VOLUME XIV, NO. 16
APRIL 19, 1961

THE WORD'S WORK

IF you get to wondering about whether there is in the world today one man who, in his breadth of understanding and philosophic stance, comprehends and speaks for this age, you soon realize that finding such a man is quite unlikely, if not impossible. While there are a number of currents moving toward synthesis in thought, our time is as yet far from being an age of synthesis. Instead, you will probably conclude that it is an age of maturing specialties, and that while many men declare the need for synthesis, the intellectual grounds for a unified system of thought do not exist.

Synthesis requires philosophy, and the present is not a time when philosophy has much stature in the world of thought. What we do have, however, is some of the *ingredients* of philosophy, some of the primary moral insights and intellectual perceptions out of which great philosophies of life are made. These elements of philosophy are presented to us by the specialists—men who, having mastered their own disciplines, are reaching out to understand the relationships between what they know and what lies beyond the field of their immediate studies. You see men originally concerned with nutrition becoming interested in the problems of agriculture, world food supply, and population growth. You see psychotherapists taking up sociology, intent upon the question of what sort of environment will make a better contribution to mental health. You find a man who has been a lifelong student of the humanities and the drama turning to investigation of the natural world, in hopes of gaining more intimate touch with the essences of life. You find scientists, aghast at the forces of ruin at their disposal, turning pacifist or semi-pacifist, and you find politicians, frustrated by the ineffectuality of their labors, seeking new means of regenerating the social community. Artists and writers are, almost to a man, rebels or potential rebels, and scholars, led on by the underlying assumptions in great literature, are becoming critical essayists. The architect moves from the creation of single edifices to the larger problems of community and city planning and, discovering that houses and towns are ultimately the creatures of the people who live in them, can hardly escape becoming a humanist reformer. The designer is likewise driven to broadening fields of enterprise, until he runs into the blank wall of intellectual and moral blindness which prevents his best conceptions from being realized.

This is surely the right way, in our time, to return to questions of synthesis—that is, to philosophical questions and issues. The problems, if they are to be taken seriously, must emerge in the context of immediate experience. When a psychotherapist insists that "man is not a thing," this is more than an echo of ancient theological assumption. It is a communication which rises from the moment of tender contact between two human beings, one of them more or less sick, the other more or less well. It is a conviction which has grown out of the rapport of consciousness, disclosed as an "empirical" reality, in the best sense of this expression. Whatever of philosophy we can have in the future, it will have to have roots of this sort in the immediacies of life. We may make use of past theories and metaphysical systems, but if there is one thing that we have learned from the past hundred years of collective and individual experience, it is that religions and ideologies which lack the direct sanction of experience are not only useless but viciously harmful in what they may persuade men to do to other men.

It is, therefore, the men who speak out of the intensity of personal experience, yet show a grasp of human affairs and problems beyond the

immediate area of that experience, who can command our attention, these days. They have the maturity of seasoned specialists. This maturity is the product of a non-specialized sense of proportion and a general regard for the welfare of the human race.

The work of the specialist is to recognize and define the terms of the problems characteristic in his field, and then to set about solving them. In most cases special problems can be solved by individuals or teams of experts working together. When the specialist matures, however, the problems he sets tend to become general problems which he can no longer solve by himself. He addresses the statement of these problems to the general public.

There are of course various sorts of specialists. The way in which these people grow aware of general problems and formulate them depends in some measure upon the fields they work in. For example, years ago Albert P. Mathews, an eminent biochemist, wrote in a text on cytology:

> We must leave out, because of our ignorance, the psychic side of chemical reactions. Our equations, therefore, will be as incomplete as if energy were omitted. The transformation of matter and energy alone can be considered in this chapter, which becomes hence like Hamlet with Hamlet left out. Let us not blind ourselves to this fact. (*General Cytology*, E. V. Cowdry, ed., Chicago University Press.)

The philosophical question of the role of mind in chemical reactions is here raised. It was not, when Cowdry's book appeared, a problem that chemists or biologists could deal with, nor is it now. Whether it can be dealt with at all by familiar scientific means is also open to question. But Dr. Mathews was a mature specialist who in this brief passage made clear the limitations of his specialty and passed along the philosophical problem of mind for general consideration.

Another sort of specialty is represented by the work of Robert M. Hutchins and his colleagues and associates of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, at Santa Barbara, California. The work of this group is so broad that it may be a mistake to speak of it as a specialty, yet you would have to say that the philosophical issues with which the Center is concerned are *derived* issues—the great human questions are considered in terms of the political and social institutions of the democratic society rather than directly. So, in this sense, the work of the Center is a specialty.

Last November Mr. Hutchins spoke at Simmons College in Boston in honor of the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Jane Addams, pioneer American social worker and founder of Hull House in Chicago. Miss Addams was a kind of specialist, too. She devoted her life to binding up the wounds of people who had suffered from the indifference and the cruelty of impersonal social processes. In a moving appreciation of her work, Mr. Hutchins shows how even the specialist in this field is now confronted with conditions which radically alter—mainly by extending—the frontiers of what may be called "social work." He points out how the problems and tasks of the social worker have in recent years been transformed into general problems for which all members of the community must make themselves responsible. Perhaps it has always been true that the significant problems of the specialist are in some sense general problems, too, but Mr. Hutchins is able to show that it is now *inescapably* true. In this portion of his address he begins with a description of the social scene:

> The present stage of industrialization is totally new. What is new about it is that we have a commitment to the highest possible rate of technological change and the capacity to produce technological change on a scale and with a speed heretofore undreamed of. The obvious example of the terrifying implications of these developments is the arms race, where we make things because we can, not because we need them or believe that we can ever use them. But the high rate of technological change and our commitment to it affect every aspect of our lives. These phenomena raise questions about education,

about the use of free time, about work as the principal occupation of our lives, about the meaning of work. These problems Jane Addams foresaw. She said, "If the shop constantly tends to make the workman a specialist, then the problem of the educator in regard to him is quite clear: it is to give him what may be an offset from the overspecialization of his daily work, to supply him with general information and to insist that he shall be a cultivated member of society with a consciousness of his industrial and social value."

She went on: "If a workingman is to have a conception of his value at all, he must see industry in its unity and entirety; he must have a conception that will include not only himself and his immediate family and community, but the industrial organization as a whole. . . . To make the moral connection it would be necessary to give him a social consciousness of the value of his work, and at least a sense of participation and a certain joy in its ultimate use; to make the intellectual connection it would be essential to create in him some historic conception of the development of industry and the relation of his individual work to it."

Miss Addams saw the educational problem and the need for liberal education more clearly than most professional educators. She saw the problem of the need for the worker to understand his work and its relation to society more clearly than most professional labor leaders.

In the context of this recollection of Miss Addams' profound insight into social problems, we can now see looming larger philosophical problems and issues which would undoubtedly oppress her still more today. A large portion of our industry is engaged in making explicit the "terrifying implications" of the arms race, and for the worker to gain some "historic conception" of what he is doing in such labors might be extraordinarily demoralizing to him. What sort of a sense of participation and "wholeness" can you develop while working on an intercontinental ballistic missile? At best, such projects are acts of sheer desperation. Here the problem is even greater for the "educator" who undertakes to carry out Miss Addams' suggestion. He has not only his role to fulfill, but he has also to justify it to himself.

Mr. Hutchins anticipates further problems arising from automation:

What Miss Addams could not foresee was a world without work, and consequently without workmen. The certainty of such a world makes the need for liberal education, and for liberal education throughout life, even more intense. It makes the need for getting workers out of their grooves and developing their minds and their power of adaptation to new jobs and new situations even more serious. The groove and the grave are now very close together. Already we see a constantly diminishing proportion of workers at work in the manufacture of goods. But the shift into the service trades does not mean that the consequences of automation will be avoided, they will merely be postponed, as the spread of self-service and mechanical devices can no more be stopped in the service trades than it can in industry. When you can hang your clothes in a closet and press a button that starts a machine that cleans your clothes as they hang, there is little ultimate hope for the dry cleaners now operating on every block in New York. The advance of technology may mean that we shall all be killed, or that we shall all be bored to death. But it could mean something else. It could mean the realization of the dream of mankind from the dawn of history, relief from drudgery, relief from want, relief from disease, and the opportunity at last to become truly human through having the time and the freedom to exercise our highest human powers.

What is the *general* problem pressed upon our attention, here? It is locked in the expression, "the dream of mankind from the dawn of history." The framework of the problem, today, as Mr. Hutchins indicates, lies in the prospective loss of work for human beings. We already know something of what this can do to people, since it has happened to our children. Bringing up a child in an American city or suburban area is a frightening undertaking. There is almost nothing for him to do. Such children, you could say, already have "the opportunity at last to become truly human through having the time and the freedom to exercise our highest human powers," but the results, instead of being a fulfillment, are practically appalling. How can we stand to have the same thing happen to the adults, also? The problem, so conceived, is that when people get the time and the freedom to exercise their best

powers, *they don't do it.* Somewhere, something goes bitterly, agonizingly wrong.

It seems necessary for us to take leave of the twentieth-century version of "the dream of mankind" and to look elsewhere for an explanation. What could be worse than having "nothing to do"? Paul Goodman speaks of this in *Growing Up Absurd*:

> . . . it is a major defect of our present organized system and the economy of abundance that, without providing great goals, it has taken away some of the important real necessities, leaving people with nothing to do. The void is soon filled. Behavior like going into debt on the installment plan, gives an artificial but then real necessity, something to do, paying up. This *is* the Rat Race, but I doubt that it would be run if people did not need its justifying necessity, for the commodities themselves are not that attractive. Young fellows drift into narcotics, and then find that they have something they must do all day looking for a connection and a fix, and how to get the loot. Compulsive sex-hunting is something to do. . . .Our society is *not* abounding in highly worth-while goals available to average gifts and underprivileged attainments.

More is involved here than a technology to set men materially free and a political system to declare them living in liberty and equal. Turn them loose from work—take away the "drudgery"—and they enslave themselves. Is this *really* what we wanted—not to have to do any "work"? The whole question of Utopia, and whether it is at all possible, is deeply involved in this problem.

Mr. Hutchins sets the problem with three alternatives. The advance of technology, he says, "may mean that we shall all be killed," or, it may mean that "we shall all be bored to death," or, finally, it could mean "the realization of the dream of mankind from the dawn of history." The problem comes down to this, that we shall have to know more about this "dream of mankind." And this is difficult, since people—on the surface, at least—don't hunger and dream after the same things. Looking at the matter in this way helps us to understand the role of the myth in human history. It seems obvious that the myth is an attempt to generalize the "dream of mankind" in terms that will somehow reach in and capture the secret longings of everyone, and thus contain an essential truth for all.

The fact is that the twentieth-century theory of progress has violated all the ancestral myths. What myth do you like? The wanderings of Ulysses? The labors of Hercules? The semi-annual captivity of Persephone? The search for the Nibelungen gold? Rama's recovery of Sita? Arjuna's war with the Kurus?

All the myths involve incredible determination, heroic struggle, on the part of the protagonist. The obstacles are enormous. What are you going to do in a society which has made everything easy, taken away the obstacles, put determination into the movies and handed conflict over to the nuclear physicists as a special problem for them to solve over our heads?

Maybe the alchemists had the right idea. Work, for them, was an earthly process which typified higher transactions going on in subjective nature. The work they did was selected as an appropriate symbol of the *real* work going on inside themselves. They were refining and transmuting base metals into gold; and meanwhile, by a kind of induction, a corresponding transformation was proceeding in the base elements of human nature. Can you imagine an alchemist letting someone else—or something else, like a machine—do his work for him? It would be like selling his soul to the Devil.

And yet, you can't argue that technology's lightening of the physical burdens of human beings has been a bad thing. "Relief from drudgery, relief from want, relief from disease," are by no stretch of the imagination evils. The trouble seems to be in the way we spell out the meaning of "the dream of mankind from the dawn of history." We don't really know, or are not able to say, what that dream is. We have the same problem in respect to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This is

the undistributed middle in our proposition about the Good Life.

It is at this point that the need for a metaphysic becomes so obvious that you have to give up entirely unless you are willing to look for help in this direction. You need a Hegelian proposition about the World Spirit realizing itself in the forms of material embodiment, working in those forms as the means to self-realization; or you need a Gnostic doctrine of the emergence of souls from the One, pursuing a long cycle of pilgrimages on earth and returning, finally, to the One, enriched by the contact and extension of awareness which the Odyssey of existence made possible.

There will be those, quite likely, eager to point out that such talk is out of harmony with the scientific spirit, which knows nothing of souls and can have no commerce with any ideas of radical unity such as the Platonic One. And this is quite correct. The scientific spirit—or what we take to be the scientific spirit—is absolutely against this sort of speculation. But what must also be admitted is that the *operative* scientific spirit of our time is also out of harmony with the survival of the human race, to say nothing of the subtler issues of the dignity of man. More than we need what passes for the scientific spirit, today, we need the autonomy of the *human* spirit, and the sort of thinking about the nature of man which gives the individual *something to do.*

We are not prepared to suggest the form in which metaphysical ideas will be able to come back into the tradition of Western philosophy. We do say that these ideas will somehow have to return, and that they will come by non-theological paths. Possibly psychic research will have something to do with the revival of metaphysics, and possibly a quickening of mystical experience in the race as a whole will strengthen the sinews of metaphysical thought. Above all, it seems likely that men will find kinds of work to do which will, for modern times, duplicate the old symbolism of the alchemists and even the rites of the nature festivals of antiquity. There are profound longings in the hearts of men for a return to nature; with this difference, that the nature we are beginning to become more intimately acquainted with is a *conscious* nature—the nature of consciousness, or of conscious life, you might say. The pain of our alienation is great, while our love as well as our conscious reverence of life is growing. The several crises of the age, from which we take almost forcible instructions, while terrible in their threat and implications, may be but the external phenomena of a travail that hastens on a new birth.

REVIEW
"THE GODDAM WHITE MAN"

DAVID LYTTON'S novel of this title (MacGibbon & Kee, London, 1960) is another reminder that many of the nonwhite peoples of the world have acquired a bias that is fully as virulent as the feelings which most red-blooded Americans display towards the Russians—but with much more excuse. This book shows the grounds for resentment against white supremacy in Africa. The author spent his first twenty-one years in and around the Cape Peninsula, going to Great Britain to work for the BBC after the fall of the Smuts government in 1948. Two subsequent trips to Africa on behalf of the BBC led him to try a trilogy of novels—books in which he could speak to listeners and readers sympathetic to the millions in Africa who are caught between two cultures.

As one reviewer says, this is a direct and powerful story. The first three paragraphs give the point of view and reveal the impact of this writer:

> Jesus, can I hate the white man. From the pit of my stomach, right up to my throat, sometimes the hate fills me. Goddam the white man. That's what they sing in the streets of Johannesburg. The kaffir work gangs sing it to put swing into the work and the whites stand around and take the English and American visitors to see it and say "The old rhythm of Africa"; but the words which they don't understand say "Goddam the white man."
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> And the white women. Worse, much worse than the men. The evil ones, the cruel white bitch. Goddam the white woman. She has nothing to do except be superior. We are the servants who must do the work that gives her time to be superior. She lies on the beach, goes to the races, goes to the parties, all the parties, stepping with her long white legs like the secretary bird that steps dainty to find snakes in the grass.
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> The white men are stupid. That is plain to see. You have to go far and search deep before you find a white man who is clever in this country. The sun fries up their brains. They lie in the sun on the beaches and fry themselves brown; some are nearly as black as my mother. You would think, now that's a strange thing for people to do who can't be in the same room with a colored man. But there it is. There they lie, all day on the beach at Muizenberg, St. James, Gordon's Bay, the Strand; I've seen them lying there with oil rubbed into them to make a good deep fry. One day all the white people are going to be black. That's going to be a day. There's going to be a lot of laughing that day. But I won't see it. It's a long way off. They must still make a lot more injustices before that day is sent upon them.

Johannes, the part-white African who speaks his piece throughout the book, is well aware that a certain number of the whites proclaim their sympathy for the oppressed race, but usually as a salve to an intermittent conscience. After a conversation with a white woman for whom he is chauffeuring, who tells him of her own disgust for the standards of privileged society, Johannes remarks:

> It was like driving the drunks after a party; the last one in the car always was your friend, he hated what the whites did to the coloureds, he hated all the slums that had to be; but what could one person do about it? I heard that many times. Sometimes they even cried, great big tears gobbing up in their eyes. It used to make me sick in the stomach.

In reading a book like Mr. Lytton's it is well to remember that Africa is not simply a "backward" country. There are more Africans than Americans, approximately ten million more. The continual stream of articles in the liberal press on the problems besetting this strife-torn land constitutes a plea to white intelligence—that the attitudes which have been behind the policies of colonialism and exploitation for so many centuries must be reversed. The British Parliament, considerably more enlightened as it reviews its past history of India and England, is still, curiously enough, a scene where much of the future of Africa will be decided. Britain has lately acquired a new kind of prestige throughout the world for liberal policy, and recommendations in Parliament or by the Prime Minister are not likely to be entirely ignored either by the Foreign Office or by other governments.

An interview with some Nigerian students in the *New Republic* (Feb. 20) shows that more and more Africans are learning to think with some sophistication. The following remarks—some from one student and some from another—are directed to Americans:

> "Africans are weary of being pushed around like pawns on your Cold War chessboard. You take it for granted that we lack intelligence to make our own decisions and shape our own future. Russia and America haven't yet realized that Africa does not need to decide between capitalism and Communism. There are alternatives and we can find them."
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> "You Americans are the most obstinate people. You above all others should realize that Africa is not to be wooed like a child with no mind of its own. There is so much talk in the United States about winning Africa for the free world. Has it ever occurred to you that perhaps we don't want to be won, perhaps we don't regard your freedom as being particularly desirable?"
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> "We are ready to receive your help, but help that comes from love, not pity. We don't want a patronizing pat on the back. We don't want your American superiority flaunted in our faces, because in fact we don't recognize this superiority."
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> "You must realize that when we talk like this it is not because we are pro-Communist. We want nothing to do with Communism. The Hungaries repel us. We have never looked to Moscow for leadership. We have looked to the West but you have disappointed us."
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> "Put it another way. The West is a declining civilization. Where is the human race going to get the leaven it needs so badly if Africans—and Asians—are not allowed to express themselves as human beings?"

The year 1960 was a truly amazing one for the history of Africa: sixteen new independent African nations emerged, with complicated after-effects which are now reverberating throughout the world. For supplementary reading we recommend Senator Frank E. Moss's "New Frontiers in Africa" in the March *Progressive*, and MP Denis Healey's letter from London in the March 6 *New Republic*, titled "Deadlock Over Northern Rhodesia."

COMMENTARY
SOCRATIC DOUBT

GOING over Mr. Crammer's views on teaching in this week's "Children," and considering what happened to Socrates, one reflects that this sort of education is not only "painful and unsettling" to the pupils, but also to the community at large. So little, after all, stands up under searching critical examination. And what does stand up seems to be made up of qualities of life, attitudes of mind, rather than conclusions about the nature of things.

It is possible to suggest that this period of history is one in which large numbers of people are becoming unwilling pupils of the Socratic spirit. That is, the events of the times are shaking them loose from well-established convictions. You might even argue that the real meaning of the traumatic experience of the present is that men are being forced to find new grounds for hope, self-confidence, and a sense of purpose in their lives. The conventional forms of security are losing their reliability and their prestige. The "last resort" of a beleaguered people—war—is now being recognized as probably worse than the evils it is intended to cure. Even the catharsis of absolute violence is now denied to us. We may try it, of course, but we are not likely to survive it.

The good things are no longer good. It is becoming increasingly difficult to pretend that they are good, or that we still think they are good.

No Athenian sage is persuading us of these things, but the pressing course of events. Only the frantic and the neurotically insecure look for scapegoats, these days. Khrushchev, Mao, and now Castro may bother us some, but it takes more exaggeration than sensible people are capable of to blame them for all the things we feel to be wrong.

Actually, we are hounded by an abstract Socrates. That nasty question, Is it true?, or, Why should I believe it?, keeps on coming up.

A certain courage is needed to face such questions. Most likely one of the causes of the revival of popular religion, these days, is the hope that these questions can be evaded. A strong, emotional draft of faith will sometimes help to stave them off.

It is even conceivable that the most unlovely political movement of the twentieth century, Fascism, really arose from the fear of having to face unpleasant questions. Communism seems a little different, although, after it gets going, some of its operational methods are hardly to be distinguished from fascist undertakings.

You read about the trial and death of Socrates and you feel contempt for the Five Hundred. They condemned him—or let a clique of his enemies condemn him while the majority sat back in passive virtue. But the Five Hundred were not so very different from the fearful people of the twentieth century who resist Socratic questioning. They may not want to poison their best philosophers, but they may be quite content to drive them out of the nation's schools. They may feel great sympathy for hungry waifs at home and abroad, but they are easily polarized into outspoken justification of the atom bombing of Hiroshima, forgetting the innocent children of that city, and of the cities which the protection of our "way of life" may oblige us to bomb in the future.

You have to admit that the Five Hundred were not Bad People. Too many other people—people of today—are like them. They don't want to be forced to think, to leave the strongholds of habitual opinion.

But *why*, if they are good people, should thinking be so painful for them?

Without prolonging this argument to work out all the steps in between, we should like to suggest that this question has only a philosophical answer—or, if you will, a religious answer. These people have not been led to think that justice and truth are the highest good for human beings. The focus of their faith has been elsewhere. They have

not been helped to experience the joy of impartial investigation. So, when the practical bastions of their lesser faiths are threatened, like any living thing, they recoil in fear.

They do not have confidence in the wonderful powers of the human mind. Their capacity for individual discovery has not been honored and fostered. *They do not believe in themselves.*

So, they are not "enemies." They, as Camus said, "both victims and executioners."

This is the luminous truth, the great humanitarian discovery of the twentieth century.

This is the truth that the intellectuals and moralists of the age cannot let go, because of its fascinating application to so many practical human problems. This is the abstract Socrates which is instructing us all. It is a truth which slowly but surely will do away with angry doctrines about Good People and Bad people. In time it will make teachers and educators out of all honest patriots and true revolutionists. What else is there to do, in this age of universal doubt, but to discover in new terms the meaning of the dignity of man?

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
SOCRATES AND THE COMMUNISTS

RECENTLY a junior high school teacher—possibly after reading an editorial in the Los Angeles *Times*—confessed to his class that he was veritably distraught at the way our golden democracy is beleaguered by the Communist menace. "Everywhere," he said, "Communist ideas are sneakily intruding. I just can't express how much I hate communism. I'm a very religious man."

Almost everyone, it seems to us—even the communists—involves some part of his being in what might be called "religious" belief. But the trouble is that any sort of blind belief precludes recognition that it is belief and not knowledge. The worst of all the things that can be said about the Communist regime is that the absoluteness of party belief leads to the justification of thought-control. But emotional anti-Communists are also in favor of thought-control, prepared to contend for measures which make democratic discussion on a national basis impossible. No intelligent man is fanatical about any particular belief. If an emotional man is to become a thinking man, he must be willing to defend his position without recourse to an "absolute." Uncritical belief is dangerous simply because it inhibits the development of the tools of thought which replace fearfulness with an investigatory attitude.

In both *The Greek Way* and *The Echo of Greece*, Edith Hamilton explains why Western civilization took a wrong turning when the Christian Church went the way of Rome, rather than the way of Greece. Constantine and a number of politically-minded Church Fathers collaborated to convert the supernatural elements of the Christian tradition into buttresses of centralized authority. Greek Christianity was Platonic and Socratic; Roman Christianity became Aristotelian, categorical, and loaded with attributes which made it impossible for its adherents to realize that their views were, after all, only unverified "beliefs."

So the habits of arbitrary and dogmatic thought are deeply ingrained in the mental fabric of Occidental culture, in and out of religion and in and out of communism. Everyone's God is a jealous God. And consequently every nation is a jealous nation, every party a jealous party, and most families are jealous, too, because the wrong sort of "God" enforces the egocentric predicament. A good teacher has to cut through this overlay of attitudinal immaturity and to do this he must be a man of rare courage. (If we could gather together all the teachers and professors who have refused to sign the loyalty oath during the past ten years, we would have a rare and wonderful faculty.)

As things stand, it is difficult for a teacher to be thoroughly courageous and open-minded on political and religious questions—particularly if he hopes to continue working with young people. But it is possible to begin teaching by patient *philosophical* penetration of the murk. An excellent example of how this may be done is provided in an article in the October, 1960, *Aryan Path* by a retired English headmaster, Mr. R. W. Crammer, who is now a tutor at a training college for men teachers. His article, "The Socratic Method in Teaching," will say nothing new to most MANAS readers, but he speaks directly and in a manner which is hard for any professed "lover of democracy" to ignore. He writes:

> The Socratic method in teaching is known as "midwifery" from Socrates' description of it in Plato's *Theaetetus*. He compared his art to that of midwives. It, however, differed from theirs in that he attended men and looked after their souls and not their bodies. Like midwives, he, too was barren. By this he meant that he was himself unable to produce a constructive answer to the questions he went about asking people concerning the precise meaning of the words they used in their everyday life, such as " justice," "virtue," "courage," etc. Their answers to these questions, which he described as the thoughts their minds brought forth, he subjected to a thorough, critical examination in discussions with them in order to discover whether these answers were "phantoms and lies or a true birth." The discussions ended inconclusively.
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> With his usual irony, or it may be, genuine humility based upon his recognition that his wisdom consisted in his awareness of his ignorance, he

> declared himself not wise enough to bring forth positive instruction to those whom he questioned. Nevertheless, he claimed that they profited from their discussions with him. Even some of them who appeared dull at first did in the course of time make admittedly astonishing progress, as was acknowledged by others as well as by the questioned themselves. He fully realized that this negative education was intellectually very painful and unsettling. But the demolition of the conventional answers was essential before the young men could be in a position to arrive at a satisfactory, constructive answer by their own thinking. Socrates maintained that all that they discovered came from themselves, to him they owed only the "delivery" of the truth that was in them. Before they could make their discovery they had first to be purged of their prejudices, and in order to learn modesty they had to be refuted, for without refutation, he held, a man is uneducated and in an awful state of impurity.

Just because he is a good Socratic, Mr. Crammer candidly admits that the opening of all topics to free discussion "has its dangers." It is possible for young minds to become enamored of spectacular but unsound opinions. "But," he says, "the question has to be squarely faced whether encouraging one's pupils to think for themselves is right or not. I believe that it is right, and that this freedom of thought, though exposed like any other freedom to dangers, it is imperative to stimulate and to uphold." At the root of the problem of evaluation is the discovery that no criticism can be fully responsible unless it "demands a just understanding of what is being criticized." Which means, of course, that communism can not be discussed unless it is fairly presented in the context of its own choosing, as well as the critical context which we choose to supply.

We recall that, many years ago, Robert Hutchins, then president of the University of Chicago, caused consternation throughout the land by announcing that young people "should be taught communism,"—not so that they would become Communists, but in order that they might acquire enough understanding to be unafraid of any idea and competent to make sound judgments. If, in the years to come, those who are now youths in both Russia and America are ever to reach beyond the walls of suspicions and fear, they will have to develop the intellectual sense of fair play upon which success in communication depends. Teachers who think as Mr. Crammer proposes are affording their pupils at least the opportunity to develop an *honest* critical faculty. Further, since they are arguing about principles instead of simply reflecting partisan opinions on current political alignments, they will be attacked only by bigots, whose absurdities soon reveal themselves.

Here is a final quotation dealing with Crammer's conduct of discussion in the classroom:

> In all the discussions I made a point of impressing upon the group the necessity of taking care to see the difference between fact and opinion of comment, between an observation and a deduction, what exactly is meant by the word "proof," and what kind of proof a question would reasonably admit of. What is relevant and entirely irrelevant, what is the main argument and what the subsidiary or incidental arguments advanced—these must be clearly distinguished. It is not uncommon for pupils learning how to think to believe that they have demolished a point of view or at any rate shown it to be unworthy of further consideration by them when they have merely found out errors of detail, whether of fact or argument.
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> I tell my pupils beforehand that I do not intend to give my answers to the questions I raise with them, that I am resolutely opposed to spoon-feeding them. My intention is to start them on the road to intellectual maturity. There are, I know, many students who would be glad to be relieved of the arduous task of thinking things out for themselves and, because of the teacher's authority, to adopt his beliefs. I have a great respect for the individuality of my students, and I have been most anxious during the whole of my teaching life to guard against the risk of indoctrination or propaganda, which to me are the very antithesis of education.
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> I am well aware that my method may be painful and unsettling to my pupils. But my answer is that they must learn to have their views challenged and also, if necessary, to bear suspension of judgment. Intellectual independence is bound to have its difficulties, like the growth from the dependence of childhood through adolescence to the independence of manhood. The scepticism and bewilderment it involves may, however, be temporary, as some of my pupils have revealed to me.

FRONTIERS

Good and Bad Generalizations

OCCASIONALLY a MANAS reader writes a critical letter objecting to some form of generalization. "Why do you *label* people?" the critic will ask. Often, the critic is right. Often, it would have been better to say something else besides "conservative," "reactionary," "radical," or "liberal," or whatever the term which was used. Labels of this sort abstract from the human qualities of people and give them an identity in which their opinions on certain questions are made more important than the fact that they are human. For many people in the United States, for example, a "Communist" is not really a human being, but a kind of mad, would-be invader of our righteous lives. As a person, we know no more about him, and probably want to know no more about him, than we would about some menacing creature from outer space. We know he is a *Communist,* and that's enough, isn't it?

It isn't, of course. Not nearly enough. Yet we are going to go on using the term Communist, even with the best of intentions, mainly because, in discussion, you can't interrupt the continuity of what you say with a gloss that will give the gist of two hundred years of European history, in order to explain what communists are and how they came to be.

Every man who puts words on paper or opens his mouth to speak about anything important takes terrible chances. He takes two kinds of chances. He may not be able to make himself understood; or, what is just as likely, he may not know altogether what he is talking about, himself. That is why, in scientific papers, the authors usually start out with a definition of the terms they are going to use. Normally, scientists try to reduce the possibility of such misunderstandings to a minimum. Within the limitations of scientific investigation, this procedure is usually successful, since the scientists commonly undertake to examine only finite elements, processes, or aspects of experience. Incommensurable realities resist scientific study. How can you be *exact* about matters which will not submit to definition?

In non-scientific discourse, the writer often expects you to divine from the context what he means by a particular word. Sometimes this seems justified, sometimes not. You can always get up an argument with a writer by complaining about his undefined terms. And sometimes this seems justified, sometimes not.

Illustrations should be helpful, here. We have a printed copy of an address by Harry J. Rathbun, professor of law at Stanford University. The title is "The Pursuit of Happiness," and the talk was presented at the Stanford Business Conference held July 19-22, 1959. Toward the end of his discussion, Prof. Rathbun has reason to consider the idea of "God." He says:

> . . . *God;* that's a very big subject—the biggest subject there is. Let me just suggest a few things. The scientist, I think, is never an atheist. He may call himself one, but I have never met a real live atheist. What I find usually, is that the person who calls himself an atheist is really saying, "I repudiate this childish anthropomorphic deity that I was brought up with, the old gentleman with the long white beard, dressed in a white nightgown sitting up on a throne with a crown on his head and pulling all the strings and being wheedled and cajoled into doing what I want him to do if I'm smart enough." That has been called the cosmic-bellhop concept. Such a concept is obviously too childish and immature and of course must be repudiated. I repudiated it long ago but I don't think I'm an atheist. The scientist really does love God in at least one aspect—Truth. The old Greeks recognized three basic values, the trilogy of truth, beauty, and goodness. They are still pretty good today. Truth is one of the aspects of that which we call God, and the scientist loves truth. His life is dedicated to the search for it. An aspect of Truth is Law. The scientist bases his whole life upon his faith in an orderly universe, the order of which is discoverable if one is patient enough and honest enough and humble enough. P. W. Bridgeman of Harvard made an interesting comment in a science magazine some time ago. He said, "Before a fact a scientist has an attitude which is almost religious." I should take the "almost" out of it and say, "Before a

> fact a scientist has an attitude which is religious." He accepts it. He has to deal with it as it is. That is where he starts. So the scientist, it seems to me, is a deeply religious person so far as he goes. But, of course, the content for the word *God* doesn't stop there. There is an old saying that has meaning for me: "God is that whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere." . . . Another aspect of deity, or God, or of Reality, or whatever word you might want to use (and I certainly would not insist on the necessity of using any particular word to designate that which is beyond words), is the reality with which we have to come to terms, whether we like it or not. I did not create the universe. Something was here before me to which I am subject, with which I must come to terms.

Most readers will agree that Mr. Rathbun has done pretty well in spelling out what he means when he says "God," and while pantheists would find reason to differ with his last two sentences, almost no one else is likely to quarrel with him except the Fundamentalists. But has he done justice to all the other categories of belief?

What about the atheists? "I have never met a real live atheist," Mr. Rathbun says, and goes on to suggest that atheists usually confuse God with the anthropomorphic image of primitive, pictorial Christianity. This implies that a *real* atheist is a pretty bad thing to be. Well, maybe so. But in the same hour we encountered Mr. Rathbun's address we came across two different uses of the word "atheist," making it plain that the term needs further contextual development. Both uses occur in the *Nation* for March 25. In a review of some scholarly volumes on Shelley, George Steiner tells how in 1811 the young poet was expelled from Oxford University for having published a pamphlet entitled, *The Necessity of Atheism.* In the same year Shelley wrote to his friend, Thomas Hogg, who had also been expelled on suspicion of sharing responsibility for the pamphlet: "I will crush Christianity! I will at least attempt it. To fail even in so useful an attempt were glorious. . . ."

Well! Not having read Shelley's pamphlet, we went to the *Britannica* to see how the poet had offended. We learned that Shelley and Hogg issued the pamphlet with this title anonymously and sent it around to "bishops and all sorts of people as an invitation or challenge to discussion." Its content, the *Britannica* relates,

> amounted to saying that neither reason nor testimony is adequate to establish the existence of a deity, and that nothing short of a personal individual self-revelation of the deity would be sufficient.

One can easily see why Shelley gave his *Prometheus Unbound* the content of the age-old struggle between free human intelligence and the grim tyranny of the god of anthropomorphic religion.

The other use of "atheist" in this issue of the *Nation* appears in an article by Almena Lomax, a Negro mother of six children and editor of the Los Angeles *Tribune*. Mrs. Lomax tells the story of her visit to Tuskegee, Alabama, and her experience of southern segregation practices en route there and in Montgomery. In passing, she calls herself a "practicing atheist-agnostic," although she goes on to speak of a "private understanding between me and a god of the universe who exists in my mind, a god satisfied with the democracy of a lower-case 'g'."

The point, here, is that Mrs. Lomax announces her atheist-agnostic position almost as a badge of virtue, qualifying her to speak with social intelligence. And the fact is that, by and large, it does so qualify her. By this means she identifies herself as one of those who know something of the history of organized religion in the West and who have deliberately separated themselves from its partisanships and historic indifference to social injustice.

What we are suggesting is that Prof. Rathbun, when he gave an account of the various shadings of meaning of the word "God," would have added considerably to the value of his essay if he had made a similar contribution concerning the background meanings of Atheism. Atheism in the West is usually much more than an intellectual rejection of "the old gentleman with the long

white beard." It is also a militant stand against the social behavior throughout hundreds of years of believers in and spokesmen for the God of the Christian churches. The motivation for atheism, in short, has a potent moral foundation as well as an intellectual foundation. Granted that the moral grounds for atheism have been diminishing in recent years. But if the idea of Deity is to be approached with anything like impartiality, all these influences and pressures on human decision need to be acknowledged, arrayed, evaluated, and given a just weighting.

The trouble with failing to do this is that people, when they find that the reasons for the position they have taken are not understood—and that often there is not even an effort made to understand them—*harden* in their views and proceed to systematic justification of what they say they believe. This makes reconciliation with them exceedingly difficult. The political atheism of the nineteenth century, which found its ultimate expression in Communism, is at least partially explained by this means. So, the generalizations about "atheists" are just as important to analyze and explain as are the generalizations about "God."