

THE BIG QUESTION

THE question which a reader, in a letter, calls the "big question" is not asked by everyone, nor, when asked, is it always regarded as "big," but it is the question to which all human knowledge of religion and philosophy can be traced. The question is, "What about Ethics?", and it does not change very much, through the centuries. What does change is the circumstances under which it is asked. Our correspondent writes of the problem of a man who works in modern industry:

This man unfortunately must earn his living in a company that bases its success on fleecing the government or private business out of an unearned dollar. Misrepresentation seems to be the key. This is big business and apparently indicates the way most big business is run today. What is a man who sees this, yet has a family to support, to do?

A serious regard for "ethics" is often held to be naïve, these days. Recently a man honest enough to quote fair prices to a customer lost his job because, as his sales manager said, "he was just a misfit in the competitive business world." You can say that such a man ought never to have taken such a job, but a man does have to eat and support his family.

How can we avoid "big wars" when "little wars" are being waged all around us? Is the example Christ set for our Christian world to follow so difficult that only a fool or a martyr would attempt it?

There is a lot more to this letter, but the foregoing sets the essential problem. This problem, however, does not become clear without some qualifications and comments concerning the circumstances under which it arises. Are we, for example, talking about the private moral problem of one man, or about the moral aspect of the social situation? Then, to what extent is it true that "misrepresentation" is the key to business success?

The thing to be noted, first, is that these questions cannot be answered with any certainty

except from the viewpoint of sweeping philosophical, social, and moral judgments.

There is obviously a lot of "misrepresentation" in business. Yet this criticism as a universal charge against business would evoke highly indignant response from members of the business community. It is certainly a fact that many businessmen acquire their feelings of self-respect and integrity from the way they do business with other men. Further, there are different conceptions of basic ethical responsibility in different areas of commercial enterprise. The liquor business has one level, the munitions business another, cosmetics still another. It goes without saying that what a businessman does with his time, money, and personal energy reflects in some way his concepts of value. Is his idea of ethical responsibility to be judged or regarded *within* the scheme of his chosen activity, or from the viewpoint of some larger perspective?

Then there is the question of sales promotion and advertising. The engineering department of a large manufacturing concern may do its work in a very different spirit and with quite different ideas of responsibility from the attitude of the men in charge of advertising and selling the product. An engineer is trained in exactitude of statement and precision in work. He may feel considerable contempt for the half-truths of the advertising which is used to market what he designs or manufactures.

If you go very far with this sort of criticism, you soon find yourself drawn into the perspective of some revolutionary philosophy which proposes that there are built-in defects in the competitive, free-enterprise system which compel men to do things contrary to their best moral feelings. And then, if you are not attracted to the revolutionary program—because of another sort of compulsion

which it seems to involve you may find that the only practicable solution seems to lie with the Quaker principle of Right Livelihood, which means choosing a way of making a living which has at least a minimum of undesirable features. It is better, you could argue, to grow potatoes than it is to make bullets. It is better to build houses than it is to build the bombs and bombers to destroy them. People do have a spectrum of choice in the way they make a living.

No choice, it will be said, is "ideal." Actually, whatever a man does, there will be somebody else who can find something wrong with it. The goal, we are obliged to say, is not some impossible, immediate perfection, but constant movement toward an ideal. When it comes to making a living—which is something very difficult to do except under conditions established by other people—the problem of life is obviously both a personal and a social problem. Some men, by reason of their moral vision, personal strength, capacity, and ingenuity, often manage to be freer than others in their decisions. It goes without saying that a society created entirely by men of this caliber would afford much greater freedom than the present society. In such a society, the importance of free moral decision would have primary attention. Care would be taken not to trap any man into work that is morally repugnant to him. But the general sense of values dictating this attitude would come first, long before it was imperfectly embodied in law. It might not even be necessary to make laws about such things, in a society largely composed of men of this sort.

But we do not have that kind of a society. What then?

In the past, men who felt that the existing society intolerably frustrated their moral purposes either emigrated or started a revolution. Men to whom freedom was most important sometimes sought the socially unorganized frontier, preferring the conditions presented by the wilderness to the political, economic, and moral oppressions of a heavily institutionalized society.

Or they formed political parties of revolution and reform, to establish conditions more conducive to freedom.

Today, these alternatives are much reduced. The frontier—in the United States, at least—is swallowed up, and while there may be frontier situations remaining in other parts of the world, modern transport and communications are rapidly turning practically every remote area into a suburb of large centers of population. Furthermore, only a small portion of any given population is made up of people who have the skills and the vigor to survive under wilderness conditions.

What about political revolution? Here, too, the circumstances are greatly changed. We have learned much about the processes and effects of political revolution during the past fifty years. Most revolutions are undertaken in a mood of righteous anger, and while they may institute needed changes, the management of the affairs of a large human population has its own unpleasant necessities which often make the revolutionary rule as oppressive as the regime which was overthrown. Further, a revolutionary government which lacks the strong emotional support of its people must resort to terrorism to remain in power.

Finally, in this matter of revolution, there is the question of a believable revolutionary program. The immediate end of a revolution is to compel some people to do things that they won't do voluntarily, or to stop them from doing things they won't stop doing voluntarily. A political revolution, in short, is useful only for controlling gross and easily definable forms of human behavior. If the revolution is supposed to put into power people who have more pretentious and far-reaching ends, such as changing the character and motives of the population, then it is not a political revolution that is intended, but a religious revolution from which moral regeneration is supposed to result.

For the intelligent man of today, belief in this latter kind of revolution is practically impossible.

He cannot believe that any kind of moral regeneration can follow from the immense destruction made possible by modern weapons. Further, he knows that moral regeneration is a tender plant which never grows by dictation, but only under conditions of freedom.

It is true, of course, that an indomitable individual will sharpen the blade of his determination on the obstacles he has to overcome. Men become great, very often, not by being *made* free, but by fighting for their freedom. So the question of what is the ideal environment is a difficult one to answer. It depends upon the sort of crop you are trying to raise.

Is there anything in nature that can be taken for an analogy of the human situation? Do you want orderly wheat fields, set out over a vast acreage, planned for the convenience of the farmer? Do you want row upon row of fruit trees, properly spaced for efficient irrigation, cultivation, and harvesting? Or will you go to ragged, unpopulated mountain country to study the extraordinary survival of seeds which have fallen into crevices of stone and sprouted in a few particles of dirt? Will you wonder at the centuries which pass while a plant community grows in the widening crack, and after fifty thousand years, with the aid of wind and water, tears down the mountain?

The analogies, while suggestive, all break down when pressed to conclusions. If you try to plan for the ideal community too extensively, along biological lines, you are likely to end with a stockyard conception of human excellence. If you conceive the good society as something that can be realized only by changing other people, you may finally be forced to the decision that it can't be done without Storm Troopers and occasional assistance from an Inquisition or an NKVD.

So we come back to the present and the man with a job he is beginning to hate. There are solutions for this problem, but none of them is easy. You could say that Arthur E. Morgan, one of the most distinguished citizens the United

States has produced, has devoted the entirety of a life of Yankee ingenuity to dealing practically with this problem in all its phases. In 1909, he wrote in his diary:

It is cowardly for people to shirk or deny the responsibilities of life. Every man but the anarchist admits the necessity of some sort of politics; and I have as much respect for the ward-heeler as I have for the man who will call the policeman when his house is broken into, but who abhors politics and advises all decent people to keep out of it.

Every man except the savage buys food and clothes from the storekeeper. I have small admiration for any "godly" man who becomes a preacher because a man cannot be honest in business. So much for the practical life. But I do not want anything to be "practical" to me which does not conform to these other standards—which would not be practical to Christ.

Morgan became a flood control engineer. As a result, he was often employed by municipalities. On one occasion he was offered a job by a community which needed his services for a considerable period. He wanted the job—he had a wife and a growing family—but he was suspicious of what might go with it. He wondered about the integrity of the city officials and what they might ask him to do. Here was the question of economic security versus ethical integrity. He took the job, but at once started to develop a side line, a business of his own. He moved into the town, bought a house, and settled down. Things went about the way he had expected. He worked for the city, and he was eventually asked to do things which would constitute a violation of public trust. So he quit the job with the city and supported himself with the business he had kept going on the side. Dr. Morgan tells about this experience in a pamphlet, *The Economic Basis of Idealism*.

It seems fair to say that a man has to plan for his ethical security at least as much as for his economic security. Well, suppose he hasn't, and finds himself caught? In this case he at least has a lot of company. One thing he can do, even then, is to figure out as well as he can the nature of the

dilemma which confronts him, and how it came about. The traditional solution of revolution is hardly open to him, nor do recent revolutions give much encouragement to think it would work. First of all, he can refuse to pretend, at least to himself, that work involving moral compromise is a tolerable situation for human beings. Then he can start counting the number of people in the world who are caught in intolerable situations and study the causes for their being caught. Having done this, he can start to fight in whatever way is open to him. Maybe he can write a good novel exposing the whole disgusting mess.

There are eye-openers in the lives of men who have found ways of working against the contemptible aspects of modern society—working without hate, but with unrelenting vigor. Arthur Morgan is such a man and he has many works, including his life story, in print. Clarence Darrow is another, and Irving Stone's book about him, *Darrow for the Defense*, is a minor classic. Darrow once wrote:

I determined to get what I could out of the system and use it to *destroy* the system. I have since sold my professional services to every corporation or individual who cared to buy; the only exception I have made is that I have never given them aid to oppress the weak or convict the innocent. I have taken their ill-gotten gains and tried to use it to prevent suffering. My preaching and practicing have ever been the same: I have always tried to show a state and a way to reach it where men and women can be honest and tender. I care nothing whatever for money except to use it in this work. I have defended the weak and the poor, have done it without pay, will do it again. I cannot defend them without bread; I cannot get this except from those who give it and by giving some measure of conformity to get it.

These are the words of a man who studied the human situation and planned a course of his own for improving it. The important thing is not to imitate Clarence Darrow, nor even to approve his course; the important thing is to have a course of one's own and to work at it.

The lesson of the present epoch may well be that the situation will not get any better unless we

personally make it better. But what can one man do? He can do what one man can do, which is always more than he thinks. Ethics is not correct behavior in an ideal situation. Ethics arises from the direction of one's life in *any* situation.

Letter from **GENEVA**

GENEVA.—My friend was giving his reading of the situation following a short first visit in a Communist country. "We must keep in mind," he said, "that the Communist governments have succeeded in providing some real satisfactions for their people." In principle, one must agree: else the governments would not survive. But after (necessarily brief) visits in six countries of Eastern Europe, and a shorter trip through a seventh, the case seems more complicated than I thought my friend implied, though he is a Swiss of major professional stature and sound judgment.

It is true that in some of these countries a very great deal of satisfaction is being built out of very little. Driving along a highway in Poland, we found young people waving something at us. It appeared to be a sort of target design, printed on a cardboard and composed of concentric varicolored rings. It turned out to be the insignie of an official hitch-hiking organization, to which any young person may belong, and which provides, in the absence of vehicular traffic and private cars, a method of making use of all possible space, in cars and trucks, all over the country. The organization provides insurance, protecting both the hiker and the motorist, and the target-sign is an evidence of this, a kind of "character-reference," and an advance assurance that the motorist will be rewarded for his willingness to accept a passenger. The reward is in the form of a book of mileage coupons, offered by the hiker, from which the motorist takes an amount equivalent to the distance of his assistance. At the end of the year he participates in a lottery, based upon his accumulation of coupons, the prizes of which include such items as a car, radios, etc. In a country in which transport is one of the citizen's major frustrations, it would be hard to think up a more imaginative solution for restless young people, without financial resources and otherwise

condemned to remain endlessly in their own communities.

But if there are ingenious successes, there are failures, too. Recently I was talking—while driving privately in my car, I should add—with a scientist in a Communist country. He is a mature and intelligent person, a responsible citizen and one not out of favor with his own government. He said something like this: "Unfortunately, due to our system of government, we scientists are being wasted here. I lecture four hours a week; I have four or five major students under my care; I have some research to do, but it is not politically possible to relate it to the needs or the concerns of my own country. . . . Let me tell you how things are run, here. Last week the Prime Minister and the Minister of _____ came over to the Academy of Sciences, and we were all convened to hear them. The Prime Minister talked for an hour, laying down the line we were to follow, and all the scientists kowtowed and said 'Thank you, sir, for your wonderful leadership,' and they left. So we all went back to our work. Any man with an ounce of sense keeps as far from this government as he can manage."

That doesn't sound very much like either professional or personal satisfaction. How would it look to a serious student, a competent scientist, and an essentially fine human being, to be faced by an endless vista of that sort of thing? Most of us will have real difficulty in imagining what it would be like, much less being able to suggest something to do about it.

Well, what is "satisfaction," anyway? I heard an American talking with a citizen of a Communist country, one day. The American was trying to learn enough to be able to compare reactions of Western and of Communist citizens to some aspects of ordinary life, and was being frustrated by some of the narrowly ideological answers he was getting. "Look," he said, "this is what I mean. The average American has a car, and a radio, and perhaps a TV, but as soon as he gets these things he wants something else; perhaps a

second TV or an outboard motor, or a sailboat. Now, what does the Communist citizen *want?*" The answer was pretty quick: "The citizen of a Socialist state wants to participate in the creation of a Socialist world. He is interested in something really important, not in sailboats!" "Well," says the American, "how do you *know* this?" "Why!"—the clincher—"it's in Marx!" That ended it. You don't always get very far in such discussions.

There is of course some satisfaction in opposing something. This is a widespread human reaction which must be admitted and understood, rather than denied. It may have explained my young Romanian friend who so gratingly denounced capitalism to me one day. But other phenomena are more interesting. We were pursued on a number of occasions in Moscow by good-looking, well-dressed young men who persisted in attempts to buy American money or American clothes from us at ridiculously high rates of ruble exchange. Did they want the money? (For what?) Did they want the clothes? (More likely, perhaps, since quality is very different.) Did they want an association? (Possibly.) In any event, something was lacking in their society, and they were seeking satisfaction, at very real danger to themselves, somewhere outside of it.

I suppose the first and finest wisdom is probably in self-understanding. First we will have to face the question of where our own social satisfactions come from, and rate them upon some scale of maturity and usefulness, before we can determine to what extent my Swiss friend was right in thinking that Communism is succeeding in establishing satisfactions in its form of society.

ROVING CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW

KEEPING UP WITH M. MAYER

WE would probably quote more frequently from Milton Mayer's *Progressive* articles, save for two facts: first, MANAS readers who particularly appreciate this amusing, confusing, and perceptive gadfly have probably already become *Progressive* subscribers; second, even the less-important of Mayer's writings have a kind of artistic balance or symmetry which lends itself poorly to review by way of isolated quotations. However, we do believe in "keeping up with Mayer," and turn to some of his recent pieces, the first being a brief account of the Democratic National Convention which opened in Los Angeles on July 2.

As everyone who reads him knows, Mr. Mayer is not by nature, and could never become, a "Party man." In fact, from the standpoint of majority opinion, he is always so far out that we can hardly imagine him really scaring up votes for anyone more conventional than, say, Linus Pauling or the Reverend Martin Luther King. As a result his report on a political convention is bound to be caustic, full of irony, although at the same time educational. Under the title, "The Big Word Was 'Win'," in the August *Progressive*, Mayer reveals why the counting of votes in either a convention or election is, for him, largely a no-account business:

"A Kennedy-Humphrey ticket," said Walter Reuther before the nomination, "would be a liberal ticket, and a Kennedy-Symington ticket would be a conservative ticket." Brethren, do you begin to get the idea? It is, Win with anything.

After we win, of course—. The editor of our local Republican newspaper is one of the best newspapermen in the business, a Kennedy named Ed. Ed doesn't own the paper, and he will probably find himself pirouetting for Nixon in another month or so. But here is what he says right now:

"Both Kennedy and Nixon are young, highly intelligent, with driving energy, open and friendly on the surface but cold and calculating underneath. Both can be ruthless when necessary. Both have an

impatience with the inferior, with anything second-rate. Both have courage and conviction.

"And above all, both are men of burning ambition, men with unbridled determination to excel."

It is no surprise to discover that next to, possibly, Chester Bowles, Mayer favors Adlai Stevenson. But even here, he is less an unqualified Stevenson supporter than a supporter of some of the youthful energies which made Stevenson a rallying point—for lack, perhaps, of anyone else to so serve. Mr. Mayer puts it this way:

Young eggheads are beginning to stir in America, and it was young people, without free rides, free drinks, and free jobs, who carried the homemade signs for Stevenson, the same young eggheads, including the beats, who are fighting the Un-American Activities Committee, R.O.T.C., capital punishment, and lunch-counter segregation. They are 'way ahead of the conventional Stevenson. But they have to have a symbol for their insistence life is something more than the trough that their parents have made of it. Stevenson can read and write good English, and, unlike the Kennedys, read and write his own. He has the cast of a gentleman and a man.

Mr. Mayer is a great champion of breast-beating and humility for Americans, and usually starts making his point with a bit of "Socratic" self-criticism. What he says about the Democratic National Convention—and we are sure that Mayer's coverage of the Republican spectacle would have presented the other "Party" in no better light—falls into line with the concluding installment of Mayer's recent *Progressive* series of reports on his year-and-a-half tour of Europe. Both in Moscow and in other centers on the "wrong side of the iron curtain," Mayer discovered what he doubtless expected to discover—that provincialism is not apt to be any worse in one place than another. When we are certain that the faults of other persons or other nations are worse than our own, we can see those other persons or nations only as opponents, threatening both our well-being and our "values." Now, when you are afraid of a person or a nation,

you begin to have unpleasant dreams, and these dreams tend to become more and more like nightmares. And what do you do to stop having nightmares? You can try to exterminate your enemies, but you are pretty sure to get worse ones afterwards, since your capacity for nightmaring has been improved by practice. Mayer sums up:

Now nothing needs correction as badly as other people's shortcomings; but one of their shortcomings is their resistance to our good advice. If, however, their shortcomings turn out to be identical with our own, we can correct them by correcting our own. What Communism needs is a shining example.

Our task is to contribute our energies to the dream, so that it will work as well in society as it does in the home and the church. But we are chained fast by the nightmare, and this is where we came in. Unless we can dissolve the nightmare, we shall be able to recognize neither the fundamental good in the evil of the Communist world nor the fundamental evil in the good of our own. Dissolution of the nightmare, not armament, disarmament, technical assistance, or co-existence, is the condition of a detente. The cause of our immobilization has got to be eliminated before we can move at all. . . .

Not to stop sinning, but only to know we have sinned and are sinning; to recognize that we've got it coming to us, whatever it is and whoever presents the bill in whatever form. Not repentance, but confession. Not to change our condition, but only to know it. Is this outside our nature? I think not. And if this is possible to us, then daybreak is possible, and the end of the nightmare.

As long as I see myself sinless and my brother in Russia and China as sinful—as indeed he is—I shall pursue his destruction. I must. I should. Good should not, and will not, willingly co-exist with evil.

When I can see in my brother in Russia and China the good that is in me, and in myself the bad that is in him, I can speak of co-existence without the hypocrisy that he, no less than I, discerns in my oratory.

So, you see, Mayer has a way of getting to the heart of an issue—gaining a hearing from the conscience of anyone who is able to cut through the propaganda in any kind of politics, domestic or international. On another current and related subject, racial equality, we recommend the same

writer. (See the MANAS review of "The Issue Is Miscegenation," Feb. 3, 1960.) Once addressing a church group in Santa Monica, when the "race" issue was touched upon, he said something like this: "You know, I'm not one who believes that Negroes should be treated as if they can do no wrong, and I'm tired of those who are so pro-Negro that they always talk up the Negro every chance they get. In my opinion, and on the basis of my experience, a Negro is not one bit better than a white man!"

COMMENTARY A CRITICAL LETTER

WE have a letter from a reader in Australia who finds grounds in an article in a *MANAS* of a year ago (Sept. 9, 1959) for accusing its writer of anti-Christian assertions.

In it [he says] Christians are identified with that larger section of humanity "in mental flight" who always seek to build walls between themselves and nasty reality. This type of human being, by inference, is the typical member of a church group.

How does this comprehend the great host of Christians of all denominations who, rather than compromise their hard-earned individual understanding of moral law, preferred to die by torture than surrender their intellectual and spiritual integrity?

Today we do not seek to destroy such with racks and stakes amid a pile of flaming faggots. These methods proved unsatisfactory for they only served to demonstrate publicly that in a bedevilled and bewildered world, personal and spiritual integrity was a realizable ambition.

These days we confound humanity by seeking to confuse and distort moral law in slick "highbrow" magazines. But the ultimate aim is identical. The article in the Sept. 9 issue says: 'Jesus felt that if there has to be a church, it should be an instrument to put men on their own.'

Here the writer claims to understand the more subtle personal motives of Jesus, yet elsewhere palpably shows he doesn't even know *what* he taught, let alone comprehend the *meaning* of what he taught.

...

Such letters are difficult to answer, since they involve so many issues. First of all, there is considerable difference between what the churches maintain and what Jesus taught, as most honest and outspoken churchmen freely admit. Second, there is hardly a unanimity among Christians as to what Jesus meant, since there are dozens of creeds with different versions of his meaning. If the differences are unimportant, the creeds are an obvious violation of Christian fellowship; and if they are important, then it is fair

to say that Christians do not agree on important questions of doctrine and faith.

The last quotation cited by this writer from our article, which he finds so presumptuous, was by no means a private interpretation of Jesus' motives, but was found in the chapter on the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevski's novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*. It is possible to challenge Dostoevski's contention, but in doing so one attacks one of the noblest defenses of spiritual religion ever set on paper. Certainly it should not be attacked without a more careful reading by its critic, who in the present case neglected to notice that our sentence was obviously a reading of Dostoevski.

As for the Christians who endured faggot and rack—it was, after all, mostly other Christians who put them to torture and the stake, saying that their victims were not the *true* Christians. We did not suggest in our article that Christian martyrs lacked courage.

The article under attack was concerned with the role of institutions in human society, and offered some discussion of different types of institutions. With the help of a quotation from Laurens van der Post's *The Dark Eye in Africa*, the article indicated that institutions function as buffers between men and the Great Unknown which lies beyond familiar human experience. It went on to suggest that there are two kinds of institutions which have this role—protective institutions and instrumental institutions.

A good example of an instrumental institution is a scientific society. The scientific society is made up of men who are working to extend their and the world's knowledge of the natural environment and the universe around us. It is a body devoted to extending the knowledge that we have. It admits the possibility of total revision of its major assumptions. The members are engaged in search, not declarations of final satisfaction with what they know.

Religious institutions are seldom of this character. Usually, they are the last to submit to cultural change. The proceeds of the Copernican Revolution, for example, were not acknowledged by the Roman Church until 1820, when books teaching the rotation of the earth around the sun were finally removed from the Index Expurgatorius. In 1925, a young teacher was tried in Dayton, Tennessee, for imparting the doctrines of organic evolution to school children. He was convicted.

Religious institutions commonly claim the security of having the Right Answers. They shun the kind of search that would disturb the stability of their claims to final truth. We don't know where the Presbyterians stand, just now, on infant damnation and predestination, but if they have reformed their creed, it has been within the past twenty-five or thirty years.

For some reason or other, critics who read comment such as the above assume that the writer is "against" Jesus. Nothing could be further from the truth. We take the view that vigorous criticism of institutional religion is a way of *honoring* Jesus. It is absolutely incredible to us that this wholly courageous and self-reliant man would have anything to do with the orthodoxies of any of the current forms of Christianity. On the other hand, we have no doubt that countless earnest men and women find through their various religious affiliations some contact with the inspiration that the memory and tradition of Jesus affords. But this fact can hardly stand in the way of candid analysis of social and cultural institutions. That such analysis can still excite determined opposition is ample evidence that it should be continued.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves NOTES ON READING

ALDOUS HUXLEY, in the course of being interviewed by the *Paris Review*, put a question of his own to the interviewer on the subject of creativity. "Why is it," he asked, "that in most children education seems to destroy the creative urge? Why do so many boys and girls leave school with blunted perceptions and a closed mind? A majority of young people seem to develop mental arteriosclerosis forty years before they get the physical kind."

Before Huxley was seventeen, he had read more books than many college professors. Then, struck by an illness that produced almost total blindness, he began to *think* prolongedly about what he had read, conceived an idea for a novel, and typed it out by the touch system. Today, again an omnivorous reader with sight partially restored by the Bates system of eye exercises (see his *Art of Seeing*), this versatile author believes that almost anything one reads can "get the mind going"—if the mind is willing. But you can't really be a reader unless you are also interested in being a thinker. The advantage of reading over TV-watching or movie-going lies chiefly in the fact that even one who takes on a book as a sedative finds himself doing some imagining and some interpretation, and in these activities, the *rudiments* of thought, at least, are involved. In our opinion, one of the saddest things about today's youth is the decline of interest in reading and in relating ideas found in books with the experiences of one's own life.

In a rather weird paperback novel called *A Real Cool Cat*, Jerry Weil lays some ground work for revolt against homogenized culture. The target in these passages is television:

"Hello, Tommy," he called to his son from the doorway.

"Hi, Dad."

"What's on?"

"Rocky Jones."

"Any good?"

"Come on in, Dad. Sit down. But please be quiet."

He entered the room and sat beside his son on the boy's bed.

The bed was against one wall of the room. The set was on his son's desk, facing out from the opposite wall.

"How was school today?" he asked his son.

"All right."

"Nothing new at all?"

"Gee, Dad, can't you see what's happening? If they don't get that gyroscope going pretty soon, they'll end up drifting in space and die out there."

"Sorry, son."

He sat in silence with his son and watched the efforts of strangely-clad spacemen as they attempted to fix their gyroscope. These efforts were interrupted by the commercial.

"So, now let's hear all about school."

"School's fine," said Tommy, absently. He was still watching the television screen.

"How's your reading coming along?"

"Gee, Dad, do you think I could get one of those?"

"What?"

"A magnetic-ray gun. Look! He's showing one now."

"Oh."

"It's fifty cents and you have to buy that chocolate syrup and send in the inside label. Do you think I could, Dad?"

"I don't see why not."

"Gee, thanks, Dad. I'll tell Mom you said it was all right."

"Now then, how's the reading coming along?" the father asked again. But the commercial had ended.

"They'd better get that gyroscope fixed quick," said his son, "or they're finished."

He stood up and walked to the door of his son's room. "I'll go ahead and shave, I guess," he said.

"Sure, Dad," said Tommy, his eyes following the magical movement of light on the screen.

In the bathroom, as he prepared his shaving equipment, he wondered if there were some way he could become a television set for a day or so. Then maybe he could communicate with his child.

Most parents we know find it difficult to resist a child's plea for having an outmoded TV set in his own room. Conscientiously, these parents devise regulations to limit watching and to establish a mild censorship in program selection. So with Tommy's parents in Mr. Weil's book. However: "The terms were easier to set down than to enforce, and Tommy seemed to be watching his little set more and more as time went on. His wife was controlling it all right, but it was the sort of control that always allowed for this or that extra, and the extras had a way of turning into routine. And as more extras turned into routine and other extras were added, it became increasingly difficult to maintain the boy's watching habits within a strictly defined line. Putting that television set in his room was like asking him to spill a glass of water in the center of a table and keep all the water within a certain boundary."

It is of course ridiculous to blame our fundamental cultural, educational and parental failings on a bunch of tubes and wires. But it is possible to point out that TV-watching, or continued absorption in another kind of sight-and-sound entertainment, leads to a dreamlike identification with the characters and events. And while it is far harder to identify with an idea than with what happens on the TV screen, we agree with Mr. Huxley that the intelligent reading of fiction or biography can lead quite naturally to the beginnings of philosophic thinking. Huxley believes that reading is a natural doorway to psychology and metaphysics. As he says in the *Paris Review* (No. 23):

I think one can say much more about general abstract ideas in terms of concrete characters and situations, whether fictional or real, than one can in abstract terms. Several of the books I like best of what I've written are historical and biographical things: *Grey Eminence*, and *The Devils of Loudun*, and the biography of Maine de Biran, the *Variations on a Philosopher*. These are all discussions of what are to me important general ideas in terms of specific lives and incidents. And I must say I think that probably *all* philosophy ought to be written in this form; it would be much more profound and much more edifying. It's awfully easy to write abstractly, without attaching much meaning to the big words. But the moment you have to express ideas in the light of a particular context, in a particular set of

circumstances, although it's a limitation in some ways, it's also an invitation to go much further and much deeper. I think that fiction and, as I say, history and biography are *immensely* important, not only for their own sake, because they provide a picture of life now and of life in the past, but also as vehicles for the expression of general philosophic ideas, religious ideas, social ideas. My goodness, Dostoevsky is six times as profound as Kierkegaard, because he writes *fiction*. In Kierkegaard you have this Abstract Man going on and on—like Coleridge—why, it's *nothing* compared with the really profound Fictional Man, who has always to keep these tremendous ideas *alive* in a concrete form. In fiction you have the reconciliation of the absolute and the relative, so to speak, the expression of the general in the particular. And this, it seems to me, is the exciting thing—both in life and in art.

One need not believe that philosophy's highest expression is in terms of "specific lives and incidents" to recognize the importance of what Huxley is saying and to see that he is talking about a way of reading, as well.

FRONTIERS

"The Group for a Living Peace"

[From time to time, MANAS receives letters from people who want to start a study or discussion group. Often the inquirer will ask for suggestions concerning subject-matter, and also for the names of MANAS readers living in his region who might be prospective participants. MANAS does not give out the names and addresses of its subscribers without permission, and in cases of this sort the editors propose to the correspondent that he prepare a number of postcards announcing his plan for a group and saying how he may be reached by those interested. MANAS then addresses these cards to readers who might be able to attend the meetings of the group, leaving them free to respond or not, as they choose. "The Group for a Living Peace" is a group recently organized in Taos, New Mexico. The chairmanship rotates with each meeting. John Collier, Sr., is the secretary. The address is Box 923, Rancho de Taos, New Mexico. We print here a preliminary statement of the purposes of this group, since it probably articulates considerations and aims which many MANAS readers feel to be of great importance.—Editors.]

THIS group became informally organized at a date prior to the "Summit" and post "Summit" events. A tentative statement of considerations and purposes was there discussed. The statement is here somewhat modified and greatly abbreviated.

1. Humanity's and our Earth's need for avoidance of nuclear and germ and poison-gas war is an overwhelming need—a need absolute, immediate, permanent. The need overrides even the most radical of ideological, institutional, and self-serving differences. Our own people and all peoples are living under a titanic sword of Damocles. The sword could descend in one half-hour's time. It is in our power collectively to lift that sword away. It is our individual duty and personal will to help in the effort on which all future ages on earth depend *here and now*. We quote President Eisenhower's words addressed to the Indian National Parliament at Delhi, December 10th last. Currently, at Manila, he has repeated these words:

Governments are burdened with sterile expenditures, preoccupied with the attainment of a defensive military posture that grows less meaningful against today's weapon carriers. . . . Controlled universal disarmament is the imperative of our time. The demand for it by hundreds of millions whose chief concern is the long future of themselves and their children will, I hope, become so universal and insistent that no man, no government can withstand it.

2. The frustration of the "Summit" and thereafter has indeed been dismaying; yet there was and is nothing final in that frustration. On the contrary, hundreds of millions, in practically every land, are today more conscious of the world peril than they were a year or a month ago, and are better enabled to identify the forces operating toward doom. These forces toward doom are ideological, economic, institutional and bureaucratic; yet even to the heart of the most obsessed of these forces, there now has commenced to enter an inhibiting consciousness of what their own dance of death portends for themselves: since they are members of the human Race and the extermination so near at hand will not leave them aside. We may be nearer to a consensus on the avoidance of death than any of us realize; and now supremely is the time when individual and group effort against death and toward living peace is called for—called for by the living and the unborn and the silent future ages which do awfully beseech us: Let us come into being, let us have our chance on an earth not destroyed.

3. We state the objectives, without here expounding on ways and means. Ways and means will be suggested in future statements. There are practical ways and means toward the attainable end.

Total nuclear, germ and poison-gas disarmament, with the permanent stoppage of nuclear testing as a critical first step; and *total* disarmament, since pre-atomic, conventional warfare, given the technological knowledge and equipments of many governments, swiftly would pass across into nuclear, germ and poison-gas

warfare. We merely mention a strengthened United Nations made universal.

And the more than one hundred billion dollars now being burnt up in preparation for the final fatal war, to be re-applied toward living peace—a living peace world-wide, freed from terror, and very rapidly experienced as economic, mental-hygienic and spiritual gain in our own country and all over the world.

These objectives are not utopian. They are the attainable imperatives of here and now. They are the *minima* without which human and even organic continuance on this our Earth can not be hoped for. And they are within our people's power to have and to give—even within far less of effort than we collectively are giving to the white-heating momentum of the cold war.

Yet not *without* effort, not *without* struggle and pain, are these minima to be accomplished, these goals to be won. We of this small group shall contribute our infinitesimal part to the effort of our Race—the effort whose victory may be nearer at hand than any of us can guess.

CUBAN DEFENSE COMMITTEE

Readers interested in finding out as much as they can about the issues in the controversy between Cuba and the United States may want to request that they be placed on the mailing list of the Cuban Defense Committee. Lawrence Shumm is the co-ordinator of the Committee. The address is Box 7064, Stanford, California. This group candidly supports the revolution led by Fidel Castro. The following extracts from its literature illustrate the view of the Committee:

The purpose of the Committee to Defend the Cuban Revolution is to spread the truth about Cuba and argue for the support of Castro. The committee is non-partisan as we feel that friendship for the Cuban people and their revolution knows no political boundaries. We appeal to all Americans who are no longer willing to see their own government oppose the progress and happiness of other peoples. . . .

The United States now has the choice of either helping the Cuban people and their social transformation and winning the respect of the people of Latin America, or else attempting, directly or indirectly, to destroy the revolution and isolating ourselves even further from Latin America. . . .

But what about "international communism"? Since Castro cannot go it alone and henceforth American help is barred, he has turned to the Soviet Union for help. A man who talks as much as Castro must give utterance to a certain number of follies, but there is no reason to doubt his basic good sense. He is a Nationalist, not a Communist, and presumably he has no more desire to be slavishly dependent on the Soviet Union than on the United States. He must be aware that Khrushchev is using him for yet another step in the systematic and so far successful downgrading of Yankee prestige. But Castro may also consider it possible that the Soviet Union is prepared to make a showcase of Cuba as a co-equal ally with an economic system which will evolve in its own way. In any case, that is the Cuban's affair. . . .

When you have been fighting for six years against apparently insuperable odds, fighting with rifles against tanks and airplanes, you are not afraid of death, and you are not afraid of the United States which, after all, can only kill you (and the chances are, dares not do that). There is also the memory of events, none very remote. The United States supported Batista militarily and economically. Batista killed thousands of Cubans, upped the national debt by a billion dollars, and, not coincidentally, he and his henchmen stole a billion. . . . Let us remember that we once had a revolution, also.