THE WAR AGAINST "SYSTEMS"

THE effort of the human mind to free itself of confinements, yet still maintain touch with the world of life and experience, is probably among the most ancient of problems. It is also both a theoretical and an extremely practical problem. Since it is a basic interest of MANAS to attempt to show that theoretical questions—what are sometimes treated as "mere" philosopical questions—are often concerned with matters that bear heavily on our daily lives, we present a portion of a letter which sharpens the issue. This reader writes:

> It seems to me essential to state what a philosophy of "Non-System" can be, because I am very much impressed by the fact that any idea or new teachings eventually become crystallized into a dogmatic system, with the result that we allow ourselves to be swallowed up by systems. We do not realize the extent to which we are prevented from realizing personal freedom by the fact that we live within systems all our lives. Most of us are not even aware of how systems block the way to self-realization as well as the attainment of more adequate means of comprehension.

Our correspondent is speaking of philosophical systems, but we might first take note of the fact that the past fifteen or twenty years have made very clear the stultifying confinements which result from rigid *political* systems. Dwight Macdonald's call for "a new political vocabulary" (in *The Root Is Man)* distills this experience into essential political wisdom for our time. We have discovered the folly of planning too much—or, at any rate, of too much planning of the wrong kind. Skepticism of systems is thus the order of the day. In a recent *Encounter* article, Macdonald called attention to the almost complete lack of political ardor ("political" in the radical or revolutionary sense), except for a sprinkling of anarcho-pacifists, on a typical university campus in the United States. He found a similar lack of concern with pretentious political programs among English students. The idea of a great and saving "system" has lost its fascination and its promise.

Roy Finch, professor of philosophy at Sarah Lawrence College, writing on "Religion and the New Generation," reports a parallel condition in *Liberation* for May. He says:

> The attitude of the young today is small-scale—honestly and refreshingly so. They know that they have enough to do to handle their own lives and the problems immediately surrounding them. They do not have the old respect for those who set out to save the world when they cannot manage their own personal and family affairs. Perhaps there is a loss of imagination here, but it is made up for by the gain in honesty. The cardinal sin in the contemporary breviary is "phonyness," by which is meant pretending to be what we are not, talking big but not being willing to stake anything personally. The world is full of pretense and counterfeit, this attitude says; let us at least try not to fall into *that* trap.

> In trying to characterize this frame of mind three aspects can be singled out: a personalistic emphasis, non-involvement and conventionalism. The growing interest in religion takes place in the context of these and cannot be understood except in terms of them.

Finch is writing to defend the younger generation against the charge of "apathy," so often made these days. "Enthusiasms," he says, "particularly political and social ones, are not popular today." He adds:

> But those who accuse the young of "apathy" forget how often they have been committed to enthusiasms that have created havoc or that have gotten nowhere. If the choice is between enthusiasms, "apathy" may be the more decent alternative. Similarly, when the young are urged to "speak up" by those whose speech has become empty rhetoric on the one hand or sectarian jargon on the other, perhaps it is small wonder that they prefer to keep silent.

We live, then, in a time when the very idea of a "system" is at a discount, when not only the

young but a lot of other thoughtful people are looking for some kind of faith to live by—a faith which, on the one hand, has some resilience, yet, on the other, will not get them into trouble. For systems, as our correspondent points out, do get us into trouble.

But a time when systems are at a discount is precisely the time when the system-building propensity should come in for close examination. It is apparently a very natural thing for men to erect theoretical structures of thought in an attempt to explain the universe to themselves. There is a sense in which social institutions are the expression of some kind of "system-thinking," and every theology is a development of simple affirmative ideas about the nature of things into a structure of explanation.

Can we, actually, live *without systems?* There are times when we try to. Or it is plain from the past that epochs of history are created by the efforts of men to destroy the old system which they regard as false and to replace it with a "true" system. In antiquity, the Stoic philosophy was a relatively "systemless" point of view. Today, what is loosely called "Humanism" may qualify as systemless philosophy. Existentialism is desperately systemless and Logical Positivism, the prevailing scientific philosophy, is little more than philosophical nihilism in comparison to the "truth-bearing" systems of past centuries.

Christianity, which early in its history rejected the Gnostic systems, had very little of orderly or systematic explanation in its own content, and proceeded to borrow from the pagan systems, chiefly the neo-Platonic, for its mysticism and its metaphysics.

The eighteenth century is an engrossing period from the viewpoint of a study of the decline and rebirth of systems. We might say that in overthrowing the hierarchical assumptions of the Middle Ages in politics, the "revelation" system in religion (the Deists, who were also political reformers, found the ground of religious authority in Reason), the driving but sagacious

thinkers of the eighteenth century arrived at a balance between system and freedom which has not been equalled since. The Constitution of the United States was a climactic achievement in the design of a system for political freedom, even though, paradoxically, we are now constrained to admit that the ideas of "system" and "freedom" are, practically speaking, a contradiction in terms.

The thing that is difficult to realize is that any balance between freedom and system is an *unstable* equilibrium. The "perfection" of a system can never be more than "average" and momentary. It is a perfection which can be compared with a work of art—which can never be repeated without losing something of its genius, and the more it is repeated or imitated, the more its quality declines.

Every generation, in short, needs its Founding Fathers, or those who are wise enough to change the system without disturbing the balance—who recognize and know how to preserve the *principle* of balance, and are strong enough to be ruthless in discarding its outmoded forms.

But for reasons still obscure, generations of men do not follow one another with growing or even equal wisdom. Love of freedom, also, waxes and wanes from generation to generation, with the consequence that periodic revolutions are needed to start a new cycle of freedom within a fresh system of more flexible design.

Except for the anarchists, all men admit the need for some sort of government or political system. And all thoughtful men agree with Thomas Jefferson that the best government is the least government. It follows that you can have the least government when you have the best men. An over-governed people is a people overtaken by lethargy, by indifference to freedom. However much they protest their devotion to freedom, if they are system-ridden, they did not really want to be free; that, or they failed to understand what it means to be free, how to become so and how to remain so.

Today, the problems created by political systems reach a crisis in war. Past, present, and future wars obsess modern politics. War is the absolute, as Randolph Bourne pointed out forty years ago. "War is the Health of the State." We did not lose our freedom to war, but it is war which takes away our freedom. It also takes all but approximately twenty per cent of our corporate wealth as a nation. It dominates entirely our thought about national policy. The necessities of war turn our military managers into Machiavellians who seek control of the minds of the young, to make them into submissive materiel for the fighting services. It has made of our scientists hostages to destruction and transformed the great majority of our teachers into timid, frightened conformists. It has become the backbone of the national economy and the architect of all future thinking about "planned production." It has given a platform of witch-hunting to demagogues and turned religion into a utility of patriotic "morale." It has prepared an entire population for cowering in underground tunnels, while grade-school children must drill to scramble under desks, in expectation of death from the sky.

We did not lose our freedom to war, but as Thomas a Kempis said hundreds of years ago, we lost it to the things which make for war. Our "system" has been unable to protect us from shortsightedness and indifference. The threat of total war is the result, but it is a question whether we should now blame "the system," or blame our failure to comprehend the limited role of systems in human life.

Enough of politics. What of systems in philosophy?

It seems doubtful that we can do without systems in philosophy any more than we can do without them in politics. Philosophy is judgment about the nature of man, the good of man, the destiny of man. But we don't really know the nature of man, and consequently are ignorant of

the good of man and his destiny. Hence the need for theories, or systems.

It is possible, of course, to work up a collection of statements about man which will not be severely disputed. But it is also possible that a collection of undisputed statements will ignore what is most important.

There is the matter of the intuitive reverence we feel for men like Gautama Buddha and Jesus the Christ. Yet both these men were disputed in their lifetime and have been ever since. If it be stipulated that these two—to choose them as types of great philosophical teachers—had more of the truth than most of the rest of us, then it follows that we—the rest of us—do not see as much as they could see. We may see *part* of what they saw, and hence respect them, but what we *don't* see becomes what may be called the "system" part of the teachings of Buddha or Jesus.

Religious philosophies are made up of ethics and metaphysics. In general, the metaphysics deals with what we can't prove to ourselves, now, but hope will become demonstrable through whatever development is proposed as possible by the system.

If it is claimed that the metaphysics—or something corresponding to metaphysics—is true but *not* demonstrable, now or ever, then you have dogmas and dogmatic religion. If it is claimed that mystical development or "spiritual growth" will eventually give certainty where now we have only theory, you have philosophical religion, but you still have a *system*. And wherever there is system, there is the possibility—or the probability—of sectarianism and the slow development of dogma.

Take the question of what happens after death. To answer this question, we have the resources of science, religion, metaphysics, intuition, and reason. But none of these resources provides any "public" certainty on the question, so that it is a question that is not easily settled, if it can be settled at all. Nor is there any reason to

suppose that, if "apparently" settled, it will stay settled. Only the systems, as such, declare it to be settled.

So the man who is sick of systems and their pretensions; or sick, rather, of what men have made of the systems which other and perhaps wiser men have taught—this man declares: "I will not concern myself with this question of immortality. It is not important."

He can say this, but will he be right? He may argue that he will be right because what happens after death has been made into a promise of reward or a threat of punishment by certain theological systems. He may feel a just contempt for such pseudo-ethical transactions. The good life, he will argue, is not bought by rewards nor regulated by fears. He is certainly right, there.

Suppose this man lives at a time when the commercialization and exploitation of the human hope of immortality has reached an intolerably degrading level. He is revolted by this corruption. Intensely concerned, he makes a philosophy of ethics for here-and-now. He inaugurates constructive reform, ennobling reform in human values.

Even if immortality is a fact, this man is certainly more "right" than some others, whatever they believe, who are without his compassion, his regard for justice, and his respect for a fearless facing of the present, regardless of what the future holds.

But without pressing the point, we should like to suggest that this man's attitude has the breath of eternity in it. His technical rejection of immortality is an almost unimportant detail.

In another age, however, the conceptions of the time may revolve wholly around material existence. In such a period, the idea of immortality may provide an entirely different sort of leverage. It may raise the eyes of poets and dreamers like William Blake. A sense of high dignity may be born in the human breast from reflection on the prospect of eternal continuity. It

is possible, although it is rare, for an inspiration of this sort to find expression in the conviction of immortality, without the heavy shackles of a "system." W. Macneile Dixon's *Human Situation* is a book to illustrate this, and there are others.

The difficulty, here, is that expressions which form a living inspiration for one man often cannot be contemplated by another except as the rules and doctrines of a system. We see no way of overcoming this difficulty, but the fact of the difficulty does not permit us to ignore the importance of the inspiration.

It may be folly to abandon all "systems" in thought, only because they make things difficult for us. Yet what we can abandon is the presumption that belief in a system is the same as *knowledge,* for it is this presumption which has given all systems a bad name.

The development of systems is a task which usually falls to the intellectuals. The intellectuals, as is well known, may not be particularly wise or stable individuals. They possess certain skill in the manipulation of concepts and symbols, and this skill may or may not be united with wisdom. The intellectuals are, so to say, the technologists of philosophy and religion. Because of their facility, the intellectuals "write up" the systems, and, unfortunately, tend to become "authorities" on what they write about.

The wise man or the teacher is always confronted by this dilemma. Buddha refused to say whether or not he believed in immortality, on one occasion, lest what he said be made into a dogma by the intellectuals and the sectarians of his time. He wrote nothing. Nor did Jesus record his teachings. In antiquity, Plato was perhaps the most successful, of the philosophers who wrote, in avoiding capture by the system-builders and dogmatists. He wrote as an artist as well as a philosopher, and he made extensive use of imaginative forms—the myths. The Neoplatonists did make a system out of Plato's teachings, although it is possibly the least confining of any of the religious systems of the past.

It seems reasonable, finally, to say that the truly wise man can live without the aid of a system, but only he. The wise man has no need of theory. He simply knows. But what will this wise man tell a child?   Will he utter a cryptic abstraction which contains the potentiality of all knowledge, smile benevolently at the child, and go his way?

Systems are the only means the half-knowing man has of coping with the unknown. If he is denied good systems, he will make bad ones, since life demands that he cope as well as he can. The best system is the self-dissolving one, just as the best government is the government which retires wherever and whenever possible, and the best administrator is the man who works himself out of a job.

REVIEW
"THE LIMITATIONS OF PSYCHOANALYSIS"

IN the lead article of the *Saturday Review* for March 16, Erich Fromm contributes the most valuable short article on the relationship between psychology and philosophy that we have ever read. Among other things, it is a brilliant synthesis of the definitions of the "soul" provided by Dr. Fromm in his earlier works—and by Karen Horney in her endeavor to distinguish between the "social self" of man and his "real self"—plus the convincing evaluations of sociological trends made by David Riesman in his *Lonely Crowd* and *Individualism Reconsidered.*

Dr. Fromm begins by calling attention to the fact that certain aspects of contemporary psychology are threatening to spiritual development, for psychological knowledge *can* lead to techniques for "manipulating" human beings. "Market psychology," the fountainhead of cleverness in all forms of advertising, regards each human being as a controllable statistic. And in the managing of industrial enterprise, a kind of psychological understanding is used to condition workers into being "happy and well-adjusted." This is not all, for, as Dr. Fromm puts it, "from the manipulation of the customer and the worker, the uses of psychology have spread to the manipulation of everybody, to politics. While the idea of democracy originally centered around the concept of clear-thinking and responsible citizens, the practice of democracy becomes more and more distorted by the same methods of manipulation which were first developed in market research and 'human relations'."

While, as Dr. Fromm says, such dangers are well known to those who follow the critics of today's "popular culture," a subtler difficulty grows from both psychoanalysis and individual psychology. "To what extent," asks Dr. Fromm, "is psychology possible?" Psychology that is "knowledge of the soul"? Here the writer exposes the psychological anatomy of problems which underlie the general trend to conformity and loss of individuality—away from the faith that one can achieve "self-consistency" or "self-definition." Dr. Fromm challenges the claim that psychology can really "know" any individual, saying that this claim is both erroneous and dangerous:

> Complete rational knowledge is possible only of *things*. Things can be dissected without being destroyed; they can be manipulated without damage to their nature; they can be reproduced. *Man is not a thing*. He cannot be dissected without being destroyed. He cannot be manipulated without being harmed. And he cannot be manipulated artificially. Life in its biological aspects is a miracle and a secret, and man in his human aspects is an unfathomable secret. We know our fellow man and ourselves in many ways, yet we do not know him or ourselves fully because we are not things. The further we reach into the depth of our being, or someone else's being, the more the goal of full knowledge eludes us. Yet we cannot help desiring to penetrate into the secret of man's soul, into the nucleus of "he."

> Psychology can show us what man is not. It cannot tell us what man, each one of us, is. The soul of man, the unique core of each individual, can never be grasped and described adequately. It can be "known" only inasmuch as it is not misconceived. The legitimate aim of psychology, as far as ultimate knowledge is concerned, is the negative, the removal of distortions and illusions, *not the positive*, full, and complete knowledge of a human being.

Psychoanalysis, in Fromm's view, is a true help only to the extent that the analyst is fully aware of his limitations. And, today, he *should* also be aware that large numbers of the general populace are using conceptions or misconceptions of psychoanalysis as an excuse to defer their own evolution as individuals. The following paragraphs seem to us to constitute a classic statement:

> Psychology as a surrogate becomes apparent in the phenomenon of the popularity of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis can be most helpful in undoing the parataxic distortions within ourselves and about our fellow man. It can undo one illusion after another, and free the way to the decisive act, which we alone can perform: the "courage to be," the jump, the act of ultimate commitment. Man after his physical birth

has to go through a continuous process of birth. Emerging from the mother's womb is the first act of birth, from her breast is the second; from her arm the third. From here on the process of birth can stop; a person can develop into a socially adjusted and useful person and yet remain stillborn in a spiritual sense. If he is to develop into what he potentially is as a human being, he must continue to be born. That is, he must continue to dissolve the primary ties of soil and blood. He must proceed from one act of separation to the next. He must give up certainty and defenses and take the jump into the act of commitment, concern, and love.

> What happens so often in psychoanalytic treatment is that there is a silent agreement between therapist and patient which consists in the assumption that psychoanalysis is a method by which one can attain happiness and maturity and yet avoid the jump, the act, the pain of separation. To use the analogy of the jump a little further, the psychoanalytic situation looks sometimes like that of a man wanting to learn how to swim and yet intensely afraid of the moment when he has to jump into the water, to have faith in the water's buoyancy. The man stands at the edge of the pool and listens to his teacher explain to him the movements he has to make, that is good and necessary. But if we see him going on talking, talking, talking we become suspicious that the talking and understanding have become a substitute for the real swim. No amount or depth of psychological insight can take the place of the act, the commitment, the jump. It can lead to it, prepare for it, make it possible—and this is the legitimate function of psychoanalytic work. But it must not try to be a substitute for the responsible art of commitment, an act without which no real change occurs in a human being.

From this standpoint the psychoanalyst who is less than a philosopher, who likes to think of himself as a "scientist," alienates himself from his patients by a presumption of knowledge—an all-too-easy knowledge: "The patient is considered as a thing, the sum of many parts. Some of these parts are defective and need to be 'fixed,' like the parts of an automobile. There is a defect here and a defect there, called symptoms. The psychiatrist considers it his function to fix them. He does not look at the patient as a unique totality."

In his final paragraph, Dr. Fromm returns to the long forbidden concept of "soul"; his use of such words as "soul," "spiritual" and "intuition" is so well considered, however, that only superficial critics can object. His basic premise is that no psychological *system,* no *technique* of psychoanalysis, should ever be regarded as an equivalent of self-knowledge—or even as an approximation of self-knowledge. The closest thing to "final" understanding of a patient by an analyst, in Fromm's terms, "cannot be expressed fully in words." He continues:

> It is not an "interpretation' which describes the patient as an object with its various defects, and their genesis, but it is an overall intuitive grasp; it takes place first in the analyst and then, if the analysis is successful, in the patient. This grasp is sudden. It is an intuitive act which can be prepared by many cerebral insights but can never be replaced by them. If psychoanalysis is to develop in this direction it has still unexhausted possibilities for human transformation and spiritual change. If it remains enmeshed in the socially patterned defect of alienation it may remedy this or that defect, but it will become another tool for making man more automatized and adjusted to an alienated and basically "inhuman" society.

COMMENTARY
SQUARING THE CIRCLE

THERE are moments when, after reading through an issue of MANAS, we are driven to the reflection, "What a terrible place the world is! How do we manage to exist at all?"

This is the trouble with criticism and analysis. We need to criticize and analyze, yet this abstracting process too easily overlooks the miracle of human adaptation—the capacity of man somehow to "get along," under the most adverse circumstances, and in some instances, to challenge those circumstances. Macdonald's investigation of modern political thinking was not pursued in peace and quiet on Mars, but in the midst of confusion. Erich Fromm *belongs* to our culture, of which he is a severe critic. Prescott Lecky was a working educator and Nicola Chiaromonte is a contemporary essayist. All these men wrestle with the problems they write about. They do not submit. From obstacles, difficulties, misconceptions and delusions, they forge a portion of the wisdom of our time.

Meanwhile the less articulate people who are less self-conscious, and more characteristically the captives of contemporary situations, systems and attitudes— they, too, have their areas of freedom, their moments of immunity to the intrusions of the mass.

Critical examinations of the environment largely assume that people are entirely its helpless victims, which, of course, they are not. What the criticism shows is that they are not *strong;* that they tend to be unaware of their captivity; that over a long period they are swept from one situation to another, without opportunity to say much about what happens to them.

But in each situation, they find a relative place and make the best of that place. The nobler qualities of man find a relative expression and so accomplish a relative defeat of the surrounding circumstances.

So, when we read about the confinements which the "system" imposes, or when the heavy hand of the "mass situation" is described by Mr. Chiaromonte, we tend to say to ourselves: "These things are bad, but they don't affect *me* or the people I know to that extent. It is to those other people—the people 'out there' in the mass—that these things apply."

In thinking this, we are probably both right and wrong. Life has a protean energy and an unpredictable versatility. The man who wants to be free always finds a way. He stakes out his independence. And the wonder of human affection has a transforming influence even upon the deadliest of cliches. There is a magic in human beings which isolates the good and focuses thought and feeling upon it, diminishing and neutralizing the intolerable.

But this wonderful fact does not contradict the criticism nor make it unimportant. The astonishing resilience of man's life, when recognized, enables us to understand why "things" are not worse, and how we manage as well as we do.

This capacity of man to live under difficulties, to turn even delusions into an appearance of human happiness, is perhaps our greatest resource, but it should not allow us to relax in complacent content. We ought not to say, "Critics come and go, but life goes on." We still need to listen to the critics, and ask ourselves, *what kind of life.?*

It was that famous critic of his times, Socrates, who declared that "not life, but a good life, is to be chiefly valued." Without our critics, we might be so foolish as to suppose that the good life is already ours.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

FREEDOM AND SELF-DEFINITION

THOUGH we could hardly place Prescott Lecky's *Self-Consistency* (Island Press, 1951), on the "easy reading" list of books for parents, this volume, fruit of Lecky's lifework, focuses attention on a basic issue of education.

Gardner Murphy, now Research Director for the Menninger Foundation at Topeka, says in a foreword that Lecky's major contribution lay in the fact that he extended, beyond all the work of his contemporaries, "the conception that the individual must define for himself the nature of that totality which he is." Until his premature death in 1941, Lecky taught thought-provoking courses (at Columbia) in the psychology of personality, developing his concept of "self-consistency" as a broad approach to psychoanalysis and psychiatric theorizing. Though using an entirely different set of terms, Lecky, like Erich Fromm, appears to have felt that man is primarily a "soul in evolution." For this reason, as Dr. Murphy says, "he must throughout life assimilate new experiences in such fashion as both to be and to appear a living unit. The practical consequence is that new habits are made, and old ones lost, not in terms of sheer conditioning or habit formation, not in terms of isolated neural bonds, but in terms of assimilation, as the individual conceives the forward step to be a continuation and fulfillment of himself. This subtle and penetrating conception was for years applied in teaching, in clinical work, and in business situations; was tested, redrafted, and rewritten until in these present chapters, the psychology of self-consistency achieves mature expression."

There is nothing startling, perhaps, in this summary, but it was Lecky's endeavor to particularize his view so as to demonstrate, substantially and analytically, that the crucial problem of any individual, young, or old, is that of self-definition. He held that what a person is able to learn, and what he is able to unlearn, depends "especially upon how he has learned to define himself." In respect to problems evolving around the teacher-pupil relationship, Lecky wrote:

> Differences in native ability cannot be summarily dismissed, but at present this explanation is frequently dragged in simply to serve as an alibi, both for the school and for the individual.

> It should be repeated in this connection that a person may accept any definition whatsoever if nothing has been learned to the contrary to interfere with its acceptance; while a contrary definition provides a sort of immunity. We have an instance of a very slow boy who characterized himself as "the slow one" and his brother as "the quick one." He felt so guilty when working too rapidly that he had developed a large repertory of devices to use up the necessary amount of time in order to be true to his role. Attempts to teach him rapid methods of work naturally met with complete failure as long as the original definition was retained. Very often a troublesome child has unwittingly been cast in that part by the criticism of parents or teachers. A boy who has previously defined himself as "good" would vigorously resist, of course, the suggestion that he is "bad." If his definition in this respect has not yet been strongly established, however, he may accept the role and consider the question closed. Thereafter he endeavors to perfect himself in the part to which he has been assigned, and grows more and more unmanageable the more his behavior is condemned. Youths who are placed in reformatories usually emerge not reformed, but confirmed in their self-definition as social outcasts and potential criminals.

> Shyness, seclusiveness, feelings of insecurity and inadequacy, lack of friends and the like are symptomatic of self-valuations which are not supported in the situation in which the subject finds himself.

Dr. Lecky's book probably yields its greatest value as a source for correlative references which expand the general point of view indicated.

An article by the English novelist, I. A. R Wylie, suggests support of Lecky's approach. In *Woman's Day* for May, Miss Wylie discusses "How to Be Happy though Young," writing on how she would wish her parents to view and treat her, if she were a child. The need for "self-definition" is implicit. She poses the problem by calling attention to the fact that children's adolescence is by no means necessarily the "happiest period of their life." Many a child's grief, imposed by the parent's failure to accept the child for what he presently is, has resulted in later feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty: "All periods of life present their peculiar problems. Life itself is difficult. It would be intolerable if it were not. If we didn't have a constant

fight on our hands, with ourselves and our circumstances, we would fall apart with boredom. But adults are like travelers who have acquired maps and compasses. Children are pioneers trying to find their uncharted way out of the jungle of their primitive instincts into a world of law and order. Since most of their difficulties lie below the surface, within themselves, and differ profoundly with the individual, much adult advice and admonition remains pointless." Miss Wylie continues:

> This is an age of experimentation. We experiment with the forces of nature. We experiment with childhood and youth. Sometimes I think our experimentation is too scientific as applied to the imponderables of flesh, blood and nerves. We need a simpler approach. What, in plain terms can we do to help in the difficult process of growing up? For an answer, we ought to turn to youth itself. What do youngsters really want, as distinct from what they have been taught by our luxury-ridden society to think they want? I have tried to go back to my own childhood and youth. What, if I were young again, but armed with hindsight, would I want of my adults, my environment and myself? What would I do differently in my particular "Pursuit of Happiness"?

> I would want my parents' love but not their dependence on my love. I would want to know that when the time came, I could go on my own way without a sense of guilt and self-reproach. Healthy children yearn for independence. To feel themselves tied, especially to their mother, by her need of them, is to feel hobbled. And the hobbled colt can become a cripple. My chosen parents, sufficient unto themselves, would set me an example of marital happiness that would set me free to seek my own.

> It was by the merest accident that one day, as an early teenager, I wandered into the British Museum. A custodian, amused, no doubt, by this pigtailed, wide-eyed visitor, took me in hand and led me from treasure to treasure. For the first time, the windows of the world were flung open to me. The winds of great unsuspected wonders flew about my ears.

> Chocolate mice, or their equivalent, dropped to their proper place. The excitement of that first great adventure has lasted me to this day, keeping me alive with the capacity to explore and wander.

> Few teachers have the time or capacity to help children to my chance discovery. It is in the home that the taste for adventure is bred. I would want my parents to be tireless explorers and to take me with them.

> I would want to earn my own living at the earliest possible moment. The youngster with his first paycheck is as happy as kings are supposed to feel. I remember the first short story I sold at the age of eighteen. That meager check was worth millions to me. I would want my parents to teach me that one of our greatest satisfactions is the proof that we are worth our salt and can stand upright on our own two feet.

Miss Wylie's concluding paragraphs also suggest philosophical dimensions, especially in her statement that "self-definition" can be encouraged by a teacher or a friend, when a youth has an extremely poor parental situation. She writes:

> If I were born with unwise parents, a squalid home and a bad environment, I would not claim to be underprivileged. I would accept my circumstances as a challenge. Some of our best citizens have reacted to a bad start like a race horse to the spur and have won the race. If I had made my bad start, I would pick myself up, dust myself off and start again, blaming nobody and nothing. "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves."

And last, but not least, Miss Wylie indicates that much of the frenetic behavior of youth grows from the mistaken effort to crowd all manner of exciting experiences into a short period of time; this is *not* the result of natural desire so much as the result of a curious popular myth—which actually stands in the way of self-realization:

> Above all, I would put youth in its place. It is now, as a visitor from Mars would gather from our fiction and social attitudes, the only worthwhile part of life. It isn't even a prelude, but just a small section of life, "a stuff that won't endure." To regard it as a sort of climax beyond which is only decline and decay, is to live under a feverish pressure and to deprive oneself of one's own future.

FRONTIERS
Culture in Captivity

THE article, "The Individual and the Mass," by Nicola Chiaromonte, in the Spring 1957 issue of *Dissent* (a quarterly of socialist opinion), wholly justifies the editors' remark that the author is "one of the most distinguished critics of our time." Mr. Chiaromonte is able to give objectivity to a condition which surrounds and interpenetrates our lives so thoroughly as to remain almost unnoticed, or to be taken for granted.

This condition is made up of the impersonal, unavoidable relationships among the human beings of a mass society. A mass relationship is the remote contact of mask with mask, never of man with man. But this, we say, is not our *real* life. Perhaps so, but as the circumstantial crowding wedges more intimately into our daily existence, there is less and less left of what we regard as our "real" life. Functions which *ought* to be a part of our real life have been turned into mass relationships. The process of subdivision goes on and on. The question which must finally be faced is: How much of our individuality will remain, after this invasion by the processes of the mass society is complete—if it ever is complete?

Mr. Chiaromonte describes the situation:

> . . . communication between individuals in a crowd is reduced to conventional signs, or, in any event, to a very impoverished language. It is not that I cannot have a conversation with the next fellow. But it is as if I do not know him; as if I have in common with him only a humanity which is both very much reduced and rather general; as if, in addition, I know that my relation with him is purely occasional and transient. It is evident that there is no room for a genuine exchange of feelings and thoughts between us. One could indeed say that, given the situation in which we find ourselves, we can communicate only by remaining external to each other as much as possible. We can exchange only the most conventional words. The expression of complex ideas, subtle evaluations, the communication of delicate feelings must evidently be left for other occasions.

The conditions of the mass society have grown without either plan or intention, as the unrationalized response to bigness and complexity. They are made up of the haphazard routes which solve a vast traffic problem. To get to work, you *must* go a certain way. You are packed in a subway car or suffer a daily bottleneck on the freeway. You become subject to routines which must process millions of human beings. For the purposes of industry and government, the hidden individual must be labeled for easy classification—by competence, by race, by religion, by "loyalty." In dozens of multiple relationships, you are not a man but a category that fits, a measurement that meets the requirement of a norm.

There is no one to blame for all this. That is simply the way things are:

> We are together because "we can't help it." This is the prime fact. No one can help it. Everyone knows that the other person is constrained by the same necessity which has compelled one's self. Here is, one could say, the normative fact of the "mass situation," its justification, and even the foundation of its humanity. Only if we recognize this necessity, this common subjection, does the other person impress himself on our consciousness as a "fellow man." Otherwise, the relation between individuals in a mass is material, external, and provisional, and the next fellow appears as a profoundly alien being, or even as an obstacle and an enemy; if he were removed our situation would be easier, we would be more comfortable, there would be *more room. . . .*

> The condition of the individual in the mass is completely ambiguous and obscure; caused by all and willed by no one; inevitable and "natural," but unjustifiable and artificial; solitary and unanimous; essentially unstable and dangerous, but yet reassuring; loaded with violence and hostility, but yet fraternal. What is most ambiguous and obscure is the relation between the individual and his fellow. How does one treat him, and speak of him? Who is he— this being who is both intimate and a stranger? It would be almost as easy to imagine what the first men were like in the dawn of time.

Now an obvious response to this would be to say that we don't *have* to look upon our fellow members of the human crowd as mysterious

aliens. That is true, but it takes a special effort of the imagination to think of them as people like ourselves. In a small community, you get to know everyone in town pretty well. You learn something about their lives, their hopes, their struggles. Sympathy comes naturally. You are moved to help where you can. The crowd is different. You can't possibly get to "know" the crowd, or even a small part of it. There is no time, no occasion, and circumstances do not permit.

Of course, persons of "outgoing" temperament try to correct this inhuman situation by adding a note of cordiality to the touch of peripheral relationships. They make an effort to see *people* instead of just a crowd. It is a pleasant surprise to fall in with such persons. Moments of life are warmed by meeting them. But this is far from "knowing" and "understanding" others. And momentary friendliness, however desirable, is not a substitute for real communication.

It was Ortega's contribution, Mr. Chiaromonte points out, to show that a life entirely dominated by these mass contacts is precisely what defines the *mass man.* Even what are regarded as intimate personal relationships are eventually affected by the casual quality of meetings "in the crowd," so that for many, individuality is practically extinguished.

What is to be done? The primary matter for recognition, here, is that the problem is characterized by a general feeling that nothing *can* be done. This is the obscure source of a total demoralization which spreads throughout the mass society. As Chiaromonte says:

> The individual, in his work, in his politics, in the circumstances of social life, may submit to acting in a given way because "he can't help it." In behaving this way, however, he does not deny that it would be better to be able to do what he does with the conviction of doing something good and useful. But he feels forced to put aside the question of good and evil. Naturally, if the necessity to which he submitted seemed to be in absolute contradiction to his firm religious or moral convictions, he would not act as he

does, he would have compunctions about doing wrong and his situation would change. But what one does because one cannot do otherwise does not appear as a moral choice, does not openly contradict any "value." Indeed, such an action is characterized by rationality, in the sense in which one considers it rational for the individual to submit to circumstances independent of his will. Thus, it hardly seems reasonable for a worker to oppose the technical demands of the factory on the grounds of conscience; or for a citizen to claim the privilege of individual liberty as against bondage to the collective organization. Such ties do not appear bad in themselves, just as being crushed in a mob does not seem degrading in itself. There is no reason to be opposed to them. . . .

> So a corrupt situation does not change by virtue of pure ideas, nor by violence, but uniquely, "according to the order of Time," through our suffering the common lot in common, seeking to understand it.

> And the fact remains that we do not leave the cave in a mass, but only one by one.

This "seeking to understand" is of the essence. A man of intuition and sensibility, a man like Nicola Chiaromonte, can feel the evil of the mass situation and evoke this evil for his readers, but a certain strength is needed to break out, even in mind, from the conditions of the mass society. What, moreover, does the mass situation "mean," for human beings and the ends of human beings?

Where did we go wrong, that we are now so engulfed by the blind irresponsibility of impersonal processes in our common life? What, in man, in individual man, has been writ large in the labyrinthine structure of the mass?

These questions are of some importance, if we are to have any hope, and hope is necessary. When Mr. Chiaromonte speaks, in his last sentence, of the fact that "we do not leave the cave in a mass, but only one by one," this is an allusion to the Platonic philosopher who emerges from the cave of ignorance, the cave where everyone submits to the common cultural delusions. But having emerged, he then has the problem of what to say when he returns to the cave to explain the situation to others still in darkness. What language will he use? The

language of the crowd? The language of the crowd, alas, has no vocabulary except one made from the currency of the illusions of the crowd, the mass situation. Where will the Platonist find the leverage to lift its vision?

> No matter how refined, sensitive, and aware he may be, he can define his ideas only in relation to the ideas of the mass; even if it is to oppose them. This already sets him in bondage. On the other hand, if he truly seeks lost reasons and truths, if he wishes to communicate meanings and not merely to use formulas, if he feels himself the more or less worthy heir of a tradition, the intellectual must wish to be free. But he knows one thing for certain: he exists and works in a situation in which he himself has only an equivocal and doubtful relation to tradition, to the "aristocratic values," to reasons and intelligible truths. This is an extreme situation.

What is obviously needed by the Platonist, the intellectual, or the philosopher, is a schematic ground for historical analysis, with which to support his hope and his conviction. It is a question of the good of man, and *why* that good is frustrated by the conditions of a mass society. It is a question of what lies we have told ourselves about the good of man, with the result that we have allowed the conditions of a mass society to take possession of our lives.

There is one encouragement on an otherwise gloomy horizon. Only in the past ten or fifteen years have we come to recognize that there are major evils in human life for which no single person or class or group of persons can be blamed. This recognition has begun a new kind of questioning found in Dwight Macdonald's essay, "The Responsibility of Peoples," and is implicit, also, in this article by Chiaromonte. The work of David Riesman, again, is an introduction to the same problem—a problem which suggests that no scapegoats can be blamed for its existence.

Thinking of this sort is new for the modern world. Fundamentally, of course, it is the old ethical thinking of ancient philosophers; what is new about it is its projection on a sociological scale and its application to the ills of social wholes instead of to social units.

But the "one by one" aspect of the solution is very new, in our time, so far as social problems are concerned. This may be the true revolutionary discovery of the twentieth century.