

CAPACITY FOR GOOD AND EVIL

THE leading article in MANAS for Feb. 6, "The Meaning of Salvation," has brought more interested comment from readers than any other article has evoked for a year or more. Further, in almost every case, the reader writing has offered some thoughts of his own which are well worth publishing. We are saving these letters and plan to use them, at intervals, as the basis for further discussions. We take particular pleasure in the quality of these communications, and in the fact that they are all from regular MANAS readers. MANAS readers, apparently, form a community of minds with more or less common philosophical interests, which are reflected in this correspondence.

Following is one of the letters:

MANAS: You recently discussed a letter from a reader who raised the issue of salvation, saying that it has been an issue with him for over forty years. I have always been stopped by an even more imponderable paradox: the question of physical pain. How can we account for pain in an organism of "organized" inert matter, if that is what animals are? If the stone we kick or the tree we cut feels no pain, how can pain be said to exist at all? Hypnosis and anaesthesia suggest that pain is related to a conscious or nerve center, but the issue still remains. How can "matter" (organized or unorganized) feel pain in any sense at all? Yet we feel it, for apparently no "good" reason.

Another issue raised in a recent article is that of environment vs endowment. The author quoted by MANAS seemed to imply that totalitarian rulers started with the premise that man is a creature of environment, proceeding to shape the environment to make what they would of him—an image of their state-idea.

I propose an alternate hypothesis. Assume man has a nature which is neither a product of environment nor of endowment, but one of his own choosing. He kills because it is easiest, he lies because it pleases him and he will sell his soul, not to the devil, but to the state representative. Assume he takes the path of least resistance, whether out of ignorance, folly or indolence. Is this not sufficient

knowledge on which to form a control apparatus? If man is his *own* undoer, why spend all that effort shaping his environment? Just give him free rein and he will soon be safely in your stable. Do not brain-wash, but give what he wants and he will be in your tent, gladly accepting your dogma. Why *teach* him to hate if he can stumble on that path all by himself?

In short, is it not possible that man has a nature which *gives in* to the environment more than it is formed by it? A dictator does not have to manipulate the environment so much as the man *per se*. Is it not the nature of great reformers to question motives *themselves* rather than the *conditions* of motivation? Even Marx damned the motives of the Bourgeoisie and would have found it difficult to account for *his own* refusal to follow in their footsteps.

Why not give man back his capacity for evil? It is rightfully his. I would much prefer to err out of evil nature than because of an unstable environment. If I cannot commit evil, then I cannot commit good. I would prefer to be the author of my acts and accept the consequences. Are those who reject this philosophy not the ones most susceptible to "influence" of environment?

The phenomenon of sensation—which is what is involved in the feeling of pain—is an almost completely mysterious subject. We hardly feel competent to discuss it, except to acknowledge the mystery, to take note of some curious facts in relation to the sensation of pain, and to speculate a bit.

An anaesthetic sometimes used in dentistry is nitrous oxide or laughing gas. This gas is administered by the patient to himself and its effect on the organism is such that the subject, if he desires, can retain complete consciousness and remain aware of everything the dentist does, and even of every sensation of the drill, but *without pain*. There are other effects of a psychological character, such as a kind of philosophical elation, but the elimination of pain is the fact that is important, here. How is this possible? There may be a physiological explanation,

but what we should like to have is a psychological explanation.

One theory would go something like this: At the center of every human being is the abstract, perceiving self. An enormously complicated array of mechanisms conduct perceptions to the self. Many of these mechanisms can be affected by chemical means—by sedatives, narcotics, tranquilizing drugs, and the like. It is apparently possible to "block" or qualify these communications, with the selectivity of the blocks and qualifications being governed by what we have learned of organic chemistry. Certain drugs, it has been discovered, have the power to reduce or blot out anxiety, accomplishing what might be termed a "chemical lobotomy." A superficial conclusion from experiments and clinical experience of this sort is that consciousness is no more than a chemical phenomenon, and that, given the proper combination of chemical modifiers, personality can be "created" or changed according to the formula for the type of person desired. But this view, in the last analysis, has no more validity than the claim that because it is possible to destroy a man's body, thus cutting off completely any sort of communication with him, there is nothing left of him at all. Such experiments give no certainty that there is not an inward, perceiving self; they prove only that perceptions are modified by changes in the organs of perception. Those organs may be sensory, as in the case of the feeling of pain, or they may belong to the higher centers, governing discriminative judgment, the moral sense, and conscience. If the function of the centers of the brain governing perceptions of this order is inhibited, these powers may appear to be dulled, but the inner man may still be present, although unable to act. Mutilate a musician's hands and he will not be able to play for you, even though he still has the heart and mind of a musician.

The more sensitively attuned the individual, the more susceptible he is to pain, although he may discipline himself to remain relatively unaffected. And the finer the sensibilities of the man, the more varieties of the pain he can experience—and of pleasure, of course, as well. The capacity to feel pain, then, is an evolutionary index. It is a measure of the delicacy of the instrument which the individual

has developed to report to him the qualities of experience. The report concerns the relationships prevailing in his life. The wider those relationships, and the subtler the ties uniting him with others, the more exquisite the feelings which *identify* them. Pain, then, would be a report of disharmony in those relationships, and evidence, also, of the radius of psychic unity possessed by the individual who feels the pain.

The second portion of our correspondent's letter is equally or even more interesting, because capable of clearer analysis. The fact that emerges from the "alternate hypothesis" regarding man's nature is that man is *both* "a creature of environment" and the maker of his own destiny—"his own undoer." Any careful student of the literature comparing environmental and hereditary influences can make hash of the claims of either school by pointing to endless exceptions to both. Generally speaking, the evidence offered for the supremacy of either heredity or environment is statistical evidence, involving the study of large groups of people. What we might say of both heredity and environment is that they cause *predispositions* in human attitudes and behavior, so that studies of entire populations seem to support the claim that these forces are controlling factors. But statistical evidence hides the importance of the deviating individuals who distinguish themselves from "average" behavior by becoming what they determine to make of themselves, regardless of either heredity or environment. They may bear the superficial marks of their origin, and speak with the "accent" of their surroundings, but their ideas and their speech are entirely their own.

When our correspondent asks, "Why not give man back his capacity for evil?", he is also asking, "Why not give man back his capacity to be *human*—to be an original thinker, an artist, or a scientist?" It is something of an irony to have to defend the integrity of the human individual against the dissolving influence of scientific theories of "conditioning," whether by heredity or environment, when science is itself an impressive declaration of the independence of the mind, an assertion of its freedom from the biases of time and circumstance. The virtue of a scientific truth is said to be its independence of the

person of its discoverer, once it has been established. Scientific truth is *impersonal*. You cannot seek the origin and validity of the formulated laws of nature in the genes of a Newton or the childhood nurture of an Einstein. Truth is not tagged with personality. By it men get out of the confinements of what is local and limiting about their lives. This, indeed, is an essential difference between science and revealed religion. Supernatural revelation is forever condemned to the vocabulary and conceptual expressions of the revealer. It chains its believers to the theory of conditioning. The believer in a particular revelation is obliged to reinterpret all experience in the terms of his faith, which is a single articulation. There is no independence of mind for the believer, no original thinking or fresh discovery possible. For this reason, perhaps, the behavior of dogmatic religionists is considerably more predictable than the behavior of a miscellaneous population made up of every sort of person, including freethinkers, agnostics, and atheists. The people who embrace a conditioning theory, as our correspondent suggests, are the most susceptible to the influence of environment.

An obvious issue in connection with this question is the matter of "responsibility." Totalitarian social philosophies represent the claim that "society" is responsible for what the individual is, and how he turns out, and the logical conclusion from this view is that, being responsible, society should exercise all important powers of decision, with the individual being trained to obedience. This is the social justification for such activities as "brain-washing" in modern times, and for the similar activities of the Inquisition during the Middle Ages, as clearly explained by the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*.

Modern totalitarianism has at least the virtue of greater logical consistency, since in theory, and despite outbursts of Kremlin invective, the evils done by the enemies of "scientific socialism" are not seen as acts of personal immorality, but as the outcome of bad conditionings imposed by corrupt capitalistic societies, and the liquidation of the offenders is not "punishment" but a kind of social surgery undertaken in the interest of the greatest good for the greatest

number. The inconsistency of communist theory is rather in failing to account for the communists themselves—the first communists, at least—who broke with the vicious circle of conditioning and established forms of behavior wholly alien to the environment which produced them. The fact is that every theory of human nature which relies on outside forces for the production of human types, is obliged, when made into a *practical* doctrine and put to work in a scheme of social change or reform, to make provision for an *élite* group which is above the common rule because it *makes* the common rule and interprets and administers it.

Thus the Party becomes a kind of pseudo-individual, compensating for the theoretical loss of individuality to the masses. This compensating function is absolutely necessary. *Somebody* has to be free. Somebody has to supply the logic of the system and keep the wheels turning. There has to be a God or a Fuehrer or a Party or an Emperor or a Shaman. Or there have to be relatively free individuals. The equation must be balanced somehow.

Who, then, is really responsible? Manifestly, both society and the individual are responsible—relatively responsible; and total responsibility is the sum of individual and social responsibility. How do you divide the two? You can't. That is why justice in terms of reward and punishment is quite impossible, and why education for freedom supplies the only philosophy which resolves the dilemma.

But education for freedom is exceedingly difficult. Being without formula or objective paradigm—being a mood and a motive rather than a system and a form—education for freedom begins and ends with incommensurables. It has nothing to offer to either nations or individuals who want a sure thing. It does not comfort the insecure nor will it surround the timid with safe bastions against uncertainty. Education for freedom is killed by fear. Where do you get courage? That, truly, is what philosophy is about, or it is not philosophy, but some shambling, pedantic pretense.

REVIEW

WHAT PRICE COMPASSION?

EDMUND FULLER, writing on "The New Compassion in the American Novel" in the *Spring American Scholar*, obliges MANAS reviewers to consider some searching criticisms of trends observable in a number of contemporary novels. The cycle of conventional "idealism" ran its course a long while ago, and, as part of the general rebellion against all the old standards, we are now in an era where the *absence* of clear values is apt to win the cash awards of popularity. According to Mr. Fuller, popular culture has adopted an entirely false view of "compassion," confusing it with a tolerance which lacks a foundation for its own existence. The point is well made: tolerance is meaningful only when we evaluate *and* fail to condemn. If, on the other hand, we make no evaluations and accept all the characters of a novel "as they are," our acceptance has no more meaning than "accepting" the changing patterns of a kaleidoscope.

A worth-while novel is "compassionate." But this is because it shows something of striving or goodness in even the characters which a first glance might cause us to despise. Also, a sound tendency measures the lives of Little People against those of Big People to prove that there *may* be more of human value or beauty among the lowly than among the successful. But the history of literature, as the history of everything else, shows that you can carry all good things too far.

Let us allow Mr. Fuller to state his own complaint:

For some years, authors, publishers and reviewers have kicked around the word *compassion* so loosely that its meaning may become corrupted and lost.

Some writers, especially those talented men William Saroyan, in *The Time of Your Life*, and John Steinbeck, in several books from his early *Tortilla Flat* to his recent *Sweet Thursday*, developed the lovable bums into the fallacy of "the beautiful little people"—which almost always meant the shiftless,

the drunk, the amoral and the wards of society. A corollary was implied: if you didn't love these characters, you were a self-righteous bigot, hard of heart by contrast to the author's compassion and love for the common clay of humanity. Conversely, these books imply another world of respectable and economically stable people who vaguely are not nice, not right, compared to the ineffable and intransigent little people."

A sinister twist came in the path some years ago, and abruptly this new soft streak lost its innocence. The lovable bum began to slip away, and in his place emerged the genial rapist, the jolly slasher, the fun-loving dope pusher. Now we see increasingly a technique of simple identification with the degraded which is miscalled compassion. It lacks the requisites for compassion as much as its subjects lack the requisites for tragedy.

Mr. Fuller is careful not to indict either Saroyan or Steinbeck in terms of all they have written, and here we come to an interesting point. Both Saroyan and Steinbeck—the latter clearly evidencing both ethical concern and compassion in his *Grapes of Wrath*, *Burning Bright* and *East of Eden*—demonstrate that some of our authors may fluctuate between "valueless" writing and writing in a questing spirit. This, we think, is an accurate reflection of our times and of an aspect of American culture, so rather than criticize such authors, we should, perhaps, rather compliment them on their intent to produce something *more* than "entertainment."

But Fuller declares that one feels authentic compassion only when he can conceive of a situation better than that experienced in the lives of his characters. If the reader gets the feeling that the protagonists of a novel are static rather than dynamic—if they are "going nowhere"—what earthly benefit can be gained from reading the book, beyond recognizing that there *are* some who give no indications at present, of "going anywhere"? The novel possessing ingredients of heroism and striving, on the other hand, allows the reader to identify himself constructively with the struggles depicted—no matter how tragically. These are things, we think, which Mr. Fuller has in mind:

What is compassion, anyhow? It means the sharing of a sorrow, a pity and sympathy, a desire to help—feeling another's pain or plight as if it were one's own, seeing "those in chains as bound with them." It applies to a man's moral as well as material or physical breakdown.

You have to have a standard of values in order to see how corrupt, warped, misdirected values destroy themselves and others. That's the realm of tragedy, of individuality and subtlety. If you have no values, and see no values, you cannot distinguish the hypocrite from the virtuous man, the self-righteous man from the genuinely good, the Uriah Heep from the man of honest humility. The world contains them all, and more. Beginning by seeing only bad, the new compassion ends by inverting it to be a curious "good" to which normal life stands as a kind of "bad." "Evil, be thou my good": this is the key to our paranoid novelists.

In Mr. Fuller's analysis, in other words, to give mistaken or corrupted motives no significance is to imply that neither mistakenness nor corruption *have* any significance. And, truly enough, as he asserts, "far from being neutral or unmoralistic or undogmatic, this is a highly partisan, positive philosophical position indeed." So we think that Mr. Fuller's article is a valuable one and worth reading in its entirety. He calls attention to the fact that if, in reading, you cannot in some measure identify yourself with a distressing character by finding "any chain of moral cause and effect by which you could get from where you are to where their characters are," you cannot have compassion.

As is often the case in the building of a forceful thesis, Mr. Fuller seems to go to an extreme in his criticisms of James Jones' *From Here to Eternity*, and we might differ with him in respect to some other (unmentioned) novels he probably has in mind. Whatever the nature of their vocations and avocations, Jones' characters were *not* static. They were, if anything, strivers and idealists, even in limited terms, and were inwardly reaching beyond the sordidness of events in which they played a role. The presentation of the National Book Award to *From Here to Eternity*, we feel, resulted from something more

than a glorification of Mr. Fuller's "pseudo-compassion." Whatever Mr. Jones does in the future, we cannot forget that his book contains as much or more about integrity and about philosophy—despite his celebrated "obscurity"—than many books we have read in recent years. So perhaps, after all, one has to make his own use of Fuller's analysis. Most important is recognition of the motive or intent of the author--the only real criterion for distinguishing "true" from "false" compassion.

COMMENTARY

THE ALOOFNESS OF THE ARTS

IN the passage quoted from Macneile Dixon on the arts (see *Frontiers*) is a sentence which speaks of the "peculiar aloofness from life's daily routine" that is found in poetry and the other arts. This is a pregnant thought, for the speech of the arts, unlike most other communications, is an end in itself. A work of art has no ulterior motive. It has nothing to sell. An artist, it is true, must buy and sell; he must eat, and he needs shelter; but the work of his mind or his heart or his hands is not completed like a product for the market. A work of art is declarative and annunciatory. When made into merchandise, it ceases to be art.

In the issue of *Fortune* which printed Dixon's essay is included a note on William Blake, some of whose watercolors are used to illustrate "Civilization and the Arts." The story of Blake's career is outlined in a paragraph:

The legendary Blake [1757-1827] was an actuality living in London a life of almost incredible productivity. Employed as an engraver by day, he would awake at night to paint and write at the dictates of visions. But nothing he wrote found a publisher during his lifetime, and Blake was obliged to produce his own works. He used a new process, which he declared was revealed to him in a vision by a dead brother: illuminated printing, a method of engraving letterpress and decorations at the same time. *Songs of Innocence* was thus printed, the lettering in color, the exquisite decorations hand-painted by Blake or by his wife, who would then stitch them into covers. Blake was thirty-two when he printed *Songs of Innocence* (*Songs of Experience* was added five years later), and for the rest of his life the occasional sale of a copy was to be a godsend to him. The songs did not find a publisher for forty years, nor a public for nearly a hundred.

Blake left to the world a legacy of breathtaking beauty. He was artist and mystic and singer. Of him *Fortune* says respectfully, "No unworthy action clouded any moment of the life of this man whom Swinburne called all mist and fire." Blake was a man who stood up to be counted in other ways. When Thomas Paine

injudiciously came to England after the American Revolution, Blake hid him from the vengeful British who were determined to hang him.

Blake's was the life of an artist. Dixon writes:

What, then, was Blake's meaning and contention? His doctrine, however extravagantly expressed, is easily apprehended. The fine arts are essentially religious, and for this reason: they interpret the world and human life in the language of the soul, as distinguished from reason and science, which attempt to interpret them exclusively in terms of the intellect. To the assumption that reason is the only avenue to truth Blake opposed an inflexible and unyielding front, as did Pascal when he wrote, "The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing." Blake believed with passionate conviction that man's reason, enslaved in the service of his bodily necessities, is lost and cannot but be lost when it attempts to enter the realm of supersensuous reality, the region of ultimate and innermost truth, when it presumptuously proposes to unveil the last secrets of the universe. It is lost as hopelessly as the geologist or mathematician is lost in the inner and spiritual realms. What has physics or chemistry to say of our ideals and sympathies, our hopes and fears and longings? Are there no such things; are these words without meaning?

One reason why the arts are not honored by all men as Blake and Dixon honored them is the necessity of a man to practice an art in order to know its meaning. The fruits of science can be put into a text, a manual of equations and formulas. Not so the arts. Art is a way of loving, knowing, appreciating. You can hire a scientist to work for you, to invent for you, but not an artist. An artist can never really work for anyone but himself.

And so the language of the artist is a speech aloof, free of transaction and innocent of ambition. Why can we not have a literature for children which is wholly concerned with such men, which records their dreams and labors as though nothing else were worth while? Our young have far too much instruction in the need for "success." A man's real life is in what he does for its own sake, never in what he does for money.

We talk of a better world, a world at peace, a world where men have "learned to get along with one another"; yet in the same breath there is blather about standards of living and spreading "progress" over the globe. There is nothing wrong with progress except thinking it is necessary or important. The necessary and important things are always those things which men do because they love them, because they cannot live without the air of free creation.

A better world will come when there are better men, not just "good" men, but men who eat and sleep in order to work at what moves their hearts in the doing. A world where men work in order to have more than they need to eat, and where peace is construed as a condition in which everyone has so much that there is nothing to fight about, is a monstrous nightmare of inverted standards. It is the perfect formula for war, for it makes men so miserable that they are driven to war by their endless frustrations.

If men would be artists as Tolstoy and Blake and Dixon would have them, there could be no war, nor any poverty. For the artist is teacher of the truth that men have all worthy ends within themselves.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

"WHAT do you want to be when you grow up?" This conventional query to children, often accompanied with pats on the head, can carry with it an insidious influence. For when an adult puts the query, although he may not expect a serious answer, he may be reflecting that unfortunate attitude which identifies a man with his occupation. From the standpoint of the liberal arts, or in terms of any idealistic philosophy, it is quite important for youth to learn to differentiate between the *tasks* of the world that people perform, and what those people, as *people*, actually are.

For many children, the complete preoccupation of a parent with his particular trade or profession encourages identification of work and person. If a man is a carpenter or construction foreman, the harassed owner of a small business, or a harassed teacher in an overcrowded school district, he may tend to identify all his hopes and all problems with his calling. But hopes and problems reach far beyond an occupational mold, and are rooted in the individual psyche. Both the hopes and the problems would be on hand whether one was employed differently or not at all, and for this reason liberal arts devotees have always felt something of prejudice against vocational guidance, courses in "business," etc. The liberal arts advocate is bound to hope that every young person will attain, first of all, a *concept of self-realization*.

To learn the sort of person one should like to become, in other words, is ultimately much more important than choosing the work one is best adapted to perform. Educators who emphasize vocational guidance can be chided for mental myopia, and often are.

What is the ideal? For youths who are intellectually alive and imaginative, it would indeed seem best to leave all thoughts of future professions to a later date and more spontaneous decision.

But the crowded elementary and high-school districts of the United States may face a situation which cannot be met by counsels of perfection. Many children in industrial areas, whose parents have a less than middle-class yearly income, will not be able to spend four years in college, and may more naturally consider the work they want to do. The "higher education," even if economically available to all, moreover, is actually reserved for those who are able to understand concepts as such. Those who think of "work" as skilled manual activity, and those who feel that "work" is simply what one does in order to obtain money to enjoy the pleasures of life, may sorely need rudimentary help from teachers and curriculum planners. Since their parents are not always apt or able to provide basic information as to the requirements of different occupations, the school system is quite right in feeling an obligation to fill in. Inadequate information may lead a teenager to identify himself with a form of future work for which he has little inclination. If informed concerning the requirements and opportunities of other vocations, his whole perspective on the future may be brighter, and his imagination consequently stimulated. There is no harm, then, in letting youth see, in as many ways as possible, that this is a wide world, and that one can take time to find the work and the place he likes best.

A Curriculum Unit folder at hand indicates that some of these considerations are very much in the minds of those who devote themselves to such elementary school units of study as *Careers for Future Citizens*. This particular paper considers the value of a broad survey of professions and crafts, and suggests two general purposes behind a detailed study which might be made available for the students of the eighth grade:

The first is the recognition of a very natural interest in future jobs or careers by almost every eighth grade child. We cannot expect eighth graders to be always realistic in their approach to such interests. Perhaps this is just as well. Teachers would do well to let eighth graders entertain a few day dreams about their futures. At this age we do not expect boys and girls to settle once and for all into the grooves of life-time activities. The men and women who have become famous in history for their achievements often pursued many lines of endeavor during their lifetimes. The second general purpose behind this unit is to give pupils opportunity to know more about their immediate community and its vocational opportunities.

Such a "study" need not serve simply as a source of the teacher's information. The folder continues by remarking that "it can never be emphasized too much that eighth grade pupils need to do much of their own planning; and take the responsibility themselves for the work they do." It is for each teacher to devote what skill he has toward *pupil* planning. It is not easy, but it can be done. It is suggested that teachers use the material in this unit as the raw stuff for their own tentative outline of the total study; that they then present tentative plans to the class, or stimulate the class toward making its own outlines. Thus the pupils will feel impelled by self-determination to "carry out the projects they begin." The most important accomplishment, it seems to us, is to create an atmosphere in which the various vocations are considered as interesting subjects in themselves, and the teacher would do well to suggest that any premature identification with a job, however attractive it may seem, may create a prejudice which must later be overcome. What is to be avoided at all costs—and the schools can help rather than hinder, here—is that attitude of mind which allows the child to identify himself with the work his father, uncle or brothers do. This may be his work, yet it also may hold only drudgery for him.

Perhaps the most valuable field for student-investigation of professions is that of teaching itself, for whatever is learned in examining the implications of this career can be turned to

advantage in any area of employment. One might almost say that no one belongs in any particular vocational niche unless he has a desire and an aptitude to *teach* something about it to others. All foremen and all executives are "teachers" to some degree, and since their success is often measured by their spontaneous enthusiasm, pleasure in teaching and instruction suggests a fundamental criterion. It is also quite obvious that the teachers of our schools are better qualified to present the conditions obtaining in their profession than in other work, so it is no surprise to discover that this curriculum folder stresses this point, recognizing that whenever steps can be taken for teacher recruitment, a service to the community is performed. For example:

Teaching as a Career

Special emphasis *is* given to this particular career, in the hope that every teacher will stress it in the total unit, encouraging able students to consider this line of work.

A. The teacher himself as a resource person might tell why he enjoys teaching, how he came to enter the profession the kind of training he has had.

B. Other teachers in the building might be interviewed for their observations on the profession.

C. A list of the possible scholarships available to those who plan to teach could be presented, and posted.

D. Selected pupils interested could be given the opportunity (by arrangement with a nearby elementary principal) to participate during class time (for one or two hours) as helpers in a lower grade.

E. The teacher, by his friendly attitude toward the pupils his pleasant manner and enthusiastic point of view toward teaching as a career can *greatly influence* many to consider the field for their careers.

F. The teacher should display his own professional journals, and other materials about teaching in a prominent place in the classroom.

G. Pupils could take turns "teaching" the class something, or being responsible for the planning (with the teacher) and presentation of the day's work.

Every child, in our opinion, since he experiences during school hours the "teacher-pupil

relationship," should be taken inside the professional problems of his instructors. The system of allowing interested youngsters to serve as helpers in a lower grade is of great value and has been used with considerable success in both experimental private schools and understaffed public schools. This, of itself, is means of building a bridge between the liberal arts advocates and the vocational guidance enthusiasts.

But what can elementary and high-school teachers do about suggesting the broad psychological perspectives which can derive from a cultural and philosophical foundation? So far as we can see, what they may do—or what they should do—is to encourage a philosophical orientation in culture among themselves. It is the teachers who really need the "liberal arts," for if they are able to derive anything from the wisdom of men like Stringfellow Barr, Alexander Meiklejohn and Robert M. Hutchins, they will carry this atmosphere wherever they go. Philosophy, psychology and "value thinking" in general are not specialties, but simply indications of depth and maturity. So we may stop worrying about "vocational guidance" enterprises so far as pupils are concerned (except for the qualifications noted at the beginning of this discussion).

What we do wonder about is the tendency to make the profession of teaching so much a matter of specialized training in techniques. How else than through serious discussion of great thought can an instructor provide perspective? Teachers who return to summer school for courses in abstract or theoretical subjects which interest *them* are the most likely to bring stimulation and richness, however indirectly, to the elementary and high-school pupils they teach. *Some* of the recent complaints voiced in angry books against the "new educationists" are justified, for a thousand meticulous courses in classroom techniques will not supply a fraction of that stimulation to the imagination which the liberal arts encourage.

We note a paragraph from a recent *National Education Association Journal* which calls for an ingredient which formal "teacher training" cannot supply:

Is it not plain that what the world needs just now is a new devotion to great ideals? In statecraft, in business, in industry, in law, in the church, in science, or in teaching can anything be more intensely fruitful and practical than a renewed faith in the higher and inner things? Hour after hour, day after day, we are all facing situations where there is choice between the higher and the lower. It takes but a little common sense and a will to choose the higher path—to change the whole course of a life, a school, a nation, or an age. A little more faith, a little more idealism. . . .

"A little more idealism" is not, certainly, taught by even the most skilled "technicians" in instruction. Enrichment of life is a philosophical undertaking. However, a teacher *can* be philosophical about broadening his pupils' conceptions of the vocations so long as he enjoys a growing breadth of perspective himself.

FRONTIERS

What is Art?

FOR years we have pondered the problem of a proper treatment of art and the arts in MANAS. Apart from the question of our competence to discuss these endlessly ramifying subjects, there is the question of how they can be discussed with profit for the general reader. If you want to talk about drawings, it seems practically necessary to have some drawings before you; or if the subject is music, the discussion should be illustrated with sound. When specialists write on their subjects, they find it difficult to say what they want without referring to a particular work of art, and the reader is assumed to be familiar with that work. If it is a book, the reviewer can quote a text for discussion, but this method of illustrated analysis is not possible for drawing, painting, and music. Not, at any rate, in MANAS.

But discussion of the arts is possible and fruitful at a very general level—at the level, say, of W. Macneile Dixon's essay, "Civilization and the Arts." To accept Dixon's account of art and the arts is to make a decisive judgment concerning the nature of things. Toward the end of this essay, he says:

When you enter the temple of the arts you enter a building dedicated to the Muses, and the soul is there disturbed by a sense of how great and terrible, how strange and beautiful is this universe of ours. Make human life as trivial as you please, there remains the simple, positive, undeniable fact, among the other facts—the eating and drinking, walking and talking—that we are taking part in cosmic affairs, of a magnitude beyond all imagination to compass or language to express. All finite things have their roots in the infinite, and if you wish to understand life at all, you cannot tear it out of its context. And that context, astounding even to bodily eyes, is the heaven of the stars and the incredible procession of the great galaxies.

In poetry, like its sister arts, you discern—it is common knowledge—not only a peculiar aloofness from life's daily routine, but a singular language. By this idiom the arts are known, the form and grace, the celestial quality, the rhythm of their speech. And

what is rhythm, and why celestial? Celestial since, however it be defined, it is, in fact, the speech of nature and of life. Unseen and unobserved it rules the movements of the heavens, guides the atom and the star, swings the seasons and the days and nights. It illuminates the world in the passage of light, controls the winds and waves all the organic processes of our bodies, the sleeping and waking, the pulsing of the heart and lungs. The laws of rhythm are the laws that guide the whole fabric of creation, a structure harmonious in all its manifestations, the smallest as the greatest. To this voice from the depths, this music of the spheres, the soul, the organ of feeling, is attuned. There is, as Aristotle's pregnant sentence expresses it, "a kind of relationship between the soul and harmonies and rhythms." All art is tuneful—not music only. A painting, a statue, a building, each in its own manner, is a melodious creation. Have you observed that a tune has a secret virtue, unique and all its own? It is a work of magic. It possesses occult properties. When a tune falls on your ear you respond with instant sympathy. You accept without question the suggested measure, you surrender with what Schopenhauer described as "blind consent" to its enchantment, its peculiar spell. You cannot deny, argue with, or contradict a tune. You cannot take another point of view or advance a contrary proposition. The tune is your master, you its spellbound servant. And in the arts this peculiar language is everywhere and by all men understood. It is the soul's native tongue, and needs no learning.

It is better to listen *to* Dixon before a definition of art, rather than after. For Dixon is himself an artist and proves his point without argument. A scientific truth can be "pointed out," but the truth of a work of art must always be *generated*. By his own incantation, Dixon creates for his readers the transcendent reality of which he writes. Dixon is a disciple of William Blake, who held that all life is art, and that the man who knows nothing of art can hardly be human at all.

We are now as prepared as we shall ever be for attempts to answer the question, "What is Art?"

The most famous and the most frequently contradicted answer is that of Tolstoy, who, in an essay of this title, declared that art, to be genuine, must be simple, universal, and capable of being understood and appreciated by all. Tolstoy was a

radical and a revolutionist—to some, indeed, practically a nihilist—on this subject. He was a hot-gospeller on the subject of art, as he was on nearly every other subject:

Art is not a pleasure, a solace, or an amusement; art is a great matter. Art is an organ of human life transmitting man's reasonable perception into feeling. In our age the common religious perception of men is the consciousness of the brotherhood of man—we know that the well-being of man lies in union with his fellow-men. True science should indicate the various methods of applying this method to life. Art should transform this perception into feeling.

In this essay, Tolstoy starts out by an attack on the opera. He tells how he watched a rehearsal of an opera, how the director berated the singers and the musicians, how the opera was drawn together by shouted insults and anger. After expressing his contempt for the whole proceeding, he asks:

Instinctively the question presents itself: For whom is this being done? Whom *can* it please? If there are occasionally good melodies in the opera, to which it is pleasant to listen, they could have been sung simply without these stupid costumes and all the processions, recitatives and hand-wavings. . . . one is quite at a loss as to whom these things are done for. The man of culture is heartily sick of them, while to a real working man they are utterly incomprehensible. . . .

This is only a sample of Tolstoy's method, which runs through hundreds of pages of criticism of conventional art forms. After several chapters, he arrives at his own definition, which he prints in italics:

To evoke in oneself a feeling one has once experienced and having evoked it in oneself then by means of movements, lines, colors, sounds, or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling that others experience the same feeling—this is the activity of art.

Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously by means of external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that others are infected by these feelings and also experience them. . . .

He continues:

Art is differentiated from activity of the understanding, which demands preparation and a certain sequence of knowledge (so that one cannot learn trigonometry before knowing geometry), by the fact that it acts on people independently of their state of development and education, that the charm of a picture, of sounds, or of forms, infects any man whatever his plane of development.

The business of art lies just in this to make that understood and felt which in the form of an argument might be incomprehensible and inaccessible. Usually it seems to the recipient of an artistic impression that he knew the thing before, but had been unable to express it. . . .

Art cannot be incomprehensible to the great masses only because it is very good—as artists of our day are fond of telling us. Rather we are bound to conclude that this art is unintelligible to the great masses only because it is bad art, or even is not art at all. So that the favorite argument (naïvely accepted by the cultured crowd), that in order to feel art one has first to understand it (which really only means habituate oneself to it), is the truest indication that what we are asked to understand by such a method is either very bad, exclusive art, or is not art at all.

Enough has been quoted from Tolstoy to start at least a dozen arguments which could go on forever. It can be urged, for example, that art ought not to be made into propaganda for goodness, that art turned into propaganda is perverted art. It can be said that Tolstoy's demand that art be immediately understood by all neglects the widely varying degrees of human sensibility. Great beauty often goes unrecognized. Tolstoy, apparently, would insist that in this case it is not great.

But without arguing these questions, we should like to present the comment of another practicing artist—Lafcadio Hearn. Hearn in many ways agreed with Tolstoy, yet his judgment may stand for those who disagree as well. The following observations, from *Talks to Writers*, were made by Hearn in a lecture on Tolstoy's theory of art given at the University of Tokyo, somewhere between 1896 and 1902 (the reports of these lectures were made by his students, who devotedly took them down, word for word):

. . . I must warn you not to allow yourselves to be prejudiced against the theory by anything in the way of criticism made upon it. One of the most important things for a literary student to learn is not to allow his judgment to be formed by other people's opinions. I have to lecture to you hoping that you will keep to this rule even in regard to my own opinion. Do not think that something is good or bad, merely because I say so, but try to find out for yourself by unprejudiced reading and thinking whether I am right or wrong. In the case of Tolstoi, the criticisms have been so fierce and in some respects so well founded, that even I hesitated for a moment to buy the book. But I suspected very soon that any book capable of making half the world angry on the subject of art must be a book of great power. Indeed, it is rather a good sign that a man is worth something, when thousands of people abuse him simply for his opinions. And now, having read the book, I find that I was quite right in my reflections. It is a very great book, but you must be prepared for startling errors in it, extraordinary misjudgments, things that really deserve harsh criticism. Many great thinkers are as weak in some one direction as they happen to be strong in another. Ruskin, who could not really understand Greek art, and who resembled Tolstoi in many ways, was a man of this kind, inclined to abuse what he did not understand, Japanese art not less than Greek art. About Greek art one of his judgments clearly proves the limitation of his faculty. He said that the Venus de Medici was a very uninteresting little person. Tolstoi has said more extraordinary things than that, he has no liking for Shakespeare, for Dante, for other men whose fame has been established for centuries.

That Hearn was himself a really great artist probably accounts for his deep understanding of Tolstoy, and possibly for his sympathy for Tolstoy's point of view, which he finally adopts, in his last paragraph:

I think this is a very great and noble book, I also think it is fundamentally true from beginning to end. There are mistakes in it—as, for instance, when Tolstoi speaks of Kipling as an essentially obscure writer, incomprehensible to the people. But Kipling happens to be just the man who speaks to the people. He uses their vernacular. Such little mistakes, due to an imperfect knowledge of a foreign people, do not in the least affect the value of the moral in this teaching. But the reforms advised are at present, of course, impossible. Although I believe Tolstoi is perfectly right, I could not lecture to you—I could not fulfill

my duties in this university—by strictly observing his principles. Were I to do that, I should be obliged to tell you that hundreds of books famous in English literature are essentially bad books, and that you ought not to read them at all; whereas I am engaged for the purpose of pointing out to you the literary merits of those very books.

The thing that is perhaps not so evident in this presentation of Tolstoy's views on art is that he wanted total reform, not simply in the arts, but in all civilization. He was sick and disgusted with the familiar forms of civilization. He was a practical pacifist, almost an anarchist, and a rebel in religion as well as in art and politics. In a Tolstoyan world, Tolstoy's theory of art might merit far less criticism than has been made of it. But simply because of its extreme character, it makes a fine place to begin a study of the meaning and role of art in human life.