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THE NONCOMPLACENT MINORITIES

IT is always gratifying to the publishers of a magazine to find someone who enjoys universal respect in the intellectual community giving expression to views which are the same as those which shape the editorial policy of their magazine—the same, indeed, as the ideas which in large measure caused it to be started. This observation is prompted by an article by David Riesman, "Private People and Public Policy," in the May issue of *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, in which the writer assembles for lay readers material to illustrate "some of the things social scientists believe they have discovered concerning public opinion." The bulk of his discussion is devoted to showing, from current research, that only very small minorities interest themselves in the facts and implications of the major issues before the world. Even the members of special groups which are supposed to be well-informed often grow indifferent to implications growing out of their specialties. To illustrate this, Prof. Riesman turns to the scientists who are working either directly for the government or on government contracts:

> Some of the atomic scientists among them feel that they have lived in the awareness of disaster since Hiroshima, and that nobody cares. The lack of a lay audience which understands their concerns, if not all the details of their technology, makes them feel isolated and sometimes reduces them to apathy. The fact that liberals and social scientists have, on the whole, not concerned themselves with military affairs has increased the divorce of morality and knowledge and made the morality of many civilian commentators on science and on military policy unrealistic—certainly few civilians recognize the differences among the military services, or the nature of their links to the civilian economy on the one side, and civilian politics on the other. The scientists who are thus divorced from a lay audience outside the government often feel equally isolated within government or the armed services, viewing their military or civilian superiors as hopelessly out of date and as still fighting the last war or the war before that one.
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> In an atmosphere where they must choose between moral preachment divorced from factuality on the one side, and technical discourse divorced from morality on the other, members of this cadre of scientists often are inclined to feel, "What's the use: the world is going to blow up anyway, so we might as well get our paychecks and do our perhaps creative technical work." The work of the Federation of the American Scientists and of the supporters of and contributors to the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* shows, *inter alia*, how vital the concern of the scientific community remains. Even so, it would be a mistake to believe that most scientists share this concern, and the relatively small readership of the *Bulletin* inside as well as outside the scientific community may be taken as an index of current amnesias even among people in academic and research activities.

Having established the fact of widespread indifference through "samplings" of this sort, Prof. Riesman examines the plight of the small groups who are *not* indifferent. He calls these the "noncomplacent minorities" and to illustrate them chooses polar opposites—the officers of the Strategic Air Command, and the pacifists who believe in taking action to arouse public conscience concerning the moral issues of nuclear war. Both these groups, Prof. Riesman suggests, are led by dedicated persons who take their mission seriously and believe in it. He comments:

> It seems to me that one of our real dangers today is that the apathy of the public, its lack of response, tempts people to despairing courses of action which are eventually self-defeating. To put this another way: the noncomplacent minorities, whether pacifist or officers of the Strategic Air Command, may be driven to impatience and bad judgment by the lack of a larger audience which understands the issues between them.

Now comes Prof. Riesman's major point, which made the occasion for our opening paragraph:

> I have misgivings about looking for that [larger] audience in the amorphous public at large. Even in a Utopian society people would be differentially

> interested in foreign affairs, and even at moments of great crisis and danger not everyone would be mobilized. Eventually, one would hope more people might respond to foreign affairs out of self-interest and the wish to survive and the desire for a better world, and out of curiosity and disinterested motives as well. But a society in which this were so would be very different from ours; and *the more imperative need today is for ideas and for small audiences for them—ideas which are not immediately cut short or truncated by the need to make them appealing to a mass audience. That is, we must have the courage to experiment with ideas among ourselves and within each of us—ideas which cannot be immediately sloganized and sold.* (Our emphasis.)
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> . . . to live as some SAC pilots have done with the knowledge that if war came they would have a one-way ticket to the Soviet Union in planes which could not make the round trip requires an enormous dedication, akin to that of the pacifists of the *Golden Rule.* Such dedication is compatible with personal sanity in part because it is shared, whereas individuals having to face in utter isolation the mass apathy of American life might easily go crazy.

(Here, we should like to interpolate a distinction which, since it is not essential to his argument, Prof. Riesman does not make, but would doubtless admit. It is that the "dedication" of the pacifists of the *Golden Rule* and the *Phoenix*—and of those demonstrating, today, at the missile bases near Omaha—involves an imaginative and independent commitment of a sort which makes possible the breadth and even some of the wisdom of Prof. Riesman's discussion. There is extreme pertinence in the observation that these pacifists have helped the problems confronting the American people to obtain symmetrical definition, staking out for everyone to see an ethical frame of reference which sociologists like Riesman cannot ignore and do not wish to ignore. Surely, no further justification of such pacifist action is needed, although it might be justified on many other grounds than this one.)

Following is Prof. Riesman's concluding paragraph:

> Against the spread of enlightened ideas of whatever sort there are the traditional barriers of apathy and distrust. Liberals in this country could previously act with a certain sureness because they were innocent of the bigotry of working-class folk, and could blame what they found on a few bad warmongers, or a power elite. Social science has helped increase the liberal's sense of hopelessness at the very moment in history when the liberal cause lost momentum because of the war or because of the linkage with communism, and because of the achievement of many domestic goals. Thus, new barriers have been discovered. One of them is an enemy which doesn't fight back, a lack of debate. Another is the fear of idealism which is so strong that even a great idealist like George Kennan argues about the dangers of idealism as if we were still living in a Wilsonian period. It is now, moreover, that we are aware of the strength of irrational forces in man, and are sometimes tempted to appeal to these forces when, for instance, we try to scare people into wisdom only to discover, in many cases, that they lack the imagination to be frightened. There is, it goes without saying, no guarantee that self-clarification in the minds of a few can save us. But I believe it is worth engaging in on its own account, and there is always the chance, as infinitesimal in the beginning as a genetic mutation, that it may be of practical help.

In the italicized matter above, and in the closing sentences of this last paragraph, Prof. Riesman has summarized some of the thinking which led to the founding of MANAS and which helps to sustain the publishers in a venture which has many of the features of a "forlorn hope." Yet, apart from the fact that, on this basis, there *is* nothing else to do, the publishers of MANAS confess to more optimism than Prof. Riesman discloses in his guarded appeal for such undertakings. It is an optimism based on the fact that every great historical change in which human deliberation has played a part began in precisely this way—through searching and careful cultivation by small groups of revolutionary ideas. For example: The Platonic Academy, the Florentine Revival of Learning, the Copernican Revolution, and the French and American Revolutions.

There is further justification for insisting that small groups should mature their thinking about contemporary issues, in terms of the sense of emergency felt by the aroused spokesmen of several independent minorities. This thinking must continue at a level which preserves seminal ideas from being "immediately sloganized and sold." The speed with which Madison Avenue capitalized on the theme of

"nonconformity" illustrates the futility of achieving quick popularity for ideas which are potent for good.

Quotations from two further discussions in the May *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* provide examples of the concern of other "noncomplacent minorities." One, by Brock Chisholm, is concerned with the failure of modern governments to inform the people about the threat of biological warfare. This eminent psychiatrist concludes:

> Unless our governments can, in some way not visible at the present time, show us that our present system of national armaments and international lawlessness can give us a real peace, and soon, we have an inescapable obligation to future life on this planet. That obligation is to explore the alternatives and then to move in the direction which we find most hopeful for the survival of the human race, no matter what the cost to ourselves in terms of local loyalties, standard of living, or change from the ways of our ancestors.
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> We do not serve our great pioneers and prophets by freezing them at the point of their deaths, and not allowing them to grow any further. They were all rebels, whether in social, educational, economic, military, or religious fields, and would be still if they were still alive. Their value to us is not in the detail of their conclusions, no matter how wise and appropriate for their time and place, but in their conviction that significant change in circumstances may require drastic changes in thinking and living patterns. It becomes increasingly clear that ancestral patterns by which each nation, alone or in cooperation with some others, arranged for its own defense, have now become exceedingly dangerous for us all. The prospect of existing only from day to day, by a system of threats and counterthreats, is increasingly being found to be intolerable. A widespread demand is arising that our governments face facts, make public all the realities of potential weapons and their possible uses, and, lacking effective defense, make proposals for world peace through world law for our consideration.

The demand for accurate information on these things may, as Dr. Chisholm declares, be "widespread," but only in a relative sense. It does not exist in Tallahassee, where state legislators recently disclosed their determination to keep the school children of Florida free from the contaminating influence of people like Dr. Chisholm, who want "world peace through world law." Nor has this "demand" been noticed by the mass media, which, with some few exceptions, ignore all evidences of aroused minority opinion—as for example in the boycotting by the national radio networks of Dr. Schweitzer's addresses and in the suppression by California newspapers (and doubtless elsewhere) of wire association reports of the Aldermaston March of British pacifists in protest against British nuclear weapons research.

It is the work done by the few in self-clarification and in the development of ideas which do not appeal to a mass audience which will one day bring the thinking of the few to a pitch of development that will *compel* attention from the apathetic majority. Fortunately, this work is proceeding. A letter to the editor of the *Bulletin*, by Clore Warne, a Los Angeles attorney often identified with liberal causes, refers to an address by Harrison Brown and makes the following comment:

> . . . by a well-reasoned approach he [Dr. Brown] brilliantly presented a thoroughly convincing argument as to the dangerous and tragic situation in which we, that is, the people of the world, are currently poised. In some eight thousand well-chosen words and with the best of arguments he made an extraordinarily good case. But all of it failed to produce social Judgments and suggestions for supplementing action to do within time what is required to be done.
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> What I want to project at the moment is something which might be said to be a "beyond sanity" approach. And I would insist that such approach must and can only be done by scientists.
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> Are we not agreed, that we have entered an era, that of the *"scientific revolution"* with all of its asset/liability content. The problems admittedly posed thereby must be solved by *approaches which are revolutionary.* And, as stated, such approaches can only be by scientists.
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> May I suggest that you and your scientists, by way of an appropriate "manifesto," project approaches which must necessarily and could properly include (but would not be limited to) the following:
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> 1. *The need for a revolutionary form of political approach,* whereby the scientists and other intellectuals of the world disregarding their conventional governmental "loyalties," and acting

over the heads of government, would consider plans and ways and means to establish a rule of law and government of the affairs of men and of peoples whereby their disputes are resolved under concepts of law and established legal procedures, and without right of private violence.

2. *The need for a revolutionary concept of economics* which will permit individualized processes in business and industry and which will exploit the technologies and the world's resources for the benefit and development of all peoples.

3. *The need for a revolutionary concept of morals and ethics* which will fit this post-Christian age and which can lay a basis for development of the dignity of man, and relegate to the religions their tribal customs and hygiene facilities and permit them to cater to the personal needs of those who require religious solace.

4. *The need for a revolutionary concept of politics* whereby there may be achieved the spirit of the "public philosophy" of which Walter Lippmann writes and where revised political procedures and structures are consonant with the achievements and needs of urbanized industrialized societies, and where petty professional politicians do not control the destiny of men.

I'll make no argument for my proposal, for if what I have said does not appear obvious, it has no merit. . . .

Mr. Warne's communication is valuable for its widening of the spectrum of our need, as well as for its concise statement of the issues. Here, again, however, it is at once evident that no one is—at present, at least—going to lead a successful "crusade" in any of these directions. All of the "concepts" proposed by Mr. Warne need investigation and elaboration, and it is doubtful whether very many scientists, *qua* scientists, will feel competent to undertake all four lines of endeavor. Mr. Warne has charted a program, not just for scientists, but for mankind.

Doubtless scientists should be among the leaders, since they are among the foremost in offering diagnoses of what is wrong. But others may be equally important. Further, it is quite possible that the entire approach to the problem, on the assumption that we have an "emergency" because of the threat of nuclear war, justifying this demand for "action," may be a hindsighted approach. Other breakdowns in our civilization may be more deserving of attention.

If, as Doris Lessing says—"the best and most vital works of Western literature have been despairing statements of emotional anarchy"—it may be that this cultural decay is more serious than the predilection to blow ourselves up. And if, as a writer in the May *Harper's* proposes, the most "advanced" representatives of the Christian tradition suffer from the curiously "humanitarian" hypocrisy of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, although without that militant Christian's program of *enforced* ignorance, the failure of the men of our time to comprehend the meaning of religion may be a worse disaster than their mastery of the secrets of the atom. Finally, the artificial standards of human achievement set by our acquisitive society, marked by a pitiful but none the less voracious struggle for *status* according to these standards, may be the most conclusive evidence of all that human beings have lost their way—hence our neurotic love affair with nuclear instruments of self-destruction.

If, as more than one philosopher-prophet has exclaimed, "The God who can be named is not the true God!", it may be a parallel truth that the ills which are most apparent are not our true ills, but only gross reflections thereof.

So, with Prof. Riesman, we say that "the more imperative need today is for ideas and for small audiences for them—ideas which are not immediately cut short or truncated by the need to make them appealing to a mass audience."

REVIEW
AN ISSUE OF DISSENT

MANAS readers, we are sure, have long ago made the acquaintance of the quarterly magazine *Dissent*, now in its sixth volume. After perusing the Spring, 1959 issue, it seems natural to invite other MANAS subscribers to enjoy the diverse benefits of this "socialist" publication. In this issue, one encounters the skilful analysis of an editor, Michael Walzer, A. J. Muste's excellent summary of C. Wright Mills' challenging book, *The Causes of World War III*, a book review by Erich Fromm, and a letter from Ignazio Silone, telling how he was inspired by Dostoevsky while incarcerated as a youth in a Spanish prison. The spontaneous drive in all this writing is never found in "mass-media" periodicals, and one is reminded that such writers view contemporary communism as a much more complicated phenomenon than do, say, Harry and Bonaro Overstreet, and were among the first to offer effective criticisms of Marxist ideology and communist policy.

Mr. Walzer opens a series under the title, "Education for a Democratic Culture." One of his concluding paragraphs shows how an independent socialist views the need for blending liberal theories with social obligation. He writes:

> Democratic education involves a two-fold opposition to the conditions of contemporary America, and this is an opposition which we would do well to recognize and admit. It is possible only if teachers insist upon the integrity of their subjects, only if they discover within their history, English or physics standards of excellence and value. And if they make such discoveries, they must share them. First, the schools must aim at reaching the underprivileged, and with the same "facts" which the privileged are taught. Almost inevitably, this implies conflict between school and home, and resistance, discouragement, even delinquency on the part of the child. These can be alleviated by an intelligent and sympathetic teacher; socially, the levels on which conflict is expressed may be raised; but finally, struggle and discouragement are the immediate price we pay in order to confront class society with equality and cultural value. Young socialists in England have written movingly of how a state-educated working class boy can "never go home again." The point, however, is not to educate a handful of outcasts—though even that may prove a necessary beginning—but to reach a whole class.
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> At the same time as the schools seek to extend their reach, they must also defend that body of knowledge which they represent. This effort, again *necessarily*, will bring them into conflict with the commercialized vulgarity of American culture.

A. J. Muste begins his review of Mills' *Causes of World War III* with some effective praise of the author:

> Let me begin by placing on the record my opinion that Mills has written a sound, brilliant and most timely political tract. In using the latter term I do not mean to put it into a minor category but to praise it as being in a great tradition of books which are of high intellectual quality but which also propose a program and sound a call for action. That an American sociologist of Mills' standing who is also an unusually well informed and sophisticated analyst of political events should publish such a book is an event in the world struggle against war. If the book meets with the response from Mills' fellow intellectuals and from the physical scientists which I think it merits, it may prove a major turning point in that struggle.

Mr. Muste's enthusiasm for one of Mills' proposals—a call to intellectuals in general, not only scientists, to become conscientious objectors—is understandable. Mr. Muste has been, as most liberals know, a determined and effective pacifist for many years. Mills has finally come to the conclusion that, today, the decision to become a conscientious objector "requires only sanity." Muste confirms: "To say, as some scientists and others do, that if they do not undertake certain war jobs, others will, 'is less an argument than the mannerism of the irresponsible.' To refuse such work 'is an act affirming yourself as a moral center of responsible decision. . . . It reveals the resolution of one human being to take at least his own fate into his own hands'." Muste quotes Mills' writings extensively, noting such proposals as that "the U.S. government should at once and unilaterally cease all further production

of 'extermination' weapons and take steps to destroy existing stocks or convert them in so far as it is technically possible to peace time uses," and "the government should abandon all military bases and installations outside the continental domain of the U.S." Mr. Muste continues:

> I think Mills is correct in charging that an important reason for the bankruptcy of U.S. foreign policy and the dolorous state of society in general is that a good many of the best of our intellectuals allowed "themselves to be trapped by the politics of anti-Stalinism, which has been a main passageway from the political thirties to the intellectual default of the apolitical fifties." That both ecclesiastical and secular leaders of opinion in rejecting Stalinism, have in effect been apologists for U.S. foreign policy and its war machine or at best ineffective critics of it is a major tragedy. In this context Mills correctly calls attention to the fact that "the first significant cracks in the intellectual cold war came in the Communist world after the death of Stalin"—in Poland, Hungary and Yugoslavia, and that the enemy now is not Russia or the United States, as the case may be, but war. This is the stark, ultimate fact of life now. To see this and proclaim it is not to go soft about Communism or Soviet diplomacy and militarism. It means, as Mills says, to "have feelings of equal contempt for leading types of underdeveloped cultural workmen of the overdeveloped countries" on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Erich Fromm reviews *Trotsky's Diary in Exile* (Harvard University Press). While never a Communist sympathizer in the political sense, Dr. Fromm demonstrates that a psychologist-philosopher can always do better than repeat conventional negative judgments. He begins:

> The general habit of considering Stalinism and present-day Communism as identical with, or at least as a continuation of revolutionary Marxism, has also led to an increasing misunderstanding of the personalities of the great revolutionary figures: Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. Just as their theories are seen as related to those of Stalin and Khrushchev, the picture of the "revolutionary fanatic" is applied to them as it is to the vengeful killer Stalin and to the opportunistic conservative Khrushchev. This distortion is a real loss for the present and the future. In whatever way one may disagree with Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, there can be no doubt that as persons they represent a flowering of Western humanity.
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> They were men with an uncompromising sense of truth penetrating to the very essence of reality, and never taken in by the deceptive surface; of an unquenchable courage and integrity; of deep concern and devotion to man and his future unselfish and with little vanity or lust for power. They were always stimulating, always alive, always themselves, and whatever they touched became alive. They represented the Western tradition in its best features, its faith in reason and in the progress of man. Their errors and mistakes are the very ones which also follow from Western thinking: rationalism and the Western over-estimation of the efficacy of force which underlies the great middle-class revolutions of the last few centuries.

There is something always warm and inviting about the writing of Silone, whether it be an essay, a novel—or simply, as in this case, a ruminative letter. In 1993 Silone was thrown into a "model prison" in Barcelona because his presence in Spain as a tourist occasioned political alarm. He shared quarters and many hours of excellent conversation with a young man who had been condemned to death for "acts of terrorism"—political agitation. Since this young radical was not yet twenty-one years of age, and since the Church frowned upon executions for minors, the military men in charge of the prison were at a loss as to how to proceed. They finally decided to keep him confined until he came of age and then strangle him with the garrote. As Silone aptly characterized it, this was certainly a Dostoevskian situation, and it was with this cheerful young man who lived only to die on his twenty-first birthday that the young Silone read and discussed those great Russian novels which a kind prison doctor supplied.

There is much of poignance in Silone's account, but little of conventional pathos. The young man, like Silone, seemed always to be able to live beyond anything that might be done to him:

> I was no longer in prison. The reading of these books caused the walls of my narrow cell to vanish, and transported me thousands of miles distant, to an atmosphere that filled me with an anguish such as I

had never known. Sometimes I was walking with an immense crowd along the banks of a great river, the Neva, while far off in the bright night gleamed the gilded domes of a monastery. Or in a large garden, sitting among jasmine, I tremblingly watched Prince Mishkin as he waited for Nastasia Filippovna. Or in the monastery hall I knelt amidst other pilgrims, listening to the hoarse inspired voice of a holy old man, the *starets* Zosima.

What else could I possibly have talked about with that young man who had been condemned to death, each morning when I rejoined him in the infirmary?

Intervening time has done nothing to change my remembrance: those were marvelous days. They were among the most beautiful days of my life.

COMMENTARY
ASKING TOO MUCH

SOME 250 top-ranking scientists plus a few industrialists and foundation executives gathered in New York on May 14 to discuss the problems of "pure" research (New York *Times*, May 15). They met at Rockefeller Institute for a three-day symposium sponsored by two scientific bodies and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. The conclusions of the first day were mostly to the effect that not enough money is available to pay for basic research—"basic research" being defined as "research directed toward an increase of knowledge by an investigator who is not seeking primarily a practical application." It was claimed by speakers that "history shows that the latter [basic] type of research will in the end produce more significant and profound truths."

These devotees of pure science want more money to pursue the truth with a capital "T." At present only about $670,000,000 a year is alloted to basic research, while the total budget in America for research and development is $9,000,000,000. The head of the National Science Foundation would like to see at least a billion dollars available annually for basic investigation. This allotment would enable the "pure" researchers to buy such expensive tools as "nuclear particle accelerators."

Dr. Harry L. Shapiro of the American Museum of Natural History, an anthropologist, thinks that the natural sciences have the lion's share of pure research funds. Social science is poorly supported, he said, pointing out that "it may be that support of basic research in the behavioral sciences is needed more than support of any other scientific field."

There is something wrong with this picture. Just why would the conventional institutions—the *moneyed* institutions, that is—of a society as far off the beam as our society is, pay for research that would disclose the truth about ourselves and increase our obligation to change?

Basic research is not a matter of "budgets." Nobody ever paid a real pioneer a salary. No discoverer of important truth ever enjoyed much popularity in his own lifetime. Apart from facts of this sort, the methodology of conventional "truth-seeking" may not even apply in questions which are really basic. This is probably true generally as well as more specifically in the case of what Dr. Shapiro calls "the behavioral sciences." The experiments in living, whether individual or social, which have brought new vision and new understanding about human behavior have been carried out by people committed by great convictions. Being "paid" for their work was the last thing that concerned them.

Then there is the matter of the imagination. The "social" truths we now cherish and wish we were living by obtained existential reality from men who broke with the past, who dreamed high dreams and then transformed them into fact. It is the men who prove something without any money who contribute to the welfare of mankind, since mankind in general is without money and is likely to stay that way.

Social science has a strong dislike of exceptional cases, of atypical individuals. A statistician can't do much with people like that except omit them from his calculations. He pretends that they are not there. Of course, a point may be reached by the influence of some "atypical individual" where it becomes necessary for social scientists to write papers about him. You may even get a foundation devoted to research about his life, or his *kind* of life. After the literature gets built up, the subject becomes canonical, and then you can research away forever without getting into trouble.

There are a lot of people doing genuine research in "behavioral science," these days, but the big foundations have never heard of them, and probably never will. There have been two or three experiments in cooperative farming here in California, during the past ten years. There are couples, here and there, teaching their children at

home, with or without the knowledge or consent of the state educational authorities, and one family finally went to Mexico in order to practice educational freedom. There are Bruderhof communities in England, Paraguay, and the United States, and various individuals who, each in his own way, are trying to reduce to a minimum their participation in and contribution to the evils of contemporary social life. (See Scott and Helen Nearing's *The Quest for the Good Life.)*

You can try something like this, or you can become a social scientist and get paid for writing papers about such activities of fifty years ago. Or, if you want to do a more modern study, you can draw a parallel between Dr. Schweitzer and the beatniks. This is good for a laugh and is likely to make everybody feel more secure, which is always a constructive contribution. As Dr. G. H. Turner-Hood, a woman psychiatrist, told the Pontiac Rotary Club recently, Dr. Schweitzer might well be called "king of the beatniks." Schweitzer, she said, has been entreating modern man "to liberate himself from the domination of mass institutions and mass ideas," while the beat generation, likewise, is "protesting against a superfluity of tongue-in-cheek conformity." The beatniks, she added, "are superior people afflicted with too much insight into the psychodrama of real life." They "represent a mass retreat and a protest against all areas where things have become overwhelming." But "they have no comfortable place to retreat to. They can't all go to Africa." (New York *Times*, May 27.)

There is doubtless some truth here, but not very pure, and not the kind anyone will do anything about.

The interesting part of the New York meeting of the research scientists came at the beginning, when Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer, who has certainly had *his* lesson in messing with Truth about human behavior, opened the symposium. He pointed out:

> The need for new knowledge has not always been fully recognized by the authorities, as the story of Adam and Eve and the legend of Prometheus remind us. New knowledge has been feared as the destroyer of man's innocence and his virtue, as an incitement to pride and insubordination, and as subversive of public order and public good. It is, of course, guilty of all those charges.

Maybe the other men didn't hear what he said. Anyway, they went right on with the meeting and explained how the government and the foundations don't give them enough money for the Pursuit of Truth.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

NOTES IN PASSING

WE still remember one criticism, rather caustic, directed at what seemed our tiresome praise of the "frontier situation" as an ideal educational environment for small children. Why, said this correspondent, join the mourners of days gone by? Well, despite the arguments based on the illustrative value of any utopian "basic education" opportunity, we must agree that it is more of a challenge to look around the present scene for possible ways in which simple physical and psychic disciplines can be devised.

When children passed from childhood to useful maturity pursuing tasks organic to the home, a good portion of "initiatory rites" were automatically fulfilled. But the frontier boy passed another sort of test when he took his first job with a neighbor. Often a father would choose to send the boy "out," not just for the extra money, but also because he felt the boy needed to come to terms with the requirements of the outside world. If successful in meeting and dealing with the new situation, the boy would be that much more valuable in his own home—both in terms of demonstrated capacity and as a person of widened experience.

Today, the argument for the outside employment of growing youths is even stronger, whether or not the family has direct need of further income. On the one hand is the praise of jobs for youth from judges of juvenile courts and other youth authorities, stressing the value of the discipline involved. On the other, the youth attains a greater measure of independence, which is what the "initiatory rites" meant to those who passed them successfully in the simpler societies of the past. This experience is virtually indispensable. The youth who is allowed to leave the parental environment needs to become accountable for the consequences of his independent activities, at least financially.

But what can a growing boy do, today, to earn some money for himself? Opportunities vary with the general setting. Yet while the widest scope is offered in the rural community, even city-dwelling youngsters have a chance for some kind of responsible employment. In our own neighborhood, which is neither poor nor wealthy, the boys with paper routes seem to benefit immeasurably from the natural disciplines which attend their task. Rising before dawn—with less TV watching the night before—the boy awakes to a world in which he is one of the few functioning units. The magic of early morning brings a heightened awareness to all who enjoy good health. In this atmosphere, the lessons of promptness and regularity can be learned with a kind of quiet pride. A paper route cuts into aimless time, but need not hinder the pursuit of either studies or sports. The boy begins to learn how to organize his time.

What about young girls, growing into adolescence? For girls there is a wide potential in cooperation in household tasks. As an extension of these comes the opportunity for "baby-sitting" for neighbors, and perhaps throughout the community. No matter what one might feel inclined to say about parents who spend a number of evenings away from home, the fact is that there is constant demand for reliable youngsters to "mind the children," and that a girl can, in meeting this demand, pass her way through some of her own "initiatory rites" on the road to independence. (The boys, it must be admitted, have an edge here, since newspapers do not hire girls for paper routes, etc., whereas boys often serve as baby-sitters.) But, a few years later, the girls have their advantage in vacation and holiday employment in department, clothing, and novelty stores.

It seems to us that nearly all these young employees are happier and better integrated as a result of their gainful activities, and that there are forms of legitimate pleasure connected with work for the young. Even from the point of view of pleasure alone, we deprive the child who has no

work to do. In the private school situation, experiments at modified self-sufficiency, provided one has an enlightened staff, seem to result in high morale. This was the case in the early days of Black Mountain College in America, and markedly so at the educational center established by Gandhi at Sevagram in India. Whether child or university student, the human being responds to a call to undertake responsibility—provided the need is genuine.

Most of these considerations, we suppose, may be held to be quite obvious. Yet the present seems a time when just such generalizations should be looked at closely in relation to the social surroundings. It is not so much a *theory* of discipline which youth needs, as the opportunities for work which call forth an ordering and training of energies.

Macneile Dixon recounts a little Spanish girl's first visit to London. Looking outward from a train window at the drab horizon, she remarked, "These people have no view!" and burst into tears. Most of our young people have no *style,* and this, perhaps, comes from missing the chance to participate in activities which represent adult work *or* pleasure. For adult activities, even if they border on the frivolous, as in the case of conventional sports, have some psychological connection with the "initiatory rites" of the past. The youth who caddies regularly on a golf course, or who receives training as a ball-boy for a major tennis tournament, learns a "style" which he carries with him. Speaking with more direct experience of the latter, we have seen ten- and eleven-year-olds earn their "ball-boy" money with polished dexterity—move like a streak when the occasion calls for it, and freeze into complete immobility when the slightest motion on their part would disturb the play. Tennis may be an artificial sport, an apparently useless expenditure of money and effort, but it *is* training, physical and mental, in which the young can take pride. It connects the boy or youth with something many adults do with pleasure, and a "style" which results from discipline is not without value.

How many other such minor opportunities are there? Perhaps many, more impressive and instructive than these, which are worth thinking about in relation to one's own children. The style of the drifting adolescent is now a mockery of the adult world, a commentary on what it has failed to provide in the way of "initiatory rites"—save for those connected with soldiering, which by now we should have outgrown.

FRONTIERS

"HE," "SHE," or "IT"?

IT remains for small-circulation magazines whose editors hold and express strong opinions to discuss touchy questions of religion. By "discuss," we mean an examination of religious beliefs on their merits. Modern writers usually limit themselves to "sociological" criticism when considering religion or religious groups, as for example Paul Blanchard, who has been scrupulously careful not to argue the content of Catholicism, while examining the relation of Catholic organizations to politics and international affairs. No doubt the subjects are different, with justification for keeping them separate, yet there was a time when historians found reason to seek in peoples' beliefs an explanation for their actions, as for example W. E. H. Lecky in his studies of European morals and the rise of rationalism.

The discussion which provokes this comment is the lead article of the May *Realist,* a new monthly published in New York (225 Lafayette St., N.Y. 12, N.Y.), with Paul Krassner as editor. The article is "The Semantics of 'God'," by Robert Anton Wilson, who edits the Newsletter of the Institute for General Semantics.

Mr. Wilson begins with the familiar semantic proposition that language confines and shapes thought, and that if we are to have free thought, we need to emancipate ourselves from habits of speech which prejudice thinking. Becoming specific, he writes:

> I would like to propose that the traditional ideas of theism agnosticism and atheism would all have to be changed—if we all said (and thought) "it" instead of "he" when referring to "God."
>
> The average Believer considers *God* a man like himself, only bigger and invisible—a sort of translucent *homo sapiens* of galactic heft and mass. His own theologians will tell him this is an absurdity bordering almost on blasphemy. I suggest that this ridiculous mental picture results solely from the habitual use, from childhood on, of the pronoun "he" in reference to Divinity.

The use of "he," usually written "He," certainly makes it difficult to get rid of the personal conception of deity, yet we should hardly agree that the "ridiculous mental picture" results *solely* from language. Along with "Bible stories" and the prayers taught to children, Michelangelo's painting of Creation has surely been a contributing cause of the anthropomorphic idea of God, hanging, as it does, in so many conspicuous places where it may be seen by the impressionable young. We don't know if the anthropological sculpture of *Homo Neanderthalis* and *Pithecanthropus Erectus* to be seen in many museums is much of an improvement over Michelangelo for a portrait of man's progenitor, but there is little doubt that such images have a far-reaching effect.

The body of Mr. Wilson's argument, however, is clearly on the right track. He points out that if, as contemporary theologians assert, God is a "spirit," the elderly gent pictured in Grandma's Bible can not "represent" God. He continues:

> It is this "he," furthermore, which has given Christianity, Judaism and Islam that anthropomorphic cast which makes them so unattractive to the scientifically trained. Wald writes (in the August *Scientific American):* "I try to avoid making sentences with the word 'God' in them." What he is objecting to is clearly the anthropomorphic associations of the term for later he adds that when somebody else says "God," he mentally translates "the order of nature."

The rest of Mr. Wilson's discussion is devoted to taking illustrations from the religious thought of the East, to show the great difference between impersonal ideas about the Highest and the anthropomorphic conceptions common to the Christian tradition.

Someone, reading his analysis, might argue that Oriental religion, in particular Indian religion, is filled with personification—that the Hindu pantheon, for example, has dozens of "gods." This is true, but they are none of them "almighty" gods. That is, ancient Oriental religion almost always combines polytheism with pantheism. The

multiple major and minor deities of such systems are easily conceived of as *within* Nature—they all have different roles and functions. It is the *transcendent* Deity which is beyond description or finite limitation—sexless, bodiless, and immanent, as well as all-pervasive. These distinctions between the manifest and the unmanifest deity were early lost by Christianity, through the branding of philosophizing Christians as *heretics.* The story of pantheistic thought in Christendom is the story of persecuted philosophers who seldom escaped the punishments meted out by a vengeful orthodoxy, unless it were by carefully hiding their beliefs behind verbal smokescreens and metaphysical subtleties. Philosophic Christians do the same today, although with considerably less justification. Mr. Wilson continues:

> The Chinese have had from very early times two words for "the Divine Principle." *T'ien* we usually translate "heaven"; *Shang-Ti* is "heaven's ruler," *i.e.,* a sort of "God." Chinese philosophers, whether Confucian, Taoist, Mohist, Fa-Chiaist or whatnot, have always preferred to write about *T'ien* rather than *Shang-Ti.* (Confucius, for instance, often talks of "Heaven's decree," or "Heaven's laws"; and Lao-Tse tells us "Heaven is not human-hearted.")
>
> As a result, Chinese philosophy, even at its most mystical, has an objectivity and impersonality that makes it much less offensive to the scientific or liberal thinker than the mystic writings of the West. It was in China that the concept of the *Tao* was formulated: this is the only process-oriented, rather than static, view of Divinity, conceived by man in pre-scientific times. It took Darwin and Einstein to revolutionize the West enough to get Bergson, Whitehead and Alexander (among others) thinking along similar lines.
>
> So, then: suppose the Believer begins referring to "God" as "it." He will soon find that his statements about "it" will grow more abstract and impersonal. If he implies purpose to "it," he will be more cautious about supposing that to be a human purpose, or a purpose necessarily benevolent to man. Dr. Wald will find it easier to translate the believer's statements, the "order of nature" is more an "it" than a "he."
>
> The non-believer, in his turn, will begin to wonder what, precisely, he is opposing. If he objects to some of the things the Believer says about "God," it will be in the same way he objects to some of the things Marxists say about "History": he will at least know that they are talking about something he recognizes, even if they imply more knowledge about it than man can possibly have.

This seems a valuable analysis. Militant atheism, when you look at it closely, can always be recognized as primarily a firm stand against an outside control over human behavior by an arbitrary power, a *personal* power. An "it" can hardly be personal. When the offensive functions of deity are dispensed with, atheism has very little excuse for being. Remove anthropomorphism, and even theism, from religion, and there remains that common ground of "spirit" of which the great pantheists have taught, and which has been the inspiration of countless poets and seers. The curse of religion has always been the arrogant assumption of power by some men over others, in its name. The first atheist was the first intelligent man who heard the first priest start in to "interpret" God's will.

Contrasting Eastern and Western religion, Wilson says:

> Occidentals, thinking of "God" as "he," early began to ask, "What does he want of us?" (All "he's" want something.) They have never gotten beyond that. Hindus and Buddhists, thinking of "Brahman" or "Dharma" as "it," began thinking, "What does it want of us?"—but they soon developed a school which took the assumption that "it" wants nothing (non-teleology).
>
> The *Upanistads* say, "Brahman is not the being who is worshipped under that name," [This sounds more like Lao-Tse although the Upanishads may say the same.—Eds., MANAS], and "Brahman is the power by which the tongue speaks and the eye sees"; the Mahayana Buddhists very early began to teach that the One becomes (or creates) the Many without purpose, and the Many return to the One to again become Many in an endless cycle, equally without purpose.
>
> The very rigid causal scheme of *karma* is unthinkable to one who thinks of the Divine as "he"—Christians and Jews are always trying to cheat God, as Ibsen pointed out, by making bargains with "him"—but no Hindu or Buddhist ever imagined he

> could escape the consequences of his acts by bargaining with "karma."

There is hardly anything to quarrel with in Mr. Wilson's analysis, although we suspect that scholars might find considerable fault with this brief summary of Oriental beliefs. For example, while it is certain that the Highest, or Mr. Wilson's "It," can want nothing, since absolute completeness cannot be added to, there is the corresponding idea that everything which has a *definable* existence is *in* existence in order to obtain a fulfillment of some sort, so that a good, and therefore a purpose, is present throughout the universe. Nirvana is the philosophic term for absolute realization, in Eastern thought. But *It* remains unchanged, whether the universe is in Nirvana, or engaged in Manvantara: therefore, *It* must be said to have no "purpose." But the *cycles of development* do have purpose—the purposes of the beings who make the cycles and who finally exhaust their potentialities of experience.

Then, there is the reference to karma as presenting a "very rigid causal scheme." Karma, as we understand it, is indeed rigid in the sense that every cause set in motion must exhaust itself in appropriate action; but the "rigidity" is qualified by the capacity of individuals to set into motion new causes which modify the existing state of affairs. This is the sort of "freedom" contemplated in Eastern thought. As put in the Mandukya Upanishad, Parabrahm is that which is supreme and not supreme; supreme as *cause*, not supreme as effect. Mr. Wilson concludes:

> In all these Oriental faiths, we see foreshadowings of the scientific outlook; they all derive from the impersonality of "it" thinking. As long as the Occident continues to think of its Divinity as a "he," it will remain schizophrenically split away from the scientific views of its intellectual minority.

Obviously, the discipline of semantic analysis has enabled this writer to isolate a major weakness in contemporary religion. One wonders whether this skill could be turned with equal effect to an analysis of scientific thought.