VOLUME XI, NO. 10
MARCH 5, 1958

UNSETTLED QUESTIONS

THE relation of the individual to society involves at once the most pressing problems and the most fascinating mysteries of our time. This relation has created all the essential ideological conflicts of the day—essential, that is, before they become vulgarized by propaganda and slogans—and it supplies modern literature with endless "problem situations" to be developed in novels, essays, and psycho-social philosophizing. The best treatments, perhaps, of this relation take the form of sensitive *reporting,* since we recognize and appreciate the value of precise description of particular situations but tend to get lost when large and abstract theories form the basis of the discussion. We recognize, that is, accurate accounts of the *feelings* of people who are victims of this relation, but are bewildered by our own and the writer's ignorance when some pretentious doctrinal explanation of the relation between the individual and society dominates what is written. The ignorance is "out there," like an all-encompassing cloud, and we wonder why we don't "understand" more of what is going on, as a result of what is behind the cloud. But the relationships never get defined with any clarity, and our ignorance continues.

The relationships never get defined with any clarity and our ignorance continues because we don't know what an individual is and don't know what society is. We have a lot of inconclusive ideas on both subjects, but we don't really know.

Nothing of any great importance, of course, will be settled here, in this discussion, but there may be value in getting the fact of our ignorance more clearly out in the open. To this end, and for a beginning, we print a letter from a reader concerning the lead article in MANAS for Jan. 15:

> In "Canons of Criticism," you quote Simone Weil as saying that Gide's two books have greatly influenced the conduct of hundreds of young people, and that there is no reason for placing such books behind an inviolable barrier of art for art's sake. Many of your readers, I imagine, would like to know what your opinion is on these books and others like them, and whether you along with Miss Weil are willing "to name names" and state your convictions. Gide was accused of corrupting French youth, but because few people took the charge seriously he was able to counter the accusation without difficulty.
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> At the end of this article you come out sharply with the opinion that the writer who has contempt for man is hardly worth criticizing except to expose his contempt. The exposure of this contempt is of great importance to protect the gullible from being taken in by his artistic skill, and many of your readers, I believe, would appreciate your attempting to criticize some of the famous modern writers on this basis. Would these two books by Gide reveal a contempt for man? Would Faulkner's *Sanctuary?* Or Caldwell's *Tobacco Road?*
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> This article ties in so neatly with your review of Jung's *Atlantic* essay that I am tempted to wonder to what degree the psychologists have furthered the split between good and evil and helped to bring about the present conflict between the "good" man and the "evil" society which Jung deplores. Both Gide and Freud, for example, defend the innocent individual against the guilt and corruption of institutions.

To the question about Gide's two books, *Nourritures Terrestres* and *Caves du Vatican,* we can make no answer, not having read them. Of *The Counterfeiters,* read many years ago, we remember only the feeling that Gide treated his characters more or less as puppets whose lives were entirely directed by the irrational elements of circumstance and impulse and desire. We remember wondering, "Has this man *no* sympathy for his people?" We read no more of Gide.

For Gide, at any rate, whatever his merits, was never haunted by the dilemma which overtook Diderot, causing him to hide from his publisher works which he thought might have a "bad influence" on public morality. After

describing the contents of the *Entretien* and the *Physiologie,* Carl Becker writes (in "The Dilemma of Diderot," an Essay included in the volume, *Every Man his own Historian,* Crofts, 1935):

> But . . . what was the bearing of such a [mechanistic] philosophy upon the problem of morality and conduct? No question that it destroyed the intellectual basis of morality as taught by the Church; but it was one of the ironies of fate that the speculative thinking of Diderot, of which the principal purpose was to furnish a firm foundation for natural morality, ended by destroying the foundation of all morality as he understood it. This was the dilemma, that if the conclusions of Diderot the speculative philosopher were valid, the aspirations of Diderot the moral man, all the vital purposes and sustaining hopes of his life, were but as the substance of a dream. For reason told him that man was after all but a speck of sentient dust, a chance deposit on the surface of the world, the necessary product of the same purposeless forces that build up crystal or dissolve granite. Aspiration, love and hope, sympathy, the belief in virtue itself,—what were these but the refined products of mechanical processes, spiritual perfumes, as it were, arising from the alternate waste and repair of brain tissue? Freedom was surely a chimera if the will could be defined as "the last impulse of desire and aversion." . . .

What use to preach "a great deal of morality" to a creature whose will is nothing but "the last impulse of desire and aversion?" This was the question which came to stare Diderot in the face about the year 1765; and about the year 1765 he ceased to publish.

The great *philosophe* hoped, as he wrote Mlle. Volland, to compose some great constructive work on morality, but he never even began it:

> "I have not even dared to take up the pen to write the first line. I say to myself: if I do not come out of the attempt victorious, I become the apologist of wickedness; I will have betrayed the cause of virtue, I will have encouraged men in the way of vice. No. I do not feel myself equal to this sublime work; I have uselessly consecrated my whole life to it."

This is the sort of conscience, it seems to us, that the creative writer should cultivate.

Sanctuary by Faulkner we found an unpleasant and profitless book, most of which we have fortunately forgotten, save for the bad taste it left. Yet we are bound to recognize that the intentions of an author who can, on the other hand, write an *Intruder in the Dust* may be hidden from us, and will say only that if *Sanctuary* had a "message," we did not get it. We have only hearsay impressions of Caldwell's *Tobacco Road.*

Now the fault of all such criticism, if it can be called criticism, is that it may seem to demand that all writers be didactic and consciously "uplifting." We can imagine little that would be quite so immoral as this. We take the view that the "moral" of a work of art ought to be as accidental as possible, an overtone of the integrity of what is done. The intentionally "moral" work is studied, self-righteous, and self-conscious, and it is also in large part presumptuous. If an author wants to push a metaphysic or a moral attitude, *per se,* let him write an honest essay on the subject, giving his reasons.

There is a distinction to be made, of course, between literary and philosophical criticism. Literary criticism, we suppose, is primarily concerned with the technical quality of what is written, with the skill shown by the writer in executing his design, whatever that design may be. With literary criticism we have very little to do, in these pages. Here, we are interested in what a writer reveals of his opinions about man and about nature, and in the grace, persuasiveness, and form with which he reveals them. This brings us to the question with which we started out—the relation between man and society.

Our correspondent raises the now familiar question of the "conflict between the 'good' man and the 'evil' society." What might be said about this?

There is an obvious tendency on the part of writers to defend the innocent individual against the corruptions of his social environment. The child, this theory holds, is born good, remaining so until he becomes infected by his elders and the

institutions they have erected. There is enough truth in this view to support a great deal of literary and political rebellion. Possibly there is an expedient merit in the claim that virtue belongs to youth, as a countermeasure to the resistance to change of every "older" generation, but there is certainly no profound truth in the assertion. In fact, its implications, when pursued, turn out to be almost vicious. For if the young are good by virtue of being young, then people ought to be done away with at about the time when the involuntary sin of "age" overtakes them—say, at about thirty-nine. Or if the decay incident to age can be arrested by changing the institutional surroundings of the aging generation, then something like the Omnipotent State should be given authority to control or defer the cycle of degeneration.

Books which place all the blame for human ills on "society" are romantic over-simplifications which win emotional support from the desire to escape responsibility and from the human reluctance to deal with the existence of evil. The root of the problem probably lies with the mystery of evil. If you can assign a simple explanation for evil, you can launch a crusade with a clear conscience. If institutions are wholly responsible for evil, then all you have to do is wipe out the institutions and make a clean start with some new "truths" you can rely on. But what are those "truths"? Diderot thought for a time that he had found them out, but, being an honest man, he confessed his ignorance in the end. The Communists thought they knew, and are only now admitting certain doubts—that is, *some* Communists are admitting *some* doubts.

Now there is either a naturalistic (materialistic) or a transcendental (metaphysical) solution for this problem, or there is no solution at all. If the solution is transcendental, it will probably begin with some unifying philosophical conception of both man and nature (or man and society), in which the destiny-realizing unit is the human soul, and the soul is endowed with potentialities of both good and evil. The question of the origin of good and evil is a metaphysical question involving large assumptions about the nature of things. Manifestly, if this question could be settled, all the other questions could also be settled, for if we knew definitely the origin of good and evil, we should have adequate ideas about the nature of man and be able to describe his ends and give a reasonable account of the means of reaching them.

At first thought, to have knowledge of this sort sounds eminently desirable, but is it, really? Apparently, to know all about good and evil, where it comes from, how and why it occurs in human life, and what, supposedly, must be done to make an end of evil, would erase all mystery from our thinking and our experience. Are we "ready" for this? Or would blueprints of the reality of these matters blight our lives with an unimaginative certainty?

We have no way of proving it, but we offer the proposition that an invasion of our lives by a sudden knowledge of good and evil would be the final mutilation of our being, to the very heart of life. Human existence we should like to suggest, is rather a slow, laborious, painful growth toward independent discovery of the truth involved in such ideas; and this, therefore, is the meaning of our life and being—to mature the organism of our thought concerning the great philosophical questions.

But in lieu of knowledge, what can we have? We can have what we always have had—the metaphysical constructions of philosophy; the semi-philosophical revelations of archaic religion; the intimations of myth, tradition and allegory; the reminiscent intuitions of mystical illumination; and, finally, the demands made upon life by awakened and synthesizing minds.

Again, returning to the idea of certainty about good and evil, if we had this certainty, what would we do with it?

We would do precisely what Plato's critics charged him with wanting to do in the *Republic* and the *Laws.* We might even do what the Inquisitor (in the chapter on the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoievsky's *Brothers Karamazov)* told the returned Jesus the Catholic Church had done. We would build a "system" to accommodate all the new "facts" we had learned. But this strikes us intuitively as a rather horrible idea. We know, somehow, that it wouldn't work. We know that there is no such thing as a mechanical arrangement to smooth the path of human progress. We know, if we think about it, that this is precisely the mistake that we have made so many times before, with the half-knowledge that we already possess, or think we possess.

For if we can make a "system" that is suitable to deal with the problem of good and evil, we have to do it by setting the source of good and evil *outside* the human individual. An article by Albert Fowler in the Fall 1957 *Modern Age* treats suggestively of this idea:

> The world of experience is a bewildering combination of good and evil, and neither in society nor in the individual is the good or the bad to be found by itself. If the novelist is free to do what the disciples of naturalism have done with impunity since Rousseau, to separate good from bad, to endow the hero with the good qualities and his society with the bad ones, this falsification will continue to charm the reader as long as it can command belief. The weakness of naturalism becomes apparent whenever it tackles the problem of evil as part of the makeup of the individual without foisting it off on the external world.

Mr. Fowler presses the analysis further:

> It is convenient and comforting to forget that almost as soon as Rousseau proclaimed man was born good, his contemporary the Marquis de Sade proclaimed man was born evil. It is becoming increasingly difficult to dismiss Sade's maleficent individual as a force in history after the series of events that were touched off in 1914 and 1939. Naturalism has been about as busy celebrating maleficence as his beneficent counterpart, and his friends and defenders form a famous line from Sade through Baudelaire to Nietzsche. So little attention has been paid to this side of naturalism, however, that it is hard to name more than a handful of well reasoned books devoted to the subject, notable among which are Mario Praz' *The Romantic Agony* and Albert Camus' *The Rebel.* But enough work has been done to show that as long as Rousseau's idea of man good in essence persists, Sade's idea of man evil in essence will flourish beside it.

Another trouble with the idea that the source of evil can be easily located is the incredible cruelty and self-righteousness it develops in those who believe that they have *found* its source—found it, say, in the Jews, or the Capitalist Class, or—for the Duration—in the Germans and the Japanese, or in the Communists. When you know what Evil is and who is infected with it, you need show no mercy. You can struggle, poison, bomb, deceive, and obliterate, all in the name of the Good, God, and Country. On the positive side and in another way, the Rousseauist delusion is responsible for the pathetic and childlike faith placed in Technology by modern man. Fowler notes this development in his closing paragraph:

> Rousseau's assumption of man noble and innocent at birth, endowed by nature with all beautiful and lovable qualities only to have them tainted and poisoned by contact with society, has held an enormous appeal ever since the West began to discard the discipline of the church and to depend for its existence on the technology of science. From the seventeenth century on, men have been fascinated with the possibility that the church had misled them, that perhaps they were not born both good and evil, perhaps life was not a battleground between good and bad, but was instead a paradise of virtue waiting to welcome them once they should see through the church's deception. But no matter how hard they have tried to believe in the human soul as essentially good, they have never succeeded in ridding it of the essence of evil. The shining figure of Rousseau is forever shadowed by Sade, and the good and evil they argue for continue to struggle together in the individual as well as in society.

One of the greatest sources of trouble in human life, it seems, is the misplacement of evil, and possibly its misdefinition. How do we know when we misdefine evil? Well, it is difficult to be sure, but when every war "to end all war" by

killing off the bad people turns out to be just another sowing of dragon's teeth, it seems plain that the evil has been misdefined. And when the pursuit of what we suppose to be the good, as well as the avoidance of evil, produces the "neurotic personality of our time," technological horrors like nuclear weapons, social nihilism like national socialism, and Communism's solidarity of terror, it is reasonable to think that we have misdefined both good and evil as well as mistaken their source.

The church, however, is not so innocent in its location of good and evil as Mr. Fowler's last paragraph might be taken to imply. In the dogmas of Western religion, while both good and evil influences meet in man, they arise *outside* him. God is certainly the source of good for man, in orthodox religion, and while the Devil has become an exceedingly hazy figure in modern belief, this vagueness can hardly contribute to human understanding of the problem of evil. Nor were the historical consequences of conventional religious belief concerning good and evil in any way superior to the harvest of the Rousseauist delusion.

But it is natural enough, these days, to long for the majestic outline of a classical scheme of meaning, in which man has a recognizable place and role. That is what we—many of us, at least—would like to have, and wonder why it is so difficult to get. A speculative answer, for what it is worth, would be that we have outlived the Age of Faith, exhausted the Age of Reason, and have now to combine our heightened and indispensable sense of individuality with some independently gained sense of transcendental structure. And yet, we are denied the help of imposing social superstructures to give embodiment to a faith of this sort. This is the dilemma. We are called upon to live beyond ourselves and we do not feel able to do it.

We need to begin, perhaps, with a feeling of being selves which are essentially beyond both good and evil, partaking of a reality beyond time and space, while suffering a partial captivity to all four—good, evil, time, and space. We may find help in all the ancient and modern theologies, philosophies and sciences, yet we can lean on none of them. We have to become authors of our own truth and acknowledgers of our own good and evil, admitting no saviors but ourselves, and seeking no scapegoats for our sufferings. This, it will be urged, may be found difficult, but it is the one view that has on occasion *worked,* and it may be made to work again. The life of no man spent in flight from external evil is worth remembering, while the good that we can catalog and honor is always a human creation, not a benefit from some supernatural source.

What, then, is the relation of the individual to society? If anything, it is, as Pico declared at the dawn of the Renaissance, a *variable* relation, and no one has any business trying to make it fixed. This, at least, we are able to say, right at the beginning of the quest for greater understanding.

REVIEW
"PATHS OF GLORY"

WHEN, in 1935, Humphrey Cobb chose this ironic title for his heart-stopping novel on military amorality, he pressed home the same, bitter conclusion that Dwight Macdonald reached in "The Responsibility of Peoples." Commenting on the posthumous decoration of members of a Negro labor battalion who were blown to bits while loading ammunition at Mare Island during World War II, Macdonald showed that in modern war, bravery and its decorations, and "cowardice" and its punishments, often have no intrinsic meaning. Now that the film version of *Paths of Glory* is traveling around the country, carrying an impact at least comparable to the book, a large number of people will be brought face to face with the fact that the military destroys any hope of justice for the individual soldier.

While the movie version has been altered to make a starring role for Kirk Douglas, it remains true in essential spirit to the book. Writing in the Dec. 21, 1957, *Saturday Review,* Hollis Alpert says that the picture is "so searing in its intensity that it will probably take its place, in years to come, as one of the screen's most extraordinary achievements." Alpert summarizes the story:

> The story is shocking. It tells of a French divisional commander who, tempted by the reward of a higher rank, orders an attack on an impregnable German position during the period of stabilized trench warfare in 1916. There is nothing rational about this order, nor anything rational about the general attack order given by a higher officer, presumably the Army chief of staff, under pressure of the press and the government to make tangible progress in the war. An entire regiment makes the attack and fails after sustaining murderous casualties. The division commander then orders a court-martial of one man, as a scapegoat, from each of the three battalions in the attack. The charge: cowardice. The penalty in the event of conviction: death by firing squad.

Pleased at indications that *Paths of Glory* will be a box-office success, Alpert apparently feels that the average man experiences a twinge of conscience about the maintenance of a permanent army. He also thinks "it is a wonder, in this time of unsettled conditions in the film industry, that *Paths of Glory* was made at all. It has none of the elements or gimmicks in it that are supposed to be box-office. It will not be shown on a large screen; it is in black and white; and its subject, an attack on the military command mentality, can hardly be expected to have vast popularity at this time. Its war, World War I, seems like primitive combat in these days of ICBMs with hydrogen warheads. But there is never anything untimely about an appeal to the human conscience, and this *Paths of Glory* makes, as only one other movie I have seen makes. That was *Grand Illusion."*

Turning to the book, we find poignant passages concerned with the thoughts of a man irrationally ordered to attack—one Langlois, who has been decorated for bravery, who, though hating war, also has always done his duty, and who is a sensitive and intelligent man. Before the beginning of the suicidal attack, he reflects:

> Langlois looked at the men around him. Some of them were condemned to be dead within the half hour. Perhaps he was one of them. The thought passed through his head, a strangely impersonal one, as if it had not been a thought of his at all, but some story he was reading. He noted the unusual self-possession of these men but he had seen it before and accepted it as granted. The thought kept returning: this one, or this one, or that one, would actually, inevitably be dead in a few minutes. He tried, half-heartedly, to guess which. Then: a number of lives right there next to him, within touching distance, some of which he had been in intimate terms with, were rushing with incredible speed (yet a stationary one, too) towards their ends. No, the ends were rushing towards the lives. Thirty minutes more to live, and then the totally unknown, apotheosis. The idea had a force so poignant at that time and place that it suffocated and extinguished itself.

We then see the prospective attack through the eyes of the general who has ordered it, from a safe distance:

> As he reviewed the various features of the terrain, he ticked off percentages of losses in his

mind. He was pleased to find that his arithmetic left a substantial margin of numbers to overrun the crest of the hill and to establish themselves on the ground beyond. His optimism increased and, in proportion, the height and the reputation of the hill diminished. Given enough troops and ammunition, he could take anything. It was all a question of percentages. Men had to be killed, of course, sometimes lots of them. They absorbed bullets and shrapnel and by so doing made it possible for others to get through. Say, five per cent killed by their own barrage (a very generous allowance, that). Ten per cent lost in crossing no-man's-land, and twenty per cent more in getting through the wire. That left sixty-five per cent, and the worst part of the job over, the most exposed part.

His reasoning was faulty and his percentages were pure guess-work, but he failed to notice his fallacies in the exuberance of winning a battle in his head. He even failed to notice them when they themselves provided a hint in the form of an idea, an idea which captivated him so that it displaced all others, blinded him to the very light of which it was itself the source. The idea was simply this: after the attack he would have the burial parties make detailed records on maps of exactly where all the dead had been found. He and his staff would then correlate the information, make a report and a critique of it, and send it on up the hierarchic ladder in the hope that it might eventually reach G.H.Q. and draw attention there to the fact that its author was a man of brains as well as of bayonets. General Assolant instantly became impatient for the attack to begin so that he could the sooner put his idea into practice. He was in no mood to remember that a battle is a thing of flux, and that you cannot measure flux by the debris that it leaves behind. Nor did it occur to him that while an operation might be, strategically, a neatly conceived plan, tactically it tended to become more and more a series of accidents.

Later, Langlois, condemned to be shot for alleged "cowardice," spends his last hours writing a letter to his wife. What he says might be uttered by anyone made victim of the relentless machinery of military orders:

The injustice of this to me is something so obvious that I have no desire to enlarge upon it. Of course, I am in a state of violent rebellion against it. But it is the injustice to you that throws me into a frenzy, if I allow myself to dwell upon it. Here we are, two human beings who have never harmed anybody. We love each other and we have constructed, from two lives, one life together, one which is ours, which is wholly of ourselves, which is our most precious possession, a beautiful, satisfying thing, intangible but more real, more necessary than anything else in life. We have applied our effort and intelligence to building, expanding, and keeping the structure in repair. Somebody suddenly steps in, not caring, not even knowing who we are, and in an instant has reduced our utterly private relationship to a horrible ruin, mangled and bleeding and aching with pain.

Since the motion picture version of *Paths of Glory* is otherwise true to the novel, we regret concessions made to the church during the last scenes. In the movie the priest summoned to prepare the men for the firing squad helps them to hold onto their manhood. In the book, however, Cobb suggests that a man facing death in this fashion cannot be expected to relate to ritual aid. This is the way the conversation went when the two men, "helped" by the priest in the movie, speak as Cobb himself had them speak:

The priest wanted to open up the subject of confession and extreme unction, but he didn't quite know how to go about it. Nor did he seem to be getting much encouragement from the men for whom these rites were intended. Their attitude, he felt, was one of friendliness towards him as a man, of hostility as a priest. He decided he would recite a prayer out loud.

"Hail Mary, full of grace! The Lord is with thee—"

"Look here, sergeant," Didier interrupted, "you're a good fellow and pal and all that. But don't start unloading stuff around here. I don't want any of it, see. If the others want it, give it to them quietly in a corner. I'm sick enough to my stomach as it is."

Langlois was still pacing the floor when the priest approached him and put himself in step. Didier, sitting against the wall, watched them go back and forth, a slight sneer on his face.

"Please, please, father," Langlois said before Picard had a chance to begin. "It's quite useless, and I don't want to have to hurt your feelings. I was brought up a Catholic. I know exactly what you're going to say. I respect your faith, but this is no time to try to thrust it on me. I have no use for it."

> "But, my son, you are an intelligent, educated man. Your mind is therefore open to reason . . ."
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> "Precisely, father, and the stuff you talk is not reasonable. It's just superstition. Cruelly ironical superstition, under the circumstances." Langlois smiled a faintly bitter smile, then went on. "You can't do a thing for me. Please understand that. I mean it in all kindness, just as I know you do. But I have to live through this night alone."

This is a stark, somber novel. Cobb is no pacifist, as he makes clear, but he does his best to dispel any illusion that war and justice can ever be equated.

COMMENTARY
ART AND MORALITY

WHEN our lead article (p. 2) condemns the intentionally "moral" work, yet invites the creative writer to cultivate the sort of conscience which made Diderot refuse to publish matter he felt would undermine "morality," there is at least some basis for the charge of contradiction. For how is a man to exert a moral influence unless he has designs in this direction, and how can he avoid being a bad influence without choosing themes which embody the qualities that are wanted?

There is something tiresome about people who are determined to "do good," not because there is anything wrong with good, or doing it, but because of the artificiality of trying to do by deliberation what ought to arise naturally.

The best in man comes out unbidden. The greatest art, the highest morality, is always the spontaneous expression of the human being. We respond to spontaneity because it is of man being man, and this we begin to feel capable of, ourselves, without anyone telling us it is what we "ought" to do. There is no pressure, no subtle suggestion, in the free, spontaneous expression. It calls upon us like a dancing figure which moves about from sheer joy, or like the beat of music which dictates motion. The response is solicited by an impersonal, uncalculating impulse. We move because it is our nature to move, because we are touched, but not cajoled or nudged by the reforming drives of another. A man who goes about trying to "save" or "change" others is somehow disrespectful of them.

The artist will honor what is good because it is good, not because it is a good "influence."

And yet every artist has need of being a critic, which is the negative function of the philosopher. The artist who is not in some sense a philosopher will never be able to name his frenzy, nor can he tell whether his work is really worth doing. He is a kind of medium, an aolian harp which hangs in an unprotected place. He welcomes any big wind, and if the storm sears, if its music weakens or infuriates—what has he to do with that? That was the way it came out.

Will criticism stifle the creative impulse? Shall a nervous self-consciousness be permitted to harass the flow of inspiration?

This is the artist's problem and you cannot take it away from him without doing him injury. He must justify his work by his mind as well as with his feelings. This is not to suggest a Calvinist strait-jacket nor a heavy metaphysical apparatus for the artist. But a man needs to think about what he is doing, how he is doing it, and to what end.

The artist who rejects this responsibility has need of looking to the example of his betters. It is not required that he "succeed," but only that he try. After all, Tolstoy thought that *he* had failed in realizing his objectives. But we, who are no Tolstoys, can walk through the invisible arch of triumph raised by Tolstoy's "failures."

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
DISCUSSION OF A GENERATION: III

JACK KEROUAC'S controversial novel, *On the Road,* published last September, is now the chief focal point for varying literary interpretations of the psyche of the "weird" generation. A New York *Times* reviewer called the book "the most important utterance" yet made by a younger writer, suggesting that it represents the present generation as Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* was supposed to represent that of the 20's. While this seems to us extravagant, it may well be that a "spokesman" sort of novel will take us farther into the labyrinth of "hipster" thinking than sociological analyses and statistics. Though Kerouac and his San Francisco compatriot, Allen Ginsberg, are writers and poets and identifiable with weird-talking rock 'n' rollers, hoodlums and speed-fiends, both Kerouac and Ginsberg seem able to live in the same world of feeling that is inhabited by their less palatable contemporaries.

Kerouac has adapted the sobriquet "beat" for the entire generation, and, while "beat" has various interpretations, one meaning may stand legitimately for all youths who have taken unconventional roads. As John Clellon Holmes has remarked, "everyone who has lived through a war, any sort of war, knows that beat means, not so much weariness, as rawness of the nerves; not so much being 'filled up to *here,'* as being emptied out. It describes a state of mind from which all unessentials have been stripped, leaving it receptive to everything around it, but impatient with trivial obstructions. To be beat is to be at the bottom of your personality, looking up." Holmes (in *Esquire* for February) continues:

> Perhaps all generations feel that they have inherited "the worst of all possible worlds," but the Beat Generation probably has more claim to the feeling than any that have come before it. The historical climate which formed its attitudes was violent, and it did as much violence to ideas as it did to the men who believed in them. One does not have to be consciously aware of such destruction to feel it. Conventional notions of private and public morality have been steadily atrophied in the last ten or fifteen years by the exposure of treason in government, corruption in labor and business, and scandal among the mighty of Broadway and Hollywood. The political faiths which sometimes seem to justify slaughter have become steadily less appealing as slaughter has reached proportions that stagger even the mathematical mind. Orthodox religious conceptions of good and evil seem increasingly inadequate to explain a world of science-fiction turned fact, past-enemies turned bosom-friends, and honorable-diplomacy turned brink-of-war. Older generations may be distressed or cynical or apathetic about this world, or they may have somehow adjusted their conceptions to it. But the Beat Generation is specifically the *product* of this world, and it is the only world its members have ever known.
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> It is the first generation in American history that has grown up with peacetime military training as a fully accepted fact of life. It is the first generation for whom the catch phrases of psychiatry have become such intellectual pablum that it can dare to think they may not be the final yardstick of the human soul. It is the first generation for whom genocide, brain-washing, cybernetics, motivational research—and the resultant limitation of the concept of human volition which is inherent in them—have been as familiar as its own face. It is also the first generation that has grown up since the possibility of the nuclear destruction of the world has become the final answer to all questions.

In the New York *Times* for Sept. 5, 1957, Gilbert Millstein suggests that "the Beat Generation and its artists display recognizable 'stigmata' ":

> Outwardly, these may be summed up as the frenzied pursuit of every possible sensory impression, an extreme exacerbation of the nerves, a constant outraging of the body. (One gets "kicks"; one "digs" everything, whether it be drink, drugs, sexual promiscuity, driving at high speeds or absorbing Zen Buddhism.) The "Beat Generation" was born disillusioned; it takes for granted the imminence of war, the barrenness of politics and the hostility of the rest of society. It is not even impressed by (although it never pretends to scorn) material well-being (as distinguished from materialism). It does not know what refuge it is seeking. . . .

Turning back to a post-World War II summation of statistics on juvenile unrest—William Bernard's *Jailbait*—we may note some of the undeniable factors which have been working on the emotions of the young since the early 40's. Sociologists and juvenile authorities accounted for the rapid rise of juvenile crime during the war by pointing to the mobility of war work, or soldier families, the stepped-up pace of living, etc., and confidently predicted that when the war was over things would straighten out. But juvenile trouble was like a snowball rolling downhill: it acquired a momentum which continued to accelerate after the war was over. In 1948 and the first six months of 1949, adolescent crime exceeded the pre-war levels by at least 50 per cent. Of the criminal element of "the Beat Generation," Mr. Bernard remarks:

> These younger delinquents of today are a strange, cold crew, often vicious where their predecessors were merely adventurous. One Child Guidance Bureau psychiatric worker in New York attributes their rise to the same social upheavals which spawned so many child offenders during the war. "Those disturbances also affected parents, and through them were passed on to the crop of infants at the time. Now the infants have matured, with the disturbances ripening into delinquent behavior."
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> With the growth of these saplings, delinquency seems again to be climbing on every police graph. Definitive figures are lacking, but the trend is unmistakable. Child-gang warfare flourishes in our big cities and some of the smaller ones. Again newspapers and national magazines are running sensational articles on the sins and vices of youth. Alarmed warnings come from pulpits; courts and welfare departments from coast to coast plead for greater public efforts to stem the growing scourge. And one New York official sadly shakes his head as he tells the press, "It was bad enough during the war—but we've never seen anything like this!"
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> What is the answer? No single or absolute solution exists.

Now the "hipster" is by no means necessarily a criminal or criminally inclined, but the overwhelming majority of juvenile offenders do consider themselves to be "hip." The most common words in their language are "frantic," "crazy," "mad," "beat," and "gone" and the hipster's language may represent the symbols of unity for a generation which is far more "lost" than Hemingway's ever was. For now the old "standards" do not even seem worth noting by way of rebellion or protest. The conclusion seems to be that the only thing left to do is to live for those moments of intense emotional experience which can take you "out of this world"—flying high, man, flying high.

There are alarming aspects of the state of mind (or rather feeling) which has developed out of youth's relation to the world situation—for some of the "hipsters" are quite different from authors Keoruac and Ginsberg. Even though Ginsberg has remarked that "the best minds of our time have decided to give up thinking," he and Kerouac still think and write, and talk about being on some kind of an undefined quest. As Herbert Gold says graphically in *The Nation* (Nov. 16) distinguishing between the average hipster and the hipster-writer: ". . . the frozen thugs gathered west of Sheridan Square or in the hopped-up cars do not bother with talk. That's why they say 'man' to everyone—they can't remember anybody's name. But Ginsberg and Kerouac are *frantic.* They care too much, and they care aloud. 'I'm *hungry,* I'm *starving,* let's *eat right now!'* That they care mostly for themselves is a sign of adolescence, but at least they care for something, and it's a beginning. The hipster is past caring. He is the criminal with no motivation in hunger, the delinquent with no zest, the gang follower with no love of the gang; i.e., the worker without ambition or pleasure in work, the youngster with undescended passions, the organization man with sloanwilsonian gregory-peckerism in his cold, cold heart. He has entered a deep cavern where desire and art are unknown; swimming blind, scarred and silent, he eats whatever is alive—a symptom of trouble, but hardly feeling it anymore."

FRONTIERS
More about Names

IN any sort of analysis of religious ideas and beliefs, it is well to have some general criterion of value, and if the analysis is to have "objectivity," the criterion should be independent of the religion or religious idea under examination. For example, in the *Christian Century* for Jan. 1, Roy Pearson considers American reactions to the Russian production of *sputniks,* developing certain conclusions which are extremely unflattering to the culture of the United States. What is the basis of his judgments? Are they "Christian"?

Now Mr. Pearson is himself a Christian of some distinction. He is dean of Andover Newton Theological School, in Massachusetts, and author of more than one book on Christian themes. But in an effort to evaluate his article, which seems excellent, we found it helpful to consider what he says as a Platonic rather than a specifically "Christian" argument. How is it Platonic?

Well, Mr. Pearson is dissatisfied with the American reaction to the *sputniki* (I and II). He writes:

> One of the most disturbing aspects in the recent news [not so recent, now] about the satellites is its testimony to our immaturity. The details of Russia's achievement are still hidden from our sight, but there is no secret whatever about the fact that when we found ourselves outsmarted we acted like children. Our manifestations of adolescent behavior have been innumerable. There is, for instance, the widely prevalent attitude that in some strange way the Russians were unfair in pushing us out of first place in the struggle for the laurel wreaths of science. I do not refer to simple disappointment, which would be an understandable and even normal emotion. Rather, I mean that we have reacted as if we found injustice in the Russians' even *trying* to be proficient, as if we knew them to be second-class people, thought they ought to recognize their own inferior status, and resented their assumption of a throne reserved only for ourselves.

This is a not unjust account of one phase of the American reaction to the sputniks. There is more. Mr. Pearson contends that not only did we behave like "spoiled children" when the Russians outdid us in rocketry and preliminary "space travel," but that our further reactions betrayed a deep insecurity:

> The secure man is not susceptible to the excessive influence of either friends or enemies. Our frenzied conduct of the past few weeks has been evidence not of our national strength but rather of our personal and corporate insecurity.

It is here, in this statement, that we find Mr. Pearson's Platonic base. For Plato defined the soul as the unit which *moves itself,* as distinguished from the more material or rudimentary "monads" which obtain their motion from external forces. Mr. Pearson's "secure man" is plainly the man animated by the self-energized motion attributed to the soul by Plato. In contrast to this sort of security, Americans manifested a very different reaction to the Russian sputniks, as Pearson points out:

> Closely related to the insecurity which has caused such wild fluctuations in our basic decisions is the humiliating lack of assurance which makes us little more than apes of the enemy. In the competition of modern business it is a reasonable assumption that a service rendered by one company will have to be matched by its rival: if one grocer stocks frozen foods, his competitor will probably have to do likewise or risk loss of customers; and if one insurance company offers a popular "family plan," the others cannot linger long behind. It is understandable also that as long as force continues to be the ultimate arbiter of international disputes, it ill behooves the United States to allow the Soviet Union too much superiority. But our recent behavior with reference to the Russians seems to betoken an insecurity far beyond the normal. By the nature of our resistance we have let Mr. Krushchev lead us around by the nose. At the very moment when we have most loudly cursed the Russian idols we have done obeisance to them and made them our own gods. It is hard to escape the conclusion that we are not sufficiently mature to have a mind of our own and that we are letting the Russians do the thinking for us. Most of the recent decisions in the high places of our government might be summarized as a craven "Me too!" Originality is one of the surest offsprings of security, and slavish imitation is as clearly a mark of instability—in a nation as in an individual. . . .
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> Without meaning to do so, we are becoming materialists of the first magnitude. Finding it impossible to serve both God and mammon, we are

finding it equally impossible to serve God. In fact, we are in danger of forgetting God completely, concluding that we have no defense beyond ourselves, and then letting the enemy choose the weapons with which we shall engage him in battle.

There seems to be little recognition among us that force is always ultimately impotent. It cannot do the one thing that really needs to be done: it cannot turn our enemy into our friend.

The force of Mr. Pearson's argument derives from his Platonic view of the "mature man"—the man who chooses for himself what is right for him to do, and sets about doing it, without being materially affected by what others may do or not do. For him, as for Plato, self-induced originality, is evidence of strength and independence of soul. These are the ideas which have intuitive appeal for the reader of this article. They are, so to say, "behavioristic" criteria of integrity and wisdom in decision.

Such ideas command independent respect, regardless of the context in which they are found. They are not particularly "religious" ideas, however—or, at any rate, they do not belong uniquely to any religion. The same sort of behavioristic account of the "secure" man is found in the *Bhagavad-Gita,* in Chapter II:

"A man is said to be confirmed in spiritual knowledge when he forsaketh every desire which entereth into his heart, and of himself is happy and content in the Self through the Self. His mind is undisturbed in adversity; he is happy and contented in prosperity, and he is a stranger to anxiety, fear, and anger. Such a man is called a Muni [a wise man]. When in every condition he receives each event, whether favorable or unfavorable, with an equal mind which neither likes nor dislikes, his wisdom is established, neither rejoicing at the one nor cast down by the other."

Apparently, there is a body of traditional wisdom, expressions of which are found in every religion, which provides description of how wise and good men may be expected to behave. We verify this wisdom ourselves, without reference to creed, dogma, or theological teaching, simply by comparing it with our own working common sense and the knowledge gained from experience. You could call it "humanistic" wisdom, so long as it is separated from a particular transcendental tradition. We find this humanistic content in the writings of the Stoics, in Buddhism, pre-eminently in the *Dhammapada,* and in all non-collectivist philosophies in which the role of the individual is paramount in the establishment of moral values.

Why, then, speak of the "Platonic base" of Mr. Pearson's argument? Because, in Plato, what is simply a descriptive account of human excellence in humanistic writings is connected with a metaphysical proposition concerning the nature of the human individual. The soul, Plato says, is the unit which moves itself. Thus virtue, according to Plato, is rooted in the inherent nature of man as a soul.

Why should this be important? It is important, we think, to get as close as we can to final causes in all questions of moral decision. The task of philosophy is to relate human decision, as far as possible, to first principles and to show how those decisions may grow out of perception of the ultimate nature of things. Even on a "behavioristic" basis, this is desirable. If we take the "security" and "originality" of the mature man as a prime good, then that security and originality should begin at the source, it should be seen as intrinsic to man. If we define the good as realization of one's nature and potentialities, then the clarity of our decisions as to what is in fact "good" will depend upon the clarity of our ideas about man's nature. Hence the value of the Platonic proposition. If there is schism in our thinking about the nature of man, there will be schism in our other thinking and our actions.

Even if we are unable to make up our minds about what we think is the intrinsic nature of man—and we can hardly be hasty in making so far-reaching a decision—there will still be incalculable value in seeing the connection between one's philosophic position and the practical choices made in life. There is tremendous satisfaction in having done the best you can, and not a little of the "stability" which Mr. Pearson values so highly.