

## "PROGRESSIVES" AND "RADICALS"

A MAGAZINE'S most cherished possession is the careful reader who reacts to what he reads with both clarity and imagination. One such MANAS reader—who happens also to be an editor—offers comment on both the lead article ("Anger Without an Object") and the editorial ("The Environment of Freedom") in the Oct. 30 issue. Concerning the lead:

The chief article in your Oct. 30 issue seems to me to falter badly because of your superficial (in my opinion) finding that it is the "consumers, ultimately, who are responsible" for the failings of the mass media. . . . it would take many pages to show, in any convincing form, how much of an oversimplification this is. . . .

We don't object in the least to the charge of over-simplification, since two basic and basically bad situations are very briefly disposed of in the sentence to which our reader objects. Earlier, our article had said: "The triviality and mendacity of popular reading matter springs from no political advantage or special privilege, but from the actual *preferences* of the reading public." The two situations referred to are (1) the vulgarized tastes of the mass audience, and (2) the exploitation of those tastes by advertisers and publishers who use them as an avenue to sales to the mass market.

Almost any discussion of these situations, with a view to assigning responsibility for them, is likely to be oversimplified, for the reason that they both involve judgments about the nature and capacities of and the differences among human beings. All major political issues turn on such judgments. Proposals for correction of these situations run all the way from the *laissez faire* attitude of nineteenth-century liberalism, through various degrees of government regulation of free enterprise, to the strict control of both literary standards and economic distribution exercised by the Welfare State (whether communist or fascist).

Concerning the question of quality of reading material, one view is that there is no great argument

about the very bad and the very good. The very bad, we could stipulate, may be illustrated by the worst sort of comic books and the gossip magazines such as *Confidential* and *Whisper*. Plato and Shakespeare may perhaps stand for the very good. But if we change the frame of reference, it might be insisted that comic books, while gross and brutalizing in influence, are not half so bad as the insinuating commercialism of the "slick" magazines, which corrupts the reader with its pretentious but spurious morality. Some say that there is less harm in the unashamed barbarism of comic-book violence and crime. Again, one could argue that disputes about quality ought not to invoke "the classics," since there is already too much unthinking genuflection to them in the name of Culture. Judgments concerning quality should avoid every form of piety. Piety always introduces an element of social pressure, and this is corrupting in another way.

But even if agreement can be reached concerning the extremes of good and bad in literature, there remains the vast middle ground where quality is never a matter of common consent. The wisdom of long centuries of experience informs us that, in relation to this middle ground, there can be no wide agreement about quality, and least of all any valid "official" opinion or judgment concerning what is good and what is bad literature. Any official opinion concerning what is good or bad in the arts is offensive, as for example when a customs official must decide whether or not a painting or a statue is a "work of art" and entitled to enter the country duty free. To let officials make such decisions creates an impossible situation, despite the fact that the General Welfare clause of the Preamble to the Constitution could doubtless be invoked to support a policy of hospitable welcome to works of art imported from other countries.

But why formulate the question in terms of dilemmas? Why not admit that government is at least competent to support quality in a general way,

without setting up as the corporate arbiter of disputes in esthetics? Government could subsidize libraries, establish museums, lend assistance to educational institutions, and even patronize the arts by grants of various kinds and by such activities as the WPA Writers' Project and similar depression-born projects.

Government could do all these things, and is doing some of them. Sometimes government does them successfully—that is, without interference in the field of æsthetic judgment—but sometimes the consequence is that the work of some artists or writers is ruled out as "radical" or "subversive" or "decadent" or "reactionary," depending upon the ideology of the country involved. The *Nation*, for example, cannot be read in the libraries of the New York City public school system, on the ground that it is offensive to Catholics. Russian composers are continually getting into trouble with the Soviet Cultural Commissars, and in Hitler's Germany painters were made to conform to the Nazi version of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful.

Let us admit, however, that it is possible, if hazardous, for government to contribute to culture through wise and unrestrictive policies. The question then becomes: How do you get such a government? You get it by deserving it, by voting into office the men who will give you that kind of government. And how do you get people to vote for such men? The answer is a General Education in the liberal arts, toward the end of developing people who *care* about such things. Once people care about the quality of what they read, they will begin to act in behalf of more and better quality. What other way is there to raise the level of popular reading matter?

Hence our conclusion: "It is the consumers, ultimately, who are responsible." Here, the word "ultimately" has some importance, since analysis is needed to show that any elevation of taste must always begin with individuals.

We have omitted any serious consideration to authoritarian control of "quality," since such quality is always limited by bureaucratic definition and subjects the beneficiaries of this sort of "culture" to politicalized standards in the arts. We say this, even though, according to a recent *Unesco Courier*, the

reading of good books in Russia far outruns similar reading in the United States. The "good" books are in this case only those regarded as politically "safe" by the Soviet censors. Under these conditions, "quality" tends to become a negligible or even fraudulent value.

A second phase of the question raised by our reader involves the idea of economic justice. People, we say, need to be protected against exploitation by other people. How, this critic might ask, can you justify throwing the ball back to the poor "consumer"? How can he filter out the truth among the lies and half-truths manufacturers spread about their products? What chance has he got against the persuasions of four-color process printing, copywriters who get a thousand dollars a paragraph, the siren appeals of radio and television announcers, and the association of every lure Madison Avenue can devise with the merchandise he is expected to buy?

We never said that the Consumer has an easy time of it. It was the furthest from our mind to suggest that the cards are not stacked against the Consumer. Nor have we any admiration at all for the profit motive. We'll defend freedom without qualification, but not "free enterprise" as currently practiced and interpreted by its practitioners.

What we said was that the Consumer is the only one, *ultimately*, who can unstack the cards.

We might have added that he has to *want* to unstack the cards. Is anybody ready to separate the Consumers who want to unstack the cards from those who are willing to let the deck alone so long as they can get into the game and *deal*?

What we are questioning is the magic of "systems." We doubt if it is possible to devise a system which will eliminate exploitation. For every man clever enough to devise a better system, there is another man clever enough to get around it. This is not an expression of contempt for systems, as such, but an attempt to point out that every system that is effective for justice is staffed by men who are effective for justice. One should admit, also, that a lot of the products which enjoy the support of national advertising are nevertheless good products

which bring to the public all the excellences contributed by the integrity of their engineers and the fair dealing (within the limits of the system) of their manufacturers.

The "system" approach to human problems tends to deal in blacks and whites. One acquires the habit of thinking that what happens under the right system is good, while what happens under the wrong system is bound to be bad. But the natural qualities of human beings always modify even the worst systems. Even though the dominant motive of the profit system is to exploit—a balance sheet has no column in it to represent the long-term educational or cultural effects of the corporate operation—there are a few businessmen who turn their energies in other directions. When you criticize a system, you criticize its gross attributes, its broad statistical effects, and its generalized psychological influence. But this omits the ever-present modifications contributed by human beings, who are forever making the system either better or worse. The tendency is to discount these human influences, since they are always there, and since they are difficult to measure. The precise vocabulary of the language of systems has little room for the incommensurables of human nature.

Now it is true that a system can express the intentions of either justice or injustice. After the revolutions of the eighteenth century, a new conception of human relations emerged. The medieval order, while not devoid of thinking about justice, was a system of fixed, hierarchical relationships under which both justice and responsibility were conceived in terms of status. There was a different "justice" for each class or estate. The revolution proclaimed the equality of all men. It staked out the principle that no man is entitled to privilege or special treatment from the State by reason of his heredity. The first half of the nineteenth century, as Herbert Spencer has pointed out in *Man and the State*, was devoted to releasing human energy from the cramping effects of laws which favored the landed and blooded aristocracy. The laws of privilege were replaced by laws declaring equality.

It is one thing to repeal laws which deny equality, but quite another to pass laws which *guarantee* it. How do you strike a balance between just legislation and the variable energies of men? How far can you go toward assuring equality without enacting repression?

These questions obviously raise all the ghosts of political argument during the past hundred years. The fact that the conservative arguments are usually tainted with self-interest and a to-have-and-to-hold motivation does not mean that the arguments are altogether unsound, but only that they have been perverted and misused. The fact that the moral appeal of socialism has been turned into a justification of liquidation, thought-control, and the Leninist rejection of even the principles of traditional morality, does not reduce in the least the reality of the social and economic injustice which gave the socialist appeal its power. What has happened is that great questions of human psychology have been torn from their natural context in philosophy and education, made into political footballs, and kicked around with such self-righteousness and arrogance that it is now overlooked that no one knows very much at all about the real issues which lie behind political issues. The real issues are almost completely buried under piles of hackneyed slogans and worn-out epithets.

If a man shows an interest in human suffering and pursues that interest to a point of political or national action—demanding, say, an end to nuclear bomb testing—he is almost certain to be branded as "communistic." Or if he attempts to apply some of the discoveries of modern psychiatry to the social situation, he will be accused of darkly autocratic intentions. Nobody seems ready to admit any of the half-truths cherished by the opposition, and this points to an unhappy conclusion: that the modern world is much too afraid of itself to want to find any (political) truth at all, since we shall certainly have to recognize and acknowledge the half-truths that are available before we can put some of the halves together to make a few whole truths.

The present is a peculiarly passive interlude in Western history. We have gone the whole way from absolute stratification of class and bred-in-the-bone

exploitation of one class by another to the absolute "equality" enforced (in theory) by the communist system. We have boxed the political compass and still don't know what to do. The obvious answer to this is that the Constitution of the United States offers a working balance between the two extremes, since it (in theory) places the individual and his freedom above the State and declares the incompetence of the State to exercise any more power than is delegated to it by the free individuals who use the Constitution to govern themselves.

But two great forces—almost indistinguishable at present—have invaded the scene to render the American solution a purely academic one. Those forces are total war and modern technology, which, in turn, have introduced the compulsions of national security and the compulsions of modern marketing. Under the pressure of these forces, the individual—whose person is sacred, but mostly in tradition and theory—has become a pale and inconsequential pawn, a unit to be manipulated, to be fought in a war or sold in a market. You can rise in the system or you can submit to manipulation, or you can find some tufts of grass in the hinterlands and graze sparingly, either loving your neighbors or railing at your times. You can do this, or you can become a Macdonald-type radical, or something that is operatively similar—a writer like Camus, a Gandhian constructive worker, or a man who tries to bring clarification to his time in whatever way he is able.

When we say that the Consumer, ultimately, is responsible, we mean that the work of individuals in saving themselves from this incredible mess cannot be performed by anyone besides the individuals who are in the mess; that a political program which proposes insights and solutions which are not grasped, shared, and applied by the individuals who are to be served by the program, simply *will not work*. The insights stop being insights when they are not understood. They become slogans, dogmas, and sources of wholesale deception. They become the stereotyped symbols of Machiavellian maneuvers. This brings us to another of our reader's comments. He argues that Macdonald has no business to shuffle the old political categories and reassemble them in

two groups: (1) the "Progressives" and (2) the "Radicals." Macdonald wrote:

By "Progressive" would be understood those who see the Present as an episode on the road to a better Future, those who think more in terms of historical process than of moral values; those who believe that the main trouble with the world is partly lack of scientific knowledge and partly failure to apply to human affairs such knowledge as we do have. . . .

"Radical" would apply to the as yet few individuals—mostly anarchists, conscientious objectors, and renegade Marxists like myself—who reject the concept of Progress, who judge things by their present meaning and effects. . . . The Progressive makes History the center of his ideology. The Radical puts man there.

Now the comment:

Once I saw Bishop Sheen (I repeat, once). He drew a line down the middle of a blackboard and proceeded to enunciate the difference between men and women. On one side he wrote, "men are rational," on the other, "women are emotional."

This isn't even thinking; it's plain foolishness. Yet what does Macdonald do in discussing the "Progressive" and the "Radical"?

I know. It's possible to search *The Root Is Man* and to come up with all sorts of qualifiers and explanatory phrases. But it reads to me quite as though all these are merely bows to scholarship, and don't really affect his thinking at all. Nor yours, or you could never have quoted the passages you did without quoting any qualification.

. . . where are these people who "make History the center of their ideology"? Communists, perhaps, at least verbally. But Macdonald says that the only "Radicals" are anarchists, C.O.'s, and a few renegade Marxists.

What about the political liberal? Does Senator Neuberger or Adlai Stevenson or Herbert Lehman center his ideology on history rather than on Man? I doubt it. . . .

And if the "Progressive" is one who believes "that the main trouble with the world is partly lack of scientific knowledge and partly failure to apply to human affairs such knowledge as we do have," where in this classification falls the man who strongly believes the second part without holding any brief for the first? There are a lot of us, you know, who insist

that at least the scientific method, as organon, can't be condemned until it's tried.

Abstraction followed by generalization is a legitimate form of analysis, and if you can't find people who are "absolute" embodiments of either Progressives or Radicals according to Macdonald, you can come close. Killing a million kulaks as a part of the march of progress of the Peoples' Revolution is considerably more than a "verbal" expression of the Progressive point of view, as Macdonald has defined it. The justification of the slaughter of the American Indians and the elimination of other "inferior" peoples as an expression of Manifest Destiny (a historical theory of progress) was more than a matter of words. The Bomb was dropped on Hiroshima in the name of the survival of the "Free World." These sacrifices, while unpleasant, are said to manure the soil of future harvests for all mankind, or our particular portion of it.

What will you do in order to gain power in order to "do good"? The answer to that question will show in which camp a man belongs. What current immoralities will you sanction for tomorrow's free society? What will you do to win an election, or defeat a "bad" opponent? Often a man may not discover whether he is a Progressive or a Radical until the chips are down. When a country is at war and civil liberties go down the drain, which do you think is the real crisis? Where does the greatest evil lie—in what you do to other men, or in what they do to you? Such questions are so basic that Macdonald's alleged neglect of qualifications (we don't remember any special qualifications, although they are probably amply packed in some footnote) doesn't seem so important to us.

We don't know too much about Sen. Neuberger or Herbert Lehman, but recall that Mr. Stevenson (whose first campaign was bound to impress anyone with half an open mind) did not cover himself with glory in 1956 on the segregation issue when touring the South. We don't say this to pick at Mr. Stevenson, but to illustrate the vulnerability of political candidates who want to win in order to do good, and who feel obliged to practice expedience in order to win. Somewhere along the line, expedience

becomes "selling out." Macdonald's analysis makes it necessary to recognize this fact. The extreme of the Progressive view makes expedience into a new morality—the "objective morality" of Communist doctrine. For the doctrinaire Communist, there is no subjective morality, only the relation of one's behavior to the Party Line. Thus there are all degrees of Progressivism. Macdonald, it seems to us, has provided the intellectual tools which enable a Westerner to examine his conscience from a Gandhian point of view.

What will you do to be saved? Would you burn a heretic at the stake? Would you report your father to the Commissar? Would you tell little white lies to the voters, or secretly admire the man who tells thumping big ones? Would you pretend to know when you don't? Would you promise what can't be delivered? If you had been Jesus, what would you have said to the Grand Inquisitor? (See "The Grand Inquisitor" in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*.)

It is time to stop. This discussion seems to bounce back and forth between platitudes and obscurities. The subject, alas, is difficult.

## *REVIEW*

### IMMORTALITY AND ETHICAL CULTURE

AN unusually oriented article with this title, by James S. Wallerstein, appears in the September-October issue of *The Ethical Outlook*, Journal of The American Ethical Union. The author, a graduate of the Ethical Culture School, now feels it necessary to point out that devotion to the precepts of humanism need not preclude investigation of the possibility that the "human" self transcends its physical base of operations. Mr. Wallerstein's treatment begins with his explanation of why discussion of the possibility of human immortality may suggest a rational basis for the ethics in which all "good" men find agreement:

An article in this periodical, "Releasing the Spirit" (March 1957) suggests that human personality is a transient manifestation, an aspect of the body which perishes with the body. At the same time Mr. Gilbert pleads for ethical and moral values, and eloquently insists the Universe is "meaningful." Values, however, presuppose a mind which does the valuing and can hardly be less transient than their creator. A universe can be "meaningful" only to conscious intelligences. The extinction of mind necessarily involves the extinction of value and meaning. It is true that a noble deed may be remembered and may inspire others. But little is remembered after a century. Even the noblest deed of 7,000 B.C. is now forgotten. In these days of hydrogen super-weapons, survival of any form of conscious life is by no means assured. Surely a meaningful universe would not depend on mortal memory to preserve its value.

And what mind would be interested in preserving abstract value, if it were destined only for extinction? Who could dispute us if we sought instead the pleasures of the moment? Intellectual pleasures might still be better than carnal ones, because they are more lasting. But self-sacrifice would be pointless. We who are forbidden to sigh for the Paradise to come will

*"Take the cash and let the credit go  
Nor heed the ramble of the distant drum."*

The great martyrs and spiritual heroes throughout the ages, Jesus, Socrates, John Huss, were upborne by a conviction of their eternity.

The 19th-Century Materialist contrasted the "illusion of a soul" with the "common sense reality" of solid matter. But "solid matter," we know today, is itself an illusion.

It has been extremely difficult for humanists, naturalists, and pragmatists to free themselves of some of the illogical accompaniments of a logical distrust for theology. The mere fact that conceptions of immortality found in Christian and other orthodoxies have militated against the liberation of the human spirit does not mean that all *philosophizing* on the subject of immortality has this result. Both Socrates and Plato believed that the immortality of a "human soul" was most logical indeed, but they did not make immortality conditional upon acceptance of certain dogmas, nor upon obedience to moral commandments. If immortality is "natural"—and who has shown that it is not?—the survival of the essence of a human being is as much a part of the natural order of things as our awakening from sleep.

The ever widening scope of investigation of extrasensory perception in recent years has demonstrated that one need not become a "believer" in some special theory of immortality in order to consider the serious possibility of survival of death. As a matter of fact, there are so many indications of man's capacity to transcend the "space-time" continuum that any sort of philosopher should feel an obligation to incorporate the implications of ESP research in his reflections. Mr. Wallerstein writes:

Extra-sensory perception experiments indicate that the unconscious mind possesses powers of telepathy and clairvoyance not explainable in terms of ordinary physical laws. The reality of these phenomena is attested statistically by odds of trillions to one. (See J. B. Rhine "The Reach of the Mind"; Sloane, 1947.) Mental as well as physical causality is recognized by modern medicine. Both faith cure and psychosomatic ailments are of the Mind, and are not explainable in physiological terms. Attempts to apply mechanical laws to man have met conspicuous

failure. For the mere knowledge of any such law is sufficient to destroy its validity.

Two of Mr. Wallerstein's concluding paragraphs make effective plea for a rethinking of the immortality question:

Belief in survival arises not as an illusion of hope, but as a primitive, instinctual insight into the nature of reality. Death is actually a rather sophisticated concept and can be derived only by analogy. For it is impossible to picture the death of oneself. But an ethical view of the afterlife will be quite different from that of the orthodox religions. The future life can be faced without fear; for if life is good, then eternity will be better. If we believe that moral advancement is the aim of life, then we must believe that moral growth is possible and can be infinite.

Our better instincts revolt against a Universe of futility. If each human being is unique and irreplaceable, then in the words of Charles Darwin, (Life and Letters, 1887) "the prospect of complete annihilation becomes intolerable." Perhaps we never really believe that death is the end. Otherwise we would enjoy ourselves more and care less about the future. We would not stop to mourn the dead, if we were certain they could not hear us. We would not strive so hard to be remembered. For we should be forgotten anyway sooner or later, if not in three generations, then in thirty or three hundred. Somehow, in our hearts, we are convinced that what we do counts for eternity.

In glancing through the other articles in this issue of *The Ethical Outlook* we discovered some editorial remarks which fit in well with Mr. Wallerstein's discussion. M. les Spetter's discussion of "The Revivalist and the Bomb" concludes that "our chances for better life depend neither on 'coming forward to testify amidst the hoopla of huge, organized mass meetings, nor on the so-called security of hellish machines. It rests on what Man reveals of himself to himself." The trouble with our knowing too little about ourselves, in a philosophic sense, is that we easily accept the presumed fact of our individual insignificance. Men grouped together around infantile ideological alignments have too little encouragement in their ability to build a sane

world by their own endeavors. Mr. Spetter continues:

Is it mere accident that a powerful revivalist like Billy Graham is riding high in the period when American public opinion is slowly awakening to the monstrous realities of radio-active fall-out? We do not think so. For Mr. Graham and the atomic scientists both address themselves to certain related ultimate propositions. The Evangelist hopes for the fall-out of spiritual rebirth as a result of new devotion to Christ, the Savior. The brains behind the newer weapons hope for an ultimate instrument of power that will guarantee security in a time of permanent challenge. To Graham it would appear that Man's salvation can be secured only by consecration to and submergence in the Holy Spirit of the Christian Messiah. To the atomic scientist producing the ultimate weapons, world-peace, balance of power, can be safeguarded only by a primary concentration of the country's resources on building bigger and better bombs.

But both see Man as fundamentally suspended between forces he cannot control. To both the human being seems to need a projection "out of this world" to be saved. To both it seems there is only the alternative of one ultimate or the other. Against that notion we want to raise our voice.

In order to generate an atmosphere hospitable to Mr. Wallerstein's treatment, one has only to add that both theology and environmental determinism have "seen man as fundamentally suspended between forces he cannot control." Conceptions of immortality historically identified with Christian orthodoxy have not, certainly, helped matters, since a soul "belonging to God" is not, nor ever can be, a soul belonging to itself. It seems to us quite likely, on the other hand, that self-reliant men will tend to ruminate on the question of immortality in a non-theological fashion—in other words, philosophically—as Mr. Wallerstein has done.

## COMMENTARY ENEMIES AND FRIENDS

PUTTING Norman Cousins's article (reprinted in *Frontiers*) and the quotation from Dwight Macdonald (page 7) side by side makes an interesting comparison.

Norman Cousins indicts opportunism, short-sightedness, and selfishness, while Macdonald is concerned with the zealots of ideology. Cousins is against lack of principle, Macdonald is against bad principles.

This difference is perhaps natural. Mr. Cousins addresses hundreds of thousands in the *Saturday Review* while Macdonald addresses (or addressed) only thousands in his magazine, *Politics*.

Both critics are needed, since a man might take Mr. Cousins to heart and still be in danger of the mistakes examined by Mr. Macdonald. The man who needs to listen to Cousins probably couldn't understand Macdonald. Never having been in danger of succumbing to the drives of the zealot, he is interested only in private gain. He, therefore, as Macdonald might point out, is less of a menace than the ardent "Progressive" who insists on a large company of helpers or followers for his enterprise. The trouble with the Progressive, it seems to us, is that his conception of the Good Life cannot be maintained without large-scale influence or control over other people. This is a very dangerous point of view, since, when such men become fanatical, they stop counting the cost. Eventually, they'll do *anything* to gain power; eventually, they come to think that *anything* is a righteous act if it leads to power for the right party—the party that intends to save the world, or maybe just the "free" world.

If Macdonald were to write an essay in oblique counterpoint to Mr. Cousins's editorial, he would probably repeat some of the other ideas expressed in the *Root Is Man*. He would take the step Mr. Cousins leads up to and try to suggest

what a man who is not an "enemy" can set out to do with confidence that he is making no mistake.

Mr. Cousins, of course, says a lot by implication about what a man may do to become a friend instead of an enemy. But Macdonald picks up the analysis where Cousins leaves off: If you are going to "do something," be sure that what you do goes to the root of the matter: become a radical, if you are going to become anything.

In contemporary terms, it is "radical" to refuse to do in behalf of some "cause" or program what you would not do as an individual. Macdonald wrote in the closing section of *The Root*:

The first step towards a new concept of political action (and political morality) is for each person to decide what he thinks is right, what satisfies *him*, what *he* wants. And then to examine with scientific method the environment to figure out how to get it, to see how much he can get without compromising his personal values. Selfishness must be restored to respectability in our scheme of political values. Not that the individual exists apart from his fellow men, in Max Stirner's sense. I agree with Marx and Proudhon that the individual must define himself partly in his social relations. But the point is to make these real *human* relations and not abstract conceptions of class or history. It has often been observed that nations—and, I might add, classes, even the proletariat—have a lower standard of ethical behavior than individuals do. Even if all the legal constraints were removed, I take it we can assume that few people would devote themselves exclusively to murder or would constantly lie to their friends and families; yet the most respected leaders of present societies, the military men and the political chieftains, in their public capacities become specialists in lying and murder. Always, of course, with the largest aims, "for the good of humanity."

Pick, says Macdonald, in effect, a project you can complete by yourself without having to "sell" a lot of other people on it to help you. Conceive your morality on an individual basis. Scale the problems you set out to solve to a proportion you can cope with. When the constraint of others becomes a major condition of your success, it is



time to get out before you become the understudy of tyrants.

Tolstoy, Lao-tse, and Dwight Macdonald may be an odd assortment, but these three have provided what seems to us the best possible introduction to the political problems of the present.

*Somebody* has to spread ideas of this sort, against the day when the bitter fruits of "mass" action will arouse the millions to really listen to men like Norman Cousins, and the millions decide that the time has come to repair their neglect of the world and its problems. It is then that the thought of Tolstoy, Lao-tse, and Dwight Macdonald will become crucially important to understand.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves A POET EDUCATES

WHATEVER the distinction between inspiration and education, we rather suspect that both words lose significance unless each includes some of the meaning of the other. There can be little doubt, for example, that the unfettered imagination expressed in poetic literature has provided the germinal seed for much learning. Unless one feels beauty in the heart of things, unless the imagination is helped to soar, there isn't much point in trying for anything except security—or in learning more than the rules of safety for a protected life. Perhaps this is why Macneile Dixon refused to compose his Gifford lectures (published as *The Human Situation*) as students might expect a professor of English literature to do. Shelley once wrote that "it exceeds all imagination to conceive what would have been the moral condition of the world if the poets had never been born. . . . What were our consolations on this side of the grave, and what were our aspirations beyond it—if poetry did not ascend to bring light and fire from those eternal regions where the owl-winged faculty of calculation dare not ever soar?" Dixon adds:

I put my trust in the larger vision of the poets. It is to their inextinguishable sympathy with humanity that they owe their understanding. Not to science or philosophy, but to their profounder appreciation of the strange situation in which we find ourselves, to their sense of the pitiful estate of man who, with all the forces of nature proclaiming an alien creed, still holds to his intuitions, who knows and knows well that he cannot support himself otherwise than by clinging—as a sailor clings to his raft in angry seas—to his passion for justice, his trust in the affections of his heart, his love of the lovely, his lonely struggle for the best, however clumsy and mistaken he may be in his present estimates of what is indeed best.

Dixon was the sort of man who must have felt profound admiration for Rainer-Maria Rilke, for Rilke was not only a poet, but a poet who could not help teaching—just as Dixon was a

teacher who could not help being poetic. In Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet* (W. W. Norton) are the following suggestions to a young man who has been agonizing over the "problems of sex." These few paragraphs, to our way of thinking, are a thousand times more valuable and revealing than any formal sort of "sex education" any parent or teacher might attempt. Rilke shows great delicacy, yet no aspect of the subject is left untouched:

If you will cling to Nature, to the simple in Nature, to the little things that hardly any one sees, and that can so unexpectedly become big and beyond measuring; if you have this love of inconsiderable things and seek quite humbly as a ministrant to win the confidence of what seems poor: then everything will become easier, more coherent and somehow more conciliatory for you, not in your intellect, perhaps, which lags behind astonished, but in your inmost consciousness, waking and cognizance. You are so young, so before all beginning, and I want to beg you, as much as I can, dear sir, to be patient towards all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love *the questions themselves* like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, that cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. *Live* the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer. It may very well be that you bear within yourself the possibility of fashioning and forming as a particularly happy and clean way of living; train yourself to it—but take to yourself whatever comes with great trust, and if only it comes out of your own will, out of some need of your inmost being, take it upon yourself and hate nothing. Sex is difficult; yes. But they are difficult things that were laid upon us; almost everything serious is difficult, and everything is serious. If you only recognize this and manage, out of yourself, out of *your* aptitudes and ways, out of *your* experience and childhood and strength to achieve a relation to sex wholly your own (not influenced by convention and custom), then you need no longer be afraid of losing yourself and becoming unworthy of your best possession.

There is true profundity in Rilke's suggestion that the young, when they admit to being on an uncharted course, must learn to "live the questions." This means that one should treat the

major issues of life with sufficient reverence to recognize that neither the ayes nor nays of any psychological situation should be declared with finality. Rilke does not ask his young friend to "live carefully," but provides a context within which thoughtful and sensitive living can merge:

Physical pleasure is a sensual experience no different from pure seeing or the pure sensation with which a fine fruit fills the tongue; it is a great unending experience, that is given us, a knowing of the world, the fullness and the glory of all knowing. And not our acceptance of it is bad; the bad thing is that most people misuse and squander these experiences and take them as a stimulant in the tired spots of their lives and as distraction instead of as a gathering together towards exalted moments. Men have made even eating into something else: want on the one hand, excess upon the other have obscured the distinctness of this necessity, and all the deep, simple urgencies in which life renews itself have become similarly obscured. But the individual can clarify for himself and live them clearly (and if not the individual, who is too dependent, then at least the solitary man). He can remind himself that all beauty in animals and plants is a quiet enduring form of love and desire, and he can see animals, as he sees plants, patiently and willingly uniting and increasing and growing not out of physical delight, not out of physical suffering, bending to necessities that are greater than pleasure and pain and more powerful than will and withstanding. O that man might take this secret, of which the world is full even to its littlest things, more humbly to himself and bear it, endure it, more seriously and feel how terribly difficult it is, instead of taking it lightly. That he might be more reverent toward his fruitfulness, which is but *one*, whether it seems mental or physical.

Do not be bewildered by the surfaces; in the depths all becomes law. And those who live the secret wrong and badly (and they are very many), lose it only for themselves and still hand it on, like a sealed letter, without knowing it.

For young persons of creative ability who long for approval from adults with reputation, Rilke also has some excellent advice:

You ask whether your verses are good. You ask me. You have asked others before. You send them to magazines. You compare them with other poems, and you are disturbed when certain editors reject your efforts. Now (since you have allowed me to advise

you) I beg you to give up all that. You are looking outward, and that above all you should not now do. Nobody can counsel and help you, nobody. There is only one single way. Go into yourself. Investigate the reason that bids you write; find out whether it is spreading out its roots in the deepest places of your heart, acknowledge to yourself whether you would have to die if it were denied you to write. This above all: ask yourself in the stillest hour of your night: *must* I write? Delve into yourself for a deep answer. And if this should be affirmative, if you may meet this earnest question with a strong and simple "I must," then build your life according to this necessity; your life even into its most indifferent and slightest hour must be a sign of this urge and a testimony to it. Then draw near to Nature. Then try, as a first human being, to say what you see and experience and love and lose.

Nor does Rilke leave the matter here. In calling for a "descent into yourself and your inner solitude," he invites the aspirant to have sufficient courage to give up his chosen field, unless he feels that he cannot live without doing this work.

## *FRONTIERS*

### Checklist of Enemies

[This article by Norman Cousins first appeared as an editorial in the *Saturday Review* for July 27, and is here reprinted by special permission.]

THE enemy is not solely an atomic-muscled totalitarian power with a world ideology.

The enemy is many people. He is a man whose only concern about the world is that it stay in one piece during his own lifetime. He is invariably up to his hips in success and regards his good fortune not as a challenge to get close to the real problems of the age but as proof of the correctness of everything he does. Nothing to him is less important than the shape of things to come or the needs of the next generation. Talk of the legacy of the past or of human destiny leaves him cold. Historically, he is the disconnected man. Hence, when he thinks about the world at all it is usually in terms of his hope that the atomic fireworks can be postponed for fifteen or twenty years. He is an enemy because nothing less than a passionate concern for the rights of unborn legions will enable the world itself to become connected and whole.

The enemy is a man who not only believes in his own helplessness but actually worships it. His main article of faith is that there are mammoth forces at work which the individual cannot possibly comprehend, much less alter or direct. And so he expends vast energies in attempting to convince other people that there is nothing they can do. He is an enemy because of the proximity of helplessness to hopelessness.

The enemy is a man who has a total willingness to delegate his worries about the world to officialdom. He assumes that only the people in authority are in a position to know and act. He believes that if vital information essential to the making of public decisions is withheld, it can only be for a good reason. If a problem is wholly or partially scientific in nature, he will ask no questions even though the consequences of the

problem are political or social. He is an enemy because government, by its very nature, is unable to deal effectively today with matters concerned with human survival. What is necessary is something to tame the national sovereignties and create a design of the whole. If this is to be done, it can be done not by the national sovereignties themselves but by bold, determined, and insistent acts of the public will.

The enemy is any man in government, high or low, who keeps waiting for a public mandate before he can develop big ideas of his own, but who does little or nothing to bring about such a mandate. Along with this goes an obsessive fear of criticism. To such a man, the worst thing in the world that can happen is to be accused of not being tough-minded in the nation's dealings with other governments. He can take in his stride, however, the accusation that he is doing something that may result in grave injury to the human race. He lives entirely on the plane of plot-and-counterplot, where the dominant reality is represented by scoring points on a day-by-day basis. He figures security largely in terms of statistics—generally in terms of the kind of force that can be put to work in a showdown situation—rather than in terms of the confidence and good-will a nation may enjoy among its neighbors in the world. He is an enemy because he sees no connection between his own authority and the need to act in behalf of the human community.

The enemy is a scientist who makes his calling seem more mysterious than it is, and who allows this mystery to interfere with public participation in decisions involving science or the products of science. His own specialized training may have shielded him from the give-and-take so essential to the democratic process in government. In a position of responsibility he is apt to make decisions, or to influence others in making decisions, without due regard for the fact that the ultimate power in a democratic society must reside with the individual citizen. The

requirements of the laboratory may call for complete autonomy; the requirements of the government call for an informed citizenry full of prodding questions.

The enemy is any man in the pulpit who by his words and acts encourages his congregation to believe that the main purpose of the church or the synagogue is to provide social respectability for its members. He talks about the sacredness of life, but he never relates that concept to the real and specific threats that exist today to such sacredness. He identifies himself as a man of God but feels no urge to speak out against a situation in which the nature of man is likely to be altered and cheapened, the genetic integrity of man violated, and distant generations condemned to a lower species. He is a dispenser of balm rather than an awakener of conscience. He is preoccupied with the need to provide personal peace of mind rather than to create a blazing sense of restlessness to set things right. He is an enemy because the crisis today is as much a spiritual crisis as it is a political one.

The enemy is not necessarily a bad man—indeed, he may be a man of high character and considerable good-will. He may be giving the best that is in him to his family and his work. But he is a dangerous man nonetheless because he is a chronic absentee from his main job. His main job is to become supremely aware of and intimately involved in the great issues of his time. In this way he may help to create a design of safety and sanity for a world in need of both.

—N.C.