

A CRUCIAL DISTINCTION

YEARS ago, an eminent teacher of philosophy explained to an editor of this Magazine why he did not remain associated with a group of people whose thought attracted him and whose ideals seemed very much like his own. "It became apparent to me," he said, "that those people were unable to distinguish between what they believed and what they *knew*, and were unwilling even to try to make this distinction."

This seems about the closest anyone can come to describing the *correctable* problems of the modern world. This basic confusion between belief and knowledge, doubtless a built-in propensity of human nature, lies at the root of the ignorance and superstition associated with dogmatic religion, and is, of course, what the rigorous methodology of science was designed to prevent. But today, after some three hundred years of the practice and elaboration of scientific method, we recognize that science itself has always been honeycombed with unexamined metaphysical assumptions, which only now are beginning to receive critical examination, and that the splendid finality of scientific solutions has been obtained by restricting science to the secondary problems of the external world. Its unexamined assumptions turn the philosophical aspect of science into a form of belief which is mistaken for knowledge, and the refusal to look at these assumptions critically results in a learned ignorance as prejudicial in its consequences as any theological dogma or even "superstition."

As further instances of this confusion, there are the errors of liberal reformers, as recounted from nineteenth-century socio-political history by Herbert Spencer (*Man Against the State*), and there are the blandly repeated miscalculations of conservative economists in relation to the cruel effects of the business cycle and the dire human need which their theories ignore or neglect.

Finally, there are the day-to-day mistakes and routine immoralities which pervade virtually every modern society. Take for example the indifference to well-established human values shown by businessmen who, because they believe themselves to be exemplars of the one true system of life, imagine that their acquisitive pursuits cannot possibly do any "real" wrong. When confronted by plain evidence to the contrary, they feel hurt and misused, not guilty. The picture is *distorted*, they say. One must, they say, have a *larger* point of view.

A recent instance of this confusion became manifest when a large oil company secured permission to drill a test hole in a residential section of the Los Angeles area. Now it is the business of an oil company to find, pump, refine, and sell oil. The oil business has great importance to the economy of the United States—it is a foundation-stone of our great economic edifice. However, there are routine requirements to be met when drilling operations may constitute a hazard or a nuisance to human beings. Accordingly, in this case, the oil company *almost* conformed. It secured a permit for drilling in the residential area for thirty days, with signed releases from all but one of the nearby homeowners. (Expectation of certain small royalties for these residents if oil was found made persuasion easy enough.) But thirty days, it turned out, was not adequate, and the permit needed to be renewed. This time, the company decided it had better get the signature of the previously neglected householder. But he refused to sign. He pointed out that his family's evenings and early mornings were disturbed by the constant din of the drill and the mud pumps, and of the heavy trucks which rolled past his door from seven in the morning to nine at night. He observed that the test hole was in a park, now spoiled for any

recreation. It was also, he said, near a public school, and he noted that the extension of time would coincide with the school's September re-opening, and the big trucks would now grind through a street where there were bound to be throngs of children at certain times. The oil man pleaded, he offered what amounted to magnificent bribes, he tried to shock the householder by saying that to lose the hole would cost his company a hundred and fifty thousand dollars—an unAmerican tragedy sufficient to touch even the hardest of hearts. But the householder remained firm. He pointed out to the representative that his company had given only the most nominal attention to the laws intended to protect citizens from such operations. That the ruthless, let's-get-things-done credo of the company was a calculated attack on the democratic process—a *subversion* of self-government far more ominous than the fancied threat of powerless "communists."

The oil company representative could not accommodate his beliefs to this criticism. All this good and conscientious man really understood was that he had a problem he could not solve by ordinary means. His job, his American "ideals," his experience in "getting things done" by public relations techniques acquired through years of practice—all this had made him unprepared for such an encounter. *He* wasn't undermining the American way of life, but was making it better by getting more oil out of the ground, adding to the country's prosperity. . . . Well, the situation was *atypical* and his company was smart and rich enough to budget for special problems created by screwballs.

It would take too much space to give corresponding examples of the fallacies of welfarism and collectivism, and they are obvious, anyhow. One has only to compare the achievements of the do-it-yourself rehabilitation projects springing up around the country—achievements in self-respect, *esprit de corps*, and discovery of hidden capacities and resourcefulness

with the sluggish flow of bureaucratic aid to the needy to see how wrong it is to argue for total welfarism on the assumption that the problem is too big to be solved in any other way. This is the same as arguing that because we have great big problems, we are entitled to make great big mistakes. (Of course, this comment is not to be taken as advocating ruthless elimination of existing welfare facilities, but simply as saying that people who claim to be intelligent ought to be able to find a better way of helping people than the demoralizing processes which have worked destruction ever since the days of ancient Rome.)

In addition to these examples of the blindness in major ideological beliefs, there are illustrations of how people submit nominally to a prevailing doctrine of social good and then hamstring it, privately. This applies to the administration of many of the welfare measures in the South. In one Georgia county, according to eyewitness report, jobless Negroes are discouraged from registering as unemployed, since this would make them eligible for certain educational opportunities. By such means the local patriots can boast that they have little or no unemployment; and they can deny educational help to Negroes and get cheap labor at the same time, since the Negroes are told that curb pickup labor opportunities will be available to them if they *don't* register with the unemployment office. The Negroes, of course, need the work. Then, in a city in Northern California, the local administrators of welfare are under constant pressure from local conservative businessmen to treat their clients as basically "undeserving." With this encouragement, small-minded social workers sometimes behave like minor Jehovistic deities in their relations with the timid and often desperate people they are supposed to be *helping*. Such petty but numerous ideological abuses of power rot the social fabric and can have only mean and cruel results. Beliefs confused with knowledge are the root-cause of all this.

Stalin, we say, starved twenty million kulaks to death, when we recount the crimes of the communists. But when told that we pervert the minds of the young by indoctrinating them in ideals of acquisitiveness and dog-eat-dog competition, we become indignant and talk about "building character" and the importance of "self-reliance." We say this in the face of a public record of the rape and exhaustion of nature, of resources converted into hideous piles of junk, of a prosperity dependent on constant over-stimulation of vanity and the gross appetites of the population, of a vast industrial plant increasingly reliant upon the requirements of perpetual war, and of a debilitating saturation of minds and feelings with the trivialities and degradations of the mass media.

These are some of the objective evidences of the "character" we build and the moral verities we are supposed to be fostering and defending. They are also some of the reasons why psychologists, especially those who have daily contact with human beings of every sort of "belief," are alienated from both politics and ideology as time goes on. They see, before their eyes, the virtually total irrelevance of deciding which are the "good" beliefs, in contrast to the enormous importance of understanding the operation of emotionally justified but obviously unverified beliefs—an operation which, when carried to an extreme, is simply mental illness and rampant psychic disorder.

The problem, in short, is not in selecting the "right" beliefs, but in acquiring basic insight into the dynamics of action based on belief, but unsupported by knowledge of how that action will work and what its consequences will be. The real troublemakers of the world are not honestly ignorant men, but men who are ignorant of their ignorance, and determined to make their beliefs the rule of existence for all.

There is the further problem that every society is an objective result of some idea-system involving beliefs about the nature of things.

Where the typical human error of identifying beliefs with knowledge remains unnoticed, there are bound to be widening gaps between the prevailing beliefs and the realities to which they once may have legitimately applied. The fact that the beliefs no longer correspond to the facts of life may be vaguely admitted, but the idea of *giving up* the beliefs is fundamentally repugnant, since almost invariably they have been connected with moral values. For this reason it seems better to distort reality than to weaken belief. It is right here, in this Machiavellian corruption, that men who undertake to fulfill social responsibilities make the mistake that is fatal to all. For now what they believe, or what they think they believe, about the *public good* becomes more important to them than what they know. Now they are responsible *leaders!* How could such important men *dare* to question themselves? From this moral impasse it is but a short step to conscious hypocrisy, followed by cynical manipulation, until, at last, even the justifying motive of serving the public good is dissolved by the habit of systematic deception. The end-result of all this is well described by Harvey Wheeler in his paper, "The Rise and Fall of Liberal Democracy":

The contemporary picture of the American electorate is one of a vast, amorphous reservoir of mass political emotion. The state of this emotion can be tapped accurately by public-opinion polling devices. The reservoir can be manipulated by suitable emotional appeals, channeled through the mass media. As an issue arises, each candidate jockeys for primacy in the opinion-formation process in an effort to see that the mass media reflect his own position. This cannot be achieved through rational appeals, and so it must be achieved emotionally. The method is to stigmatize as fearful, dangerous, and alien the position one opposes; to give emotional patriotic coloration to the position one supports; and to do everything possible to see that the mass media express this bias. If this happens the post-audit opinion polls will successfully record these carefully instilled prejudices and policies. The successful candidate then triumphantly announces them as the rational democratic will of the people.

A more devastating degradation of the democratic dogma would be difficult to find, for what the process achieves is of course precisely the opposite of our democratic belief. . . .

When, by such means, "successful" politics becomes the betrayer of the rational process, then politics is itself anti-educational, and necessarily *anti-human*. There is nothing new in this diagnosis. Cicero applied it to the declining days of the Roman Republic, and it is illustrated in every account of the trickeries of demagogues and the techniques of the "engineers of consent."

Where shall we go for a remedy? There is only one place to go—to the character-shaping processes in the education of the young. What shall we look at? *Not* the question of whether or not the young are being taught "correct" beliefs. We must look at all the ways in which we are failing to teach the young to distinguish between what they believe and what they know, for if they do not know how to make this distinction, they will be forever vulnerable to manipulation. They will be vulnerable, first, to their own wishful thinking, and through this, to the emotional button-pushing techniques of the politicians and other "hidden persuaders."

It should be quite obvious that there is no alternative to this primary approach to the problem. All the other evils of both personal and social life spring from this area of fundamental neglect. Why is it so neglected? Because it is an area of hypersensitivity in human feeling; and in social affairs, this hypersensitivity is pompously institutionalized as a weapon of thought-control, giving dark, emotional power to such epithets as "heretic," "subversive," "troublemaker," "agitator," etc. The success of all thought-control techniques depends upon obliterating the distinction between what has been called "creative disorder" and nihilistic attack on the *status quo*. A point is reached during the progressive inroads of the manipulative process when making this distinction is no longer possible for large numbers of people, and from that point on participation in

"mass politics" becomes a futile undertaking for those who recognize that democratic politics and public education are indivisible.

According to Werner Jaeger, Plato wrote the *Republic* because he felt that there was no longer any use in practical politics in the Athens of his day. As Jaeger says:

Plato's demand that philosophers shall be kings, which he maintained unabated right to the end, means that the state is to be rendered ethical through and through. It shows that persons who stood highest in the ethical scale had already abandoned the actual ship of state, for a state like Plato's could not have come alive in his own time, and perhaps at any time.

Similar conclusions are evident in the new radical thinking about a "counter society" (see William Harrell in *Liberation* for the Summer of 1966), and in the basic principles of the Indian Sarvodaya movement, as conceived and led by Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan.

Ultimately, the issue comes down to the problem as set by Leonard Nelson in his essay on Socratic method (Dover, 1965). It is quite clear that what Socrates was after among his pupils is the development of the capacity in men to distinguish between what they believe and what they *know*. As Nelson puts it:

Philosophical instruction fulfills its task when it systematically weakens the influences that obstruct the growth of philosophical comprehension and reinforces those that promote it. Without going into the question of other relevant influences, let us keep firmly in mind the one that must be excluded unconditionally: the influence that may emanate from the instructor's assertions. If this influence is not eliminated, all labor is vain. The instructor will have done everything possible to forestall the pupil's own judgment by offering him a ready-made judgment.

But what about the way Plato works his own transcendental conceptions into the Dialogues? These are surely "judgments" of a sort.

The exciting discovery, here, is that Plato's doctrines are not intended to communicate "dogmas," but to increase his listeners' confidence in their own ability to find the truth. Nelson

develops this point. In the *Meno*, when Socrates maintains that his own determined doubting spurs others to doubt and question—

Meno counters with the celebrated question: "Why, on what lines will you look, Socrates, for a thing of whose nature you know nothing at all?" And this draws from Socrates the more celebrated answer: "Because the soul should be able to recollect all that she knew before." We all know that these words are an echo of the Platonic doctrine of ideas, which the historic Socrates did not teach. Yet there is in them the Socratic spirit, the stout spirit of reason's self-confidence, its reverence for its own self-sufficient strength. This strength gives Socrates the composure that permits him to let the seekers after truth go astray and stumble. More than that, it gives him the courage to send them astray in order to test their convictions, to separate knowledge simply taken over from the truth that gains clarity in us through our own reflection. He is unafraid of the confession of not-knowing; indeed, he even induces it. In this he is guided by an attitude of thinking so far from skeptical that he regards this admission as the first step toward deeper knowledge. "He does not think he knows . . . and is he not better off in respect of the matter which he did not know?" he says of the slave to whom he gives instruction in mathematics. "For now he will push on in the search gladly, as lacking knowledge."

We may stop here, proposing that Socrates has put clearly the crux of the question. Two important aspects of it, however, have not been discussed. One involves what is to be done for children in whom the critical faculty is not yet aroused, and who need to trust both themselves and others. The other aspect of the problem has a sliding scale, being concerned with the operation of Socratic method in mental environments dominated by various assumptions, some of which are open to question, while others remain practically closed, for reasons of psychological rigidity. Here education becomes virtually a branch of "therapy," with all the resulting dangers of the *hubris* common to Western man. Ideals of "purity" and "perfectionism," in relation to the problems of "relativism" and "compromise," are essential considerations to be looked into.

REVIEW

DELIGHTS AND FRUSTRATIONS

THERE is a particular pleasure in finding in old books a quality of insight one supposed to belong only to modern times. Take the first principle of William Glasser's Reality Therapy—the idea that we are basically responsible, if not for what we are, certainly for what we have yet to become, from the moment that we begin to reflect on the question of what shapes our lives. A reader recently pointed out that this idea is to be found in Epictetus, and having an 1890 (Little, Brown) edition of the works of this Roman slave (died 120 A.D.), we began turning the pages. Almost at once, we came across a veritable treatise on the subject, and, marking the place, put the book aside. Then, a few days later, sitting down to write about this "find," we read some more, discovering (with a certain embarrassment) that the entire volume is devoted to this theme!

Early in his work, in a section called "Of Courage," Epictetus states a general principle:

The essence of good and evil is a certain disposition of the will.

What are things outward, then?

Materials on which the will may act, in attaining its own good or evil.

How, then, will it attain good?

If it be not dazzled by its own materials for right principles concerning these materials keep the will in a good state; but perverse and distorted principles, in a bad one.

In another section, "Of Natural Affection," Epictetus converses with a man who says that he loved his daughter so much he couldn't bear to stay with her while she was sick. Defending his leaving home, the man argues, "All, or most, of us fathers are affected in the same way." Epictetus answers:

I do not deny the fact; but the question between us is, whether it is right. For by this way of reasoning it must be said that diseases happen for the good of the body, because they do happen; and even that vices

are natural, because all, or most of us, are guilty of them. Do you show me, then, how such behavior as yours appears to be natural. . . . Do but convince me that it was acting naturally, and I can as well convince you that everything natural is right.

Follows some Socratic type argument which reaches a climax when Epictetus asks his friend whether the child's mother loves her, and whether, if she does, *she* ought to leave her, too. The father, of course, objects. Neither, he agrees, should others who love her leave her when she is sick—such as her nurse and her teacher. "Heaven forbid!" says the father. Then Epictetus says: "But is it not unreasonable and unjust that what you think right in yourself, on account of your affection, should not be allowed to others, who have the very same affection with you?" He asks the father: "Would you not rejoice, if it were possible, to have such a kind of affection from your enemies, as to make them thus let you alone?" Then he says:

It remains, that your behavior was by no means affectionate. But now, was there no other motive that induced you to desert your child? . . .

At present, perhaps, it cannot be made clear to you. It is sufficient to be convinced, if what philosophers say be true, that we are not to seek any motive merely from without; but that there is the same unseen motive in all cases, which moves us to do or forbear any action. . . . Is it anything else but what seemed right to us to do so? . . . And if it had seemed otherwise to us, what else should we have done than what we thought right? This, and not the death of Patroclus, was the real source of the lamentation of Achilles,—for every man is not thus affected by the death of a friend,—that it seemed right to him. This too was the cause of your running away from your child, that it then seemed right; and if hereafter you should stay with her, it will be because that seems right. . . .

From this day forward, then, whenever we do anything wrong, we will impute it to the wrong principles from which we act; and we will endeavor to extirpate and remove that with greater care than we would remove wens and tumors from the body. In like manner, we will ascribe what we do right to the same cause; and we will accuse neither servant, nor neighbor, nor wife, nor children, as the cause of any evil to us,—persuaded that if we had not accepted

certain principles, we should not carry them to such consequences. The control of these principles lies in us, and not in any outward things. Of these principles we ourselves, and not things outward, are the masters. . . . From this day, then, we will not so closely inquire as to any external conditions, . . . but only make sure of our own principles.

However, when his visitor agreed to this policy, Epictetus warned him:

You see, then, that it is necessary for you to become a student, that being whom everyone laughs at, if you really desire to make an examination of your own principles, but this, as you should know, is not the work of an hour or a day.

This philosophizing by Epictetus recalls what Clark Moustakas was quoted as saying in "Children" two weeks ago:

The "facts" regarding human behavior have little meaning in themselves. It is the manner in which they are perceived that tells us how they will influence behavior. Experiments at the Hanover Institute, Hanover, New Hampshire, have shown that we do not get our perceptions from the things around us but that our perceptions come from within us. These studies indicate that there is no reality except individual reality, which is always based on a background of unique experience.

There is a sense in which Epictetus is saying just this when he argues that misfortune is never in external events, but within the individual. Medea, he points out, when she slaughters her own children to be revenged upon her husband, is tragically self-deceived; and he asks:

Why, then, are you angry with her, that the unhappy woman is deceived in the most important points, and instead of a human creature, becomes a viper? Why do you not rather as we pity the blind and lame, so likewise pity those who are blinded and lamed in their superior faculties? Whoever, therefore, duly remembers that the appearances of things to the mind is the standard of every action to man . . .,—such a person will not be outrageous and angry at anyone.

"So then, have all the great and dreadful deeds that have been done in the world no other origin than semblances?"

Absolutely no other. The *Iliad* consists of nothing but semblances and their results. It seemed

to Paris that he should carry off the wife of Menelaus. It seemed to Helen that she should follow him. If, then, it had seemed to Menelaus that it was an advantage to be robbed of such a wife, what could have happened? Not only the *Iliad* had been lost, but the *Odyssey*, too.

Epictetus adds a dry Roman practicality to the Socratic spirit.

COMMENTARY

MISPLACED PERFECTIONISM

THE neglected phases of the Socratic method, mentioned at the end of this week's lead article, are difficult to examine because of the heavy moralism of Western thought. All starting-points in self-discovery are involved in some kind of limitation, and while we are usually content with this situation in behalf of our own growth, the imperfect starting-points of other people spur the critical spirit.

In regard to children, this becomes obvious in respect to art education. Fond fathers and mothers are seldom willing to understand that children don't *see* the way adults do, and for this reason are prone to be blind to what may be high achievement in the work of their offspring.

In the matter of social issues, the traditional radical has no use for any businessman, who is seen as deeply flawed by original sin simply by having this role in society.

Likewise the radical, who may be preoccupied by considerably more difficult projects than meeting a payroll, is *ipso facto* not worth listening to for many conventionally minded people. He is not a "practical" man.

The philosopher may easily become contemptuous of the psychotherapist, who, he contends, has only replaced the priest in the confessional box. That a number of therapists are extremely sensible of this aspect of their interpersonal relations and do what they can to correct for it merely excites impatience instead of sympathy. And the anarchist, blind to the limited good accomplished by public servants, would have them all quit their jobs.

While there is truth in all these iconoclastic contentions, the fact is that no human undertaking can have a perfect environment, and some of the best evolutions have been accomplished against heavy environmental odds. The world is not a planed and ploughed orchard with even spacing

between the saplings; the bull-dozing treatment to make the terrain flat and even is not ever appropriate for human development, and certainly fails when men with absolute power attempt to apply it.

Why should men want to arrange everything perfectly at the start, and, failing in this, why do they become angry and uncompromising enemies of only partial good?

There may be two reasons for this. First, they are reluctant to distinguish between the abstract perfection of metaphysical analysis and the endlessly complex relativities of actual human relationships. Second, dealing in absolutes makes criticism easy and self-righteousness always triumphant.

A theological extenuation for human imperfection is available in the doctrine of Original Sin. A much better reason for understanding and patience lies in the evolutionary conception of the human being and of human society. Not the *status* of a man's life and action at any moment, but the *thrust* of his energies is what matters. A man stands on the rock of his past and chips away at the barriers of his own limitations. Each man has his own elevation, and his personal vision is no more sacred than that of any other, his mistakes no more deserving of tender tolerance than the things other men do wrong.

What are the objections to this view? Its main fault is that it tends to dissolve the basis of objective criticism, since merit and demerit now have only subjective measures. It gives everyone an excuse for doing nothing and takes away reason for "blaming" others. There are, in fact, all sorts of practical arguments against this view. The only thing to be said in its favor is that it probably contains more truth about human beings and their moral development than any other way of regarding them.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

CAMPUS REPORT

THE July-August *California Monthly*—alumni magazine of the University of California—has in it a letter from a class of '66 student, Stephen Cornet, who comments on a recent editorial concerning "student activism":

After mentioning the stereotype of our campus, the "bearded" ones and the "black stocking" set, you mentioned all-too-briefly that the vast majority of the students were not like this. You were correct, but I feel you ought to have stressed the reasons many of us get involved. The impression I received from your article was that any of us who were *not* agitators were also not involved. This is not true. Many of us and I speak as an unofficial representative of persons both with and without beards, have become very, very involved. We can look around us, at our school, at our state, at our society, and especially at our fellow man, and sense the hypocrisy and lack of justice, of love, of respect in these. We are in constant conflict with our ideals, as a result of these clashes. This is why we, or rather, the vast majority of us, have become involved. We believe in an inherent justice, an aura of love, in life, and it is to this ideal that we are dedicated.

We are very idealistic. We have heard stories of Hitler's Germany; we have heard story after story about the McCarthy era; we do *not* want to live in a society like that.

We are involved. We are involved because we believe in justice and love. We are involved, because we want to create a better society.

A somewhat different but hardly contradictory view was expressed last month by Joel P. Smith, associate dean of students at Stanford University. In an interview reported in the Los Angeles *Times* (Sept. 22), Mr. Smith said that conversation with members of Stanford's increasingly activist student body has made him think that the idealism of recent years on the campus is souring. By "idealism" he meant the enthusiasm with which many students looked forward to joining Peace Corps, and the sense of participation they felt working for civil rights and

in urban ghettos and rural slums. He gave four reasons for student disillusionment: dislike of the present national leadership, the Vietnam war, the lessened opportunities for working in the civil rights movement (because of the black power policy decision of SNCC), and the general cultural stress on money and success as personal goals. The students, he said, feel that there is "an exaggerated preoccupation with the financial health of the nation, whereas they are concerned with the richness of individual life." He regards the increase in drug-taking, sexual promiscuity, and contempt for the draft as symptoms of this general disillusionment. The *Times* article continues:

The results are "an intense sensualism" on campus—drugs, sex, and other forms of personal indulgence—and an increased alienation from society. "There is a wallowing in indignation that just isn't productive at all. Students are taking a personal delight in disaffection. They find camaraderie in this attitude. I find this ironic. The activists object so to greed when it is selfishness measured in economic terms. Yet this sensualism is really just another kind of selfishness. It is extremely selfish to be so alienated from the rest of society that you make no contribution to it at all."

Part of the responsibility for student attitudes, Mr. Smith believes, can be traced to lack of response by educational administrators:

Activist students are frustrated by the extent to which colleges and universities refuse to accept their good faith in trying to make suggestions for educational change. . . . Administrators have got to understand that these people really have something to say and hear them out, not in the usual condescending way but with a clear intent to pay attention and to make changes that are sensible.

On the question of how many students can be called "activist," Mr. Smith would not attempt to give figures, but pointed out that in the election of student officers last spring—the largest voter turn-out in Stanford history—the choice for president of the student body was David Harris, an open admirer of New Left politics. The election of Harris, he said, was no student "whim." Harris "had wide appeal," Mr. Smith

thinks, "even among students who live conventional lives." Another comment was:

Students think they see a "working relationship between higher education and 'the good life,' as it is defined by society. They have been told for years that a college degree means more earning power and they resent the notion that the reason to go to college is to make more money."

For general background on all these questions we suggest the following paperbacks: *The Berkeley Student Revolt*, Anchor, \$1.95; *Revolution at Berkeley*, Dell, 95 cents; *Berkeley: The New Student Revolt*, Evergreen, 95 cents; and the Beacon hardback volume, *The New Student Left* by Cohen and Hale, \$4.95.

Unrest among intelligent students is worldwide. *Good Housekeeping* for August of this year reprinted from *Himmat*, a Bombay weekly, a prize-winning essay on the subject by a last-year medical student at Madras University, Miss Saraswathy Ganapathy. She wrote:

Everywhere youth in rebellion is hitting the headlines: Mods and Rockers, juvenile delinquents, *stilyagi*, *blousons noirs*. All over India, youth is striking, protesting and demonstrating. And everywhere our "elders and betters" are throwing up their hands in horror and asking "Why?"

We have heard words like "God" and "country" used to whitewash the vilest deeds in history. We have been exhorted to honesty by crooks, to patriotism by near-traitors. We have heard sexual license extolled and advocated by those who should know—and then seen what havoc it can wreak in us, in our homes, in our societies. We "know the price of everything and the value of nothing" because all values have been carefully and efficiently destroyed before our eyes. We pin our faith in men because we have not been given a faith in anything bigger—and when men fail, as fail they must, we are left bewildered and hopeless.

We rebel because we want a new order in which man can stand up in the decency and pride that are his birthright—an idea occasionally so unfamiliar to us that we do not even recognize it as the cause we are fighting for, but this is why we rage and smash and destroy.

Enlightened self-interest seems to be the guiding principle in the lives of many of our elders—and you want us to sweat, to fight, to live for this? Thank you, but we are not interested. Give us a cause big enough to challenge all our energy and spirit—dare us to take on humanity, to change the world—and then come and help us remake it.

Obviously, this is not a generation for which "practical men" will have much appeal. We can probably look forward, instead, to an epoch of triumphant Pied Pipers.

FRONTIERS

Behind "Pen-Pals For Prisoners"

ALTHOUGH Pen-pals for Prisoners as a service organization is far from actualization on a significant scale, I find myself wanting to tell its story "historically" rather than to promote the idea in a more conventional manner. For the idea of such a service did not come into my life—my mind, should I say?—impersonally; rather it grew to consciousness by a succession of intimate experiences. The story began in June of 1962 when I began serving federal prison time for draft refusal, and its nexus was pain: not the pain of adjusting to confinement behind bars, but the pain of being released. For friends must remain behind, some for only a few months or a year or two, but some for five years, ten, thirty perhaps; some until death.

Every convict in this country probably knows the three "time-honored" rules for doing easy time: walk slowly, drink lots of water, do your own time (not your buddies' as well). With the help of fasting one day a week I mastered the first two, but though more than a year has passed since my final release, the third still eludes me. In July of 1964 came the first release, but tied to conditions to which I would not conform, and thus the empathy with luckless friends doing long, hard time had to be endured again in June of 1965.

Life behind bars tends to be oppressive, notwithstanding the pretended benevolence of most prison systems, and even the sincere benevolence of a very few. To begin a severe sentence alone is one of the steepest challenges our society imposes; to endure it alone, but sane, one of the most painful. And most embittering. Seventy-five per cent of the men and women behind bars (out of the ninety-seven per cent who are to be released) in the United States (in prisons, as opposed to jails) are destined, as the system now operates, to eventually return. This statistic would seem to have alarming implications for American society when it is juxtaposed with the fact (*Newsweek*, Aug. 16, 1965) that seventy per cent of all serious crimes are by first offenders under twenty-five, and the additional fact that forty-eight

per cent of the Americans arrested in 1964 were teenagers under seventeen.

During the past few years, in part stimulated by research undertaken by prisoners and published in their own periodicals, an epoch of penal improvement comparable to that which marked the 1930's seems possibly in the making. A tone of hesitant expectation has begun to dull the edge of despair which has dominated the penal press since the war (when progress turned to reaction in many respects). The following, by one of the most forthright and least appreciated editors in the country, Neil Pettry of *The Angolite* (published by the inmates of the Louisiana State Penitentiary), is an example of the new hope as well as of the old despair:

Someone once said in the early days of this country that the United States, by its very existence, threatened every European government. So too will the new and more humanely modern prisons with their progressively programmed systems of mental and vocational rehabilitation, though now so few, threaten every punitive institution in this country. And any administrator who fails to acknowledge their need and benefit, refusing to comply with what is rapidly becoming a public demand, is in effect signing the termination of his own career.

For those of us here, however, reading and hearing of all the policy changes in other states, such as increased visiting and writing privileges, furloughs, job-training, real schools, conjugal visits, outside jobs, "prisoner's rights," and a hearing before a parole is violated (as opposed to after)—while this joint grows more crowded with faces, old and new—we can only wonder if the public really cares. . . .

You can continue to buy the hard-sell of the politician and the excuse-making of the police, who have a ready-made scapegoat in the penitentiary and its alumni. Or you can take a look at the facts. Whenever a move is made toward cure by the penologist, the cry of "molly-coddling" is rendered by the same fellow who cries "wolf." The politician. There are no winners, only losers—except of course those who are furthering their political ambitions.

(To readers who may wish to be brought up to date on non-visionary progressive penal thinking, I suggest *The Future of Imprisonment in a Free Society*, brought out in 1965 as No. 2 of *KDY Issues*,

a publication of Chicago's Catholic Diocese, available from St. Leonard's House, 2100 W. Warren Blvd., Chicago, Illinois 60619.)

It is particularly in association with other new opportunities that a pen-pal service for prisoners would be helpful. Its merit par excellence would be its power to relieve suffering through self-help, which should appeal to anyone not naïve enough to believe that suffering can be redemptive when it is not voluntarily chosen.

For one doing enough time behind bars, it is of course possible to correspond voluminously as well as to suffer considerably. Bob Stroud, the "Birdman of Alcatraz," was such an individual. During the year and a half we knew each other at the Medical Center for Federal Prisoners (ending with his death in November of 1963), Mr. Stroud would often speak of the many important events in his life which kept his spirit alive during forty-three years in solitary at Leavenworth and Alcatraz ("The Rock"). Looking back over those events, I can't think of a single one which did not involve the aid of outsiders, dependent upon correspondence. As an unfree man, Bob Stroud's suffering was emphatically not redemptive, but he managed to do fifty-three hard years without losing his capacity for constructive initiative.

My opinion has come to be that true rehabilitation must be self-rehabilitation: that to help another person must mean to make possible self-help. During Stroud's lifetime, so far as we knew, there was no prison system in the U.S. which did not censor mail. (Now there is said to be one: the Indiana system.) After the initiation of his bird-disease-analysis business in Leavenworth in the 1920's Stroud for decades sent all important correspondence secretly between the laminations of his bird boxes (a fact probably never discovered by the Federal Bureau of Prisons, but I see no point in concealing it now). During the various campaigns for his release, he authored the petitions personally. Who in the outside world would self-righteously condemn this kind of rule-breaking?

In Portland, Oregon, I recently visited the author of *The Birdman of Alcatraz*, Dr. Thomas Gaddis.

Due to the Stroud case, Dr. Gaddis is not popular among prison administrators (nor even among most criminologists), though he spent much of his life as a probation officer within the California system and looks it. On the pen-pals subject, Dr. Gaddis pointed out that inside-outside contact is now in the forefront of measures being pushed by researchers concerning themselves with rehabilitation. But penologists, he said, are today as always decades behind the recommendations of criminologists. It's fortunate for the bulk of prisoners that they have in their midst men with objective minds and indomitable spirits—spirits which remind others automatically of what freedom means. Another outstanding example of this among my friends at the Medical Center in Springfield, Missouri, was Morton Sobell.

I'm convinced that the Pen-pals service could be another vital aid in the struggle which a prisoner must wage to retain free feelings and authentic experiences. This I learned while still a prisoner myself and long before the idea of an organized pen-pal service occurred to me, for empathy drove me to violate prison rules by arranging five or six correspondences, some of which could not begin without taking the risk of smuggling out the first letter. In mentally sifting my "free world" friends for a suitable correspondent for each of these inside friends, the choice inevitably—for reasons as defensible as they are obvious—lit upon some charming young lady, both sensible and unmarried. The constructive influence of this correspondence was amazing, although each one was dropped as the fellows were released into their own free-world relationships.

It need not be doubted that if administrative approval can be gained for the free working of a pen-pal service—whether channelled through prison chaplains, case workers or committees of actual prisoners—there would be a groundswell of response from men who find themselves doing hard time. And it probably wouldn't matter if nuns or housewives—or even men—became outside volunteer pen-pals instead of mysterious co-eds. Most inmates would write nonetheless, and probably learn more from being in touch with a mature person than they would with a student. But spread of the

idea on college campuses would not be a mistake: it may be necessary to use lists of outside volunteers as a lobby to induce prison administrators to give the idea a try. A letterhead listing honorary sponsors may be necessary also as a lobbying device.

In the February and April issues of this year, the *Catholic Worker*, with its 70,000 circulation, carried columns on the Pen-pals proposal, and more than fifty volunteers have made contact with me, some anxious to undertake tasks over and above serving as a pen-pal. MANAS readers are urged to consider participating. (Write me at: Voluntown, Connecticut 06384.) Readers who find themselves sufficiently interested to volunteer will receive, not the name and address of a prisoner (since no prison system has yet been "cracked"), but rather periodical progress round-ups along with a list of individuals likewise interested. Meanwhile, anyone should feel free to publicize the proposal in any media as openings may be found.

Before me is the prisoners' newspaper for April, 1966 from the Massachusetts State Penitentiary at South Walpole, in which the first *Catholic Worker* story was reprinted. By this means the idea has already reached 6000 men behind bars, and through the network of inside periodical exchanges has probably been noticed and reprinted in other prison papers.

More tasks face the Pen-pal idea than I can even list. While in California recently, I found support for it from a prominent lawyer who intends to do all in his power to introduce the program into the California system as soon as it has been accepted by a single system elsewhere. He named the Vermont and Philadelphia systems as perhaps liberal enough to consider being the first. The task of gaining such acceptance, to make a national precedent, is crucial. Other openings might be sought through—

(1) Clergymen, who could seek contacts via the Prison Chaplains' office of the National Council of Churches (475 Riverside Drive, New York City);

(2) The American Psychiatric Association and other professional groups;

(3) Social workers who may have prison contacts.

It's conceivable that the prison chaplains' association or a similar group would wish to help sponsor the idea.

If Bob Stroud had ever made peace with prison systems, perhaps I too might, grudgingly, have decided to "leave well enough alone." But the last thing I heard from his lips in November of 1963 was that, from 1909 on, he had fought the injustices of the prison system every step of the way, and would never stop fighting till the day he died. On the night of November 20-21 Stroud was up twice, due to a heart attack, attempting to exercise his right to communicate with the doctor on duty. It became common knowledge among the inmates on the tier that the desk officer in charge refused this right to Stroud. Since the medical heart stimulation thus denied to Stroud might have pulled him through, it is reasonable to say that this arbitrary decision by the desk officer assured the Birdman's death. At 6 A.M. our mutual friend Morton Sobell called Bob for breakfast, shook him, then felt for his pulse, before looking him in the face and noticing his open eyes.

I hope there will be no misunderstanding in regard to motivations. Allow me to state explicitly that I oppose the practice of imprisonment—and I hope that the Pen-pal service will give convicts a more effective wedge than they now have to "beat the system,"—to sustain the sensation and substance of freedom rather than emerge, finally, as broken men.

Since I'm an ex-con, there may be a strain of defiance in this view.

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