

## MAN'S CREATIVE POTENTIAL

OURS is an alienated and an alienating era. This state is not due only to the estrangements and dislocations in our socio-economic relations. The hunger for bread is gradually being met by the development of technology which is liberating the energies of our natural resources, at the same time satisfying the hunger for leisure. But there is a deeper hunger which is not being satisfied by these achievements. It is the hunger to be oneself, to be creative.

The present holds a special threat to individual autonomy. The fateful question today is this: How do I prevent myself from being flattened by the system, the machine, "integrated" with the party, the committee, the organization? How can I feel and say "*I exist?*"

This burning question is opened up to Mitya Karamazov in his prison cell:

You wouldn't believe [he tells his brother Alexey] how I want to live now, what a thirst for existence and consciousness has sprung up in me within these peeling walls. . . . And I seem to have such strength in me now, that I think I could stand anything, any suffering, only to be able to say and to repeat to myself every moment, "I exist." In thousands of agonies—"I exist!" I'm tormented on the rack—but I exist! Though I sit alone in a pillar—I exist!

Today, the individual, particularly the creative artist, writer, and scientist, feels himself to be in a kind of prison, the prison of impersonal authorities. The problem of creativity is immense in our time because of the difficulty of identification with creative models. The egalitarian fashion, supported by the ideal of mechanical uniformity, does not favor the emergence and expression of personal stature, of "personalities" who kindle our enthusiasm by virtue of their *being*.

Identification, in our day, is molded by forces which make for a coordination in which the individual feels left out and alone. Our "communication media" foster automatic response from the viewer. Radio and television inform, evaluate and interpret, even supply us with ready-made imagery and feelings. Automation "integrates" to the point of wiping out indigenous folk-roots and folk-ways, stamping out personal insignia. It has been making for little and hollow men, for Mr. and Mrs. Zeros, for dead salesmen, for the naked and the dead. Over all rules the organization man who puts everything into a uniform.

The hope that technical power with its resultant increase of material goods and free time would bring gladness of heart is withering away. Indeed, many now feel that these very "goods" tend to increase spiritual and emotional tensions. The thermonuclear Moloch can turn deserts into gardens; but, in this process, the single flower loses its uniqueness. Reflecting on the abundance of foliage which suddenly appears in an Italian spring, Rilke once wrote: "What does one little flower matter here, where a million flowers bloom?"

And the thermonuclear bomb can also turn gardens into deserts. Here, contemporary man faces an impersonal power of incalculable and universal dimension, a diabolical power that could be unleashed by a single individual pushing a gadget. Indeed, gadgets ride man of today, condition the feverish rhythm and directionless pace of his life. They determine his "other-directed" needs and wants, distorting his human needs and wants.

The reaction to this false security is the despairing call for "freedom" by withdrawal, by isolation, expressed by the angry young men and

defiant beatniks. Where the individual can find no organic attachments to the demands of the day, he tends to succumb to the devil's two major temptations: lethargy and dullness or violence and frenzy.

Are these the sole alternatives open to us? To become part of the "mass-cult," to merge with what Ernst Toller called the *Massemensch*? Or else vainly to seek the blessed isles which are surely becoming extinct? Both of these alternatives are at odds with the kind of life we hope for and dream about, are at odds with what ancient prophets, seers, artists, poets and mythmakers have envisioned.

Now, the machine and leisure in themselves cannot be held responsible for our spiritual "malaise." It is true that the corruption of our economic-social-political relations contributes to the corroding of our motives, to the reigning attitude which is constantly on guard, asking "what's in it for him?" However, on a deeper level, the breakdown is nurtured by our focus on the immediate present, the latest fashion, on predominant attention to the *nunc et stans*. But, by itself, "news on the hour" can offer no direction, no purpose or goal. It produces what Thomas Mann once called "futurism without a future." It has no future because—and this anticipates my argument—it lacks vision of the values stamped in the past by our living mythic tradition. Without such a basic platform, the satisfactions of technology are not humanly satisfying. We remain restless, nervous, irritable.

But there is an alternate identification that might counteract this gloomy outlook—identification with the symbolic values of our mythic heroes, as fashioned in the outstanding literary classics from The Book of Job to *Joseph and His Brothers*. This hero is not the average, nor the common denominator of humanity. Neither is he the aristocratic individual disconnected from what is common to man. The mythic hero is in continuity with the *elemental* sources of life, but represents them in their higher,

wider, and deeper phases. In the study and "imitation" of mythic heroes, such as Job, Prometheus, Œdipus, Virgil and Dante, of Don Quixote, Hamlet, Faust, Mitya Karamazov, and Captain Ahab, yes, even of contemporary heroes, of Nexo's Pelle, Thomas Mann's Joseph and Gide's Theseus, lies the hope for the revival of creativity.

According to Greek legends, Memory was the Mother of the Muses. Mythology draws on our oldest memories and, from time immemorial, it has fascinated the common man, as well as the artist, writer and thinker. In the form of a picture, a story or a song, myth touches on man's basic relation to his world and fellowmen, on his original roots, his future possibilities and destiny. Primitive and Oriental peoples saw natural and human phenomena as expressions of mystic powers, and even as the Greeks developed the scientific method, they viewed nearly everything in the form of mythic imagery. Myth has cast a spell on the very ages which denied or opposed it. Like the severed head of Orpheus, it "goes on singing even in death and from afar" (Carl Kerényi).

The perennial appeal and vitality of mythic thinking and feeling issue from the fact that they make us feel that in all civilizations men face analogous situations, undergo similar experiences. Myth draws on these underlying correspondences embedded in what Jack Lindsay calls "the deeper sources of our common life," and which inevitably make for One World. For Nietzsche, myth is "the concentrated picture of the world" without which a culture loses its creative power. I. A. Richards states that through mythology, "our will is collected, our powers unified, our growth controlled." Men, writes Hocking (in *Goethe and the Modern Era*), "must loyally remember . . . if only to retain their identity . . . must be united in their sense of destiny to which their journey points." Myth supplies "a symbolic memory and a symbolic hope, and an allegorized account of the perils of the way." In sum, myth unfolds the great living chain providing the recurrent "recognition

scenes" of the human drama. Its story tells us that we are not strangers and alone in the world.

Plato remarked that the task of the artist was not to present doctrines, but to create myths. We are here concerned with "mythopoesis"—the myth in poetic recreation—rather than with mythology, that is, with accounts of legends, such as we have in Ovid, Hesiod and others. Mythopoesis deals with those myths which have seized the imagination of our great writers who have formed them into our classical heritage. These writers do not want us to believe the factual content of the legends—say, that Prometheus actually stole fire from Zeus. But they do believe that, transposed into their symbolic meaning, these stories contain a vision which is applicable to all ages. Indeed, the poetic form of the myth arises precisely when the literal account of the legend is no longer accepted, when the historic time is out of joint, when men cannot find anchorage in the authoritative symbols of their day. The great literary myths were executed in periods of transition, of crisis, when faith in the solid structure of its *mores* was waning. At this juncture, artists and writers attempt to save the residual values of the passing epoch, and point to the need of integrating them with the present and future.

The modern revival of the myth began in the nineteenth century, that is, at the very time when technology threatened to wipe out ancient folkways. In our own day, the theme has again fired the imagination of our major artists from Picasso to the surrealists, our major writers from Proust, Joyce and Thomas Mann to Kafka, Sartre, Cocteau and Faulkner. It penetrates our cultural areas, from anthropology, philosophy and religion to criticism and psychology in the work of men such as Malinowski, Cassirer and Tillich, of Spengler and Toynbee, of I. A. Richards and T. S. Eliot, of Freud, Jung and Reik.

The revival of myth in our time is an attempt to satisfy the human need for relatedness to "others," to fellow-travellers on our common

journey. These others are to be found in the *living* past, that is, a past which points to the future. In *The Need for Roots*, Simone Weil states that man has the urge to preserve in living shape "certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations of the future."

In the terminology of psychoanalysis, the myth addresses itself to the problem of identity, asking "Who am I?" And it proceeds to examine three questions that are organically related: "Where do I come from?", "Where am I bound?", and "What must I do now to get there?" In mythic language, the problems deal with Creation, with Destiny and with the Quest.

In his *Life of Reason*, George Santayana makes the pithy observation that those "who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." The living myth would not restore the dead past, but would *redeem* its living heritage. The myth also contains *the tradition of recreation*. Unrest, disquiet and revolt are as much part of man's history as is the tradition of idolatry. The culture hero in mythopoesis *chooses* his tradition, rejects the stultified in favor of the creative roots in the past. His choice of tradition is a recollection of man's native genius. By aligning himself with the high levels of the past, man gains the dignity of belonging without becoming depersonalized.

The myth is of particular import for the modern artist who feels himself estranged from the divisiveness and uniformity of our age. Many have responded by removing themselves to a pure esthetics, to a no-man's land of abstract fancy. But this purist realm is itself an expression of the very specialization against which it is directed, and it addresses itself and communicates to a specialized audience. The myth offers the artist a theme which sounds a basic motif and thus makes it possible for him to return to his world-wide audience.

The myth is a power by which men live. And this power can be used for good or evil. Mythic symbols can represent an ideal or an ideology.

The fateful import of the myth for our day stems from the fact that it is pivotal to the idea of One World. It can determine whether this world is to be one of unity and totality or one of uniformity and totalitarianism, whether the powers of man are to be freed or shackled.

The living, humanized myth is not given, but must be won:

What from your father's heritage is lent,  
Earn it anew, to really possess it!  
Goethe, *Faust, Part I*

This depends partly on historic pressures which can quicken or drain a myth. But it also depends on the vision and the will to realize it.

The assumption is that man's original sources contain not only destructive domination but creative powers, not only the Thanatos but also the Eros principle; that, despite the agonizing conflicts and inhibiting forces operative today, the creative potential inherent in man can be reactivated.

The singular import of the living myth for our time lies in the fact that it invokes the memory of One World, the "first time" when men lived in unity and concord. It tells not only of what was, but also of what can be. Here, the past becomes, in Paul Claudel's formulation, "an incantation of things to come." Or, as Hocking puts it: "Whatever in its nature belongs to all men, will be sought by all men—this is the principle which is automatically making for world unity."

At this moment, we seem to be rushing towards an abyss. Yet, we can draw comfort from the story of mythopoesis, from its long-range perspective which enables us to see beneath and beyond the dust of the hour. It assures us of the never-extinguished genius of man which needs to be remembered and reactivated. Our own time records such memory in Nexö's *Pelle the Conqueror*, Malraux's *Man's Fate* and *Man's Hope*, Gide's *Theseus*, and Thomas Mann's *Joseph and His Brothers*. In each, the tradition of a

rebellious quest is pitted against a paralyzing tradition.

Western mythopoesis touches on Oriental mythology and presents the residue of the Eastern myth of the Earth-Mother in *The Brothers Karamazov*. The literary works involved do not have equal scope, artistic structure and resonance. *Ædipus* and *Hamlet* have more universal echo than *Moby Dick* and *The Trial*; *The Brothers Karamazov* and *The Magic Mountain* have a broader canvas than Gide's *Theseus* and Sartre's *The Flies*. *The Divine Comedy* is more structured than *Don Quixote*. What they all have in common is that each sounds the perennial motifs of human nature, its origin, quest and destiny. This is their universal relevance. But each speaks this universal language in its particular dialect. Every epoch has its own myth which provides the center of its life, gives the tone, manner and rhythm to its existence, permeates its institutions and thought, its art, science, religion, politics, its psychology and its folkways—that is, *the myth organizes the values of its epoch*. The literary form of the myth preserves its symbolic values, values which transcend the drossy historical surface.

"The old myths," a MANAS writer states, "the almost forgotten myths of antiquity, were stories we can no longer believe, as stories, but we may still discover in these ancient intuitions the thread of an undying vision . . . in these days of crumbling institutional forms and beliefs, and in the agony of a desperation which finds no peace or promise of peace in the world we know, we may begin to hear our own voices as almost the cry of disembodied intelligence, demanding its spiritual rights. And then, perhaps, we shall begin to make a new sort of alliance with the world, on terms which acknowledge and declare, first of all, the humanity of the human race."

New York, N.Y.

HARRY SLOCHOWER

## *REVIEW*

### A CRITIC WRITES

WELL, here is evidence that one of our readers examines MANAS reviews with critical deliberation. Commenting on "'Cultural Criticism' in Recent Novels," MANAS, May 10, he says:

The writer of Review ought not to mislead us. He sometimes classes things as literature because he likes the ideas. For instance, Mr. Harvey Swados is a very nice man. His *On the Line* is hardly a novel, and if it is, this sort of thing was done better in the thirties. Next to real proletarian writers, or any good writer, this novel is neither "memorable" nor "poignant."

The passage quoted from *The Ivy Trap* supposedly "illustrates an interesting trend of optimistic metaphysics. . . ." If this is the kind of person who metaphysicizes optimistically, there is little hope for us. It takes a genius to give didactic writing and characters a heart. Mr. Angus is not a genius. Most murder mysteries have as much philosophizing in them and they are easier to read.

Perhaps your review man will consult his muses and point out the social significance of the film, *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, or the recent translation of Mayakovsky's *The Bedbug*. There is good material around which is socially significant.

There are several reasons why we do not intend an extensive rebuttal to this criticism, the first of which is that literary taste is often a matter of temperamental preference. It is true enough that nearly all our reviewing is done on a basis of "liking the ideas," but it is not true that MANAS either states or implies the degree to which a particular work may be properly classed as "literature." Such classifications have their own relevance, no doubt, and it may well be in this area. Still, if Mr. Swados' book stays in the memory of a reviewer for several weeks after its reading—pushing up around the many other books read and not reviewed—it is at least to this degree "memorable." And while there may be other excellent studies of the psychological effects of automobile assembly line production, Mr. Swados' is the best we have personally encountered lately in the form of interpretative

writing. Also there is, we still feel, an element of "poignance" in such passages as the following, taken from another portion of *On the Line*. Here, Mr. Swados describes the experience of a man on part of "the line," one who had always prided himself on his ability to "work hard" and to improve the methods of work:

In the days that followed, Orrin learned what it meant to be stupefied. Mindlessly he snapped the little clips together, hundreds of them, thousands of them, his fingertips doing the childish little endlessly repeated trick while his mind was utterly free to roam as it pleased. For a while he amused himself as, he thought, any intelligent man would—by devising new and simpler ways to do the work, by laying out the clips in overlapping rows before beginning to snap them together, by spreading out the finished groups so that they could all be painted at once—but then there was nothing left for him to improve upon, the whole operation was basically stupid, and he fell back to allowing himself to get behind, dawdling along until the Negro assembler looked nervously at the dwindling pile of clips, and then working frenziedly to catch up. That was a game that could not be repeated indefinitely, though, and finally he simply slouched over the table, slipping the pieces together and dreaming—dreaming of the exalted moments of his past life, dwindled away now to little trinkets that had to be fitted together and smeared anyhow with paint.

In the review at which our critic takes aim, three novels were noted briefly by quotation—obviously because, while we did not feel that MANAS readers would on the whole want to read these books, they might be interested in the varied "cultural criticism" they afford. As for the quotation from *The Ivy Trap*, possibly this book would have to be read—or at least skimmed—in its entirety to be sure that Mr. Angus is seriously concerned with some philosophical problems. The college professor whose scandalous relationship with a co-ed causes his ruin is a man who becomes involved because his intellectual conditioning provides him no sense of direction. In other words, as he moves into middle age, bringing closer the prospects of the termination of his physical existence, he cannot abide the thought of passing up any potentially momentous

experience. Religion fails to give him a sense of futurity which takes the significance of human striving beyond the grave, for he is a sophisticated intellectual of the epoch of science. He is appalled by the meaninglessness of life, a meaninglessness which seems the only outcome of an experiment in living which does not go anywhere or become anything. In other words, if all that is within the genius of an individual human mind passes into nothingness, the only reality becomes an amassing of pleasurable moments.

"Allan" is possessed of good ethical perceptions. He is furthermore gentle, kind, and desirous of conferring benefits wherever he goes. But he is a man in a metaphysical quandary, and ill-equipped to escape. The fact that Mr. Angus senses the possibility of a solution is made apparent through the chief philosophical protagonist, who is portrayed as a non-traditional thinker. It is this man who seeks to rescue Allan before it is too late—by suggesting to him a vague hopeful vision of "something like purpose in the universe and man's place in that purpose." "Lubinkoff" continues:

In spite of all deviations, all lost causes and ends, the general trend is always from the simple to the complex and so to consciousness; it is no longer reasonable to see the universe as meaningless, or man as an insignificant accident. We are: powerful concentrations of the creative power inherent in matter. . . . Over and over again among the billions of stars, the process will produce intelligence, and somewhere that intelligence will break through and the universe go on to realize its possibilities. The important thing is that we have a chance at this wonderful destiny.

Well, this may not be great writing or well-defined metaphysics, but it is clear that the author is trying to get on the track of something and that he is convinced that the track requires metaphysical effort to find and pursue. So it is with a number of contemporary novelists. We would like to eavesdrop at an informal convention of writers like Mr. Angus—men engaged in an attempt to give content to a metaphysical and ethical approach to life, for it is possible that they

would come up with something less barren than the results of most conclaves of professional philosophers.

## COMMENTARY POLARIS ACTION

POLARIS ACTION BULLETIN No. 24 (dated June 29) is filled with news of the numerous activities of the New England Committee for Nonviolent Action. As usual, the *Bulletin* is written by a number of hands, each contributor reporting on some phase of CNVA action. Robert Swann describes the "summer program" now going on, which includes discussion seminars on questions such as "Legal Aspects of Civil Disobedience," "Prison Etiquette," and "Can World Government Police Power Be Nonviolent?" It was decided at the Chicago meeting of the National CNVA that if nuclear testing is resumed, "all major energies would go into direct action on this issue," and the New England discussions will also cover issues connected with this prospect.

Readers may remember Bob Swann's article, "Direct Action and Constructive Program," which appeared in MANAS for March 8 of this year. In the current *Bulletin*, he speaks briefly of some of the work involved:

Meanwhile, the household chores at Norwich house and the farm, planting and weeding a large truck garden, keeping the cars in repair, the New London office open daily, and some 15-25 people fed—somehow all get done in more or less organized fashion. A building department will start next week to bring in some cash income and provide manual experience for some participants. Truly, this is a many-faceted experiment, combining varied aspects from many different types of programs. If you wish to join us for more than a week or two, apply to Dr. Gordon Christiansen, Chairman of the New England CNVA Personnel Committee, 13, North Bank Street, New London, Connecticut—giving information about your background in peace work, interests, skills, whether you can afford to contribute for room and board, and time you wish to spend here.

Other pages of the *Bulletin* report on the trials and sentencings of nonviolent demonstrators, on arrests, beatings, and some acquittals. There is an urgent appeal for funds to

support the work of the Committee, and the following "want list" for the household and office:

At present we could use the following: a mill for grinding whole wheat flour (we make our own bread); furniture especially beds, mattresses, chairs, lamps; stencils for Elliot addressing machine; canning jars and lids; a girl's 24-inch bicycle (Carol Swann's was stolen recently) . . . .

Readers who want to keep track of the work of Polaris Action, which focuses on nonviolent protests against the nuclear-armed Polaris submarines manufactured in the region of New London, may ask to be placed on the mailing list to receive the *Polaris Action Bulletin* regularly. The address is 13 North Bank Street, New London, Conn.

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This week's lead article, by Harry Slochower, is adapted from the preface of a book now in manuscript form. Dr. Slochower is a New York psychoanalyst and a member of the Society of Applied Psychoanalysis. His earlier book, *No Voice Is Wholly Lost*, was published by Dufour in 1946.

## CHILDREN

### . . . and Ourselves

#### PROMETHEUS UNBOUND

THE most worthwhile "science fiction" we have encountered in a long time is now being constructed by Howard Fast, who first turned his hand to this means of expression in 1958. In a collection of his tales, published under the title, *The Edge of Tomorrow*, the opening story, called "The First Men," portrays the long delayed emergence from *within* human nature of capacities to realize a full and true human potential. Present humanity is seen as existing in a kind of nether-world, since the "higher" capacities are kept from developing by cultural blocks. The point of the story is that unless potentialities of human greatness are stimulated before puberty, "the tissues change, the brain cells lose all potential of development in that area."

In Mr. Fast's plot, two child-psychologists spend years pondering and collecting the data of the extraordinary phenomena revealed whenever an infant is lost in a wilderness and nurtured by animals: a Bantu baby, lost in the jungle, was adopted by a roving tribe of baboons, while an Assamese girl has been "raised" for years by a wolf pack. Rescued after puberty, neither child is recognizably human, for emotional and mental responses had become frozen at the level of baboon and wolf capacity. (Such cases have been reported in nearly every century.) The two psychologists consider this a revelation of tremendous magnitude, since it is possible that all known forms of *human* society since the dawn of history have similarly "trapped" the higher potentials of the species so effectively that they seldom if ever find expression. One of the psychologists in Fast's story develops the possible implications of this theory:

The child reared by a wolf is a wolf

Our own work adds up to the parallel conclusion: the child reared by a man is a man. If man-plus exists, he is trapped and caged as certainly

as any human child reared by animals. Our proposition is that he exists.

Why do we think this super-child exists? Well, there are many reasons, and neither the time nor the space to go into all in detail. But here are two very telling reasons. Firstly we have case histories of several hundred men and women who as children had IQs of 150 or above. In spite of their enormous intellectual promise as children, less than ten percent have succeeded in their chosen careers. Roughly another ten percent have been institutionalized as mental cases beyond recovery. About fourteen percent have had or require therapy in terms of mental health problems. Six percent have been suicides, one percent are in prison, twenty-seven percent have had one or more divorces, nineteen percent are chronic failures at whatever they attempt—and the rest are undistinguished in any important manner. All of the IQs have dwindled—almost in the sense of a smooth graph line in relation to age.

Since society has never provided the full potential for such a mentality, we are uncertain as to what it might be. But we can guess that against it, they have been reduced to a sort of idiocy—an idiocy that we call normalcy.

The second reason we put forward is this: we know that man uses only a tiny fraction of his brain. What blocks him from the rest of it? Why has nature given him equipment that he cannot put to use? Or has society prevented him from breaking the barriers around his own potential?

Well, the psychologists devise a way in which "man-plus" can be nurtured—though after he comes to being, society is understandably afraid of him, for the new children are "godless" and evolve a code of morality very different from that which the world customarily recognizes. Further, all the members of this generation of super-children are able to read thoughts and motivations by telepathy.

The tale does not have a happy ending, though this new race of human beings, born from the psychological ashes of the old, discovers how to preserve itself without war. But what we find most interesting is the dramatic way in which this story has a thousand and one applications in the matter of child-rearing. A. S. Neill's latest and

most complete work, *Summerhill* (reviewed in MANAS for May 31), illustrates many of these applications. On the subject of "influencing the child," for instance, Mr. Neill suggests how contemporary society "traps" the "highest" human potential of the child:

Some day a new generation will not accept the obsolete religion and myths of today. When a new religion comes, it will refute the idea of man's being born in sin. A new religion will praise God by making men happy.

The new religion will refuse the antithesis of body and spirit. It will recognize that the flesh is not sinful. A new religion will find God on the meadows and not in the skies. Just imagine all that would be accomplished if only ten percent of all the hours spent in prayer and churchgoing were devoted to good deeds and acts of charity and helpfulness.

A parent should always question whether he is not imposing directives because of his own power drive and his need to satisfy that drive by fashioning someone else. Everyone seeks the good opinion of his neighbors. Unless other forces push him into unsocial behavior, a child will naturally want to do that which will cause him to be well-regarded, but this desire to please others develops at a certain stage in his growth. The attempt by parents and teachers to artificially accelerate this stage does the child irreparable damage.

I once visited a modern school where over a hundred boys and girls assembled in the morning to hear a clergyman address them. He spoke earnestly, advising them to be ready to hear Christ's call. The principal asked me later what I thought of the address. I replied that I thought it criminal. Here were scores of children, each with a conscience about sex and other things; the sermon simply increased each child's sense of guilt.

Neither Mr. Fast nor Mr. Neill is primarily concerned with a direct attack upon religion, but they are unalterably opposed to many of its usual psychological accompaniments. It is their belief that any "morality" which is prompted by either fear or the promise of special reward is corrupting, because it blocks an awareness of the fact that a truly ethical basis must be arrived at naturally from evolutionary growth. As Neill puts it: "To force a child to adopt values that he is not

naturally ready to adopt not alone results in blocking off the adoption of such values in due course and in due time, but also induces neuroses."

We close with another passage from Mr. Fast's story, in which a psychologist who survived the ordeal of a Nazi death camp speaks of the necessity for a new view of man—beginning with childhood:

I have lived through the worst years of horror and bestiality that mankind ever knew. When I saw what I saw, I asked myself a thousand times: What is the meaning of mankind—if it has any meaning at all, if it is not simply a haphazard accident, an unusual complexity of molecular structure? I know you have all asked yourselves the same thing. Who are we? What are we destined for? What is our purpose? Where is sanity or reason in these bits of struggling, clowning, sick flesh? We kill, we torture, we hurt and destroy as no other species does. We enoble murder and falsehood and hypocrisy and superstition; we destroy our own body with drugs and poisonous food; we deceive ourselves as well as others—and we hate and hate and hate.

If these children can go into each other's minds completely—then they will have a single memory, which is the memory of all of them. All experience will be common to all of them all knowledge, all dreams—and they will be immortal. For as one dies, another child is linked to the whole, and another and another. Death will lose all meaning, all of its dark horror. Mankind will begin, here in this place, to fulfill a part of its intended destiny—to become a single, wonderful unit, a whole—almost in the old words of your poet, John Donne, who sensed what we have all sensed at one time, that no man is an island unto himself. Has any thoughtful man lived without having a sense of that singleness of mankind? I don't think so. We have been living in darkness, in the night, struggling each of us with his own poor brain and then dying with all the memories of a lifetime. It is no wonder that we have achieved so little. The wonder is that we have achieved so much. Yet all that we know, all that we have done will be nothing compared to what these children will know and do and create.

## *FRONTIERS*

### A Question of Values

AT the root of the problems of ethical philosophy is the question of the values or ends of human beings. It is often assumed that the chief difficulty lies in the fact that men have differing values, which leads them to be in conflict with one another. On this view, the goal might be conceived of as being the establishment of a common value system to which all would subscribe. This, at any rate, is often the central principle of harmony around which utopian schemes are devised.

There are two major difficulties in all such plans. First, men are not easily moved to change their values by the persuasions of utopian philosophers. Not much is known, really, of how men reach their convictions about values. We do know, on the other hand, that authoritarian attempts to make the goals of men uniform produce all the evils of the collectivist society. In such circumstances, there are multiplying undesirable side-effects in the form of conventionalized hypocrisy, widespread fear of being recognized as "different," and sub-systems of false values connected with the rewards of ostentatious conformity.

Second, it is simply not true that men with different values must of necessity come into conflict with each other. A physical culturist whose ideal is realized on muscle beach, a businessman who wants to make a lot of money, and a man who cares about nothing but working with children and teaching them what he can, may get along without any mishaps. Their diverse goals might easily fit together with a remarkable degree of harmony. Actually, the caste system of ancient India was a rational scheme of integration of men with basically different objectives or values. The corruptions and social failure of the caste system came from the identification of values with *hereditary* groups, rather than from its realistic acknowledgement of the wide spectrum

of human aims and interests. You could say that the real trouble from the differences in human values arises chiefly from the *institutionalization* of dissimilar value systems, which tends to create whole societies founded upon partisan ends. It is here that conflicts begin to seem irreconcilable because of the differences in ends.

You might even insist that the troubles of the modern world have come in large part from the fact that the major human groups in conflict today have the *same* ends. They are competing for control over the sources of economic and political power. It is possible that a strenuous pursuit of identical material ends by all men can be resolved only by some ultimate military catastrophe. Accordingly, it might be necessary to say that a uniformity of ends is desirable only if the ends are of a sort which are not diminished by being sought by all; or rather, that it is the *character* of the ends which is critical, not their similarity or dissimilarity.

In any event, the world today is the scene of a vast competition of conflicting ends and value systems. Resolution of these conflicts usually comes by attrition and compromise, or they remain in modified incompatibility wherever the tensions they produce are not sufficient to demand a final settlement of issues. There is of course the political solution of regulating or controlling conflict of interests through the hierarchy of values established by a constitution, but there are large areas of human and institutional relationships to which constitutional controls do not or have not been made to apply. Further, the *pertinence* of the available constitutional controls and compromises often seems to decline in relationship to vast institutional changes in the social and economic relationships of human groups.

A letter from a South American reader formulates this general problem in abstract terms:

Would it not be helpful if thinking could be done about the values entertained by others, however much they diverge from our own? Quite possibly our

own value systems could then be more effectively overhauled to attain greater comprehensiveness, or integrity. There might then also be added hope for resolving some apparent conflict, through the possible discovery that all men—however perverted some of them might seem at first glance—are essentially engaged in the process of evaluation, even though their understanding of this process may be too limited to lead to what we would regard as satisfactory results.

MANAS tends toward a specific value system, with which I happen to agree, more or less, and I think that many others have similar views. The particular system, perhaps, is a kind of humanism, or even—subject to a relevant definition—a kind of religion. Perhaps this kind of system, when developed to its best, is the most satisfactory one that man can conceive. Nevertheless, there is a necessity to transcend this system. A value system is at least conceivable in which the disappearance of the human species becomes a desideratum, *e.g.*, in order to make room for something that is better than man.

The same necessity exists within the humanistic frame of reference. What is the benefit of the best value system developed by the best thinkers, if others cannot share in it? What are the values of the humble people, those working so hard, living so poorly, or exposed to such gross misinformation, that their thinking is severely stunted? What are the values of nomads, village people, military elites, believers in personal or group superiority, rural recruits in the army of a less privileged nation, collectivized farmers, church leaders, beggars, salesmen, gangsters, teen-agers, independent farmers, trade union officials, etc.? How integrated can such values be, or how can these diverse values be reconciled? Something more will have to be known about the property of value, as such.

Instead of taking up this communication, point by point, it may be more useful to make another and perhaps parallel approach to the general problem. First of all, we may start with the fact that all human beings seek value. That is, the human life is a purposeful life. It is also a life which involves decision or choice. While some men seem to exercise the power of choice with greater frequency and care than other men, and while some men undoubtedly choose more wisely than others, it remains a primary fact that all men, all human beings, *choose*.

Is it possible to generalize concerning the goals or goal of human decision? There must be hundreds of ways to describe what men seek in life, but all of them would doubtless qualify as means to what is spoken of as "fulfillment." Obviously, as our correspondent indicates in listing so many classes or "types" of people, fulfillment is a variable in human striving. William James put the problem in another way, and before attention is given to any proposed philosophical resolution, we should remind ourselves of what he says concerning the conflict of motives, or ends:

Not that I would not, if I could be both handsome and fat and well dressed, and a great athlete, and make a million a year, be a wit, a *bon vivant*, and a lady-killer, as well as a philosopher, statesman, warrior, and African explorer, as well as a "tone-poet" and a saint. The thing is simply impossible. The millionaire's work would run counter to the saint's, the *bon vivant* and the philanthropist would trip each other up; the philosopher and the lady-killer could not well keep house in the same tenement of clay.

What are we to do about these irreconcilables, and all the others which might be added? The first thing to be noted is that this question is not distinguished by novelty. The oldest religions of the Orient take full account of all these various "drives" in human beings, arranging them in a kind of hierarchical relation, one to another, with the idea that, ultimately, the lesser motives will be exhausted and replaced by the more worthy ones, ending, finally, in a burning zeal for self-knowledge. Buddhism is pre-eminently the religion of comparative values, although "values," in this case, are divided into those which contribute to the evolution of the soul, and those which do not.

A pyramidal arrangement of values is possible only in a culture which offers some scheme of ascending levels of value, crowned by the religious ideal of absolute fulfillment.

This sort of philosophy has been extremely unpopular for centuries in the West. Hierarchical conceptions of value have been the excuse for

every sort of tyranny and presumption of superior right, both political and religious, so that in Western thought "the Good" is purposely left undefined in order to assure the individual the right to choose his own.

But manifestly, the lack of worthy ends is at the same time a besetting evil in the West. The replacement of authoritarian versions of value by the dogma that all ends are of equal value—a foolish consequence of naïve "democratic" thinking—has given the police, the courts, the moralists, and more recently the psychotherapists, endless work to do.

What we need, perhaps, are the ordered priorities of hierarchical thinking about ends, but *without* the coercive authority of a political or "aristocratic" elite. At the same time we need the freedom of the democracy of values, but without the leveling to a low uniformity of the idea of excellence.

Going back, then, to the primary assumption, we may say that all men select their ends, some good, some bad, some indifferent, and that this is the essence of being human. Upon what does the choice of ends or values depend? The simplest answer to this question is to say that it depends upon the idea of the self. Self-fulfillment can hardly escape being a fulfillment in terms of what the self is conceived to be.

Obviously, there are complications. Let us say, for example, that regardless of what a man thinks he is, or says he is, there is something within him, some root-being or character, which he *really* is. So human behavior, on this hypothesis, is a curious compound of conscious and unconscious intentions. There is the essential drive of the "real" man—and we must stipulate that this is not understood—to which are added desires of various sorts, the moral pressures of the age and community, the personal sense of "ought" or moral obligation, and, finally, the varying effects of deliberate efforts on the part of the individual to reconcile all this diversity of motives

and ends in terms of some intellectually conceived ideal.

How is "order" to be imposed upon this process? The first step, quite plainly, is to become aware of the process. Awareness is in itself a kind of ordering principle, or "therapy," since in many cases simply to recognize a motive in one's life is to dispose of it or to strengthen it. So far as we can see, this is the principle of psychoanalysis. It seeks the relative autonomy of the individual by the progressive identification of the motives which lie behind feelings and actions.

But therapy is a method, not a philosophy. For some psychotherapists, however, the method itself *implies* a philosophy. That is, the method itself will not work, or will not work to sensible ends, unless some few principles of value are adopted. Erich Fromm had this to say in his *Saturday Review* article, "Man Is Not a Thing";

What happens so often in psychoanalytic treatment is that there is a silent agreement between therapist and patient which consists in the assumption that psychoanalysis is a method by which one can attain happiness and maturity and yet avoid the jump, the act, the pain of separation. No amount or depth of psychological insight can take the place of the act, the commitment, the jump. It can lead to it, prepare for it, make it possible—and this is the legitimate function of psychoanalytic work. But it must not try to be a substitute for the responsible act of commitment, an act without which no real change occurs in a human being.

Psychology can show us what man is *not*. It cannot tell us what man, each one of us, *is*. The soul of man, the unique core of each individual, can never be grasped and described adequately. It can be "known" only inasmuch as it is not misconceived. The legitimate aim of psychology, as far as ultimate knowledge is concerned, is the *negative*, the removal of distortions and illusions, *not the positive*, full, and complete knowledge of a human being.

What we are getting at, here, is a conception of man as a core of self-determination, similar to what was suggested by Pico in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. Man's *dignity*, Pico suggested, lies in the act of decision by the individual as to what he would become. It is this dynamic

essence, consisting in choosing and becoming, rather than any definable, substantive reality, which makes the true nature of man practically ineffable.

But out of this general conception arises a cluster of values—values which exist because of their service to human decision, their psychological contribution to impartiality, and all the other factors which enlarge the scope of perception, and therefore the *range* of decision. These values constitute a metaphysic of human function.

Here, no doubt, is the foundation of the philosophical ideal of human life. But all men, it will be said, are not philosophers, nor *want* to be philosophers. This may be so, but the fact remains that men are at their best as human beings when they act philosophically—that is, when what they do, in whatever frame of particularized experience or action, expresses some universal meaning which can be understood by other men.

After all, a man can be any number of particular things, devote his energies to a whole gamut of undertakings, without ceasing to be a human being in quest of self-fulfillment, and without losing sight of this foundation purpose of his life. The trouble arises only when one's idea of self-fulfillment runs counter to the fulfillment of others. When this happens, there is conflict and pain.

In personal health, including health of mind, we reach balance and harmony as a result of learning from pain. We discover, that is, in Dr. Fromm's words, what health is *not*, or what the good life is *not*, and eventually gain some approximation of constructive and satisfying existence. The same sort of negative definition will doubtless some day be available for communities and societies, when we decide to learn from the social experience of pain. Growing up, reshaping values, reaching some workable idea of the self, both personal and social, is apparently in part a process of *wearing out* our

misconceptions and exhausting the emotional energy of our mistakes.

The highest value, from this point of view, would be the old Socratic value of self-knowledge, with all its ramifying meanings and under- and overtones.

Whether there is a level of value beyond this, leading to "something better than man," we beg to leave unexamined. There is the possibility, of course, that the broadest conception of "Self" would indeed reach beyond man, in that it would represent a universal pantheist ground including all that is or conceivably might be. But since man is nonetheless the agency for conceiving of this ideal, it is hardly "beyond" him. Our present hypothesis is that there is nothing greater or better than man *at his best*.