VOLUME XVI, NO. 10
MARCH 6, 1963

THE HEALTH IN US

MOST social or moral criticism fails, not as criticism, but as a base for constructive action, because it neglects to identify existing starting-points for change. Here, we propose to look at some of these starting-points. To frame this effort, some ideas out of Dwight Macdonald's latest book, *Against the American Grain* (Random House, $6.50), will be useful. According to *Time* for Jan. 4:

> In *Against the American Grain*, a collection of essays written over the last ten years, Macdonald argues that American standards are threatened in a new and peculiar way. In times gone by, highbrow culture was clearly distinguished from lowbrow, today the two have been blurred by what Macdonald calls "Midcult." "In Masscult," he writes, "the trick is plain: to please the crowd by any means. But Midcult has it both ways; it pretends to respect the standards of high culture while in fact it waters them down and vulgarizes them."

On this view, the worst thing you can say about Midcult is that its endless compromises destroy the very basis for intelligent criticism. There are exceptions, however, and in these exceptions may be recognized the signs of the health that is in us. We have for review two examples of these signs taken from prime organs of Midcult opinion. The first is an article by Arthur Miller, "The Bored and the Violent," in *Harper's* for last November. Miller's interest in the problems of youth goes back a long time, probably to his own boyhood on the streets of New York and Brooklyn. A few years ago he attempted to have produced a film story he put together about juvenile delinquency (see MANAS, July 30, 1958), but could find no sponsor for his sort of searching analysis. Midcult won that round. In this *Harper's* article, however, which is partly a review of Riccio and Slocum's *All the Way Down* (Simon and Schuster), Miller says what he wanted to say. He begins by showing that "delinquency seems to be immune to the usual sociological analysis or cures." It occurs among both rich and poor, in both capitalist and communist societies. To see in the typical delinquent a "rebel" against conventional values is a mistake:

> . . . that would confuse him with the bourgeois Beatnik. The delinquent has only respect, even reverence, for certain allegedly bourgeois values. He implicitly believes that there are good girls and bad girls, for instance. Sex and marriage are two entirely separate things. He is, in my experience anyway, deeply patriotic. Which is simply to say that he respects those values he never experienced, like money and good girls and the Army and Navy. What he has experienced has left him with absolute contempt, or more accurately, an active indifference. Once he does experience decency—as he does sometimes in a wife—he reacts decently to it. For to this date the only known cure for delinquency is marriage.

Now comes the nub of Miller's diagnosis:

> The delinquent, far from being the rebel, is the conformist par excellence. He is actually incapable of doing anything alone, and a story may indicate how incapable he is. I went along with Riccio and the gang in his book to a YMCA camp outside New York City for an overnight outing. In the afternoon we started a baseball game, and everything proceeded normally until somebody hit a ball to the outfield. I turned to watch the play and saw ten or twelve kids running for the catch. It turned out that not one of them was willing to play the outfield by himself, insisting that the entire group hang around out there together: The reason was that a boy alone might drop a catch and would not be able to bear the humiliation. So they ran around out there in a drove all afternoon, creating a stampede every time a ball was hit.
>
> They are frightened kids, and that is why they are so dangerous. But again, it will not do to say—it is simply not true—that they are therefore unrelated to the rest of the population's frame of mind. Like most of us, the delinquent is simply doing as he was taught.

These were "poor" kids, but the basic pattern of delinquency was the same in a youthful gang in Greenwich, Conn., said to be the wealthiest

community in the United States. After some description and analysis, Miller says:

> The Greenwich gang, therefore, is also doing as it was taught, just as the slum gang does, but more subtly. The Greenwich gang is conforming to the hidden inhumanity of conformism, to the herd quality in conformism; it is acting out the terror-fury that lies hidden under father's acceptable conformism. It is simply conformity sincere, conformity revealing its true content, which is hatred of others, a stunted wish for omnipotence, and the conformist's secret belief that nothing outside his skin is real or true. For which reason he must redouble his obeisance to institutions lest, if the act of obeisance be withheld, the whole external world will vanish, leaving him alone. And to be left alone when you do not sense any existence in yourself is the ultimate terror.

Here is a real starting-point. Miller gets down to the basic idea of self, or the lack of it, in our society, as the root of delinquency. Not its superficial "welfare" aspects, but its *philosophical depths*, are in control, he says. His final definition is of delinquency as a "product of technology destroying the very concept of man as a value in himself." He writes:

> I have heard most of the solutions men have offered, and they are spiritless, they do not assume that the wrong is deep and terrible and general among us all. There is, in a word, a spirit gone. Perhaps two world wars, brutality immeasurable, have blown it off the earth; perhaps the very processes of technology have sucked it out of man's soul; but it is gone. Many men rarely relate to one another excepting as customer to seller, worker to boss, the affluent to the deprived and vice versa—in short, as factors to be somehow manipulated and not as intrinsically valuable persons.

We have a small quarrel with Mr. Miller on a point concerning which he would probably agree at once. "Technology," as such, is not destroying anything. The philosophical vacuum in our lives, which we have allowed the busy acquisitiveness and distractions of technology to fill, is doing the destruction.

We ought to go on to other "starting-points," but one passage by Miller on how the rationalizations of our technological culture work is too good to omit:

> Today power would have us believe—everywhere—that it is purely beneficent. The bank is not a place which makes more money with your deposits than it returns to you in the form of interest, it is not a sheer economic necessity, it is not a business at all. It is "Your Friendly Bank," a kind of welfare institution whose one prayer, day and night, is to serve your whims or needs. A school is no longer a place of mental discipline but a kind of day-care center, a social gathering where you go through a ritual of games and entertainments which insinuate knowledge and the crafts of the outside world. Business is not the practice of buying low and selling high, it is a species of public service. The good life itself is not the life of struggle for meaning, not the quest for union with the past with God, with man, that it traditionally was. The good life is the life of ceaseless entertainment, effortless joys, the air-conditioned, dust-free languor beyond the Mussulman's most supine dream. Freedom is, after all, comfort, sexuality is a photograph. The enemy of it all is the real. The enemy is conflict. The enemy, in a word, is life.

We haven't seen all the literature—not even a small fraction of it—but we doubt if *anyone* has ever put the delinquency problems of modern society more clearly.

Our next example of the health in us is taken from *Frontier*, a West Coast liberal monthly magazine. In the January issue, Dick Meister, a California newspaperman, writes on a difficult and touchy subject—"Black Nationalism in San Francisco's Ghetto." The subject is touchy for the reason that almost nobody knows the right answers in respect to the solution of the problems of racial conflict and injustice. Many of us know, or think we know, the answer in terms of general principles, but how to put those principles to work in a social framework that is saturated with many kinds of prejudice as well as ignorance remains extremely difficult. The best-intentioned whites may make bad mistakes through their own feelings of guilt: not by good will alone can they escape from what James Baldwin calls "that collection of myths to which white Americans cling: that their ancestors were all freedom-loving heroes, that

they were born in the greatest country the world has ever seen, or that Americans are invincible in battle and wise in peace, that Americans have always dealt honorably with Mexicans and Indians and all other neighbors or inferiors, that American men are the world's most direct and virile, that American women are pure."

Truly, no man—least of all a white man—is an island, and the liberal white man, filled with social ideals and democratic intentions, cannot help but suffer curious infections from his still-deluded fellows. Likewise his black brothers, also being men, have their own delusions to contend with. Whatever we think is right and just, and however determined we are upon the application of principles, it should be obvious that no peace or justice can come out of a confrontation of rival delusions. And manifestly, each race must work upon the correction of its own delusions, not the other fellow's. As Baldwin says, "color" is

> [a] fearful and delicate problem, which compromises, when it does not corrupt, all the American efforts to build a better world—here, there, or anywhere. It is for this reason that everything white Americans think they believe in must now be re-examined. . . . For the sake of one's children, ... one must be careful not to take refuge in any delusion—and the value placed on the color of the skin is always and everywhere and forever a delusion. . . . If we (whites and blacks) do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and . . . change the history of the world. . . .

Dick Meister's *Frontier* article may have been mistitled. It does not seem from the context of what he says that the activities of the Afro-American Association in San Francisco are properly called "Black Nationalism." Led by talented young Negroes who are mostly graduate students or graduates of the University of California, the Afro-American Association has organized a program of self-help combined with what Mr. Meister calls "a frank appraisal of the Negro's problems and a constant expression of ideas largely ignored by today's leaders, but long latent in Negro communities and never before voiced in the midst of a genuine drive for racial integration."

The theme of this group is not integration, but motivation. Dick Meister quotes at length from Don Warden, a twenty-six-year-old Negro attorney who recently graduated from law school and was preparing to leave this country for work in Nigeria. He and some other young Negroes had been meeting to consider ways of helping the development of Africa, but began to feel that there was plenty to do in the United States. Warden is chairman of the Afro-American Association, which, in his words, aims to give the American Negro—

> "a feeling of pride and purpose to replace the inferiority instilled by a white culture which he is taught to chase, but not allowed to join, a culture which has degraded him and taught him to be ashamed of his blackness. The white man broke link with the past, dragging us from our homeland into slavery, and we had no choice but to drink his culture; but we were rejected and our inferiority reinforced."

Warden proposes a recovery by American Negroes of their African heritage and culture, while acknowledging various shortcomings of the race in its present circumstances and white environment. Meister writes:

> Warden's group isn't the only Negro organization to make such comments, and in the final analysis it also ascribes the problems at least in large part to discrimination. But unlike most other groups, the association does not point further to lack of integration as a cause. It contends, in fact, that integration, where it has come about, has helped but little, and isn't likely to help. For it means subjecting the Negro to what Warden terms "the jungle of the black man," a jungle of hair straighteners and bleaching creams where Negroes claw toward an unattainable goal: to be fair-skinned.

You could say that Warden and his group want the Negroes to find stability and self-respect on their own account, so as to be independent of this temptation to imitate the whites. Meister continues:

> Seeking desperately to identify with a dominant majority the Negro has always been plagued by this problem in the thoughts of more Negroes today than most of their leaders will admit. They prefer to ignore it, in fear perhaps that concern with what one association calls "the pathological desire of the black man to become white" can only slow the pace toward the paramount goal of integration—or halt it altogether. But the Afro-American Association doesn't ignore the problem which it blames in large part on the mass media and on the schools. The association says the mass media "define beauty strictly in terms of white," and the schools "teach only a white culture and rob our children of drive and motivation."

It would be a great mistake for any white man to react to this by saying, "You see, the most intelligent Negroes don't really *want* integration!" It is not a white citizen's business to decide what a black citizen "wants." It is the white citizen's business to see that the black citizen is accorded exactly the same consideration before the law as any other citizen. That some Negro leaders are attacking the problem of race without waiting for the gross methods of legality and political justice to accomplish what little they can accomplish for the Negroes as human beings, is an exciting and reassuring fact of current history—*not* an excuse for delaying the political justice. Moreover, such individual enterprise and resourcefulness on the part of Negro Americans add to the cultural wealth of all Americans—a sign of the health that is in us. Here are some more paragraphs from Mr. Meister's article:

> The association's solution to the problem, and to most other problems of discrimination, centers on the schools. Ultimately it hopes to give the Negro a chance to stay out of them completely—at least until the age of ten—and be able to attend instead private all-Negro schools operated by the association nation-wide. This summer the association conducted a daily full-time school for thirty-five youths in Oakland. Current operations, however, are restricted to weekly classes held at night after regular public school hours—two classes in Oakland and one in San Francisco.
>
> Conducted by Negro college students and professional teachers, the schools concentrate on the history and culture of past and present-day Africa and on other lessons designed to give students a sense of personal dignity and self-control and a sense of responsibility to their community and to each other. Aimed particularly at Negroes involved in crime and on welfare rolls, the lessons emphasize respect for law and order, and treat other specific community problems.
>
> Community planning is stressed—that girls, for instance, should strive to become nurses rather than beauticians, because their communities have a far greater need for nurses. Other young students are encouraged to acquire the business, legal, medical, and higher technical skills sorely needed in Negro communities. They're told, in short, "that they're not just going to school for themselves, but for all their people." . . .
>
> "The ghetto is not what we want, but what is," says Warden, "and it's going to be with us a long time. The real choice, then, is not between having a ghetto and not having one, but between having a good ghetto or having a bad one. Chinatown is a good ghetto. It has almost no crime, has strong family discipline, great community feeling, and strong ties to the past of its people. The Chinese knew they wouldn't be integrated, so instead of concentrating on integration, they stayed where they were and built up their own people. And their schools, like ours, are an important part of that process." . . . Once ghetto and personal standards are raised through such "self-help," says Warden, Negroes will have the means to break into outside society—discrimination or no discrimination.

The NAACP, says Mr. Meister, has denounced the Afro-American Association as fostering discrimination and black nationalism. The "average Negro," according to NAACP spokesmen, wants to be integrated now, "not singled out and glorified." We can't speak to this point, save to say that cultural self-respect is not nationalism, and to add our agreement with Mr. Meister's conclusion: "The new movement is attracting attention, and . . . whatever its ultimate effect, it is going to cause Negroes and whites alike to look closely into some matters too long left virtually unexplored."

If it is to be argued, as we have argued, that these are signs of health, some notice should be taken of the considerable difference between our

examples. Arthur Miller's examination of juvenile delinquency is hardly more than a "literary" gesture, so far as practical results are concerned, while the work of the Afro-American Association is pursued on the actual frontier of individual and social reconstruction. Both have to do with the basic question of the idea of the self, but Miller stops with an acutely perceptive diagnosis, while the young Negroes in San Francisco have gone much further, in pursuit and re-creation of a positive social ideal. Yet this difference, it seems to us, is inevitable. Miller's criticism is "total" in the sense of relating to the dominant culture of the Western World and its over-all ills. He is dealing with the basic cause of the conditions which have created the problems of all races, and by which modern Negroes are affected in a particular way. Miller has opened up for his readers a way of seeing the terrible void at the center of modern life. He is not the only one, of course, who has called attention to this emptiness, but he has certainly done it with great power and effect. The serious limitation on all such efforts—a limitation which neither Mr. Miller nor any other individual can by himself overcome—is that what he says is too easily forgotten, covered up, buried, by the spate of technologically produced words which have no meaning but which flow on and on, poured out by the mindless compulsions of the technology which dominates our lives. The need is for many, many people to brood over what Miller and others like him are saying, as though they had at last discovered the Philosopher's Stone, or had at least polished one of its facets for their fellow men to see. When this begins to happen in earnest, we shall have not-only signs of health, here and there, but the start of a viable social organism for us all.

REVIEW
"ACCIDENTAL" OBLITERATION

FAIL-SAFE, the Burdick-Wheeler novel (McGraw-Hill, 1962), is an elaboration of a story written by Harvey Wheeler in 1957, based upon the possibility of a nuclear war begun by a mechanical error. We tend to agree with most critics that this is not a particularly good novel, yet any piece which illustrates, in any way, the horrendous chances of a "war" nobody wants can serve the cause of education.

In a recent press interview (Dec. 18, 1962), President Kennedy made two remarks which provide ample justification for the Burdick-Wheeler theme. Referring to the recent Cuban crisis and the possibility of similar "show-downs," the President admitted that "one mistake can make this whole thing blow up." Later, speaking of the effort to perfect a defensive armament system, he said: "We hope sometime to develop a system which will permit us to fire a missile at a missile coming towards us and destroy it . . . but it will cost billions."

Mr. Burdick and Mr. Wheeler do a fair job of presenting the various reasons why *no* armaments, defensive or otherwise, can guarantee the prevention of nuclear attacks. Mechanical failure in a single transmission system, once the air forces are called out to investigate "an unidentified flying object," *could* conceivably trigger an attack upon Moscow. The scientist who designed most of the equipment used in the *Fail-Safe* "war room" at Omaha, Nebraska, was well aware of the fact that technical intricacies made 100 per cent defense against air attack impossible. But the congressmen who secured appropriations for installation of the system had disregarded such "fine points." The public must feel secure, even when it was not.

The characters in *Fail-Safe* are improbable almost to a man, but the conjunction of events which eventually leads to the destruction of both Moscow and New York is not improbable at all, as the brief quotations from President Kennedy show. Here, however, we are chiefly interested in the dehumanizing aspects of all organization for atomic war. This psychological trend is aptly described in one of the early chapters of *Fail-Safe*—dealing with the lives of the "dedicated" men who serve the contemporary robots of war:

> The men who expended their lives raising and lowering these gigantic masses of intricate and explosive material were aware of the eerie, nightmarish quality of their existence. The more speculative of the missilemen, the eggheads among them, had discovered an unofficial poet laureate: Albert Camus. Camus, who had understood fully the futility and the antic and the senselessness of much of modern life, had also, in a perverse way, found the principle and will which allowed him to live through the awful stresses of the French underground during World War II. Like Camus, the missilemen had learned to live seriously in a world which was absurd. To enter a missile compound on Gold Alert was like entering a severe monastic order, utterly dedicated to the service of ununderstood mechanical totems.
>
> There was an element in the subterranean life which was pervasive, perfectly known, understood, and never discussed. There was the knowledge that the enemy was doing precisely what they were doing. Somewhere halfway around the world there was another set of silos, another pattern of hard sites, another organization of men—almost, they assumed, precisely like theirs. This is no easy knowledge to carry. It is one thing to arm the thermonuclear warhead on an immense missile. It is another to know that another person, with almost the same training, is doing the identical thing—and that he must be thinking of you—and knowing that you are thinking of him thinking of you, and on and on.

It can certainly be argued from a clinical standpoint that all preparations for nuclear warfare are insane, since it is hardly possible for either side to secure a clear-cut victory when both are triggered for mass retaliation following an initial attack. Insanity is betokened by an act which lacks any logical relationship to supposedly desired consequences. Neither a Napoleon nor a Hitler could *conquer* today's world, in the traditionally accepted sense of the word, because no one can occupy territories by dropping nuclear bombs—nor can such territories be exploited after

obliteration of the population. On the defensive side, no Horatio can stand bravely upon the bridge, because the specifics of nuclear strategy are the result of mathematical calculations translated into fire power by automation. All the decisions respecting armament and weapons must be made long before their possible use in offense or defense. The military relies upon a series of detailed Plans, and when one of the Plans is activated, any change of mind, any conceivable "retreat" or different sort of "advance," is inconceivable.

The last chapter of *Fail-Safe* consists largely of an imaginary conversation between Premier Khrushchev and President Kennedy during the few moments that remain before the first non-recallable bombs strike. The dialogue screams of the authors' contrivance and in its entirety is a bit hard to take, but the points emphasized, as we have said, can stand dramatization. So, blushing a little for Burdick and Wheeler, we reprint these paragraphs:

> "Premier Khrushchev?" There was a tentative note to the president's voice.
>
> "Yes, Mr. President?"
>
> "This crisis of ours—this accident, as you say. . . . In one way it's no man's fault. No human being made any mistake, and there's no point in trying to place the blame on anyone." The President paused.
>
> "I agree, Mr. President."
>
> Buck noticed the President nod, receiving the agreement as if both men were in the same room talking together. The President continued, in part thinking aloud: "This disappearance of human responsibility is one of the most disturbing aspects of the whole thing. It's as if human beings had evaporated, and their places were taken by computors. And all day you and I have sat here, fighting, not each other, but rather this big rebellious computerized system, struggling to keep it from blowing up the world."
>
> "It is true, Mr. President. Today the whole world could have burned without any man being given a chance to have a say in it."
>
> "In one way," continued the President, "we didn't even make the decision to have the computerized systems in the first place. These automated systems became technologically possible, so we built them. Then it became possible to turn more and more control decisions over to them, so we did that. And before we knew it, we had gone so far that the systems were able to put us in the situation we are in today."
>
> "Yes, we both trusted these systems too much." A new grimness crept into Khrushchev's voice. "You can never trust any system, Mr. President, whether it is made of computers, or of people . . .". He seemed lost in his own thoughts and his voice faded.

Fail-Safe has something of a happy ending—if one can assimilate the idea that both Moscow and New York have to be wiped out before a wondrous "intuitive bond" develops between the Premier and the President. A useful criticism of the book, considering it in terms of its Book of the Month Club circulation, is provided by a review in the *Christian Century* (Dec. 5, 1962) by Priscilla Grundy:

Fail-Safe is a propaganda novel, written to persuade the public that in spite of every check and countercheck devisable by man and machine, mechanical failure could still cause nuclear war. Perhaps in 1957 this message needed to be conveyed. Today quite clearly it does not. Knowledge of such a possibility is surely a safely ensconced factor in our natural neuroticism about nuclear war.

The authors offer no alternatives or solutions to our present arms race, which makes accidental war possible. They do suggest disarmament, but acknowledge that only an enormous tragedy will convince both sides that they must cooperate in disarming. Like most of the rest of us they do not consider unilateral action. The result is that the reader is warned to fear the worst—which he already does—and is then left dangling more precariously than ever over the familiar abyss of nuclear holocaust.

COMMENTARY
THE WAY THE WORLD WILL GET BETTER

BECAUSE of the material we print on men like Henry David Thoreau (it is easy, come to think of it, to say "men like" Thoreau, but not easy to name even one or two), the question of why they grip our minds, and something more than our minds, keeps coming up. Among contemporary authors, only Henry Miller has a similar quality. and it is just as puzzling in his case.

Well, we have developed a theory about this, based on what might be called social and individual introspection. It has to do with how we feel about ourselves.

Nearly all men (and women) have a tendency to strike attitudes. You don't strike an attitude to please yourself, but to please others. The idea of what is good and right to think and do is for most of us a mixed bag of certainties and half-certainties. The certainties are the things we are sure of, without consulting anyone else; the half-certainties are the attitudes we borrow from other people—people whom we believe to be on the Right Side.

The really fortunate men, you might argue, are those who have been stripped of the reassurances they get from others, compelling them to find out for themselves what they really think. A man who knows what he really thinks carries around with him a special kind of power which affects everyone he meets, even in casual encounters. People are drawn to him; they like to be with him; or sometimes, he frightens them as some kind of menace who makes the terrible unknowns in their own being come to the surface.

But this analysis hardly explains such individuals. A lot of people grew up in Concord, Mass., early in the nineteenth century, but Concord produced only one Thoreau. What pared him down to relying solely on his own reflections? We don't know.

Then, on this question of being stripped of your defenses, of your propensity to lean on other people's opinions—how many are ready for this ordeal? It will no doubt strengthen and mature some men, but others will break under the pressure and take flight from the inner darkness.

And yet, after you do some thinking along these lines, you can't ever go back to any kind of leaning in comfort—no *conscious* leaning, that is. "A poor thing," you say to yourself, "but is it really my own?"

Finally, you begin to get some working definitions of the good life that are likely to stand up in any situation. You begin to look at yourself with considerable suspicion, asking, is this an honest conviction, or only an echo of some "public" or other to which I hope I belong?

Now this, one might suppose, is a formula for becoming shaken and insecure, but it does not work that way at all. Instead, just to ask such questions is a curious sort of strengthener. The stereotypes we have lived by, it turns out, were some kind of psychological "mulch" we have been using, to protect our personal frailty, and they are, we begin to see, only the dead leaves of other men's opinions.

How do you tell the basic convictions of a man from the stereotypes he repeats? Well, on Lincoln's Birthday we happened to turn on the Pacifica Station, KPFK, and heard Raymond Massey reciting some of Abe Lincoln's speeches. With an ear sensitive to political clichés, we listened and listened, but we heard not a one. At the end we decided that the judgment of our countrymen is sound on this point—Lincoln was truly a great man. It was as though *everything* he said was a conclusion he had arrived at personally. The question of whether a man like that could gain office today was a sobering thought.

Occasionally you meet such individuals—people who are psychologically *unable* to repeat the opinions of other men before they have completely digested them and made them their

own. Then you know you are in the presence of a man, and not some kind of echo. You feel *spoken to* as a human being, as a subject, not an object of the attempt at manipulation with popular slogans. The individuality of the speaker reaches in and touches the individuality of the listener. It is a contact of mind with mind.

This is the essence of the good life for human beings. Everything else is subordinate, everything else is only a means or even an obstacle.

But as with other important matters, this experience has degrees of intensity, or of dilution. You don't get it pure, most of the time. For one thing, there are not enough people who embody this strength of individual thought—not enough Thoreaus, you could say—to create the milieu of true individuality. The most you can hope for, probably, is to encounter people who have some feeling for the ideal and are working toward it in their own way. Now and then you may hear a man stop, correct himself, question himself, and pay you the immeasurable compliment of trying to be completely honest with you—since to be honest with you he has to question himself.

This is the way the world will get better, actually the only way, since this will make all our other abilities work for good.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
DISCUSSIONS WITH DR. BETTELHEIM

WE have not yet seen Bruno Bettelheim's new volume, *Dialogues with Mothers* (Macmillan), but a 12-page "preview" of the book was made available in *Redbook* for May, 1962. This material consists entirely of tape recordings of discussions with young mothers whose children are "normal." Since all of Bettelheim's writings since he has headed the Sonia Shankman School in Chicago have concerned seriously disturbed youngsters, it is most interesting to see how this remarkable psychiatrist translates the wealth of his experience into simple counsel from which any mother can profit.

Dr. Bettelheim initiated these informal discussions a few years ago. They are mostly with the young wives of veterans studying under the GI Bill of Rights at the University of Chicago. "Toward the end of the first year," Bettelheim remarks, "they no longer asked each other what they thought I would consider the 'right' answer, but instead speculated about how I would probably go about trying to discover what was wrong." *Redbook* introduces the tapes:

> In the simplest possible terms, what Dr. Bettelheim sought to discover in each situation was: (1) how the child really felt and why, and (2) how the mother really felt and why. Once these questions were answered, the mothers were able to find their own, individual ways of dealing with problems—rather than looking for an authoritative answer that would apply to all mothers and children.

Speaking of "the jealous child," Dr. Bettelheim makes no essential distinction between "children" and ourselves:

> So you see, it's really very simple as soon as we're convinced that in their situation we'd behave exactly as they do. The actions you can see. But as long as you can't construct from them an analogous situation where you'd behave exactly as they do, you'll have to think back. . . . Because that's all you need to learn and it's all I can teach you.

With the young mothers, Bettelheim uses the Socratic method, as he does with children:

> Dr. B.: Now tell me, are you jealous of a person who's of no importance to you?
>
> Mother: No.
>
> Dr. B.: And the closer you are, the greater your positive feelings are for a person, the more or the less jealous are you going to be?
>
> Mother: The more.
>
> Dr. B.: So why are you amazed, then, if your kid goes up and kisses the baby? Jealousy by definition is a mixed emotion, isn't it? A combination of love and hate and not hate alone. The interesting thing is that you know this very well about yourselves. If you hate somebody, you say, "I hate him"; you don't say, "I'm jealous." You would never mix these up in your own case. You know very well the difference between being jealous of someone and hating someone or despising someone.
>
> Then when you read that children are jealous and you see the child showing love, you're amazed. Wasn't that implied in your initial description and the definitions of jealousy we've heard? Okay, what I wanted to show you is that sometimes you apply yardsticks for your children different from those for yourselves. But then you're less apt to be as helpful as if you rightly understood what the child feels when he's troubled by jealousy.
>
> Actually, most children aren't jealous of each other, they're jealous of their parents. They want to be sure that the new baby doesn't get too much of Mother's love. If they've watched and convinced themselves that it doesn't, then they can kiss it.

Another session deals with the psychological impact of such words as "naughty" and "bad," indicating why semantic sloppiness in the home may be more than an academic concern:

> Mother: We have a four-year-old, and she's asked me, "What is naughty?" Now, I'm having a hard time defining in my own mind the symbols of morality I'd like her to have. I say that playing with matches is naughty and crossing the street without your mother is naughty. But beyond that she knows that I disapprove of some things, and yet I don't want her to feel that they're naughty. Naughtiness in my mind should be something forbidden and I'm having a hard time defining it.

Dr. B.: Yes, but I think you confuse the poor child. If you want your child to be a reasonable citizen, then you have to give for each of your actions the specific reasons, because that's how intelligence develops. It develops by exploring the specific attributes of a specific situation, and you deny the child this right to explore if you use one global word for entirely different things. If you keep on this way, you'll get an automaton who divides activities into those that are fully naughty, partly naughty or not naughty. But you cannot have an intelligent citizen and tell the child it's naughty to cross the street, because you do it yourself all the time.

Mother: Well, would it have made any difference if I said "bad"? Naughty is synonomous with bad, isn't it?

Dr. B.: No, it isn't. Besides, I certainly don't think that crossing the street is bad.

Mother: Well, how else do you convey a generalization to a child, unless you—

Dr. B.: Isn't "dangerous" as good a generalization as "naughty"?

Mother: Yes, I think it is.

Dr B.: But dangerous—what does dangerous imply? What question?

Mother: Well, "Why?"

Dr. B.: Yes. "Why is it dangerous?" And you can then demonstrate and tell her why it's dangerous. And she will quickly see that each action is dangerous in a different way. Correct? All right. Isn't that how thinking proceeds? Don't you want your child to be able to figure out why an action is dangerous? With your term "naughty" you prevent that.

Mother: Yes, but I did think that as the child got older I'd explain more. After all, you've got to be adamant about certain things as long as possible.

Dr. B.: Oh, I certainly don't say you've been wrong in being adamant about safety rules. Not because they're naughty, but because it's dangerous to transgress them.

Third Mother: That raises another point. We don't use the word "naughty" or "bad" or "good," but Paul's picked them up in nursery school. And now he wants to know what's "bad" and what's "good." He's been called a bad boy, and of course we assure him he's not.

Dr. B.: The issue "Am I a nice boy?" is an issue I wouldn't permit to arise. "You are Johnny and you're fine with me, but sometimes you do things I don't like you to do, and that was one of them. Do you understand why I didn't like that? All right, if you understand, that's all I'm interested in. So go; run along, my boy." But of course, if you tell him, "Nice boy, good boy," you know, and, "Isn't he a nice child?" then of course you never get away from it. Then whether he's good or bad depends on your, or Uncle Joe's, judgment, and that's something I wouldn't wish on a dog—that somebody else's judgment should establish the worth or the worthlessness of a person. I think that he alone is the one to judge if he's a nice person or not. But I wouldn't even give him those words. It's a miserable way to think of a child.

Such material speaks for itself. Perhaps even more than other good psychiatrists, Dr. Bettelheim has disabled himself as a moralist. We suspect that the volume, *Dialogues with Mothers*, will be a valuable addition to the libraries of MANAS readers.

FRONTIERS

A Letter on the "Classics"

A READER who has several times contributed to these pages, and who is a teacher, writes to say:

> I have been following your description of new schooling opportunities very closely and with much interest, since I am presently in search of a teaching position for the Fall (at either the college or high school level). Some of the experiments you describe are "different" rather than a genuine step forward, and in this category I would place the Olivewood School in Riverside, California, which you describe in the Dec. 12 issue. This is a school which would go backward to the classics and thus provide students with an education that is irrelevant to the needs and problems of life in the twentieth century. (I grant that there is always a basic core of truth which is relevant, no matter what the age, but the way to approach that truth is not the way other ages have approached it, through *their* classics. We need our own classics—as, for example, Joseph Wood Krutch points out David Riesman has done in *The Lonely Crowd.* The truth is timeless, but the approach to it is always through time.
>
> An educational institution that emphasizes the classics does not appear to me to meet anyone's needs—except the academic needs of a few classical enthusiasts. On a different level altogether is such a venture as Pacific High School in Palo Alto, Calif., on which you also report in the Dec. 13 issue.
>
> In your excellent article on education, "Socrates Rides Again," in the Jan. 2 issue, you raise the question of whether education concerned with being and knowing oneself is possible, and suggest that it is not, except on a do-it-yourself basis. In a sense, you are correct and everyone must ultimately educate himself in these matters. Still, I think it is possible for the formal educational system to contribute much more in this respect than it does at present. The educational system can at least perform the negative function of putting up as few obstacles as possible to an education of the self, and discouraging as little as possible both students and teachers from exploring the possibilities of this kind of knowledge. (The Pacific High School, with its emphasis on spontaneity, friendliness, intensity of learning, and responsiveness to the individual needs of students, looks like a step in this direction. So does the proposed new Summerhill School in New York.)
>
> The need is so great for a more authentic kind of education that the situation cannot continue on indefinitely as it is. Existing antiquated structures must crumble and give way to fresh approaches. In final measure, the sterility and stifling confinement of our conventional education will last only so long as we are willing to put up with it—which means, so long as we can see no alternatives to it.

We are in no position to argue the old question of the "classics" with this correspondent, having neither learned nor taught them, in any conventional way. We can, however, testify to the enormous fruitfulness of exposure to the Socratic dialogues as offered, say, in the first year of a Great Books Seminar. Then, it seems that authentic Humanist culture can hardly be achieved by Westerners without some grounding in the literature of Hellenic civilization. A sense of continuity, of roots in the past, may be a prerequisite to successful forays into the future. One learns from the classics the meaning of the heroism of men of principle and of the agonies of moral decision. But perhaps this is the "basic core of truth" conceded to the classics by our correspondent. For our part, we should feel psychologically mutilated were anyone able to take away from us our recollections of the generalized wisdom of the Greek myths, of the rational spirit of the Platonic Dialectic, of the wonder and the lucidity of Greek thought. These thinkers are among our intellectual and moral forefathers. How grasp the meaning of the Renaissance without knowledge of its original progenitors, the Greeks? And how understand the strivings of our own cycle of history without placing ourselves in relation to the Renaissance and more distant periods in the past?

We also have a kind of "hunch" about this question. It is that a period of history has a beginning, a middle, a climactic moment, and an end. The classics of an age represent the best expression of its climactic moment. It behooves the men of any other age—especially the "educated" men—to look closely at the climactic expressions of past cycles of civilization. They may find some homologous relations that will help

to bring their own age to maturity. We suspect, that is, that the wisdom of any period, however idiomatically peculiar to that period, has more in common with the wisdom of other periods than our correspondent is inclined to grant. What we are trying to suggest is that our culture has not yet sufficiently "ripened" to produce a true classical expression. We need modern classics; there is no doubt about that; but an informed appreciation of the classics of the past may put us in a better position to recognize our own when they come along. In saying this, it is furthest from our wish to slight Dr. Riesman, who in our opinion has taken long strides toward bringing our culture to the maturity which may some day produce our "classical" period. But we are confident that Dr. Riesman would agree that we have a long way still to go, and we would argue that knowledge of the classics may be necessary for developing that sense of "measure" which enables us to say that a classic is "contemporary" in every age. In other words, a whole future rests upon an assimilated past.

We make, of course, no defense of labored study of the ancients simply because they are "old" or "established." The fetishes of the profession of learning are as bad as any other kind of fetish, or worse because of their pretensions to wisdom. Only an intelligent or "creative" use of the past has any validity in the present. (It should be added that in the Dec. 12 discussion of the Olivewood School in Riverside, a quotation from William P. Chapman, whose thinking pervades the conception of the school, was omitted for lack of space. This quotation, which appears in the Jan. 30 issue in "Children and Ourselves," helps to show that the general intentions of Olivewood are somewhat different from the; conclusions drawn by this correspondent.)

As for our correspondent's comment on Miss Navratil's proposal, we can only heartily agree. If the example of private schools and the efforts of individuals—in or out of the public school system—can finally bring about conditions under which simple philosophical investigations of self-knowledge are pursued in schools of all kinds, we shall have a fresh Renaissance indeed! Then, perhaps, we shall be able to dispense with learned studies concerned with the problems of parents whose children come home from school after an air raid "drill" wanting to know when the bombs are going to fall. Some of the preoccupations of school children were noted recently in *Time* (Jan. 4):

> Teen-agers are already old enough to be worrying about the kind of world they will inherit. They ask, "Will our children be freaks?" And their doubts and fears can easily degenerate into a sense of defeat, a feeling that the battle of life has already been lost for them by their elders.

So far as we can see, the quest for self-knowledge, when it occurs in our time, comes largely as an effect of revulsion, of disgust for the present and most of its works. To be of any value, this quest needs to be undertaken with a certain intensity and must be pursued with dogged continuity. It may not, therefore, be left to the elders to institute such a program; the young may be driven to undertake it themselves, in self-defense.

A return to the question of the "classics" seems appropriate here. For example, if a young person expressed a wondering about what men in other ages and civilizations had thought about the Self, we could not resist suggesting that he read, along with Plato's *Apology* and the *Phaedo*, the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, and, if he asked for more, the *Katha* and *Prashna Upanishads.* And we might add the *Bhagavad-Gita.* This would be good reading to do, to complement studies in Carl Rogers, Rollo May, A. H. Maslow, Erich Fromm, and David Riesman. The "empirical self" is one thing; the "self" of depth psychology another, the multiple "selves" of John Dewey still others, and all these, eventually, may gain in meaning from a comparison with Upanishadic and Greek thought. One thing is sure: nobody will ever be able to "complete" this course of investigation, nor will anyone, once he has begun, ever wish to give it up.