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THE PRESSURE GAUGE

IF you happen to go to see a performance of Genet's *The Blacks, you* may come away with mingled feelings of anguish, shock, and indignation. The play is only partly concerned with the crimes of colonialism. It is also filled with the equivocations of life. Life, these days, does not spell out its own significance, and while the theatre once took the complexities of life and framed them in a classical meaning, the Theatre of the Absurd has another purpose: to present the bewilderments of the existential situation. It says to the spectator: Do not be mocked by the clean and sure explanations which you can no longer really believe. There is greater truth in the mockery of uncertainty and indecision than in the ritual confidence of a classically unfolding plot.

A puzzled witness of *The Blacks* may say to himself, "People are not all that bad. I would rather experience the tender compassion of *Cry, The Beloved Country*, which finds courage and hope at the core of the human heart, than this *caricature* of human behavior."

But Paton's story expresses a belief in the reality of individuals, and the modern world does not really believe in individuals. Only mass behavior is *real* behavior. The practical decisions of the great nations are all based upon anticipations of mass behavior. Those Polaris submarines they are launching on the East and West coasts of the United States can enter into no equations with individual behavior. Like many other institutional devices of our civilization, they express the operation of minds which do not cognize individuals.

Too much of modern life has swollen and oozed out of the classical frame of meaning. The institutional controls and interpretations are breaking down. The unknown "out there" is moving in on us. The old habits of "side-taking" no longer supply us with constructive fervor. The suffering of the black people of the world, while real, becomes a type of the more general human predicament. As Martin Esslin says in the Anchor volume, *The Theatre of the Absurd:*

> . . . we know full well that the Negroes on the stage stand for more than simply Negroes. . . . the Negroes in *The Blacks,* acted by Negroes, are not really Negroes. As Genet himself puts it in a cryptic prefatory note in the play, "One evening an actor asked me to write a play for an all-black cast. But what exactly is a black? First of all, what is his color?" The Negroes in the play are an image of all outcasts of society; they stand; above all, for Genet himself, who, when called a thief at the age of ten, decided "to be what they wanted us to be." Or as Archibald [the stage-manager] .puts it, "On this stage we are like guilty prisoners who play at being guilty." The blacks are again the convicts, the prisoners who, deprived of the chance to take part in the real world, dream their dreams of guilt and revenge. . . .

The play-goer who wants a familiar account of good and evil is likely to reject what seems to him the equivocation of the new "absurd" theatre, neglecting to inquire whether there may be more value in recognizing the equivocation than in hearing lessons he has already learned and which he cannot as an individual put to use.

To the aggrieved claim that these plays *distort* life, there is the answer that an increasing portion of our lives is in fact framed by distortion—that portion over which we apparently have no control—and it is the business of the arts to require an acknowledgment of this reality. We get the reports of the kind of a world we live in, but are we actually touched by its meaning—or its defiance of all rational meaning? Here, for example, is an account of recent developments in South Africa, taken from an editorial in the June issue of *Africa Today:*

> The curtain has risen on the final act of the *Tragedy of Apartheid.* The overture is made up of

three panic-inspired parliamentary measures: the sabotage bill, the censorship bill, and the new defense budget.

The sabotage bill (still a bill, for as of this writing it is not yet law) calls for a maximum penalty of death for anyone who "furthers or encourages . . . social or economic change." The censorship bill would require all new newspapers to deposit $28,000 with the Minister of "Justice." If the paper then "furthers the aims of Communism," the money is forfeited and the paper banned. The new defense budget more than doubles last year's (from $67 million to $168 million) .

In 1959, F. C. Erasmus, then Minister of Defense, told a conference of senior Army officers that: "You must not think we are arming against an external enemy. We are not. We are arming in order to shoot down the black masses" ("*om die swart massas neer te skiet"*).

The threat is self-fulfilling, for it has forced those struggling against apartheid (except for the Progressive and Liberal Parties) into abandoning non-violent methods of opposition. So while the all-white parliament debates the definition of sabotage and the press splits hairs on the threat of external invasion, the hunted underground movements are making plans to strike back. The most likely first phase of the insurrection will probably consist of raids by small, flexible well-armed guerilla groups on isolated farms. The groups, perhaps not more than two or three to start with will probably destroy the crops, burn the farmhouses, and kill the inhabitants. The main purpose of such raids will be to serve notice on both Europeans and Africans that the age of docility is over.

The present leaders of South Africa are fanatically attached to their Master Race delusions. A large part of the electorate is equally schizophrenic. One could argue that a national electro-shock therapy program or a massive Thorazine airlift points to a more reasonable solution than armed insurrection. But nations cannot yet be governed as if they were mental institutions. Hence, though we are saddened by the nature of the coming struggle, we nevertheless stand with those whose courage and determination will finally bring down the curtain on the mad power of Afrikanerdom.

What would you do, today, if you lived in South Africa? How would you *feel?* Is it important to have an answer to this question? Of course, we are not like *those* people. This may be true, it may be untrue, or the appropriate comment may be "Not yet." We are certainly different from the South Africans in that we happen to have the power to immediately wipe out non-nuclear powers or groups who we think threaten us. And we are different in that only minorities talk about *using* that power (Barry Goldwater wants us to teach Cuba a "lesson," right now), while in South Africa the people ready to use what power they have against the blacks are running the government.

Maybe there are important differences, but are we ready to be tested?

In his review of Henri Alleg's *The Question*, Jean-Paul Sartre told how he and other Frenchmen during the occupation—

> looked at the German soldiers who walked about with an inoffensive air and said to ourselves from time to time: "These men who, in spite of everything, resemble us. How can they do what they are doing?" And we were proud because we did not understand.

The Nazis had a torture center in Paris on the rue Lauriston where they interrogated Frenchmen. The victims cried out from pain, and could be heard on the street. The French then said to themselves that never would men "be made to cry out in our name." But in 1958, in Algeria, the French were daily torturing Algerians for the "grandeur of France." Sartre comments:

> . . . the French have uncovered a terrible fact. If nothing protects a nation against itself, neither its past, its integrity, nor its laws—if fifteen years are enough to change victims into executioners—it means the occasion alone will decide. According to the circumstances, anyone, anytime, will become either the victim or the executioner.

Is this a judgment we can accept? If we are Stimulus-and-Response psychologists, if we think in terms of national identities, if we believe that only mass behavior is significant, we have *got* to accept it. The "occasion" will make us into whatever its necessities require. What we may learn from recent history, on this basis, is that there is no important difference between

Frenchmen and Algerians, between Germans and Frenchmen, between blacks and whites. Either may be, on occasion, victims or executioners. So why write plays about the injustice of the whites to the blacks, or of the blacks to the whites? Only what man does to man counts and has to be understood.

This is one of the communications of the Theatre of the Absurd.

Except for Edward Albee, the Theatre of the Absurd is lacking in American playwrights. Martin Esslin has a comment:

> . . . the reason for this dearth of examples . . . in the United States is probably simple enough—the convention of the Absurd springs from a feeling of deep disillusionment, the draining away of the sense of meaning and purpose in life, which has been characteristic of countries like France and Britain in the years after the Second World War. In the United States there has been no corresponding loss of meaning and purpose. The American dream of the good life is still very strong. In the United States the belief in progress that characterized Europe in the nineteenth century has been maintained into the middle of the twentieth. There have been signs, particularly since the shock administered by the Russian successes in the space race, that disillusion and frustration might become a factor in the American scene, but the rise of phenomena like the beat generation has been marginal compared to parallel developments in Europe.

It is true enough that the abandonment of conventional art forms has been progressing rapidly in the United States for some twenty years, in both poetry and painting, but these are arts which can be practiced by individuals. For the theatre, you need a large group of artists and a willing audience. Such cultural changes come more slowly.

Yet an American audience already exists and there will doubtless be many such plays written by Americans before another ten years pass. Mr. Esslin begins his book by describing the reception of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in 1957, when actors of the San Francisco Actors' Workshop performed it before fourteen hundred convicts at the San Quentin penitentiary. The men were with it from the beginning. A writer in the prison paper said:

> It was an expression, symbolic in order to avoid all personal error, by an author who expected each member of his audience to draw his own conclusions, make his own errors. It asked nothing in point, it forced no dramatized moral on the viewer, it held out no specific hope. . . . We're still waiting for Godot, and shall continue to wait. When the scenery gets too drab and the action too slow, we'll call each other names and swear to part forever—but then, there's no place to go.

What, actually, are the playwrights of the Absurd doing? Mr. Esslin makes this answer:

> Human beings who in their daily lives confront a world that has split up into a series of disconnected fragments and lost its purpose, but who are no longer aware of this state of affairs and its disintegrating effect on their personalities, are brought face to face with a heightened representation of this schizophrenic universe. "The vacuum between what is shown on the stage and the onlooker has become so unbearable that the latter has no alternative but either to reject and turn away or to be drawn into the enigma of the plays in which nothing reminds him of any of his purposes in and reactions to the world around him." Once drawn into the mystery of the play, the spectator is compelled to come to terms with his experience. The stage supplies him with a number of disjointed clues that he has to fit into a meaningful pattern. In this manner, he is forced to make a creative effort of his own an effort at interpretation and integration. The time has been made to appear out of joint; the audience of the Theatre of the Absurd is being compelled to set it right, or, rather, by being made to see that the world has become absurd, in acknowledging that fact takes the first step in coming to terms with reality.

The Theatre of the Absurd presents an encounter with a world "that has split up into a series of disconnected fragments." The image of this "schizophrenic universe" needs to be heightened by the art of the theatre because of the bland mix we experience daily through the homogenization of culture provided by technology. We need to have the "madness of the times" pointed out to us. Dwight Macdonald's recent study, *Masscult and Midcult,* puts in the

terms of rational criticism a part of what the Theatre of the Absurd has to say by intuitive impact. Macdonald uses an issue of *Life* to illustrate the indifference to values which characterizes Masscult:

> *Life* is a typical homogenized magazine, appearing on the mahogany library tables of the rich, the glass cocktail tables of the middleclass, and the oilcloth kitchen tables of the poor. Its contents are as thoroughly homogenized as its circulation. The same issue will present a serious exposition of atomic energy followed by a disquisition on Rita Hayworth's love life; photos of starving children picking up garbage in Calcutta and of sleek models wearing adhesive brassieres; an editorial hailing Bertrand Russell's eightieth birthday (A GREAT MIND IS STILL ANNOYING AND ADORNING OUR AGE) across from a full-page photo of a matron arguing with a baseball umpire (MOM GETS THUMB); nine color pages of Renoir paintings followed by a picture of a roller-skating horse; a cover announcing in the same size type two features: A NEW FOREIGN POLICY, BY JOHN FOSTER DULLES and KERIMA: HER MARATHON KISS IS A MOVIE SENSATION. Somehow these scramblings together seem to work all one way, degrading the serious rather than elevating the frivolous. Defenders of our Masscult society like Professor Edward Shils of the University of Chicago—he is, of course, a sociologist—see phenomena like *Life* as inspiriting attempts at popular education—just think, nine pages of Renoirs! But that roller-skating horse comes along, and the final impression is that both Renoir and the horse were talented.

It is necessary for the man of the modern world to recognize that such a magazine and many others like it—is not an organ of normal communication but an exhibit of the symptoms of a sick society which belongs, not on the reading tables of homes and public libraries, but in the casebooks of psycho-social therapeutics. As Esslin says:

> The madness of the times lies precisely in the existence, side by side, of a large number of unreconciled beliefs and attitudes—conventional morality, for example, on the one hand, and the values of advertising on the other; the conflicting claims of science and religion; or the loudly proclaimed strivings of all sections for the general interest when in fact each is pursuing very narrow and selfish particular ends. On each page of his newspaper, the man in the street is confronted with a different and contradictory pattern of values.
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> The challenge to make sense out of what appears as a senseless and fragmented action, the recognition that the fact that the modern world has lost its unifying principle is the source of its bewildering and soul-destroying quality, is therefore more than an intellectual exercise, it has a therapeutic effect. . . . In the Theatre of the Absurd, the spectator is confronted with the madness of the human condition, is enabled to see his situation in all its grimness and despair, and this, in stripping him of illusions or vaguely felt fears and anxieties, enables him to face it consciously, rather than feel it vaguely below the surface of euphemisms and optimistic illusions. And this, in turn, results in the liberating effect of anxieties overcome by being formulated. . . . Instead of being provided with a *solution*, the spectator is challenged to formulate the *questions* that he will have to ask if he wants to approach the meaning of the play. . . . We are confronted with a projection of a psychological reality and with human archetypes shrouded in perpetual mystery.

There are two reasons for feeling "critical" toward the Theatre of the Absurd. One arises from its refusal to repeat even those "residual reassurances" left to us that, despite appearances all's right with the world. There may be profound truths to be uttered concerning what *is* right with the world, but the culture of our age has neither the conceptual clarity nor the verbal vocabulary to give them expression. Before we can say with any certitude what is right, we have to understand more of what is wrong. One of our deepest ills comes from a failure to distinguish right from wrong—existential right from existential wrong—and without some correction of this blindness any serious attempt at upward-and-onward literature or drama is likely to be filled with the clichés of yesterday's moralizing. As Tom Driver said in the *Nation* for April 21: "What do we learn from *A Raisin in the Sun* or *Sunrise at Campobello* except that the 'liberal' notions we hold are indeed correct and look very good as dressed-up soap opera?"

The Theatre of the Absurd is a way of examining the unexamined aspect of our lives.

There is a sense in which its dramas are outside of time and outside the causal sequences of action, and outside, therefore, of the developmental schemes of plot and history. As Esslin says:

> In most dramatic conventions, the audience is constantly asking itself the question "What is going to happen next?" In the Theatre of the Absurd . . . the relevant question is not so much what is going to happen but what *is* happening? "What does the action of the play represent?"

The spectator who is not ready to face such questions will turn away.

The second reason for feeling critical toward these plays has some validity. Speaking of Greek tragedy, Mr. Esslin points out that the great examples of classical drama presented to the spectators "man's forlorn but heroic stand against the inexorable forces of fate and the will of the gods—and this had a cathartic effect upon them and made them better able to face their time." But in Greek tragedy, the forces which opposed man's will were given some identity. They were part of the cosmic scheme and had interpretation in the meanings of the religio-philosophical background of Greek religion and in the purificatory rites of the Mystery Schools. Not so in the Theatre of the Absurd. "It's dark out, Jack," says Kenneth Patchen, speaking for our age. "The stations out there don't identify themselves." Beyond the battlements of man's rational life are—

> The white and vacant eyes of something above there,
> Something that doesn't know we exist.
> I smell heartbreak up there, Jack,
> Heartbreak at the center of things
> Which we don't figure at all.

Much has happened since the time of Æschylus and Sophocles. In the fourth century Julian sorrowed that the old gods had faded to pallid, impotent ghosts from man's unbelief. In the nineteenth century Nietzsche declared that "God is dead!" And in the twentieth, the lights went out all over and a leading poet wrote without apology or mannerism: "This is the way the world ends/ Not with a bang but a whimper." Thus, while the Theatre of the Absurd, as Mr. Esslin says, "bravely faces up to the fact that for those to whom the world has lost its central explanation and meaning, it is no longer possible to accept art forms still based on the continuation of standards and concepts that have lost their validity," it lacks the Olympian resources of the Greek drama. It has the position Leo Tolstoy found himself in when he contemplated suicide.

Tolstoy found a way out for himself, first from confession, then from diagnosis, and finally from great resolve. Modern man may find a similar course. Meanwhile, we give Mr. Esslin the last word on the Theatre of the Absurd, that pressure gauge of the desperation of man's condition in our time:

> In expressing the tragic sense of loss at the disappearance of ultimate certainties the Theatre of the Absurd, by a strange paradox, is also a symptom of what probably comes nearest to being a genuine religious quest in our age: an effort, however timid and tentative' to sing, to laugh, to weep—and to growl—if not in praise of God (whose name, in Adamov's phrase, has for so long been degraded by usage that it has lost its meaning), at least in search of a dimension of the Ineffable; an effort to make man aware of the ultimate realities of his condition, to instill in him again the lost sense of cosmic wonder and primeval anguish, to shock him out of an existence that has become trite, mechanical, complacent, and deprived of the dignity that comes of awareness. For God is dead, above all, to the masses who live from day to day and have lost all contact with the basic facts—and mysteries—of the human condition with which, in former times, they were kept in touch through the living ritual of their religion, which made them parts of a real community and not just atoms in an atomized society.

REVIEW
TOYNBEE AND TELEVISION

THERE are, it seems likely, at least a few Arnold Toynbee enthusiasts among MANAS readers. Your reviewer has never felt quite sure as to what to say about the noted creator of these monumental historical projects—partly because they have been described as deriving from a "Christian" interpretation of history and our experience indicates that theology and historiography fit together rather poorly. But there is one aspect of the Toynbee perspective which should without difficulty engage anyone's respect and interest. That is his theory of "cultural radiation." Following is an example of cultural radiation at work:

A dispatch from MOSCOW *(Saturday Review*, June 2) by Robert L. Shayon tells the encouraging story of a five-man television documentary crew from the United States which recently, in Moscow, finished shooting film for an hour-long TV program "which will give American viewers their first glimpse of elementary and secondary education in the Soviet Union." Mr. Shayon and the other members of the crew seem to be considerably enthused about a number of genuine Russo-American "break-throughs" to human understanding which this project made possible. Shayon writes:

> The Soviet Radio-TV Committee acknowledged that they were all stimulated by the operational procedure of the ABC team. They will probably experiment with and perhaps introduce some of these techniques in their own future documentary work. The experience recalls Toynbee's theory of the psychology of encounters among civilizations. The English historian has suggested that, in the past, nations faced with cultural "aggression" by their neighbors, have often permitted the intrusion of trivial strands (usually technological) of the aggressor culture into their spiritual bodies on the assumption that these could do no serious damage to the defending culture. Toynbee says, however, that the flaked-off splinter of the aggressor's technology, when absorbed, inevitably draws after it the other "component elements of the social system in which this splinter is at home. . . ."
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> Thus, India, Japan, and even Russia have been unable to "decontaminate" Western technology, once they have absorbed it. Moreover, other strands of Western culture have invariably followed after the technological Pied Piper. It may be that, on a modest but nonetheless important scale, something like this may have happened in the recent encounter between the ABC-TV documentary team and their Soviet hosts.

(One is here reminded of the "break-throughs" which occurred between Russians and Americans during the course of the last Olympic Games. The athletes, it seemed, were not able to keep their minds on their respective political superiorities because they were so fascinated by each other's skills—and something of this mutual respect has survived in the sports pages of the newspapers in the United States and in the USSR.) Commenting on the psychology of the successful TV encounter between Russia and America, Mr. Shayon continues:

> It had become quickly apparent to the Russians that the ABC team was there to get the story and to transmit it as honestly as it was able—against the grain of inescapable cultural prejudices. This assessment by the Russians of the crew's motives may have been the most important factor in their decision to expand the original agreement. Toynbee's notion of the penetrating power of a strand of cultural radiation worked even deeper in this encounter.
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> This was an exchange between one major American network and the Soviet government—something of a semiofficial innovation. Sooner or later other networks should follow. The wide-angle lens of television's cultural "aggression" operating at fundamental settings of human relationships, may contribute more to world peace than many a more formal diplomatic or political interaction.

There are other indications that Arnold Toynbee is in some sense a supporter of the "Peace Movement." His contribution to the *SR* series "Toward a Warless World" (May 12) directs attention to the concept of "gradualism" as the only means by which global understanding can ever be reached. Toynbee writes:

> The common experience of the virtual world states of the past does throw light on the domestic prospects of a literal world state, if we succeed in establishing one. The gist of the common experience is that it is impossible for a government to freeze human life, however hard it may try, and however propitious the circumstances may seem to be. In the Soviet Union under the present Communist regime, it looks as if comparable shifts in the domestic balance of power are taking place today, regardless of the efforts made by an ostensibly omnipotent government to keep the country imprisoned in the strait jacket of the Communist system.

Within the structure of even the most rigid government there are bound to be developments of new thinking and shifts of power. When the new ideas are revolutionary or when the shifts of power are quick and violent, bloodshed and warfare may be considered the expected consequences. But violence and war do not really contribute to "progress," as many historiographers have thought. Violence serves an ambivalent function; it is used to secure change, but it is also used in an attempt to "freeze" the social order at a given point. For this reason a revolutionary "reign of terror" shifts easily to the more prolonged terrorist methods by which the one-time revolutionists become, actually, embodiments of the extreme Right.

A concluding passage in Toynbee's "How to Change the World Without War" allows that the slower pace of physical development in a warless world enables the tortoise to get to a finish line which the hare will never reach:

> The historical evidence suggests that the policy of trying to freeze a domestic situation is foredoomed to failure—and this even if there is no intervention from outside. Human affairs will never freeze; they will always stew; and the sure effect of putting the lid on them is to make them boil over. We are assuming that war has been suppressed, and that revolution by force of arms has also been ruled out. The price of banning violence may be to slow down the pace of change, but it seems most improbable that the effect will be to bring change to a halt. The frozen stream of human life will go on moving, even if only at glacier pace. Wealth and, with it, power will continue to pass from one class to another. Officially established ideologies will tacitly be put in cold storage while continuing nominally to be honored. Satellite states and subject races will gradually succeed in asserting their human rights. When the use of physical force as an instrument of social change is abandoned, the spiritual force, which Gandhi released in India with such potent effect, will continue to do its transforming work. The Negro minority in the United States could never have asserted its human rights by force of arms, and the military victory of the North in the Civil War did not solve the problem either. Insofar as it is being solved in our time, it is being solved by the force of conscience. The fifth column that is shaping the Southern whites' resistance to the doing of social justice is an awareness in their own hearts that their cause is not, after all, a just one.

Improvement in relations between Russia and America, we suspect, will be carried on most effectively by minority groups within the United States and eventually within Russia. Meantime, we are glad to join with Toynbee enthusiasts on one point—that every kind of "cultural radiation" should be furthered, and that no non-violent encounter with human beings who are supposedly committed to an alien ideology is without value.

COMMENTARY
NEW BEGINNINGS

READERS of this week's Frontiers who would like to acquaint themselves more thoroughly with the work of the Synanon Foundation will find full-length articles in back issues of MANAS—"Ex-Addicts, Incorporated," Sept 4, 1960, and "Synanon Revisited," Feb. 6, 1961, both by Walker Winslow. The address of Synanon House is 1351 Ocean Front, Santa Monica, California. The members maintain a staff to correspond with inquirers and are glad to send materials descriptive of the work carried on there.

BEYOND ABSURDITY

Shortly after the end of the war in Europe, Arthur Adamov, one of the dramatists of the Theatre of the Absurd, became editor of a short-lived literary review, *L'Heure Nouvelle.* Martin Esslin's summary of a paper by Adamov which appeared in this journal contributes so much to a clarification of the motives of the creators of this new form of the theatre that we use this space to quote a further passage from Esslin's book:

Adamov returned to the same themes . . . in a spirit of detachment, in the posture of a thinker called upon, at a great turning point in history, to work out a program of action for a new beginning in a new epoch.

> It is a program characterized by a complete absence of illusions and easy solutions: "We are accused of pessimism, as though pessimism were but one among a number of possible attitudes, as if man were capable of choosing between two alternatives—optimism and pessimism." Such a program would of necessity be destructive in its rejection of all existing dogmatisms. It insists on the artist's duty to avoid selecting just one aspect of the world—"religious, psychological, scientific, social—but to evoke behind each of these the shadow of the whole in which they must emerge." And again this search for wholeness, for the reality underlying the bewildering multiplicity of appearances, is seen as a search for the sacred: "the crisis of our time is essentially a religious crisis. It is a matter of life or death." Yet the concept of God is dead. We are on the threshold of an era of impersonal aspects of the absolute, hence the revival of creeds like Taoism and Buddhism. This is the tragic impasse in which modern man finds himself: "From whatever point he starts, whatever path he follows, modern man comes to the same conclusion: behind its visible appearances, life hides a meaning that is eternally inaccessible to penetration by the spirit that seeks for its discovery, caught in the dilemma of being aware that it is impossible to find it, and yet also impossible to renounce the hopeless quest." Adamov points out that this is not, strictly speaking, a philosophy of the absurd, because it still presupposes that the world *has* a meaning, although it is of necessity outside the reach of human consciousness. The awareness that there may be a meaning but that it will never be found out is tragic. Any conviction that the world is wholly absurd would lack this tragic element.

A further light is given by Eugene Ionesco, in a statement precipitated by his controversy with Kenneth Tynan, drama critic of the London *Observer:*

> To discover the fundamental problem common to all mankind, I must ask myself what my fundamental problem is, what *my* most ineradicable fear is. I am certain then to find the problems and fears of literally everyone. That is the true road into my own darkness, our darkness, which I try to bring to the light of day. . . . A work of art is the expression of an incommunicable reality that one tries to communicate—and which sometimes can be communicated. That is its paradox and its truth.

In other words, behind the insistence on absurdity in the Theatre of the Absurd, there is an equally insistent demand for meaning. One may think that when this form of the drama has lampooned and worn away sufficiently the false faces and spurious ideas of the good which have caricatured human life in our time, more affirmative expressions will be forthcoming from these new dramatists.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
AUTONOMOUS MOTIVATION

AN article with this title in the Fall, 1961, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* should be of more than passing interest to parents. Chosen as the lead discussion by the editorial board, this paper by Dr. Dorothy Lee develops a fresh psycho-anthropological approach by examining motivation at the high school and university levels. Of course, it is easy to be enthusiastic about articles in the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, as this publication embodies an unusual *esprit de corps*, brought, perhaps, by the participation of such men as the late Andras Angyal and the very much present Abraham Maslow. But Dr. Lee's piece seems to be independently stand-out material. (She is, incidentally, Curator of the Peabody Museum at Harvard University.)

As an anthropologist, Dr. Lee had first been conditioned to thinking of "motivation" as arising according to familiar theory. "I had accepted," she said, "the notion that man behaved in response to basic needs." "Man's activities were presented to me as economic or, at any rate, as leading to satisfaction of needs. When they were religious, even religion was presented to me as a means to an end—usually to an economic end—with pre-imagined, hoped-for results, furnishing the activity literally with an end, a finish. With the years, the social sciences have provided me with a variety of theories of motivation. Man was motivated to satisfy basic needs, or to reduce tension, or to respond to an externally applied stimulus. . . ."

But a study of the so-called "primitive cultures" reveals large areas of intense activity which this conception of motivation does not account for. The Eskimos, the Trobrianders, and the Arapesh, for example, have gone to extremes of exertion in pursuit of fulfillments which could hardly be called either economic or religious. Underneath the societal behavior of these tribes, some sort of striving seemed to be always pushing toward the surface, a striving beyond explainable characteristic motivations. It soon became clear to Dr. Lee that parallels in our own culture are not hard to find. She writes:

> Once I decided that I needed a fresh theory, I saw that people in all the societies which I studied exerted themselves—often to unimaginable lengths—but their efforts might or might not result in food or shelter or prestige. It seemed as if the exertion itself, expanded within a meaningful situation was sufficient in itself.
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> When I looked around me in this country, I did not see such absurdity of exertion at first glance. I saw people preferring to ride rather than walk, to push a button rather than light a stove, to turn on an automatic washing machine rather than scrub clothes. I saw people responding to the stimulus of profit, working harder and longer for more pay. Yet I also saw these same people working even harder, beyond profit and beyond pay. I saw women inventing new stitches to make their knitting more engrossing and demanding more alertness; and I saw them devising more intricate and laborious cooking to do on their push-button stoves.
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> All around me I saw people who work to earn money to buy themselves the opportunity to exert themselves for no profit, beyond any imaginable limit; unreasonable, without calculating risk or effort or profit, in danger to limb and life itself; attempting to climb inaccessible cliffs and peaks, skiing, shooting rapids, swimming beyond the limits of safety. Occasionally they did this in public—perhaps seeking prestige—but much more often they did it in obscurity.

While this may seem to be a commonplace observation, its relation to the urge for self-fulfillment among high school students is of great interest. Dr. Lee's theories came into focus as she observed the behavior of her son:

> I saw all this most clearly in connection with our own educational process. This was when my son, a high school freshman, took up tennis. He had been a text book paradigm of the theory of motivation which I had held. According to his teachers and the school authorities, he was a model student, fulfilling all requirements and meeting all obligations. He carried out all his assignments competently, completing them acceptably on time. In every school situation, he moved until he bumped his head against the ceiling of his goal: the reasonable expectations of his teachers and the established requirements for an A. His mind was flabby; he was bored and listless. He did not want to get up in the morning because there was nothing to get up for.

> Then he discovered tennis. This had an inviting horizon—a horizon which could never stop him because it retreated as he moved. No contrived incentive had to be furnished, no fixed grade insured a reasonable effort, no defined achievement put an end to his effort. Tennis invited him to unlimited exertion. Now on Sundays he got up at daybreak so as to have a long time at the tennis courts without a break for meals, dressed unbecomingly in sweat clothes against the cold drizzle of late winter. Paying no heed to discomfort or the passage of time, he played far into exhaustion.
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> What was he seeking? What he was seeking was an opponent—and I use this term in its literal sense of someone who is opposite—who would draw from him the full exercise of all that was in him; one who would evoke him, not push or compel him, to an answering response of exertion beyond known limits. The partners he liked usually defeated him. Yet he chose them because they invited him to actualize all his capacities—his coordination, his split-second judgment, his footwork, his skill, his imagination, his planning—all of these focussed upon the one instant of hitting the tennis ball. He sought for a partner one who would engage his whole being to full commitment.

We would agree with Dr. Lee that the answer is not simply that the youth who responds in such a manner prefers sports to books. This youth, for example, approached high school with an urgent sense of inquiry. The school did not recognize the importance of the urgency, partly because "they had on hand a system of organized, externally applied motivations for the students, since the filling of school assignments could not be left to the compelling force of basic needs." Dr. Lee continues:

> So they stopped his immoderate appetite by feeding him what was appropriate for a boy of his age. For his clamorous inquiry they substituted their concept of what an educated man should know; or the so-called need for achievement, which could be satisfied when one's limited goal had been achieved. If his urgency had been recognized and encouraged, instead of being firmly fenced in—if the view of motivation as depending on needs and drives and external stimuli had not been substituted for the striving of the human spirit, I believe he would have been truly as alive in school as he was on the tennis court. Actually, he himself was aware of the constricting effect of set goals and chose to go to a college without grades, where his inquiry is gushing freely and tennis has taken second place.

Dr. Lee appends some provocative observations: first that in our own culture at the present time there is little recognition of the quality of exuberance. We are much more concerned with predictability and adjustment—or with a calculating response to the challenge of competition. But in so thinking, we leave out of account that life without enthusiasm is life only partly lived, that all great art and literature is moved by a spirit which presses beyond convention or even acceptable balance, and that motivation reaches its peak—or beyond itself—in terms of a conception of boundlessness, of infinity. Even so, as Dr. Lee sees it, the aim is not that of autonomy in the exclusive sense of individualism. She concludes:

> I have attempted to say in this paper that the theory of motivation which we have applied generally in the schools does motivate, but only up to a limit. If the full capacity of the individual is to be tapped and encouraged toward development, we have to have a new view to operate on a new basic
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> The basis which I have been describing in this paper, the strong invitation to the individual to collaborate in creating his situation—in this case his educational situation—has been progressively eliminated from the schools in this century.
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> We have seen competition only as competitive success, as leading to harmful comparative evaluation of the human being; and much of it was exactly this and was rightly expelled from the school situation. We saw achievement only as a pawn in the winning of conditional love, or as a bid for approval. As such it was undesirable and harmful, and was eliminated; at any rate, at the policy-making level. We failed to see achievement as the end product of spontaneously entered exertion and discipline as the enjoyed performance of carefully learned skills. And we failed to see the necessity for a competitor as collaborator in creating the situations which would call forth this unmeasured exertion, this chosen self-discipline and learning; and, in fact, there were no situations to create, as they were furnished ready-made.
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> In the beginning of my paper I said that I was not speaking of autonomous motivation. I have tried to show that I speak of striving and thrust instead, and that an individual, if he is to strive with all his capacity, is not completely autonomous; he needs to see himself as collaborating.

FRONTIERS

Toward a Humane Society

UNTIL the United States Supreme Court nullified it recently, the State of California had on its books a law that enabled law enforcement agencies to arrest a person who had on his body those hypodermic needle puncture marks that are as a rule an indication of addiction to a narcotic drug. Under this law, it wasn't necessary that the individual have on his person narcotics or the equipment for administering the drug (the possession of which are felonies), or even that the individual be demonstrably under the influence of drugs, in order to obtain a conviction that carried a sentence of from three months to one year in jail. All that the unfortunate addict needed in order to get this sentence was the modern equivalent of the leper's sores. What is known in the parlance as "custodial prevention" was applied; there was no consideration of treatment for such individuals.

In writing the majority opinion of the Court, Associate Justice Stewart said:

> It is unlikely that any state at this moment in history would attempt to make it a criminal offense for a person to be mentally ill, or a leper, or to be afflicted with venereal disease.
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> A state might determine that the general health and welfare required that the victim of these and other human afflictions be dealt with by compulsory treatment, involving quarantine, confinement or sequestration. But in the light of contemporary human knowledge, a law which made a criminal offense of such a disease would doubtless be universally thought to be an infliction of cruel and unusual punishment in violation of the 8th and 14th Amendments.

In a concurring opinion, Justice Douglas even more firmly stressed the need to protect ill people and to give *all* who are ill legal protection against punishment.

Quite naturally, there were some violent objections to the Supreme Court's ruling. One leading law enforcement officer said that it would eliminate 27 per cent of all narcotic arrests made in Los Angeles and stimulate the illegal traffic in narcotics. No mention was made of the fact that a known addict can, under civil law, be committed to a state mental hospital for treatment, or at least the custodial care which state hospitals are better able to offer at this time.

Almost everyone will agree that strong laws are needed to control the illegal sale of narcotics, but in what has amounted to mass hysteria there has been a tendency to make the addict-victim as much of a criminal as the operators of the dope rings, local and national. The admission by law enforcement agencies that 27 per cent of narcotics arrests are made on the basis of needle marks alone shows not only a tendency to provide scapegoats, but a failure to stop the flow of drugs at their source. Vigilance is diverted into a dead end; jail space is wasted. In a sense, the addict arrested and sentenced for the felony of sale or possession is better off than the man who is arrested time and again for marks. The felons at least end up on a parole program where some effort is made toward their supervision and rehabilitation.

There has always been ambivalence toward any disease that is considered incurable; whether to punish or attempt to treat has been the question: Lepers were once stoned to death, belled, driven out of cities to die in the countryside; pest houses for contagious disease bore a stigma, as if their inmates were somehow being punished—as they most certainly were—by neglect; the history of our treatment of the mentally ill in the past is too well known to go into here, and there are other examples related to venereal disease, tuberculosis, and even cancer. Only when pioneers have discovered successful treatment methods for diseases that were once quasi-crimes have the physicians replaced the tormenters and wardens. As our best for the narcotic addict we have had the federal narcotic hospitals at Lexington, Kentucky and Fort Worth, Texas, and these have functioned as hospitals and prisons at the same time.

In spite of the American Medical Association's insistence that medical treatment deteriorates when governmental control enters in, it has accepted the Harrison Narcotic Act for nearly fifty years as well as state laws that tell a physician just how, when, where, and how much narcotics he can prescribe.

He can't, for example, accept a narcotic addict as a patient and treat him outside of an approved sanitarium, nor can he even administer one injection of narcotics to relieve the pain of an addict suffering from withdrawal symptoms. Federal and state inspectors are empowered to check on the needs of terminal cancer patients for whom opiates may be prescribed in large amounts. In justice to the doctors, they were glad to shift the responsibility for a problem they hadn't been able to police among themselves over to firmer, and—as I am sure they thought—more objective agencies. Now, in a sense, the United States Supreme Court has returned the addict to the doctors.

As has often happened in the past, as with mental illness, for example, it would seem that the break-through in proving that narcotic addiction is a treatable disease with a chance of recovery has been made by a layman. I am speaking, of course, of Charles E. Dederich and his Synanon Foundation, which has just observed its fourth anniversary. In Synanon, intensive mutual aid in an open-doored environment, so unique in concept as to have been outside the law at its inception, has resulted in a hitherto unknown abstinence and recovery rate among addicts. At the moment it has 115 members—a quarter of whom are living outside of Synanon quarters—who have abstained from drug use for periods ranging from a few weeks up to four years. Over half the membership has been abstinent for over a year.

This is something unheard of in a free environment and no known method of treating addicts has come near this record. The big federal hospitals have a 95 per cent recidivism rate.

While Synanon's efforts may seem infinitesimal, in that they directly reach but a small fraction of the nation's 60 to 70 thousand narcotic addicts, it has proved, through example and education, that an active minority can change the attitude of both law-makers and the public. As an instance of this, the California state legislature recently passed a bill legalizing Synanon as a place where addicts may live together and aid each other in recovery. It is certain that at least some of the Justices of the Supreme Court were familiar with Synanon and its success, and this may have aided them in making their decision. Mass circulation magazines and the press have carried Synanon's story to a vast audience, as has TV. Soon the magazine with the world's greatest circulation will carry a Synanon story and a movie is coming up. Tens of thousands of reprints from MANAS, *Life, Nation, Time, Sepia, Downbeat* and other publications have been circulated. Better still, many of the new rehabilitation programs are utilizing some of Synanon's innovations.

The sensational press of the past, and present, has spread misconceptions about drugs and addicts that have become a deeply embedded folklore in the public's thinking. Incredibly, Synanon is dissolving this. Americans, no matter how much they have allowed their independence to deteriorate, are attracted to people who do things for themselves and without even a Dr. Casey in attendance. A figure such as Charles E. ("Chuck") Dederich is more emotionally important than the latest tycoon. The opiates at last have a human antagonist in the humanistic tradition. Laws can now be changed and reinterpreted simply because it is known that something can be done for the drug addict.

Synanon has given an example and issued a challenge to medicine and the social sciences and, in effect, the United States Supreme Court has echoed this challenge by lifting the criminal stigma from a disease and saying: Heal these people; their plight in itself has been punishment enough.

What Synanon has accomplished should give encouragement to all minority movements with humanistic aims. Even if it were to be dissolved tomorrow—which you may be sure it won't—its place in history is secure.

The fact that the Synanon experiment has taken place in a discarded armory building gives the whole picture a nice touch that is not without its own significance.

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