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THE AGE OF DILEMMAS

IF we contrast the problems and issues of present-day Western society with, say, those of fifty years ago, one striking difference becomes manifest. At the turn of the century we were confronted by challenges which seemed to call for familiar applications of intellectual, technological, and moral intelligence. While there was obviously much to do to reach the presumed goals of the good society, men thought they knew how to define those goals and how to work toward them. *No such confidence exists today.* Instead of being lit by the glow of ideals in process of being realized, our horizons are darkened by dilemmas. Indeed, ours is an *age* of dilemmas. From being confronted simply by the prospect of arduous and difficult labors, we have moved into an area where insolubility instead of difficulty seems to characterize the problems we face.

Take for example the Cold War. Here, plainly, is a real dilemma. The fact that the managers of our nation's policy have been able to find no better response to the issues of the Cold War than the Balance of Terror strategy is evidence enough. The expectation, occasionally expressed, that out of this policy may come the conditions of peace is about as realistic as Karl Marx's prediction that, by processes he never defined, the Communist State would eventually "wither away."

Choose any frontier of primary social concern, or human concern, and you encounter dilemmas. The successful operation of a democratic society in a field of forces created by engineers whose ends are technological, neither social nor human, presents an equally defiant dilemma. The same comment might result from comparing the ends of the modern corporation with the traditional or alleged ends of the democratic society. Then there is the dilemma which confronts educators: How are they to develop a citizenry capable of enlightened decision from the progeny of the members of a mass society whose chief characteristics—if we are to believe the psychologists—are bewilderment, loss of identity, and frustration?

What we are trying to suggest—and it seems plain enough—is that the problems of our age are no longer quantitative. We cannot solve them by redoubled effort of the sort we have applied in the past. The old methods do not work. Nothing is more discouraging to an intelligent man of the present than the monotony of hearing his leaders repeat now meaningless slogans from the past. Actually, we do not have "problems" any more, but one common problem: the quality of our thinking and acting gives no promise of accomplishing what we want to accomplish and must accomplish. This is our master dilemma, fertile parent of all the lesser dilemmas.

What is the best way to set this problem? Is it a political problem? A cultural or an educational problem? A "moral" problem? These terms do not help much. They give familiar names to our difficulties, but offer no fresh solution. Perhaps if we take one approach to the general dilemma, and look at it carefully, we may be able to see further into the question. For this purpose we have a passage from S. I. Hayakawa's introductory essay to Gyorgy Kepes' *The Language of Vision*. Mr. Hayakawa is primarily concerned with the contribution of Mr. Kepes' study of visual communication, but what he says in general has direct application to our question. He begins by pointing out that the language transmitted to us from previous generations is both a tool and a trap. It is a tool when it corresponds more or less accurately to the reality of what we experience. It becomes a trap when the meanings it is capable of embodying are outrun by the kind of experience we undergo. As

Mr. Hayakawa puts it:

> If the abstractions, the words, the phrases, the sentences, the visual clichés, the interpretive stereotypes, that we have inherited from our cultural environment are adequate to their task, no problem is presented. But like other instruments, languages select, and in selecting what they select, they leave out what they do not select. The thermometer, which speaks one kind of limited language, knows nothing of weight. If only temperature matters and weight does not, what the thermometer "says" is adequate. But if weight, or color, or odor, or factors other than temperature matter, then those factors that the thermometer cannot speak about are the teeth of the trap. Every language, like the language of the thermometer leaves work undone for other languages to do.
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> It is no accident historically that Mr. Kepes and other artists of similar orientation speak of "the new vision" and the "language of vision." Revisions of languages are needed. Every day we are, all of us, as persons, as groups, as societies, caught in the teeth of what the older languages leave completely out of account. We talk of a new, shrunken, interdependent world in the primitive smoke-signals of "nationality," "race," and "sovereignty." We talk of the problems of an age of international cartels and patent monopolies in the economic baby-talk of Poor Richard's Almanack. We attempt to visualize the eventfulness of a universe that is an electrodynamic plenum in the representational clichés evolved at a time when statistically conceived, isolable "objects" were regarded as occupying positions in an empty and absolute "space." Visually, the majority of us are still "object-minded" and not "relation-minded." We are the prisoners of ancient orientations imbedded in the languages we have inherited.

Only a little attention to Mr. Hayakawa's analysis is enough to bring the admission that his method is fruitful. We do try to comprehend and act in new situations, using old tools of understanding. Dozens of specialists, each a pioneer in his own field, have pointed this out. And Mr. Hayakawa has the advantage of most of these specialists, being himself a specialist of language, of conceptual vocabulary, and therefore better equipped to make a general diagnosis.

But after you reflect upon what he says, the dilemma at the level of his formulation seems more overwhelming than before. Here is an extremely sophisticated man who sees quite clearly the inadequacy of human understanding (he would say "language") in relation to the problems of many levels of our existence. Only a very few individuals, he implies, have outgrown the "ancient orientations" which confine the great majority of men to thinking that bears little relation to the realities in their lives.

Let us look specifically at the old orientations he names. We are still captives, he says, of "the primitive smoke-signals of 'nationality,' 'race,' and 'sovereignty'." Second, our economic thinking belongs to the age of Ben Franklin, while the facts of our economic life involve endless legal conventions and the complex manipulations of finance capitalism. Then, we have a nineteenth-century view of the physical world—we still think in terms of Newton's "world-machine"—when actually we live in a web of energy concentrations, an "electro-dynamic plenum." We are "thing"-minded, not "relation"-minded.

Here are three general complexes or fields of experience: (1) the national-international political complex; (2) the economic complex; and (3) the complex of the physical environment. Moral considerations are intrinsic in the first two fields, but hardly enter the third at all, which is intellectual and scientific. Or, to put this in other terms, emotional factors enter into our opinions, judgments and decisions in the first two fields, but not in the third.

Now, if we look at our history, in particular at the dramatic attainments of our civilization, we see that what we call progress has been most notable in the third field—that of physical science and its applications by technology, affecting every aspect of our lives. We have been generally content to allow the scientific and engineering specialists to pursue this progress in the control and manipulation of natural forces, which has taken place without any idea of rational control or order, except for the order which has arisen out of the internal needs of technology itself, in relation

to economic processes. Submission to those needs has come as a matter of course—any other reaction would be to stand in the way of "progress."

Meanwhile, the modifications which science and technology have introduced in politics and economics are so far-reaching, and the institutions which have grown up in both these fields are so complex and extensive in their operations, that more and more they have assumed the impersonal, non-moral character of the physical sciences, by which they have been made to develop. It follows that as technical specialists have taken over in politics and economics, the moral relations of the lay individual—the "common man," or the "man in the street"—to the operations in these fields have become increasingly passive, symbolic, and unreal.

There is a sense, therefore, in which it is correct to say that the great majority of people have today lost their "wholeness." Or, more accurately, they have less "wholeness" in their lives than they had when they were able to see the moral relations of cause and effect in political and economic decisions. They did not become less whole, themselves, but their environment has altered to the point of being "out of scale" for ordinary human beings. And when the environment is out of scale for ordinary human beings, it is out of scale for *all* human beings. This, in other words, is a situation which cannot be compensated for by experts. A good society is a society in which enough people act as whole human beings to give the society its prevailing quality. In this case a general society is very much like an educational society. A brilliant faculty will not correct a poor educational situation unless the students learn.

Aldous Huxley developed a point something like this one in his series of lectures given in Santa Barbara a year or two ago. Discussing "history" in the large sense, with emphasis on its far-reaching transitions and differing epochs, he asked: How many people are really "in" history, in the sense of taking a conscious or participating part in the distinctive attributes of an age? And how many are merely swept along by the tide, without much awareness of the changes which are said to be an essential part of their lives?

We are building up a pessimistic, even a "defeatist" picture of the modern world. But what are we to do? It does not seem sensible to announce with great determination that we *must* set about educating modern man in the intricacies of the several specialties which cover contemporary "knowledge" of national and world affairs, the economic relations of individuals and institutions, and the basic conceptions of modern physics. This is, after all, more or less what modern education is supposed to be doing, and what it is not succeeding at all in doing. It is questionable that to add our small voice to the general exhortation will accomplish any appreciable good.

The dilemma, in short, remains.

There seems to be only one course left, and that is to reject the dilemma as not *necessarily* representative of the present human situation. In other words, can we not decide to define the terms of human experience in a way that does not close out all hope of coping with its multiple complexities?

Do we *have* to submit to the definitions of the "real" world which are provided by these specialists? Suppose we say that the development of modern thought and its categories of what is actual and important might have gone in another direction? Shall we argue that human beings are under no obligation to adopt a view of the world which is so complicated that they cannot possibly gain conceptual unity of what it involves for significant human decision? Would it be "unrealistic" or "visionary" simply to walk away from definitions which produce a world we simply cannot manage?

No doubt there are aspects of reality which are every bit as complicated as the dynamic relationships which concern modern physics, and

which require elaborate equations to represent them. No doubt *somebody* ought to pursue an understanding of these relationships, but what we are after, today, is a conception of natural, social, and moral order which is within the grasp of ordinary human beings.

We are not suggesting that "modern knowledge" be watered down to meet the capacity of the mass man's IQ. This would only further the process of sloganization which has already emasculated public opinion in many areas of national decision. The need is rather to find some acceptable way of going back to the fundamentals of human values, and of slowly developing cultural and social institutions which remain in scale with the perceptions and capacities of human beings.

There are times, of course, when nature or events conspire to help a human society to move in this direction. A natural cataclysm will sometimes be the means of simplifying the human encounter with life, bringing rich discoveries of meaning to the individuals involved. A great migration of people to new lands may have a similar effect. A particular kind of human dignity was born on the North American continent with the coming of the colonists from the Old World. No doubt a hunger for wholeness is one of the motives which underlie the pioneer's longing for adventure and for trials of strength and endurance.

But now we are confronted by a challenge of another sort. We are made to ask why it is that a mature society—that is, a society embodying a high level of technological and institutional organization—*seems the least likely to produce mature individuals.* If we can learn how to meet this challenge, we may find ourselves able to develop a new kind of individual maturity—something more than the well-rounded capacity to cope with the physical environment that results from being thrown into primitive circumstances. The difficulty is that this sort of challenge can present itself and *remain unseen.* This is what, in *The Hidden Remnant,* Gerald Sykes was talking about when he said, *"America is the land of the refused revolution."*

What is the revolution we have refused? The revolution against spurious definitions of reality and of the good.

But will nature or events conspire to press us into involvement with this challenge? It is difficult to see how events can help us very much. Our problem is not so much in learning how to cope with practical circumstances as it is in being able or willing to reconsider the values which, over a period of a century or more, led us to produce those circumstances. The problem, today, is to give this need for reevaluation a recognizable, graspable objectivity.

Just possibly, however, we might learn something from the events which arise from the revolutionary impulse gone wrong.

Unlike the revolutions of the eighteenth century, the revolutions of the twentieth century went wrong. We speak of the *European* revolutions in the twentieth century—the Nazi and Communist revolutions—not the post-World War II anti-colonial uprisings and expressions of nationalism which were really eighteenth-century-type revolutions for a dozen or more new nations.

What, essentially, was wrong with the Nazi and Communist revolutions? They were not directly in behalf of Man. They put into power institutions which were *supposed to be* in behalf of man, but were really against individual human beings—against, that is, the individuality of human beings. The good they promised to man was derivative, not direct.

Let us return to Mr. Hayakawa. In some degree, his diagnosis participates in the weakness of these revolutions. He accepts the institutional categories of reality—he speaks of the inadequacy of our political conceptions, our economic and physical conceptions. He does not insist that we go behind these levels or categories of generalization but proposes that modern man must learn to use his mind and develop his language in

conformity to the most recent developments in these fields of specialized knowledge.

Now this is, in some sense, a reliance on institutions and institutional categories of knowledge or "truth."

We are not, or course, in any sense seeking to associate Mr. Hayakawa with the abortive revolutions of the twentieth century. What we are trying to suggest is that the basic dilemma of the twentieth century grows out of a basic fault in the way in which we define our problems and set about solving them. This applies to all the peoples that come under the heading of "Western Man," regardless of ideologies.

If you press to an absolute conclusion the Western reliance on institutions and institutional definitions of reality, it is difficult to reject the logic of a "Communist" type revolution. The worst thing about the Communist revolution was its bald assertion of total and exclusive faith in the power of institutions to create human good. In this ideology, the institution is everything, the man—the *individual*, that is—is nothing. The individual, as such, has no role or destiny in the Communist society. He becomes a man, something "real," only by losing his identity in the absolute collective. This is not an unjust criticism since it must be admitted that a *rebel* against the established order in a Communist society is not acknowledged to have any legitimate being. He either submits to reconstruction and conformity or he is erased, liquidated, imprisoned, or otherwise hidden from view. A man can have identity only by conformity in this society.

So, we might feel a wry gratitude to the Communists for showing us what happens when a society decides to define reality altogether in terms of social institutions.

Suppose—just suppose, for example—the challenges of antiquated language listed by Mr. Hayakawa had been differently put. Suppose that instead of objecting to talk of the world in the "primitive smoke-signals of 'nationality,' 'race,' and 'sovereignty'," he had questioned talk about the *individual* in these terms. There is a great deal to be understood about the cultural impoverishment of a society which until recently had very little to say about human beings except that they were either French or German or American or Chinese human beings; and now we seem to care more about whether they are Capitalist or Communist than that they are *human.* What is the content of the word *human?* Is it so empty of meaning that we are unable to use it significantly except in a racial or national or ideological context? Isn't it just possible that we cling to the "ancient orientations" Mr. Hayakawa condemns because without them we have little more than a vacuum as our idea of man?

And why, in the last analysis, should we give our precious time to comprehending the mechanisms and machinations of international cartels? Who or what is it that compels us to acknowledge that cartels and patent monopolies have such overwhelming importance? A man with some real human affairs to interest him can surely live a full life without mastering this kind of economic vocabulary.

What, moreover, is the central economic consideration in a man's life? It is not a knowledge of the data on cartels, but rather a question of what sort of a livelihood a man can pursue with dignity and self-respect. This is a category of economic thinking that needs no specialists' knowledge and no elaborate semantic discipline. It depends entirely upon what you think a human being is and what the fulfillment of his life may be. Imposing economic institutions have power over our lives and seem to require a deep understanding only because we have nourished their partisan aims with the substance of our lives. A man who puts first things first will not find it difficult to get along without up-to-date verbiage on the subject. And the society of men who refuse to bow to the delusive importance of "economism"—to recall Albert J. Nock's epithet—will probably cut their cartels (if they

need them) down to more manageable size. Cartels, after all, are only means, not ends. Human beings have an obligation to do their important thinking about ends, not about means. This is especially true today, when we have a superfluity of means, but no ends worth talking about. The only ends realistically in sight, these days, are the horrifying ends connected with unrestrained nuclear fission.

Finally, there is the matter of our clinging to the old, pre-Einsteinian physics with its pleasantly objective ball-bearing sort of atoms, instead of facing bravely up to the subtleties of field mechanics and energy concentrations.

Well, we may be wrong about this, but it seems to us that the preoccupation with physical theory as a means of encountering "Nature" as she really is, is no longer in fashion. The generation of people who have the habit of thinking about the world and themselves in this way is rapidly dying out, and the younger folk who are taking the stage have an entirely different bent. They are thinking about reality in psychological rather than physical terms. Even the grounding in biology, as the foundation for serious thought about man, seems daily less important.

Today, the encounter with nature and reality seems to be acknowledged, by a kind of intuitive common consent, to be psychological in character. The most intimate touch we have with nature is through and in ourselves. And it is here, perhaps, that we may find the greatest hope of breaking out of the age of dilemmas. A man who finds primary reality in himself, and who then uses what rational capacities he has available to relate this perception justly and wisely to the field of experience—the field as *he* experiences it, and not as he is told to think of it by institutional authority—is a man who understands and has accepted the true challenge of the age.

REVIEW
WISDOM AND THE BOMB

IN the event that the chronicles of our time have at some future date to be dug from under radioactive rubble, archeologists will hardly be able to conclude that we blew ourselves up because there was no wisdom around to prevent the holocaust. A surprisingly large number of respected contemporaries have analyzed the nuclear weapons complex with clarity and their forceful pleas for common sense are impressive to any who are willing to face the disturbing truth—that the enemy of continued life on earth cannot be isolated in any one ideology, but resides in attitudes common to both sides of the Cold War.

Breakthrough to Peace (New Directions, 1962) provides a comprehensive text for those willing to search for "the things that make for peace." Several of the twelve essays in this excellent paperback have already been reviewed and quoted in MANAS. Here readers will encounter again the writings of Lewis Mumford, Norman Cousins, Erich Fromm, and Jerome D. Frank. These, however, will bear rereading, and the context of Thomas Merton's Introduction gives a special value to the volume as a whole. As Merton points out, each of the contributors lays down, in his own way, the only hopeful assumption which can be made—that questions of group attitude are "not already closed forever by prejudice or by the informal dictatorship of 'thought control'." Mr. Merton continues:

> If we assume that the basic questions have already been answered, our doom is sealed. On the contrary, if we recognize that we still have the obligation and, we hope, the time to re-examine certain fundamental assumptions, we may perhaps be able to open the way for developments in policy that will help future generations work out a fully constructive and peaceful solution.
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> No slogans will be found in this book. Nor do these writers offer easy solutions. Indeed, they do not pretend to an infallibility which can promise anything beyond the austerity of a task that may turn out to be fruitless. But they seek to offer sincere and unprejudiced judgments of our predicament and their analysis is not without very significant hopes, if only we can be faithful to the reason and wisdom which we have not yet irrevocably lost.

It goes without saying that *Breakthrough to Peace* has the texture of "deviant" opinions—deviant so far as conventional political or ideological stances are concerned. But this is more than ever a time when the true radicals of thought should be heard and honored. As Dr. Joost A. M. Meerloo puts it in a concluding paragraph of his contribution, "Can War be Cured?": "Mankind should be guaranteed the right not to hear and not to conform, and the more subtle right to defend himself against psychological encroachment and against intervention in the form of oppressive mass propaganda, totalitarian pressure and mental coercion. No compromise or appeasement is possible in dealing with such attitudes. However, even our denunciations may have a paradoxical effect. Fear and hysteria further totalitarianism. What we need is careful analysis and understanding of such soul-disturbing phenomena."

Mr. Merton gives the general background of these essays:

> In the unexampled and criminal frightfulness of World War II, massive attacks on defenseless civilian centers came to be accepted as perfectly normal in spite of protests of the Pope and other spokesmen for traditional ethics. It was believed that systematic terrorism was essential to beat down all resistance of the "Fascist war criminals" and bring them to an unconditional surrender that would definitely end all war. Finally the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki—the climax of this ruthless policy.
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> Yet at the very moment when the bomb fell, the cold war between America and Russia was already on. The threat of this bomb, which ended the hot war with Japan, was to be the chief weapon of the cold war. Instead of producing peace the atom bomb started the most fantastic arms race in history.
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> Nuclear deterrence has proved to be an illusion, for the bomb deters no one. It did not prevent war in Korea, Indochina, Laos, the Congo. It did not prevent the Russian suppression of the Hungarian revolt. And now those who once relied on deterrence, on the threat of massive retaliation, are insensibly moving toward a policy that assumes a *first strike capacity*. This policy is dictated by the very weapons themselves. The missile armed with a nuclear

warhead is the perfect weapon of offense, so perfect that no defense against it has yet been devised. An H-bomb is the cheapest of all mass engines of destruction. It costs only two hundred and fifty thousand dollars to make, and one can go all the way up the megaton scale without prohibitively increasing either the expense or the engineering difficulty. It has been said that the H-bomb "gives more destructive power for the dollar" than any other weapon in existence. Knowing man's love for a good bargain this atrocious estimate should certainly give us food for thought.

In this situation, where the issues are too enormous for the mind of the average man to grasp, when the threat is too appalling for his political habits and instincts to instruct him adequately, the tendency is to take refuge in fanaticism or in passive desperation.

Among the essays not previously noted in MANAS is "Human Nature and the Dominion of Fear," by Herbert Butterfield, professor of Modern History at Cambridge University. To condemn as irrational anyone who doubts that the bomb is the only ultimate way of dealing with our enemies is itself irrational—irrational because we are fearful. When fear is in dominion, it is precisely the rational proposals, the "austere remedies" of which Mr. Merton speaks, which are apt to be termed "subversive." In any case, Prof. Butterfield endeavors to make it as difficult as he can for readers to remain content with oversimplifications of the issues in international conflict. He writes:

We cannot argue still again that no generation past or future could possibly have to face an enemy as wicked as our present enemy. We should have to conclude that ours is a civilization that took the wrong turn long ago, and now, by the hydrogen bomb, had to be rolled back to its primitive stages so that, in a second Fall of Man, the world could unload itself of knowledge too dangerous for human possession. It is not necessary to take a very high perspective on these matters; it is just too crazy and unseemly when a civilization as lofty as ours (pouring the best of its inventive genius into the task) carries the pursuit of destructiveness to the point at which we are now carrying it. Let us be clear about one important fact: the destructiveness which some people are now prepared to contemplate, is not to be justified for the sake of any conceivable mundane object, any purported religious claim or super-mundane purpose, or any virtue that one system of organization can possess as against another It is very questionable whether when it comes to the point, any responsible leader of a nation will ever use the hydrogen bomb in actual warfare, however much he may have determined in advance to do so. The weapon is dangerous to the world because it is a weapon only for men like the falling Hitler—desperate men making their last retreat. The real danger will come from the war leader who will stop at nothing because he knows that he is defeated and doomed in any case. He may be reckless even of his own nation, determined to postpone his own destruction for a week, or to carry the rest of the world down with him. As in the case of Germany when Hitler was falling, war may be protracted by the will of a handful of wicked and desperate men. On these terms we are going to be more afraid of defeating our enemy than of suffering ordinary military defeat ourselves.

Prof. Butterfield proposes a simple ethical imperative—that we be willing to refrain from using the bomb, even if the enemy should use it first, for "the right of retaliation could mean no more than the right to multiply an initial catastrophe that could not be undone." He continues:

Some day, no doubt, a wiser world than ours will use the term "aggressor" against any people which enjoys rights, powers and possessions in a country that is not its own, and exploits these against the will of the population concerned. Sometimes we seem to be using the term in respect of peoples who are merely seeking to be freed from such oppression; in this sense I have seen the Algerian rebels described as aggressors, using violence for the purpose of securing a change in the status quo. The Anglo-French action at Suez should open our eyes to the fact that a so-called "invasion" (though it be by armies in full array) can arise from something much more complicated than a mere cruel lust for conquest. The United Nations condemned the Anglo-French enterprise, but, even so, a hydrogen bomb on London or Paris would have been an unspeakable form of punishment.

One must play a trick on fatality by introducing a new factor into the case. We seem unable to subdue the demon of frightfulness in a head-on fight. Let us take the devil by the rear, and surprise him with a dose of those gentler virtues that will be poison to him.

COMMENTARY
THE MEANING OF "HUMAN"

THE question of the content of the word "human," raised in this week's lead article, is admittedly not easy to answer. The difficulties come into focus with the help of the passage from Joseph Campbell quoted in Review of two weeks ago (Dec. 12):

> The problem of mankind today is . . . the opposite to that of men in the comparatively stable periods of . . . great coordinating mythologies. Then all the meaning was in the group, in the great anonymous forms, none in the self-expressive individual; today no meaning is in the group—none in the world: all is in the individual. But . . . one does not know toward what one moves. One does not know by what one is propelled. . . . Not the animal world, not the plant world, not the miracle of the spheres but man himself is now the crucial mystery. Man is that alien presence with whom the forces of egoism must come to terms, through whom the ego is to be crucified and resurrected, and in whose image society is to be reformed.

It is no doubt natural for our problems to be set in terms of the "group," since that is where the meanings we have worked with until now, were to be found. But the meanings of the past, the categories of reality which once sufficed, do not suffice for us. We need to understand ourselves in the terms of our common humanity.

How does one make a beginning at this? Well, who, for example, worked on this question? Socrates did. So also Montaigne and Shakespeare. Then, more recently, and in our part of the world, there were Emerson and Thoreau. William James had a part in this work, and more recently John McTaggart and W. Macneile Dixon. Among contemporaries there are Erich Fromm, Abraham Maslow, and David Riesman.

If anyone were to go at reading these men in a mood of determination to find out what they have understood by the term "human," he would get a rich working capital for some thinking of his own.

It is true, of course, that the substance of the meaning sought has an elusive character. Human understanding is a quality of thought, not a quantity of conclusions, and to have to seek the reality of man's being in a *quality* is a forbidding task for people who like their answers laid out for them. This is the explanation of the popularity of dogmatic religions and of the heavy-handed metaphysical systems which can be turned into political creeds. The lust to turn a quality into a quantity—to *nail down* truth the way you shoot a deer or condemn a man to death—has shut out the possibility of spiritual perception for all too many men. It is for this reason, mainly, that "man himself is now the crucial mystery."

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

THE OFF-BEAT STUDENT

AN article, "The College and the Creative Nonconformist,' in the NEA *Journal* for last April, speaks of a situation which often stumps good teachers. The writers, Martha T. and Sarnoff A. Mednick, say:

> Apparently there exists a very special group of high-ability people who do not fit into the conventional academic mind.
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> At the college level at least, they are not succeeding and evidently not benefiting from the offerings and challenges of the average university. In this sense, then, they are nonconforming. We are not talking about the unproductive nonconformist or any others who are different only for the sake of novelty. The group that concerns us includes the bright nonconformist, the underchallenged, and the individual with very specialized ability. Although they have high abilities, they often have low grades.

Working with the sponsorship of the educational branch of the U.S. Public Health Service, the Mednicks developed an experimental test on "the ability for creative thinking," and selected a group of six of the highest scorers for extended personal interviews. The Mednick paper continues:

> It was astounding to find that some of these capable people were having difficulties in maintaining their grades at a level which would allow them to continue their college education, much less go on to graduate or professional training. In short, they were in real danger of being dropped from school.
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> To further underscore this state of affairs, we found that one young man, Student X, who had received the highest score in the entire group on the creativity test, was by far the poorest in academic achievement. His professors and a dean of the college described him as one of the most creative students on the campus—yet he could not maintain his course average.
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> One cause of his difficulty was that he lacked a well-rounded; interest in numerous courses. If a particular problem caught his imagination, he would become completely absorbed and involved in its solution to the exclusion of all other academic pursuits. His dedication to the area of interest would be intense and his work brilliant, but he could not or would not devote himself to any other matter.
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> A further negative factor was X's lack of interest in matters which required rote learning and memorization. As he himself put it, "Why should I memorize formulae which are readily available in any standard text and which the professors themselves have not memorized?"
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> It is obvious that X and his college were operating at entirely different motivational and interest levels and that considerable frustration was being generated to mutual disadvantage.
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> Further evidence of this kind may be gleaned from the studies of currently eminent men that were conducted at the Institute for Personality Assessment and Research at the University of California in Berkeley in I96I. One of the groups studied was composed of forty prominent architects chosen on the basis of ratings by deans of colleges of architecture and by editors of architecture magazines. The forty participants underwent a series of tests and interviews. Those architects who were considered most creative on the basis of various tests and judgments tended to be those who reported the lowest college grades.

A piece in *School and Society* (Feb. 25, 1962) recalls William James' uncompromising attitude towards the watering down processes of large institutions, leaving the potential "autonomous" individual with neither inspiration nor challenge. James wrote: "I am against bigness and greatness in all its forms and with the invisible molecular forces that work from individual to individual. . . . The bigger the unit you deal with, the hollower, the more brutal, the more mendacious the life displayed." Prof. Harold A. Larrabee says:

> Long before beatniks had been invented, James diagnosed the creeping paralysis of will that was causing "an irremediable flatness to come over the world," and sought to counteract it by drawing upon fresh sources of energy and moral courage. He clearly recognized, as do the contemporary Existentialists, that life demands decisions and commitments where complete scientific knowledge is not available and where the force of commitments

> may decide issues. As a militant liberal, he fought against imperialism and war long before such causes were popular. A world calling for moral heroism, as the late Prof. R. B. Perry said, "suited his taste in universes" and "made life worth living."
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> It was this attitude of eagerness in confronting a changing, challenging world full of risk and adventure which was James' greatest contribution to American education. . . .

The British psychiatrist, Arthur Guirdham, makes contemporary comment on the opposition between creative thinking and normative "adjustment" to educational standards. In *Man: Divine or Social*, Dr. Guirdham writes:

> In the control of the instincts the social personality has its eye on the herd and is continually submitting to its pressure. The contemplative seeking enlightenment has, on the other hand, rejected gregarious values.
>
> In school the child is taught to be concerned more with the comparison between things than with their intrinsic nature. He learns that for convenience in living it is necessary for him to study the comparisons and differences between the objects he encounters. The Oneness in which he existed previously is sacrificed in the interest of a tabulation of likes and unlikes which forms the basis for systems of ideas which will later provide an obstacle of growing immensity to his contact with reality. Only the natural artists and the naturally religious resist such a process and cling to the conception of Oneness with which they were provided in their early years. We should always remember that the feeling of identity with what is infinite and universal is the foundation not only of holiness but of genius. The resistance of the artist is often only maintained at some cost to himself. His rebelliousness is a common enough phenomenon and the explanation for it is to be found not in a desire to shock the bourgeoisie but because his revolt is conducted on behalf of his very soul. His revolt, if he be sincere, is an attempt to keep the herd at bay. This is not because he feels himself superior to it, though he often does, but in order to resist the pressure of those systems of ideas which, as we shall see later, are part of the fundamental framework of the herd system which threatens his integrity.

Today, in our universities, there is another irrational prompting to being off-beat—the spread of "vocational training guidance" via batteries of personality tests. Faculty counselling is a time-honored institution, but to cope with the vastly increased student population professors tend to rely upon graduate assistants, and the graduate assistants upon a formula-type analysis of students' talents. And the worst thing that can happen to any student, if he has a spark of respect for his own burgeoning individuality, is to be told why he should channel his efforts in one direction instead of another. If he feels that the scenery is closing in on him he may rebel psychologically, if not physically, but whether his dissent will later result in true originality is still fortunately unpredictable.

FRONTIERS
Miscellany

J. ROBERT OPPENHEIMER, the American physicist whose brilliant career was shadowed by a non-professional interest in peace, is always worth reading. He has a synthesizing and clarifying mind—the kind of mind a good teacher ought to have—with the result that his writing tends to frame the human situation in terms that provoke the reader to carry on on his own. Following are some generalizations made by Mr. Oppenheimer in the October *Encounter,* under the title, "Science and Culture":

> . . . in man's history the sciences make changes which cannot be wished away and cannot be undone. Let me give two quite different examples. There is much talk about getting rid of atomic bombs. I like that talk, but we must not fool ourselves. The world will not be the same, no matter what we do with atomic bombs, because the knowledge of how to make them cannot be exorcised. It is there; and all our arrangements for living in a new age must bear in mind its omnipotent virtual presence, and the fact that one cannot change that. A different example: we can never again have the delusions about the centrality and importance of our physical habitat, now that we know something of where the earth is in the solar system, and know that there are hundreds of billions of suns in our galaxy within reach of the great telescopes of the world. We can never again base the dignity of man's life on the special character in space and time of the place where he happens to live.
>
> These are irreversible changes; so it is that the cumulative character gives a paradigm of something which is, in other respects, very much more subject to question: the idea of human progress. One cannot doubt that in the sciences the direction of growth is progress. This is true both of the knowledge of fact, the understanding of nature, and the knowledge of skill, of technology, of learning how to do things. When one applies this to the human situation, and complains that we make great progress in automation and computing and space research but no comparable moral progress, this involves a total misunderstanding of the difference between the two kinds of progress. I do not mean that moral progress is impossible; but it is not, in any sense, automatic. Moral regress, as we have seen in our day, is just as possible. Scientific regress is not compatible with the continued practice of science.

Mr. Oppenheimer is worth reading because he always makes some kind of contribution to the Great Dialogue concerning meaning, which goes on forever. The question that occurs to us, in relation to the foregoing, is whether it would be useful to consider the possibility that the ranges of man's control over nature and of his awareness of the almost limitless continuum of Life have not come simply as a kind of accident following upon scientific "progress," but that there has also been a subtler inner development going on in man—egoic growth, you might call it—which must now come to the surface and begin to play a part in human relationships and our relationships with the world.

The *New Republic* for Aug. 27 had in it a letter from Henry Neumann, a leader of the Society for Ethical Culture for nearly half a century. This letter contains a kind of observation on the Eichmann case that one seldom sees. Dr. Neumann wrote:

> No editorial comment has appeared so far as I have been able to find on the last words of Adolph Eichmann: "I lived believing in God; I die believing in God." Plainly the ethical quality and direction of such belief are at least as important as professing the credo. But a brief letter of mine on this head was not accepted by the *New York Times* or the *Herald Tribune* though both papers gave space to sermons on the execution. Surely the point raised here is as worth considering as other aspects of our religious life. For one example our Federal law now requires a conscientious objector to believe in a Supreme Being. Thus a potential Eichmann would qualify while a courageous, kindly, honest unbeliever would not—a Mark Twain, for instance. Is it not time to think ethical behaviors entitled to as much consideration as avowals of belief or of disbelief in supernatural guidance?

The network of communication for peace is now so extensive that a small, two-volume directory has been made to list all the presently existing organizations and periodicals with this concern. Publication of *Pocket Directory of*

Peace-Oriented Organizations and Periodicals is a labor of love by Eileen and Laird Wilcox. Since the listings change frequently and grow, the directory is brought out four or more times a year. Copies may be had at 25 cents for the set. Send orders or inquiries to Eileen M. Wilcox, P.O. Box 42, Topeka, Kans. We should say that volume one is devoted to organizations and papers in the U.S., and volume two to international groups.

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Founded five years ago in the Los Angeles area by Tom McGrath, a Western poet, *Coastlines* has the distinction of being the only little magazine on the West Coast with a manifest interest in social issues. It publishes short stories, poems, sketches and essays and comes out "whenever cash permits." A subscription for four issues is $3.00 (address: 471 Sycamore Road, Santa Monica, California). However, the nineteenth issue of *Coastlines*—No. 3 of Vol. 5—is a special anti-war issue edited by Curtis Zahn, and sells for $1.00. It has 96 pages, some good photographs (including scenes of the San Francisco-to-Moscow Peace Walk here and abroad), and various anti-war writings. The cover design is by Lowell Naeve, and Kenneth Patchen did one of his "scrolls" for the inside-back cover—called "Defend Life." There are poems by Gene Frumkin (until recently *Coastlines'* editor), James Boyer May, Tom McGrath, John Beecher, and others. There are fiction, satire, interviews, and informative pieces such as a concluding editorial roundup on the "anti-war publications extant throughout the United States," plus a list of organizations from which peace literature may be obtained. A few usefully characterizing sentences tell what these periodicals and groups are like.

The writing in this issue of *Coastlines*—if we were to attempt literary criticism—might be said to be uneven, but of first importance to notice is the vigor of this effort, its diverse contents, and the general aliveness of the contributors. For quotation we choose a portion of the Beecher poem, which puts into the strong imagery of this poet's vision some impressions gained while he took part in the peace walk to Moscow. "Engagement at Salt Fork" tells of an evening in the American West:

> We camped one night beside the Salt Fork, near
> a town through which they'd hustled us with guns
> and imprecations lest ideas start
> an epidemic there. Our campfire lit,
> potatoes boiling and someone's guitar
> strumming *Down by the Riverside*, people
> began to drift in from the country round.
>
> . . . Faces in the firelight grew
> into hundreds, boys with their dates, big-hats
> from nearby ranches, preachers whose wives had brought
> us popcorn, apples. Dozens of arguments
> swirled into being as good-humoredly
> they challenged us to win their minds with fact
> and logic. Raw through the night, shirt-sleeved they stood
> and battled with us till they came to see
> the meaning of our walk. . . .
>
> Long after midnight was it when the last
> of them went home. I could not sleep for pride
> in these my people, still square shooters, still
> ready to tote fair with the other man.
> I could not sleep for sadness too, to think
> how these great hearts are gulled with lies.
> God help the liars when my people wake!