

## TOWARD NATURAL PHILOSOPHY

THE woman had come from a funeral. She said to a friend, "I shall have to think a great deal about why such a thing could happen. The minister, while he said many nice things, said nothing to explain this death." It had been an untimely death, carrying off a person of great unselfishness and usefulness to others—a death which seemed ruthlessly without meaning, which needed explaining, if anything in the world needs explaining.

There is nothing extraordinary about this incident. In a country as large as the United States, such remarks are probably made daily by hundreds of people. What is extraordinary is the fact that only ordinary people find reason to make them. Philosophers do not busy themselves with these questions, nor even serious-minded men of religion. These are days in which much earnest writing about religion is going on, and there is a new and more practical spirit in philosophy as well, yet the most oppressive happenings, such as the apparently wanton carrying-off of a useful human being, are not considered to be material for either religionists or philosophers to ponder.

One wonders why.

There are superficial explanations, of course. There is the familiar historical reason for scholarly neglect of the mystery of death. The old theological account of death is wholly unsatisfying, since it proposes that the will of God, in such matters, is beyond understanding. This is not explanation, but the frustration of explanation. Then, with the displacement of theology by science as the chief authority on the processes of life, modern thought passed into habitual neglect of all questions which lie outside the scope of scientific inquiry. The man whose intellectual life has been shaped by the temper of science is inclined to acquire a stoic indifference to matters which are not only beyond the reach of science, but which have lost intelligible reality from being beyond reach. The very idea of seeking an explanation for death is regarded as meaningless. It

has a physiological explanation, of course, and what other explanation could there be?

The renaissance of idealism in philosophy seems to have passed such considerations by. With the exception of C. J. Ducasse, of Brown University, we know of no man concerned with the problems of philosophy who has publicly interested himself in the question of the meaning of death. This is a strange block in the modern mind. In a period which boasts of the discovery of "the importance of the individual," idealism has almost nothing to say about the distinctive problems of individuals. From Hegel to Whitehead, the idealists who have produced profound inquiries into the "larger" meanings of human experience, showing that a world in which consciousness is the fundamental reality is the only sort of world thoughtful men can acknowledge, give the fortunes of *individual* consciousness short shrift. Hegel, as John McTaggart has pointed out, was simply not interested in individuals (an aspect of the Hegelian cosmology which the Marxists faithfully copied), while Whitehead was too busy healing the rift in Western thought left by Descartes to have time for the problems of individuals.

The further obvious explanation, and the one we should probably adopt as having the most force, is that individual experiences are extremely difficult to comprehend. It is much easier to found a general proposition about the nature of man upon philosophic reasoning than it is to work out a theory which is competent to deal with the eccentric destinies of individuals.

Here, perhaps, is the fundamental difference between ancient and modern religion. Ancient Indian religion—both Hindu and Buddhist—dealt credibly and reasonably with death. Socrates did not withdraw from the subject, nor was he in the least disturbed by his own impending end at the hands of his fellow Athenians.

It must be acknowledged, however, that a kind of agnosticism accompanied even the ancient teachings about death. While both Hinduism and Buddhism instruct in the doctrine of metempsychosis, and the migration of the soul from one body to another, the Hindu scripture, the *Bhagavad-gita*, also declares that the ante-natal state remains unknown and that the condition after death is not to be discovered, while the Buddha remained silent when an importunate monk demanded a simple answer about the survival of the soul. But although these old religions shrouded the subject of death with a mystery that ought to attach to so obscure a matter, there is clear promise that assiduous search into the mystery will be rewarded. And there is plain indication of belief in a continuous thread of existence for the individual, in which the lifetime of a man is but a single episode.

The basic difference between these Oriental religions and Christianity on the subject of death lies in the role of the individual. In Indian religion, the individual can have knowledge, but he must seek it, win it, while in Christianity he has only to accept it; in fact, he *must* accept it, for there is no other way for him to get it. Revelation, in Christianity, replaces the searching intuition of the individual. Christian mysticism retains the element of individual striving for inward vision, but there is nothing in Christian thought to be compared with the idea of *gnosis* as found in Oriental systems. The whole effort, in Christian mysticism, is toward identification with God, with no attention to the very real problems which life presents to the *mind*. These problems are simply "dissolved" by the prospect of an ultimate unity in which they will no longer exist. Eastern mysticism is less cavalier toward the world and its problems; in fact, there are clear implications in Eastern philosophy that no problem can ever be left behind until it is completely understood. Christian doctrine simply declares what takes place after death (Catholic doctrine, that is; the Protestants are more modest in their assumptions), but for the anomalies in divine justice there is no explanation at all. The divine is conveniently held to be incomprehensible *because* it is divine. Ancient philosophers—some of them at least—took another view. The ultimate

order, they thought, ought to be more rather than less rational than merely casual happenings.

We have, then, this comparison to make: that while the ancients held individual destiny, although obscure, to be nonetheless knowable, we believe that it is not simply obscure, but wholly without meaning, and we do not try to understand it; that is, we do not try to understand it if we follow the lead of the serious thinkers of our time.

Thus the question arises: Can these people be called "serious" thinkers? After all, if the deepest feelings of human beings, their thoughts about justice and the meaning of life, are inextricably involved in the emotions which respond to love, birth, and death, these are the ultimate experiences of individuals and it becomes the prime duty of the philosopher to concern himself with them.

It is not that we can or ought to expect simple and clear explanations of the inequities of birth and death, but that our words concerning these things, as Lao-tse put it, have need of "an ancestry," our deeds "a lord." It is a stupendous folly to go through life without any acquaintance with the content of antique philosophical traditions on the subject of death, as though we were born without a past, and therefore, indeed, without a future. In the arts, we are surrounded by the usufruct of the past. We are rich beyond calculation. The harmonies of great music sound in our ears, the beauties of color, line and form seep into our consciousness. Literature informs us of the nobility and the strength of human beings, their incredible courage, their capacity for suffering, their aspirations and underlying longings. These declarations of meaning flow about us like pulsations from the great heart of mankind, yet the articulations of philosophy on the subject of death are ignored, as though some irrational barrier, some modern superstition or taboo of decadent culture, prohibited them.

Why should it appear to modern philosophers that to inquire into the mystery of death is a fruitless or unprofessional procedure? Nothing that can bring to hungry hearts the riches of deep wondering should be thought of as fruitless. One exceptional thinker of our age, W. Macneile Dixon, gave the full strength

of his searching mind to the mystery of death, revealing the splendor of ancient philosophy to his readers. In *The Human Situation*, he wrote:

It is Plato's doctrine, and none more defensible, that the soul before it entered the realm of Becoming existed in the universe of Being. Released from the region of time and space, it returns to its former abode, "the Sabbath, or rest of souls," into communion with itself. After a season of quiet "alone with the Alone," of assimilation of its earthly experiences and memories, refreshed and invigorated, it is seized again by the desire for further trials of its strength, further knowledge of the universe, the companionship of former friends, by the desire to keep in step and on the march with the moving world. There it seeks out and once more animates a body, the medium of communication with its fellow travelers, and sails forth in that vessel upon a new adventure in the ocean of Becoming.

Many, no doubt, will be its ventures, many its voyages. For not until all the possibilities of Being have been manifested in Becoming, not until all the good, beauty and happiness of which existence allows have, by the wayfaring soul, been experienced, not until it has become all that it is capable of becoming—and who can tell to what heights of power and vision it may climb?—is it fitted to choose for itself the state and society which best meets its many requirements. . . .

*The Bhagavad-Gita* makes a direct answer to the question concerning the fate of one who is torn from life by a death which seems, from any point of view, a tragic interruption. Krishna declares:

Such a man, O son of Pritha, doth not perish here or hereafter. For never to an evil place goeth one who doeth good. The man whose devotion has been broken off by death goeth to the regions of the righteous, where he dwells for an immensity of years and is then born again on earth in a pure and fortunate family; or even in a family of those who are spiritually illuminated. But such a rebirth into this life as this last is more difficult to obtain. Being thus born again he comes in contact with the knowledge which belonged to him in his former body, and from that time he struggles more diligently towards perfection, O son of Kuru. For even unwittingly, by reason of that past practice, he is led and works on.

How are these "teachings" to be regarded? They can be regarded precisely as the philosophers who declared them said they ought to be regarded.

In the *Phaedo*, after a discourse on the expectation of immortality, Plato makes Socrates say:

I do not mean to affirm that the description which I have given of the soul and her mansions is exactly true—a man of sense ought hardly to say that. But I do say that inasmuch as the soul is shown to be immortal, he may venture to think, not improperly or unworthily, that something of the kind is true.

Buddha, who continued the Upanishadic tradition, told his followers to accept nothing from him but what was in accord with their reason; and the anxious sectarians of religion are dealt with in the Buddhist *Sutta-Nipata*:

Stubborn in theories  
which they themselves devised,  
these wrangle on through life.  
—Leave then dogmatic views  
and their attendant strife! . . .

Well, just supposing there is, or could be, a wisdom-religion of the sort Buddha and Plato seemed to draw upon, what guidance has the ordinary man, or even the modern philosopher, in examining its teachings? He has the best possible guidance—the guidance felt by the woman quoted at the beginning of this article, which made her say that she would have to think a great deal about the mystery of death. She, at any rate, had far better guidance than those who are so schooled in modern skepticism that they are disinclined to think about such matters at all.

## Danilo's Proclamation

READERS of Carlo Levi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli* and the novels of Ignazio Silone know about the almost unparalleled misery of the Italian poor. In 1952, a young writer and architect, Danilo Dolci, went to the township of Trappeto, a seacoast area near Palermo populated by fishermen. Taking only the clothes on his back, he became a wage-earner and lived under the same conditions as the fishermen and farmers—conditions of extreme poverty and semi-starvation. After some months of this experience, when a baby died in his arms because the mother had no milk and no money for milk powder, Dolci took drastic action—he announced that he would lie in the dead baby's crib and fast until the government took relieving action.

Several influences met in Dolci, leading to this stand. He had worked with a Catholic priest who founded a community of "brotherhood under the laws of love" (later suppressed by the Vatican) and had been affected by other religious reformers. Gandhi's opposition to violence found response in him. He did one stint in the Italian army as a non-combatant, but chose prison the second time.

The press reported Dolci's fast and after seven days money began to come in. Joined by helpers, Dolci built a shelter for orphans and the children of imprisoned people. He built a recreational center for the people of Trappeto and later a pharmacy and two small hospitals.

The need of the people of the area is plain from the fact that the average Trappeto worker makes about 50 cents a day for fifteen or sixteen hours of work, and he is idle four months of the year. Outlawry and banditry are common in the area. Dolci studied the outlaws, finding that, on the average, they had had less than two years' schooling but had spent eight years in prison—3000 man-years behind bars for 350 outlaws!

Moving his headquarters to Partinico, a larger town, Dolci investigated two run-down sections.

A portion of his report was printed in *Fellowship* for March, in an article by Giovanni Piolo. Dolci said:

There [in August, 1954] we found that. . . 400 out of a total of 900 families were in great distress and in 160 of the 400 the head of the family was either in prison, an outlaw, an ex-convict, or had been executed. We found 17 cases of serious mental illness. . . .

These "criminals" had resorted to illegal means of support because they were usually unemployed four to six months of the year and made as little as 75 cents a day when they worked. They had to support families on this income.

A project which brought Dolci into conflict with the authorities was his "reverse strike." He gathered unemployed men together and with them began to mend an impassable country road. The police ordered the "rebels" to disperse, but Dolci refused. The Constitution guarantees Italians the right to work, he said. They ought to be able to do constructive work, he argued, even if no one will pay them. Charged with six crimes, Dolci and his accomplices were brought to trial. Italian writers and intellectuals rallied to his defense. Hundreds of lawyers and jurists declared their solidarity with Dolci. The charges were finally whittled down to two—trespassing on state property and disobeying the police order to disperse. Dolci's conviction on these charges is being appealed.

Today, a National Solidarity Committee has been formed in Rome to help and support Dolci. The American Friends Service Committee has set up a work camp at Trappeto to build a road giving better access to the sea for the fishermen of the town. However, Dolci's work is still harrassed by the opposition of Italian officialdom, both civil and ecclesiastical. Dolci, meanwhile, on June 10 of this year, issued the following proclamation:

Not every Italian can accept the fact that in certain parts of the country, especially in the south, we do not know how to systematically utilize the resources of the unemployed and of the land, allowing

this waste to spell degradation for all, and often illness, violence and death.

The poorest often know no trade and lack the cultural and political means of making their voices heard. If they band together and exert some pressure we put them in jail and at times even shoot those who refuse to sit idle, labeling them rascal—outstandingly delinquent—subversive.

A man may renounce his rights for the common good, but he cannot—and should not—renounce his duty. It is a great shame to prevent a man, directly or indirectly, from exercising his most elementary duty.

Each year Italy finds more than 600 billion lire (about 1 billion dollars) for the police and the military program—this is very significant, for it shows that for these two items all is foreseen and organized; but where are the plans and projects for full employment? The Varoni plan is now practically dead, and his technical commission has no political support. We go blindly forward. It is hard enough to travel straight, but without a goal how can we get anywhere? We do not even have a research bureau to study conditions. "Abused and flogged besides," they say in Sicily.

The interests of the strong, the wealthy, the well-organized of the various types of conservatives for whom unemployment is harmless or even profitable, are easily safeguarded. Do not say Italy is poor and that work for all is a luxury we cannot afford. Every zone and every group has undiscovered values, and the contrary is true, namely that work for all is best for all, from every point of view. The number of idle men is not diminishing, even though responsible politicians seem to be unaware of this. But at least hunger is very real to the man out of work.

Let us not bear this situation longer, against our Constitution. Let us encourage in towns and cities, in every region, wider and deeper group discussions so that the people may see their problems and solve them. Let volunteers go to the most depressed zones, even if for short periods, to study and to help. Let us promote meetings to acquaint every one with the facts and data now only known to a few; let there be reports to stimulate nation-wide debates which will lead to deeper and more detailed studies. To have a clear understanding of the truth means to gain new impetus and new strength.

We are badly complacent. In Italy millions of people are wasting away in idleness or poor occupation because of our neglect of this problem. Let each exert what pressure he can, with the best

means on hand, but most of all let the unemployed be stirred, be they monarchist or communist, democristian or socialist; all political shades will find unity in this task at least. He who seeks finds.

Unless we succeed in improving this situation by early November, we will begin fasting in protest, and will fast until sufficient guarantees come to assure us that this problem will be clarified, studied and encountered.

FRANCO ALASIA  
DANILO DOLCI

June 10, 1957

## *REVIEW*

### PARTISAN PORTRAIT

JUST what will be the long-term effect of books like *The Hidden Persuaders* by Vance Packard (David McKay, 1957) is difficult to anticipate. This book was written to be and is "a shocker." The author has presented a picture of the use of modern psychiatric and psychoanalytical knowledge by the advertising profession. His method is sensational, but no more sensational than the material that he has to present.

The key expression in *The Hidden Persuaders* is "motivation research." Most large advertising agencies now have specialists in determining the "real" reasons why people buy, or they retain the services of psychological research bureaus to obtain this information. The book is a study of actual advertising campaigns. It tells, or attempts to tell, why the campaigns succeeded or failed.

The chief message of the book—not exactly new, but presented here in revolting detail—is that the main springs of human behavior, at least so far as purchasing is concerned, are non-rational. People do not buy goods for the reasons that they give for buying them. They seek psychic satisfactions of one sort or another, inventing plausible "rationalizations" to justify the way in which they get those satisfactions.

For example, the cake-mix people found their sales lagging. When they asked for help, the depth psychologists told them that women felt guilty in using a prepared mix. What kind of a wife would give her husband a cake to which she had added only water? So, to leave room for a little "creativity" on the part of the woman, the mixes appeared on the market with new requirements: the cook was now to add an egg, or some milk, as her unique touch, making the confection "her very own."

A less attractive instance of "deep" selling is in the field of life insurance. The following is Mr.

Packard's paraphrase of the counsel of Edward Weiss, partner in an advertising agency. Speaking before an assemblage of insurance men—

Weiss criticized many of the current selling messages as being blind to the realities of this man who usually makes the buying decision. Typically, he demonstrated, current ads either glorified the persistence and helpfulness of the insurance agent or else portrayed the comfortable pattern of life the family had managed to achieve after the breadwinner's death, thanks to the insurance. Both approaches, said Mr. Weiss, are dead wrong. In a few cases, he conceded, the breadwinner may be praised for his foresight, but still he is always depicted as someone dead and gone.

One of the real appeals of life insurance to a man, his probers found, is that it assures the buyer of "the prospect of immortality through the perpetuation of his influence, for it is not the fact of his own *physical* death that is inconceivable; it is the prospect of his *obliteration*." The man can't stand the thought of obliteration. Weiss reported that when they talked at the conscious and more formal level about insurance they talked of their great desire to protect their loved ones in case of any "eventuality." In this their desire for immortality was plain enough. But Weiss said there was strong evidence that this socially commendable acceptance of responsibility was not always the real and main desire of the prospective customer. "In many instances," he went on, "our projective tests revealed the respondent's fierce desire to achieve immortality in order to *control* his family after death. These men obtain insurance against obliteration through the knowledge that they will continue to *dominate* their families; to *control* the family standard of living, and to guide the education of their children long after they are gone."

Asked what the advertiser of insurance should do, Mr. Weiss replied:

"I suggest that such advertising may become more effective as it is concentrated on the emotional problems of the buyer himself rather than picturing the comfort of his surviving family." He proposed that in picturing the security and unity of the surviving family, the "living personality" of the breadwinner should always be present by picture or by implication. Not only should he be there in the family picture, "but he, and he alone, is the hero eternally shielding, providing, comforting and governing."

Case after case of low sales transformed into high sales with the help of "depth" psychology is described by Mr. Packard. While the MR (motivation research) experts are not infallible, their score, as he reports it, is remarkably good. The experts try to get at the emotional attitudes of people and exploit them. These methods have already invaded politics: "During the 1952 campaign Dr. Dichter [one of the experts] announced that all the long-winded talk about issues such as inflation and Korea would actually have very little to do with the outcome. The crux of the campaign, he insisted, was the emotional pull exercised by the rival candidates." Mr. Stevenson deserves full credit for saying, when this sort of talk reached democratic circles: "The idea that you can merchandise candidates for high office like breakfast cereal . . . is the ultimate indignity to the democratic process."

This book should be widely read, and probably will be. But whether it will produce much more than a few *tsk tsks* and some tired resignation is a question. Mr. Packard has a chapter on the "morality" of depth persuasion in marketing and he raises his eyebrows at the proper points, but his treatment at this level is basically inconclusive. His own "challenge" is this:

. . . when you are manipulating, where do you stop? Who is to fix the point at which manipulative attempts become socially undesirable?

The assumption, here, is that *some* manipulation is perfectly all right. But consider the pressures under which sales managers operate in our industrial and acquisitive society. Vast economic empires are dependent upon the movement of goods. If a car fails to become popular, thousands of people may be thrown out of work. If prunes lose out to a more romantic fruit, the prune people will suffer. Nor is there any way to call off the competitive struggle to extract more and more dollars from the consumer—who is, after all, "greatly benefited" by being served with all the wonderful comforts,

luxuries and sources of security that America's expanding economy *must* persuade him to buy.

Actually, to oppose depth selling is to attack the economic foundations of modern society. It is like being against war, or rather military "readiness," which is another foundation stone of modern prosperity. So far as we can see, the only importance of *The Hidden Persuaders* is that it may in some small way contribute to the self-realization by modern man of the portrait he has drawn of himself, and which he seems willing to live with.

It is the portrait of a man entirely shaped by his fears and his vanities, who never makes an important decision except from self-interest (conscious or unconscious), and who is utterly dependent upon his institutional surroundings for the satisfaction of both his material and psychological needs. What this book makes plain is that there is no way under heaven of changing this portrait without changing the dominant motives in human life and their accommodating structures in our socio-economic relationships.

This is a frightening prospect, for how are you going to make a beginning in this direction, when the forces ranged against such a change are so big and so powerful?

The only way to begin is to begin. This means the formulation of a conception of human beings as beings of inherent dignity, self-reliance, and strength, and it means the practical documentation of this view of man in as many ways and from as many sources as can be found. It means the firm rejection of the entire "philosophy" of manipulation as bad in itself—not bad only when it is used for "evil" or exploitative purposes.

Where can convictions of this sort be found? MANAS is published to help discover answers to such questions.

## COMMENTARY CRYPTO-COLLECTIVISTS

IT is time to recognize that no man can be much better than the way he makes his living. This is the terrible moral of *The Hidden Persuaders* (see Review). The cleverest men of our culture, who could perhaps be the wisest, devote their talents to making as many as possible of the rest of the population into irrational puppets. A man who supports himself by such activities cannot possibly retain any real self-respect, nor can he respect the pliable objects of his efforts.

None of these people—neither the manipulators nor their victims—has given any serious thought to the meaning of individual human life and of ends worthy of individual human beings. A mass population of the persuaded and a small minority of "hidden persuaders"—this is the completely logical composition of a civilization impoverished in philosophy, whose best thinkers are, regardless of politics, *collectivists*, who habitually neglect the questions vital to individuals.

The simplest of North American Indian tribes knew better than our modern philosophers and educators. They brought their young up by preparing them to become independent, self-reliant individuals. Before he could be a brave—a *man*—the Indian youth had to achieve both physical and psychic independence in the ordeal of initiation. He had to learn to *stand alone*.

In our culture, both the casual and the planned forces which influence the young tend to make them *dependent*—helpless without the endless shields, supports, and "securities" of our commercial and political institutions.

Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:  
Little we see in Nature that is ours;  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

As evidence of an occasional break-through the tinsel curtain of modern merchandising, we

reprint a paragraph from the Aug. 26 *New Republic*:

In a period of inflation and frequent style changes, the combination of exorbitant cost of upkeep of autos and driving expenses, plus the drastic loss in depreciation, has finally impressed many American car owners. The most practical answer to those problems is the small car. Volkswagen pioneered the way and is here to stay. The Big Three can't help noting with envy that Volkswagen has a three to four month backlog of orders while Ford, Chrysler and General Motors have 800,000 unsold cars at dealers.

Big Brother doesn't win *all* the arguments, even if he wins enough of them to give his spokesmen, the hidden persuaders, delusions of grandeur.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

### NOTES IN PASSING

ALTHOUGH *Man on Fire*, by Owen Aherne, is a bit outside the familiar scope of this page, it is a book well worth considering for parental reading and discussion. The plot, as most who read motion picture advertisements probably know, concerns divorce and a broken home—the complicated interplay of feelings between a man, his former wife, and an eleven-year-old son whose custody changes hands twice. Mr. Aherne is an able writer, but the value of *Man on Fire* derives chiefly from the scarcity of books of this type—encouraging evaluation of the sort of situation which confronts so many children in America today (statistics still show more divorces than marriages in the U. S.). The author's welcome dispassion is revealed by an evident determination to avoid any quickening of the story by treating the main characters as "types." It has no single villain nor any purely villainous act, while the most difficult and painful of tribulations are sensitively presented.

The film version of *Man on Fire*, although affording an excellent character portrayal by Bing Crosby, is in no sense an adequate substitute for the book. The thoughts and feelings of the three persons, as revealed by Mr. Aherne, are worth musing attention, and once more we are reminded that the mere visualization of a situation, even when assisted by sensitive acting, almost always leads to oversimplification in the resolution of conflict. When one walks away from the movie, for instance, he will probably tend to feel that everything has been "worked out," and that all is ultimately for the best. But there is no full resolution in the novel, and we are helped to realize that emotional tensions and scars of this order can be erased only by assimilation through the long passage of years. In this context, one feels some sympathy for the Catholic lawyer in *Man on Fire*—not really a protagonist for the

author's point of view—who cites the effect of the divorce on the young boy as an instance of why divorce can never be a good thing. Then, too, parents with any sense of responsibility toward a child are never entirely "divorced." Some part of each parent's nature is bound up with the other parent as well as with the child, and this difficult or even tortuous situation must somehow be kept in balance, unless one of them breaks under the strain, giving way to a hostility which makes communication impossible.

Readers who have been touched by a similar experience will be encouraged to do some more philosophizing about it during a reading of *Man on Fire*. And what is equally important, parents whose pattern of life has never been threatened in this fashion can gain considerably in sympathy for all three parties to such a separation. Teachers who have children of divorced parents in their classrooms may also benefit. Last, and of incidental importance, there is the contrast between the motion picture and the book. No more faithful use of the author's words in dialogue could have been possible, yet many of the paragraphs of psychological explanation are sorely missed. The screen is simply not an adequate medium for material of this kind. Both film and book show, however, that it is at least *conceivable* for a child to learn to feel at home in two houses and with two different sets of parents, and to take the best from both environments, perhaps even realizing that he may be happier this way than he could have been if the incompatible marital partners had held on to their home for fear of the consequences of separation. One can also see, however, that this possibility is in no way and at no time easy; lesser principals than those portrayed in *Man on Fire* could easily mar the child's life, reducing his hope for a happy marriage of his own.

The *New Republic* for August contains an oddly amusing article entitled. "What Johnny Don't Know," by Professors Arthur Norman and

Lewis Sawin. Apparently, the age of television is *not*, as some of its breeziest defenders insist, a time when youths may be expected to increase their store of information about what goes on in the world. Professors Norman and Sawin made up a list of twenty important and/or notorious persons from public life, past and present, and asked 359 college freshmen and sophomores at a state university to identify them. This attempt to test the students' knowledge of history, the arts and current affairs' may have revealed the fact that bombardment by too much information about too many things makes the average young person unable to recall anything with clarity. Of special interest to the *New Republic* was the fact that only a tiny minority of these college students had any knowledge at all concerning liberal thought and its representatives. Even Henry Wallace was practically an unknown quantity; only fourteen per cent of the 359 students could place him accurately, while others identified Wallace variously as "an official of the CIO," a "German leader in World War II," and "the Duke of Wales." Read this for both amazement and amusement:

Even more astonishing than these complete misidentifications are the answers of those students who *have* heard something about Wallace but not enough to know what he stood for politically. He "once ran for president on non partisan ticket"; he "ran for President on Probation Ticket"; he is an ex-president of the United States or a "Past president with subversive affiliations?"; he "ran for president with Truman, he was a communist." Eight students called him a past presidential candidate on the Socialist ticket. Other comments: communist (two students); Communist party presidential candidate (two students); "a communist and Vice-Pres. of the US"; and "I somehow associate his name with Communism."

We don't know how important it is to be able to identify Warren G. Harding, but the vastly confused misinformation on this former President must indicate something:

It is gratifying that 40 per cent and more of our students could recognize the name of one of the Presidents of the United States. From those who had

trouble identifying Warren G. Harding came responses such as: "President during the bombing of Pearl Harbor"; "Assinated President of US" "President impeached." Two called Harding a news commentator, four a labor leader, three a military figure, nine a US Senator; he was called an FBI agent or counterspy (David Harding, Counterspy?) by four, and head of the FBI by one. One soul stated that he ran for President on the Progressive Party ticket. From confusion with Earl Warren he was called variously the "Former governor of Calif. also Chief Justice," a former Chief Justice, and so on. Other comments were: "Popular character on true detective mysteries"; "head of department of treasury agents" (David Harding again); "great aviator"; and "communist."

On the arts, the test group was even further off, identifying Picasso variously as "the Dictator of Italy," "a Mexican bullfighter," and as "discoverer of the New World." T. S. Elliot became a "war correspondent, died in battle" and the "author of *Leaves of Grass*." Composer Richard Wagner emerged as a movie star (apparently confused with Robert Wagner), and as a motion picture producer (probably Walter Wanger). Wagner was also identified as an "American outlaw" and as a "baseball player."

No danger, here, that these youths have been reading *Das Kapital*. Karl Marx was identified as "an Emperor of Germany," "Nazi author of *Mein Kampf*—dead," and, to cap it off, as a "TV actor with Sid Caesar."

Pursuing our urge to blame television watching habits, we suggest that most parents do not converse or argue at home these days, and therefore, along with cutting off their children from sharing their parents' store of factual and cultural information, they probably cut them off from all the other values of intelligent conversation as well.

## *FRONTIERS*

### **Lots of Autos and Some Psychology**

As a MANAS contributor observed some two years ago, the increased attention paid foreign automobiles in the United States has thrown some of the most questionable Detroit practices into sharp relief. Example: A leading import, the German Volkswagen, with continuously skyrocketing sales and a phenomenal resale value, is a car which stands for no nonsense. The Volkswagen is designed for function, gets the most from the least, and provides a durable conveyance for either business or traveling which cuts the typical maintenance cost of low-priced American cars sharply down the middle (35 miles per gallon of gas and such slight tire wear that all owners rejoice). Incidentally, Americans who take pride in their autos and in the ability to utilize them properly, find the Volkswagen a thing of pride and joy. While one has to get busy and learn how to drive one of these little marvels properly, there can be considerable sense of accomplishment in the correct manipulation of a four-speed gearbox.

The Volkswagen is the world's most extreme example of functionalism in auto design and performance, and has become an international pacemaker on that basis. Other foreign imports essay various forms of compromise, but not very successfully. In 1958 all the major American manufacturers will be featuring one or more small foreign cars through regular dealerships. General Motors is the latest to feel the pressure and now plans to import the British-made Vauxhall Victor and the German-built Opel Rekord, thus competing with British Fords, and the British-made Nash Metropolitan. All these little cars, easy to handle and economical, are stripping away some of the tinsel and gilt from the more ornate Detroit monstrosities.

This minor influence will not be without value. In the first place, mere ornamentation has accounted for numerous accidents. Projecting

metal on the front of a car (no foreign imports have these nonessentials) has speared and maimed the American public for years, but is now being toned down or eliminated. According to *Harper's* for February, Cornell University's Safety Research Project revealed that careful safety design could have saved life in 84 per cent of the fatal accidents occurring in a twelve-month period. Paul W. Kearney, who provides such statistics in *Harper's*, points out that safety features are under-emphasized because advertising men and sales executives are apt to work hand in hand to the neglect of advice from the engineers. As Kearney puts it:

The huckster approach, dinned into us for years, has lulled the public into thinking it has a safe car when it hasn't. The buyer has been aided and abetted in this by an industry congenitally allergic to the word "accident." Having long ago classified the consumer as a moron, the manufacturers are certain that if anybody breathes the forbidden word the prospect will dash across the street and buy another make of car, one which doesn't have accidents. As Benson Ford himself put it, not long ago: "There has been a fear that by some sort of reverse English you will find that the danger stigma has become attached to your own product."

It is possible, of course, that the race for more power—the public is still being psychologized into purchasing cars capable of 114 to 145 miles per hour, while no road in the country posts a legal limit of more than 65 mph—will eventually slow down. New York's Traffic Commissioner, T. T. Wiley, has often been vehement about what he calls a "horsepower jag that is as insidious as opium," castigating advertisers who keep talking about additional power as if it were no more than a "safety factor in tight passing situations." What actually happens with more horsepower is that everyone speeds up—usually without the benefit of adequate brakes, safety belts, sensible safety design for car interiors, or adequate driving capacity.

Mr. Kearney is campaigning for a shift in the control of such factors from sales executives and

advertising agencies to some sort of engineering testing association. He points out that electrical appliances are governed by underwriters' laboratories whose engineers cut through sales talk and get down to essential safety features. Why shouldn't this be arranged for automobiles? In Kearney's words:

In the realm of electrical appliances and fire-protection devices, the pioneer UL symbol of the Underwriters' Laboratories has stood in the same enviable position for an even longer time. Here many different industries participate in paying the costs of brutal, impartial testing by an organization of hard-boiled experts, sponsored by the one group with the most to gain from safety: the insurance companies.

Isn't this the real answer for the automotive industry? Why shouldn't it and the automobile insurance companies finance an impartial testing laboratory of their own—logically under the auspices of the Society of Automotive Engineers—and make an SAE seal of approval as valuable as the AGA or UL labels, and just as impervious to outside influence?

Yes, American automobiles are in need of numerous improvements, but *not* more gadgets, such as power steering, power brakes, automatic transmissions, etc. Today, the money that could go into engineering in the interests of safety and economy goes into almost everything else instead. As *U.S. News & World Report* for July 12 puts it, the advertising has been so successful that "few buyers are content with a 'stripped down' auto. It is the higher-priced models with the expensive hard top bodies that are showing the biggest gains in production and sales."

Many drivers, the *U.S. News* writer points out, have come to suppose that automatic transmission, power brakes and steering are "necessities." When you add the cost of these items to the bill for radios and defrosters, a so-called "low-priced" car moves up close to the \$3,000 class. All this up-grading is making low-priced American-made automobiles practically non-existent.

One peculiar consequence of this "up-grading" of lower-priced makes is that it is

increasingly difficult to tell the difference between a high-priced and a low-priced car—in terms of riding comfort, performance or handling ability. And, in order for the low-priced cars to compete with the traditionally more powerful makes of greater price, the *basic* car—frame, chassis and motor space—ends up too large and potentially powerful for the needs of economy users. During the last three years in particular, every sort of car has become very much like every other sort—to our way of thinking, a very poor development indeed.

As recently as 1953-54 it was still possible for a prospective buyer to consider very carefully the type of motor and weight of car which would best serve his individual purposes. Various six-cylinder motors offered simplicity of design and consequent low up-keep, together with general economy—horsepower giving way before these requirements. In 1949-50 only the largest cars boosted horsepower to the vicinity of 150, whereas 90-100 HP Fords and Chevrolets were cruising the highways adequately on low compression motors with economical four-ring pistons—and could attain speeds in the vicinity of 90 MPH. Now it is impossible to buy any full-sized car without acquiring a high compression motor of 145 or more horsepower, and even the rapidly dying-out sixes are regarded as *underpowered* by the general public. Chevrolet's once durable six, excellent for commercial use, has developed into something it was never meant to be with the multiplication of horsepower and the reduction of ring surface. Pontiac's excellent straight-eight motor, ideal for certain sorts of driving, has disappeared, and the overwhelming majority of cars sold are high horsepower, high compression V-8's. There is nothing wrong with a V-8 engine; in fact, as a high performance production plant it is excellent. But a vast proportion of the public does not need this type of engine, nor would desire it if the comparable virtues of other and simpler mechanisms were properly made known.

So far as we can see, three makes of cars, differing in mechanical design, cost, economy and performance, would serve the American public far better than the dozens of differently tagged models now available, for these latter are almost indistinguishable one from the other. The growth in foreign car sales, however, certainly indicates that many people who now "buy foreign" are gradually educating themselves. Doctrines evolved by competitive advertising have wasted millions of dollars in the car business, and some consumers are beginning to recognize this, although the "big change" spoken of by the *U.S. News & World Report* will only come about when consumer education has been greatly extended.

So when you see a Volkswagen smoothly cruising down the road at the legal speed limit, with still more than a little to spare, think of some of the contrasts afforded. Select your next car on the basis of the features which will serve you best, not on the basis of competition concerning either horsepower or flashy appearance. In 1957 it was possible to purchase fair economy and safety features in a full-sized American car, but only if, as a customer, you stopped to think the matter over for a while and made your demands clear.