

There was a principle involved in June Miller's judgment. She objected to the ruthless marshalling of human resources for economic ends. There is no particular argument about the facts of the communist *position* in this instance. It is that the greatest material good for the greatest number must determine national decision. Civil rights and other prerogatives of the individual are held to be less important than the total national welfare. The communist ideologist insists that such rights are a "luxury" which a society in the throes of revolution cannot afford. June Miller's article was a measured rejection of the communist view. The argument, therefore, is about the general issue of human ends, and is by no means dependent for its outcome upon the minute accuracy of the "facts" of what is going on in China. The role of facts in such an argument is to illustrate the validity of the principles, but not to *establish* it. The establishment of the principle results from the determination of philosophic value; one then goes to experience for illustrations and applications, to see how the principle works out in practice.

But since the complex scene of human experience seems to submit itself to a wide variety of interpretations, the expectation that one will be able to *prove* the principle in this way is seldom fulfilled. One person recoils in pain from the report of people being regimented and directed like machines, in order to fulfill a production quota; another reads off the totals of achievement as though they were a manifesto of the highest human dreams.

The question still remains: What is the good of man?

Then, for contrast, you read material such as last week's "Letter from India," in which the writer speaks of the absence of "dynamism" in the Indian people, and the relative failure, there, of revolutionary enthusiasm. It is popular, now, to compare China's extraordinary economic progress with India's enormous problems, and to wonder whether some "regimentation" might not be

necessary, after all, for the Indian people. Admirers of China tell about the stirring, upward-and-onward emotions of the Chinese people as they march in step to meet their destiny; only the backward few, they say, resist the tide of progress, remaining indifferent to the transforming feeling of devotion to the common good!

The "facts," we see, are in some measure subjective. If a person doesn't *feel* regimented, is he *being* regimented? If people don't long for "individuality," where is the ruthlessness in denying it in behalf of the social good?

When you get to questions of this sort, you begin to see that only total involvement in the situation at issue would provide acceptable answers; and even then, the answers would be personal; you could not, that is, claim that they would be answers for everyone else. So you return to your first principle and cleave to it, not with more uncertainty, but with a greater generosity of spirit toward those who have embraced other principles.

Let us turn now to other objections by our correspondent. He says that there is not time to wait for individuals to make themselves into better people.

We are not sure we entirely understand what this means. What is the alternative to individual improvement? What is probably in our correspondent's mind as an alternative is some kind of system which will *control* behavior to avert the disaster he anticipates. We shall not pursue this question, since the alternative of political control is precisely what we now have, and it is not working very well. This is the conventional solution, before us, in fact or theory, in many forms. There is the theory of world government, the present half-world fact of a communist empire, the past half-world fact of the British Empire. There is the theory of the American Century, during which the protective hand of American military power is supposed to assure the freedom and private enterprise of all.

It is the competition of rival theories of political control which has brought us to the desperate *impasse* of the present.

Then there is the question, *Why* don't we have time to wait for individuals to improve themselves? It will be said that we may blow ourselves up before the desired development has come about. This would mean that millions of people would be killed.

But death, after all, will come anyway. Effective political control will not give immortality to anybody. Men have been killed by the million in past wars. To say that *we* can't wait means that we are more important than they were—or it suggests that the fact that they were killed turned their lives into some kind of ultimate failure.

Is it true that death is failure—or is it only mass death or extermination in war that is failure?

What counts for the most when a man dies—what he is doing at the time, or the degree of social excellence he has been able to achieve in concert with his fellows? What is the criterion of final value in human life? What are the reference-points by which the good is measured?

Obviously, to say we "don't have time" has very little burden of meaning unless we go on to say what it is that we shall not have time for.

We honor martyrs and heroes. We remember them with reverence and tell our children about them. What had they time for, that we praise their achievement? These questions need to be filled in.

Our correspondent would have us give less attention to "mysticisms, to abstract religious and philosophical views, and personal speculations," yet he would like to have more wonderings "about where Man is headed in this new age of truth about the physical universe." And he doesn't want us to indulge in guessing games about communist countries. Well, we don't see how we are going to reconcile these requirements. The question of whether or not "we have time" depends upon *what we are* and what is the Good for us; and this, we

submit, *is* a mystical, religious and philosophic question.

There is a value in the pursuit of these questions, and they ought to be pursued without embarrassment or apology. Why should not men write today, as Marcus Aurelius wrote nearly two thousand years ago:

In the morning, when thou risest unwillingly, let this thought be present—I am rising to the work of a human being.

Why then am I dissatisfied if I am going to do the things for which I exist and for which I was brought into the world? Or have I been made for this, to lie in the bedclothes and keep myself warm? . . . Dost thou exist then to take thy pleasure, and not at all for action or exertion? Dost thou not see the little plants, the little birds, the ants, the spiders, the bees working together to put in order their several parts of the universe? And art thou unwilling to do the work of a human being, and dost thou not make haste to do that which is according to thy nature? . . .

Marcus also said this:

If thou findest in human life anything better than justice, truth, temperance, fortitude, and, in a word, anything better than thy mind's own self-satisfaction in the things which it enables thee to do according to right reason, and in the condition which is assigned to thee without thy own choice; if, I say, thou seest anything better than this, turn to it with all thy soul, and enjoy that which thou hast found to be the best. But if nothing appears to be better than the deity which is planted in thee, which has subjected to itself all thy appetites, and carefully examines all the impressions, and, as Socrates said, has detached itself from the persuasions of sense, and has submitted itself to the gods, and cares for mankind; if thou findest everything else smaller and of less value than this, give place to nothing else, for if thou dost once diverge and incline to it, thou wilt no longer without distraction be able to give the preference to that good thing which is thy proper possession and thy own; for it is not right that anything of any other kind, such as praise from the many, or power, or enjoyment of pleasure, should come into competition with that which is rationally and politically (or practically) good.

Marcus was his own man from this kind of thinking, which arises from pondering on what is good for human beings, and this is philosophy,

mysticism and speculation. So far as we can see, it is "escapism" to follow any other course.

There is no need to think the same thoughts as Marcus Aurelius thought, but there is a great need for men to recognize the importance of this *kind* of thinking. The freedom we prize is the freedom to do this kind of thinking without prejudice. What good is our freedom if we don't use it? What is "time" for, if it is not for this? What good is a life, when it is not reaching for the possibilities inherent in this kind of thinking and in the conduct to which it leads? The highest value in the entire philosophy of freedom arises from the potentialities of such thought in every man.