

## YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN—RUSSIAN VERSION

THE jacket of *A Man Survives* by Vladimir Maximov (translated by Anselm Hollo, Grove Press: 1963) calls this book "The Sensational Soviet Novel about a Russian Rebel without a Cause." It might be argued that Grove Press has more right than any other publisher to describe a hero as a "Rebel without a Cause," since Robert Lindner's book by that name appears under Grove's Evergreen imprint, but the use, once more, of what has become a cliché—the turned-down mouth and knotted brow on the cover, and the general penchant of publishers to tout Russian writers of all stripes (see the ads for Yevtushenko's *A Precocious Autobiography*, a young man with his head thrown back, his mouth wide open, again the knotted brow, his hands in gestures of pleading)—tended to discourage this reader. The back of the jacket is no better; one of two paragraphs quoted from the book begins, "I hate the whole world," and ends with "You can go to hell." We have had enough novels about rebellion which go no further than to demonstrate the symbiosis between the rebel and whatever it is he is rebelling against. Why bother with another expose of the psyche? Now that the reading public has been jaded by apparently unlimited supplies of sex, violence, perversion, narcotically induced and other hallucinations, and simple nonsense, is the search for titillation being pursued into a forbidden area? Is the New Evil going to be the Russian Beats (The Angry Comrades)? This would combine the "best" of two widely disapproved (but fascinating) worlds: the social outcast and the political revolutionary—the evil (but fascinating) other.

*A Man Survives* is a short book (only 106 pages), so, in spite of these misgivings, I read it. The style is stark and abrupt. Only occasionally is there a passage that would be believably "Russian" in the tradition of the great naturalistic writers of that country. The following description brought Turgenev to mind:

I step out on the porch, my school bag under my arm. In front of me are these three steps—I know

them by heart—and from them, dividing our courtyard in two, a well-swept brick path, leading to the gate. As always, as yesterday, thick smoke is rising from the chimneys and smoke stacks, grown to different heights, which surround this flat town of ours, Yuzhnogorsk; as yesterday, the sounds and colors, familiar since childhood days, come flowing toward me from all sides. The cocks crowing, the wash hanging out on the lines above the fence, the fluffy poplar seeds spinning in the air. As yesterday, I'm now on my way to school, and I'll be going there for a long, long time yet, all of three years. But I do know that something inside me has suddenly changed. . . .

More typical is a grim passage reminiscent of Celine:

We are driven from camp to camp, along smoking roads and through the furnace heat of July noons. The roads coat our teeth with gritty dust, and this sends shivers down our spines. We are coughing up these roads again, with a dry, lung-rending cough. We march through towns and villages, and they all look flattened and squat, as if crushed by these atrocious times. The women who watch us pass look dark distressed and mute, like tombstones.

Surprisingly, this novel seems to share certain themes with an apparently completely dissimilar book, Carl Ewald's *My Little Boy / My Big Girl* (Horizon Press). At first glance these two books have nothing in common. Ewald's book is set in the matrix of Danish simplicity and reserve; the protagonists are a young boy, and a girl becoming a woman; the conflicts are psychological and internal—within a richly functioning family life. Maximov's novel is a first-person account of an outcast's misadventures; it is set within the upheaval of World War II and the postwar years in the Russia of hunger, labor camps, and Stalin; the most apparent conflicts are between the narrator and the hostile world in which he finds himself.

There is no family life for Sergei Zarev. Barely in his teens, he runs away from home (after his father is mysteriously arrested) and becomes, in order, a

thief, a smuggler, a prisoner in an SS camp, a murderer, and a runaway from a labor camp. He spends his adolescence in a Nazi prison camp, only to be repatriated for conscription into a Russian forced-labor camp. Ewald's book is characterized by compassionate instruction; Maximov's by hate-filled rebellion.

In spite of these differences, what these two books have in common may be worth exploring. The pivotal character in each book is the father. In *My Little Boy / My Big Girl* the father is the narrator; he is ubiquitous, known, loved, the concerned teacher and friend. The mother and children are not in the background—no one in this family is in the background—but they contribute to, rather than frame, the conflicts and resolutions of the stories, although one might like to have them write a book about the same events. I would suspect that the father would turn out to be the key figure in such accounts; at any rate, Ewald's book is definitely the father's account. At the end of the book, we have no doubt about these children: they have had love, respect, and thoughtful instruction. Nor have we doubts about the parents; they have been able to give these things.

Contrastingly, in Maximov's novel the father is crucially important because he is absent. Sergei Zarev's father is arrested in the first few pages of the novel. The mother's only—and contemptible (according to the boy)—reaction was to tremble; she neither cried (the missing tears were a horror to Sergei), nor tried to stop the men from taking her husband away. The rest of the novel is about the boy's search for a father, and his search for a way to do without a father.

The day after his father is arrested, Sergei abruptly leaves school in the middle of a class. That same day he runs away from home. As he leaves (in the night, of course), he imagines a beautiful native princess on a non-existent south-sea island who will not marry, and who is sad and lonely; she is waiting, as she tells her concerned father, for a "noble young man" named Zarev. This fantasy in reaction to loss is a harbinger of other bold psychological dramas throughout the novel. Maximov does not dilute his perceptions with explanations; he dramatizes. His

characters come alive, often with only a few quick strokes of imagery and insight.

Zarev's search takes him far and wide: physically and psychologically. His hate and bitterness increase; his real and symbolic deprivations increase; he cannot find a father. The deprivations build, one on the other. His hate turns inward, and Maximov's descriptions of masochism—its delusions of power and its destructiveness—are succinct and accurate. Sergei's "boss" in a smuggling enterprise is a sadistic power who frightens the boy, but to whom he is attracted.

I make up for my feeling of powerlessness before my boss by a hidden hatred. And I'm keeping books. I really hope Albert Ivanovitch will settle, one fine day. . . . it may seem that I've given in: but I'm not forgetting a thing. All I have to do is remember . . . and I'm flooded with anger. In those moments I'm ready to kill him. But let me meet his glance and in an instant I withdraw, I am quenched. . . . Three years is a long time, especially for me. But during this time, I was not able to guess who my boss was: who was he, why was he doing this? The mystery is simply beyond me. As at the time of our first meeting, Albert Ivanovitch frightens me and attracts me, like an abandoned house.

The one acceptable substitute for his father he finds is a small-time politician—a furrier from Moscow—whom he comes to know in a Nazi prison camp. Semyon Semyonovitch confronts Sergei with a new search:

—You accuse men? But have you been living among *men*? You believe real men to be the same as the scum you've known. Your Albert Ivanovitch was simply a Czarist officer who got away with it, his brain probably half rotten with syphilis anyway. . . . You can't stand those in power? Is a jailer, a turnkey, your idea of the power of the Soviet Union? I've been there too, I've been in jail, and I know it isn't sweet. But after seven years there were people who went to the trouble of seeking me out—of taking up my case, of getting me acquitted and rehabilitated! I'm no big shot, I'm a simple furrier. But so there *are* good men, so there *is* justice! And you ask me why I enlisted: well then, I enlisted because it is my country, my own country I can feel under the soles of my feet.

But during a forced march a guard kills Semyonovitch while he is trying to get water for

Sergei, who is delirious with malaria. This event substantiates an already overwhelming load of Oedipal guilt. The search for a father is a collective theme for many human expressions. It involves not only the search for a mentor, but also the search for expiation and forgiveness of guilt originating in the Oedipal drama. The arrest of his father perpetuated and re-emphasized a process underscoring this guilt. Later in the story, after the death of Semyon Semyonovitch, when Sergei is reminded of his friend in an unguarded moment, this guilt overwhelms him; he cannot use what Semyon Semyonovitch said and lived; this terrifying confrontation contains the prediction of the tragedy which ends the novel.

Food and warmth take effect on me. I feel drowsy. I close my eyes. The thin film that separates dream from reality, thin like a razor's edge, now sticks in my throat in the shape of a question I had long forgotten: "You accuse men; but have you really been living among men?"

I cry out, inside myself, a wild and frantic yell to drown these noises of my soul: "Don't you try to indoctrinate me Semyon Semyonovitch, cut that propaganda out, I'm telling you cut it out! My blood is freezing as it is. . . ."

After the war, and before he is impressed into a labor camp, he returns to Yuzhnogorsk. This interlude in his search is remarkably similar to those of Thomas Wolfe's characters who are always trying—without success—to return to the towns of their childhood. And, as has been repeatedly pointed out, Wolfe's life and writing are primarily concerned with his search for his father, and for what his father came to mean to him. The irony—the tragedy of compulsion—is that while both Wolfe and Sergei Zarev seemed to know that "you can't go home again," they both still kept trying to do so.

I couldn't help getting off at this station. Acting against the most elementary laws of the vagabond tribe, against all good sense, I am indeed getting off at this station! And here I am, standing on the station square, facing my home town, without really recognizing it. It is no more the Yuzhnogorsk of yesterday, of the years before the war. Beyond the rustling acacia trees I can see the new thoroughfares of the new city with its new houses, new colors, new smells. . . .

At nightfall I am still rambling through unfamiliar streets, trying to find at least a trace, however small, of my childhood scrutinizing the faces of people that pass. But at the crossings the utterly faceless streets of this town escape me, they run away in all directions, away from me. Only by Khytrov pool do I hit upon a tiny island of the past. . . .

After that I take a long rest. I lie on the grass below the railroad embankment, the back of my head cushioned on my palms. I've stopped thinking. In fact, it seems to me now that there never was such a thing as my childhood in this town, that it was all a dream. There is no earthly evidence for it whatsoever; so, probably, there never was one.

He takes the next freight train out of town. On this train he meets a young man who is joining his father!

Sergei Zarev ends his story (and his search?) in an infirmary where he is being treated for injuries sustained in an escape from a labor camp. The people taking care of him do not know that he is a runaway; he believes that if they find out who he is, they will hate him, perhaps abandon him. The novel is a compilation of fantasies, flash-backs, and memory fragments the boy has as he waits for a doctor. The doctor is away in another village. Because of a severe snow storm, there is no way to reach him—the lines of communication are down. A man goes into the storm to get the doctor for Sergei Zarev. The doctor finally arrives, but he has not seen the man who went for him.

After Sergei is out of danger, the volunteer is found dead from exposure. This death triggers the boy's building, unrelieved guilt; he capitulates in the face of these internal and external threats. His search ends and it seems that no new search will follow. He accepts an identity found in confession, in passivity; not from within, but from without; not on his terms, but at the mercy of the forces he has been resisting for years.

And now I know the meaning of this silence. I know who is lying there [the volunteer]. I want to put an end to this silence, it is as intolerable as a continuous, piercing scream. And I cry out, with grief, with shame, with the unspeakable:

—Aaaaaaaahhhhh. . . .

Hands reach out, pick me up, carry me back toward the warm air. I keep my eyes shut, I am afraid of seeing their faces. But each word I hear myself saying is like a stone rolling off my shoulders:

—I'm a runaway. My name is Zarev. Sergei Zarev. Sergei Alexeyevitch.

The search for a father is a major theme of our time (covering the gamut from Philip Wylie's *A Generation of Vipers* to Erik Erikson's *Young Man Luther*), and perhaps of all time. Oedipus was, after all, looking for his identity, for his birthright, for his real father (the bearer of his name). The questions framed by this search lead in many directions: where are the fathers? can young people find an identity without having been "fathered"? does the search mask realities which would be difficult to confront? For Oedipus, "finding" his father was also discovering that he was guilty of patricide and of incest. Given the risks, exploration of the search for a father may be a valuable and flexible lens for a variety of penetrations.

It is unfortunate that books like *Rebel without a Cause* and *A Man Survives* are often dismissed as novels of the case history, or as novels for adolescents. It is fashionable these days to make jokes about Thomas Wolfe's real and alleged pathologies. But it is too easy—and limiting—to slough off these representations of the search for a father, to apply handy psychological labels to them and forget them. These books should be read—if for no other reason—as contributions, in literary form, to our understanding of the long and continuous human search for meaning, for ideals for viable identity. The child searching for a father is, at least in part, searching for the best the world has to offer. There is hope in such a search, and hope, too, that the search will eventually be directed back to regions within the searcher.

Elements of the search for a father are part of the personality of the most healthy child. The children in Carl Ewald's *My Little Boy / My Big Girl* are searching. But unlike Sergei Zarev, their search will probably continue as a symbolic and open-ended evolution, from which they will be able to forge themselves and remake parts of their worlds. Having had a real father, they will not have to insist

on—and thereby limit and truncate their search—a symbiotic relationship with a single person: a relationship supported and shot-through with hate, guilt, and fear. The body of thought, the ideas, exemplified by *My Little Boy / My Big Girl*, and by some schools (Summerhill, for example) are obvious, basic solutions—beginning-places—which would help children grow into adults who would be able to handle, direct, and use their searches. Sergei Zarev would have had alternatives to his capitulation, if he had had something comparable in his background.

But the feelings and ideas revolving around books like *My Little Boy / My Big Girl* and schools like Summerhill are only partly suggestive of solutions to the problems surrounding the search for a father. Of more pressing and prerequisite need are designs to encourage and aid adults so that their energies and aspirations may be directed toward becoming the sort of people who would spontaneously create and support schools like Summerhill, and who would live experiences like those of the family in Ewald's book, not just read about them. Such people would find ways, create a civilization, in which such schools and such experiences would take hold and flourish.

The facts and designs of love, compassion, concern, and understanding have been part of human knowledge for thousands of years; their perpetuation has defined generations of the highest order of courage. What is not known is how to direct a generation of deprived children—grown into a parody of adulthood—toward a maturity useful and fecund for themselves and their children. What is not known is how to implement these facts of human knowledge without people who have themselves been children raised in just such an environment, by the kind of parents they will themselves have to become. It seems inevitable that the parents in one generation will have to simultaneously sustain deprivation and transform themselves, so that they can provide the parents in the generation that follows them with what they have not had themselves: love, compassion, concern, and understanding. In short, what other possibilities were available to Sergei Zarev; what alternatives to capitulation are real and

available to the generation which will assume the responsibility of personal transformations?

The search for a father may be resolved in three ways, at least. The search may continue not a resolution, really. The multifarious forms of the sado-masochistic polarity are readily available to take up and perpetuate the energies of the search. Despair and atrophy—and their resultant self-limitations—flood and dominate the personality. A father is found, again and again. This way one not only can't go home again; one can never really create a new home of one's own. This way is, at best, a way of delaying a final solution. It is more flexible than capitulation, but it is indistinguishable from capitulation if it becomes a mode of life.

Another way, Sergei Zarev's, is to submit to the internal and external threats produced by the search, the self-made and the world's pressures and delusions, cruelties and perversions. This is the way of the convert; confession is followed by initiation. Responsibility for one's self is given up; guilt is defined by others, not by one's self. One is so afraid of being submerged internally, that one seeks fusion externally; one makes of himself a gift to another (person, institution, religion, ideology). He kills that part of himself that screams by smothering it. To retrieve himself, when and if he can, would mean the resurrection of his murdered self, and the horrible confrontation which made the capitulation necessary in the first place.

The third way, the rare way—our best hope—is in what sometimes happens in the moment after the end of the search but before capitulation. This is the moment when the search for a father has collapsed—when the guilt, hate, and fear are in chaos in every corner of the brain, and the world's blind force, madness, casual cruelty, and inanity are undeniable—and before capitulation is absolutely necessary. This "moment between" may hold the key to human physical and psychological survival. Recognizing that remarkable—even unbelievable—changes can take place in this "moment between" is only a matter of studying the lives of men whom we often call "great," men who somehow prevailed in that moment (really many moments). To know that many more fail in that moment (or never reach it) is

only a matter of looking—not just at the statistics on crime and mental illness—around in the course of a day at the people one knows (and at one's self).

In that crucial "moment between"—perhaps a truly holy moment—one has an opportunity to die and be reborn. This psychological death is educative; it is reversible; it may contain analogies to physical death: a hint and a rehearsal. If one can sustain the anxiety of the unknown long enough, answers boil up out of one's precarious chaos: wordless answers that fill every dimension of one's being with wonder, freedom, and the seeds of a new search.

The new search is the search for a father fulfilled in the dynamism of searching—searching for the boundaries of a self-defined and self-actualizeable maturity, for one's own emerging parenthood, for all one's milling potentialities. And the child who was never "fathered" has a way to become a father (or a mother). The new search redirects the diversified and conflicting energies of the individual. The child's search for a father can be transformed into the adult's search for himself.

WILLIAM MATHES

San Francisco

## *REVIEW*

### SCIENCE AND MAN

THE *Nation* for Jan. 4 (as once before, at Christmas time in 1956) devotes very nearly its entire issue to an essay by J. Bronowski. This one is called "The Abacus and the Rose," the title being taken from some verses with which the writer concludes, meaning that the proper practice of science is sufficient to make an entire culture. That is, there need not be *two* cultures (as C. P. Snow would have it): the scientific counter and measurer can also thrill in response to the rose; he rejects "the feud of eye and intellect." Mr. Bronowski's earlier essay, "Science and Human Values," eventually brought out by Harper as a paperback, had much the same burden, and while we tried to find something fresh in the present contribution, it did not appear.

What Mr. Bronowski does do is put together a dialogue which, by its consummate literary skill and astonishing insight into nuance and foible, is practically certain to delight all his readers, even severely critical ones. The scene is a Swiss restaurant, the characters three Englishmen: one, an urbane member of the Establishment; another, a classical Humanist; the third an ardent practitioner of science. They finally focus on the old question of whether mankind is *really* better off because of scientific advance and the material bounty of technology. The argument is conducted with such finesse that the reader feels somewhat shy about entering in. Here, we shall call attention to some questions which were not raised, but surely ought to have been.

When, for example, the Humanist argues against "the idol of technical advance," the Scientist mocks him for opposing "hygiene" and for indifference to the liberation of the poor from economic bondage. Mr. Bronowski could have given his Humanist more and better words; perhaps these, from Ortega's *Toward a Philosophy of History*:

When naturalist reason studies man it seeks, in consistence with itself, to reveal his nature. It observes that man has a body, which is a thing, and hastens to submit it to physics; and since this body is also an organism, it hands it over to biology. It observes further that in man as in animals there functions a certain mechanism incorporeally, confusedly attached to the body, the psychic mechanism, which is also a thing, and entrusts its study to psychology, a natural science. But the fact is that this has been going on for three hundred years and that all the naturalist studies on man's body and soul put together have not been of the slightest use in throwing light on any of our most strictly human feelings, on what each individual calls his own life, that life which, intermingling with others, forms societies, that in their turn, persisting, make up human destiny. The prodigious achievement of natural science in the direction of the knowledge of things contrasts brutally with the collapse of this same natural science when faced with the strictly human element. . . .

The Humanist might then have called another witness, this time a scientist. The witness is Edwin Grant Conklin, distinguished biologist, and the testimony is taken from his 1937 address as retiring president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. His subject, the impact of science on society, has obvious pertinence to this debate. He said:

In spite of a few notable exceptions, it must be confessed that scientists did not win the freedom which they have generally enjoyed, and they have not been conspicuous in defending that freedom when it has been threatened. Perhaps they have lacked that confidence in absolute truth and that emotional exaltation that have led martyrs and heroes to welcome persecution and death in defense of their faith. . . . The scientist realizes that his knowledge is relative and not absolute, he conceives it possible that he may be mistaken, and he is willing to wait in confidence that ultimately truth will prevail. . . .

The scientist's knowledge is indeed relative. It is concerned with "objects," and the number and extent of objects are plainly infinite in all directions. So *of course* his knowledge is relative. What the Humanist is concerned with is *subjects*, although here, again, our knowledge is relative, if knowledge is a quantitative affair. But there are

nonetheless some absolutes for the conscious subjects who are men. There are certain things which men know they must do, whether or not all the facts are in. A man knows that he becomes less than a man when his conduct fails to be consistent with his convictions. This is the image of man we obtain from philosophy. It is different from the image the scientists have to offer, which is an image of a thing found in the world. The argument of the Humanist is or ought to be that when the practice of science is allowed to displace or make light of the practice of philosophy, things go wrong with man, no matter how well we get on with and in the world.

But why, after all, is this argument made to sound so important? Science has obvious value. That is not the question. The question concerns the value, and the values, of man. A debate about Humanism versus Science is as silly as the war between the generations or between the men and the women. Why is Science a cult that must be defended against all comers? How did it get to be something "special"?

"Science," according to Morris Cohen, "may be distinguished from ordinary common-sense knowledge by the rigour with which it subordinates all other considerations to the pursuit of the ideal of certainty, exactness, universality, and system."

Manifestly, the products of science will depend upon its focus—on *where* it looks for "certainty." Until now the focus of science has been on the external world. As Dr. Einstein put it: "The belief in an external world independent of the percipient subject is the foundation of all science." If we accept this definition, it follows that the internal world—the world "of the percipient subject"—is not included in the scope of scientific inquiry. How then, as Mr. Bronowski's advocate urges, can science be a "complete culture"? The claim is incomprehensible, and argument based upon it cannot be anything but barren. It is not enough to insist that scientists are "creative," that they have

the souls of poets, and to demonstrate it with some excellent verse.

Conceivably, although we are not sure, what is being contended in this paper is that all truths worth knowing are "public" truths, and if they cannot be made public, they are not truths. If this is what Mr. Bronowski is saying, then we are in the presence of a jurisdictional dispute. The scientific union wants to be accepted as the only institution that can go to work in the factories of "truth." Or, he may be making a last, desperate attempt to preserve the very idea of "objectivity" and "certainty." For if there are nonpublic truths, then the hard ground of fact will give way to the morass of "mysticism," or investigators will have to learn how to go aloft into the trackless airs of metaphysics, and what will then happen to the union label? How can scientists back one another in such affairs? It will be like having Nazi physics and Soviet genetics!

In conclusion, we should say that Mr. Bronowski is a practicing scientist of distinction, and, as the *Nation* remarks, a man of letters. The reader of this essay will not need any assurances of his skill as a writer. One wishes only that he were not so devilish clever! He almost brings it off.

## **COMMENTARY ON GROWING UP**

THE "father," in William Mathes' essay-in-review of Maximov's *A Man Survives*, is the child's not-yet-found self, the image of competent maturity and capacity to cope with the world and its problems. What can we do for these children who, because they *are* children, are not yet ready to encounter the essential loneliness of being human; who cannot understand, much less undertake, the Promethean errand of life?

The merciless indifference of the State is no adequate substitute for parental affection and regard; this we know, without the zeal of American publishers to press the lesson home in the words of a *Russian* novelist; nor does a clueless environment of plentiful self-indulgence help, when parents abdicate their role, relinquishing authority to the sovereignty of the teen-age subculture. Nor, again, will the desperate stoicism of the Existentialists serve the tender young; this is a philosophy for men still able to arise from battlefields of destruction; it is itself a kind of heroism, and not a school for getting the strength one needs to be a hero.

As Mathes says:

It seems inevitable that the parents in one generation will have to simultaneously sustain deprivation and transform themselves, so that they can provide the parents in the generation that follows them with what they have not had themselves: love, compassion, concern, and understanding.

There is a sense in which this requires of us no more than to be, simply, healthy human beings. In A. H. Maslow's *Toward a Psychology of Being*, there is a chapter-title, "Health as Transcendence of Environment." This is to say that the individual who is no more than an off-print of his environment—whether a good or a bad environment does not *really* matter—can make no claim to being a healthy human being.

The school, then, and the family conceived as an environment for education, are places where, in

the course of growing up, the child picks up miscellaneous information; but most of all they are places where he learns to test his capacity for independent decision, under the eye of those who, by reason of their own maturity, know that there is no other way of growing up, and that, by comparison with the disaster of *not* growing up, the risks are actually quite small. This, truly, is the lesson of all our psychology, all our political experience, all our ideological soul-searching. The only system we need is a system which has this view of human development as its guiding star.

# CHILDREN

## . . . and Ourselves

### TEEN-AGE TYRANNY

SINCE a number of people might have chosen this title for "view-with-alarm" castigations of teenagers, readers may join us in being glad that the book is written by Grace and Fred Hechinger (William Morrow, 1963). Mr. Hechinger is Education Editor of the *New York Times*, and his wife has worked for the Ford Foundation and at Brandeis University. Neither of them is a tirade type, nor, so far as we know, a partisan of any embattled school of educationist thought. The introduction states the thesis of their book:

We do not want to be cantankerous. But we strongly believe that, for reasons to be documented in the succeeding chapters, American civilization tends to stand in such awe of its teen-age segment that it is in danger of becoming a teen-age society, with permanently teen-age standards of thought, culture and goals. As a result, American society is growing down rather than growing up.

This is a creeping disease, not unlike hardening of the arteries. It is a softening of adulthood. It leads to immature goals in music, art and literature. It forces newspapers, television producers and movie-makers to translate the adult English usage into the limited vocabulary of the teen-culture. It opens up vast opportunities for commercial exploitation and thereby sets off a chain reaction which constantly strengthens teen-age tyranny. It is a tyranny that dominates most brutally the teen-agers themselves.

It is not new to say that the "nonconformity" of the typical teen-ager is itself an ultimate in conformism, but the point is well made by the Hechingers:

In the absence of the security of knowledge, students substitute fads for more normal independent action. On the surface, these fads—from unconventional dress to obscure language—may appear to be the essence of nonconformity. In fact, they are not, quite the contrary, they are conformity reduced to absurdity. For while the teen-age fads, often totally incomprehensible to the adult world, may seem distinguished by their daring difference from society, this is an illusion. Since teen-age society is a

fortress unto itself, the fad within it is as solid in its conformity as the behavior of the most housebroken Organization Man in suburbia. These adolescent conformists have been trained in their own subculture to do the bidding of the group. They will emerge as the perfect replacements of their conforming elders.

The clue to the antidote should be plain from even a cursory look at teen-age society today. Who are the true nonconformists among this subculture? Not the "activity girls" or the cheer-leaders, not the beatniks, conforming to shabby obscurantism, nor the hot-rodders. The nonconforming teenagers are those with strong interests, those who have competed in the sciences and languages and the arts and, having built the foundation of self-confidence, have the strength to set their own pace and break out of the confinement of their peer-dominated subculture.

One wonders, of course, about the necessity of *competition* for the development of an autonomous young person. While on the present scene, this may often seem to be the case, we should rather say that the evolutionary involvement of the mind of a youth in the discipline of serious thought is the touchstone of value. On the subject of "freedom versus religion," the Hechingers write:

In the early days of the liberal education reforms at the University of Chicago, the story goes, a student's father complained to the dean that he could not understand why undergraduates were told exactly what courses they had to take while they were permitted to be absent from classes and lectures as much as they pleased. He accused the University of being inconsistent. The dean replied that freedom is not an absolute commodity. To be free, an individual must understand the privileges he is given. An undergraduate, he concluded, could not possibly be expected to know what parts of the classics, which aspects of mathematics and what teachings of philosophy would turn out to be most essential to his liberal education—and so he needed the guiding hand of those who had read and experienced more than he. But this same student could be expected to be experienced and mature enough to know how important it is for him to be present in class. Hence, giving him freedom to determine his conduct was by no means inconsistent with the relative lack of freedom in selecting his courses.

The latest perspectives of child psychologists are hardly needed to make it plain that the young

expect and require a measure of authority. The infant, certainly, is not capable of making all decisions regarding his own welfare nor does he want to. Small children verging on tantrums will often stop when they are held tightly; they find security in having some larger power or intelligence render them temporarily immobile. The adolescent, any adolescent, respects genuine authority—which has nothing to do with his vital need for areas of "freedom."

As the Hechingers point out, the "athletic aristocracy" in the typical high school respects authority and discipline as it relates to sports, while at home the same teen-agers may not have been presented with authority in a way that makes its value come through clear and strong. Most teen-agers, because their reflexes and physical strength are not extraordinary, do not even have the benefit of athletic discipline. Like the athletes, they seek excitement, but gain it vicariously, and this often leads to destructive mischief.

An appalling example of non-motivated delinquency reached the headlines in San Francisco in 1961, when some middle-class boys were finally tracked down and arrested after a fourteen-month persecution of a Jewish couple. The choice of the victims was entirely incidental—one of the gang remembered that the couple had protested the noise of his motorcycle in front of their house. The group began by making acrimonious phone calls, sometimes threatening, sometimes obscene. The Jewish couple's car had its tires slashed; paint was dumped on it; and finally it was burned. With great hilarity these teen-agers made a succession of telephone calls which resulted in the appearance of ambulances, television repair men, and finally a hearse. Funny? This went on for fourteen months, until the hapless victims were afraid to leave their home. Worst of all was that part of the vandalism and many of the phone calls were made by new arrivals in the group who had no idea of the origin of the "campaign." When interviewed by the police, the stock excuse was simply, "We had

nothing better to do." The recital of this case in *Teen-age Tyranny* is called "Indigestion through Affluence." In this context the Hechingers discuss the TV entertainment featuring surly and even sadistic teen-age "heroes"—an example being a script titled "A Lion Walks Among Us," in which a pouting Fabian confounds every conceivable standard of adult behavior.

To repeat, the Hechingers are not resentful of teen-agers, but of adult irresponsibility which allows such teen-agers to distort so seriously their own emotional lives. They say in conclusion:

For several decades now, the most insecure and most immature members of adult society have permitted, often in the name of self-expression and pseudo psychology, the most insecure and most immature adolescents to establish their own independent and sovereign culture: teen-age. The task now is to make it clearly understood that adolescence is a stage of human development, not an empire or even a colony. The mission of the adult world is to help teen-agers become adults by raising their standards and values to maturity rather than by lowering adulthood to their insecure immaturity. The task for the adult world is to make adolescence a step toward growing up, not a privilege to be exploited.

## *FRONTIERS*

### Existentialism Revisited

[This article, a critique of an essay by Joseph Wood Krutch in the *Saturday Review*, is by Dr. Frederick Mayer, professor of the Humanities at the University of Redlands. The discussion makes occasion for remarking that Existentialism is more of a temper than a doctrine, and that its influence seems to intensify affirmation and give focus to despair, at the same time. This paradoxical effect may be chiefly responsible for the great stimulus found in Existentialist thinking. Viktor Frankl, for instance, provides striking affirmation concerning the noëtic aspect of the human "soul," yet his Existentialist assumptions for psychiatry arise from the personal experience of a Nazi death camp. It follows that the successful characterization of Existentialism through generalization is hardly possible. After reading this article in manuscript, Mr. Krutch remarked, disarmingly: "There are so many different interpretations of Existentialism and many of them are so vague that for all I know I may be one myself. But I think that some who call themselves Existentialists are properly characterized in my article and I still disagree with them."—Editors.]

IN an article in the *Saturday Review*, Joseph Wood Krutch remarked that "the image of man which existentialism projects is about as contemptible as possible. It is, in fact, the latest and apparently the ultimate stage in the progressive degradation of man."

Existentialism, contrary to this view, stresses the possibilities of man, his freedom and uniqueness, and his paradoxical place in the universe. Man, as Pascal observed so wisely, is situated midway between the infinitesimal and the infinite. His life is dominated by tensions. On the one hand, he is a creator, on the other hand he is a destroyer. As he becomes aware of the preciousness and uniqueness of existence, he is filled at the same time by a sense of dread regarding death.

Existentialism is the mirror of man, of his frailties and his triumphs, his failures and his achievements, his ideas and his emotions, his solitariness and his search for relatedness, his faith

and his denial of faith, his callousness and his compassion, his being and his nothingness, his finiteness and his striving for transcendence. Existentialism does not submerge man in a larger essence; it does not regard him as a manifestation of the Absolute; it does not explain away the evils of life or dissolve them in a scheme of metaphysical perfection. Existentialism deals with the primary concerns of man such as the sense of life and the sense of death and makes these concerns the center of the philosophic enterprise.

Existentialism thus cannot be defined in formal terms. It is opposed to all forms of abstractionism. Indeed, Gabriel Marcel, one of the most brilliant contemporary existentialists, feels that it is his main function as a thinker to be a critic of abstractions. Existentialism looks to concreteness, to the interior aspects of experience.

To be deliberately subjective means that we realize that we construct our own universe and that our world is different from the world of anyone else. Self-awareness in this sense becomes an overture to uniqueness. It cannot be analyzed; it can only be grasped in intuitive terms.

Existentialism places intuition above reason, becoming over static being, awareness over analysis, subjectivity over objectivity, anguish over contentment, time over space, paradox over coherent truth, wisdom over knowledge, and, most important, man over the external universe.

Existentialism thus, as is well known, reverses a traditional viewpoint in philosophy. When Descartes stated that I think therefore I am, he implied that man's reason defined his existence. Existentialism instead believes that man's existence precedes his reason and that reason is only a frail superstructure for man's emotional life. Man exists in a situational way. He exists at one time in a certain place; he is threatened by non-being. His entire life thus is an encounter with nothingness.

Critics of existentialism, like Krutch, have pointed to the "nihilistic nature of existentialism."

The genuine existentialist would not object too much to this criticism, for he realizes that nothingness has both a personal and a cosmic meaning. As Jaspers remarked: "I must die, I must suffer; I must struggle; I must involve myself inexorably in guilt." Jaspers shows that man faces ultimate situations which he cannot evade. An atheistic existentialist, like Sartre, describes how life is an interlude in the ocean of nothingness. In the atomic age we are all conscious of the possibility of total destruction—an awareness which gives us a sense of desperation and at the same time a sense of the dignity of life.

Nihilism depends on perspective. To the detached observer it means pure negation; to the existential participant it is like an experience of nirvana, a negation which leads to a more meaningful affirmation. To read, for example, novels like *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Farewell to Arms*, is to be impressed at the same time by the starkness and inevitability of death and the sweetness of life.

Krutch condemns existentialism not only for its nihilism but also for its cynical view of man. Like many academic thinkers he looks upon existentialism as a thoroughly immoral philosophy.

Actually, this charge is unfounded. To be sure, existentialism has no place for conventional morality. Undoubtedly, a conformist will be shocked by certain passages in Sartre's *Nausea* or in Camus' *The Fall*. Sartre in his description of love goes into physiological detail. He is conscious that behind the veil of love is either a *sadistic* or a *masochistic* attitude. We either want to conquer our beloved and make her an object to be dominated or we become serfs to someone else's desires and moods. Camus shows that in love there is an immense amount of self-gratification. He describes with penetration the feeling of a lawyer after he has seen his mistress; how his entire system now is tranquil and serene and at the same time how he feels a sense of detachment and objectivity.

Such descriptions may be incompatible with ordinary morality and with the abstractions of conventional thinkers, but they illuminate man's most significant drives and they give a new clarity to his values.

Existentialism in a sense is an extremely moral philosophy. It calls for commitment, for a way of life. Merely to theorize is inadequate. Merely to describe the universe is a superficial occupation. Just to use the method of analysis is to remain an outsider, alien to the realities of life. Existentialism calls for action through which we become pilgrims of inwardness and through which we realize a new significance.

Marcel uses the term testimony to indicate man's need for commitment. When we give testimony we reveal the innermost foundations of our subjectivity and, at the same time, are conscious of an order which exists beyond us. Testimony means that we live by the realities in which we believe; it implies that knowledge has become an urgent necessity to us and has been appropriated by us and that truth is a secret profession rather than an abstraction to be dissected.

Critics like Krutch have pointed out that existentialism is an extremely pessimistic philosophy. This indictment is valid if we believe in a philosophy of extreme optimism, that this is the best of all possible worlds, and that goodness automatically will triumph in the universe.

The central themes of Heidegger's work *Being and Time* are anguish and death—subjects which have been ignored by orthodox philosophers. Heidegger points out that unless man develops a genuine *concern*, life will have little authentic meaning. Man has the choice of being preoccupied with triviality or with major preconceptions; he can cultivate his own individuality and find a genuine community of ideas or he can live like a philistine, forever struggling on the surface and forever dominated by fear of "the others." To Sartre and to Camus, the underground is a symbol of man's genuine

morality. When we belong to the underground we are defiant rebels; at any moment our life may come to a violent end. The question is: Will we remain true to our beliefs? Will we keep the secrets of our comrades or will we break under torture? Thus we understand Sartre's viewpoint that "in choosing we choose for all." This implies real responsibility, not an evasion of our obligations.

In short, existentialism points to a *new* morality, to a transvaluation of values. The immoral man is the Pharisee who is smug and self-satisfied, whose benevolence is only a mask for lethargy. Morality in existentialism implies a recognition of finiteness. The existentialist says in effect: *I do not want to become an object. I do not want to be a machine. I do not want to live a conventional life. I realize that this experience, this moment is unique and hence I want to exploit it to the fullest. I have a sense of guilt which is ontological in its nature, for I will never explore completely my own potentialities and the possibilities of life. I am conscious that I must make awesome choices which involve my total being and that the end may not give me greater certainty but more awesome and agonizing uncertainty.*

This attitude has important implications in education, religion, and philosophy. Real education is not concerned with formulas and standards; real religion implies a personal relationship with the principle of reality; real philosophy is wisdom applied to the turmoil of experience. Genuine education, genuine religion, and genuine philosophy rest upon existential experiences which are the foundations of culture and the bases of man's moral emancipation and moral enlightenment.

FREDERICK MAYER

Redlands, Calif.