VOLUME XIV, NO. 51
DECEMBER 20, 1961

THE QUESTION OF "ABSOLUTES"

HOW does the present age differ from other epochs of history? Mainly, we think, by the almost total loss of external authority. One of the most moving expressions in the Bible is the cry of the distraught father (in *Mark,* ix, 24) to Jesus: "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief." So long as there is someone, or something, to whom this call for help can be addressed, with heart-felt confidence that it may be answered, there is hope for a familiar kind of order in human affairs.

It is not only a question of secure faith in a benevolent deity. A principle of relationships may serve as well. The great speech of Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida* illustrates the apprehensions of men who find their accustomed values weakening:

> O! when degree is shak'd
> Which is the ladder of all high designs
> The enterprise is sick.
> How could communities,
> Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities, . . .
> But by degree, stand in authentic place?
> Take but degree away, untune that string
> And, hark! what discord follows . . .
> Then everything includes itself in power,
> Power into will, will into appetite;
> Appetite, a universal wolf
> So doubly seconded with will and power
> Must make perforce a universal prey,
> And last eat up himself.

In the past, revolutionary epochs have been characterized by a relocation of the source of power and authority. This is the meaning of the Protestant Reformation. It is also the meaning, at another level, of the political revolution of the eighteenth century. It is the meaning of the Copernican revolution in cosmology, of the Darwinian revolution in anthropology, and of the industrial revolution in economic life. It is the meaning, finally, of the scientific revolution in thought, with its far-reaching consequences for philosophy and religion.

When to the disturbing impacts of these various revolutions of the past four hundred years or so you add the complications brought by the wars and the "progress" of the twentieth century, it is not difficult to understand the confusions and indecision of the present. A revolution is supposed to replace an old order with new principles and relationships which establish conditions of justice, freedom, and security. The revolutions of Western civilization have had these ends (as well as some others), but because they were inadequate, or because men expected too much of them, or because they have arrived so rapidly that we have not had time to assimilate their impact and order their multiple effects, their total result has been to wear away human confidence in all these undertakings. Even while men were enjoying the fruits of energy released by revolutionary change—during, that is, the calm and placidity created by the enthusiastic practice of the new faiths—the insatiable intellectuality of doubt and criticism was wearing away the foundations of belief.

Today, to the man who longs for a faith to live by, the integrity of his mind declares to him, "You cannot go back," while the looming disasters of the present exhibit equally ominous barriers. What is the direction of going forward? Great mechanisms of yesterday's theory of progress are all in motion, like competitive cars of Juggernaut. They have their own ends and they do not consult the forlorn hopes of human beings nor take account of their fears. There is the politics of "freedom" and its nuclear armament. There is the driving energy of acquisitive individualism with its vast apparatus for the distribution of goods and its practical monopoly of the channels of mass communication. By no

means weaker, and possibly stronger, because of its centralized control, is the spreading power of acquisitive statism, which does not lack in weapons of universal destruction.

So, the man of our time well may ask, Is there a meaning at the root of the universe? Is there a philosophy of rational accountability for the forces of the human and natural world, to which a man of reason may resort? It is not possible for human beings to deny the importance of these questions or to declare them unanswerable. They have to be considered if we are to go on being human. The genius of the epoch—if a time like ours may be said to have a genius—is that, whatever difficulties or compulsions we feel, we will not be satisfied with partisan answers.

You might say that the form the conflict takes—the personal conflict, that is—is the struggle between the critical mind and the affirmative heart. What can the heart declare that the mind will not reject? What can the heart declare that the mind will not hamstring and diminish to a point of ineffectual impotence?

We have some correspondence from a man who in his maturity has been much involved in thoughts of this sort. His inability to accept easy solutions makes him a type of the best contemporary intelligence, while his determined efforts to find a solution which is without intellectual or moral compromise may be taken as a symbol of the Promethean independence of which we all have great need. Following are some of his observations:

> Unfortunately, I cannot accept Julian Huxley's optimistic humanist religion. He places his faith in a belief that evolution is creative. So it is; it has created the hydrogen bomb and now a neutron ray. There is more reason to accept Seidenberg's conclusions than Huxley's, if one places his faith in science.
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> I feel the need of a mystical faith, but I can't fit it in rationally and I can't accept an arbitrary God. . . . It is not easy for one who thinks largely in the deterministic terms of science. Individuality is obviously founded in a dualism. The individual self is lost entirely in the absolute of mysticism. In many ways this appeals to me as it should to everyone, since self-consciousness feeds easily to the suffering involved in egocentricity.
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> No dualism is satisfactory to most modern thinkers. Integration is sought in different ways, Bohr's principle of complementarity being especially fashionable at present. My thesis is that love must be looked for, its tender sprouts recognized and decent soil for growth tilled. Unless love, even very imperfectly grown love, is given priority in our consciousness, I don't anticipate much from the abstruse (for most people) idea of complementarily. (I think I write abstractly. If my ideas are to have any meaning to others, they must be clothed warmly and attractively.)
>
> Since love is not subject to will-power and yet exists, we must assume that the spirit of love (or Freud's Eros, if one chooses, as I don't most of the time and do at others) is latent in everyone. I think this is true. Our present society crushes it badly—it's a barren soil. . . . and yet, I have no rational grounds for claiming that love is inherent in the laws governing this universe. . . .

Elsewhere this correspondent has written at length in criticism of the idea of absolute values. The point we should like to take for consideration here is connected with the fact that, historically, commitment to some form of absolute values seems to have been the rule in the lives of men who have accomplished the greatest liberation for their fellows. It seems quite possible that the case against absolute values is rather a case against their misuse, or a case against what are in fact relative values raised to the status of absolutes.

The general introduction to this discussion was devoted to a review of the progressive breakdown of various sorts of "absolutes" upon which men have in the past relied. The appeal to the Deity to take away the impotence of our unbelief no longer holds promise for the great majority of men. The structure of the traditional, hierarchical society—based upon "degree"—no longer instills in us a sense of order and security; on the contrary, it violates the spirit of the equalitarian philosophy, which we believe is true even though we no longer are confident that we

know how to make it work. The nineteenth-century optimism which relied upon the promise of scientific progress to create a comparative "heaven on earth" has disappeared almost entirely, and with it the emotional underpinnings of the scientific theory of knowledge. It is not that scientific method is without valid principles, but that its deterministic or mechanistic frame—upon which its "certainty" depends—leaves out the spontaneous quality of human thought and decision, which is the very essence of being human. We were led to a peak of critical eminence by the practice of scientific method and analysis—a stance that we cannot abandon if we retain our intellectual honesty—yet on that peak now find ourselves without a workable faith. The great question, then, is whether it is possible to find principles of philosophical and ethical inspiration without discarding the very ground of the critical achievements of the age—achievements which have raised us above naive self-deception and child-like fables concerning the nature of things.

It is this dilemma which presses modern man to consider with a seriousness akin to desperation the affirmations of mysticism. Alone among religious thinkers, the mystic seems to violate no important canon of the scientific account of natural reality. The mystic seems somehow to have understood that philosophic absolutes must not be warped into the narrow confinements of historical or personal necessity, that absolutes can never be means to less than absolute ends. The mystic approaches the veil of the Absolute, but the closer he gets the more speechless he becomes. The only substitute for this silence is the abstractions of metaphysics, and contemporary thought is hardly ready for this sort of speculative construction. Meanwhile, the perceptions of the mystic attract because they are experiential. As Josiah Royce said, "The mystic is the only pure empiricist."

Reflections of this sort soon conduct today's inquirer to the ante-chamber of what we have come to call "religious experience." One eminent psychologist is already investigating the possibility of conceiving religious experience in a framework of humanist assumptions, in order to avoid the stipulations of supernaturalism.

What, actually, does the mystic encounter—what does he experience? While it may be folly to "talk" about such matters, one can at least point out the fact that poetry and the arts have always been resources for the vocabulary of the mystic. The work of art, while it may have parts or details, presents a kind of panoramic or even "oceanic" experience, suggesting or in some sense paralleling the mystical experience. William Blake no doubt felt this way about his drawings and poems. And here was one who bowed to no man in the intensity of his ethical convictions. In Blake is the flavor of devotion to the felt substance of an absolute reality; at the same time, one would be hard put to find in Blake the offenses which are usually charged to believers in "absolutes." It was as though he enjoyed a double vision—sight, at once, of both the eternal and the temporal process.

Some day someone, perhaps, will do a book on the sociology of the mystics, to see what they have thought in common on the problems of the world. Ordinary men of good will often find themselves both inspired and bewildered by the attitudes of the mystics—something like, it may be, Nehru's reaction to Gandhi, although we hasten to add that Nehru is no ordinary man. Nor is this to suggest any infallibility for the mystics, but rather the existence of some kind of rock of personal stability in their lives, which gives them strength and an inner consistency. Whitman, it seems almost certain, felt something of this sort when he wrote (in "To Him Who Was Crucified"):

> That we all labor together, transmitting the same charge and succession,
> We few equals indifferent of lands, indifferent of times,
> We, enclosers of all continents, all castes, allowers of all theologies,
> Compassionators, perceivers, rapport of men,

> We walk silent among disputes and assertions, but reject not the disputers or anything that is asserted,
> We hear the bawling and the din, we are reached at by divisions, jealousies, recriminations on every side,
> They close peremptorily upon us to surround us, my comrade, Yet we walk upheld, free, the whole earth over, journeying up and down till we make our ineffaceable mark upon time and the diverse eras,
> Till we saturate time and eras, that the men and women of races, ages to come, may prove brethren and lovers as we are.

Something, some inward experience, moved Whitman to write in this way. It must have been a response to a felt unity with other men, his brothers.

There is a passage in the *Bhagavad-Gita* which suggests this quality in another way:

> "When thy heart shall have worked through the snares of delusion, then thou wilt attain to high indifference as to those doctrines which are already taught or which are yet to be taught. When thy mind once liberated from the Vedas shall be fixed immovably in contemplation, then shalt thou attain to devotion."

What, in this context, are "the Vedas"? They are the equivalent of what we call either religion or science—the revealed or established truth. The passage says in effect that once a man gains his own inside perception he will never be trapped by the verbalizations, however skillful, of the perceptions of other men, however knowing or knowledgeable.

Well, how does this help us? It is a question, mostly, of allowing the possibility of this kind of sight, this kind of perceptive integration, in thinking about the meaning of human life. As Richard Groff wrote some weeks ago in his paper on Thoreau:

> To postulate the existence of absolute or ultimate values is not necessarily to assert one's thorough-going understanding of them. Can we not be perceptive without being presumptuous? Thoreau had intimations of the higher laws, to be sure, but he never claimed infallibility or clairvoyance concerning them. Moreover, it is chiefly in man's relationship with the "noble abstractions"—pure truth, pure freedom, pure love, and the rest—that absolutes are to be applied. Introducing absolute concepts into the derived and arbitrary issues of social customs, political questions, and the like often proves only confusing.

It is easy, of course, to get into trouble in this way. Suppose you say that truth-telling is an absolute value in ethical behavior. Only the grossest sort of issues can be settled with an objective measure of truth-telling. In circumstances of any subtlety, subjective considerations of decisive importance arise. There is the problem of precocious knowledge. A blind adherence to the mechanical interpretation of the rule could be traumatic to a child or to a vulnerable adult. The "truth" has to be examined, not for its technical status, but for its communicated impact. A mechanical telling of a truth might easily cause someone to emotionally embrace a lie.

Absolutes, in other words, are double-edged affairs. We have no doubt that ostentatious belief in a dogmatic authority—whether it be Jehovah or the Leader, or even "Science"—is commonly a means of avoiding the pain of deciding for one's self how to apply absolute principles of thought and behavior.

The argument about absolutes, so far as we can see, breaks down more or less in this way: The mystics and the great moral reformers have their absolutes, but they never abuse the authority of their own insight, which is personal, not public. Yet, at the same time, others are sometimes able to *feel* the impact of this vision, even if they do not understand the means of its communication. Who can read the Sermon on the Mount without experiencing elements of awe and inspiration? Then there are those who want the certainty but not the labor of self-discovery. These are the misusers of absolutes—the pretenders to religious inspiration, the half-taught disciples, the psychic prophets and the strident declarers of revelations. The opposite numbers of the misusers of intuitive

absolutes are the hard-logic builders of systems of compulsion who get their certainty by leaving out the inner half of life. They have their absolutes, too, their "brute facts," which upon inspection turn out to be more brutish than fact.

Perhaps we can find a way out of the welter of contradictions by saying that absolutes have substance as propositions only in complete abstraction. In life, in practice in concrete situations, the absolutes become relative—relative to the circumstances involved and the communicated values in relationships to others. Now, instead of the abstract values being absolute, it is *method* which becomes absolute. In action, that is, there are only dynamic absolutes. Thomas Huxley's prayer, "O Lord, give me the courage to face a fact, even if it slay me!" is the kind of absolute an inquirer needs—not a pretense to certainty about "the facts." In the abstract, you may say, "Love" is the transcendent value for human relations, but *in those relations* the only absolute that ought to prevail is the human determination to see how genuine love ought to work in each particular instance and confrontation.

But this, one may say, is like walking a high wire all the way through life. Admitted, but the sort of men we have taken for our examples of the good life would live in no other way. The objection to this kind of continual discrimination and decision is based upon the assumption that it will not work, or is of little value, unless all men are somehow made to adopt it as a way of life. This is really totalitarian nonsense which ignores the fact that the great majority of people are now conforming to ignoble patterns of behavior established for them by ridiculously low estimates of human potentiality. It is true enough that not all men are capable of the high commitment of self-decision, yet only a few men can create the educational and cultural mold for the slow movement of the whole in this direction. Besides, in the exigencies of the present, with the breakdown of the familiar forms of authority, what else is there to do?

Letter from **GENEVA**

GENEVA.—The classic tale of the Englishman dressing for dinner in his tent in the jungle has, like most such tales, a good deal of truth in it. We have just heard the story of a member of the Secretariat of the United Nations, assigned to emergency duty in Leopoldville (Congo). He is French, a *bon vivant,* long-time resident of Geneva, where his bachelor's establishment is as well-known as is his able performance in an important U.N. post. A friend just returned from the Congo gives high praise of this man's performance there, where he worked, as have so many others, all day and most of the nights and all weekends, at the thankless task of trying to help a nation to be born out of that tribal wilderness. "And at three in the morning," says our friend, "returning to his flat, he would start marinating his next day's meat!"

We all carry our cultural baggage with us. By turns results are humorous, ridiculous, pitiful, or tragic, but always significant. What is civilization, if not an accumulation of cultural baggage? Yet sometimes the habits we live by become so strong that we may become quite unable to reach sound understandings of other people.

We have just spent a fascinating evening with a group of young trainees for the diplomatic services of nine new countries. Of the eleven men in the group, nine were Africans, representing seven new states, largely those usually described as *"tendance francaise."* One of the results of this evening, for me, was the realization that this description is out of date. It we continue to look at Africa through the spectacles of our own conception of Africa's past, we will continue unable to understand what we see.

It is true that all these men speak French: good, vigorous, expressive French, too. It is further true that this is the only language in which they can communicate with each other. It is true, without going into detail, that this use of a second language handicaps each man in understanding the other, in understanding himself, as he faces complicated social and political issues, and in understanding the society of which he forms a part of a very much separated elite.

There are detectable social, psychological and political consequences of these factors which must not be overlooked. But they are in a sense peripheral to the major forces which drive these men and these new countries.

I am saying, in the first place, that the ex-colonial relationship is one important aspect of the development of freedom in Africa, but that it is not central to it. The real heart of the matter is a positive phenomenon, one shared in some measure by all Black Africa, recently called, among other things, "Negritude." In the long future it will be the contribution of this basic feeling of belonging to something, and of widespread, forceful rejection of inferiority and discrimination, which will develop the African character.

It will be a very long future. The divisions of Africa are not, as some African leaders have contended, simple results of a Balkanization brought about by the colonialists for their own purposes. The barriers of tribe, of language, and of religion are extraordinarily varied and complex; though it is quite true, of course, as the President of Togo recently said, that he can pick up his office telephone and be almost instantly connected over 3000 miles with Paris, while he cannot telephone the scant 250 miles to Accra at all.

This brings me to the second consideration. We must not assign primary importance to the forms of relationship which seem to have replaced the colonial status—that is, the British Commonwealth and the French Community. Quite another set of relationships is in fact involved. Two recent phenomena will serve to illustrate the political superficiality of these two associations. First, it was clearly the active threats of Britain's Black African partners that forced the Union of South Africa from the Commonwealth. And second, even the financial lines of association

of the ex-French territories with France are being challenged in current Paris conversations looking toward greater control of the common currency, and West African Franc, by the individual countries themselves. One is tempted to think that the initiative now rests with the new states, who will maintain these associations only if their interests are served.

And though Nigerian Judges speak very British English and wear very British wigs, the forms and institutions toward which the new states are moving are new forms and institutions, not imitations of old ones. One can see three different paths being cut through into the future. The most conservative, taking its leadership from previous elite groups, is that of Morocco, with (this is a long leap) Ethiopia as a model. The middle way, characterized by an attempt to develop the standard national structure of an educated mass and a relatively free and unplanned economy, is being followed by Nigeria, against a British background, and possibly Senegal, against a French. But the real excitement is the third, whose characteristic is "dirigisme," an aggressive attempt to build a planned, coordinated, *directed* social structure and economy. The colonial background is incidental, for Ghana and Guinea have equally set their feet on this third path. We have to try to separate the concept and the performance in our minds. The marshalling of all group resources in one grand effort to leap a thousand years forward is one thing; the social cost of Nkrumah's wholesale imprisonment of the opposition is another.

It is too bad that Cold War attitudes so often skew our judgment, but here it is very serious indeed. We are inclined far too often to equate this attempt to leap ahead in history by means of the directed society with Communism, which I think it is not. What it is, of course, is a reflection of one aspect of the independent attitude of neutralism, or non-alignment. Is it too much to expect us of the West to try to understand and accept, if not to foster, a certain "plague on both your houses" attitude in Africa while the search for independent maturity goes on? In the midst of the pressures and demands of the grosser political phenomena, the rude measures of Communism, the death agonies of colonialism, and the birth pangs of the Congo, let's listen and look for the quieter, subtler forces to which Africans are increasingly responding.

ROVING CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
ON NATIONAL BOUNDARIES

WHILE MANAS editors endeavor to read informative material on the major political crises, this is not with any thought of attempting extensive commentary in these pages. However, once in a while material comes to hand which, in selective context, can be made essentially *a*-political. Such an opportunity is presently provided by a comparison between some historical notes occuring in Fred Warner Neal's contribution to the Committee of Correspondence *Newsletter* of Aug. 24, and a few paragraphs which conclude Dr. Brock Chisholm's *Prescription for Survival (Columbia,* 1957).

Dr. Neal is professor of international relations and government at Claremont Graduate School, and contributed the lead article to this 42-page issue of the *Newsletter* (the editorial committee includes A. J. Muste, David Riesman, and Roger Hagan). Dr. Neal's account of the origin of the Berlin crisis tells a great deal about the origin of "boundaries" in general:

> The problem of Berlin arose as a result of the four-power occupation of Germany following the defeat of the Nazis. Germany was, as you all know, divided into zones, with the Soviet armed forces controlling the Eastern zone—roughly that area already occupied by them at the end of the war—and two Western zones, one for the Americans and one for the British; and the Americans subsequently brought in the French, to whom was given control of a part of our original zone. Each military commander was to have absolute authority on political matters in his own zone, subject to the proviso that matters affecting the whole of Germany, especially economic matters, were to be determined by a quadripartite allied control council situated in Berlin. Berlin itself was divided into four sectors, one for each occupying power. And Berlin was deep inside the Soviet zone. There is room for questioning the wisdom of the details of this arrangement—which resulted from the Yalta and Potsdam conferences—and even more room for criticizing the failure of the Americans and their Western allies to obtain a formal agreement guaranteeing them free access at all times to West Berlin, but it does little good to dwell on these points now.
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> The aim of this arrangement—agreed on by all concerned—was that after taking of reparations and reordering German political and economic life, the four zones would be unified into a single German state. Meanwhile, at Potsdam, the powers agreed to a revision of Germany's Eastern borders, in favor of the Poles and the Russians. The boundary tentatively agreed on was roughly along the line of the Oder and Niesse Rivers, with this line to be ratified, give or take a little here or there, by a German peace treaty later. This peace treaty has never been worked out, and that is, in part, what Khrushchev wants now. One reason why there was no peace treaty is that quadripartite control of Germany broke down almost before it began. It is fashionable in the United States to put the blame for this break-down altogether on the Soviet Union, just as it is fashionable in the USSR to put the blame altogether on the United States. Both were guilty, and in just about equal degree. But there was also the disruptive role of the French, who never signed the Potsdam agreement even when they were made an occupying power. Paris insisted that if the USSR and Poland were to get part of Germany on the East. France should get part of Germany on the West. And failing this, the French obstructed the work of the Allied Control Council, which, consequently, was unable to establish all-German political parties, labor organizations, postal system or anything else.
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> Meanwhile, the Russians—destroyed, impoverished and greedy—began an action which certainly violated the Potsdam agreement in spirit if not in letter—the taking of reparations from their zone of Germany by operating factories on the spot and shipping off all the production to the USSR, rather than by the slower and supposedly agreed upon process of dismantling. This caused a strain on the occupation economy in all zones and had a severe inflationary effect. The West retaliated by reneging on promised reparations shipments from its zones to the USSR. Moscow in turn retaliated by reneging on promised food and fertilizer shipments from its zone to the Western zones. Then the Western powers, perhaps necessarily but still in clear violation of the treaty, adopted a West zonal currency and prepared to merge their three zones into one. It was in retaliation for this that Moscow in 1948 began the Berlin Blockade.
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> By now the wartime agreements on Germany were already as Mr. James P. Warburg says, a dead

letter. The cold war was well under way. And the United States was committed to the idea, long propagated by men like the late James V. Forrestal, that it was necessary to build up Germany as a military buffer to Soviet power. To accomplish this, the Western powers, under American leadership, took a fateful step that changed the whole complexion of the German situation. They established their merged Western zones into a new separate independent German state—West Germany. Originally, the rationale for the Western powers being in Berlin was that this was necessary for quadripartite control and administration of Germany looking toward a unified German state with Berlin as its capital. The Western action in establishing a West German state brought an abrupt end to this rationale. As many foresaw, the Soviet Union almost immediately followed suit and created an East German state under its domination. There were now two German states, east and west, one as valid and as legal as the other.

We now turn to a phantasy which Dr. Chisholm used, in 1957, to express disgust with a sort of nationalist thinking which he feels should long ago have been outgrown. Chisholm, of course, is arguing for world government, and so the points developed have application to all "territorial" nationalist concerns. He invites his readers to approach the earth as if travelling here for the first time from outer space. Having arrived, and being curious as to the nature of earth, we would naturally ask for a map to see what the geography looked like, and, having seen the map, would notice a great number of markings that had nothing to do with oceans, rivers, lakes and mountains. So we would inquire what they were, and be told:

"Oh, those are the international boundary lines."

We say, "Well, what is that?"

We are told, "Those are just lines between countries. People of one country live on one side and people of another country live on the other."

"But," we ask, "is this a good thing? Should people be kept apart from each other?"

"Of course, they should be kept apart from each other," the earth men would answer. "That's exactly what international boundaries are for. We have more space and better land than some other people."

Well, the logic of this may be all right from a "nationalist" point of view, but why not at least make the boundaries conform to natural configurations of land along the tops of mountains, across barren areas, etc.?

"Well, really!" the inhabitants say, with obvious impatience. "It isn't a question of whether they are in the best place or even in the right place or not. This is just where they are, that's all."

"Why?"

And then we would get what would be to us amazing explanations: because sometime, somewhere in the past, somebody was stronger than somebody else and marched in and took this much land, because somebody ran out of food at this point in his advance and dug in at this point; because one time when there was a war on, in the middle of a battle it started to rain and both armies stopped here. And we would be told with great pride:

"This is our national boundary, and rightly so. And for more than 200 or 300 or 600 years our people have fought to the death to keep this boundary exactly where it is—unless of course, we could extend it farther into the territory of somebody else."

And we would be told further, "It is disloyal—almost sacrilegious—to question these things. We have known and believed these things since we were children. They are the way they are, and that's the way we want them."

As visitors from outer space we would come to the inevitable conclusion that loyalties inculcated in childhood mean limitations on capacity to think for the rest of one's life, and we would consider this gravely serious. We would be appalled that the earth's inhabitants did no thinking at all in these tabooed areas and it would seem to us that these things vitally needed some thinking about.

COMMENTARY
A CLASSROOM PROBLEM

IN his column, "Perspective," in *Newsweek* for Nov. 20, Raymond Moley has a short story about a young professor at Barnard College which we wish we had come across in time to repeat last week, along with the Frontiers discussion of problems in education. While what Mr. Moley relates took place at Barnard in the 1920's, the circumstances are somewhat parallel to what our correspondent of last week objected to in contemporary university education.

This professor was teaching a small class in state and local government. His first assignment, after six weeks of work, was a single essay question: "Write a draft of an amendment to the New York Constitution granting home rule to New York City."

The class rebelled. No papers were turned in. Instead, the teacher was favored with a resolution, signed by a majority of the class, which said that his question was "unfair." Mr. Moley now tells how the young professor reacted:

> The teacher's good sense told him that argument or the exercise of his authority would precipitate continued friction. He knew that the "revolt" had been created by a devout believer in John Dewey's philosophy which held that children should direct their own education. And so he proposed that the class select a committee, with the Dewey disciple as chairman. He would then give the course for the remainder of the term according to his own plan. Then the committee would submit a critique thereof, with suggestions for changes. The report was interesting and helpful. There were no more revolts, and in the years following his registrations grew to match the largest in the institution. His assigned readings always included varied points of view. There was no indoctrination.

If one ignores Mr. Moley's faintly patronizing tone toward the Dewey disciple, this might be taken as an example of what our last week's correspondent was asking for from a teacher.

Perhaps we should add that Paul Wienpahl's paper, "An Unorthodox Lecture" (MANAS, Aug. 31, 1961, and printed in a longer version in *Chicago Review* last year) and the writings of Carl Rogers have played a considerable part in the thinking of this correspondent's views on education. Of the latter, he says: "His [Rogers'] new book, *On Becoming a Person,* is a masterpiece and belongs beside *The Informed Heart* as a classic for our time. Bettelheim tells us what is wrong with our society, how difficult the struggle is, and Rogers tells us what we can *do* about it. But what a contrast in their classroom techniques!"

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
ANARCHY ON PURPOSE

ON the subject of elementary school playgrounds, most teachers would probably say that, without any "supervision," some rather frightening forms of disorder immediately appear. Anarchy on the swings and slide can be dangerous. But there is an entirely different way of looking at the conventional playground situation and facilities—a way thoughtfully and thoroughly discussed in the English journal, *Anarchy,* for September, 1961.

With the exception of a few pages, this whole issue is devoted to various "adventure" playgrounds where the usual equipment has either been discarded or disregarded in an effort to see whether opportunities for creativity—which conventional equipment does not suggest—would not turn anarchy into constructive cooperation. The following is from the brief introduction:

> All the problems of social life present a choice between libertarian and authoritarian solutions, and the ultimate claim we may make for the libertarian approach is that it is more efficient—it fulfills its function better. The adventure playground is an arresting example of this living anarchy, one which is valuable both in itself and as an experimental verification of a whole social approach. The need to provide children's playgrounds as such is a result of high-density urban living and fast-moving traffic. The authoritarian solution to this need is to provide an area of tarmac and some pieces of expensive ironmongery in the form of swings, see-saws and roundabouts, which provide a certain amount of fun (though because of their inflexibility children soon tire of them), but which call for no imaginative or constructive effort on the child's part and cannot be incorporated in any self-chosen activity. Swings and roundabouts can only be used in one way, they cater for no fantasies, for developing no skills, for no emulation of adult activities, they call for no mental effort and very little physical effort, and we are giving way to simpler and freer apparatus like climbing frames, log piles, "jungle gyms," commando nets, or to play sculptures—abstract shapes to clamber through and over, or large constructions in the form of boats, traction engines, lorries or trains. But even these provide for a limited age-group and a limited range of activities, and it is not surprising that children find more interest in the street, the derelict building, the bombed site or the scrap heap.

Speaking of teen-age games for older boys in the early 1900's, the writer, Patrick Geddes, recalls that youngsters "are at most granted a cricket pitch, or lent a space between football goals, but otherwise are jealously watched, as potential savages, who on the least symptom of their natural activities of wigwam-building, cave-digging, stream-damming, and so on—must be instantly chivvied away, and are lucky if not handed over to the police." Mr. Geddes continues:

> That there should be anything novel in simply providing facilities for the spontaneous, unorganised activities of childhood is an indication of how deeply rooted in our social behaviour is the urge to control, direct and limit the flow of life. But when they get the chance, in the country, or where there are large gardens, woods or bits of waste land, what are children doing? Enclosing space, making caves, tents, dens, from old bricks, bits of wood and corrugated iron. Finding some corner which the adult world has passed over and making it their own. But how can children find this kind of private world in towns, where, as Agnete Vestereg of the Copenhagen Junk Playground wrote: "Every bit of land is put to industrial or commercial use, where every patch of grass is protected or enclosed, where streams and hollows are filled in, cultivated and built on? But more is done for children now than used to be done, it may be objected. Yes, but that is one of the chief faults—the things are *done*. Town children move about in a world full of the marvels of technical science. They may see and be impressed by things; but they long also to take possession of them, to have them in their hands, to make something themselves, to create and re-create."

The Emdrup playground, begun in 1943 in Copenhagen by a Workers' Cooperative Housing Association, was one of the first experiments and perhaps the most famous. The idea for it came from the landscape architect for Emdrup school, who had noticed that the children seemed to have more fun clambering into building sites and trying to do something with left-over materials than in

the regular playground activities or in organized games. So Emdrup school provided the equivalent, and let the children do as they wished—with the result that fights and other expressions of ill-will almost immediately disappeared. Why? This was a setting rich in opportunities for creative activities. Initial success in Copenhagen led to a gradual diffusion of the idea—though often with local variations—in Stockholm, Minneapolis, and in Swiss and English cities.

This whole movement, certainly, may be regarded as a large-scale application of educational theories and practices pioneered by Homer Lane and A. S. Neill—all of which gives very strong support to the thinking of these two.

The success of the Grimsby Playground in England is particularly illuminating on the "continuity" aspect of playground philosophy. At the end of the school year, the children saw up their shacks, shanties and other constructions, converting them into firewood which they then deliver with enthusiasm to the homes of old-age pensioners and others short of fuel supply. Then, when the next school term begins, the children are ready for a more mature embodiment of the plans they were carrying out before. "They never pick up where they left off at the end of the previous summer. It's the same with fires. They begin by lighting them just for fun. Then they cook potatoes and by the end of the summer they're cooking eggs, bacon and beans."

Participants in the "adventure playground" teaching experiments are, of course, aware of a natural debt to Lane and Neill. In the issue of Anarchy which tells of the adventure playground movement, we find this quotation from one of Neill's books:

> Granting that childhood is playhood, how do we adults generally react to this fact? We *ignore* it. We forget all about it—because play, to us, is a waste of time. Hence we erect a large city school with many rooms and expensive apparatus for teaching; but more often than not, all we offer to the play instinct is a small concrete space. One could, with some truth claim that the evils of civilization are due to the fact that no child has ever had enough play. . . . Parents who have forgotten the yearnings of their childhood—forgotten how to play and how to fantasy—make poor parents. When a child has lost the ability to play, he is psychically dead and a danger to any child who comes into contact with him.

FRONTIERS

Decline of the West

I WAS very much interested in Harry Zitzler's suggestion in your October 4 issue about correspondence between MANAS readers. To tell the truth, I have often wished for some sort of communication with other people who have interests and concerns similar to mine. Mine are mainly philosophical, that is, getting at the Truth, and how to put my convictions into practice. These appear to be the two main concerns of MANAS, and so I presume these are the main concern of its readers.

As for topics, I should think they would almost automatically reflect these two main interests. The variety of particular subjects and of particular stimuli to discussion, such as current political events, advances in science and educational theory, personal and psychological problems of ethics and putting one's philosophy into practice, recent books, would reflect the variety within MANAS itself. Once the first batch of letters is printed, I should think a chain of reaction would be started which would stabilize the problems of deepest concern to MANAS readers.

The emphasis in both Harry Zitzler's letter and Sherwood Anderson's is on *personal* communication to overcome the feeling of isolation. Although the publication of a "round-robin" is indeed the only way to get started, it has the disadvantage of losing some of the spontaneity of personal letters. To overcome this, it might be well for correspondents, at least at first, to give a little of their background, and, if they desired to have direct correspondence with anyone interested, their mailing address. That way some real friendships might develop.

In order not to renege on my own advice, let me say that I live on the edge of a National Forest, which is fast disappearing. This is the bane and frustration of my life. When I first moved here from San Francisco, about six years ago, I could say I lived on the edge of the wilderness in a small logging community, with my nearest neighbors about half a mile away, no fresh vegetables or fruits available except what you grew yourself (and what the chipmunks, rabbits, deer and bear did not eat), everyone knowing everyone else, always generous with help when needed but never interfering. One could hike anywhere through the virgin forest of grand old Douglas Fir (about the size of redwoods), tall ferns, soft, deep moss, rushing streams, talk to the deer, have lunch with a coyote, get lost both figuratively and literally, in a paradise which used to be prevalent before white men destroyed it. Now they are building dams near here, for which they have absolutely destroyed the most beautiful streams and forest and have cut off a lot of the National Forest besides, as part of the "logging on a perpetual basis" program, which means destruction of the virgin forest and its replacement by either denuded soil and scrub, or, with luck, reforestation with spindly second-growth. Besides this they have gone crazy building "access" roads so the public may enjoy the "wilderness"—in the form of bare stumps, half-burned discarded logs, dust and mud. Besides this, of course, trailer courts have sprung up all along the river (the McKenzie) to house the dam workers, stores with flashing neon signs have sprung up, et cetera.

When I lived in the city, I used to think of dams as "progressive" and necessary to raise the standard of living of people in general. But when I see the destruction they cause and think of the unnecessary gadgets their power goes to make, I have come to realize they are regressive, especially with atomic generators at hand. Of course it is not only the dams which are destroying the forest; the logging industry is determined to cut down the last old-growth tree before it will be satisfied with cutting second-growth. Some 53,000 acres were recently taken out of the Three Sisters Wilderness Area here, so that it could be logged off, leaving the "Wilderness Area" just about that portion which is above timber-line anyway, and making it so small

and exposed to civilization that it will no longer be wilderness. They then want to build a highway along the Skyline Trail of the Cascades, which would completely destroy the wilderness and the feeling of exhilaration one gets from hiking and climbing and finally coming to a mountain meadow, wildflowers, and a glacial stream.

Of course there are clubs such as the Sierra Club and the Obsidians in this area, which are doing all they can to conserve the wilderness. I belong to them, but I am not temperamentally suited to organizational work, and do nothing really constructive to help them. Instead, I am attempting to write a book on the present crisis in civilization which will point out the necessity for conservation (an esthetic and ethical as well as an economic necessity). But this is taking a long time, especially since I keep digging into such philosophical problems as free-will and determinism, knowledge, and values and ethics. In the meantime, the forest all around me is being destroyed forever, and I feel I should stand at some strategic spot and defy them to cut any further, just as Jerry Wheeler (in your Oct. 11 issue) entered the Lawrence Radiation Laboratory and the Davis-Monthan Air Force Base. Yet I may not have the courage, nor do I really want to disrupt my life before I finish the book.

I am sure that Jerry Wheeler is right: deeds count 100 per cent more than words. I was very much impressed by the depth of his psychological insight in his article "In the Pima County Jail" into his own attitude and its effect upon others. I should like to hear more from him as to his first experiences and his first decisions to take public action. He speaks of "loving *equally in all directions,"* the inanimate, the plants, other animals, as well as other human beings—with which I agree completely. But his remarks refer to removing the hate of others after his own positive action has been taken. My problem is in removing my feeling of frustration at standing helplessly by while murder is being done. From one point of view, writing the book is itself a deed, an act, and I try to conceive of it as such and channel my energies into it, but I wonder, since a book is after all only words, if I am only rationalizing.

ELEANOR WOODS

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