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THE SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

SINCE so much is written, these days, in behalf of the individual, and against the state—or against some form of repressive or restrictive organization—there should be some value in looking at the other side of the ledger. For this purpose, and to do the idea of organization full justice, we should press the consideration beyond the more obvious uses of organization. It is not enough to speak of what may be called the *E Pluribus Unum* advantages, nor will the protective shield afforded to individuals by large-scale organization exhaust the subject. There are aspects of behavior and psychological needs of the individual which seem to require the existence and reality of the group, and it is by no means certain that these should invariably be read off as "weaknesses."

One difficulty of all such investigations lies in the oversimplification of all-or-nothing criticisms. We have an example of this in the anti-religious temper of nineteenth-century rationalism, which found its most aggressive expression in angry political atheism. Only today, after more than half a century of bitter conflict between contemptuous "free-thought" and self-satisfied Christianity, are we beginning to see that both extremes have been at fault; and that the delay in this recognition is in part responsible for the terrible impasse of the Cold War; once moralizing oversimplifications become frozen into self-righteous political dogmas, the disaster of war is very hard to avoid.

The anarchists, too, have their difficulties with this sort of criticism. So we get distinctions (no doubt proper ones) between the State and government, between administrative function and the notion of "sovereignty," since, even in an ideal anarchist society, there will be over-all tasks that must be planned and fulfilled by some kind of organization. In almost every case, the hateful word is "authority," since it is authority, and not the effective function of organization, which has been abused.

The same problem exists in relation to a large area of social criticism. There are those who insist that the word "patriotism" has no longer any constructive meaning, mainly because it is so closely associated with the reactionary psychology of Nationalism. A certain emotional splendor attaches to uncompromising iconoclasm toward social forms which have been the agency for so much bloodshed. There is probably some kind of law which determines the mood or the extremes of revolutionary action: beyond a certain point in tyranny and brutality, Nihilism becomes emotionally acceptable, with total razing of the past a kind of "spiritual" obligation. In mythic terms, this is the theory of progress by *Götterdämmerung*—by universal cleansing with a destruction that is supposed to make all things new. It has expression today in the ideas of the extremists of both Communism and anti-Communism.

But, it will be said, there is a long passage of development, with ideological trimmings added on the way, from the human group to the Nation-State. This is certainly the case; our only rejoinder is that the distortions and politicalizations of the meaning of the group must not be allowed to hide the importance of its legitimate functions, nor to prevent our wondering how these functions might have developed, had they been permitted to grow to maturity in another psychological (or philosophical) environment. These are questions we wish to pursue here. A passage from the letter of a reader may serve to open up the subject:

> Now what about power?
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> Power obviously belongs to society, however much individuals may desire it. My question is, Can society aspire to anything other than power?

Well, in what activities (in which power has no role) do people need society, the "society," that is, of other people?

The most familiar activity that we pursue together—necessary, desirable, and humanly fulfilling—is education. *Education has no use for power*. Education takes place only when power is absent. Education, we may say, has for its end the leading out and the training of the rational faculties and the stimulation of the intuitive faculties. It is an end in itself, and not a means to other ends (except subordinately, as, for example, for the end of "good citizenship"). Why is power always absent when education takes place? Because all true learning is voluntary.

Probably education has been named first in this series because it is embodied in an omnipresent institution. The schools are everywhere wherever there are children. But looking at education more broadly, we might say that "communication" is its informal or unorganized expression. The man who does not communicate is hardly human. We need to speak and write to others. The human community is made up of people in communication with one another. Again, power has no role, and for the same reasons.

Then there is the practice of the arts. Power can do nothing but blight the arts. One who sings wants to sing freely for others and with others. So with those who write, act, dance, paint, sculpt, or perform with instruments. For these human interchanges, the community—society—is essential.

There is the quest for truth, in both its scientific and its religious aspects. Here, although in different forms, there are findings and sharings of findings. Power, in these relationships, is completely ridiculous, yet society, or some kind of social organization, is essential. It is essential for the communication, for comparison and evaluation, and to devise the practical instrumentalities which are needed in these pursuits. We require libraries, lecture halls, laboratories, and organs of publication.

For very nearly everything that men do in furtherance of their humanity, society is needed, and power must be excluded.

Now it is quite impossible to list such vital human conjunctions of the individual with society without becoming obsessed by the haunting presence of their corruption by intrusions of power. But let us, before examining the intrusions, admit the principle: In all these relationships, society is a necessity and power has no place.

But the intrusions do come. Were it not for them, the regions of public assembly, for the concourse of large and small groups, would be sacred places. They would be pervaded by the atmosphere of realization and discovery. They would be cherished and cared for by all, with feelings akin to reverence and joy.

But our public places are not like that. They wear the stain of indifference and public apathy. A little dignity remains, but mostly they smell of fear and bribery and jealous privilege. Power, asked for, taken, in the name of the public good, has brought this about. The limited systems of rationalism practiced in the legislatures and the courts are hemmed in, surrounded and infected by the cynicism and irrationalism of power—power in the name of the evil that men will do if not prevented—in the name of the partisan righteousness of faction and party. This power has only one justification—the enforcement of the good; yet everywhere it brings anything but good. We do not understand the mechanism of this corruption of our social life by power, but we are beginning to learn that the corruption worked by power is a fact.

Ring a school house with a circle of men with guns; what will the children learn, now? Explain to them that it is to keep out the bad teachers who give false instruction: will the children learn their lessons any better for hearing this? In the

presence of power and the instruments of power, human functions wither and die. The fault lies, as Karl Menninger said recently, in "a philosophy that replies to violence with violence and that encourages the idea that crime plus punishment equals zero."

What happens to men who adopt this "philosophy"? What sort of conceptions of the good produce this kind of thinking and this practical social result? Years ago, Dr. Alan Gregg made some remarks on "conformity" which apply here:

> I think you are in the problem or area of something that has interested me for a long time, namely, the distinction between the Greek idea of virtue and the Roman idea of morality. The Greek idea of virtue is an extraordinarily simple one. It was that your conduct be consistent with your convictions. The Roman idea of morality was that your conduct be that which is expected of your station in society, your age, maybe your sex, but, at any rate, your station in society and what is expected of you. It takes only a moment's reflection to realize that you can be virtuous without being moral and you can also be moral without being virtuous.

The evil of the State lies precisely here: it tends to subordinate the virtue of the individual to the morality of smooth political function; and, in the last analysis, smooth political function is held to depend upon power. From the viewpoint of the State, the remedy for the failure of power is always *more* power, until, finally, all the schools are encircled by men with guns. The corruption thus accomplished is very nearly ultimate, since now, by a marriage of extremes, the virtue of the individual must become political also, in the form of anarchist, when not nihilist, denial of the all-embracing authority of the State. Now the moral equation has become nakedly simple: it turns on the meeting between unlimited power and its unqualified rejection. There is no distribution of rational issues any more. Man, as the Existentialists say, is absurd.

Robert Briffault, in *The Making of Humanity*, gives a perceptive analysis of how this situation comes about. We quote a summary of Briffault by David Lindsay Watson (in *Scientists Are Human):*

> The reason why an institution decays, he [Briffault] tells us, is because of a progressive falsification of the thought-processes on which it is based. An idea wins its spurs in the first place because it helps us to understand and act. Once it has proved its effectiveness, however, it attracts to its service men who are unable to grasp its real truth or beauty, but who are conscious of the power it gives them as a symbol. Gradually thought begins to take on a form that is acceptable to the holders of power and not to that logic of events out of which alone truth can rise. There is, then, an inevitable socio-psychologic process at work, by which the inspired product of genius degenerates into dogma—until what was a fluid truth has lost its ability to help us cope with the world.
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> Says Briffault: "The disease is absolutely inevitable and incurable. . . . It is not a question of wickedness or unscrupulousness, it is a question of rigid psychological mechanics. The power-holder can no more divest himself of power-thought than the rich man can enter the kingdom of heaven. . . .
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> "Like many biological processes, the falsifying operation of power-thought, beginning perhaps as a deliberate action rapidly becomes spontaneous, automatic. All of the nature of deliberate intellectual dishonesty, even if at first dimly present, very soon wholly disappears; and without any consciousness of prejudice, with the fullest conviction and purpose of moral and intellectual rectitude, power-thought operates with vulpine astuteness in a medium of stainless integrity and candour. . . . The workings of the mind are distorted, all intellectual counters are counterfeit, men think by means of ideas stamped with spurious values; their vocabulary, the import of words, is a part of the falsified mental world in which they move."

The political evils which result from this process are bad enough, but they are nothing in comparison to the reduction it brings to thought about the nature of man, and the possibilities and relationships of individual and social life. For now there are only the obedient servants, the quietists, the passive resisters, and the just assassins. What other role remains?

No other role remains, if Briffault is right, and the disease is "absolutely inevitable and incurable."

But let us, in behalf of the dream of the good things that might come about in a proper social community, argue that Briffault is wrong. Let us admit the process he affirms, but reject his Spenglerian finality. Let us insist that the men who have access to power are still men, and that there is in them, as in us, the will to do good and the longing for understanding. The "absolutes" Briffault proclaims are all right as the abstract result of a mechanistic analysis of history; they define a tendency, and are pure and unqualified within the tendency; but men are more than processes of history. They are visionaries and idealists as well as victims and executioners. The *Tempest* has an Ariel as well as a Caliban in it. Just to write about "man's fate" is to begin to undo it. Oedipus was blind before he put out his eyes; what he really did, in destroying his sight, was to give it to other men. Acts of this sort accumulate the riches of the community.

The man who exercises power, when he comes to understand its barren fruit, may be unable to abandon it. Yet he may in some sense be able to stand apart from it, as a man. He may speak of the ways of power without the swagger of those who eagerly embrace it, and of the contemporary pressure of its mindless resources without identifying his hopes for mankind with the "falsified mental world" power has created.

Suppose, for example, that an American statesman were to make a determined effort to practice the Greek idea of virtue, and to say only what is consistent with his convictions as a man? He might, within a narrow compass of freedom, do this without abandoning altogether the Roman idea of morality and abdicating his diplomatic role. He might say, for example, to the leaders of Red China or to the Chinese people themselves—if by a fortunate and extraordinary arrangement they could hear him—something like the following:

It is now more than a hundred years since China first experienced the heavy hand of foreign intrusion by might of arms (the Opium War, which began in 1844), and it is barely a decade since the present leaders of mainland China established by revolution its now-existing social order. Many Americans, though not all, are able to look upon this long interference with China from without, with feelings of regret for the humiliations suffered, the presumptions endured, and the political confusions survived by the Chinese throughout a long period of subjection. Many Americans, though not all, are able to sympathize with the pride the Chinese people take in their new-found freedom and their manifest capacity for self-determination. It is hardly cause for surprise that a people which has, over thousands of years, made so many contributions to civilization, should now, after this bitter interlude of enforced subservience to foreign powers, give expression to a somewhat stiff-necked independence. Nor is it extraordinary that the "fundamentalist form of Communism" which the Chinese revolution adopted, and is now championed by Chinese leaders, should strongly color the declarations of Chinese policy before the world.

Yet there can be no doubt but that American sympathies for the Chinese are frustrated by the intransigence which implies—if it does not assert—that the non-Communist governments of the world must fall, and their peoples made the doubtful beneficiaries of an unwanted political revolution, before there can be an enduring peace. The people of the United States have established by their own revolutionary right, and have cherished by cultural tradition for nearly two centuries, the view that there is no such thing as an infallible political formula. This is the meaning of American freedom—that the people reserve the right to shape their government according to their needs. Yet I need not point out that, under the threat of war, and especially under the difficult conditions of the Cold War, the political life and freedom of the United States are subjected to distorting tensions. The same is true of other countries. War and the danger of war are not friends of political freedom. The twentieth century has seen enough of modern war—even non-nuclear war—to hold no illusions on this

score. So, in order to avoid war, and to reduce the emotions which make for war, there is every reason for all peoples to hold on a tight leash the angry absolutisms of States. You, the Chinese, can help in this, by consulting the conditions necessary to your own peaceful growth and development.

You bitterly resent, you make it plain, the support given by the United States to the ten million Chinese on Taiwan, outside the hegemony of mainland China. We cannot help this situation now. We are not without an understanding of your feeling, but in the circumstances we ask you to understand ours, or at least to drop the subject for a while. There are small elements of a parallel in the fact that, in the eighteenth century, when we made our revolution, there were a number of our people who insisted that the determination of the colonists to be free of the British king, his armies, his taxes, and his rule, was wrong and disloyal. Many of these people went to Canada, where their descendants now have their homes. Today, no national boundary is more casually observed than the boundary which separates Canada and the United States. We ask you to let this matter of Taiwan go. Your world of seven hundred million people is not threatened or deprived by the people of Taiwan. Their world is linked to ours by the fortunes and compacts of the past, which we have no choice but to honor; yet this can be done without giving you material cause for disturbance.

Meanwhile, let us agree, or try to agree, that the Chinese people and the people of the United States share in common interests which cross ideological lines. Let us cultivate those interests and take pride in the fact that we are helping to make a world in which strong differences of political faith are not permitted to destroy the fraternity of human beings.

One thing more: The intercourse of States, unwieldy and limited at best, is of little value compared with the intercourse of people. Many of our scholars and students, as well as ordinary citizens, would like to visit your land. It may surprise you to hear that, along with much criticism, our people read with interest reports on the reforms you have instituted, and of your advances in education, medicine, and other branches of science. We may be skeptical of your politics, and you of ours, but we are not skeptical of your humanity. Only recently efforts have been made within our State Department to rescind the ban on travel to China, so that American scholars may seek entry on their own. Interest shown by you in such visitors, with appropriate gestures, might begin to diminish the political anxieties which now stand in the way of such a move. We continue the invitation to you to send to the United States representatives of your press, and ask you to welcome ours. Good political relations must be preceded by at least a modicum of good human relations. I conclude by recalling the recent words of our Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs:

> . . . if I may paraphrase a classic canon of our past, we pursue today toward Communist China a policy of the open door: We are determined to keep the door open to the possibility of change, and not to slam it shut against any developments which might advance our national good, serve the free world, and benefit the people of China.

REVIEW
"FOUNDATIONS OF MODERN ART"

IN our age, the practice of art tends to be a specialty, and your reviewer, being no specialist, and finding some if not many of the forms of modern art enigmatic, approached the book, *Foundations of Modern Art,* by Ozenfant (Dover paperback, $1.95), with reservations. The precaution, however, was not necessary. While we have by no means understood him in all respects, this writer, who was also a modern painter, does not use any secret code in talking about his subject, and if the book is more of a dithyramb than an orderly discussion, it is certainly worth reading.

A passage in the original Preface (1928) sets the keynote of the book:

> The one aim an artist could confess to should be that of producing great art. But this postulates a nobility of spirit that at no period has been so difficult to attain. Has man ever found himself in so tragic a moral situation? Every belief has been bled white or abolished, and we are left stewing in our own skins. Yet heroes and saints do exist, but they are civilians and wear hard hats. Scientists devote their lives, and do not in return expect either fortune or paradise; there is something fine in the stoicism of today, only it is rather rare. But the ordinary run of artists cannot be taken seriously, because it is so hard for them to dispense with acclamation.
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> The wretched attitude towards art that is general today wobbles on a foundation of Turkish Delight. This is a gifted age yet think of the gifts that have been ruined by the need for distraction. We demand that the painter shall lead us from surprise to surprise, it is not the matured egg we demand, but Easter eggs in the latest fashion. The result is that the miserable artist, harried by the bored rapacity of his patron, goes on pretending to lay new sensational wonders. Frivolities merely. Or again. Nowadays the word "new" is the highest praise, even when applied to the worst trash. It is easy enough to seem "new" by perpetrating something the masters would never have permitted themselves, had they even thought of it. What imbecility, this prejudice of the hideous called beautiful is, merely because it is new: as if every novelty necessarily meant something!

Ozenfant is concerned primarily with the great innovators, and he does not regard the criterion of the pleasing as having much bearing on his subject. "In minor epochs," he says, "minor folk understand nothing of beauty, and only appreciate what gives them pleasure." The intent of true art, Ozenfant maintains, is to elevate:

> All we can say is that the feeling of elevation gratifies us. To say it pleases us is, as an explanation, inadequate.
>
> The truth is that a masterpiece inevitably calls forth strong emotion: some feel pleasure because of this emotion, but others feel pain: we must have nobility ourselves to support grandeur. Beauty, one of man's essential yearnings, is the feeling of being raised up. There are no glorious ascents without fatigue, and for that reason the greatest works are not pleasing. . . .
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> But now let us be quite clear! I do not mean that beauty is what is tedious. Watteau even, can at times elevate one, Mozart always, Cézanne often, and, from time to time, Renoir. . . .
>
> It has been said that a masterpiece operates like a natural force, and it is true that the great forces of the universe have in them such power as elevates us. The great forces of art dominate and silence in us the chatter of our passing individuality and recall us to the sense of our pettiness: thus for a time they deliver us from the burden of ourselves. Thus it is when we frequent masterpieces: they make us forget ourselves.

Today, however, there are special hazards for the practitioner of the arts. We are members of a culture that has been pulled out of shape by a long list of distortions. These may be described and accounted for in various ways, but the fundamental explanation probably lies in the general breakdown of hierarchies of value. We are a race of talented and energetic people who do not know what we want, and have no really significant sense of "ought" to equate by reasonable means with our spontaneous longings. This makes for confusion, desperation, and wild attempts at rectification. The arts, along with other fields of endeavor, suffer from the misplaced ardor of these attempts.

This is a way of saying that many men of ability and conviction try to make a religion out of their chosen calling. The quest for meaning is the prime motive in human life—in naturalistic terms it might be called a tropism of the spirit, rather than a "drive"—and when the cultural environment fails to provide recognizable avenues for this pursuit the absolutism of spiritual longing often commands lesser purposes. So you see and read about men in business who concern themselves with making and buying and selling goods as though they were in the presence of the Sacraments. You see young executives behaving as though they were Roman centurions on the march, the fate of the empire in their hands. Actually, no important symbol of cultural value escapes this inversion of meaning. The imagery of advertising and sales promotion seeks to stir the feelings once reserved for ikons, while voices which come over the air, for the purposes of merchandising, take on the accent and unction of the liturgy. You hear grown men striving for emotional plausibility while they recite the virtues of a washing machine or a soap powder. You see handsome women, cast as types to represent the twentieth-century idea of "heaven on earth," turning their rich contraltos into the sound of absolute fulfillment, now that some minor unguent can be bought for money in the stores. These paid partisans of the trifle, these songsters and celebrants of the departing pimple, are the victims we sacrifice to the Moloch of our acquisitive society; they are the oldish youths and brassy maidens we feed to the Minotaur in and out of season, drafted from the declining Athens of our inner lives.

The arts are not exempt. But in the arts there is one obvious saving grace. A work of art is an end in itself. And the artist belongs to a guild of traditionally free men. He has his heart to answer to. He is supposed to hearken to his own inspiration as a Quaker to his conscience. So, in the arts, along with the "frivolities" and the "new sensational wonders," there is also freedom. Ozenfant's book is really much more than a study of "modern" art. He is a self-reliant artist who is able to rely upon his spontaneous responses to visual experience, and who has reflected upon them sufficiently to become articulate about their meaning. In the chapter on Modalities, for example, he writes:

> Mathematical constants adapt themselves equally well to Egyptian or Greek art. They apply also to those natural objects we call beautiful. Does that mean that artists were conscious of nature's norms, and used them in their art? We cannot say. Yet it is true that the Egyptians, Arabs, Persians, and certain men of the Renaissance like Piero della Francesca and Leonardo, were mad on mathematics, and applied certain arithmetical or geometrical principles to their art. On the other hand, we can assert, that although certain moderns ignore such principles, there are a great many who pay attention to them; What is important is to be able, even remotely, to intuit or feel certain constants. It matters little whether they be arithmetical, geometrical, logarithmical, or appertain to some other system: the important thing is that they should be present. If they are, even though too uncertain to constitute a precise technique, yet they will be certain to fecundate a trend, a spirit, an ethic, an æsthetic.
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> That is why art, in the highest sense, cannot be free. For a work to be great a certain harmony between man and nature must come into being. Fine, naturally beautiful things are the product of instinctive art. Nature, instinct, intellect, sometimes converge, blending into forms that inspire us. When the artist succeeds in creating some such miracle, it may be he is unveiling the abscissa and coordinates of the perceptible universe: or alternatively, those of our deepest depths: which comes to the *same* thing.

Parts of this book remind the reader of Gyorgy Kepes' *The Language of Vision*, that extraordinary manual of the vocabulary of form. Most of all, however, it is an appeal for balance, wisdom, and authentic human response to works of art, with a great deal of common-sense instruction to the reader bearing on these matters. The author attempts to relate the arts to the changing field of human experience, including the social struggle, the progress of science, and the influence of literature. The introduction is called "The Revolutionary Impulse," and has this passage:

> Our age is a propitious one for great achievements. And if we are justified in thinking its art not always at a satisfactory level, let us not forget that upon the artists and thinkers of this epoch has developed the onerous task of questioning forty centuries of accumulated and academised thought. A great Wall of China of stereotyped thinking, debts to the past and inherited usages, has had to be demolished. An Augean era. If, for a hundred years, the most eminent of them have concentrated so much effort on this form of vacuum cleaning, they must be forgiven if occasionally they lose sight of the fact that a work of art is the expression of beauty at its loftiest, and only that.

From Cézanne onwards, Ozenfant traces the revolutionary impulse in the arts. The book is filled with illustrations, some to make a particular point, some to stand for a mood or a generalization. The reader who would apply what the author says will not be able to go to the museums and galleries armed with new insight, since the idea of the book is that one must see for oneself; yet reading Ozenfant makes one feel that such an enterprise might be worth the effort, and one would go with fewer preconceptions, less bland assumption about what is "art," and less anxiety about how one "ought" to think and feel about what he will see.

To the painters of the time, Ozenfant has a final word:

> Masters of the first importance have been revolutionaries. Yes. People seem to assume that every artist owes it to himself to be a Lenin, but against what, nowadays, O God of the Arts? This tic is becoming the worst tyranny of all. Is the result worth it? What ridiculous figures they cut, the traditionalists of the artistic revolution, the pantalooned Tartarins and garrulous Nimrods, hunting lions at the North Pole and tracking illusory diplodocuses. To leap over the wall is not a particularly good joke when the door is open. I esteem the revolutionary spirit. And as a lever there is often much to be said for its qualities, its generosity, its charm. But the one revolution necessary to art nowadays should be the breaking with all revolutions that have no object, for artists from now on have full right to do anything they please in music, literature, painting, ideas, all of which in no wise resemble those of tradition. . . . We must beware lest new and futile obligations be forced upon us. It would seem that that is exactly what the academic attitude to revolution in art does stand for. The art of storming non-existent Bastiles quickly becomes "vieux jeu." . . . Art would perish if it went on idiotically admiring its navel and repeating that it was free, free, free. Yes, it is free, fortunately, at last: but art is intended for mankind, which has its laws too. I mean those of feeling, of soul, of heart, which, in spite of what is said, have their own logic and needs. Nothing of our common humanity is truly free if tested by our conceptions of liberty. The abuse of liberty can give nothing to art: art is "structure," and every construction has its laws.

Foundations of Modern Art is an enormously fertile and fertilizing book.

COMMENTARY
HUMANITY IN POLITICS

A RATHER extraordinary instance of diplomatic utterance of the sort longed for in this week's lead article appeared in the New York *Times* for last Dec. 11, in the form of an interview by Jean Daniel, foreign editor of the French weekly, *L'Express*, with the late President Kennedy. According to Pierre Salinger, the conversation between Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Daniel was "off the record," and should not have been published, but the French journalist took the view that the assassination of the President relieved him of the obligation to keep silent. The interest in what Mr. Kennedy said in this interview is deepened by the fact that Mr. Daniel later read the President's statement to Fidel Castro, and obtained reaction and comment from the Cuban Premier.

It is the spontaneous and human quality of Mr. Kennedy's remarks—and also of Fidel Castro's discussion of them—which makes the Daniel article of such importance. One wishes for the widest possible publication of this interchange. In one place, President Kennedy said to Mr. Daniels:

> I think that there is not a country in the world, including all the regions of Africa and including any country under colonial domination, where the economic colonization, the humiliation, the exploitation have been worse than those which ravaged Cuba, the result, in part, of the policy of my country, during the regime of [Fulgencie] Batista. I think that we spawned, constructed, entirely fabricated without knowing it, the Castro movement. I think that the accumulation of such errors has endangered all of Latin America.
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> The Alliance for Progress has no other aim than to reverse this disastrous course. It is one of the most important problems if not the most important, of American foreign policy. I can tell you that I understood the Cubans. I approved of Fidel Castro's proclamations in the Sierra Maestra when he sought, and rightly, justice and purity. I will tell you something else: In a certain sense, it is as though Batista were the incarnation of some of the sins committed by the United States. Now, we must pay for these sins. As far as the old regime goes, I agree with the first Cuban revolutionaries. That must be obvious. . . .
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> But it is also obvious that the problem has ceased being purely Cuban and has become international, I mean to say, Soviet. I am the President of the United States. I am not a sociologist. I am President of a free country which has responsibilities in a free world. I know that Castro has betrayed the promises of the Sierra Maestra and that he has agreed to become a Soviet agent in Latin America.

We do not print this statement in order to approve or measure its correctness, but to admire its directness as a human expression. The same might apply to the response of Premier Castro to the charge that he had become a Soviet agent:

> "I do not want to answer you as to our ties with the Soviet Union. I find that indecent. We have, for the Soviet Union, fraternal feelings of deep, of total gratitude. The Russians are making extraordinary efforts for us, which sometimes cost them dearly. But we have our own policy, which is not perhaps always the same—and we have proved this—as that of the U.S.S.R. I loathe insisting on this point, for to ask me to say that I am not a pawn on the Russian checkerboard is like asking a woman to cry out on the town square that she is not a prostitute."

We strongly suggest that readers make an effort to get the Dec. 11 issue of the New York *Times* (Eastern edition only) and read these two interviews in full.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
ON EARLY DEATH

STATISTICS released by the Suicide Prevention Center of Los Angeles reveal that in the age-group, 15 to 25—including college students and peace-time soldiers—the voluntary taking of one's own life ranks third highest among all age-groups. Possibly explaining this staggering record, according to the SPC, is "the feeling that life is no longer worth living; a serious suicidal potential exists in the person who has come to feel (over a period of time) that life no longer has any meaning." The varying phenomena of "beatness" indicate degrees of a refusal to become integrated with those social and ethical patterns which result in an atmosphere of general apathy and hypocrisy. While the angrier young men and women may have no intention of killing themselves, they seem to have set about another sort of destruction—the abandonment of conventional social existence. The attitudes of violent and disgusted youths are often indications, not alone of individual "sickness," but also of what Viktor Frankl calls the "existential vacuum." The youth of today, especially the imaginative ones, cannot help but breathe some of the air of nihilism. In this context, we present a letter by a young friend of MANAS during a summer's stay in Paris. Both the mood and the implicit philosophy seem worthy of communication:

> I know a young man who may commit suicide. He is much more brilliant than I, so he must be aware that the world's back is broad and strong, that any human being, taken singly, can be unspeakably beautiful. Surely he has seen the mountains on a clear day, or more incredibly, in the rain. He has no need of me to tell him that life is infinitely greater than our maudlin self-made messes, for he has thought and seen much. He has seen the stark simplicity of the sea on a moonless or a moon-filled night. He, as clearly as Rilke, has known the terrible angel of beauty, who quietly disdains to slay us. He has seen the sunrise and the sunset, and the high blanketing sun of the noon. Surely he has not let those few adolescent perversities of the human race blind him to the fact that life is good, however enigmatic; life is good.
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> Yet he may kill himself. What in all of nature is more incomprehensible?
>
> Perhaps he will answer that he has seen other things as well, and that man's adolescent perversities are not few, but numerous and weighty. There were six million fatal perversities performed in Germany, he might tell me. Perhaps from a more than human point of view, these are neither numerous nor weighty, but I am man, and so the perversity is mine. I can blame no one, no one on earth, if I do not blame myself. Hitler only showed to me the depths of my own perversity.
>
> And Christ? Perhaps he would answer that Christ was not human; but was he not the only truly human being, the true son of man? And Hitler, was he not *renouncing* his humanity rather than expressing it? And do we not renounce our own in little ways, every day of our lives?
>
> All these things he knows. He must, for they are evident, and he has great intelligence. He is more enigmatic than the stones.
>
> Perhaps he will agree with all I have said, and then tell me my fault lies in being too right. There is something terribly unrealistic about people who are always right, he might say. You blame me for looking too critically at the mud puddles without seeing the mountain slope. Very well, I see your mountain slopes. They are yonder. Yes, they are ever there across the ravine. The mud is by my feet. It is perverse, and I cannot avoid treading in it or recognizing its reality. But those slopes are out of reach. I am captive to this mud, and it draws me down because it is mine, and composed of my substance. Soon it will suck me down altogether, and I shall become once again the dust of the earth. The earth shall be all my memory; just as it was before my birth. Your mountain slopes may always exist, but they shall not always exist in my being. I shall forget them very soon, just as I shall forget the yellow flowers and lithe girls that live there. They shall grow old in me, they shall be crusted with my decaying vision, and shall slide slowly down into the slime of my being. You want me to look at eternal things when my only eternity is the endless stillness of stone. I don't want to see your stars. If they are not pocked with dusty craters, as I sometimes suspect them to be, then they can only raise up to me, in their beauty and brilliance, the thought of their distance, of

the fathomless gulf between themselves and my destiny. I am sure I shall forget them; I have known the horror of partial withdrawal already. But how much more horrible if the memory should linger, and visions of stars haunt my endless earth-bound sleep!

These things he might tell me, and his conviction of horror and my own of immortal reunion might argue philosophy till sundown, when night may prove one of us right. So what may I tell him, what words may I speak that would make him see that the act of living in itself is good, regardless of consequences; that we cannot provide for tomorrow, not *that* morrow, by shutting out the light of today? How am I to make him understand that the act of seeing is itself communion? What else would he do with the stars? They are too hot to approach. Why must he despair that he is not Jehovah, that some things are greater than we presently are, when we can partake of that greatness, that beauty, through the binding cords of sight? Perhaps those cords are loosened and we sink, when the sunset bleeds in the west; or perhaps, as I think, they are strengthened, redoubled in strength, from that day forward, for all the numberless days of our death, for all the swellings of feeling, and cataracts foaming with stars, for all the fathomless canyons of love.

And what is the "societal responsibility" for young men and women whose "search for meaning" has never been rewarded; Henry Murray's memorable Phi Beta Kappa address, "Beyond Yesterday's Idealisms," makes suggestive comment:

That a bent for the ideal is latent in the psyches of men and women of your age is not what I've been told by any confiding undergraduate, and it is about the last conclusion that a reader of modern literature would be likely to arrive at. For certainly most of the best poets, playwrights, and novelists, together with many psychoanalysts, behavioral psychologists, social philosophers, existentialists, and some angry others, seem to be conspiring, with peculiar unanimity, to reduce or decompose, to humiliate so far as they can do it, man's image of himself. In one way or another, the impression is conveyed that, in the realm of spirit, all of us are baffled Beats, Beatniks, or dead-beats, unable to cope as persons with the existential situation.

But tell me, what is the underlying meaning of this flood of discontent and self-depreciation? One pertinent answer comes from Emerson himself. "We grant that human life is mean, but how did we find out that it was mean? What is the ground of this uneasiness of ours, of this old discontent? What is the universal sense of want and ignorance but the *fine innuendo by which the soul makes its enormous claim?"* Yes, surely, "its enormous claim," and in the very midst of this American paradise of material prosperity. The enormous claim of the sensitive, alienated portions of our society—artists, would-be artists, and their followers—comes, as I catch the innuendoes, from want of a kindling and heartening mythology to feel, think, live, and write by. Our eyes and ears are incessantly bombarded by a mythology which breeds greed, envy, pride, lust, and violence, the mythology of our mass media, the mythology of advertising, Hollywood, and Madison Avenue. But a mythology that is sufficient to the claim of head and heart is as absent from the American scene as symbolism is absent from the new, straight-edged, barefaced, glass buildings of New York.

FRONTIERS

Of Writers and Directors

NOVELS about novels are certainly more common than motion pictures about motion pictures or plays about plays. In each instance, though, there is some popular appeal—the atmosphere of exposé or behind-the-scenes revelations.

Brian Moore's *An Answer from Limbo* (Dell, 1963) gives us a picture of a writer with talent but not very much to say—one who needs some delusions of grandeur in order to be a writer at all. This book is interesting without being in any way spectacular, and the portrait of this writer, as it emerges, is that of any human being who is petty, selfish, and even ridiculous some of the time, yet who on occasion comes close to facing himself and the need for some kind of integration of ideals and ambitions. One passage which took our eye concerns this man's thoughts on the death of his mother, whom he had imported from Ireland to an alien environment as a handy baby-sitter. He had always resented his mother's religion, which called for certain decisive choices in everyday affairs. Perhaps, he thinks, his resentment was not only of the rigidity formal religion imposes, but came also from the fact that, in his own life, he had found no adequate substitute:

She bore her husband four children and nursed him through his final illness. She had known in her lifetime perhaps a thousand people and some of those people loved her. Yet she died alone in limbo of a strange apartment and lay dead until, by accident, a stranger found her.

> My mother believed in God: I do not. She believed in hell and purgatory, penance and indulgences, baptism and extreme unction. She believed that God placed her on this world for a purpose; that in this testing ground she must, by her deeds, prove herself worthy of heaven. The temporal life was, for her, a secondary thing. For me, it is all there is. Because of this difference in belief, a gate shut between us. Because of that gate, she died alone, trying to reach me. And yet, as I sat in that coffee shop, denying and despising my wife's tears, I asked myself if my beliefs are sounder than my mother's. Will my writing change anything in my world? To talk of that is to believe in miracles. Is my motive any different from hers? Is it not, as was hers, a performance of deeds in the expectation of praise? And what is that praise really worth; how many of the praised living do I, in my secret heart admire? To wish to join their company is to desire admission to a book of saints, the true facts of whose lives and achievements bear little resemblance to the public legends. As for the verdict of posterity, is it any more deserving of belief than a belief in heaven? How many of the illustrious dead do I honor with lip service, knowing nothing of their deeds and works? Is my belief in my talent any less an act of superstitious faith than my mother's belief in the power of indulgences? And, as for the ethics of my creed, how do I know that my talent justifies the sacrifices I have asked of others in its name? O Mamma, I sacrificed you; I abandoned you: I look at you now and know that all is changed. Am I still my mother's son, my wife's husband, the father of my children? Or am I a stranger, strange even to myself?

Elliott Nugent's *Of Cheat and Charmer* (Trident, 1962) borrows its title from a verse by A. E. Housman. It is the story of a brilliant motion picture director whose sometimes cruel career led him to success, but also to a fatal heart attack at the age of forty. Despite the "provocative" passages displayed by the publisher at the beginning and end, this story of Hollywood and Broadway ends without a single completed seduction, and is a fair demonstration of the fact that men and women of intelligence and sophistication are well able to live in their minds instead of in sensual intrigue. Something else a bit different about *Cheat and Charmer* is its demonstration that the high-pressure managing that goes into successful movie-making does need and occasionally employs genius. The dominant character, a Greek who began life in the bosom of an immigrant family in Fresno, is ambitious and selfish, but Myron Myros is also an artist more concerned with his art than with the things he hopes to obtain by maneuvering himself to the top of his profession as director and producer. He has a complex character that fits none of the stereotypes. He is a man who might have been, in

different circumstances, something of a mystic or a seer. The author's touch now and again shows this quality, as, for example, in the opening chapter:

> On top of his chest of drawers there were some half-revised typewritten pages and an open copy of Bulfinch's *Mythology,* with a penknife marking the place he had left off reading. When was it? Last night or the night before that? It had gone clean out of his mind. But now as his eye picked up an illustration of the Valkyries, he was half tempted to forgo the swim, sit down and finish the chapter.
>
> He walked around the room for a minute, the events of the day swirling in his mind. All that hogwash he had talked to Dr. Alexander bothered him. What the hell was Greece to him, or his father, or those dull chapters about Zeus and Hera? He had found more affinity, strangely, with the stuff about Norse gods and the Vikings and Valkyries. He knew the whole thing, of course, from his college days, but it had been one of his peripheral interests. Still, it tied in with the drama and with pictures and with longhaired music and he would let his secretary do the rest of the research or find someone at the studio who could help to authenticate that doubtful reference to mythology in the Hawaii story that he was cooking up. He snapped the book closed, but left the penknife where it was. The Valkyries ride through the skies and when they descend to the battlefield, they only pick up heroes among the slain. Maybe he ought to get himself a good Valkyrie, he thought, since Marta's door was locked. . . .

The Valkyries also enter in the closing passages as the airliner bearing Myron Myros' coffin, his wife and another actress, flies to California from the East-coast scene of a stage success and a fatal heart attack:

> The big jet had climbed now above the clouds. They stretched out below Marta's eyes—white and endless and glowing in the sun. She turned her head a little away from the brightness and met Nina's eyes.
>
> "Only a week ago," Marta said slowly, "he was talking about the Valkyries."
>
> Nina wiped away a treacherous tear. "I can't remember much about them. What do they do?"
>
> "They ride through the skies," Marta said. "Sometimes they bring home a slain warrior."

The funny part of it is that Mr. Nugent makes us recognize in the Hollywood schemer and charmer a "warrior" of the old mythological dimension—cruel and selfish, but possessed of some nobility—a man whose battles were often confused, but into which he carried a touch of ancient magic. He was ready for every trouble except the trouble with himself.