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PROBLEMS OF THE PROPRIETORS

THE popular philosophy—*political* philosophy; we have no other—of the present has heaped enormous responsibilities on the shoulders of the common man. Unlike the tribesman of primitive society, whose role was clearly defined by *mores* and tabus, or one who belonged to an ancient theocratic or hierarchical society, in which the decrees of heaven established claims on each of its members with unquestioned authority, the modern individual is supposed to have in himself at least the potentialities of a designer of the social system. The evidence for this view is all about. You find it in the ringing appeals of politicians to what they say is the bedrock foundation of a self-governing society—the *people,* who are out there, spread around the country, thinking about what ought to be done and casting votes to implement their opinions. Socialist and Communist states exhibit a similar devotion to resources and capacities of the common man. The revolution, we are told, was a revolt and a seizure of power by the *Proletariat.* The Soviets are continually turning up poets among peasants, and pointing to the true social understanding disclosed by factory workers. Western radicals, disenchanted by the Stalinist betrayal of the Bolshevik revolution, see new hope in the shop steward movement; the fundamental tropism in every attempt to continue the classical revolutionary tradition is to find renewed inspiration in the common man.

It is of course possible to poke holes in the doctrine that the twentieth century is the era of self-government. What is not possible, however, is to deny that this idea is in the air and is in some sense accepted by the masses of people. Even those who set out to prove from history and current events that the people do not, in fact, govern themselves, show how the manipulators of power get their way by exploiting the idea of popular government and claiming to act *for* the people. We can say, therefore, that the image of the ordinary man creating and administering his government, reasoning about and selecting from various social systems the one he likes best, is the prevailing socio-political myth of the age. He may be woefully inadequate at the tasks of social proprietorship, and he may shrink from or ignore its complex obligations, but he knows he is *supposed* to be a proprietor, and he believes that becoming a responsible adult means trying to think like a proprietor of the social order. This is a convention of modern thought.

A very different convention shaped or gave direction to the thinking of ancient or medieval man. The social structure was not his responsibility. It was simply there, like the physical environment. He never thought about the possibility of tearing down or erecting political systems. The institutions of his society defined his being and established the conditions of his development. It is manifest today, incidentally, that a certain wisdom characterized many of these institutions. They embodied a framework of experience for the individual in which he grew to a maturity that gave meaning to his life. One of the curious—and possibly anomalous—achievements of the present age lies in our recognition of the values of this "maturity," regardless of the cultural background in which it was realized. It is as though a naturalist comes upon a colony of social insects and is overwhelmed by the extraordinary harmony, the successful division of labor, and the cooperative productiveness of these creatures. He is amazed and fascinated by the achievement and longs to understand it, but he is on the outside looking in. The dynamics of the system escape him.

The analogy, however, is inadequate, since the cultural anthropologist can to some extent get "inside" the ancient social community. By study and reflection he begins to feel how the "rites of passage" operated in preparing the young for life as adults in their society. The social role of ancient religion gradually becomes manifest. There was no important distinction, he finds, between politics and religion in these old societies. And for the purposes

of the "maturity" which modern man longs for with all his heart, this socio-religious organism actually *worked.*

But the cultural anthropologist, having come this far, can go no further. Once more he is on the outside looking in. The magic of the ancient society lay in the whole-hearted conviction of the people that the scheme of meaning they inhabited was indeed the truth about themselves and the world. The anthropologist is now like Tolstoy with the peasants he so much admired; Tolstoy couldn't believe in the simple faith of the peasants, and the anthropologist, schooled in the relativities of religious belief, remains only an observer of ancient wholeness. Even so, he won't give up his discovery. The maturity which became possible in these relationships is a value outside and in a sense independent of the beliefs which framed their development. The beliefs, as he shows you from history, may have been multiple, but the qualities of maturity are *one.*

There are many definitions of "maturity," but the best of them seem to be couched in generalization. Here is a passage from Robert E. Nixon (*The Art of Growing*):

> Psychological maturity is a way of living one's life. Possession of a clear, objective, and undistorted view of oneself is necessary to psychological maturity, but by itself it is not enough. Possession of an equally dear, objective, and undistorted view of the world one lives in is also necessary, but by itself it is not enough either; and the two together, moreover, are still not sufficient to constitute psychological maturity. A life lived meaningfully in the presence of, and with reference to, these two views is what constitutes psychological maturity. . . . Psychological maturity begins when a person knows who and what he *really* is, as opposed to what he is "supposed" to be. The external maturer is still trying to puzzle out his own identity at sixty-five; the conformer is satisfied to act out what he is supposed to be, and the rebel to refute it. But the psychologically mature person knows who he is at twenty-five, he knows who he is at forty-five, and he still knows who he is at seventy-five. He has a sense of sameness, of continuity, of basic identity, which remains constant despite the passage of time, the variety of experience, the growing accumulation of wisdom. The perennial maturer has, for his central core, the eternal question, "Who am I?" and his life is dedicated to a never-finished search for the answer.

Notice that maturity, for Dr. Nixon, consists in knowing answers he does not give. It would be fairer to say that it consists in answers he *cannot* give, since maturity is an individual achievement, and the synthesis gained by one individual will differ in its origin from that of every other man. This, we might say, is a basic difference between the present and the past. *Our* maturity comes from individual realization of essences, not from adapting to institutional molds. Almost mournfully, Dr. Nixon observes:

> More words have been written in description of what psychological maturity is *not* than in definition of what it is. All authorities agree, however, at least by implication, on these three elements: knowledge of self, knowledge of one's setting, and some sort of active living that makes sense in the framework provided by that knowledge.

A somewhat "negative" account of what is good about the present age would be that we are in fundamental resistance to any authoritarian filling-in of the blanks of this definition of maturity. We regard the people who claim to have these answers for others as the dangerous men of our time. The process of abstraction of the good, of ideas of value, from particular historical settings is taking place in every aspect of our culture. It is also happening, for example, in religion. Henry Nelson Wieman, one of the most respected of religious thinkers, has this to say in *Man's Ultimate Commitment* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1958):

> . . . the primary concern of religion is very commonly misconceived. For example, religion is often presented in such a way as to make it appear that its chief concern is to believe in God. On this assumption people discuss such questions as these: Is it possible to believe in God by way of evidence or authority or on some other basis? Is there a Being properly called God? Such discussions miss the basic religious problem completely. The word "God' is irrelevant to the religious problem *unless* the word is used to refer to *whatever in truth,* operates to save man from evil and to the greater good *no matter how much this operating reality may differ from all traditional ideas about it.*
>
> But this is not the common way of conceiving the problem. Rather the question as commonly conceived is this: Is there anything in reality

> corresponding to some conventional idea of God? When undertaken in this way, the discussion is as remote from the basic problem in religion as one can get. The basic problem is to find and commit oneself to what does in truth save from evil and to the good even though it be different from the belief about it which happens to possess the mind at the time, or happens to prevail in the tradition I inherit. The word "God" should refer to what actually operates to save and not merely to some belief *about* what operates in this way. But in current usage the word frequently refers to pictures in the mind and not to the actuality. This raises the question whether one should use the word at all since a word becomes very misleading when it has acquired a conventional meaning contrary to what one wishes to discuss.

Speaking for contemporary theologians who, he says, are "distinctively the outstanding leaders of the church in our time," Dr. Wieman continues:

> . . . revelation is not to be identified with any set of doctrines or beliefs or propositions of any kind. . . . If revelation is not any set of propositions, then what can it be? Obviously it must be a creative transformation of human life occurring under such conditions that men become aware of the transforming power. For example, if it should be granted that Deity is incarnate in Jesus Christ, this could not be called a revelation unless it was at the same time a creative transformation of human life branching out from Jesus to his associates and from them to others in widening circles and onward to later generations. . . . The historic Jesus can be the revelation of God only in the sense that his process of saving transformation spreads from Jesus down through the ages from man to man and group to group by way of church and the Holy Spirit. But this kind of transformation is precisely what we mean by creative interchange. To what degree it originated in Jesus or is limited to that origin must be determined by historical research, as in any other assertion about events in history.

This, in a very real sense, is rendering faceless Joseph Campbell's *Hero with a Thousand Faces.* For such religion to have meaning, the individual must himself fill in the blanks. No more "pictures" for us to put in our minds.

What we have in the present, it begins to be clear, is three kinds of withdrawal of external institutional authority. There is the virtually completed withdrawal of authoritarian political control in the democratic idea of self-government. There is the fairly recent withdrawal of religious authority in the view that religious truth is found in transforming and saving function, and not the other way about. And there is the present withdrawal of scientific (psychological) authority from any but an abstract account of the good ("mature") life for human beings. In every case, it remains for the individual to turn the abstract into the concrete to "fill in the blanks." Every man his own philosopher, guide, and priest.

In these circumstances, what are the possibilities for modern man? What hope has he of shouldering successfully the responsibilities laid upon him by his political, religious, and psychological development? Can he make for himself a social order that will work under the conditions which now exist? What would be the prerequisites of such an order?

While we can make no final answers to these questions, there are certain things we are able to say, in the form of ground rules for proceeding further. First, any conception of an "order" to frame human life will have to provide believable mechanisms of self-realization for individuals. These mechanisms will have to be *prima-facie* means of relating men to goals they want to reach, and not barriers denying them. The idea of the new society will have to appeal, therefore, not to the stale emotions of nationalism, but to the deeper resolves of human beings.

This proviso throws us into the arena with the question of "maturity." To describe our goals, we need "knowledge of self, knowledge of one's setting, and some sort of active living that makes sense in the framework provided by that knowledge." The more obvious problem, here, lies in the difficulty of making up a social compact without being able to codify this kind of "knowledge." The ancient communities could do it, but we cannot.

There is, however, a more searching if less immediately promising approach. Study of the ingredients of maturity eventually leads to a body of conceptual thinking which does not submit to the dichotomy of religious/political, or church/state.

Maturity is either pre-political or post-political. It is an "organic," not a contractual, expression of being and relationships. It is not simply coincidence that the psychologists, philosophers, and essayists who today devote themselves to a study of maturity seldom branch out into political thinking. The categories of conventional political thinking do not fit; they will not contain, except after the fashion of Procrustes' bed, the concepts relating to maturity. A good illustration of this fact is found in Erich Fromm's book, *The Sane Society.* When Dr. Fromm got around to discussing the political forms which might house a sane society, he chose the French Communities of Work as coming as close as any existing social organization to what he had in mind—and the communities of work grew up around declarations of human intention rather than according to the form of a social contract.

It is as though the social forms of the future will have somehow to reunite the element of meaning (religion) and the element of means (politics), and do this without introducing once again the twin tyrannies of mindless force and psychological manipulation. We need a politics which will not deny the spirit, and a spirit which seeks no political adventitious aids. The problem is to generate a sense of authentic reality for the ideal of such an individual and social life. The point of this entire discussion is to suggest that nothing less, in view of the breakdown and withdrawal of the various forms of external authority, will serve us in the present.

We have had a great prophet of such a social order in Ralph Waldo Emerson. We need other prophets to repeat and amplify what he said, and to give blood and bones to a conception of man which will support a common life in which maturity is the common goal. Meanwhile, there is this, from Emerson's essay on Politics:

> In our barbarous society the influence of character is in its infancy. . . . The gladiators in the lists of power feel, through all their frocks of force and dissimulation, the presence of worth. I think the very strife of trade and ambition is confession of this divinity; and successes in those fields are the poor amends, the fig-leaf with which the shamed soul attempts to hide its nakedness. I find the like unwilling homage in all quarters. It is because we know how much is due from us that we are impatient to show some petty talent as a substitute for worth. We are haunted by a conscience of this right to grandeur of character, and are false to it. But each of us has some talent, can do somewhat useful, or graceful, or formidable, or amusing, or lucrative. That we do, as an apology to others and to ourselves for not reaching the mark of a good and equal life. But it does not satisfy *us*, whilst we thrust it on the notice of our companions. . . . Most persons of ability meet in society with a kind of tacit appeal. Each seems to say, "I am not all here." Senators and presidents have climbed so high with pain enough, not because they think the place specially agreeable, but as an apology for real worth, and to vindicate their manhood in our eyes. This conspicuous chair is their compensation for being of a poor, cold, hard nature. . . .
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> The tendencies of the times favor the idea of self-government. . . . The movement in this direction has been very marked in modern history. Much has been blind and discreditable, but the nature of the revolution is not affected by the vices of the revolters; for this is a purely moral force. It was never adopted by any party in history, neither can be. It separates the individual from all party, and unites him at the same time to the race. It promises a recognition of higher rights than those of personal freedom, or the security of property. A man has a right to be employed, to be trusted, to be loved, to be revered. The power of love, as the basis of a State, has never been tried. We must not imagine that all things are lapsing into confusion if every tender protestant be not compelled to bear his part in certain social conventions; nor doubt that roads can be built, letters carried, and the fruit of labor secured, when the government of force is at an end. Are our methods now so excellent that all competition is hopeless? could not a nation of friends even devise better ways? On the other hand, let not the most conservative and timid fear anything from a premature surrender of the bayonet and the system of force. For, according to the order of nature, which is quite superior to our will, it stands thus; there will always be a government of force where men are selfish, and when they are pure enough to abjure the code of force they will be wise enough to see how these public ends of the post-office, of the highway, of commerce and the exchange of property, of museums and libraries, of institutions of art and science can be answered.
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> We live in a very low state of the world, and pay unwilling tribute to governments founded on force. There is not, among the most religious and instructed

> men of the most religious and civil nations, a reliance on the moral sentiment and a sufficient belief in the unity of things, to persuade them that society can be maintained without artificial restraints, as well as the solar system; or that the private citizen might be reasonable and a good neighbor, without the hint of a jail or a confiscation. What is strange too, there never was in any man sufficient faith in the power of rectitude to inspire him with the broad design of renovating the State on the principle of right and love. All those who have pretended this design have been partial reformers, and have admitted in some manner the supremacy of the bad State. I do not call to mind a single human being who has steadily denied the authority of the laws, on the simple ground of his own moral nature. Such designs, full of genius and full of faith as they are, are not entertained except avowedly as air-pictures. If the individual who exhibits them dare to think them practicable, he disgusts scholars and churchmen, and men of talent and women of superior sentiments cannot hide their contempt. Not the less does nature continue to fill the heart of youth with suggestions of this enthusiasm, and there are now men—if indeed I can speak in the plural number—more exactly, I will say, I have just been conversing with one man, to whom no weight of adverse experience will make it for a moment appear impossible that thousands of human beings might exercise towards each other the grandest and simplest sentiments, as well as a knot of friends, or a pair of lovers.

No more than his single acquaintance of this firm persuasion—who was probably Thoreau—is Emerson unseated in his conviction by pessimism. The simple fact is that for Emerson, there was no other way to think. Why should he waste energy bewailing its difficulties?

The realities of the human situation have not changed; instead they have become more apparent since Emerson's time. The problem is to command human hope and human devotion with a view of life and its possibilities that fits with the dawning perceptions of men as they now are. How are they now? They are still animated by the vision of the eighteenth-century revolution. They want self-determination. They want to be free and to govern themselves. They may fail; they may fail again and again; but they will not give up the vision, which has become a part of their present knowledge of who and what they *really* are. So that vision is one of the things we have to work with. Another strand in the web of contemporary self-being is the idea of functional religion, so well described by Dr. Wieman. We are people who have to *feel* the truth before we can believe it; feeling it is experiencing its verity in life. Again, we are no experts in this. We are very imperfect ablutioners in the practice of living religion. But we can't go back to the old way of belief. Tolstoy couldn't; the cultural anthropologists can't; nobody can really convince himself of something which is different, or less, than what he feels to be true. The cultural evolutions of our age set limits to turning back to the past. The theocratic glue which bonded ancient societies won't hold us together. That we know both less and more than the ancients is a part of the burden we bear in being "modern man." So we have this dilemma to work with. Unlike the well-managed symmetries of the hierarchical orders of the past, which rested on the solid foundation of revealed truth, we sit uneasily on the spurs of unstable equilibrium. To be in balance we have to be moving toward the goal. As Dr. Nixon said: "The perennial maturer has, for his central core, the eternal question, 'Who am I?' and his life is dedicated to a never-finished search for the answer."

These are the situations, problems, and projects which should be addressed by those willing to assume the responsibilities of proprietorship for the social order of the future.

REVIEW
A "BEST SELLER" YOU MAY READ

OCCASIONALLY some non-duty reading turns out to be a bonus, and in this case we are able to praise an entertaining novel which also has received wide popular acclaim. Leo Rosten's *Captain Newman, M.D.* appears as a Crest book with "Twenty-one weeks on the New York *Times* Bestseller List" emblazoned on the cover. Yet we can only approve the New York *Times,* the twenty-one weeks, all those readers, and Mr. Rosten.

The novel involves a psychiatrist and the Army Air Corps during World War II. Pacifists will read in and out of Captain Newman's various contretemps a great deal of suggestive commentary on the insanity of the "civilized" approach to armed conflict; army officers, if endowed with a spark of humor, will read it with both chagrin and delight; and psychiatrists may feel an increase in their courage to persevere.

First, a briefing on the psychological situation faced by Dr. Newman, who is speaking to the narrator:

> "What weird tales have you heard about me and Ward Seven?"
>
> "None, really."
>
> "No?" He sounded amused. "Then I'll brief you, before the enemy does. . . . We handle everything from tics to 'uncooperative behavior' to 'combat fatigue.' We deal with sickness—the kind of sickness that doesn't show up on sphygmographs or fluoroscopes. A patient may run no fever, or hits 104 out of the blue. Don't think they all babble gibberish; most of them make sense—if you listen to their special vocabulary long enough and hard enough. They're using English but speaking a foreign language—the language of suffering, which requires special symbols. A man can have a pulse that suddenly beats like a trip hammer, or one that doesn't register much more than a corpse. There's a reason, there's always a reason. To call someone mad is meaningless.
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> "There's a bigger shortage of psychiatrists in the Army than can be rectified if this war goes on for ten years, and the word has gotten around that I act like an M.D., not an officer, a psychiatrist, not a military man. We're on the side of the patients here. We try to give the same attention and concern to some miserable kid who's cracked up in a machine shop—not in the air, not under fire, not in a way that endows horror with nobility—as we do to a fifty-two-mission gunner from the C.B.I. Maybe that's unrealistic, but I don't know how else to do my job.
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> "No molly-coddling around the Air Corps. No, siree. 'Snap out of it, buster! Quit goofing-off! You yellow? Where's your guts?' They sent acute anxiety cases into combat. The pilots flew; the gunners fought. Sure. They fought the enemy and they fought their terror. Only, they developed symptoms. Symptoms. Sooner or later they cracked up, or maybe tried to blow an officer's head off. Some were discharged from the service on a Section Eight count. Do you know for what? 'Lack of moral fiber.' God almighty! 'Lack of moral fiber!' The brass just couldn't get it through their heads that a symptom is a red flag with 'Danger' all over it. Symptoms are anxiety-equivalents. You wouldn't think it takes much brains to comprehend that, would you? It isn't only men like Colonel Pyser who think fear is optional: Some of my esteemed medical colleagues, who are descended from astrologists, can't understand that; they think panic a form of cowardice. . . ."

Part of the basic situation is the anomaly of a sensitive man behind an insensitive gun. Some neurotics often make incomparable soldiers, while otherwise excellent men may become psychotic in the face of imminent death and the requirement that they kill. As Dr. Newman says:

> "We're supposed to turn out killers, alas, not saints. You can also help me predict who will break down if we *don't* send them into combat. Oh, yes, some guys do. Who *needs* combat? They may be neurotic as hell, but they're worth their weight in gold. . . . We had a devoutly religious boy here who always fired his first burst at Jesus in the clouds—because he felt Jesus wouldn't approve of killing. Only after he 'got rid of Our Lord first' could he fight—which he did in a way that racked up a record that would make your jaw drop. Strange are the ways of the psyche. . . ."

Captain Newman, M.D. is also about the unforgettable characters of every post. There is at Camp Colfax, for example, "the incredible Laibowitz," a corporal who works for Newman

and who, although he blatantly admits his own omniscience, makes a good assistant. There is also "the happiest man in the world," Coby Clay, six feet five inches of Alabama lad whose otherwise tractable disposition turns hard-rock stubborn on just one point: "'Tain't fit for a grown man to make his own bed." Clay "prevailed against the entire majestic array of military power that tried so desperately to persuade him to—make his bed." A day or a week in the guardhouse was no punishment, Clay liked it there. So his sergeant made Clay's bed and became the laughing-stock of the post until Clay reasoned that, while it wasn't fitting for a grown man to make his own bed, it might be all right if he made the sergeant's in return! And then there is Hrdlicka, who tried to steal an entire army jeep, part by part, mailing them home to a friend in the States. There are the status-hungry, and there are those oblivious of such matters as rank and degree. There are emotionally crippled survivors of fiery death—crashes overseas—and an otherwise impeccable young man who turns up in the psycho ward because of a compulsion to accompany each salute to an officer with a profane insult. There are ducks and sheep, gila monsters and rattlesnakes, and a beautiful nurse.

The narrator, a psychology student fresh from Harvard, comes of age at Camp Colfax, and finds in Captain Newman both mentor and friend. A few years after the war, he writes a summation of what he has learned:

> They are all gone out of my life, I say, but I think of them often (how could it be otherwise?) and often marvel at how much I learned from them and from my time at Colfax.
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> I learned that you can understand people better if you look at them—no matter how old or important or impressive they may be—as if they are children. For most men never mature; they simply grow taller.
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> I learned that in some way, however small and secret, each of us is a little mad. If we want to stay sane we must moderate our demands—on ourselves and on others; for those who do not understand mercy cannot escape that Ward 7 which waits within each of us.
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> I learned that everyone is lonely, at bottom, and cries to be understood; but we can never entirely understand someone else, no matter how much we try, or want to; and each of us remains part stranger even to those who love us.
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> I learned that the dimensions of suffering, of anguish, of pettiness, resentment, rancor, recrimination, envy, lust, despair, exceed the wildest imaginings of those who have not themselves witnessed men in conflict. I learned, too, that man's capacity for sacrifice, for devotion and compassion and that most miraculous of all-virtues—simple decency—can forever hearten and surprise us.
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> I learned that it is the weak who are cruel, and that gentleness is to be expected only from the strong.
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> I came to believe it not true that "the coward dies a thousand deaths, the brave man only one." I think it is the other way around: it is the brave who die a thousand deaths. For it is imagination, and not just conscience, which doth make cowards of us all. Those who do not know fear are not really brave. Courage, I think, is the capacity to confront what can be imagined.
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> I came to see that every man is subject to fantasies so obscene, yearnings so mendacious, drives so destructive that even to mention them shakes the gates which we have erected against the barbarian within. Nothing in nature, not the wonders of the firmament nor the enigmas of the atom, is half so strange as man's unconscious—that hidden, heaving sea of primordial impulse in which the most confounding contradictions live side by side: the insatiable hunger for love, the boundless rage to kill: the clamorous Now, preserved from the most distant Then, in scornful obliteration of time, the yearning to be known, the conspiracy to remain unrevealed; the male, the female, their tragic amalgams. . . . Not Xanthus nor Xanadu, for all its measureless caverns, provides so stupefying a landscape. I sometimes think there is a dimension beyond the four of experience and Einstein: insight, that fifth dimension which promises to liberate us from bondage to the long, imperfect past.

COMMENTARY
A BITTER, BRUTAL VISION

WE have just finished reading Stanley Edgar Hyman's review of *Culture Against Man* (Random House) by Jules Henry, in the *New Leader* for Nov. 11. The book aroused Mr. Hyman and his review arouses us. This author has let himself down into the dirt and slime. He feels the nameless aches of little boys whom nobody loves and the defenseless degradation of old men in "homes" for the aged. Dr. Henry is a "personality-in-culture" anthropologist who holds that such stark indifference to human need is not exceptional, that these cases "are not unfortunate accidents but the logical consequences of our culture." As Mr. Hyman puts it: "The institutional dynamics of American society are seen as the matrix of our bad human relations; *Culture Against Man* is 'social criticism'." The book, the reviewer says, is badly written, filled with exaggeration, disorganized, and crude. But he adds:

> It is a crude book of the utmost importance, however, like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* a century ago. It is the most fundamental and savage criticism of American civilization that I have ever read. Henry in his introduction disclaims any attempt to write "an objective description of America"; this book is "a passionate ethnography."
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> Despite its faults, I believe *Culture Against Man* to be right in its basic contention that our miseries are the logical consequences of our institutions; that our culture is deranged and deranging. . . . Here we are all infected: the critics of the culture no less than the rest. It is a bitter and a brutal vision, but no less true for that.

One point Dr. Henry makes, which Mr. Hyman selects for repetition, is that a great many people respond, not to values, but to *drives.* "If," says the author, "you put together in one culture uncertainty and the scientific method, competitiveness and technical ingenuity, you get a strong new explosive compound which I shall call *technological drivenness."*

The thing that puzzles the reader of Mr. Hyman's recreation of the scene which kindled this anthropologist's wrath is the curious insensibility of people who suffer these conditions, not so much without complaint as without seeming to know that they are in pain. We speak, of course, not of the extreme cases, but of the millions who pretend they are happy because they are *supposed* to be happy. You see their faces on the street, in the subways, in offices; you see them all around, marked by the ravaging creases of unsatiated and insatiable desire, dulled by endless disappointment, animated only by nervous imitation of a joy their owners think they see in others—the "successful"; while even their hates are obtained second hand, without personal reason or honest rage.

Who or what taught these people to feel and behave this way? Ruth Nanda Anshen, quoted in "Children," has some answers, and so does Leo Rosten (see Review), who says something about the "language of suffering, which requires special symbols." Emerson, too, who wrote more than a hundred years ago, spoke to our condition.

Are we only now beginning to see what has happened to us? What is the process, the rate, the cause, of the awakening to this bitter and brutal vision? And what comes after we see?

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
PERSPECTIVES ON THE FAMILY

A LOT of interesting reading can be found in *The Family: Its Function and Destiny,* a volume belonging to the Science of Culture Series (second and revised edition, Harper, 1959) . This is not simply a sociological study, but an examination of sociological data from a psychological and philosophical point of view. Among the contributors are Ralph Linton, Ruth Benedict, Erich Fromm, and Denis de Rougemont. The always percipient editor, Ruth Nanda Anshen, contributes an introductory essay in which she remarks, "A doctrine of man has been lacking in our epoch." If anything of importance answering to this description is to be evolved, it is apparent that scrutiny of many different schools of thought must be attempted. Meanwhile the sociological data in this book present us with a portrait of crisis in interpersonal and family relationships. In Mrs. Anshen's view, this situation reflects the lack of relation between the ends which our society professes and the typical *modus operandi* and *modus vivendi* in human conduct. Mrs. Anshen writes:

> The moral ambivalence of our society has penetrated to the very heart of the problem of our time—the family and the home in which our children must receive their precepts and guidance. The failure of society is reflected in the failure of parenthood, for it is within the family that the seeds of anxiety, fear, and delinquency are sown. For now, with some notable exceptions, parents bestow upon their children material goods but not spiritual and moral certainty, a heritage of the importance of success but not one of integrity. Ethical imperatives are lacking and thus children substitute self-importance for dignity, pleasure for joy, accumulation of facts for knowledge, that quality of knowledge which is reflected in the quality of being. Parents forget that the child is not a *tabula rasa* on which anything can be imprinted by external determinism but that he possesses the potentiality of creative freedom. We live in a climate of moral amnesia and physical violence and our children reflect the world of which they are a part; they partake of this amnesia and violence and insulate their consciousness from the effect by an ethos of amorality and irresponsibility. And finally the false standards of an adult society which exalt material achievements at the expense of spiritual worth are embraced by the youth whose intrinsic idealism is perverted by false gods, transforming freedom into license, individualism into egotism, and finally loyalty into herd instinct with all its accompanying brutality.
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> The family in its present state of dissolution reflects the spiritual poverty of modern man, man as the experiencing, responsible, and deciding self, endowed by nature with freedom and will, yet beset with confusion and isolation from the dynamic stream of living reality.

This, we think, is an accurate, if depressing, comment on what Robert Merton calls "the behavior of people variously situated in a social structure of a culture in which the emphasis on dominant success goals has become increasingly separated from an equivalent emphasis on institutionalized procedures for seeking these goals." Discussing "Social Structure and Anomie," Mr. Merton suggests five typical responses to the present societal-familial situation, which he lists as Conformity, Innovation, Ritualism, Retreatism, and Rebellion. It is perhaps significant that so much attention has recently been paid to attitudes which fall under the last two headings, Retreatism and Rebellion. As is often observed, the "beat" writer or individual believes that the only intelligent rebellion is deliberate alienation from institutional values. Of those who share this view, Mr. Merton writes:

> The socially disinherited, if they have none of the rewards held out by society, at least have few of the frustrations attendant upon continuing to seek these rewards. It is, moreover, a "privatized" rather than a collective mode of adaptation. Although people exhibiting this deviant behavior may gravitate toward centers where they come into contact with other deviants, and although they may come to share in the subculture of these deviant groups, their adaptations are largely private and isolated rather than unified under the aegis of a new cultural creed.

The "rebellion," however, is not apt to be revolutionary in the traditional sense. Mr. Merton continues:

This adaptation leads men outside the environing social structure to envisage and seek to bring into being a new, that is to say, a greatly modified social structure. It presupposes alienation from reigning goals and standards, which come to be regarded as purely "arbitrary." And the arbitrary is precisely that which can neither exact allegiance nor possess legitimacy, for it might just as well be something else.

It is interesting to realize that the image of those who actually gain in morale and self-esteem by rejecting current ideals of success has been increasing in stature for a long time. Abram Kardiner notes this fact in analyzing the prototype of the "bum" whose morale is excellent (using Charlie Chaplin's famous characterization). Dr. Kardiner writes:

He is Mr. Nobody and is very much aware of his own insignificance. He is always the butt of a crazy and bewildering world in which he has no place and from which he constantly runs away into do-nothingness. *He is free from conflict because he has abandoned the quest for security and prestige, and is resigned to the lack of any claim to virtue or distinction.* He always becomes involved in the world by accident. There he encounters evil and aggression against the weak and helpless which he has no power to combat. Yet always, in spite of himself he becomes the champion of the wronged and oppressed, not by virtue of his great organizing ability but by virtue of homely and insolent trickiness by which he seeks out the weaknesses of the wrongdoer. He always remains humble, poor, and lonely, but is contemptuous of the incomprehensible world and its values. He therefore represents the character of our time who is *perplexed by the dilemma either of being crushed in the struggle to achieve the socially approved goals of success and power* (he achieves it only once—in *The Gold Rush*) *or of succumbing to a hopeless resignation and flight from them.* Charlie's bum is a great comfort in that he gloats in his ability to outwit the pernicious forces aligned against him if he chooses to do so and affords every man the satisfaction of feeling that the ultimate flight from social goals to loneliness is an act of *choice* and not a symptom of his defeat.

Max Horkheimer, in "Authoritarianism and the Family," tells why our high divorce rate must be regarded as a societal sickness—not because of some intrinsic evil in divorce itself, but because the indications are so clear that divorce is often an immature reaction to conflicting values *within* society:

Individuals are as exchangeable in marriage as they are in commercial relationships. One enters a new one if it promises to work out better. Each person is identified completely with his or her function for a particular purpose. Everyone remains an abstract center of interests and accomplishments.

The discrepancy between the parents' true character as determined by modern industrialism and their role in the family is quickly discovered by the children and is largely responsible for the stunted growth of their emotional life, the hardening of their character, their premature transformation into adults. The interaction between the family and general deculturalization becomes a vicious circle. When the children grow up, the roles are played more consciously, to cultivate family ties is the thing to do. But such an attitude cannot check the emaciation of the family. Either the atomization of man will be conquered by more fundamental changes and transformations, or indeed it may prove fatal to this culture. The same economic changes which destroy the family bring about the danger of totalitarianism. The family in crisis produces the attitudes which predispose men for blind submission.

FRONTIERS

Art and Anthropology

[This article is composed of portions of a paper by Paul Riesman, who teaches anthropology at San Fernando Valley State College, in California. The paper was first read before the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. The study of cultures, once it passes the stage of collecting interesting information, of necessity enters the area of philosophy, for a "culture" represents particular ways of seeking meaning in human existence. When we speak of a man being "alienated" from his culture, we may mean either that he had failed to benefit from various forms of activity in his society, or that he has transcended the outlook of that society. The "good" society is one which invites imaginative innovation and practices a minimum of restraints.

Mr. Riesman seeks the perspectives which come to light when our own society is contrasted with that of a simple "nature people," for instance, the Eskimo. The mythology of the Eskimos, as related by this writer, is heart-warming, while the mythology of the supposedly advanced civilizations of our time is chiefly political and legalistic, therefore cold. But the artist in each one of us also seeks, perceives, and infuses warmth, and on this view there is a definite kinship between artists and the participants in a non-political or organic culture. These are the themes that occupy Mr. Riesman in a discussion of Eskimo lore, of which we have space for only his introduction.—Editors.]

MANY people, notably the Existentialists and many anthropologists, accept the notion that the world men live in is made by men. This means that ultimately each person lives in his own world. A culture, then, can be considered as meanings, or at least paths leading to meaning, which are shared by the participants in that culture. In this context the concept "man-made" does not mean the actual fabrication of the material world, but rather the meaning given by men to the material they find around them. But the new individual born into the world of Western man, finds himself immediately encased in a net of purposeful objects. Very little is available to be freshly made, since so much of the material is made already.

The problems of the artist in such a world symbolize, I think, the problems which every individual in such a world must face (or refuse to face). The artist has always been a seeker of meaning. In any given medium he has created patterns which both nourish meanings in his life and in some way respond to the nature of the medium as he apprehends it. The material with which the artist works, however, is not limited to the substance out of which he creates his work: it is the whole world in which he lives. The painter's material, for example, is not just the pigments, the canvas, etc., it is also his fantasy and the meanings he sees in his world.

In most of the non-Western world the landscape is dominated by—let us call them natural forms: the shapes, pulses, processes of the universe untouched or only embellished by man. The meanings to be found here are infinite, however selective is the artist's vision. The creation of a new art object is never thought of as destroying an old meaning, and very often it is conceived of as the bringing forth, the releasing of a meaning which was latent in the material itself.

In the Western world, however, the landscape is dominated by "fabricated" forms. These forms have meanings in themselves which were put there by the men who conceived them and made them. Most of us live within terms of the meanings implied by these forms that surround us: we work from nine to five, we trade in last year's model for the new one, we prefer anything to brand "X," we strive for greater efficiency and increased mechanization. In other words, most of us accept our world as a piece of the universe, a fair sample of it.

What meanings is the contemporary artist, working with the materials of our civilization, going to find? Obviously there can be no freshness in bringing out meanings which have already been put there by other men. As a consequence the artist must either forget civilization and search entirely within his own self (not that that's possible), or he must actively

destroy the meanings of civilization to find within its forms new meanings. I think we see both of these things being attempted in contemporary art in all media. In some artists we see a wild kind of destructiveness, as in the work of Jackson Pollock, while in others the destruction seems to be pursued in a rational way, as in the work of the cubists. This tendency seems carried to a logical extreme in the techniques of collage and of sculpture in "junk."

To our contemporary artists civilization itself is a chaos: it must be seen as meaningless before meaning can be found. When it is seen only in terms of the meanings inherited from its makers we are truly living in illusions, out of touch with the real world.

To the extent that modern man lives completely within his civilization, he lives within a sterile dream world. The dreams are not his own dreams—he is afraid to dream his own dreams. Once fabricated, the forms of civilization have no power to grow in their own right and interact with the human beings who live in them. The only things which grow and change in themselves are organisms, whose meanings and purposes are unknown, to be discovered: this means people, other forms of life and the universe itself in all its aspects. Fabricated objects and meanings do not have this property. Growth is a process which can take place only in some kind of interaction or transaction between two different organisms. Thus man living in civilization stifles his own growth, and if he is sensitive to this, falls into deep despair.

Some people have sought the meaning of life through a scientific investigation of the ultimate nature of the universe. Despite the successive blows which science has given to our feeling of being the center of the universe, many people have continued to have faith that the discovery of the laws of the universe would reveal some vast order in which humans would continue to be significant and even powerful. Two different aspects of science require our attention here: first, some of the theories themselves, and second, the methods used to investigate the universe. These two aspects are related, for some of the most striking developments in theory have dealt with the question of what can be known, and how much of it. The theory of relativity, for example, implies that given two events you cannot determine which of them happened first, and hence it is impossible to say which of them is the cause or effect of the other. Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty places a definite limit to the knowledge we can obtain about any given particle, such as an atom or an electron. The most powerful tool which science has at its disposal for investigations of the universe is measurement and statistical analysis. The result of this is that our knowledge of the universe, at its most precise, consists of numbers: almost everything we know about the universe—from atoms to stars, from cells to societies—can be expressed in terms of equations or probabilities. And yet when we ask of science the question "Why are we here?" or "What is my place in the universe?" the probabilities and equations which we get for answers do not satisfy us.

They do not satisfy us because we feel somehow that our place in the universe is nowhere in particular . . . or anywhere. I think that this is the best that science will ever do for us. No amount of research will effect a qualitative change in that answer. For it is true; it is the correct answer. It has stared us humans in the face throughout our history. Think of all the natural calamities in history that we know about; the comings and goings of the ice age, the volcanic eruptions, the earthquakes, the floods, the droughts: don't these things tell us that the universe doesn't know that we are here, that whether we exist or not doesn't matter? Or consider any historical event, such as a war: in a sense the more we investigate it the less we know about it with certainty: the recent proliferation of works on our civil war, for example, suggests to me that the closest we can come to understanding it is to consider it as something that "just

happened" to us, rather than as something we did for such and such reasons.

All that modern science has done in this situation is point out the facts more clearly. Conventional reactions to science—for example our faith in it, our belief in progress, together with social and technical developments—have made it difficult for people to understand what is going on or what they can do about it. And yet in all times and places human beings have resisted this idea that they are nowhere for no particular reason and for no particular purpose. They have almost always managed to find a somewhere to be, and a reason to be there. The finding of these somewheres is an activity which is crucial to human life, for people seem to go to pieces when events force them to contemplate the ultimate nowhere of their lives. Then they act in ways which the majority of mankind would consider inhuman, ways which they themselves would have considered inhuman from the point of view of somewhere.

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