

## MAN AND SOCIETY

IN this article, we shall set out the proposition that the decisive questions arising from the relations of man with society are metaphysical questions. The matters of fact are data which frame the questions, but the issues of value, on which decisions for action turn, are metaphysical issues which depend upon judgments concerning the nature of being.

To make this inquiry come alive, it is necessary to examine real and immediate problems. We have plenty of these. Last May a young man, one of the crew of the trimaran, *Everyman*, which was to have sailed into the nuclear testing area at Christmas Island to challenge the moral validity of the U.S. Government's weapons development program, went limp when a marshal endeavored to arrest him. This is one of the extreme forms of behavior practiced by advocates of nonviolence in their attempt to dramatize what they hold to be the immorality of the national state's preparations for war. It is an act which says to the state: I will not collaborate with you at all as a man. To remain a man, I must oblige you to treat me as a "thing," for that is the actual meaning of the policies which I am opposing. I cannot participate as a man in any way in your procedures. I cannot allow the human part of me to enter into anything that you do in relation to nuclear war. Through your physical power, you are able to do what you will with the "thing" part of me—my body—but that is the only part of me that you will be able to manipulate.

Any human action has at least two readings in the terms of our problem. A man can refuse to do what he is ordered by some external authority on grounds of personal morality. He may say: "I refuse to obey because what you order is an act of wickedness. My conscience—religion, morality, principles, etc.—will not permit me to obey." Or

he may say: "This is an act so filled with potentialities of evil against my fellow men that I cannot obey." Another way of putting the objection is this: "By my disobedience to authority I hope to show others the strength that is in all men to resist evil, to affirm the human capacity to do only good. If all men would follow my example, the world might not become perfect, but it would be able to avoid war."

These various justifications of civil disobedience may be traced to a single basis of behavior—they may mean, that is, substantially the same thing—or they may have different grounds, depending upon what is believed about individual man and the world. A man who thinks of himself as a rare specimen of goodness in a world overwhelmed by sin has a private reason for his nonconformity. This is a metaphysical theory about Being in which the world is divided into a small minority of good beings and a great number of bad ones. Another position rests on the view—hardly a developed metaphysical theory, rather a simple, intuitive stance—that "all men are brothers." Superficially the morality of this view is social, but it is nonetheless metaphysical in that it constitutes a judgment about human beings which leads to an ultimate moral decision.

Of course, there are endless shadings and interdependencies in the grounds of moral decision, with different degrees of intuitive or rational justification. And there are both moral and intellectual difficulties in all positions, and different ways of attempting to overcome them. Paradox is of the essence of the human situation. In all cases, however, the act of *taking* a position, or the fact of *remaining* in one, however ill-defined, can be reduced to a judgment about the nature of being. Even the absolute determinist who insists that he is a creature of outside forces,

incapable of making real judgments, has none the less made a judgment about the nature of being.

Early this year the President of the United States resolved to resume nuclear testing. In the final analysis, this was also a judgment about the nature of being, although a judgment formed by passing the moral and ontological questions involved through dozens of well-established institutional filters. Custom and tradition are the consolidated and rubricized judgments of the past concerning the nature of being. They are in a sense artificial social instincts built up during long history by the corporate organism of society. Some of these "social instincts" clearly amount to moral judgments, while others are simply technical conveniences. On the whole, it is easier to change the technical traditions than it is to reform the moral ones. Britain, for example, is now contemplating adoption of the metric system for its currency—an obviously burdensome reform, despite the practical benefits that will be gained by getting rid of a notoriously confusing way of counting money. But there seems little likelihood that Britain will ever be able to get rid of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church, which represent a far more confusing way of counting virtues. In other words, the *moral* traditions are the sensitive ones, when it comes to making changes on rational grounds.

Mr. Kennedy, it may be said, made the decision to resume testing on the basis of certain moral-political traditions of the United States. Since a lot of people question the moral validity of that decision, there have lately been many justifications offered for his act. These justifications amount to judgments about the nature of being. They are intended to renew public faith in familiar theories of the social and political good of the modern nation-state. Since political doctrine and tradition are manifest compromises of original principles with the requirements of expediency, the judgment of being which results from these justifications is a curious

blend of moral and practical arguments, acceptable only because we have heard it so often.

Habit, William James observed, is the flywheel of society. Or, as A. A. Berle put it recently, "The accumulated body of moral habit is the gyroscope flywheel maintaining public order in all developed society." The need to keep that wheel turning at its accustomed rate is usually the determining factor in the decisions of political leaders and legislative bodies. When Mr. Truman decided to drop the bomb on Hiroshima, the flywheel momentum took much of the burden of moral decision off his shoulders. When Mr. Kennedy finally submitted to the institutional pressures which demanded his assent to the invasion of Cuba, a nasty, clandestine rhythm of the flywheel was practically his only moral justification. The unhappy role of Governor Brown of California in the Chessman case must have been largely shaped by the flywheel of habit. Political policy-makers seldom feel much freedom in making their decisions unless the flywheel permits a fairly even distribution of the pressures of habit on each side of a public issue. This is one way of reading the judgment of Rapoport and Singer (*Nation*, March 24): "The constraints under which the decision-makers responsible for national security must work are indeed severe."

How, then, do "great" men manage to give an upward turn to the course of history? They do it, it seems to us, by managing with great sagacity to purify some main current of the national or cultural tradition, and thus make it lead to beneficial change. Both Gandhi and Lincoln had an extraordinary talent for using elements in the *mores* of existing society as leverage for raising the common moral behavior of their time to a higher level of operations. It goes without saying that such changes need the help of a historical crisis which presents easily defined alternatives, giving some unity and coherence to the moral aspect of alternate courses of action. In such circumstances there is a possibility of gaining popular support for a revolutionary objective.

The metaphysical judgments concerning the nature of being offered by Gandhi and Lincoln were the primary source of moral energy for the reforms or changes they accomplished. Gandhi's outlook was plainly that of ancestral Indian philosophy, involving uncompromising emphasis on the soul-nature of human beings, the dynamics of Karma and reincarnation, and renewal in the context of modern war of the doctrine of *Ahimsa*, or harmlessness. Lincoln drew directly upon the judgment of the nature of human beings to be found in the Declaration of Independence. In his speech on the Dred Scott decision (1857), he said:

I think the authors of that notable instrument intended to include all men, but they did not intend to declare all men equal in all respects. They did not mean to say all men were equal in color, size, intellect, moral developments, or social capacity. They defined with tolerable distinctness in what respects they did consider all men equal—equal with "certain rights among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." This they said and this they meant. They did not mean to assert the obvious untruth that all were then actually enjoying that equality, or yet that they were about to confer it immediately upon them. In fact, they had no power to confer such a boon. They meant simply to declare the right so that enforcement of it might follow as fast as circumstances might permit.

The hour for giving the principles of the Declaration of Independence wider scope struck in Lincoln's time, and he used the means of the historical forces at his disposal to fulfill that opportunity. He helped the American people to admit and apply more thoroughly the metaphysical judgment of the nature of man—of all men—that is declared in their political tradition. This process is still going on, helped by other leaders and other means.

If we are to sharpen the issues of this discussion, we need a setting for them that has the widest generality we can find, and which, at the same time, is specific enough not to lose its impact in cloudy abstractions. Such a setting is provided by Dostoevski in the scene of *The Brothers Karamazov* where the returned Jesus and

the Grand Inquisitor confront one another. Finding Jesus preaching on the streets, and being recognized and welcomed by the people, the Inquisitor has Him imprisoned, and secretly visits His cell at night to reproach Him for returning. He tells Christ that He has not understood man's nature:

So long as man remains free he strives for nothing so incessantly and so painfully as to find some one to worship. But man seeks to worship what is established beyond dispute, so that all men would agree at once to worship it. . . . Thou didst know, Thou couldst not but have known, this fundamental secret of human nature, but thou didst reject the one infallible banner of earthly bread; and thou hast rejected it for the sake of freedom and the bread of Heaven. Behold what Thou didst further. And all again in the name of freedom! I tell thee that man is tormented by no greater anxiety than to find someone quickly to whom he can hand that gift of freedom with which the ill-fated creature is born. But only one who can appease their conscience can take over their freedom. In bread there was offered Thee an invincible banner; give bread and man will worship Thee, for nothing is more certain than bread. But if someone else gains possession of his conscience—oh! then he will cast away Thy bread and follow after him who has ensnared his conscience. In that Thou wast right. For the secret of man's being is not only to live but to have something to live for. Without a stable conception of the object of life, man would not consent to go on living, and would rather destroy himself than remain on earth, though he had bread in abundance. That is true. But what happened? Instead of taking men's freedom from them, Thou didst make it greater than ever! Didst Thou forget that man prefers peace, and even death, to freedom of choice in the knowledge of good and evil? Nothing is more seductive for man than his freedom of conscience, but nothing is a greater cause of suffering. And behold, instead of giving a firm foundation for setting the conscience of man at rest forever, Thou didst choose all that is exceptional, vague, and enigmatic; Thou didst choose what was utterly beyond the strength of men, acting as though Thou didst not love them at all—Thou who didst come to give Thy life for them! Instead of taking possession of men's freedom, Thou didst increase it, and burdened the spiritual kingdom of mankind with its sufferings forever. Thou didst desire man's free love, that he should follow Thee freely, enticed and taken captive by Thee. In place of the rigid, ancient

law, man must hereafter with free heart decide for himself what is good and what is evil, having only Thy image before him as guide. But didst Thou not know he would at last reject even Thy image and Thy Truth, if he is weighed down with the fearful burden of free choice? They will cry aloud that the truth is not in Thee, for they could not have been left in greater confusion and suffering than Thou hast caused, laying upon them so many cares and unanswerable problems. . . .

This is the classical setting of the problem of man and society. Any man who thinks about the relationship of the individual to the organized group is bound to take some position which can be identified as lying along the scale between the opposite poles represented by Jesus and the Grand Inquisitor. By taking this position, he makes his judgment concerning the nature of being.

It is hardly possible for an ordinary man to be "pure" in his decision—that is, to identify completely with either Jesus or the Grand Inquisitor. Nor does it follow that total human morality lies only with Jesus, nor that any allowance in the direction of the Grand Inquisitor's view is a compromise with total depravity. But the value of the allegory is in its constraint upon the reader to choose *in principle* which side he is on. Being for bread is not evil unless one is for bread alone. Being for freedom without bread is somewhat ridiculous except in extreme situations, where the choice is literally between freedom and bread. It is none the less necessary to decide which is the prior value, even though one may admit, with Gandhi, that "To a people famishing and idle, the only acceptable form in which God can appear is work and promise of food as wages. . . . To them God can only appear as bread."

A political system is or ought to be a judicious compromise between the need for freedom and the need for bread. The specific relationships of the system should depend upon the capacity of men to earn bread and their capacity to exercise freedom. Since these capacities vary from a number of causes, from population to population, and among the members

of a single population, you find quite different political systems existing side by side at the same time. In addition you find enthusiasts of political philosophy making up particular reasons for claiming that their system is best and should be made to survive even if this means putting down all the others. These ideologists bring enormous confusion to discussion of the question. For example, you find them trying to show from history that freedom is a byproduct of how you earn your bread and hold on to it. If you can get enough bread and get security against thievery, you will get a bonus called freedom. This is the freedom of free enterprise and private property. Then there is the argument that if the state owns all the bread and bread-making facilities, the problem of freedom will no longer exist, since loss of freedom came entirely from the old system of private bread-making and acquisitive bread-owning.

These are the bread theories of freedom and they both originate in the argument of the Grand Inquisitor. If you give him the power, he will give you back bread *and* freedom. Only it isn't really freedom, and the bread is often moldy. Either the bread is moldy or it's made with vitamin-free white flour and guaranteed to give dogs epilepsy if they eat enough of it. Actually it's a religious sort of bread with three flavors of freedom baked right into it because the professors of organic chemistry who made up the recipe enjoy their God-given capitalistic right to sell it to you against the advice of practically all the sensible and honest nutritionists in the country.

After a while, it gets quite difficult to trace the beliefs and slogans of an ideological system to a metaphysical judgment about the nature of being. The sources of decision are now unexamined dogmas instead of first principles, so that no thought at all, but only formulas in reference books, are used to find out what ought to be done. The situation is something like that of the Catholic priest of a small town in the province of Quebec—a character in a current novel—who

had to decide whether or not to drive away the keeper of a brothel which had opened up in the area. The problem as he saw it was to choose between organized prostitution and the illegitimate children who kept on arriving before the brothel came to town. He finally decided that the brothel was the lesser of the two evils.

The point, of course, is that this was not a moral decision at all, but a practical decision between certain pseudo-values established long ago by the Grand Inquisitor or some of his friends. The support by "democratic" countries of barefaced tyrannies, on the hypothesis that the ruling tyrants are likely to be useful in opposing the larger threat of the Communist tyranny, is a comparable decision. In these instances the logic of the Grand Inquisitor has wholly displaced all other systems of argument.

Let us look again at the Rapoport-Singer statement: "The constraints under which the decision-makers responsible for national security must work are indeed severe."

The man who wants to relate himself to the difficulties of the decision-makers in a sympathetic and constructive way has the problem of finding some aspect of the value-system they are administering which he can support with all his heart. When this becomes either impossible or too difficult for it to seem worth attempting, he may find himself stomping on the hull of a Polaris submarine and shouting, "Here I stand; I can do no other."

A modern government, of course, is a complex organization made up of many more or less separate systems of morality. Its right hand may be shaking hands with a foreign power at a peace conference while its left foot is engaged in kicking off a small war or a "police action" somewhere else. The fact of the matter is that our whole civilization is so complex that you can inspect only small portions of it at a time. It gains unity only through catastrophe, such as war, and then you are faced with the bitter choice of either total loss of identity in the all-consuming war-

effort, or the total alienation from the Garrison State involved in war-rejection.

What this means is that the problem of man and society has grown so large that it has left the region of a *human* scale almost entirely. When this happens, the individual who wants his relations to "society" to be founded upon some clear metaphysical judgment as to the nature of being is obliged to make some severely limiting definition of society, to project its reality by an act of the imagination, and to act in accordance with this vision. There is nothing else left to do.

As a result, he will seem to ignore whole regions of apparently significant human affairs. This cannot be helped. The nature of *society* is such that no individual can act for its totality, except in acts of faith and vision. His effort is toward re-creating society, insofar as the individual can work in this way. His effort will be informed by his best judgment as to how human beings learn to extend their capacity for freedom, and how they gain balance and rationality in respect to the need for bread.

What we are saying is that the time for constructing total blue-prints of the Good Society, with instructions on how conscientious citizens may operate it, has long since passed. That time may some day return, but only as a result of a new simplicity gained by a sufficient number of individuals to give intelligible form to the *human* community—and this means a form which stands in recognizable relation to philosophical judgments concerning the nature of man and the world.

## *Letter from* **AFRICA**

OUAGADOUGOU, UPPER VOLTA.—While travelling through Black Africa one question—not, it is true, entirely unknown elsewhere repeats itself as a constant refrain: Which do men desire more—bread or dignity?

In a recent *Saturday Review* Ralph Bunche paid tribute to his favorite teacher, Miss Belle Sweet, who he says was the first person in his experience to treat him as an individual person. I suppose it is true that, as a usual thing, bread is less of a problem for some of the members of our American society than is dignity. In any event, this comment is no attempt to answer my own question.

All day yesterday I plodded across the new Republic of Upper Volta on the Abidjan-Niger Railroad's Express No. 1, the weekly Limited from Abidjan to Ouagadougou. This railroad is 1120 kilometers—about 800 miles—in length, and old No. 1 takes twenty-six hours to make the journey if it is on time, which it wasn't, yesterday. No. 1 carries a Restaurant Car and two sleepers. Its arrival is certainly the Event of the Week, at mud-brick station after mud-brick station, where crowds congregate for the sheer pleasure of seeing the train, and where one can buy local foods, boiled corn on the cob, fruits, boiled eggs, fried chickens and fried fish from baskets carried on the women's heads.

Small boys wave to trains in Upper Volta, like small boys anywhere, the difference being that here they are naked, showing the protruding childish bellies of perpetual hunger. Their mothers, too, are half-naked, only the men seem characteristically to be clothed. I don't know whether or not some notion of male dignity is at work here.

There is doubtless a lot of twaddle talked about the dignity of labor. Work is likely to be hard and boring, in my experience, unless one

shares in its aim, in the goal sought. Yesterday I saw a lot of resting, perhaps only on account of the train, but also a lot of hard work. The common occupations seemed to be hacking at the ground from a deeply bent position, using what looked like a primitive and ineffective tool in preparation for a crop; and carrying fuel on the head. I saw no cart, no wheel, no beast of burden, nothing but really brute labor. Yet if the cooking of food is some sort of identifiable landmark in the development of society, then these people are placeable. Their houses are of mud, circular in shape, and crowned by a funnel-shaped grass roof, constructed on the ground and lifted into place entire. A series of these conical-capped huts are placed in a circle and connected by large grass mats to serve as walls of the demesne. This not being a very strong arrangement for defense, it argues some other reason for the creation of semi-privacy for the family.

In Ouagadougou, burgeoning capital of a new nation, I stay in the half-finished Hotel de l'Independance (sic), built around the largest underwater-lighted swimming pool I've ever seen. All around it, seemingly for acres, are black and white tile floors. The construction method is interesting. Patterned tiles are mounted on sheets of brown paper about four feet square. The sheets are simply laid down by unskilled labor on wet cement, tamped and pushed into place, and the floor grows apace. After adhesion to the cement is complete, the paper stuck to the faces of the tiles is soaked off. So a new temple of comfort and pleasure in modern architectural style grows here in the heart of Africa, where preceding civilization has left no building, no written record, and almost no real evidence of its having existed. To whom the satisfaction and the dignity of having created this new structure? It will do its job, together with the cooling effects of Mr. Westinghouse's whirring little machines, but I keep thinking of yesterday's black people across all the alternately sodden and dusty miles of Upper Volta and its neighbors. Is somebody going to help them to bread, or to dignity, or to both?

It would be wrong, of course, to equate dignity with material satisfactions. Individual dignity is inside, not outside. There may be more essential dignity in the black mother, living in naked, muddy poverty and carrying wood on her head, than in that other apartment dweller who hardly has time to heat up a TV dinner for the family. There ought to be dignity in freedom and independence, too, but in Africa changes are coming with such immense and uncontrollable rapidity that one almost despairs of the retention of basic values. Yet one diplomat, at least, to whom I talked, expressed a hopeful view. He sees in the new Governments here, protocol-conscious and formalistic as they are, the residual forms of passing African societies which may enable the African to become at home in the modern state.

And as to the prospects for bread, one very interesting thing is happening in the Ivory Coast. In general, the African countries are raw material exporters, entirely at the mercy of world price systems they cannot control. Further, they sell their products at the first possible stage, and continue to suffer unemployment of vast proportions. But in Ivory Coast, one of whose major exports is coffee, there is being constructed a Nescafe factory. From the product prepared in this plant Ivory Coast will get, I was told, four times the amount of economic benefit as from the same amount of coffee, exported green.

ROVING CORRESPONDENT

## REVIEW

### "DOES DETERRENCE DETER?"

A PAMPHLET bearing this title, by Prof. D. F. Fleming (published by the American Friends Service Committee), belongs in the same "new pacifist" library as Erich Fromm's *May Man Prevail?* and *The Case for Unilateral Disarmament*, Jerome D. Frank's *Sanity and Survival*, and the James Real-Harrison Brown study, *Community of Fear*. (Prof. Fleming has recently published a monumental work called *The Cold War and Its Origins, 1917-1960*, in two volumes.) Prof. Fleming begins by identifying the most dangerous collective neurosis of our times:

We survive each day because of the ability of our armed might to deter a surprise attack on us by the Soviets, with thermonuclear missiles, planes and submarines. In a few years we shall live by the hour because of our ability to deter a similar onslaught on us by the Chinese. Each year our peace, prosperity and happiness depend on deterring any further communist take-overs or leftist revolutions anywhere in the world. Each time that we fail to deter one our final doom inches in upon us.

This is the world in which we live, and we can survive in it we think, only by amassing ever more destructive weapons, preparing to fight guerrilla wars everywhere and by going underground, ready to live, breathe, work and die in giant subterranean cities, until one of an endless chain of technological breakthroughs enables us or our enemies to destroy the other, with or without ending all life on this planet.

This is the end toward which both emotion and logic impel us, and it may already be too late to halt our rush toward existence in the bowels of the earth, or none. However, we are told that *deterrence* may save us and since everything depends on its success, it becomes imperative to examine this idea for its survival prospects.

Deterrence does *not* deter—and in the course of a brief thirty-seven pages Prof. Fleming establishes what seems clear historical proof that we must seek a psychological alternative to continuing reliance upon the deterrence theory. In the concluding section, Prof. Fleming suggests:

"The first and most obvious [practical] alternative is to accept the inescapable results of World War II, the great power status of the Soviet Union and China, and make peace. The Soviets have long desired this. It is not an easy thing to do, especially since it involves some retractions by us from the containment rim, but some adjustments on our part to what has happened are long overdue. Unless we can put ourselves soon in the places of those whom we so easily call our enemies, it will be forever too late. Nothing lasting or creative can be built on a basis of total distrust. That only gains us total hatred, as in the case of China."

One anomaly of our thinking lies in the fact that while we credit the Soviets with considerable rationality when we envision them conducting nuclear warfare, we do not give them credit for even a fraction of such rationality during the present time of relative "peace." Prof. Fleming approves certain phrases in President Kennedy's inaugural address when he spoke of the "insane obscenity of nuclear war" and of two powerful nations "both racing to alter that uncertain balance of terror that stays the hand of mankind's final war," going on to this conclusion:

It is high time that the rationality of the American people asserted itself. There are within us God-given qualities of common sense that can still save us from the follies of deterrence in the nuclear age. Already one hundred eighty-three college faculty members in the Boston area and eight hundred fifty others in New York City have warned the President in open letters that the emphasis on fallout shelters "prepares the people for the acceptance of nuclear war as an instrument of national policy," and diverts our energies away from a positive program of peace with freedom.

The same deep cry for a turning away from playing with nuclear death ought to rise from scores of college faculties, from hundreds of other groups and from millions of individual citizens. The American people must shake off their inertia and the feeling that they are individually too tiny and weak to know what to do, or to speak out in the face of extremist pressure. In an unforgettable sentence Norman Cousins wrote that "If the battle for sanity



and against cannibalism is lost, it will not be because of the inexorability of history but because men became so fascinated with the face of death that they lost hold of the meaning of life and the power inherent in it to shape its destiny."

For those of us who want our civilization, the hour is already perilously late. Arnold Toynbee spoke from a long view of history when he said that even if our generation avoids liquidating the human race our descendants will look back upon us as "the criminal generation." That, he said, "is what they will call us, for sure."

Can this generation of ours stop piling up missiles or dashing for the nearest fallout shelter long enough to realize "the stark inescapable fact that we cannot defend our society by war" and that the best defense of peace is not power but the removal of the causes of war? Yet, continued Lester Pearson in his Nobel Peace Prize address, "the grim fact is that we prepare for war like precocious giants and for peace like retarded pigmies." We constantly devise scientific miracles for deterrence and equally appalling theories to make their use seem rational, oblivious of Pearson's further admonition that our most urgent duty is "to bring about a state of affairs in the world where no one will wish to attack us at all—or we them."

If we are able to dispose of the argument that deterrence deters—and Prof. Fleming has certainly done his part in this direction—an important question emerges as to the kind of education that will lead political leaders and populace alike to adopt different policies in foreign affairs. In the first place, it is clear that many things about man's conception of "the enemy" must be examined and challenged. Already, a number of psychologists, notably among them Dr. Fromm, are engaged in this task. Even within the United States Information Agency one encounters evidence of the perception that psychological insight and conventional propaganda can never go hand in hand. Dr. Ralph K. White, Chief of the Soviet Bloc Division of the agency's Office of Research and Analysis, suggested last September before a meeting of the American Psychological Association that if Americans are less deluded than Russians they ought to prove it by showing more "empathy."

And the first step in evolving empathy might be in recognizing that the most dangerous delusions are shared almost equally by many Americans and many Russians. A *New York Times* report on Dr. White's address (Sept. 5, 1961) contains a summary of what he considers the worst "common delusions":

Neither country will believe that each is afraid of the other. Each has a mental image of an evil leadership on the other side that deliberately wants and drives toward war. The Russians think these are ruling circles in Wall Street and the Pentagon, and Americans have an exaggerated view of "diabolical Soviet leaders."

Both peoples believe that everything the leaders say on the other side is a lie and not worth listening to.

Looking at each other, Russians and Americans can see the same five images, Dr. White said. Any typical Russian or any typical American might say: "They are aggressive; we are peaceful; we believe in all of the good things—national independence, democracy, equal opportunity and so on; they have evil rulers; they tell lies."

It seems clear that the theory of deterrence by military threat is likely to prevail until these delusions are successfully exposed.

## *COMMENTARY* THE NATURE OF MAN

IN two articles of this issue, besides the lead, the underlying metaphysical questions of the age indirectly emerge. The "Letter from Africa" raises the question "Which do men desire—bread or dignity?" The question is of course too simple, but by working on it one may get to more fundamental questions. Then, in Review, the problem of what we think of the Russians and what the Russians think of us is shown to be basic to any hope of a peaceful world.

These questions have to do with the nature of man. The one that relates to the Africans recalls the comment of Lillian Smith on the meaning of the freedom rides and sit-ins in the South. Introducing Jim Peck's book, she said:

Sitting at lunch counters, riding the buses are symbolic rights. They are small, but we need to claim them, not because they are enough or because we really want them, but because an unclaimed human right bars a man in his search for significance.

In any society undergoing the transition from colonialism to political freedom, there are bound to be confusing mixtures of the ends of both dignity and bread. Since economically exploited people have seldom had enough bread, the pattern of their activities is very noticeably concerned with getting it. Now they want dignity in the pattern of their activities, and the end of dignity may quite naturally get mixed up with the end of bread. This type of confusion no doubt afflicts all men except those well on the way to being Buddhas or Christs. Only the rarest of men are able to separate their hungers with honest motivation analysis. The African, who has so little bread, may seem more confused than the rest of us, but let the white Anglo-Saxons go on an African diet for a while, and see what happens!

In Review, the problem is set by the double-standard in regard to the idea of the self. Dr. White's "five images" contrast portraits of the other fellow's self with our own. These are

judgments of being in terms of melodramatic stereotypes—the good guys and the bad guys. We spend a lot of time explaining to our children that it is wrong to think about other children in this way; then, when they grow up, we undo all that we have taught them.

In short, we are vague and unconvinced about the nature of man. We have no deep faith about man's dignity and promise, no inspiring credo that will help us to take risks for the sake of other human beings. We have, in short, no *philosophy*. We have only various sets of slogans which are in conflict with each other, and we switch from one set to another according to the prevailing emotional stimulus.

This is the problem. We see no rational solution for it, short of serious metaphysical inquiry, since, on a rational basis, profound conviction concerning the nature of man will alone give us the strength needed to withstand the emotional storms which dictate anti-human behavior.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

### HIGH SCHOOL READINGS—AND ENGLISH TEACHING

AN argument that should have been going on for a long time has some attention in the *New York Times Magazine* for April 1. Prof. Herman M. Ward, who teaches at Trenton State College, is for discarding nine-tenths of "classical literature" in the form it reaches the high school or young college student. Prof. Ward is also consultant to the English department of Princeton High School, which is studying student reading programs. He writes:

Educators have known for a long time that children who have learned the basic reading skills continue to read with pleasure books of their own choice until they reach a peak in the eighth grade. From the ninth grade onward the amount they read and their interest in reading begin to diminish. This downward trend continues through high school and into college until most students read practically nothing that is not assigned and leave school or college with a distaste for reading. It would seem that a successful education would have brought about exactly the opposite results.

Certainly the schools must accept some of the responsibility for this state of affairs. It is not enough to implant the reading skill; it must be kept alive. Apparently this is done with students in grade school and junior high. Why should reading begin to diminish in high school? Lack of time, pressure of other homework and extracurricular activities will be offered as excuses. The fact remains, however, that students spend five fifty-minute periods in English class each week; that they have study-hall time each day, and that their total time in school is six hours. There are also week-ends and vacations. There is, indeed, time for reading if one is really interested in reading, either on the job or off.

According to Prof. Ward, the first tragedy is that "five-pound anthology" which contains a smattering of abbreviated readings presumably designed to sophisticate the child, but which result, at least with most, in a pretty thorough alienation from any serious reading. There is another factor which can be taken as a reminder to

adults who think of themselves as "cultured," yet who are actually many years behind in good reading. If the child is bored by his reading in English classes, there is a personal reason for it—lack of identification. What he wants to read is apt to be J. D. Salinger, because he can identify with Holden Caulfield. Prof. Ward proposes:

The English class must be a place of excitement. It is only in such an atmosphere that we can establish both skill in reading and acceptance of reading as a way of life.

To understand this, one has only to witness the enthusiasm that is created among better-than-average students in the upper grades when they are offered, not the expected "classics," but such works as *Hiroshima*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, *The Guns of Navarone*, *Beau Geste*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *The Ugly American*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Pearl*, *Nectar in a Sieve*, *Cry, the Beloved Country* and *Lord of the Flies*.

Students who read these lively books are eager to comment on them, either orally or in essay form. Instead of working through the clichés of climax, plot and character development, they can discuss problems that face us all. These are books in which they can believe.

What is a book in which a youngster can "believe"? For those who are intellectually awake—and it is very hard to tell at first who they are in any classroom—the believable and meaningful books have some kind of bearing on the individual "search for identity." A teenager may be unaware that he shares in uncertainties and imponderables which hardly affected earlier generations, and that his intellectual life can hardly begin without some self-consciousness concerning these questions. The effective teacher knows that the young need to feel that their present is intelligible, before they can work up an interest in "the past" as found in literature.

Prof. Ward's substitutes for time-worn selections of the *Silas Marner* type may be good ones, but *any* selection of books may miss the essential point. The best thing that a teacher can do to encourage reading is to stimulate the art of conversation in the classroom. Meaningful

language which can pass from page to mind has to first be discovered in direct converse and argument. And the most common problem for the teacher in English is to get his students to read *anything at all*—except as a means of passing the course.

S. I. Hayakawa's observations in the February *ETC.* on the psychological predicament of the teacher may be applied to senior high school studies and first year college courses. Dr. Hayakawa writes:

Freshman English should be, in some important respects, like group psychotherapy. In both Freshman English and therapy, the aim is to integrate conflicting feelings and purposes (even the apparent lack of purpose is a symptom of purposes not integrated), to come to terms with challenging realities, to acquire self-insight and therefore to grow in one's capacity to understand and handle problems. In both, a relaxed and permissive atmosphere is desirable, because one acquires self-insight not by being pushed and harassed (and the teacher's red pencil is a form of harassment), but by being encouraged to try out one's ideas in discussions or written themes in an environment free of the fear of censure. Hence skill in keeping a flow of communication going among students and between himself and students is essential to the Freshman English teacher, as it is to the leader of group therapy sessions.

But Freshman English is not psychotherapy; it has its own goals to pursue. What should its content be? Besides instruction in semantics, I believe there should be much reading—preferably a freshman anthology that the instructor himself enjoys and a stack of paperbacks. The readings should be varied—literature, science, criticism, sports writing, biography, news, public affairs—because the interests of students are varied, and one never knows what is going to strike a spark. Furthermore, the reading should include literature that enables the student to compare and contrast his own experiences in growing up with the experiences of others—books of analytic self-revelation varying in style and content from *The Way of All Flesh* to *Catcher in the Rye*.

Prof. Ward's reading list includes, in our opinion, some mediocre books and neglects dozens available in paperbacks that answer more closely to the requirements implied by Dr.

Hayakawa. But we suspect that every teacher should be making his *own* list and revising it continually—and that the ultimate aim should be to encourage his students to do the same. From one standpoint, it may not matter so much what a young person begins with, so long as he *begins*. Many of us can look back upon a time in our youth when our tastes were atrocious, but our reading voracious. Perhaps the teacher should not so much try to select or advise, especially at the outset, as to encourage all sorts of reading—with the proviso that the book read, even if it is by Mickey Spillane, be discussed in class. Perhaps, also, the teacher should devote special attention to the few students who are really ready to discuss and to defend with passion, if not with intelligence, the books that interest them. The opportunity for progress in evaluation is characteristically stultified by forced involvement with often "fossilized" classics.

## *FRONTIERS*

### Get Well Cards

ONE day I read in the paper that a rabbi in our town had had a serious operation, and although I am not a believer in organized religion and thus did not belong to his congregation, I decided, having met and liked him in the past, to send him a get-well card. I went to the drug store and looked through the cards in the appropriate rack, carefully avoiding the "sick" variety of messages for the sick. The first card I encountered showed the picture of a dog with a wire-coil spring for a tail attached, and the inscription, GOT THE WORD YOUR TAIL'S A-DRAGGIN, HOPE YOU'RE SOON UP AND WAGGIN'! That, I decided, wasn't quite it.

I passed on to a well-wisher in the form of a pint-size William Tell, complete with apple and arrow, flanked by the message, I HEAR TELL YOU'RE SHOT TO HELL, HOPE YOU'LL SOON BE WELL. Adjoining was an elongated missive depicting nine bottles of gin and one of vermouth and only one word of text: CHEERS! Neither of these seeming right for the occasion, I skipped a few rows and tried again, riffling through a stack of cards and pulling one out from the middle. It featured a brightly colored drawing of a youthful moron and several lines of poetry, reading in full: IF YOU DON'T SHAKE THOSE MISERIES YOU'LL HAVE TO CUT OUT THINGS LIKE THESE—WINE, WOMEN, SONG, AND SNUFF, PIES AND PASTRIES, ALL SWEET STUFF, POKER, GOLF, AND DRY MARTINIS, STEAK, FRENCH FRIES, AND EVEN WIENIES, AND IF YOU CUT OUT THESE, NO DOUBT YOU'LL VERY SOON BE CUTTING OUT—at which point one had to turn the page. Doing so, I was faced, stretching in accordion-fashion, with a row of cut-out paper dolls and an order on the inside cover, demanding in big colored pen strokes, so GET WELL DOUBLE QUICK !!

It was by this time obvious that I was in the wrong section, so I moved to the opposite end of the rack, hoping for better luck there. This was the dignified category all right, represented by cards bearing angels, crosses, and assorted flowers, inscriptions like MY PRAYER FOR YOU, and poems on the inside matching the covers. For a moment my hopes rose from a rather low pitch when I saw the picture of an engaging black-and-white kitten underneath the words SORRY YOU'RE SICK, but when I turned this cover, there was a verse reading, FOLKS LIKE ME DON'T LIKE TO SEE NICE FOLKS LIKE YOU GET SICK—SO GET SOME REST AND TRY YOUR BEST TO GET WELL MIGHTY QUICK!

It went on like that. It turned my stomach. It was a comment on our national character and mass civilization that was more devastating than whole books exposing advertising and suburbia. Everything, evidently, had to be a laugh, and a belly-laugh at that, a chortle, a guffaw, a howl of glee and phony cheer. Or, if it wasn't "humorous," it had to be solemn, preachy, churchy, folksy, corny, and maudlin, that is to say in a different way insincere. Palpably behind it all, since all these cards dealt with sickness and suffering, there stood a king-sized fear of sickness and suffering, not for the recipient of the message but for the sender. And this fear, unable to look itself in the eye, could escape from itself only into the irrational or the trivial.

Judging from the assortment before me, the big grin was still the accepted method of dealing with the matter. There are various ways of baring one's teeth to life: the American way is grinning. "Keep Smiling" is our home remedy for all our anxieties, public and private. And we keep trying to convince ourselves that this is a virtue. Grinning even on our death beds and answering, with our final breath, "Fine" to the question "How are you?", we call our superficiality optimism, our triviality cheerfulness, our fearful conformity courage, and our lack of taste cuteness.

My search along the racks was, needless to add, in vain. However, when I, straying into a different section, encountered a truly unusual birthday card, I realized the full extent of my folly to search here in the first place. The birthday card, embellished with appropriate designs, read: BAFFLED! BEWILDERED! BOTHERED! BEFUDDLED! GOT YOUR BIRTHDAY DATE ALL MUDDLED! HAPPY BIRTHDAY THEN, NOW OR SOMETIME! I was, in other words, standing here in the center aisle of the American supermarket of Canned Sentiments for Every Occasion, and delineated before me were all conceivable mentalities engaged in milling through the establishment, held together by the common (the all too common) denominator of intellectual impecuniousness and emotional illiteracy. All that the purchasers of these containers of pre-cooked, pre-chewed, and pre-digested sympathy were expected to be able to do was the signing of their nicknames on the dotted line.

Only a single type and tone of personal relationship was apparently not contemplated in this Optimist Club Eden, this Rotary Heaven, this Babbitt Paradise: outside the range of thought to which the Industry grants freedom of expression was a line like, "With all good wishes for a speedy recovery." That would be too simple for the simpletons.

I ended up—as I should have begun—by writing just such a message on a plain white card; not proud of my (God help us) superior taste, but vaguely troubled by the thought that assails me also, among other occasions, at the sight of most Hollywood movies: whether the consumers, *i.e.*, the citizenry at large, consume what is served up to them because the taste-testers are right and that is what they really want, or whether they, severely restricted by the taste-makers in their bills of fare, must gradually develop a liking for what is all they're used to ever getting.

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