ROUSSEAUISTS AND PROMETHEANS

A READER has picked up a sentence in a MANAS article which appeared last summer (July 17), offering a comment which goes considerably beyond the question then under discussion. He writes:

> In accounting for the nonconformist and his plight, you say: "One of his first tasks . . . is to acknowledge the inevitability of his isolation and to understand it." Now, there is a sense in which this is obviously necessary. Yet, there is also a sense in which this attitude can be very destructive, for it can lead to a fatal resignation by the nonconformist, and evoke a complacency on the part of the conformist. I may be exaggerating, but I cannot help but feel that an emphasis on "understanding" and the "inevitability of isolation" parallels the white segregationist's advice to the Negro to stay in his place, to accept the "inevitability" of his underprivileged role in life. Or, if this is too extreme, it is reminiscent of the white moderate's advice to "Go slow." One thing is sure: The Negroes would not be demonstrating today if they concentrated upon the inevitability of their place in society. It is precisely because they do not acknowledge the inevitability of that place that they are fighting for their rights. I say that just as the Negro is repudiating his fate, so too the nonconformist must repudiate his. Otherwise, the attitude of "acknowledging" and "understanding" becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy that leaves conventional society smug, unmoved and unchanged. In final estimate, the nonconformist must recognize the inevitability of his isolation only as much as, and no more, than the Negro must recognize the inevitability of his social condition. Above all, while a sense of understanding may be useful and comforting to the nonconformist to explain his predicament, it must never be spoken to the outside society, which will use it to prolong the nonconformist's misery, discrimination, and isolation.

This seems a particularly useful setting of a basic question. The validity of this reader's argument depends, it seems to us, precisely upon the substantial identity of the nonconformist's problem and the Negro's problem. In examining this question, certain categories of thought which have become familiar only quite recently will help to clarify the issues that appear to be involved.

It is certainly correct to say, for example, that there is a fundamental difference between a man's existential situation and his socio-political situation. Let us lay out some postulates.

Let us say, first, that a socio-political situation is capable of being changed by political action and by various endeavors which are related to political action. Revolution, constitutional amendment, and legislative reform are political means of accomplishing such changes. (The other activities amount to cultural rationalizations of the change, through education, etc.)

Let us say, second, that the existential situation, which modern man is only now attempting to define, is hardly touched by politics, although it may be *framed* by political situations, and its true significance (yet to be determined) may be concealed or made to seem irrelevant by the urgencies of the political situation.

In support of this second postulate, we may borrow from Frederick Mayer a statement of the Existentialist view (noting, however, that it is not the only version that might be offered):

> 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 some awesome choices which involve my total being and that the end may not give me greater certainty, but more awesome and agonizing uncertainty.

Obviously, an important question applying to the above is: How much of this kind of pain and uncertainty can be remedied by political action?

Any of it? All of it? One can hardly make a definite reply, but it can be said that *some* of this anguish is not susceptible to any sort of political remedy, and that this portion of the pain of human life is truly an existential element of experience. (There is of course a joy which is also existential in origin.)

An oblique comment on this question, already quoted in MANAS, is obtained from Karl Popper's recent article in *ETC:*

> . . . it must be one of the first principles of rational politics that we cannot make heaven on earth. The development of communism illustrates the terrible danger of the attempt. It has often been tried, but it has always led to the establishment of something much more like hell.

From the foregoing, then, we are justified in postulating that the existential situation, insofar as it is truly existential, has its remedy (to the extent that it needs or can have a remedy) in non-political forms of behavior. What are these forms of behavior? Vaguely, we call them the quest for self-knowledge, the working toward maturity—a reconciliation with the existential facts of life.

We should like to propose, as a final postulate, that the socio-political situation and the existential situation are profoundly intermingled in human life, and that we have little understanding of how the two are related, and that this ignorance constitutes a central, if not *the* central, problem of the age. Sensitive and perceptive members of our society seem unable to avoid deep preoccupation with this problem. It is behind the scene in very nearly all of James Baldwin's writing on the predicament of the Negro in the United States. He points out that the naïve political remedy for the Negro's problems might give them "everything" that the white man has—but is this, after all, what the dignity of man, black or white, requires? The white man's life is by no means the norm of human dignity, and to define the Negro's ends in these terms is to collaborate in his betrayal. This is not to reduce one iota the obligation of fulfilling completely for the Negro

what socio-political justice demands, but to take account of what political justice cannot in the nature of things supply. The white man's rights and privileges are not the beau ideal of cultural self-realization. A similar point was made, back-handedly, by Leon Trotsky in his pamphlet, *Their Morals and Ours.* What can an authentic revolution have to do with the moral hypocrisies of a self-satisfied bourgeois society? This was the ground of Communist rejection of the traditional canons of Western morality and adoption of the objective, political morality of the revolutionary drive for power. But of course, the total suppression by the Communists of existential reality was no solution, as Popper points out.

The problem, then, remains. How do we distinguish between what we must do for ourselves, as human beings, and what we can do politically, as the makers of socio-economic systems?

On this question, we have three object-lessons, all from history. Two of them are in the form of extremes.

One extreme is the lesson of the Quietists—not the passive resisters, but the passive withdrawers. They say that the political means are an earthly delusion. They say that there is no profitable undertaking for man in this vale of tears. They say we should withdraw from the worthless political struggle and make our peace with God, or seek Nirvana. (Naturally, conservative politics, practiced by men who welcome any plausible expedient, makes use of this doctrine for the control of subservient populations.) The Quietist solution, we might argue, is a radical oversimplification of the meaning of existential reality. It reads the values of evolutionary experience out of the universe. It says, in effect, that it would have been better for the world never to have come into being. In Freudian terms, it is the return to the womb. In Humanist terms, it is a kind of spiritual suicide. In political terms, it is blind reaction or rather submission. In philosophical terms, it is the

reduction of the individual to the unconscious unity of original chaos. In historical terms, it is total denial of the values of the eighteenth century.

The other extreme is represented by the totalitarian ideologists. They say that man is entirely a political animal. They say that his identity is the creation of the State. They say that his nature is exhausted by his political existence. The consequences of this sort of "idealism" were well spelled out by Roderick Seidenberg in *Post-historic Man,* and more polemically by George Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-four.* The extreme ideologists declare total war on the idea of existential reality, since it questions the authority and utility of the political state, and *any* questioning of absolute authority is a fatal subversion.

The third object-lesson from history is the constitutional democracy. The constitution defines the scope of the political means and lays down the ground-rules of political action, but reserves to individuals an area of non-political, existential freedom. In theory, this should have been a proper solution, but you could say that it became largely a paper solution. The working of the constitutional order depends upon a rich use by men of their existential freedom. It means a full response by individuals to Emerson's challenge:

> 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?*

We Americans put into our Constitution a paper recognition of the soul's enormous claim, and then went about our business. We did not *listen* to that claim, nor recognize that within the coarse matrix of our socio-economic existence lay the tender bud of an organic spiritual life which has principles and laws of its own. So, having recognized existential reality only by political guarantees, we lost touch with its meaning—a

meaning which was never much developed in our age and culture, but has been present as a kind of ghost of future possibilities, taking on flesh and blood only for poets like Whitman and philosophers like Emerson.

This sort of analysis by abstraction soon wears out its tools. Let us try some others.

Let us establish two poles among men of good will and call them the Rousseauists and the Prometheans. By definition, both categories of men want to "help mankind." The Rousseauists want to do it by devising a system that will bring justice and good; the Prometheans are concerned with bringing fire—or light. The Rousseauists are after a proper organization; the Prometheans hope for proper men.

Rousseauist enterprises soon establish conditioning-and-response theories of good and evil. The individual Rousseaus are not inclined to think in terms of personal responsibility. They tend to blame the external environment for human troubles. They are Utopians by instinct and issue moral condemnations of whoever and whatever—people and circumstances—seem to stand in the way of what they conceive to be an ideal way of life. To the more or less existential doctrine that trial and sorrow are the natural lot of man, they prefer the explanation that tyrannical rulers and a lack of just arrangements are responsible for human difficulties. These things, they say, can be *changed.* The Rousseauist has his heroic aspect. He sets out to alter history. He will not tolerate evil, and he defines evil in terms that invite reform. His profile has the marks of social awareness and regard for the victims of exploitation. He is an activist on the side of campaigns and drives for constructive social change. He rejects what seem to him the irrelevance and distraction of existential inquiry.

The Promethean, on the other hand, is only occasionally and expediently interested in "systems." The social system, as he sees it, is an incidental apparatus of human experience, not its final mould. He is educator rather than reformer,

teacher rather than revolutionary, although, in order to do his work, he may often find himself cast as either reformer or revolutionary. His difficulty is that he is unable to see fixed categories of good and evil in any man or class of men. Men driven to seek power are beset by furies; they are sufferers, too, along with their victims. The Promethean has his own affliction— an incurable affection for all human kind. It is this warmth in his nature, this capacity to see that the high qualities of human excellence are neither a function nor a product of circumstances which makes him never more than a temporary ally of the Rousseaus, of the angry men who would manipulate history in order to serve human beings. The love of the Rousseaus for their fellows is abstract, theoretical, and tends to be doctrinaire. They are like the highly intellectual physicians spoken of by Jung, who are great analysts, skillful diagnosticians, but very bad nurses. They cannot *care* for other men; they can only attack "disease entities," which is something different from the healing of the sick. Indeed, from caring, and from impatient hearts, the Prometheans are sometimes drawn into the camp of the Rousseauists, because they see nothing else to do. Thus Mazzini, who died of or with a broken heart, when he saw his revolution abort in corruption and moral failure; and thus Bellamy, who joined with the Populists, only to have his ardent hopes drain away through the sieves of opportunist political organization.

We need, of course, both sorts of men, or something of the qualities of both in all men. It is the balance between the Rousseauist and the Promethean which is difficult—the question of how to use the opportunities of history without frustrating the processes of human growth, of existential understanding. And, needless to say, something of both qualities *is* in all men, yet so intermixed and combined in function that to separate them, except by the infidelity of abstraction, is hardly possible.

What of the isolation and loneliness of the nonconformist? Without bothering too much about what kind of nonconformist we are considering, let us stipulate that he is a good one: one who finds himself set apart by reason of principle, essential taste, and a feeling for the fitness of things. Who has the remedy for his situation? The Promethean who works and waits, or the Rousseauist who works and revolts? The Promethean seems to get little done. He makes his light, but he seems mostly to wait on his rock, feeling his shackles and suffering his pains; and meanwhile the Rousseauist makes dozens of revolutions. But today, the world is full of tired revolutionists who know they have been had by the processes of history. Either they have become tired, or they seek scapegoats; or, as in a few cases, they have begun to consider the patience and endurance of the Prometheans. What is the difference between them? For the Rousseauists there is always a "they" who must be made to change; a "they" who can be charged with major responsibility for human problems and difficulties; a "they" whose sluggish insensibility bars the way to the good life for all. The Prometheans are pessimists where the Rousseauists are optimists, and optimists where the Rousseauists are pessimists. The Rousseauists want power to do good; the Prometheans are concerned with understanding how little good you can do with power.

The nonconformist, as we have defined him, is one who sets out to live his own life in accordance with his idea of the good, but finds his milieu without sympathy for and opposed to what he attempts. We have said that he has a need "to acknowledge the inevitability of his isolation and to understand it." This still seems necessary. As a man who has taken instruction from history, he knows that cultural change is a slow process, and that while violent revolution may open some channels to progress, it also sears and brutalizes. The good revolution is the revolution which will tolerate no barrier to the Promethean longing to penetrate existential mysteries.

Seeing this, and recognizing the extreme difficulty of making these matters clear to men engaged in political struggle, or the struggle for some right and necessary form of justice, the nonconformist begins to understand the meaning of his own struggle—which is to find a true balance for his own life and efforts toward the common good. And he cannot do it, he finds, without an infusion of the Promethean spirit; he must continue his work as he is able, and endure the isolation which other men's oversimplifications of both history, justice, and self-knowledge impose upon him. Fortunately, he is never entirely alone; he has companions; there are always others who are struggling to balance the same equations for themselves.

The case of the Negro is not the same: it is not, that is, the same, save as individual men who happen to be Negroes determine to make it the same. What is upon the Negroes, today, is the "consciousness of the forum," as Lionel Abel remarked some months ago in the *Nation.* In the past, Negroes have been largely excluded (except obliquely) from the political process. They are right, and they are right to act. For them, the issues of civil rights have clear definition. There is nothing vague about the right to vote, to have opportunity for education, jobs, homes, equal with all other men. This is not nonconformity, but a demand for intelligent conformity—to the social justice of the land embodied in the law.

The nonconformist's problem is somewhat different. He is, it is true, the victim of prejudice. But there is no law against prejudice, which is a state of mind; laws protect only against overt acts which grossly offend against those forms of equality that it is possible to establish by law. Much of prejudice comes from ignorance, stupidity, and a lazy indifference of mind. You can't legislate against these qualities, although you can punish for some of their consequences in behavior. But who are the *real* victims, in this case? Not the nonconformist, surely, who knows better, and is better, but the unhappy men whose lives are confined to patterns dictated by ignorance, stupidity, and laziness. What will you do about them? What *can* you do about them?

This brutish "outside society" of which our correspondent speaks—who made it that way? Who shall be called to account, arraigned, prosecuted, punished, and by *whom?* What revolutionary theory shall be invoked for this kind of social action?

The Promethean cannot bring himself to care very much about the answer to this question. The theory which insists upon an answer usually has in the wings a guillotine, a labor camp, a Devil's Island. Every theory of controlling the conformists evolves a new breed of conformists, and so we get strain after strain, until conforming becomes a veritable principle of survival. Who can dissolve these lines of angry loyalty and in time make unimportant the canons of righteous suspicion? Only the Prometheans, whose folly in loving even wicked, stupid, and lazy men eventually brings them the Promethean fate—"For that to men he bare too fond a mind." And this will go on, until Zeus is unthroned.

So, ultimately; the human situation is the Promethean situation. You can reject it in anger, and turn into a humorless Robespierre; you can reject it in pride and contempt, and turn into a Hitler; you can reject it with opportunism and cynicism, and turn into a Stalin; or you can reject it in indifference, and get on with business as usual. All these rejections add new rivets to the shackles of Promethean man.

But today the deceptions practiced by these rejections of the human situation have become less plausible. Very nearly all the theories which neglect the reality of existential man have been tried and found wanting. The power of Zeus, of the "powers that be," is more dead weight than positive energy. The hour of the Prometheans may be near. But for the age of Prometheus to begin, we need the patient resolve of the titan, and the rich generosity of Promethean hearts.

REVIEW
"THE MYTH OF MENTAL ILLNESS"

PSYCHIATRIST Thomas Szasz' book of this title (Hoeber-Harper, 1961) should be extraordinarily useful to any layman who contemplates seeking psychiatric help—either for himself or for a relative. When Dr. Szasz began psychiatric practice he was, as the preface reveals, "increasingly impressed by the vague, capricious, and generally unsatisfactory character of the widely used concept of mental illness and its corollaries, diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment." Though "mental illness" is recognized as the nation's number one health problem, Szasz felt the classification to be extremely confusing. Mental illness is not a "thing," and no one should know this better than working psychiatrists. It is, then, on behalf of serious practitioners, as well as for the general public, that Dr. Szasz writes as follows:

> Although my thesis is that mental illness is a myth, this book is not an attempt to "debunk psychiatry." There are altogether too many books today that attempt either to sell psychiatry and psychotherapy or to unsell them. The former usually set out to show why and how this or that form of behavior *is* "mental illness," and how psychiatrists *can* help a person so afflicted. The latter often employ a two-pronged attack suggesting that psychiatrists themselves are "mentally ill," and that psychotherapy is a poor method for "treating" a sickness that manifests itself in symptoms as serious as those of mental illness.

> I should like to make clear, therefore, that although I consider the concept of mental illness to be unserviceable, I believe that psychiatry could be a science. I also believe that psychotherapy is an effective method of helping people—not to recover from an "illness," it is true, but rather to learn about themselves, others, and life.

The broad, philosophical context of Dr. Szasz' discussions is suggested in a concluding paragraph:

> Perhaps the relationship between the modern psychotherapist and his patient is a beacon that ever-increasing numbers of men will find themselves forced to follow, lest they become spiritually enslaved or physically destroyed. By this I do not mean anything so naive as to suggest that "everyone needs to be psychoanalyzed." On the contrary, "being psychoanalyzed"—like *any* human experience—can itself constitute a form of enslavement and affords, especially in its contemporary institutionalized forms, no guarantee of enhanced self-knowledge and responsibility for either patient or therapist. By speaking of the modern psychotherapeutic relationship as a beacon, I refer to a simpler but more fundamental notion than that implied in "being psychoanalyzed." This is the notion of being a *student of human living*. Some require a personal Instructor for this, others do not. Given the necessary wherewithal and ability to learn, success in this enterprise requires above all else, the sincere desire to learn and to change. This incentive, in turn, is stimulated by hope of success. This is one of the main reasons why it is the scientist's and educator's solemn responsibility to clarify—never to obscure—problems and tasks.

Examining the meaning of the loose term, "mental illness," Dr. Szasz explores the numerous varieties of "hysteria"—which range all the way from the most seriously disturbed patients to the man who lives in bondage to Miltown. At the conclusion of a chapter on Hysteria, he remarks that "the classical models of hysteria and conversion are no longer useful either for nosology or for therapy." He continues:

> The notion of hysteria as mental illness, and the psychoanalytic theory of hysteria (especially the idea of conversion), have become social symbols for psychoanalysis as a medical technique and guild. The original psychoanalytic theory of hysteria—and of neurosis, following more or less closely on the same scheme—made it possible for physicians (and allied scientists) to retain a fairly homogeneous picture of "diseases." According to this scheme, diseases could be divided into somatic and psychical, the latter retaining a large measure of apparent simplicity, borrowed from the former. In this way, too, psychotherapy could be regarded as an enterprise similar in all essentials to established modes of medical and surgical treatments. The alternative to this familiar and comfortable point of view is to abandon the entire physicalistic-medical approach to mental illness and to substitute novel theoretical viewpoints and models, appropriate to psychological, social, and ethical problems.

It is at this point that we find various psychologists and sociologists expressing an interest in group therapy and in such remarkable pilot projects as that of Synanon—the goal being an understanding of what might be called a truly therapeutic community. From the standpoint of "attitudinal psychology," disturbance or imbalance results from failure to relate the ends and aims of life to appropriate means. (In Synanon, for example, no particular form of "hysteria" is apt to be regarded as having intrinsic significance.) In the application of Freudian technique, one may trace a nervous tic or the onset of impotence to a special fear—but nonetheless that special fear is not caused by environmental conditions alone. Life in a therapeutic community does not condition human beings into attaining their full stature, as B. F. Skinner would like us to believe. Instead, therapy takes one back to an inner core of individual responsibility, which, if discovered, can lead to rearrangement of discordant personality patterns—rapidly, if one is in a sane environment.

An effective critique of classical Freudian therapy which is pertinent here is provided by O. Hobart Mowrer in *The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion* (Van Nostrand, 1961). Discussing paranoia and sociopathy, Dr. Mowrer writes:

> If one adopts the view that neurosis arises, not from personal irresponsibility and immaturity, but from excessively high moral standards which harsh and unreasonable parents (and other socializers) have drilled and dinned into the individual as a child, it follows, ineluctably, that the individual is not "to blame" for his so-called neurotic difficulties. It is rather his father, mother, siblings, teachers, minister—*anyone* but himself. And soon the analysand, under this pernicious tutelage, is luxuriating in self-pity and smoldering resentment. If there are any paranoid trends already present, how else could they be more effectively fanned and fed? The distinguishing feature of the paranoid is that, unlike the depressive, he typically projects his own outraged conscience out upon others and then perceives *them* as "after" him, and *against* him.

> Thus, it seems reasonable to infer that psychoanalysis, in its classical form and strategy, would drive individuals toward *both* sociopathy

(psychopathy) and paranoia. We have already seen that the first of these outcomes does in fact occur. In "successful" individual analysis and in the movement of society as a whole which has been encouraged by the "Freudian Ethic," we see the trend toward the "psychological liberty" which we first thought was going to be our salvation but which we are now beginning to view instead as a scourge.

The Myth of Mental Illness concludes with a note on the crucial responsibility of the individual for alienated behavior. Dr. Szasz puts it this way:

> The momentous changes in contemporary social conditions clearly forewarn that his social relations, like his genetic constitution, will undergo increasingly rapid mutations. If this is true, it will be imperative that all people, rather than just a few, *learn how to learn.* Clearly, there is no "objective" limit to learning. The limiting factor is in *man*—not in the challenge to learn.

COMMENTARY
THE FORM IS NOT THE SUBSTANCE

THERE is a tendency, in social criticism, to make no distinction between the forms of social organization which are developed by men in response to affirmative and creative or inventive activities, and those which are constructed according to the plans of reformers and moralists in the hope of shaping the behavior of human beings as they believe it *ought* to be.

For example, we are told again and again that we must have a world state because there is no other way to put an end to conflict among the nations. This is the moralist's argument. Many men see in it a threat to the independence and self-determination of smaller groups. You could call it the disciplinary and reform school theory of world peace, and we may come to it at last.

But how much better it would be if the bonds of fellowship among the peoples of the world, and the resulting mechanisms of social organization, could arise from the eager curiosity and friendliness of peoples for one another?

In both cases, you would have something that could be called a "world state," but the two would be vastly dissimilar in character and influence. The one might easily generate covert resistance, sly evasion, and sullen criticism, ending in break-up and failure, while the other would not be thought of as a "thing" at all, but would have resulted somewhat as rules are devised by children for a game they *want* to play.

This is a way of saying that the State, as a form of organization, is morally neutral, but inevitably takes on the qualities of the people for whom its administrative functions have developed. Apathetic and unresourceful people eventually get authoritarian states which in time exercise tyrannical and insolent authority. The dictatorial rule comes about because specialists in management must somehow fill the vacuum left by widespread irresponsibility. So men accumulate bitter opinions about State authority and governmental interference, when what happened was as inevitable as any other tendency in nature to establish equilibrium. One way or another, it comes.

We should stop arguing about states, and argue about men, and how to develop a temper in human life which would make the decisions about government and administrative mechanisms matters of only technical importance. The State can control morals, whether- of the nation or the world, only as a receiver in bankruptcy for the social community. The argument about states is a waste of breath and distracts our attention from the real affairs of life. It is important only for people who have decided to file their petition in bankruptcy, and are looking for some all-powerful referee to tell them what to do.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

THE PREPARATION OF A TEACHER

[This discussion is the major portion of an address given last May by Dr. Harold Taylor to Pacific Oaks College, Pasadena, Calif. Formerly president of Sarah Lawrence College, and presently vice president of the Peace Research Institute of Washington, D.C., Dr. Taylor here gives evidence that the man who is effectively in touch with his time is one who is really ahead of his time. His paper is reprinted by permission of the *Journal of Teacher Education.*]

I HOLD the view that the preparation of the student to become a teacher, particularly for the early childhood years, is one of the most significant forms of liberal education, and that to separate education into liberal and vocational, with teacher preparation considered as somehow a non-liberal or technical training, is to corrupt the meaning both of vocational and liberal. A liberal education cannot be defined simply by calling it non-vocational and contrasting it with practical studies, or by assuming that covering a certified body of academic materials will guarantee the liberalizing of the student's mind. Education in the true sense of the word is the process by which the human being finds for himself a body of knowledge, a set of trustworthy beliefs and set of skills which can be put at the service of others. If he can do nothing with his knowledge, what he knows is literally useless. On the other hand, if he has no knowledge, there is very little he can do that is useful.

In the case of the teacher, his vocation is truly liberal. We should return to the old-fashioned meaning of vocation as a calling. One should be called to teaching as one is called to the ministry, or to sculpture, or to medicine, because this is the way one wishes to spend a life.

It is too seldom noticed that the qualities necessary in the great teacher—intellectual depth, insight, sensitivity to human character, self-understanding, concern for moral issues, a wide range of knowledge—are exactly those qualities to be found in great human beings of all kinds. If we wish to have liberally educated citizens, I say teach them all to be good teachers and make sure they get lots of practice at it. Then they will be liberally educated.

I am weary these days of those who attack modern, or as they are disparagingly called, "progressive" ideas, on the grounds that they have undermined the intellectual strength of American education. What we are told is that we must ignore the character of the child and concentrate on his intellect by using uncompromising, not to say punitive, didactic methods. Never mind what he wants to learn, get him early and teach him what he has to know. If he can't learn, put him out of the way and concentrate on those who can. Only the progressives, they say, are foolish enough to cast aside the need for discipline, for competition, for the hard facts of life.

But those of us who are unreconstructed progressives have no time for such trivial arguments. Of course we care about discipline. Of course we want to teach young people to read, write and spell. Of course we want the young to have a sense of moral rectitude, a concern for spiritual values, and a fund of human knowledge. Let us not waste time arguing with those who are insulting enough to assume that we favor chaos and barbarism. The real question is, what else do we want in addition to the traditional intellectual virtues, and how do we go about achieving these aims? I suggest that we need to go back to the roots of contemporary education, and look for the basic insights on which modern theories have been formed. The ideas of progressive education itself have become worn with use, until even the phrases—individual differences, child-centered schools, needs, interest, motivation, free activity, evaluation—sound tiresome when used. This is because the ideas have already been absorbed into contemporary thinking, and are already at work on behalf of education. Let us leave them to do their work and go instead into the deeper levels of discussion where new concepts can be formed.

What was the insight which during the early years of this century captured the imagination of educators everywhere, not only in America, but in India, England, France, Germany, Italy? What was it

which struck simultaneously through the work of Dalton, Montessori, Russell, Dewey, Gandhi, and later, Whitehead? It was the simple notion that the purpose of education was to make the child free, and that the purpose and the practice of freedom were so clearly interwoven that it was impossible to take freedom as an aim without altering radically the practices of a 19th century class society and its entire educational system. The theories grew up around this central insight. The insight itself had the clean simplicity of all radical ideas, and their explosive impact as well. This was a concept dangerous to all established custom, since it put political authority, social convention, the class society, religious dogma, and even the classical curriculum into question.

Not only was the central idea powerful, but those who used contemporary knowledge in the field of biology, physics, anthropology and all of modern science, constructed around it a theory of human nature and a new philosophy of nature which contradicted the older views at all their major points. The new philosophy pointed out that each of us is born, without his consent, into a world which has already been going for some time, with its own set of aims, desires, evils, goods, rewards and punishments. As soon as that world can get its hands on us, it begins to teach us the things it wants us to know. Before we know what we are doing we learn to accept ideas, attitudes and facts which are considered suitable for us, and we gradually become accustomed to that huge apparatus of people, things, and events which make up our corner of a universe. Around each little blob of consciousness grows a conglomeration of ideas and facts. Like the amoeba, that beautifully organized little citizen, we swim our way through life, drawn by its currents, absorbing facts, ideas, and experiences, taking them into ourselves, using the parts which nourish us, and casting out the rest.

We become what we have experienced, and if our experience has been automatic and unselected, we become exactly what the world makes of us. If the central nerve of consciousness has been dulled by mechanical and repetitive reactions to the world around it, the owner of the consciousness is fair game for a society which works on him through the mass media and the mass education. Without the thrust of the individual self against custom and convention, education is nothing but the weight of established opinion placed on the shoulders of the young. Education in this sense is what Christopher Fry called "the domestication of the enormous miracle."

The aim of the teacher and the true educator must be to peel away the layers of custom and to give nourishment and strength to the individual consciousness which lies beneath. Otherwise the educational effects of the rewards and punishments which society provides for its citizens will train them up to be all alike and to perpetuate exactly their own kind.

The value of education for the child is not to be measured by grades, by academic credits, by social approval, by external rewards. Nor is the value of a school or college to be measured by its size or even by the number of ideas it generates. In the long run it is measured by the qualities it brings into the lives of children. It is measured by the expression it gives to the ideals of mankind, and by the contribution it makes to the enlargement of human understanding. The school at its best gives to the world an open place where the imagination may run free and the mind may be naturally nourished. It celebrates the joy of knowing. It therefore draws together into one community whatever there may be of compassion, sensibility and intimacy in the world at large.

Washington, D.C.

HAROLD TAYLOR

FRONTIERS
Brotherhood in Equality

DUE to a combination of causes, I unfortunately got almost six months behind in reading MANAS. Toward the end of November, I decided, reluctantly, to temporarily skip the intervening six months of issues, in order to be reading things closer to the time that you are writing them (hoping to catch up later, gradually, if possible, on the missing six months).

It thus happened that I read, almost simultaneously, Richard Groff's article entitled "The Tyranny of Equality" in the June 5 issue and Karin Marcus' reaction to it in the November 27 issue, along with Richard Groff's reply to Mrs. Marcus. Since the subject interested me greatly, I looked back quickly through my unread pile to see if there were any other communications on the matter. I found only a comment from a reader and further comment by the Editors of MANAS in the *Frontiers* section of the August 14 issue.

I don't know whether any further comment on this matter is still timely; if you feel that it is not, please ignore this letter. However, it seems to me that there are further aspects of the question of "aristocratic" *vs* "equalitarian" values which merit discussion.

I share Mr. Groff's concern about the materialism, conformity, and scarcity of conviction about or attachment to genuine values in our society. He is right in pointing out that equality, in the sense of uniformity, is usually the enemy of individual growth and wisdom.

However, it seems to me that for him to equate "aristocracy" and "aristocratic principles" with the value of individual search, and to equate "equalitarian doctrine" with the idea of a society in which men are "interchangeable persons" is to create a considerable semantic confusion. This confusion is heightened when the idea of "aristocracy" is further imbued with the belief in a set of permanent, abiding values, inherent in the

Nature of Things; and "equalitarian doctrine" is, by implication, charged with responsibility for the idea of determination-of-the-good-by-majority-vote. It should be pointed out that there is no necessary connection between these various ideas.

The terms "aristocracy" and "aristocratic principles" have usually been used in the past to describe social systems based on inherited class privilege. However, I do not gather that Mr. Groff favors a literal return to such systems, though he regrets the fact that their abandonment has "led us to discard along with their externals the profoundly true and enduring values which they also represented." Perhaps all systems incorporate some true values, but they usually trample on others. It is easy to be nostalgic about the virtues of aristocratic systems of the past now that we no longer have their vices with us; conversely, the values inherent in the present equalitarian system should not be ignored.

Mr. Groff states that "Equalitarian doctrine proceeds upon the assumption that men are of approximately equal capacity, or would be so given equally favorable environment." I have never heard anyone, equalitarian or otherwise, state seriously that "men are of approximately equal capacity." However, I have heard many eloquent pleas for *equality of opportunity,* for giving children, regardless of accident of birth, an equal chance to learn and grow and develop their capacities, whether great or small. Also, for equality of inner right of men to have a share in determining their own future. None of this implies equal capacity, nor the desirability of uniformity. It does imply a basic principle, which one might almost call religious. Mr. Groff himself accepts an equality in which "no man may be exploited or written off, and . . . every man carries at least the potentiality of individuality which we are bound to honor." Why does he not accept this as the basis of equalitarian doctrine, instead of insisting that equalitarian principle must endorse the faults which our society has developed? To do this hardly seems to be playing fair, especially in an

article which almost totally ignores the faults of aristocratic societies. Surely it is clear, once stated, that an equalitarian approach based on the equal right of all to seek and grow is consistent with a society of diversity rather than uniformity, as men seek along different paths, and with the idea of a set of values inherent in the nature of things, for which they are seeking. If, in practice, many men use their equal freedom to seek for air-conditioning rather than virtue, this is evidence of the imperfection of men, but not of the desirability of a hierarchical society.

However, if Mr. Groff's article is not meant to be taken literally as a political discussion, but is considered solely as an essay on values, I still have some serious questions about it:

1. Mr. Groff regrets the passing of the "prototype of the seeker for excellence . . . one to whom all can look up, and to whom men instinctively turn for the incarnation of their moral ideas." I have been a hero-worshipper, and think that I can appreciate some of the values of spiritual hero-worship. But, as I have grown older, I have found that the qualities one worships in a hero are not qualities which one can absorb for oneself by osmosis through contemplation of the hero; rather, to the extent to which I have grown somewhat in the direction of some of these qualities, they have come to me from within, from my own life-experience. Spiritual knowledge which comes to one in this way, through one's own individual, tiny development, has a validity in the world of life, and not only in the world of imagination. The vanishing of a big ideal may leave one feeling lost—as the vanishing of collective ideals and heroes has left our age feeling lost—but, to the extent to which ideals have validity, they will reappear in the lives of people again and again, and thus reaffirm their reality in life. I think the psychologists to whom MANAS has referred in past issues, writing of "self-actualizing people," etc., are referring to this sort of thing. Ideals may have grown dim, and values blurred, in this age of Masscult, but because

values *are* valid and because sensitive people need an ethical approach to life, values and ideals, when lost, will reappear as fresh discoveries of every age. MANAS often documents spots where this is happening in this, our age.

2. One of the great values taught by spiritual teachers which all of us too often lack is that of humility—of openness to the greatness and goodness of life, wherever it may appear. Jesus, speaking of the poor widow who had given a couple of small coins, said that she "hash cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury; for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had." There may be—in fact, almost certainly are—in our world of conformity and lack of perceptivity, many people who, in most ways conforming like the rest, nevertheless achieve in some aspect of their lives an unnoticed and unappreciated nobility. . . . And, beyond this, suppose, for example, that somehow the words and fame of Jesus had been lost to posterity and he had never become a world hero, but had remained the obscure, itinerant son of a carpenter—would he have been one whit less great? . . . .And how about the many thousands of great or near-great people to whom exactly this has happened? Does not an equalitarian approach to life open one's eyes to such people—and to such aspects of the most ordinary people—and does not a hierarchical approach to life carry with it the inherent danger of losing the very sensitivity to the value of unknown and apparently ordinary people, which we cherish as an attribute of spiritual greatness?

A further note: The Greek civilization, with its emphasis on the cultivation of individual excellence, perished through war. War has no doubt many aspects and many causes, but one universal aspect of war is lack of compassion. The welfare state, in spite of its many evils and failings, is still, on the part of many people, an attempt at an expression of the feeling that *we are our brothers' keepers,* that no one should be

excluded from the human family and left to die of hunger or disease, alone and uncared for. The tragedy of the present time is that this general human realization is dawning before the break-up of the political institution of the nation-state, so that people say "We are our brothers' keepers— within these boundaries," and not "We are our brothers' keepers through all the world." Thus the compassion to which the welfare state, at best, gives institutional expression, is a limited compassion, rather than the universal compassion which could lead to peace. It is through this limitation of compassion to "members" and exclusion of those outside as equally part of the human family, that the welfare state is becoming the warfare state; in this lies its greatest evil and danger. Without accepting "creature comforts and security" as ultimate values in any sense, and without accepting the desirability of uniformity, can we not perceive the growth of the welfare state as one expression—though limited—of the religious spirit of compassion? And is it not the problem of our age to find a way together to extend compassion beyond the boundaries of the nation-state to make one world? If we can do this—and we must if the human family is to survive—then the growth of equalitarian sensitivity to the inherent values and needs in all human beings may go down in history as one of the giant steps forward in the development of mankind, and we will have accomplished something at which the ancient Greeks, with all their splendor, failed.

And it need not be at the expense of spiritual growth.

New York City

MARGARET ELLIS WOOD