VOLUME XIII, NO. 39
SEPTEMBER 28, 1960

THE LONGING FOR DESTINY

A MAJOR difficulty in any sort of constructive writing or analysis, these days, is the absence of any commonly agreed-upon criterion or norm of what may be called the general human good. We deal with the obvious symptoms of gross ills, saying that the survival of the race is in danger, that people have grown indifferent to ancestral values, that psychic and social disorders haunt the everyday lives of countless people. But we have very little to go on when it comes to saying what *ought* to be. Of course, we can use big generalizations to describe ideal conditions, but when it comes to saying what should be done *next*, who should do it, and with what responsibility for the whole of human society, we are of necessity vague.

There are scores of "philosophies" concerning human good. Very nearly every specialized school of thought has one. There are those who have "total" philosophies to offer, and those who argue that any attempt at "total" philosophy, in these days of manifest ignorance, is intolerably presumptuous. There are those who want us to keep our heads, do nothing "extreme," and muddle through, and those who cry out against the apathy of the many who refuse to recognize that a great emergency exists in human affairs, demanding immediate action.

There are others who insist that mankind has a purely technical problem. Usually, this group makes articulate demand that people learn to be more "scientific." The knowledge of how to live sensibly and in harmony with one another, they tell us, is either on hand or on the way. We must study, experiment, practice scientific discipline in our thinking, and learn to behave rationally in the light of the best knowledge we possess.

Still others take the view that human beings are confronted by what is essentially a moral disaster. We are called upon, in this case, to awaken to the profound moral responsibilities of human beings, responsibilities which have been too long neglected. The obligation many be to God, or it may be to man, but in any case the exhortation is to the moral nature of human beings.

Often the demands upon us are made with a certain indignation, as though those who appeal to us in this way really *know* what we ought to do, and what we are capable of.

It seems more desirable, however, at least at the outset, to acknowledge that we know very little, in the scientific sense of knowing, where and what mankind "ought" to be at this particular moment of history. If you are scientifically minded, you will not say "moment of history," but "moment of the course of evolution." But then, if you really intend to say what *ought* to be, you are under some obligation to define the present with reference to some scale of evolutionary possibility and some rate of evolutionary development. And you will also have to say what sort of "evolution" you are talking about. Is it organic, is it psychological, or is it cultural? And what, precisely, do these words mean in relation to immediate human problems?

The same sort of qualification is needed in connection with the moral or religious appeal. What sort of heroism is required? What is the context of "moral awakening"? Precisely who must awaken to precisely what? Is the call to all men, or just to those whom we identify as "leaders"? All these questions represent unknown values which must be filled in, unless we are resigned to settling for an emotional ardor which simply insists that it is time to be up and doing.

Probably at no time in history has there been such confusion and indecision concerning the

meaning of human destiny. This becomes evident from a brief review of past world-views and philosophies. If we bunch together the Oriental (Indian), Platonic, and Gnostic Christian systems, as having enough in common to afford a generalized unity, we may say that the antique conception of human destiny was essentially psychological. The beginning was with the emergence from primeval spirit of units of intelligence seeking experience and growth. These may be called, variously, souls, egos, monads, which arise from the unity of the One into the diversities of embodied existence, to pursue the enrichment of a great cycle of being. The final realization of the cycle is through a return to the One, although by widely differing paths—each path unique to the individual—but each crowned with the discovery by the individual of his kinship and even identity with the common root of being, called Self or Deity. The achievement of the cycle—if we may speak of achievement in these terms—is the increased capacity of the individual to see unity in diversity, to comprehend a wider reach of experience and particularity through intimate association with the entire range of world-life.

The elaboration and details of the antique world-view were concerned with the processes and laws of this great cycle of experience. Thus the instruction of the *Upanishads* and the under-meaning of the *Bhagavad-Gita.* Thus the Myth of Er in the tenth book of Plato's *Republic*, and the various writings embodying the exegesis of the Neoplatonists, and the content of the Gnostic hymns and theology.

It is possible, of course, to make a mystical reading of Christian doctrine—as, for example, is found in Jacob Boehme—which is in more or less harmony with the antique philosophy, but the common understanding of Christian teaching represents a definite break with the old Pantheistic and Polytheistic religions. The principal reason for the break lies in Christian insistence upon exclusive possession of the truth, which led to emphasis on the *error* of the old, pagan religions and philosophies, in contrast to Christian truth.

Another dramatic innovation brought by Christianity was its identification with and dependence upon historical happenings, such as the incarnation of Jesus, the Son of God. The older religions were essentially metaphysical in content, but Christianity made its truth dependent upon a particular event in history. There were not many Avatars, but only one, in Christian teaching. While this claim made many difficulties for philosophers, it apparently did not disturb the majority of Christian believers, who felt no need for logical justification of their faith.

There was now another account of the meaning of human destiny. The soul of the individual is the creature of God, placed upon earth for a period of probation, during which he must choose either eternal bliss or eternal darkness, as his fate after death. The dynamics of this decision by the individual supply the crucial content of the Christian religion. While Christian thought on this subject has undergone various changes through the centuries, the central core of belief has always been that in order to be "saved"—that is, taken up to heaven, or enabled to enjoy eternal bliss—it is absolutely essential to believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God and that he expiated the sins of man by dying on the cross. The point of difference among the various sects of Christianity always has to do with *access* to the benefits of the act of atonement performed by Jesus. Sometimes this access is claimed to be possible only for those who join the *true* church. Sometimes it is said to result primarily from good works—the works prescribed by Jesus and by the churches which bear his name. Sometimes *faith* is said to be the sole essential to salvation, since man's weakness makes his works sadly imperfect, and works are only outward manifestations and of little value by themselves. Currently, however, the significant form of Christian fulfillment is held to be *love*, sometimes called *agape*, with diminishing reference to eschatological teachings.

The values in Christian thought have been for generations losing their cosmological and eschatological framework and assuming an increasingly subjective significance. These trends in Christian thought bespeak in some measure the submission of Western religion to the rationalism of the scientific movement, but represent also the refinement of Western thought generally, with its emphasis on the intuitive element in ethics, and the rising interest in psychological considerations.

While these developments in Christianity may stand for progress in religious attitudes, they have stripped the Western religious tradition of almost every familiar form of doctrinal certainty. It is evident that modern Christianity (excluding Roman Catholicism and the Fundamentalist sects) has practically nothing specific to say about the origin of the world, the appearance of the human species on earth, the question of immortality and the form taken by the soul in surviving the body, and what activities, if any, the individual may pursue in the after-life. In short, on all those points concerning which the Christian religion once had doctrinally precise answers, it is now vague and indecisive. In many respects, Christianity of this sort is a kind of Humanism in which the element of supernaturalism has been reduced to a metaphysical abstraction which is easily malleable to the devotional side of human nature. Under sympathetic interpretation, however, this "abstraction" may play an inspiring role in the lives of earnest people, since it is an abstraction only when subjected to intellectual analysis. As an expression of the higher feelings of human beings, it may represent wholehearted commitment, altruism, and self-sacrifice.

All that we are endeavoring to suggest, here, is that the forthright explanation of human destiny which was once explicitly embodied in Christian dogma and creed is no longer an important element of the Christian faith. Religion has lost the role of providing this explanation. How and why this happened to Western religion are questions intricately involved in the history of the past three hundred and more years, so they must be left unexamined.

There is no doubt, however, that a major influence in causing religious values to take a subjective form has been the rise of multiple scientific accounts of human destiny. Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton were the founders of modern physics, but they were also the men who abandoned the Christian cosmology, replacing it with the morally neutral World Machine. Darwin may have been personally a pious Christian, but the practical consequence of his theory of evolution was to banish forever any form of literal belief in the story of the Garden of Eden. Historians of psychological science may argue that Freud found his inspiration in Jewish mysticism, but conventional notions of morality will never be the same in the post-Freudian world. In fact, it is questionable if the term "morality" will ever again have the significance it enjoyed during the nineteenth century. Likewise Marx, though he might thunder like a Hebrew prophet, was bent upon spreading a very different version of human destiny. When these originators of the scientific world-view were through with us, they had leavened the thought of the Western world almost to the point of total transformation of the conception of the meaning of life.

The idea of human destiny had become a pluralist affair, with many new theories, and philosophizing about it was reduced to almost the hobby of retired professional specialists in the sciences. During the past half-century we have accumulated a large collection of scientifically flavored philosophies of life—the dozen or more Emergent Evolution doctrines, the Neo-Pythagorean universes of Eddington, Jeans and the German mathematical philosophers, and the Behavioristic continuum filled with the conditioned reflexes of Pavlov and John B. Watson. In the distance, on the horizon, like hovering deities of the age, are the figures who have shaped the rules of philosophic thought for our time—William James, Bertrand Russell, John

Dewey, the Logical Positivists, and a handful of others.

Whatever else may be said about the conceptions of human destiny obtained from these sources, one thing is sure: they tell us nothing directly in terms of human values. The connection of human values with the various scientific cosmologies or half-cosmologies and philosophies is a *deduced* connection. The world these philosophies tell us about has no inherent moral dynamic for the individual. It is a world that might have gotten on very well without any human beings at all, who are a kind of accident which happened to our planet. Human beings are not an intrinsic meaning of this world, but an added element now obliged to make the best of a situation they had no organic part in causing to be. Whatever ethical theories are derived from such a view are always an ethics for the *species,* not for the individual unit.

When an Existentialist declares that man is *absurd,* without rational relation to the world about him, he is only being consistent with the cosmologies of the modern scientific philosophers. He is refusing to be sentimental or to offer some merely plausible synthesis between man and a world which has in it no logical place for human beings. The Existentialist declares he will *live like a man,* with his own, self-generated autonomous values, no matter what kind of a world this is. You could say that the existentialist position is a logical, intuitive reaction to the scientific philosophies of the past hundred years, forced into articulation by a course of history which seems to *prove* that when men attempt to adapt themselves to the ways of the world, they behave like beasts, or worse than beasts. Why, then, try to deduce a philosophy of life from a physical and biological situation which is totally alien to the spontaneous values of human beings—the *existential* values?

It is also fair to say that the Existentialists stand for an important watershed in human thought, setting the rules for all future cosmologies and the deductions from them in behalf of a theory of human destiny. The statement by Camus, recently quoted in MANAS, is a fitting expression of the most important of these rules, founded, appropriately enough, on recent historical experience:

> Now that Hitler has gone, we know a certain number of things. The first is that the poison which impregnated Hitlerism has not been eliminated, it is present in each of us. Whoever today speaks of human existence in terms of power, efficiency and "historical tasks" spreads it. He is an actual or potential assassin. For if the problem of man is reduced to any kind of "historical task," he is nothing but the raw material of history, and one can do anything one pleases with him. Another thing we have learned from history is that we cannot accept any optimistic conception of existence, any happy ending whatsoever. But if we believe that optimism is silly, we also know that pessimism about the action of man among his fellows is cowardly.

The thing that is impressive about the existential position, as put here by Camus, is its acceptance of individual man's intuition of immediate human values, and his refusal to tolerate any violation of those values in the name of some great "historical task," which means some "collectivist destiny." Camus proposes the foundation for a new conception of destiny. It is a foundation which declares that no man is competent to define the destiny of another and to make him conform to it. It therefore outlaws all the experts as authorities on what should be man's philosophy of life. If there is in truth a goal, that goal must be of a nature that cannot be gained except by the individual for himself. Men may help one another, in various ways—by example, by inspiration, by lucid discussion—by every means short of *doing* what another must find a way to do for himself. This kind of individualism is not a separate, selfish individualism, but an acknowledgment of the ultimate nature of human self-realization.

If we now return to the questions asked at the beginning of this discussion, we shall soon see that they have not been answered. All that has been accomplished is that the questions have been

placed in a certain frame of limitation, that is, their answers will have to concern or include the potentialities of individuals, not deal only with whole societies, nor with societies whose resources have been organized by technological skills to move at a rapid pace in planned and predicted directions.

The philosophy of human destiny we are after will have to be scaled to the individual, and its highest dreams will have to represent realizations at least theoretically possible for individuals, not dependent upon the technical organization of individuals for "mass" or "social" achievement.

This is not to suggest that people can do no good through organized collaboration with one another. Obviously, they can eat better, have better shelter, and enjoy the full range of material benefits through technical cooperation. But what we have to remember is that people can have all these benefits and still fail to behave like human beings. Progress, if there is such a thing, must at least include the gaining of a quality of life that cannot be turned to evil and destructive ends.

So, if we are to go back to our first questions, we need to consider what may be a reasonable "rate" of progress to expect of human beings toward a goal of this sort. What have we to compare ourselves with? The Christs, the Buddhas; the Gandhis, the Schweitzers? What do we know of these men, beyond their behavior? What do we know of the mysterious inward forces which led them to become moral pioneers? How does it happen that some people—a handful, ten or twelve, perhaps, that we have heard of in our own generation, out of the billions who populate the earth—come to represent some kind of apex of individual human achievement?

It is plain enough that such questions involve a range of considerations for which our scientific philosophies have not even the hint of an answer. This is reason enough, perhaps, to explain why many men fall back upon a guarded supernaturalism to account for such men. When the rational explanations fail, and an explanation is *needed*, we may be sure that the irrational will be drafted into service once again. The question then is whether or not we have really exhausted the potentialities of rational explanation, before turning to the irrational.

There is one supreme objection to resorting to irrational explanation. This desperate remedy takes the initiative out of human hands and turns it over to some unpredictable, extra-cosmic power. All we can do, in such circumstances is to wait—to wait, and perhaps to pray.

Of course, the words "rational" and "irrational" are somewhat equivocal. The ancient Greeks used "irrational" in two ways—there was the sub-rational irrational and the super-rational irrational. History is filled with instances of both. The progress of scientific discovery, for example, reveals numerous cases of intuitive or super-rational perception which were later "rationalized"—that is, verified by patient, experimental investigation. We might say, then, that the higher kind of irrational perception reaches beyond the rational, but never violates its conditions. And we might use the word "intuition" as a synonym of the higher irrational perception, stipulating that it is a private experience, whereas the rationalized perception has the character of public truth, accessible to anyone who will go through the disciplines of rational investigation.

The sub-rational form of irrationality is simply unreflective emotional behavior—the response which seeks no justification in the light of principle. There are of course so-called "philosophies" of sub-rational behavior, propagated by the sort of people who claim to "think with their blood," who acknowledge themselves to be mediums of some mysterious "earth-spirit," needing no further sanction than their driving appetites or their sectarian enthusiasms. It is the business of philosophy to distinguish one sort of irrationalism from the other, by establishing criteria of values for human belief.

The great hunger, today, is for a conception of human destiny which has significance for individuals—which will give them something to *work on* with a sense of individual meaning that is not continually being invaded and frustrated by the fundamentally irrelevant purposes of States and Armies and Navies and other Historical or Manifest Destiny Tasks.

The men we most admire and revere have and have had this sense of meaning in their lives. It was so strong for them that they created an environment in which it could be realized—or, at any rate, effectively pursued. Their lives were not shaped by the accidents of history, although circumstances may have given what they did its outward form. In *any* external environment, they would have made their mark. Of men of this sort, we can only say that they tapped intuitive resources that do not seem available to the ordinary run of mankind. But if we say this, we ought to say something about how those resources can be made available to more individuals. What can a man do to get such inward moral conviction and sense of destiny for himself?

This is the kind of a problem we have in the middle of the twentieth century. It is not essentially an intellectual problem, although solving it undoubtedly involves some intellectual activity or work. It is not simply a moral problem, although it is a problem which obviously involves moral decisions. Ultimately, it is a problem of self-knowledge, requiring a renewal of human energy and human enterprise in its investigation.

Where else but in self-knowledge can we find some clue of what ought to be in human life, and what to do next? The mind-shaping frameworks of past religions and scientific philosophies are no longer of much help to us. Their break-down has had the frightening effect of setting us free. But how else could we come to ask these questions, except in such an interlude of lost authorities and lonely uncertainty?

REVIEW
CULTURAL ANALYSIS VIA PAPERBACKS

IT is easy to be enthused about the varied selection of current fiction available at the corner drugstore for a nominal price, and there is no doubt but that the tremendous volume of paperback trade has encouraged publishers to acquire a wide range of titles. Ironically, many a casual reader of third-rate fiction may leave the paperback rack to find that he has invested in a book that requires some thought and which—if he is to realize on his investment—may contribute to his education, and even raise the level of his taste. The irony resides in the fact that a worth-while novel is usually promoted in paperback edition as if it were but another piece of sensationalism. While occasionally the reader will appreciate the fact that he purchased more than he bargained for, others are likely to feel, with some justification, that they have been misled. The point of noting this state of confusion is simply that the educational and cultural benefits of low-cost paperback publishing are casual, incidental and haphazard, whereas honest advertising would at least clarify the differences in quality among the numerous titles which clamor for attention.

Writing in the *Saturday Review* for Aug. 13, on "Brewing Instant Fiction," Albert Van Nostrand is sympathetic to the sales problems of the publisher, but feels it necessary to point out why the confusion to which such practices lead deserves attention. A good opening for Prof. Van Nostrand's remarks, and quite likely, for his book, *The Denatured Novel*, soon to be released by Bobbs-Merrill, is provided by Ernest Van Den Haag in the Spring *American Scholar:*

> We all now cultivate cash crops in market gardens. Mass culture is manufactured according to the demands of the mass market. No *independent* elite culture is left, for mass culture is far too pervasive to permit it. Cultivated individuals and islands of high culture remain, of course. But they are interstitial and on the defensive even when admired and respected indeed; then more than ever, for they easily may be "taken up" and typecast. The intellect when alive is not part of our social structure, nor does it have its own domicile.

Paperback cover illustrating is indeed a typical example. As Van Nostrand puts it: "Regardless of the book, the reprinter, all over its covers, and inside as well, strains to show the book's extravagance. What he accomplishes by this is the limitation of each title to the mean level of all the others." Van Nostrand continues:

> All novels look the same: a new kind of instant fiction packaged in two billion compelling sequels to one another. Selling all novels as instant fiction, of course, penalizes those books which have some complexity. It takes more time to read the novel that demands some reasoning collaboration, but the paperback's entire presentation denies this fact. It does so by encouraging the buyer always to expect entertainment without effort.

"Brewing Instant Fiction" provides amusing examples of advertising which gives English professors and intelligent readers instant heartburn. Almost without exception, the cover "previews" of paperback novels emphasize sex, violence or suspense, no matter what the book actually contains. Quite possibly the volume is a work of literature primarily concerned, not with the action or situation, but with a depth-potential which explains why the characters develop as they do and the meaning of their development in terms of general human experience. But this quality the promoter of paperback sales ignores as he would an argument on religion. Van Nostrand concludes:

> The parrot-like salesmanship of the reprint business contradicts itself. It denies the possibilities of the distribution system. Since the basis of the business is the rapid turnover of many titles—with very little display room in which to sell—the reprinter must attract attention to each book. To this purpose the individuality of a book is naturally congenial. It is even strategic in finding new readers. But by ignoring or distinguishing this individuality the reprinter encourages the reader to limit every book that he does buy to what the reprinter says it is.
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> Meanwhile, the absurd image grows of a literature so parochial that all its books render the same experience, that all are equally "poignant" and

"powerful," "brutal" and "compassionate," and that one can do the job as well as another.

There is no use railing against publishers, although it is impossible not to hope that one or more of them may either become wealthy enough to undertake a cultural role, or careless enough of wealth to try to start a different trend. But when we hear increasingly from the psychologists that the contemporary human problem is best expressed by the phrase, "the quest for identity," it should be recognized that we need to individualize and separate as much as possible in every department of experience. In the present, unless a reader of fiction is encouraged to distinguish the quality of one book from another, he may lose some of his ability to distinguish one kind of experience from another. For conclusion we fit in here a point made by Prof. Van Den Haag in the *American Scholar:*

> A convinced egalitarian may ask, So what? No more elite, no more high culture; but the great majority of people—who never belonged—have what they wish. To be sure, most people never were, are not now, and are unlikely ever to be interested in high culture. Yet, it does not follow that high culture is unimportant. Its importance cannot be measured by the number of people to whom it is important. . . . Political issues, by whatever means they are decided, require collective action. Taxes cannot be levied only on those who feel they benefit proportionately from a pattern of public expenditure, or on individuals who are willing to vote for them. With art and literature it is otherwise, or it was. They could be cultivated by intellectual elites, without mass participation. This is becoming less possible every day. Mass culture threatens to decide cultural issues by a sort of universal suffrage. This is a threat to culture, not an occasion for rejoicing. For once cultural issues are regarded as indivisible, the majority will prevail—and the majority prefers entertainment to art.

COMMENTARY
HIGH, MIGHTY, AND CASUAL

A QUIET column in *Time* for Sept. 5 reports the findings of two journalists regarding Japanese efforts to make peace before the bombing of Hiroshima. While looking over still-secret State Department records, in preparation of a book on the Atom Bomb, Fletcher Knebel and Charles Bailey, *Time* says, came across material which led them to make three assertions:

> (1) The Japanese wanted to come to terms at least one month before the war's end. (2) Truman was well aware of Japanese peace overtures, and (3) he rebuffed them.

The rest of the *Time* story fills in the details—when, where, and how Mr. Truman learned of Japan's peace feelers to Soviet Russia, and why he decided to ignore them. According to Charles Bohlen, who made notes of the talks at the Potsdam Conference, the American President told Stalin that he had "no respect for the good faith of the Japanese" and approved Stalin's noncommittal reply to the feelers.

This was in mid-July of 1945. Ten days later the Japanese asked that the Soviets act as intermediaries for peace. Stalin also reported this second overture, telling Mr. Truman that he would reject it. "Truman thanked him for the information," *Time* laconically reports. A few days later, the United States atom-bombed Hiroshima and Russia declared war on Japan. Then the U.S. bombed Nagasaki and Japan surrendered.

With admitted hindsight, *Time* wonders if another arrangement might have "relieved the U.S. of the onus of having dropped the first atomic bomb—which the Communists have used as a powerful anti-U.S. propaganda point."

There is little reason to single out Mr. Truman for particular blame in this situation. His decision was consistent with attitudes which have shaped the behavior of the great powers for hundreds of years. With typical "prudence," *Time* says nothing of the useless loss of life caused by the bomb, but only remarks the possibility that the U.S. might have gained a stronger position in the propaganda war, by not dropping it.

In a recent novel, *No Ruined Castles*, James McGovern has a gay young thing say: "Do you know what we ought to do? We ought to fly over Russia and drop some atomic bombs on all their big cities before they do it to us. That's what Daddy says we ought to do. Don't you think that's a good idea?" The fact is that people, perhaps most people, form judgments about many things in just this casual way. That now such snap opinions and lightly-worn righteous assurance can precipitate immeasurable horror for millions is much more than an item in and argument for pacifist views. Most of all it is a compulsion to basic honesty with ourselves. We cannot be just and measured about the issues of war and peace without becoming just and measured about other matters. The problem of the good life for the individual, and of peace for the world, is non-specific, but basic. To have peace, we have to become the kind of people who really want it and are willing to work to understand what it means.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

ISLANDS OF EDUCATIONAL EXPERIMENT

BY courtesy of the not-inconsiderable labors of two MANAS readers, we are again made aware of various foci of philosophical exploration in "teaching and learning." Dr. and Mrs. D. C. Burden, after years of awareness of the limitations of conventional child-training in American schools, removed from the United States to San Bartolo, Baja California Sur, Mexico, in the vicinity of La Pas. Gradually they have interested some of the Mexican citizens of La Pas in the formation of a "Children's Estate," where so far as we can tell, the approach to "schooling" will have much in common with a program once personally directed by Gandhi at Sevagram in India: simplicity of living, a context in which productive work and care for the soil are integral, an attempt to let the "practical" and "theoretical" subjects merge, and a determination to help the child to discover that philosophy is a part of his natural heritage. These seem to be distinguishing features of the undertaking.

Shimber Beris—"The Children's Estate"—is apparently now in its earliest stage, but the enthusiasm of the two founders may reach out to other and kindred forms of interracial and intercultural effort. What is the prompting for such a lone enterprise? A mimeographed pamphlet, *Educating for Insight*, offers partial explanation by summarizing the philosophical effects of most current teaching-learning situations. However intelligently organized, Dr. and Mrs. Burden feel, contemporary education is directed toward two general goals: "(1) to assist the child to find a comfortable place in society, if he is not especially gifted intellectually. By 'comfortable' is meant that he will have sufficient means to ensure as pleasing an environment physically and socially as possible, and that he will so conduct himself as to find acceptance, usefulness, self-respect and, if possible, prestige among his associates; (2) to assist the gifted child to make as outstanding a contribution as possible in the artistic and intellectual 'worlds,' and to be happy, comfortable and well-adjusted while doing this. 'Well-adjusted,' of course, simply means comfortably-adjusted psychologically to the challenge of relationships in present-day society. *It does not mean the deeper adjustment which comes with a perception of values which are unconditioned by time and social conditions.* So, it is important at the offset to decide whether we wish to approach the problem of education by means of existing value criteria and to perpetuate the prevailing goals, or if we wish to go deeper and find a soundly philosophical approach, whatever radical implications may accrue from such a decision." And so there is room for some kind of intuitive yearning for a "philosophical education," shared by parents and teachers who desire more intimate connection with the roots of education. Dr. and Mrs. Burden put it this way:

> There is a hopefully copious stream of people who are feeling a kind of collective intuition, as the giant machinery of modern education falters under the impact of agitations for reform. These people are not waiting for some authoritative guide to better education, for they have begun to look askance upon the whole institution-born hierarchy of opinion. Surely this needs to happen from time to time in any society; and the institutions themselves should be glad that they are not proof against the untrained, but often lucid ideas that arise spontaneously from people who are stumbling along earnestly, and in a fresh and pioneering spirit.
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> Thus, in an unobtrusive but effective manner, individuals and families are merging their mutual dissatisfactions and searches via the means of collective efforts of one kind and another. Small, often well-written periodicals are springing up dealing with the pertinent questions of how children should be raised and educated, how people should best live to avoid the threat of materialism and hyper-scientism, what measures should be taken to bring about peace and better community relationships, and how man can make his philosophy or religion more purposeful. They are forming private schools, parent groups, and even communities to better implement their researches. Although one finds always among explorers, some exaggerated types of personalities,

> those people are, for the most part, intelligent and courageous. In these educational efforts, one senses the groping, from various points of reference, for an avenue of access to the orderly center of life; to a hook-up with universalities.

The "hook-up with universalities" clearly indicates the philosophical bent of the planners of "Children's Estate," and also indicates their faith that from various small islands of educational experiment will come support for allied undertakings. And we agree with the Burdens that: "There *is* something fundamental and far-reaching that a few thoughtful people can do to prepare for a better future world. They can make a gesture of sacrifice in the interest of helping one or more of the important new pioneering efforts that are struggling to provide a foothold in a new and better culture. These groups are composed of courageous people who know that man's problems can only be solved by improving the quality of his thought and aspiration, and who are prepared to take practical measures toward that end. They recognize the serious need for preparing some sound moral and spiritual leadership for a world which is rapidly losing sight of the philosophical values which the wisest teachers of the past have always given first importance."

The literature at hand on "The Children's Estate" indicates that work with small groups can show the latent capacity of the young. To this end, all curriculum requirements may be simplified to an extreme, but not because the teachers involved are unaware of the issues debated by rival educational theorists. Though the child may need to give attention to those disciplines which provide the tools of communication, he also must feel that *he* is creating, not simply absorbing. A short sketch by Mrs. Burden, concerned with the relation between teacher and pupil, concludes:

> When inspired education "happens," it is a good toboggan ride. One has first to climb the steep hill, pulling the conveyance, and even when one has succumbed comfortably to the laws of gravity which carry one through space like a bird, there must be awful attentiveness, supreme watchfulness, or all is thrown out of balance. If I were to cite the one failure most common to all teachers, it is this want of acute attentiveness, for it is of a quality that one seldom finds in any classroom. Moreover, it is painful—especially until a teacher becomes practiced in it. It leaves one deeply tired after a short interval of teaching, but a single such interval is worth a year of the usual brand of instruction. To summon the will it takes to put oneself in accord with that level of nature where intuition is operative is like stretching the limbs to an unaccustomed posture. Our habitual "shape," our practiced responses, are not often of the calibre to invite inspiration. One must care terribly. One must love greatly.
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> Today, all things converge to demonstrate what is possible at the humming latitude where intelligence is felt in every quarter, where nature and human beings act together for good purposes.

Other subscribers have made us aware of small "family" schools—schools beginning with the parents' feeling that they should discover something unique to offer their own youngsters and the children of friends and acquaintances. The Burdens' bedrock attempt affords a special and needed hospitality to orphans—both American and Mexican. An appeal for funds mentions the amount necessary for legal adoption—and for extra expenses to serve two American orphan children who are currently provided for solely by a small welfare check.

Inquiries as to the progress of Shimber Beris—"The Children's Estate"—should be addressed to The Secretary, Shimber Beris, Post Office Box 1672, Escondido, California, U.S.A.

FRONTIERS

A Look at Mental Illness

A MAN'S religion or philosophy may not affect very much the quality of the house he builds as a carpenter, nor are the private beliefs of a physician likely to change his efficiency in setting a broken leg. These are more or less "objective" tasks in which what must be done is hardly open to argument. However, when it comes to what we call "mental health," other factors take on importance. This is the contention of Dr. Thomas Szasz in an article, "The Myth of Mental Illness," which appeared in the *American Psychologist* for February, 1960.

Dr. Szasz is not really declaring that mental and emotional disturbance does not exist—this idea is only the rhetoric of his argument. His article is a challenge to the conception of mental illness as caused solely by some kind of "objective" disorder or defect in the physical organism. Describing this point of view, he says:

> The assumption is made that some neurological defect, perhaps a very subtle one, will ultimately be found for all the disorders of thinking and behavior. Many contemporary psychiatrists, physicians, and other scientists hold this view. This position implies that people *cannot* have troubles—expressed in what are now called "mental illnesses"—because of differences in personal needs, social aspirations, values, and so on. *All problems in living* are attributed to physico-chemical processes which in due time will be discovered by medical research.

Implicit in the position adopted by Dr. Szasz is the idea that the *psyche,* the mind or soul, of the human being, while seated in the organism, and no doubt affected by the quality and limitations of the organism, is nevertheless an autonomous system with its own relationships of cause and effect. Diagnosis of a mental ill, he points out, results from study of the communications of the patient in mental or emotional terms, and "a person's *belief*—whether this be a belief in Christianity, in Communism, or in the idea that his internal organs are 'rotting' and that his body is, in fact, already 'dead'—cannot be explained by a defect or a disease of the nervous system." Dr. Szasz develops this point:

> In medical practice, when we speak of physical disturbances, we mean either signs (for example, fever) or symptoms (for example, pain). We speak of mental symptoms, on the other hand, when we refer to a patient's *communications about himself, others, and the world about him.* He might state that he is Napoleon or that he is being persecuted by the Communists. These would be considered mental symptoms *only* if the observer believes that the patient was *not* Napoleon and that he was *not* being persecuted by the Communists. This makes it apparent that the statement that "X is a mental symptom" involves rendering a judgment. The judgment entails, moreover, a covert comparison or matching of the patient's ideas, concepts, or beliefs with those of the observer and the society in which they live. The notion of mental symptom is therefore inextricably tied to the *social* (including *ethical*) *context* in which it is made in much the same way as the notion of bodily symptom is tied to an *anatomical* and *genetic context.*

Summing up, Dr. Szasz says:

> The norm from which deviation is measured whenever one speaks of a mental illness is a *psycho-social and ethical one.* Yet the remedy is sought in terms of *medical* measures which—it is hoped and assumed—are freed from wide differences of ethical value. The definition of the disorder and the terms in which its remedy is sought are therefore at serious odds with one another. The practical significance of this covert conflict between the alleged nature of this defect and the remedy can hardly be exaggerated.

Much of Dr. Szasz's discussion is devoted to examining the implications and consequences of this conflict. Of equal interest, however, is the cause of the original confusion, which seems almost willful on the part of many members of the medical profession. Actually, the desire to give "objective" (or physiological) definition to all human ills goes back to the old war between science and religion. Before the advent of science and modern medicine, practically no distinction was made between what might be called a psychogenetic explanation and the theological explanation. The history of the advance of science is also the history of the gradual displacement of

theological explanations in every branch of human inquiry. The early popularizers of scientific knowledge and scientific method were, almost to a man, mechanists and materialists. The ideological father of modern Behaviorism was Descartes, the philosophical ancestor of biological determinism was de la Mettrie. The social and moral pressure against the theological explanation of human ills was exerted, through the centuries, with the full force of revolutionary power. There are scores of illustrations of this massive trend. For example, a century ago the French chemist, Pierre Berthelot, announced: "The object of our science is to banish 'Life' from the theories of organic chemistry." Life, in his view, was a mystical notion which had disreputable relatives in metaphysics and theology, and it would have to go. The endeavor to interpret all mental happenings as aspects of physiological events was characteristic of most of psychology from the latter part of the nineteenth century almost until the present. The great T. H. Huxley coined the term *epiphenomenon* to describe the workings of the mind, which he likened to the squeaking of a locomotive's wheels, in this case the locomotive standing for the "real" thing—the body.

In general, it was believed that it would be impossible to deal *scientifically* with the problems of human behavior unless they were reduced to physical or physiological causes. Dr. Szasz is in open revolt against this assumption, which still rules the minds of many doctors.

If mental ills are really identified by comparing their symptoms with the prevailing social, ethical and legal values of the age, then the question of the role of the therapist is dramatically posed. In the words of this writer:

> These considerations underscore the importance of asking the question "Whose agent is the psychiatrist?" and of giving a candid answer to it. The psychiatrist (psychologist or non-medical psychotherapist), it now develops, may be the agent of the patient, of the relatives, of the school, of the military services, of a business organization, of a court of law, and so forth. In speaking of the psychiatrist as the agent of these persons or organizations, it is not implied that his values concerning norms, or his ideas and aims concerning the proper nature of remedial action, need to coincide exactly with those of his employers. For example, a patient in individual psychotherapy may believe that his salvation lies in a new marriage; his psychotherapist need not share this hypothesis. As the patient's agent, however, he must abstain from bringing social or legal force to bear on the patient which would prevent him from putting his beliefs into action. If his *contract* is with the patient, the psychiatrist (psychotherapist) may disagree with him or stop his treatment; but he cannot engage others to obstruct the patient's aspirations. Similarly if a psychiatrist is engaged by a court to determine the sanity of a criminal, he need not fully share the legal authorities' values and intentions in regard to the criminal and the means available for dealing with him. But the psychiatrist is expressly barred from stating, for example, that it is not the criminal who is "insane" but the men who wrote the law on the basis of which the very actions that are being judged are regarded as "criminal." Such an opinion could be voiced, of course, but not in a court room, and not by a psychiatrist who makes it his practice to assist the court in performing its daily work.

The same problem, in a different context, was discussed by Dr. William C. Menninger in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* for September, 1947. The role of psychotherapy, and of the therapist, he pointed out, changes with the times and the historical emergencies to which men are subjected. In civilian life, Dr. Menninger said, the psychiatrist—

> attempted to understand and treat abnormal reactions of persons to normal situations. In military life he attempted to understand and treat the normal reactions to an abnormal situation. One might seriously question if our world condition does not now place us in a continuously abnormal situation to which we are having normal reactions, even though these by all previous standards are pathological. To such a turbulent world, one might legitimately ask, what is a normal reaction?

The obligation to answer such questions places a heavy burden upon the profession of psychiatry. At this point, all that Dr. Szasz is requiring is that the question be regarded as *real*. He puts his basic contention in these words:

> Psychiatry, I submit, is very much more intimately tied to the problems of ethics than is medicine. I use the word "psychiatry" here to refer to that contemporary discipline which is concerned with *problems in living* (and not with diseases of the brain, which are problems for neurology). Problems in human relations can be analyzed, interpreted, and given meaning only within given social and ethical contexts. Accordingly, it *does* make a difference—arguments to the contrary notwithstanding—what the psychiatrist's socio-ethical orientations happen to be; for these will influence his ideas on what is wrong with the patient, what deserves comment or interpretation, in what possible directions change might be desirable, and so forth. . . . In one sense, much of psychotherapy may revolve around nothing other than the elucidation and weighing of goals and values—and the means whereby they might best be harmonized, realized, or relinquished.

Statements of this sort give ample explanation of the fact that the most lucid philosophical expressions of the times often come from persons engaged in one or another of the forms of psychotherapy.