

QUESTIONS TO SOCIAL SCIENCE

IN these days of somewhat desperate looking around for broad solutions of human problems, it is natural to turn to the social sciences. After all, we have come to lean rather heavily on the physical sciences as the means of getting what we want in material terms. And if the physical sciences *work*, why not use the social sciences to get what we want at higher levels of being?

Some years ago, a writer in the *Scientific Monthly* proposed the problem thus:

In this century of revolution, the world will be swept by social changes as vast and far-reaching as the technological revolution of the past century. Fundamentally, the emerging social revolution—of which two world wars and a world depression were symptoms—revolves about the nature of man and of human society. Peoples are stirring to achieve freedom, a dignity, and a way of life worthy of their status as human beings. Can these changes be scientifically guided as were the vast technological changes of the past century, or must they be left to the emotional clash of partisan politics and of pseudo-scientific ideologies? Can we achieve a science of society, can we learn to diagnose the spiritual maladies of modern man, can we build life-giving institutions which will release the greatness that is potential in all men, can we define valid goals of collective social endeavor that correspond to the actual spiritual nature and needs of man? Or must social reconstruction continue to be based on rules of thumb, hunches, guesses, and pseudo-sciences?

This seems to cover the essential questions. But if anyone plans really to *rely* on the social sciences, certain other questions implicit in the foregoing will have to be answered—at least tentatively. The revolution of our time, it is said, "revolves about the nature of man and of human society." If this is the case, and we think that it is, then it is necessary to ask: Is social science prepared to make any important assumptions about the nature of man? Further, if it will make them, how will it back them up?

So far as we can see, there is little hope that social science will make any important assumptions about the nature of man, in the near future. We need to know more about the radical differences among human beings. First of all, the differences have to be admitted. This is difficult to do, since the man who tries to establish scientifically the wide variance of intellectual capacities and moral qualities among men is in immediate danger of attack from a class of humanitarians who regard all such views as a threat to the ethical idea of equality. This is a serious psychological pressure on the social sciences. Then, if a practitioner in this field should be so daring as to declare the differences, he is then under some obligation to explain them. If he finds them predominantly hereditary, he is likely to be charged with spreading "racist" doctrines. If he claims that environment is primarily responsible, the like views of the Communists are almost certain to be used against him. And if, with complete intellectual honesty, he proposes that neither heredity nor environment can give adequate explanation of human differences, resorting to some unknown "X" factor as the missing link in human determinism, he will probably be accused of "obscurantism." Actually, he tells nothing that we do not know, although his contribution has the virtue of bringing out into the open a fact that is commonly neglected.

But candor of this sort, supposing it can be obtained, still leaves us very far from any working account of the nature of man. *What is the good, for man?* You can hardly find out by distributing a lot of questionnaires! A central problem arises from the fact that men differ a great deal in their ideas of what is good for them. And these differences, furthermore, seem to be essential to the proper development of human beings. Accordingly, "the good," for man, must be defined

as a high-level abstraction the acceptance of which does not vitiate the need of every man to define the good for himself.

To fulfill its definition as a mode of successful prediction, science must predict. But social science can hardly predict the good of man, so long as individual good is good only when discovered for himself by the individual, and not by some external authority.

This is an essentially frustrating situation for the social sciences.

But science is not only prediction. Before it is prediction, it is history. It describes what has been and is, before it undertakes to predict what will be.

Can social science, then, tell us something about what *has been* good for man? Perhaps, but how shall we establish the criterion? Shall we list some great men and see what was good for them? Will it be what *we* think was the good, or what *they* thought about it? We are already deep in difficulties. Many of the great men of history were martyrs. Are you going to make martyrdom a correlation of the good of man? If you do, it may suddenly become difficult to differentiate social science from religion! The lives of great men are counsels of perfection. Counsels of perfection involve tremendous assumptions about what is good for man, and what is possible for man. Can social science make these assumptions?

Someone may say, "But you are neglecting the *social* aspect of this science. Social science is concerned with *society*. It tries to give an account of the best society, not the lonely path of genius."

But what would you think of a society which fails to chart any of the lonely paths of genius? What, again, is the goal? Can't we say something about that? Or will you have a formula which ignores the goal—if the path of genius is the goal—in behalf of the more democratic value of the greatest good for the greatest number?

Again, we are in trouble. The trouble is many-sided. How can you have a science which acknowledges its highest value to be the uniqueness of the individual? It would be better, perhaps, to let the geniuses go their own way and devote our sciences to the others whose aims lie within the context of the predictable or the rationally achievable. But this, alas, is the logic of the Five Hundred who poisoned Socrates, of the Sanhedrin which turned Jesus over to Pontius Pilate, of the Holy Inquisition which condemned Giordano Bruno to burn at the stake.

The greatest of men are the ones who break out of any and all statistical confinements. Can you proclaim that this violation of the norms is the highest good? Can you proclaim that it is *not*?

Our opening quotation calls for "life-giving institutions which will release the greatness that is potential in all men." That, indeed, is what we need. This means institutions which afford opportunity to each one according to his capacity and his inspiration; institutions which will hold no man back, yet, on the other hand, will press no man forward—beyond, that is, the pace of his own making.

Such institutions are not unimaginable; they are only difficult to imagine. They would be institutions which refuse to harbor any fixed idea of the good of man.

But what business have we in speaking of "great men" of the past, if the good remains so obscure? Well, science, as we suggested, is history as well as prediction, and if from the history of great men we cannot accurately deduce the good, we can at least describe its shadow. The good, whatever it is, reflects itself in human behavior in modes of action that are spoken of as great and good by common consent. The man who devotes himself to the welfare of others, and unmistakably serves it, we are entitled to call a good man. On this ground we revere Buddha, Jesus, Lincoln, Gandhi, and a host of others. Men who enlarge meaning and deepen perception—these also are great and good. How they gained

their insight, love, and resolve—this may remain obscure; but we know they had these qualities, and we honor them for it.

We cannot tolerate a social science which ignores this mystery or treats it indifferently as unamenable to scientific method. We have a civilization which has paid little attention to the wonder of human greatness, which has attempted to set the goals for all in the terms of values which take no account of men who are in nature and calling *different* from the rest. The writer already quoted has this to say:

The extraordinary paradox of modern civilization is that, as men have gained unprecedented scientific power, they have steadily lost self-respect, pride, and dignity. Probably at no stage in history has the human ego been so dangerously deflated. It is not only disillusioned about itself, but it even has the temerity to be disillusioned about the cosmic process. These are not the normal symptoms of a healthy biological organism, nor is there anything visible in the nature of the cosmos to doom man perpetually to such a pathological outlook. They are the product of frustration. Our civilization is suffering from acute spiritual anemia.

The curious thing about the situation is that the only social forms in history which show a clear awareness of this problem are notoriously reactionary from the modern liberal point of view. We mention these forms, not to suggest that they were pre-eminently successful, or even real embodiments of the ideal we are groping for, but to show that such forms or social institutions are not unimaginable. Take for example the medieval idea of Chivalry. Any youth of noble blood could enter training as a knight. To do so, he had to accept the commitments of knighthood. The ultimate commitment was the Quest for the Holy Grail. This was the apex of the ladder of human achievement. Access to the ladder was restricted to the nobility—an obvious flaw in the system—but the ideal was nonetheless a great one. No one forced a youth to mount the ladder, yet it was there, and the vision of the mystic goal lent a transcendental wonder to human existence.

In the East, a similar ascent is found in the idea of the varying duties of the different castes. Again, roles and opportunities were hedged by the accident of birth, and we are familiar enough with the abuses of caste-ism to need no special account of them here. The point is that in some ideal sense, the path to high achievement was always open, even though there was no external compulsion to choose it.

It is not ironic—it is rather natural, if not good—that the social forms which hold some hint of affording conditions that might answer to our needs are the social forms which worked the worst injustices to human beings in the memory of man. It is obvious that we can never return to caste and class. It is obvious that external grades of human beings enjoying official or religious sanction of the distinctions they establish would be the very worst sort of institutions for us to consider.

It *is* ironic, however, that with all our hatred of class distinction, we are forever improvising them informally, as though they answered to some deep psychological need. The American people take nearly as much interest in the affairs of the royal family of England as do the British themselves. We have all sorts of minor castes in business, and we have plenty of "hierarchy" in politics—and, one may add, in vice and crime. Money, of course, is a mark of status, increasingly, the world over. It seems that we are determined to have our grades, and when we wear out one scheme of calibration—say the "spiritual" variety—we turn to a material scale as a substitute. Every revolution produces a new kind of *élite*—the caste or group which is believed, for a time, to embody the essences of the good of man.

Now social psychology, of course, is filled with information of this sort about human behavior. We don't worry too much about these matters unless someone decides to try to construct an ideology out of the facts he has assembled. Hitler, who was no mean social psychologist, did

precisely this, as *Mein Kampf* makes plain. The Hidden Persuaders make another kind of use of the same facts—which concern the vulnerability of human beings to suggestion. The question, perhaps, ought to be, What intuitive conceptions of order and the inner structure of things contribute to these weaknesses, when such feelings are afforded no outlet?

Social science too easily makes of these qualities—qualities manipulated by the engineers of consent—evidence of the plastic clay of human nature. What if they are something else besides? What if the self-esteem sought so voraciously by so many is only the shadow of a spiritual longing, now misdirected and tragically "mismanaged" by certain practitioners of "psychology"? In this case it would be a "scientific" fact which hides from view a far greater, if delicately intangible, human reality.

So we come back to our question: What assumptions will social science make about the nature of man?

An entirely different line of questioning suggests itself. Recently we came across a small booklet devoted to quotation from the deliberations of a British Parliamentary Committee, the Select Committee on the Obscene Publications Bill. Issued by the Olympia Press, apparently a British publisher habitually in trouble, probably from choice, with the British obscenity laws, this booklet, *On the Old Theme of Literature and Censorship*, reflects the honest bewilderment of a group of intelligent men. The problem confronting them is to work out some means of eliminating from publication or sale matter which is "obscene," while permitting circulation of works which have artistic or literary merit. They are obviously unable to solve this problem, except in respect to extremely gross offenses.

Take, for example, the following interchange between a member of the Committee, Mr. Hugh Fraser, and Sir Theobald Mathew, Director of

Public Prosecutions, called as a witness by the Committee:

Mr. Fraser: A borderline book comes either to you or the Deputy Director?

Sir Theobald Mathew: My Deputy Director in the office is in general charge of all this indecent and obscene work. He may delegate the reading of books to other assistant directors. He may ask me if I will read a book. He reads a number himself. I accept at once that to this limited extent the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions is a censorship department; that is to say, if I do not advise a prosecution in any particular case there will not be one in all probability, unless some private citizen takes it upon himself to do it. So that, to that extent, I accept full responsibility as a censor; but I do not decide whether books are obscene.

Mr. Hugh Fraser: You do admit to some extent that you are a censor.

Sir Theobald Mathew: Yes.

Mr. Hugh Fraser: That is the point and it does strike me that there is some need for some sort of expertise on this, especially having in mind your remarks about *Ulysses* [by James Joyce]: you said you had passed *Ulysses* because you found it unintelligible. That, quite frankly, is not what I call expertise, Sir Theobald. I am not a literary man, but I do know that it has influenced (though I find it difficult to comprehend myself) and had an impact on young writers during the last twenty years or so, and that influence has been very considerable indeed. I think it is alarming that you as a semi-censor, if we can discover a censor anywhere in the whole cosmogony of the legal and police services, can do these things and can pass such a book merely because, as you have admitted, you found it completely unintelligible?

Sir Theobald Mathew: I must apologise for making a joke. But I would say, even with expertise, I am looking at a book to see whether it is calculated to corrupt and deprave those into whose hands it may fall. I defy anybody to say that *Ulysses*, in the way that it is written—and, of course, I know it has had a very considerable influence upon some literature, with its new ideas in the use of words and so forth—could either corrupt or deprave them. I turned it down for that reason. Having waded through a great deal of it and having had certain passages marked for me, I still say I do not believe anybody would read such a book as obscene or pornographic literature.

Mr. Simon: D. H. Lawrence thought it was an obscene book, curiously enough?

Sir Theobald Mathew: I am sure he did—because he understood it!

These men suffer an interesting confusion—a confusion concerning, not what is good, but what is bad, for man. Is social science prepared to help us in problems of this sort? No serious person can help but be concerned regarding some of the printed matter which is circulated for sale: this is bad, although it is not the real problem. The real problem lies in the need for clarification of the basis of judging evil influences. Obscenity has come to mean anything which relates to sexuality. One can easily admit that what the British prosecutor—and others—denominate as plain "filth" should be prohibited from sale, but why this assumption that there is no other, and no worse, kind of "filth"?

Last week's *Frontiers* quoted at length from *Wai Wai*, a book by Nicholas Guppy, an explorer, in which the author told how the missionaries insisted that the Indian women of this tribe in British Guiana cover their nakedness, while teaching them religious doctrines which had the most devastating, not to say corrupting, effects on their lives, including what we might call their "morals." Guppy wrote:

At last they understand the ruthlessness, lying, cheating, stealing, violence, bullying, adultery, drunkenness of so many of those who belong to this faith; and having accepted the Christian's beliefs, they accept his standards of behaviour. From then onwards, it is only their natural goodness, their lethargy, and the threat of the police which restrain them.

Where, in this case, does the "obscenity" lie? In British law, any work liable to "degrade or corrupt" the weak-minded is obscene. If it be admitted, as, we think, it must, that obviously obscene matter ought to be banned from circulation, what then about the activities of missionary societies, which dozens of social scientists as well as the botanist, Mr. Guppy, have shown to have these effects?

A social science which has the intention of biting into the real problems of the modern world will have to attack such questions openly, and come to some conclusion. It will have to undertake basic reforms and revolutions in every aspect of our cultural life.

REVIEW

PHILOSOPHY AND DRAMA

THE philosophers of our time are apt to turn up almost anywhere. Or perhaps we should say that *philosophy* turns up in unlikely places—in novels from *Eternity* and David Davidson's *Steeper Cliff* to the otherwise action-packed writing of dozens of pocketbooks. Again and again, certain passages reveal that even the most commercial authors may spend more than a few moments in contemplation. Such writers are striving, at these times, for precisely the thing that kept philosophers of Greece at their calling—to understand causation and to gain vision.

Arthur Miller can hardly be called "commercial," and his contributions to philosophy are consequently less fragmentary. At least, we feel confident in asserting that while Miller is a success, and while Miller very much *desires* an audience for what he has to say or portray, what he says will not be primarily conditioned by the market. Ample evidence of this was provided by Miller himself in an article written for the *August Harper's*, titled "The Shadows of the Gods." When Miller tells about the inspirations of his own youth—none, incidentally, provided by the Communist Party—he is also saying that every young person who thinks at all is capable of experiencing and partially fulfilling the same need. These paragraphs in particular, called "News of the Inner World," seem to us memorable. Miller reminisces:

When I was still in high school and ignorant, a book came into my hands, God knows how, *The Brothers Karamazov*. It must have been too rainy that day to play ball. I began reading it thinking it was a detective story. I have always blessed Dostoevski for writing in a way that any fool could understand. The book, of course, has no connection with the depression. Yet it became closer, more intimate to me, despite the Russian names, than the papers I read every day. I never thought to ask why, then. I think now it was because of the father and son conflict, but something more. It is always probing its particular scenes and characters for the hidden laws, for the place where the gods ruminate and decide, for

the rock upon which one may stand without illusion, a free man. Yet the characters appear liberated from any systematic causation.

The same yearning I felt all day for some connection with a hidden logic was the yearning in this book. It gave me no answers but it showed that I was not the only one who was full of this kind of questioning, for I did not believe—and could not after 1929—in the reality I saw with my eyes. There was an invisible world of cause and effect, mysterious, full of surprises, implacable in its course. The book said to me:

"There is a hidden order in the world. There is only one reason to live. It is to discover its nature. The good are those who do this. The evil say that there is nothing beyond the face of the world, the surface of reality. Man will only find peace when he learns to live humanly, in conformity to those laws which decree his human nature."

Only slightly less ignorant, I read Ibsen in college. Later I heard that I had been reading problem plays. I didn't know what that meant. I was told they were about social problems like the inequality of women. The women I knew about had not been even slightly unequal; I saw no such problem in "A Doll's House." I connected with Ibsen not because he wrote about problems, but because he was illuminating process. Nothing in his plays exists for itself, not a smart line, not a gesture that can be isolated. It was breath-taking.

From his work—read again and again with new wonders cropping up each time—as well as through Dostoevski's, I came to an idea of what a writer was supposed to be. These two issued the license, so to speak, the only legitimate one I could conceive, for presuming to write at all. One had the right to write because other people needed news of the inner world, and if they went too long without such news they would go mad with the chaos of their lives. With the greatest of presumption I conceived that the great writer was the destroyer of chaos, a man privy to the councils of the hidden gods who administer the hidden laws that bind us all and destroy us if we do not know them. And chaos, for one thing, was life lived oblivious of history.

When Miller discusses, in passing, the symbolic meaning of religion, he says that he had early developed a religion of his own, "however unwilling I was to be so backward." But Miller's religion was really a philosophy—"a religion with

no gods but with godlike powers." Miller, like Lafcadio Hearn and Tolstoy, asks of any dramatic construction the crucial question: "What is its ultimate force? How can that force be released?"

Maxwell Anderson had stored up years of philosophic pondering at the time he wrote *Off Broadway*, his brief critique of the dramatic arts. In our opinion, this essay often speaks the same language that Miller is speaking here. Anderson feels that all plays of real moment are "mystery plays." In a manner often similar to poetry, they evoke the shadowy images of another kind of reality—æsthetic, ethical, tragic. They present, in short, other dimensions of human existence by implication, and therefore relate to those metaphysical questions regarding human destiny which have always been asked. Anderson puts it this way:

From the beginning of our story men have insisted, despite the darkness and silence about them, that they had a destiny to fulfill—that they were part of a gigantic scheme which was understood somewhere, though they themselves might never understand it. There are no proofs of this. There are only indications—in the idealism of children and young men, in the sayings of such teachers as Christ and Buddha, in the vision of the world we glimpse in the hieroglyphics of the masters of the great arts, and in the discoveries of pure science, itself an art, as it pushes away the veils of fact to reveal new powers, new mysteries, new goals for the eternal dream. The dream of the race is that it may make itself better and wiser than it is and every great philosopher or artist who has ever appeared among us has turned his face away from what man is toward whatever seems to him most godlike that man may become. Whether the steps proposed are immediate or distant, whether he speaks in the simple parables of the New Testament or the complex musical symbols of Bach and Beethoven, the message is always to the effect that men are not essentially as they are but as they imagine and as they wish to be.

Mr. Anderson develops the figure of the hero in a way that reminds us of Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. The cycle of the hero is always the same, involving the crisis of adventurous discovery and the return to mankind with a "boon." The hero

may be quite conventional or he may be sublimely beyond any rigidities of custom. Yet, as Anderson puts it, "in the majority of ancient and modern plays it seems to me that what the audience wants to believe is that men have a desire to break the molds of earth which encase them and claim a kinship with a higher morality than that which hems them in. The rebellion of Antigone, who breaks the laws of men through adherence to a higher law of affection, the rebellion of Prometheus, who breaks the law of the gods to bring fire to men, the rebellion of God in *The Green Pastures* against the rigid doctrine of the Old Testament, the rebellion of Tony in *They Knew What They Wanted* against the convention that called on him to repudiate his cuckold child, the rebellion of Liliom against the heavenly law which asked him to betray his own integrity and make a hypocrisy of his affection, even the repudiation of the old forms and the affirmation of new by the heroes of Ibsen and Shaw, these are all instances to me of the groping of men toward an excellence dimly apprehended, seldom possible of definition. They are evidence to me that the theater at its best is a religious affirmation, an age-old rite restating and reassuring man's belief in his own destiny and his ultimate hope. The theater is much older than the doctrine of evolution, but its one faith, asseverated again and again for every age and every year, is a faith in evolution, in the reaching and the climb of men toward distant goals, glimpsed but never seen, perhaps never achieved, or achieved only to be passed impatiently on the way to a more distant horizon."

Well, we agree with Miller—"there is a hidden order in the world." But neither he nor we will ever find that it can be described to others adequately, or "sold" to others as one attempts to promote a political platform. Nor can that order ever be explained by saying it "belongs to God." The order is the harmony of pattern created by the interdependence of all living things, from lowest to highest, and it is of necessity described in different terms according to our own perspective of the moment.

COMMENTARY

THE BLESSED PRESENT

IT is customary, in these pages, to find grave fault with the present. Let us devote this space to honoring the present.

We live in an age when a leading dramatist is able to say:

There is a hidden order in the world. There is only one reason to live. It is to discover its nature. The good are those who do this. The evil say that there is nothing beyond the face of the world, the surface of reality. Man will only find peace when he learns to live humanly, in conformity to those laws which decree his human nature.

What more do you want of your time than an illumination like this one? Here is the whole of science and religion, stated in a few sentences. Here is the wisdom of Dostoievsky brought forward and made to live again.

There is plenty of wisdom around, plenty of profundity. All you have to do is look for it, and be willing to recognize it when you find it.

The world, it is true, is in perilous condition. But was there ever a man who, reaching for the truth—touching it briefly, perhaps with his fingertips—was not in perilous condition? "Men have a desire to break the molds of earth which encase them and claim a kinship with a higher morality than that which hems them in." This is a perilous condition.

Here, it may be, are some answers which social science might use with profit—Miller's scale of values for human life, Anderson's conception of human destiny as "a desire to break the molds."

The price of taking such thoughts to heart is not high. All you have to do is give up thinking "collectively," and supposing that in order to do good and right, you must get a lot of other people to do it with you.

There is a further price, however. When men like Arthur Miller are misused by their contemporaries, they need to be defended with a

high and passionate conviction. We must force our legislative watchdogs and our two-hundred percenters to stop treating men of imagination and daring with contempt. Nothing could be more "un-American" than this.

The present is rich with free thoughts and a spreading tumult of the imagination. It is filled with the promise of men who hunger after knowledge of the "hidden order in the world." There will be disturbances, of course—disturbances, false starts, and some bad mistakes. Hardly any important venture is without such difficulties.

As a final thought, we wonder if any "religious people" rose to the support of Arthur Miller. They should have, for here is a man who understands better than most what religion is really about: "There is a hidden order in the world. There is only one reason to live. It is to discover its nature."

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

MORE ON THE GENERATION

ALTHOUGH we were both diffident and apologetic during the early installments of "Discussions of a Generation," it now appears that, no matter how inadequate our attempts to synthesize current comment on the subject, some readers have appreciated the quotations we collected. We now call attention to some paragraphs by Harvey Swados appearing in the Spring issue of *Dissent*, in an article, "Popular Taste and Agonies of the Young."

Swados first compares the vulgar exploitation of Nathan Leopold's release from prison with the neglect of the trial and execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, suggesting an almost pathological public interest in the twisted psyches of the young. Loeb and Leopold were wealthy young men who had been given too much rather than too little, whose inexplicable crime placed them beyond the pale of reason. Sacco and Vanzetti—who live, today, only in the minds and hearts of radicals—made a good deal of rational sense. Only the trial and the execution were beyond reason. But, suggests Swados, we dote on the irrational, now, as at the time when Leopold and Loeb became famous. And we do so, perhaps, because we are enamored of agony in ourselves, and find release by dwelling on the even more spectacular agonies of disoriented youth. A curious corollary is the public profession of great concern with "the children." It is to this point that Mr. Swados speaks further:

Is it not extraordinary that during the very period when immigration to the United States slowed to a trickle, during the very period when the last immigrant generation was frantically assimilating itself to the American way, it should have been the immigrant attitude toward children which triumphed over the traditional Yankee attitude? The immigrant faith, often the first article of that faith, was that one must sacrifice all for the children. One came to America in the first place for the children; one labored in sweat shops, coal mines, steel mills, in order that the children might have the American opportunity. One broke one's back, burned out one's eyes, even yielded up one's ideals, in order that the

children might have the chance at a college education, a firm grip on the success ladder.

So today the first article of faith is that everything that carries contemporary sanction, from togetherness to religious revivalism, is being done for the sake of the children. The parents move from city to suburb not for themselves but for the sake of the children. (I speak now of explicit justifications and rationalizations which may not always coincide with actual reasons); the father commutes to work not from choice but so that his children can grow up in the fresh air; the mother becomes a chauffeur not to fulfill a secret desire but because there is no other way, even with the car pools, for the children to get to and from public school, Sunday school, ballet school, music school, and finally the parents hand over their inner selves to the ministrations of the community church, not because they believe, or because they expect the act of capitulation will help them, but because they think the children must have "something" in which to believe, even if they themselves need not.

The kind of children emerging from school, church, and station wagon in the 50's would seem best exemplified by their heroes and the heroes of their parents too: Elvis Presley, Sal Mineo, Natalie Wood, even James MacArthur, and—the apotheosis of the entire generation—the late James Dean. The face of each is eloquent of the tormenting discontent of an American youth for which everything is being done, to which everything is being given . . . except a reason for living and for building a socially useful life.

The face of each is one facet of the composite faces of the rich, handsome, gifted, doomed Leopold and Loeb. The sullen sulkiness of the speed-hungry Presleyan, whose motorcycle is his religion; the liquid-eyed wretchedness of Mineo the immigrant's son, who cannot belong; the bouncy emptiness of Natalie Wood, who would die like Joan if there were an ideal worth dying for; the clean-cut loneliness of the unloved MacArthur, whose Dad has a closetful of suits but no time for Son; and the astonishingly tortured and grief-stricken countenance of the Dean of them all, dead in his Porsche at 24—these speak more eloquently of the essential quality of American life in the 50's than once did Andy Hardy, Harold Teen, Our Gang or Shirley Temple for their day. Is it any wonder that the terrible story of Leopold and Loeb should return to challenge us more potently today than ever before, a ghost returned to haunt our uneasy consciences?

Well, if Mr. Swados' article "haunts" us some, this is probably all to the good. He seems to be touching a raw nerve of guiltiness in most of the adults of our time. It is, we suppose, a complication arising from the tendency to buy one's self out of the responsibilities of parenthood. It is so easy to substitute gifts and privileges for the sort of concern now increasingly difficult to feel—with the plethora of details in organization which accompany both work and home life.

We have been saving Norman Cousins' *Saturday Review* (Aug. 17) story about the patient, happy success of a young Indian boy who suffered blindness in his third year. In this essay, "A Most Remarkable Man," Cousins reminds us that the most is often done with the least. One gets the feeling that faculties seldom developed in ordinary living are thus proved to exist, when there is the will and the inspiration to give them focus. Just how the teenage hot-rodder is to be made acquainted with facts of this sort we do not know, yet the point is hard to miss. And this is why we shall never tire of suggesting that parents stop giving children too much too soon.

Mr. Cousins writes:

I met Ved Mehta for the first time in the spring of 1952.

He came to our home with his father, then in the United States as a visiting Fulbright professor. There was nothing about Ved that suggested a handicapped person. He used no cane. He had no seeing-eye dog. He didn't wait for people to lead him from one place to another. Not once did his father take him by the hand. Yet he moved about easily. He was not self-conscious about his blindness. He put my children at ease when they awkwardly tried to hide their curiosity and he answered their numberless questions with the sincerity and gentle humor that appeals to a child's mind. I found myself as fascinated as the children, especially when Ved demonstrated how he avoided bumping into walls or objects without the use of a cane or outstretched arms.

Thereafter, at least twice a year, generally at Christmas and during part of the summer vacation, Ved would come to visit us. Sometimes he would arrive after hitchhiking from the West Coast, where he had enrolled in Pomona College in the fall of 1952. I was terrified at first when I thought of this

blind boy at the mercy of the juggernauts of the highway. But I remembered that his father had once told me that Ved would never attempt anything beyond his capacity. Apparently this meant he could do just about everything, for his capacity seemed limitless.

Three highly developed senses—skin sensitivity, hearing, and memory—were involved every time he traveled by himself, whether getting on or off a train, or crossing a busy thoroughfare, hitch-hiking on a crowded highway, or riding a bicycle. Perhaps I had better repeat that—"riding a bicycle." I was astounded when Ved said casually that one of his hobbies was bicycle riding. He demonstrated by borrowing my oldest girl's bicycle. He made perfect circles in the driveway, avoiding the parked car and the low spreading branches of a pine tree. He sat high and straight on the bicycle, his head perfectly still and his face flushed with pleasure. I noticed that he would almost come upon an object before he would veer away from it.

Face to Face, Mr. Ved Mehta's book, published by Little, Brown Co., is as perfect a reflection of its author as any book I have ever read. It is straightforward, dignified, appealing. It has a great deal to give to anyone who comes to it, for it is in many ways a mindstretching experience. Ved Mehta neither exploits nor skirts around his blindness in his account of growing up in India and in coming of age in the United States. He treats it the way he lives it—as a natural part of his life. He describes it without making it central in his story; at the same time, he faces up to such aspects of blindness as may interest the reader.

Mr. Cousins' last paragraph makes a point we often have in mind when discussing "underprivileged" youths. It is demonstrably possible for the greatest handicaps to be taken "as a natural part of one's life," and for a person to make growing use of the least original capacity. Since no one would wish to deprive a child, even temporarily, of one of his senses in order that The Great Lesson of Life might be learned, the best recommendation seems to be a most parsimonious provision of the goods of this earth. What is *earned*, in one way or another, is both understood and appreciated.

FRONTIERS

Myth-Makers and Myth-Breakers

AN article in the *Humanist* (July-August) by Richard Howard Powers revives the "Failure of Nerve" thesis given currency years ago by the *Partisan Review*. The idea is that the world is in trouble and that people, including intellectuals and others who ought to know better, are becoming frightened and are losing their faith in progressivism and the scientific method. Overtaken by fear, the accusation goes, these faint-hearts are turning to religion, giving up the tough-mindedness and humanistic independence of spirit acquired throughout centuries of hard-won struggle.

Mr. Powers takes the current lack of interest in Voltaire as his text. Voltaire's life, Powers maintains, was devoted to one great objective, to smash the *infamous thing*—superstition. The great French iconoclast fought superstition because he "had one absolute value—the human race." Ancient lies and evil myths must be exposed, to end the fanaticism they breed. "Hate killed," says Mr. Powers, "and hate was the product of superstition."

In Powers' view, "myth" is the great offender. As he puts it:

In *The Myth of the State* Ernst Cassirer addressed himself to the question of why in recent times irrational thinking has overcome rational thinking almost everywhere. And he noted the obvious. In critical times of man's social life, the rational forces that resist the rise of old mythical conceptions are no longer sure of themselves. In these moments the time for myth has come again. Repeating Voltaire, Cassirer pointed out that myth is never really subjugated—it is always there, lurking in the dark and waiting for its hour and opportunity. Cassirer died in our country a decade ago, in the midst of battle to delay that hour. The hour has come nearer since.

Indeed it has. The question, however, is whether this turning to "myth" is the unmixed evil that Mr. Powers and some others think it is.

What, actually, is a "myth"? Letting the dictionary definitions go, let us say that the myth is the generalization of the heart, as distinguished from the generalization of the mind. Human beings cannot live without making generalizations. Every important truth we know is some kind of generalization. Generalizations, of course, are dangerous. When minds become warped, their generalizations grow corrupt. Then along comes a great reformer—a skeptic, perhaps, like Voltaire—who conducts unceasing and successful war against all generalizations of a certain sort. The enemy of generalizations is never against *all* generalizations. He is against only the generalizations which deceive and betray the human beings who believe them.

The great humanitarian enthusiasm for the scientific method resulted from the hope that here, at last, was a means of making generalizations which could be *proved*. Science, men felt, will not play us false. We shall be prevented from accepting false generalizations by the strict rules of scientific demonstration and by the known integrity of scientists who are trained in impartiality and who check up on one another.

The argument is sound enough, as an argument, and the enthusiasm understandable. The trouble has been that very few scientists have been willing to enter fields of investigation where the application of the scientific method is difficult, if not altogether impossible. These men have their careers to think of. Further, science is not the "pure" undertaking it seems to be from the articles and books which are written about it. Science is largely institutionalized and heavily laden with preconceptions and protective habits and traditions of its own. First of all, it wants "manageable" data to examine. It wants to observe objects that will sit still while you look at them. And it wants objects that more than one scientist can look at, at more or less the same time. The subjective experiences of individuals are not of this sort. The subjective visions of

peoples—perhaps "myths" can be so described—are not of this sort, either.

The scientists will look at subjective experiences, of course, but only after they have been taken down, tabulated, processed by statistical techniques, and arranged in columns like so many wispy, dried flowers pressed between the pages of an old book. There is something about the scientific method which *deflowers* whatever living thought it looks at.

We do not say that subjective experience cannot be approached in a scientific spirit. We say that it has not ever been done; or if it has been done, it has not been publicized; or if it has been publicized, the results have been ignored.

This is not to say that Mr. Powers is all wrong. We are willing to concede to him forty-nine per cent of the truth. There is no doubt about the evil influence of false myths. There is no mistake about the degrading influence of dogmatic religion. What seems to be overlooked is that every idea which is powerful in evil is the shadow of some great truth. The false idea gets its power from the true idea behind it. To urge that, since myths lead us astray, we must abolish them, is almost the same as saying that since parents bring up their children badly, we must abolish parents.

We can no more abolish myths than we can turn out the sun and hide the stars. Myths are a permanent part, an organic expression, of our psychic life. The myth brings an end to the terrorism of infinity. It *contains* the sphere of our being and makes relationships within that sphere conceivable to human beings. It establishes by implication the law and order of those relationships.

What is the authority of the myths we believe? If we can not abandon them, perhaps we can refine them, discriminate between them and choose the best of them.

You don't have to be a brave humanitarian opposing the bigotry of religion or the

presumptuous symbols of sovereignty paraded by the National State in order to campaign against myths. Every branch of human endeavor has myths of its own. In science, the enemies of the myth are the Positivists, who will tell you that the grand revelations of science about the Nature of Things are not to be relied upon at all. They are, the Positivist will wisely point out, only readings on a dial, reports concerning the behavior of instruments.

The Positivist position is a pretty sterile position for thinking human beings. It was natural, therefore, for some of them, after gaining the full value of the skepticism and relativism in the Positivist view, to begin a little mythmaking of their own. It was Pierre Duhem who said:

He [the physicist] will affirm that underneath the observable data, the only data accessible to his methods of study, are hidden realities whose essence cannot be grasped by these same methods, and that these realities are arranged in a certain order which physical science cannot directly contemplate. But he will note that physical theory through its successive advances tends to arrange experimental laws in an order more and more analogous to the transcendent order according to which the realities are classified, that as a result physical theory advances gradually toward its limiting form, namely, that of a *natural classification*, and finally that logical unity is a characteristic without which physical theory cannot claim this rank of natural classification.

In short, the pattern of physical facts is in some way a contrapuntal representation of an ideal order, outlining the inner nature of things. This is as mythic, in its way, as the claims of the alchemists!

The myth-making tendency is as natural to man as breathing, thinking, and loving. It represents the demand of man's nature for unitary conceptions—conceptions which answer our feelings and our synthesizing capacities. Myths do not have to be shallow, narrow, or superstitious. Buddha made no myths of this sort, nor did Jesus. Plato made many myths, none of them corrupting.

What is the hazard of myth-making? A myth is like a flight of the imagination. It is man's effort to penetrate the mystery of being. A myth is a poem with a universal reference. It is "sacred art," in the classical sense.

How shall we distinguish the myth from a mere exercise in fancy? And how shall we know that a myth can be more than this?

Here is the real argument. These questions can be answered only if it be admitted that the force of truth may lie in the grandeur of philosophic conception.

The trouble with the scientific method is that it has habituated modern man to suppose that the truth can be recognized and acknowledged only after it has been speared and nailed to the laboratory door. The result of this scientific dogma has been that little or no attention has been paid to the disciplines by which philosophic truth is recognized in its own terms and for its own value. It is so much easier to jeer at the "myth" and be forty-nine per cent right!

Then, of course, it can be argued that philosophic truth is not "objective" and therefore not worth pursuing, even though it should exist. If you should be lucky enough to find it, or some of it, you can't confine it and make it available to others. Scientific truth grows by accretion to a common body, but philosophic truth grows by ignition in private individuals.

What we are arguing for is the claim that this is the human situation, and that diatribes against "myths" will not change the human situation. All that attacks on the inwardness of symbolic representation will accomplish is to unfit all classes of men for distinguishing between good and bad myths, and this, in turn, will make them vulnerable to the siren appeal of the bad ones.