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FACTS, THINGS, AND PERSONS

THE general confusion in the world today about the role of Science—whether science is, or ought to be, as a MANAS reader contended last week, a "moral force"; or whether, as others say, science must maintain a strict neutrality toward all questions of "value"—is probably traceable to some more basic confusion than an argument about science. But if it is possible to clear up the argument about science, we might be able to dispel some of this more basic confusion—or at least get the real issues out into the open.

The confusion about science, then, seems to result from uncertainty on two questions. First: Is science a thing-in-itself? Is it, in other words, a method of investigation essentially different in some important respect from other types of investigation? Is it a unique invention of modern, Western civilization, having no genuine parallel in other, earlier cycles of history? Has it an "authority" which is distinctive and without parallel? What, in short, is the "competitive" position of science as a means to knowledge? What, furthermore, is the status of "scientific knowledge," as compared with knowledge otherwise obtained? Has knowledge otherwise obtained any right to the title of knowledge?

The second question grows out of the first. What sort of "sovereignty" does the adjective "scientific" impart to a fact or an act? In short, is a man entitled to do "as scientist" things that he would not do as a human being?

These questions are important because on the answers to them depends whatever we do about ordering the various "authorities" in our lives, both personal and social. They are important, further, for the study of human psychology. There is a natural tendency in human beings to long for authority. Authority dissipates the pain of indecision. The "glad tidings" of religion are "glad" because they bring some kind of certainty to a life shrouded in ignorance. For most of us, worse than the pain on hand is the pain not yet come. Authority gives some kind of promise that the pain not yet come can be avoided. If we can know "authoritatively" what we have to cope with, today and tomorrow, we can use our intelligence to seek the good and avoid pain.

Accordingly, when a man tells you that a certain fact is a *scientific* fact, he means that you must not dare to contradict it. A scientific fact is a fact known in a very special way. This is the rhetoric of science as a "thing-in-itself," and it is the validity of this rhetoric which we are questioning.

Large volumes could be written on this subject. Here, we propose a simple assertion to cover the essential issue. It is that science only *seems* to be a thing-in-itself. Science does of course present manifold techniques for the verification of its conclusions, and it provides a schematic outline of relationships which are to be "filled in" with experimentally determined knowledge. But the apparent *uniqueness* of science, we submit, results from the strict limitation of the field of scientific observation to the universe of physical perception. This limitation, we further propose, has caused a kind of "ghost" of ontological reality to arise from the dark bed of Nature, and to appear in measurable form—measurable for the reason that it was conjured into existence by the very tools and techniques of scientific measurement. This mutilated and submissive "reality" is what the scientist talks about when he speaks of "scientific knowledge."

Of course, since any portion of Nature, however abstracted, has a kind of "infinity" of its own, with endless correlations of forces and

transformations of both matter and energy, this field of "scientific reality" is rich enough in its potentialities to entrance the human imagination and to fill the libraries of popular science with an unbroken series of new "revelations." And since scientific statements attain to a delightful simplicity by reason of the abstraction from nature of its material, scientific "reality" becomes more and more sharply defined. (There are exceptions, of course, and a kind of law of diminishing returns which applies to the more advanced sciences, as in theoretical physics, but in this case we may substitute the "elegance" of equations and the mathematical synthesis obtained through far-teaching theories, for the simplicity once enjoyed in scientific definition.)

Here, then, is the ground on which is based the claim for the uniqueness of scientific truth.

The Positivists make no such claim. That is, they do not propose that the findings of science represent the "real" facts and laws of nature, but say only that science is a means for describing and anticipating the future course of *phenomena*. The positivist claims only to be a skilled technician within the limits of his field and offers you no grand judgments about the universal "nature of things."

But for the popular mind, the argument for the scientific conception of reality is not much affected by the qualifications of the Positivists. The popular mind wants some kind of "authority" to help get us out of the mess we are in—either the personal, private mess, or the public, social mess—and science gives, or has seemed to give, the promise of being that authority. It has been the tremendous success of applied science, in the form of technology, that has established for science its sovereign authority. The enthusiast of science is reluctant to admit that there are any facts of importance which cannot be run through the processing devices of the scientific method. Accordingly, facts which do not submit to this kind of processing are denied any "scientific reality."

Our second question relates to the sort of obligation which the practice of his discipline imposes on the scientist. Has *he* any need to hide his manuscripts, when he realizes that he has hit upon a new way of blowing up the world? Does his calling have an ethic which permits or requires him to pursue to its explosive end the trail of thermo-nuclear facts? To whom or what is he responsible?

An article in the *Christian Century* for March 26, by Robert E. Fitch, endeavors to show that the scientist is responsible only to his science:

> The first business of any professional group is to know what is its business and to order its life accordingly. The business of science is to provide the world with a truth and a power. The truth, of course, is the truth which may be the outcome of scientific inquiry—not any other sort of truth. The power, likewise, is the power which is proper to science, namely, the power of technology.
>
> It is not the business of science to produce goodness—not the moral goodness which we know as love, justice, righteousness. It may serve as a means to these ends, but it may not make these ends a ruling consideration in the pursuit of its own truth and its own power. . . . the scientist, in pursuit of this truth and his power, may not, in his professional capacity, curtail or expand his experiments because of some scruple concerning the use to which they might be put.
>
> Indeed the scientist can be quite certain that his truth and his power will frequently appear to subvert the basic goods of civilization. The truth of science in Copernicus and in Darwin seemed to threaten not only Aristotle and the Bible but all the human self-respect and decencies by which society was organized. The power of science in the industrial revolution, and again in automation, or in nuclear energy, has had the same devastating impact. And so there have always been those to argue that this truth should be suppressed, this power forsworn. Yet our world would be the poorer if the scientist had surrendered his mission out of an uncertainty whether his achievements might be put to good or evil uses.

Dr. Fitch, who is dean of the Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, Calif., apparently takes the view that the search for truth is a kind of

"composite" undertaking pursued by various sorts of institutions and individuals. He continues:

> The fact is that the crucial conflicts of life are among several competing goods which are all to be cherished. It is not so that, as Keats said, "beauty is truth, truth beauty," and that is all we need to know. On the contrary, it is the case that the artist's passion for beauty may conflict with the prophet's passion for justice, that the truth of the scientist may challenge the truth of the poet, that the goodness of the good man may stand against the good which is in politics or literature or chemistry. It is only in the mind of God, or in the mind of that metaphysician who has full access to the intellect of the deity, that truth, beauty, goodness and power come together in some harmonious fellowship. As we know these things on earth, they are in tension with one another. Indeed the business of balancing these values, of making the tension creative rather than destructive, is the main business of life. But this is the business of man as man, of man as citizen. It is not the business of anyone in his particular professional capacity.
>
> It is still the first responsibility of the professional man to be faithful to the values of his profession. The ends of science are its truth and power, and extending these is the absolute obligation of the scientist as scientist.

We are not sure how far Dr. Fitch would follow along with the logical development of this position, but there is something disturbing in the idea of delaying synthesis of the competing "authorities" or "goods" until they meet in "the mind of God." Why should not the scientist as well as the poet and the prophet check his conclusions as a *human being?* What is so sacred about a professional calling, that "scruples" must not be permitted to question the purity of the complicated body of abstractions known as scientific truth? Why is this institutional sovereignty of science sacrosanct?

One could argue, with equal legitimacy, that the theologian ought not to sully the texts of Divine Revelation by the application of Reason to an allegedly infallible report from the Deity. This pluralistic doctrine of truth may have some sort of relative merit, in the sense that there would be little point in looking through a telescope with one eye, and a microscope with the other; first you look through one, then the other, and then you make comparisons, if there is any point in making comparisons. But, as we read Dr. Fitch, he wants all the comparisons left to God and the common man: the "professionals" who make the specialized reports don't seem to be human at all; or, at least, they must not let their humanity get in the way of the practice of their specialties.

The plain conclusion from this, so far as we can see, is that the specialists are invited to continue, *ad infinitum,* to deliver to their lesser fellows a series of insoluble dilemmas. Why, in the case of Science, at least, should we so willingly submit to the imperialism of a set of abstractions from nature? Why must we agree that there is no other way to study nature, except as the scientist studies it? Why must we assume that the scientist has correctly delimited the field of his study? It may be merely an accident of intellectual and moral history that he studies one particular set of abstractions, and not some other!

A letter from a scientist, sent to us by a reader, puts the matter in much the same way as Dr. Fitch, although the language is different. We print the letter to show how seriously this limitation is taken by some practitioners of science:

> I am fully aware that some leading scientists are swinging away from the familiar bipolar dichotomy between the scientific and the normative. The fact that they are doing so indicates that they are troubled by the issue, but it does not indicate that they are right or that their defense of the position represents the sharpest thinking of our day. All the rigorous analyses of scientific method necessarily end up with the acknowledgement that scientifically ordered conclusions must be indifferent to even the slightest hint of concern with the hopes, wishes, aspirations, and possibilities of choice of human beings. This view appears in various shapes from the original debates of the seventeenth century through the nineteenth, and even with many writers today. If psychology and sociology aspire to the exactness and certitude of physics and chemistry, they have to adopt the same view. The only value considerations which science is preoccupied with are those which are

> involved in the idea of accuracy, truth, etc.; that is to say, values which are fundamental to the operation of science as science. The minute a scientist begins playing footsie with the idea of values inherent in his scientific conclusions, he has abandoned an important bastion of his art. Now, psychologists and sociologists are not happy about this, because, for instance, the laws of human conduct can be used by persons in power whether these men are good or evil. If the laws are scientific, they do not carry a built-in communication of their proper use. Physicists have also become disturbed about this. And so there has been an attempt to escape this difficult position. The attempts I have seen are usually distinguished either as ingenious rhetoric or pious hope, but they are philosophically confused, at least as I read them. They want the best of both worlds. I do not mean to say that scientists in any field are not interested in value. I contend that when they are they have put on a different cap. The presumptions and the formulations of science as science have to be impartial, indifferent to value. If they are not, they are invariably suspect as science. The position of the Catholic Church and Stalinist communism are clear indications of this problem.

If we may reinterpret, we might suggest that what this writer is saying is that if the abstractions from nature which your science makes do not include a net that picks up from nature the values which *may* be there, you have no business in saying that you found them, anyway. With this it is impossible not to agree.

Now the design of a net to pick up values from nature, in order to study them "scientifically," is a project filled with threats for the scientist. How can he be sure that theology will not creep into the laboratory? How will he eliminate "wishful thinking"? If he accepts even the idea that such a procedure *might* be possible, he is already flirting with mysticism and other uncontrollable extravagances! The scientist says to himself, in effect, "We've got something pretty good; if we get greedy, we may lose everything!"

So he says: "Have all the values you want, but take off your scientific cap while you're thinking about them. Don't be a wrecker!"

"If the laws are scientific, they do not carry a built-in communication of their proper use." This is the dogma. But suppose someone happened on a law that *did* carry a built-in ethical communication? Is this by definition inconceivable, or is it just something that hasn't happened yet? Or is it something which would be so difficult to prove that it's not worth talking about, even if theoretically possible?

We can agree that a scientist who claimed to have found a built-in ethical communication in a law of nature would probably be fired out of his scientific job, and be shunned by his colleagues as some kind of lunatic, but this might mean simply that he had found a set of abstractions on which to base his method which worked differently from the abstractions now in use.

The extension of this problem, socially, is dealt with by Dr. Fitch. If a scientist worries himself about the ethical implications of his work, he can't be a good scientist. "Our world would be poorer," says Dr. Fitch, "if the scientist had surrendered his mission out of an uncertainty whether his achievements might be put to good or evil uses.

It is a terrible thing, this "sovereignty" of science and this sacred "untouchability" of the scientific method. What about whole human beings who, daily, from hour to hour, and moment to moment, must do exactly what the scientists are never supposed to do—make value judgments! From what supernatural instruction comes the command that we must be inhuman in order to be scientific? *Why* this incredible and devastating postulate? Man is above all a value-seeking being: *For what reason* must he make things so tough for himself?

REVIEW
TWO APPROACHES TO DOOM

Editors: A statement in your review of Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (MANAS Oct. 16, 1957) to a great extent epitomized what seems to me wrong with MANAS. (I fear this is going to be a rather critical letter.) This was your comparison of Orwell unfavorably with Nevil Shute.

Are you not confusing two very separate and distinct issues? It is true that Shute's characters, as human beings, are to be preferred to those of Orwell, who are "twisted and distorted." However, it is the unfortunate fact, which it seems to me that MANAS must face up to sometime, that it is the twisted and distorted characters who determine the fate of the world today and that if there is to be any hope of changing this fate it is the latter, and not the "normal" people, who must be understood and dealt with. Average, normal people react passively to the various leaderships—this fact is nowhere delineated so clearly as in the whole structure and tone of *On the Beach.* This very helplessness of normal psychology before the forces of darkness may be said to be its theme. These people are no doubt admirable as human beings. They are also irrelevant to the historical process and the attempt to understand it.

This is where Orwell comes in. Orwell made a heroic effort to probe the mind of the present totalitarian leadership. There are contained in his work so many profound insights that they have scarcely been assimilated yet. It seems to me that we must make a greater effort to grasp and make use of these insights, if we wish to really think seriously about what is going on. It is the nihilist mind today which is the problem and normal psychology is not now and never was any particular problem. In fact we see frequently how well ordinary people of all countries can get on together and how each accuses the other's bad leadership of being responsible. And it is true that they are responsible, but in what sense? What is the source of the twistedness and distortedness in the present leadership, particularly in the Communist leadership? That seems to me the problem.

The paragraph occasioning this criticism reads as follows:

> Victor Wainright, the publisher of *On the Beach,* places Shute's novel on a par with George Orwell's *1984.* He concludes that the reading public is here offered further proof that "prophetic fiction is mightier than political exhortation." With the latter opinion we definitely agree, and so far as comparison between *1984* and *On the Beach* is concerned, we prefer Mr. Shute. Twisted and distorted characters, in an extreme situation, are gloomier and more repellent than Shute's inevitable types—men and women of decency and restraint.

Anyone who has read Mr. Orwell's *Animal Farm* has already been convinced that he is an author of depth and insight. After you read Orwell, in *Animal Farm, 1984* or elsewhere, you are apt to go on thinking about what he has written for some time. And in *1984* there is no doubt that he projects some of the psychological issues of our age onto a giant screen, so that they can hardly be overlooked. Both our "leaders" and ourselves could, conceivably, end up as did the frightening characters of this global tragedy.

However, our "preference" for Mr. Shute's *On the Beach* was not, we think, due to "confusing two very separate and distinct issues." Mr. Shute reminds us that it is *also* possible for human beings to face any sort of doom with a sense of decency and restraint. There is always something in human nature beyond its dark side, even when the prospects for the future indicate that darkness and terror may predominate. And we are not sure but that one of the most effective ways of fighting the darkness and the terror is to celebrate the human qualities capable of transcending it. Both Mr. Orwell and Mr. Shute may be said to have "exaggerated," when we realize that most of the major characters in both books seem to live in the same psychological atmosphere. But Shute's exaggerations take us back to the classic image of the hero, an image we need not do without, even though we may, at the same time, recognize Orwell's work to be much more compelling as a basis for reconstruction of our political attitudes.

Shute, especially as he defines himself in his other works, is a man who is given to suggesting new horizons—and not in despair. We don't really know how the human race can do without such suggestions, since it is only the hope of "a better world to come" which keeps people going. When Shute writes, as he did in *No Highway in the Sky,* of the possibility of a sensitive integration of extrasensory perception with the needs of a wartime world—which were not the "needs" of the material-minded authorities involved—he was offering a hypothetical escape from the tight

circle of military machinery, but an escape which *may* be grounded in psychological fact. And when, in another of his novels, he treats suggestively of the possibility of reincarnation, he again extends the imaginative horizons of his readers in a manner which *may* broaden their vision. It is this quality in Shute which we have admired and followed through the rather prosaic details of his many novels, and it was this quality in *On the Beach* for which we expressed a preference, in comparison with Orwell's imaginings in the opposite direction.

Our correspondent says: "It is the unfortunate fact, which it seems to me that MANAS must face up to sometime, that it is the twisted and distorted characters who determine the fate of the world today and that if there is to be any hope of changing this fate it is the latter, and not the normal people, who must be understood and dealt with. Average, normal people react passively to the various leaderships—this fact is nowhere delineated so clearly as in the whole structure and tone of *On the Beach."* We question the assurance that "it is the twisted and distorted characters who determine the fate of the world today." It is precisely the callous or unthinking reaction of the "normal" among us which makes possible the rise to power of men who are ridden more by ambition and "twisted" compulsions than by the simple desire to be happy amidst the creature-comforts which the present technological world affords. Shute's characters in *On the Beach* awaken too late to protest effectively what is going on around them, but one gets the impression that, given the opportunity, they *might* have generated counter measures against the demoniacal developments which are the theme of Mr. Orwell's work.

We quite agree with our correspondent that one of the greatest dangers of our time is that "normal psychology" means adjustment to a society operating on maladjusted principles. But it is this fact, and not the existence of a few "twisted and distorted characters" who gain power, which is important. Here we should like to quote a brief report in the New York *Times* (April 26, 1957) of a lecture by Erich Fromm on the dangers of "sameness":

> Distortion of the concept of equality into the concept of sameness is a great ethical challenge of the era, a psychologist declared today.
>
> The great danger in the nineteenth century was that men might become slaves, Dr. Erich Fromm told an audience at the Harvard Medical School.
>
> "The great danger in the twentieth century is that we may become robots," he added. . . .
>
> It is pleasant for persons today to say that the authoritarianism of that century is gone, Dr. Fromm observed. In fact, he added, "new vices appear that one doesn't see because one is so happy to see that the old ones aren't there."
>
> Thus, he explained, people tend to look back smugly while losing sight of the fact that today there's "no principle, no sense of hierarchy, no sense of value." Dr. Fromm said he did not mean hierarchy of power but "of knowledge and respect for those who know more."
>
> The old hoarding has given way to a new "mad consumption for consumption's sake," he went on. Cigarettes, cocktails, books, television and tranquilizers are consumed to the extent that "we are the eternal sucklings and we are looking for the big bottle that contains everything," he asserted.
>
> With regard to inequality, he said the nineteenth-century concept had "practically vanished." He cited the "fantastic progress" of races in America, "especially the Negroes."
>
> The distortion of the idea of equality has offended the principle of humanistic ethics whereby "every man is an end in himself and must not be an end for any one else," Dr. Fromm maintained.
>
> "Actually," he added, "we are afraid of being different, because we are afraid that if we are different then we will have no rights."

Mr. Shute does not instruct us in how to be radically different, but he does keep suggesting that many human beings have sufficient integrity to manage to be different when they see the necessity for it. *On the Beach* is a reminder that the task should not be put off because we are not yet sure that radical decisions are needed.

COMMENTARY
QUEST FOR "SOVEREIGNTY"

THERE is a curious parallel between the plight of the artist who, as Paul Goodman puts it, finds himself obliged to say "what he does not want to say," or things "he himself disapproves," and Dr. Fitch's scientist who must never restrain himself in his work "out of an uncertainty whether his achievements might be put to good or evil uses."

It was Thomas Huxley, as we recall, who invented a prayer for scientists which went something like this—"O Lord, give me the courage to face a fact, even though it slay me." The implication, here, is that the scientist's quest for facts is the highest value, against which no lesser values can be urged. Even if the import of the universe, as progressively revealed by the scientist, turns out to be death and discouragement, this must be faced, like any other unpleasant fact.

And the larger truth, lying behind both the attitude of the artist and that of the scientist, is that the confrontations of reality must never be ignored by persons who set out to disclose reality—that whatever reality should turn out to be, the ultimacy of man's being is better served by facing it than by ignoring it.

We are not opposing or even questioning this proposition. What we are questioning is the protection of the artist's or scientist's built-in definition of reality behind the bastion of this manifest "larger truth."

If the method of the scientist is one calculated to reveal "facts" and expose "Reality," well and good. *If* the poet is able to get into tune with the infinite and make its rhythms and accents intelligible, well and good, again.

Our point is that the declarations of the scientists and the revelations of the poets must always be examined, each one, by non-specialized man. There is no "badge" of authority to be respected by non-specialized man. It is the expression he must examine, not the special techniques which produced it or the high repute of its inspiration.

The cult of the scientist or the cult of the artist is as bad as any other cult. No cult can claim sovereignty over man and his judgments, however much, in our weaker moments, we may long for some supernatural authority to relieve us of our troubles. How nice it would be to "give ourselves up" to some magic formula, while calling it "devotion" or "sacrifice" or submission to the imperatives of "Art," and justifying ourselves with the piety that there is no hell but self-will.

It is true enough that there is no hell but in self-will, but there is no salvation, either, anywhere else.

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

JAMES WHITFIELD ELLISON'S *I'm Owen Harrison Harding* has not the depth of Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, but the over-all perspective of youth provided by Mr. Ellison is encouraging as well as amusing. Harding is a very "hip" young man, but he neither advertises the fact nor betrays it through use of a special language. And Harding makes progress, through the long course of troubles at school and greater troubles at home. He begins with the not unfamiliar conviction that grownups are the natural enemies of children, especially when they happen to be teachers. But Mr. Ellison suggests that a young man like Harding may come to respect adults who deserve it.

Our first sample passage shows how youths stand together against authority—yet impose tyrannies of their own among their peers. Harding's friend Pooch had just been hazed by the seniors on his first day at school as a freshman:

> Mr. Harris began reading off the roll and just about when he got to the end the door opened, and in walked Pooch looking like he'd really had it.
>
> "Who are you?" Mr. Harris asked him. "What happened to you?"
>
> "Nothing much," Pooch said.
>
> Boy, did he look like the end. All the hair down the middle of his head was shaved off, and he was wearing black mascara on his cheeks and lipstick on his forehead. His pants were rolled up to his knees and he was drenched from head to toe. The class got a large charge out of it.
>
> "Who did this to you?"
>
> "Oh, nobody did it," Pooch said. "I mean nobody I know did it." He rolled down his pants.
>
> "Did you recognize any of them?" Mr. Harris asked.
>
> "I guess they were seniors."
>
> "Do you know any of their names?"
>
> "They were seniors," Pooch said. "I don't know any of them. I don't know any seniors."
>
> Whenever Mr. Harris wasn't looking I kept waving very frantically at Pooch, but he didn't notice. Once I thought Mr. Harris saw me, so I pretended I was making a grab for a fly. I wanted to find out about Herby.
>
> "Now listen, you must know *some* of them. At least you could point them out to me, couldn't you?"
>
> "I doubt it," Pooch said. "I didn't have much time to look. They all looked alike to me." . . .
>
> I cleared my throat as loud as I could until Pooch noticed me, and then I ran through a lot of wild signals to find out what happened to Herby. Right in the middle of one big gesture Mr. Harris looked up and saw me. I tried to act like I was yawning or throwing a mild fit, but he was wise to me.
>
> "What's your name?" he said.
>
> "D'you mean me?" I said, like there was no reason in the world he should mean me. I even looked at the dope sitting next to me like he might mean him.
>
> "I mean you," he said. "*You!*"
>
> "My name is Owen Harding. Harrison is my middle name." For some stupid reason everybody in the room thought that was funny as all hell and started laughing. I thought it was pretty lacking in wit myself.
>
> "Why were you waving your arms around?"
>
> "I was just trying to tell him he ought to take a seat," I said, pointing to Pooch.
>
> "Is he a friend of yours?"
>
> "No. I hardly ever saw him before."
>
> "Well, do you think it's up to you to tell my pupils what to do?"
>
> "No, I guess it isn't."
>
> "Why did you do it then?" asked Mr. Harris.
>
> "Well," I said, "I just thought I'd be polite."
>
> That seemed to fix his box. He gave me a long, weird look and then began beating his gums with Pooch.

Eventually, however, Harding recognizes Mr. Harris as a friend and as a helpful human being. Of course, he must first be convinced that the teacher really wants to help him, and it has been hard for him to accept this because he is not really convinced that he, himself, is worth much trouble. Often, perhaps, behind the facade of youthful toughness and cynicism, lies the fact that the young are not encouraged by our society to think of themselves as having any real significance. An interesting scene begins with Harding

in Mr. Harris' office, being reproved for his poor marks:

> Mr. Harris walked over to the window and looked outside. He had his hands behind his back. All of a sudden he turned around and looked at me.
>
> "Your total average through junior high school was eighty-nine per cent. *Eighty-nine per cent!"* he said. The way he looked at me I thought he was going to ask me if I'd paid off the teachers. He took out his handkerchief and blew his nose again. "I hate to tell you what your average is now. It's not good—I'll tell you that. You're doing very badly." . ..
>
> "The only reason is, I haven't studied."
>
> "Yes, but why haven't you studied?" he asked me.
>
> "I don't know. I don't like to study, I guess."
>
> "Well, do you know why you don't like to study?"
>
> "No," I said. "I don't know. The work doesn't seem to interest me."
>
> He leaned way the hell back in his chair again. I thought maybe he'd fall on his head, but he didn't.
>
> "What *does* interest you, Owen?" . . .
>
> "I like to go for long walks," I said.
>
> He laughed like I didn't know what the hell I was talking about. "Everybody likes to walk," he said.
>
> "No they don't. Not for miles and miles like I do."
>
> He blinked at me. . . . I was dying for a cigarette. "On your intelligence quotient test," he said, "the one you took last semester, you did very well. One hundred thirty-one. That's really quite high, Owen. It places you definitely near the top of your class. And the interesting part is, you didn't do quite as well on your IQ tests in junior high school when you were getting better grades!"
>
> He frowned at me like I was a goddam foreign spy.
>
> "That's very interesting," I said.
>
> "What d'you suppose the answer is?" he asked me.
>
> "Well," I said, "maybe I've gotten too smart for school." Boy, that was the biggest mistake going! He stuck the chewed-up pencil in his mouth again and almost bit it in two.
>
> He put on his coat and walked over to where I was standing by the door. He put his hand on my shoulder. That made me feel sort of funny, but I couldn't do anything about it. "Look here, Owen," he said, "would you like to reconsider?"
>
> "You mean about you helping me?"
>
> "That's right. Only, Owen, say 'your helping me' instead of 'you helping me.' It's about time you began to learn a few of the basic rules."
>
> "I suppose my dad'll find out if you don't help me."
>
> "I imagine so. He might ask you."
>
> "Well, you can help me if you want to. I don't know why you'd want to, though."
>
> He smiled, and when he smiled you thought there was something inside that made him do it. He made you want to smile. "I don't know why, either. I'm really quite lazy."
>
> "Teachers aren't ever lazy, are they?"
>
> "Sure they are," he said. "At least some of us are.'
>
> "Boy—that's a new one on me."
>
> "Who else has a job with three months off in the summer?"
>
> "I suppose that's one way of looking at it," I said. "Except you probably need at least three months after teaching guys like me."
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> He opened the door and made me walk out in the hall ahead of him. That's always very embarrassing to me—who should go first and everything. We ended up almost going through at the same time and killing each other.

Anyway, we like to read about the young protagonists of Salinger's and Ellison's stories. They are people we should like to know, either now, as youths, or later on as adults. They are independent and creative, they see through the pretense and hypocrisy of much of the adult world, and their "road" holds forth the promise of leading from somewhere to somewhere. The hipsters seem bent on asserting that Somewhere is Nowhere, and, so far as we can see, they do little more than bend themselves and their friends out of shape. You don't have to be a hipster to be tolerant, to be appreciative of the predicament of underprivileged racial minorities. You do have to be without prejudice or blinding egotism, but you don't have to become what *Time* has called "Hobohemian" to get that way.

FRONTIERS
Art and Morality

SOME comments in MANAS for March 5 ("Unsettled Questions") concerning André Gide *(The Counterfeiters)* and William Faulkner *(Sanctuary)* have brought a severe reproach from one reader, Paul Goodman, who writes:

> The remarks on art, morals, and society in your issue of March 5 are surprisingly stupid. I am reminded of C. D. Broad when the magazine refused to consider articles on psychical research: "The editor of Nature seems to think he is the Author of nature." You people write as though you knew what the good was and would constrain men according to that conception; but the good is what it is human to be, and that, our nature, is what we find out as we go along.
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> Now the plots, the fictions, and the sentences of poets are *primary* evidence of the nature of man; they are partial evidence but they are bedrock evidence: that is why the philosophers are always citing passages of poets, sometimes as proof, sometimes in order to make distinctions. Very often, believe me, a poet says what he does not want to say, what he himself disapproves, but he has not the choice for it is necessary for the plot and texture, for which he has an ineluctable responsibility. (So in technique, he usually finds himself working a little beyond what he has learned to master.)
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> The remark in your lead article about Gide's lack of "sympathy for his people" is simply idiotic. Characters in a book are not people. And the attitude of naturalistic writers toward the real people from whom they abstract their characters is a scrupulous and impartial attentiveness that is not one of the least sublime functions of love. It is called understanding.
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> "We will say only that if *Sanctuary* had a 'message' we did not get it." My impression is that your writer has never "gotten" the message of any work of art; he has been deceiving himself for years. What he must learn to do is to expose himself to being moved, to take his risks just as the poet takes his risks, without the defense of "getting the message," and perhaps he will then often come away a sadder and a wiser man.

What we said about Gide and Faulkner in "Unsettled Questions" was a response to the request of another correspondent that we "attempt to criticize some of the famous modern writers," according to criteria proposed by Simone Weil—and, we might add, by Plato and Tolstoy. We spoke briefly of Gide and Faulkner in the terms objected to by our present critic.

On the whole, we find nothing important to argue about in the general meaning of Mr. Goodman's remarks about the work of artists or poets. It is in the application of these general judgments that differences must arise.

Actually, controversies of this sort center upon subtle matters of intent and mood, and implicate the large question of the role of the arts in human life. Even the distinctions inadequately represented by the terms "sacred" and "secular" are involved. A work which falls within the category of the "sacred" is a work which illuminates some aspect of life with reference to an ideal. Now it is true, as Goodman points out, that criticism which moves in this frame of reference is in danger of presumption. How does the critic "know" what is the "ideal"? Well, he has as much chance of knowing as anyone else, and pursuit or illumination of the ideal is a main business of life. The critic can hardly avoid suggestion of an ideal simply because the enterprise is hazardous or difficult. Our discussion, incidentally, proposed no "constraint" of the sort Goodman implies. Rather, the suggestion was that the creative writer ought to regulate himself. In our editorial in the same issue, we said:

> 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.

This is not constraint.

It is a fair question to ask, What is the poet celebrating? From Goodman's use of the word "naturalistic," we suppose he means that the naturalistic writer is celebrating life in its objectivity, as it is *seen.* We have never been able to persuade ourselves that this sort of

"objectivity" has the meaning it is supposed to have. The artist has a point of view and it inevitably emerges in his work. As contrasted with Gide, we find in Dostoievsky a kind of compassion which extends to even the most "despicable" of his characters, to the point of enabling the reader to think of them without contempt. The quality we are talking about is of course far more than "technique." It has to do with "love of life" or reverence for life. You might, with Goodman, call it "understanding."

Characters in books are, it is true, abstracted from life. What will an author abstract? He may abstract only caricatures of their humanity, yet do it with such deftness and attention to the minutiae of personality that the caricatures seem faithful portraits of human beings. He can put them through the jumps—the same jumps a lot of us are put through by life—and he may almost convince us that they are real human beings; yet his work, despite all this technical excellence, may still *repel.* Why should a writer do this? Well, why should anyone do contemptible things with great skill? Simone Weil objected that such behavior ought not to be shielded from criticism in the name of "art," and we agree. That is, we agree to the extent that we propose that the artist has the obligation to examine his conscience and determine, if he can, just what he is celebrating, and whether it deserves this sort of "artistic" glorification.

The writer, Goodman says, has an ineluctable responsibility to his plot and the texture of his work. What does this mean? In simple terms, it means that he must be faithful to the processes of life as he sees and understands them. He has certain ingredients and certain animating principles. These must work out in his story according to some kind of "natural law"—a law which the writer grasps intuitively or by some less direct means.

Has the writer any "choice" as to the order or "law" under which his plot or his characters develop? Can he look over competing theories of human nature and take his choice? Or is creative writing a kind of mantic invocation of "the muse" over which the poet has no control and should seek none, lest he sterilize his inspiration? Creative writing at its best, we strongly suspect, involves both processes.

Twice a Year for 1948 printed an article on John Dos Passos which will illustrate a phase of this question. The writer is Claude Edmonde Magny, who says:

> John Dos Passos' trilogy is a novel about people dispossessed of themselves, . . . The same might be said of the characters of other American novelists: those for example in John O'Hara's admirable *Appointment in Samara.* These communicate a very special malaise; the same malaise that we find in some of the magazine stories, that are so useful a study for anyone interested in the sociology and the psychopathology of the United States; with their characters stuffed full of cliches, real social mannekins, dressed in platitudes and satisfied to be nothing else; all the more terrifying in that they lack even the relative existence which suffering gives to any consciousness however empty it may otherwise be. The profound truth to which this whole world of American fiction bears witness is that nothing in man belongs to him; considered in himself, he does not exist; he is reduced to a bundle of physiological and social determinisms. Whether Dos Passos' heroes succeed or fail, are happy or unhappy, satisfied or dissatisfied, the cause is never in themselves: It is due neither to their force of character, their ability nor their wisdom. Even determinants which are usually considered intrinsic, located in the depths of being, are represented by Dos Passos as fortuitous, adventitious, exterior. His characters are always moved by some determinism, usually economic. . . .

Now books of this sort may indeed serve the purpose of the sociologist who wants to abstract from the real human beings who live in America those qualities which form the frothy surface of human life, but what of people who read such books for the reason that most people read books—for the better enjoyment and understanding of life? Dos Passos, we may admit, was a victim of his times, just as his characters are victims of their times. And we may say that he wrote in fundamental *rejection* of the very

processes of defeat to which his books made no exception. His "art," then, was an act of revulsion—but important because it was a tract for the times.

We are suggesting, however, that the artist needs to do more than report victimization. He needs to do more than give effective expression to his contempt for life and for man. Tolstoy felt this so strongly that his contempt almost drove him to suicide. It was his tremendous sense of responsibility as an artist and writer that gave moral power to his work, while his equally great devotion to the "facts" of life made him convincing. Again, we suggest a reading of Tolstoy's theory of art and Lafcadio Hearn's commentary on Tolstoy's views in *Talks to Writers* (Dodd, Mead, 1927).

One might say, perhaps, that an author is entitled to express contempt for the kind of a world he lives in, and that *Sanctuary* is such a book. He may wish to shock his readers into recognizing the true nature of what they tolerate as a "way of life." We have no business denying a writer this right. But it is our business to ask how such books may affect the reader—whether they leave him in hopeless depression or whether they move him to some kind of action (not necessarily "social" action, but simply, perhaps, a change, however small, in his "taste," or a refusal to enjoy what he has hitherto enjoyed). The sum of one's estimates in this respect is a legitimate item of critical notice. Such matters are, of course, arguable. But this is the nature of criticism. It is arguable. Criticism is not "final." It is an examination, in part, of the matters to which attention is provoked by the work under consideration.

It is obvious, of course, that the content of any work can be stretched out and made to apply to almost any hypothetical end, by argument. A more accurate measure of its validity or usefulness or contribution lies in its emotional impact. How does one *feel* after reading it? The feelings of readers will vary with the readers.

The critic can do no more than make a personal report, with respect to feelings. Yet that is his business. And the report of the critic will depend largely on what he believes should be expected of a book. This is a fundamental question, similar to the question of what one can expect of human beings. The writer is a special case of the human being. The writer sets up to say something to other people. The critic proposes that the artist is intellectually and morally answerable for what he says. Simone Weil says that the honorific title of "artist" does not reduce or alter that responsibility; indeed, it may increase the responsibility, since art is a form of persuasion.

By a parity of reasoning, the critic is responsible, too. He is responsible for a rational support of his judgments and his enthusiasms.

There is an apologetic for what is called "modern art" and for what may be spoken of as "modern literature." Whether it may be made to apply to Gide, we do not know; but it clearly applies to Dos Passos and to other writers who gave expression to the same sort of revulsion. This apologetic is by Lewis Mumford and it may be found in his book, *In the Name of Sanity* (Harcourt, Brace, 1954). Mumford wrote:

> Paintings that we must, in all critical honesty, reject as esthetic expressions, we must yet accept as despairing confessions of the soul, or as savage political commentary on our present condition arising from the depths of the unconscious. For there is one special quality in these paintings that lowers their standing as works of art: they are too factual, too realistic, they are too faithful reflections of the world we actually live in, the world we are so energetically preparing to suffer death in. These symbols of nothingness, true revelations of our purposeless mechanisms and our mechanized purposes, this constant fixation on what is violent and dehumanized, infernal—all this is not pure esthetic invention, the work of men who have no contacts with the life around them. Just the contrary: their ultimate negation of form and meaning should remind us of the goal of all our irrational plans and mechanisms.

> What they say should awaken us as no fuller and saner images might. These men, these paintings, these symbols have a terrible message to communicate: their visual nihilism is truer to reality than all the conventional paintings that assure us so smoothly that our familiar world is still there—and will always be there.
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> Let us not reproach the artist for telling us this message, which we have not the sensitivity to tell ourselves: the message that the future, on the terms that it presents itself to us now, has become formless, valueless, meaningless: . . . Let the painters who have faced this ultimate nothingness, who have found a symbol for it, be understood if not honored: what they tell us is what we are all hiding from ourselves.

These artists need their sympathetic and friendly Mumford. Without him, they only horrify. Nor do they attempt, one may think, the full-scale articulation of meaning which is presented in a book. The writer deals more directly in meanings. He tells more explicitly what he thinks is the meaning of life. The reader of a book is more vulnerable to suggestion than the viewer of a painting. A book makes greater invitation to self-identification. In this sense, the writer is a teacher, almost a priest. This is the sort of responsibility which overwhelmed Diderot (as described in "Unsettled Questions"), and to which, we suggested, the creative writer ought to give some attention.