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MEN WITH IDEAS: JOHN DEWEY

IT would be uncomplicated and pat to call John Dewey the philosopher of an age of unbelief, and it would also be in a way correct, yet it would doom the rest of our discussion to the arid view that Dr. Dewey, while a "good" man and a devoted educator, has overlooked the larger "spiritual" meaning of human existence. And this contention, although embodying a major conventional criticism of John Dewey and his influence in education and philosophy, would neglect the far more basic fact that Dewey's "unbelief" with respect to traditional philosophy and religion was the result of an extraordinary faith in the possibilities of human beings.

In other words, John Dewey represents the kind of positive conviction that men may have in an age of skepticism and denial. To find fault with his skepticism is to find fault with his age, and to do the latter successfully you must be much more than merely a critic of prevailing ideas: you must have better or wiser ideas than the age has to offer. With the possible exception of Dr. Hutchins, very few of Dr. Dewey's critics have been able to do this. They have called him an iconoclast and have accused him of undermining the roots of religious belief; and they have charged his followers with making the content of modern education trivial and opportunistic. But they have not met any of the criticisms made in the first place by Dr. Dewey of traditional views.

Of this man who was born in 1859—the year that Darwin published his *Origin of Species*—and who lives on in the present, still writing, still thinking, still a symbol of that impartial, resourceful, humane and altruistic democratic intelligence we like to think typifies the best in American life, what shall we say? It seems fitting to call John Dewey the great defender of the human spirit against betrayal by both the past and the present. In his youth, he was a student and admirer of Hegel. But of Hegel's imposing system, all that Dewey retained was Hegel's contempt for "spirit" that does not go to work in the world. The "working" spirit became indeed the keystone of John Dewey's philosophy.

Dewey was after knowledge, and the religions and speculative philosophies of the West, he found, did not give knowledge, but only an academic pretense at its attainment. The- "knowledge" of the Western philosophers, he maintained, did not lead to action, but to complacent conceits. "Serious" thought led away from life while religious orthodoxy gave tacit sanction to whatever status quo might at the moment prevail. As Dewey wrote in his *Quest for Certainty*.

> Theory separated from concrete doing and making is empty and futile; practice then becomes an immediate seizure of opportunities and enjoyments which conditions afford without the direction which theory—knowledge and ideas—has the power to supply. . . . Construction of ideals in general and their sentimental glorification are easy; the responsibilities both of serious thought and of action are shirked. Persons having the advantage of positions of leisure and who find pleasure in abstract theorizing—a most delightful indulgence to those to whom it appeals—have a large measure of liability for a cultivated diffusion of ideals and aims that are separated from the conditions which are themselves the means of actualization. Then other persons who find themselves in positions of social power and authority readily claim to be the bearers and defenders of ideal ends in church and state. They then use the prestige and authority their representative capacity as guardians of the highest ends confers on them to cover actions taken in behalf of the harshest and narrowest of material ends.

Reading Dr. Dewey's books, one has the feeling, despite their frequent obscurity, that if he had been an advocate of the Sermon on the Mount, he would have tried to practice it, seven days a week. We are entitled to say, at any rate,

that Dewey's utter sincerity and moral ardor account for the great conviction pervading his writings and explains, also, his immeasurable influence as a teacher of teachers in the United States.

As Dewey read history, more particularly social history, he saw transcendental ideas more in the role of enslaving human beings than of setting them free. He does not seem to have considered that transcendental ideas may have fallen among thieves, deserving to be rescued rather than rejected. Instead, he formulated a theory of knowledge which left transcendental ideas completely behind. In Dewey's technical language:

> All judgments of fact have reference to a determination of courses of action to be tried and to discovery of means for their realization . . . all propositions which state discoveries and ascertainments would be hypothetical, and their truth would coincide with their tested consequences effected by intelligent: action. This theory may be called pragmatism. (Quoted by Sidney Hook in *John Dewey, An Intellectual Portrait.*)

This statement makes it clear why only courageous men were attracted to become Dewey's disciples and supporters. It means that scholarship and learning have ends beyond themselves. It is contemptuous of mere intellectual embellishment and works toward the concrete betterment of human life. A thought, to be potentially true, must have an end, and to be actually true, must inhabit the realized end.

It was inevitable that Dewey should construct no "system" after the manner of traditional philosophers. The systematizers were always trying to warp the universe into their scheme, usually finding it necessary to lop off some recalcitrant projection which would not fit. Instead of trying to point to some far-off divine event, Dewey proposed that men should take one step at a time, never allowing their theories to outrun their facts, lest the fascinations of some preconceived objective should make them disregard the facts. And how shall we know what the facts are? The scientific method is the best available means.

If we had to lay down a set of principles that could be taken to express Dewey's philosophy, the first principle would be that life is an *inquiry;* and that anything which biasses or frustrates inquiry is opposed to life. He has no use for secondhand truths. They do not, in fact, exist. Dr. Dewey's observations on religion in *Human Nature and Conduct* illustrate this view:

> Religion has been distorted into a possession—or burden—of a limited part of human nature, of a limited portion of humanity which finds no way to universalize religion except by imposing its own dogmas and ceremonies on others. . . . Religion as a sense of the whole is the most individualized of all things, the most spontaneous, undefinable and varied. For individuality signifies unique connections in the whole . . . every act may carry within itself a consoling and supporting consciousness of the whole to which it belongs and which in some sense belongs to it. . . . There is a conceit fostered by perversion of religion which assimilates the universe to our personal desires; but there is also a conceit of carrying the load of the universe from which religion liberates us. Within the flickering inconsequential acts of separate selves dwells a sense of the whole which claims and dignifies them. In its presence we put off mortality and live in the universal. The life of the community in which we live and have our being is the fit symbol of this relationship. The acts in which we express our appreciation of the ties which bind us to others are its only sites and ceremonies.

It is difficult if not impossible to be wiser than Dr. Dewey in the way that he is wise. This, we think, is the measure of a great man. Brilliance in thinking can be terribly wrong, but greatness in thinking always seeks out an emphasis which is beyond contradiction. We may say that Dewey's philosophy overlooks a large area of human experience. We can urge that gnostics and mystics were able to apply Dewey's principles to the region of transcendental reality and to live in two worlds instead of the one which he regards as the only world. Finally, we can point out that because Dewey's position with respect to knowledge was more a reaction to spurious or pretentious idealism than a positive investigation

of the possibilities of knowing, he has helped to circumscribe the entirety of modern thought and limit it to the narrow realm of physical experience. We may be right in all these criticisms but we shall be wrong if we imagine that, because we are right, Dewey is in any fundamental sense wrong.

One way to estimate a man's wisdom is to study his applications of it. How marty of Dewey's critics have shown the penetration that he exhibits in the following discussion of war?

> The proposition, then, is not the moral proposition to abolish wars. It is the much more fundamental proposition to abolish the war system as an authorized and legally sanctioned institution. The first idea is either utopian at present or merely sentiment. This other proposition, to abolish the war system as an authorized, established institution sanctioned by law, contemplated by law, is practical. To grant the difference between these two propositions, one simply to do away with wars and the other to eliminate the war system as the reigning system under which international politics, diplomacy and relations are conducted—to understand the difference between these two propositions is fundamental. Recourse to violence is not only *a* legitimate method for settling international disputes at present; under certain circumstances it is the only legitimate method, the ultimate reason of state. . . .
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> How long have we been taking steps to do away with war, and why have they accomplished nothing? Because *the steps have all been taken under the war system.* It is not a step that we need, it is a right-about-face; a facing in another direction. And when we have committed ourselves to facing in another direction we have all future time to take steps in.... I believe .the fallacy which most paralyzes human effort today is the idea that progress can take place by more steps in the old wrong direction. We can, if we please, take steps to perfect the international law and international courts under the old system, but let us not delude ourselves into thinking that in improving details of this system we are taking a single step toward the elimination of the war system of the world.
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> If there be somewhere some grinning devil that watches the blundering activities of man, I can imagine nothing that gives him more malicious satisfaction than to see earnest and devoted men and women taking steps, by improving a legal and political system that is committed to war, to do away with war. (In *John Dewey's Philosophy,* edited by Joseph Ratner, pp. 515, 523.)

Philosophically, Dewey's greatest practical contribution has been his doctrine of ends and means. It is that the means men choose to realize their ends invariably reshape those ends unless they are wholly consistent with them—that, in fact, a man's perception of his End should grow from the day-to-day application of means to reach it. This obviously calls for a constantly alert ethical awareness, and for the complete absence of ideological egotisms. No honest follower of John Dewey can ever let himself suppose that he need not think intensively any more, merely because he has allied himself with the side of Righteousness and Progressivism. This aspect of Dewey's teaching is an impressive sermon, also, to all those who, because they belong to the True Faith, or believe in the Inner Light, or possess by adoption the Wisdom of the Ages, fall into the delusion of Virtue by Association. The one thing that is certain about John Dewey's contribution to the West, and to the world, is that his definitions, of Life as Inquiry, and of Learning as Doing, amount to eternal verities for all philosophies, sciences and faiths, sacred or profane.

Letter from
THE YUKON

WHITEHORSE.—On looking at a map, you will find the Territory to be very much in the shape of a cash register. The base or till of this register rests on the northern bounds of British Columbia, and extends for eight or nine hundred miles to the Beaufort Sea. Alaska is immediately to the west and the District of Mackenzie to the east. This, then, is the Yukon: perhaps a hundred and sixty thousand square miles of tundra, thinning forest, and innumerable mountains, distended in that odd shape.

In the Territory's area, which is nearly the size of Texas, ten or twelve thousand men hold dominion. Even this scant populace is confined to the south; north of Dawson, which is about the middle of the Territory, I doubt if there are ten hundred persons. These are Indians, Eskimos, nomad tribes, a sprinkling of half-mad prospectors. What the members of this anonymous group feel for their homeland we shall never know, but as for the eight thousand "outsiders" who live nearby, the Yukon seldom assumes other than cash register proportions in their minds. They are here to make a killing, a stake, and as quickly to get out and spend it elsewhere. Scarcely anything, in fact, beyond a prospect of accumulation entices men northward. The remaining handful who come north with the intensive purpose of adding something to the country, of making it richer for their presence, are more like ghosts, talked about but seldom seen. The missionaries belong to this class and they do much laudable work for the otherwise friendless Indians.

Briefly, this is the economy of the Northland. It is a precarious one, as may be seen, although an unusually prosperous one so long as the war-scare prevails, with its attendant armed forces who constitute nearly half of the Territory's white population, and who provide work for something like a quarter of the civilians. Mining and furs provide a little *real* income, of course, but even these proceeds eventually find their way south to buy the necessities of food, clothing and shelter.

In their avarice and presumption, men pursue their own undoing. Here as elsewhere, the persons who put the least into their social environment take the least out of it. Because the Yukon is only an over-night stopping place, so to speak, no one seriously sees the need of furthering *it*, or of doing anything with thoroughness and stability. Through want of care, they have made their world an intolerably comfortless place, from which they seek the oblivion of drunkenness and apathy. A good many exceptions stand forth, especially among shopkeepers who are beginning to put down roots for a stable community. Recently a Municipal Election was called into being, out of which Whitehorse emerged as a city (a town of 3,000 with five paved roads and two brick buildings); and a Civic Center is proposed.

I wish to hurl no bricks, but these metropolitan aspirations do seem rather pretentious on the part of our northern citizens. Unless radical and unforeseen changes are made, this Yukon has not even the prospects of agriculture or a landed husbandry. The summers are too short, the frost too sudden, the soil in most areas too barren. We have an experimental station at Bear Creek on the Alaska Highway, wonderful gardens at Ben My Cree, and lush growth at Dawson, but even these are forced by special efforts. Should this seem strange, consider that the leaves which fell last autumn are still lying unmolded on the ground the next summer! Decay is unbelievably slow, and the precious humus is soon lost in the high winds that tear down the mountains.

So forbidding a land, and yet so hauntingly beautiful! The vast loneliness, the unpeopled solitudes, the old-men-like mountains that totter over the brink of inland lakes, the storm and the stress and the might which each tree bares naked to the elements: this is her song. It is not a gentle or appealing beauty, but mighty, brutal, stupendous. It is not Diana or Iris, but Jove himself.

All in all, the future of the Yukon is the future of a country without agriculture or husbandry, and that scarcely is promising. As a very dear friend said on one of our winter walks, "Men being what they are to Nature, one with her at every step, we are not so low nor yet so great that a barren land fails to induce a similar barrenness and instability of soul." Surely it creeps in, like sand into a hut on the desert. Perhaps it is more than selfishness which leaves this Yukon deserted; perhaps it is a fine preservative instinct which is alive in every creature, and remains its guardian angel.

YUKON CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
THE WEST AGAINST ITSELF

A CONSIDERABLE number of persons are aware that the film version of John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* was exhibited throughout the Soviet dominion as proof positive of the failure of democracy—its attendant economic perversions and cruelties. This, said the Comrnissars of The People's Education, is the situation in the United States, where Capitalism has "progressed" the most.

It is now becoming clear that the Commissars really knew they had come upon a good thing when they used a contemporary American story to convince Russians that they were very much better off as Russians. John Steinbeck is in many ways a worthy author, and so far as we know a worthy man—an artist possessed of what is often tritely called a "social conscience." If his work can be used in the manner described, how much easier to use the cheap novels featuring unrelieved sadism and extravagant sensualism. We have quite a collection of such items among our best-selling novels. While Steinbeck writes of social chaos and the brutality of men geared to a system of privilege, there are other authors who seem so fascinated by perversion and violence that their characters reek also of personal morbidity and decadence. While this is not altogether true of writers such as Hemingway, Frederic Wakeman and Budd Schulberg, there is often a leaning in this direction. Some of the characters, at least, are presented almost entIrely in terms of their sordidness. *What Makes Sammy Run* by Schulberg is loaded with this psychological commodity, as is *The Harder They Fall.* Wakeman, perhaps, strikes some sort of balance between the number of psychotics and the number of likeable humans in *The Hucksters* and *Shore Leave.* Hemingway can, rarely, contribute beauty in his prose, but he can also trade on brutality as an ingredient of his eroticism. The point is that in all of these books we are invited to share in the untrammeled expression of purely destructive animal instincts—and not "healthy" or "normal" ones, either.

The Commissars have only to say that this is what happens to people who are *allowed* to run amok, that man *must* be geared to a social and political purpose, else internal disintegration will inevitably set in. And this apparently, is just what they are saying. First, they use the picture of American society furnished by Wakeman, Schulberg, and Steinbeck. Then (though here Steinbeck is less accommodating, since he finds something of innate strength and beauty in all those characters who possess enough intelligence to be made subjects of interest), the next step of the Commissars is to argue that the evil is not only in what happens to a "society"—it is also in what happens to the moral fibre of the human being. Without political controls, they say, man is soon lost in a sea of personal disintegration. As aids to full development of this theme, and especially produced for the European market, are to be found even "better" portrayals of the perversions of America than those supplied by the American authors already mentioned. William Faulkner sometimes makes close to the most morbid of all fiction reading, and he is widely read in Europe. Erskine Caldwell, too, probably has a good market abroad, or if he hasn't, soon will have. Then there is James Cain, who has made a science of the sort of suspense which the reader shares with some twisted character, perhaps sexually perverted, while a horrible destiny closes around him. Raymond Chandler is a poorer writer, but his blood and sadism get around. So much so that he has avid imitators abroad, writing presumably as Americans about the sordid and brutal criminals of an America they have never seen.

Geoffrey Gorer, writing in the *Partisan Review* for July-August, under the title "The Erotic Myth of America," shows how this material is made to order for "Communist Propaganda." There used to be a world-wide erotic myth for France, he recalls, but this was innocent compared to the myth about America now being developed

in modern fiction. After describing the almost incredible luridness of two ersatz Americans, "James Hadley Chase," and "Vernon Sullivan"—both imitators of Chandler and Cain—Gorer points out the unlikelihood that these men are aware of the extent to which the Commissars can "use" their books. "Chase" and 'iSullivan" are probably just writing what their public wants. Gorer is psychologically provocative on this subject, as he is in outlining the reasons why no one could place a more serviceable present in Russian hands:

> These books, it must be repeated, are enormously popular. They must represent fulfillments of deeply felt but furtive wishes. But the thought of gratifying such reprehensible wishes must also arouse a great deal of guilt. During the heyday of Victorian morality, the prostitutes who gratified (true, in more concrete fashion) the reprehensible wishes of respectable gentlemen, were accused by the respectable gentlemen of being the source of their sin. The psychological mechanism of projection worked efficiently. In much the same way, it would seem, American culture is thought to be the source of the imaginative sins which the readers of these novels commit during their solitary orgies. For most of them, the United States is the land where these things happen, happen continuously, for they have no facts to set against the falsification of the writers; were American influence to spread, It could Happen Here; the temptation and the remorse would both be intolerable.
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> These facts, I think, are not so disconcerting to European "liberals," most of whom, like "liberals" everywhere find sufficient object of hatred in their own governments, as to the non-political, who see lynching not so much as a horror but as an almost irresistible temptation, just as the streetwalker aroused the indignation of the respectable, not the libertine. To use a psychoanalytic metaphor, this myth of the United States represents the disreputable forces of the id in opposition to the restraints of the superego. The super-ego has a hard enough battle to wage already, in the moral breakdown of a great deal of contemporary Europe; any notion or set of circumstances which promises greater gratification to the id evokes panic and repudiation from the super-ego. To the extent that America seems to offer greater freedom from restraint, greater possibilities of gratification, it is seen as a more serious threat to personal integrity than the severe and puritanical restraints that a dictatorial regime would impose. . . . The spread of American influence is terrifying because in America "anything goes"; I should torture and lynch and fornicate to my heart's content, and I should hate myself for doing so. Better a police state, which will stop me misbehaving.

This sort of Communist Propaganda is the best "the other side" has, not only because it is not written to be propaganda, but because it expresses and caters to a decadence which is really present. American life is certainly not anywhere near as replete with murders, rapings and perversions as the uninformed reader of fiction would gather, but American people support the literature, and this does mean something. Support exists, perhaps, principally because we have not found the personal roots of a healthy culture, and thus seek warped adventure in lieu of normal expressions of daring.

The extremes of sensationalism figuring in Cain, Chandler and their imitators are of course represented by the Russians also—in the very use to which they put isolated and unimportant facts about the amusement habits of the Americans. Readers may have noticed in a recent *Life* pictures of a Communist Youth parade in Berlin, where life size placards depicted "American" barbarism of women wrestlers, gouging each other's eyes before a leering front row of presumed perverts. How many of us have ever had the *opportunity* to see women wrestlers?

But to come back to castigating ourselves a little more. it is also fantastic to note the amount of vilification suffered by novelist Howard Fast, who writes a warming and instructive story, simply because he is known as a "fellow traveler." So long as the perverted tales sell well, though, we cannot expect a mentality which dotes on them to accurately discriminate on the matter of just what constitutes the most effective ingredients of "Communist Propaganda."

COMMENTARY
SITUATION NORMAL?

WHETHER General Lewis B. Hershey, head of Selective Service, was just feeling out of sorts, or whether the recent UP dispatch in the Los Angeles *Times*, quoting a last month's Rotary Club address of his, was too fragmentary to be accurate, we'll probably never know, but whatever the explanation, the busy General's remarks are worth a passing notice.

A new group of "killers" is needed, he said, to fill up the gaps in the ranks of the armed forces of the United States. General Hershey may be too sophisticated to say "heroes," but was he too tired to say "defenders of our way of life"? Did he *have* to say "killers"? He could have said simply "recruits."

The report quotes General Hershey directly:

> "In the last war we had 7,000,000 killers and another 7,000,000 to back them up. But the killers are old now, 32 or 33, . . . many of them are used up, burned out, in spite of brilliant war records."
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> In indirect quotation, General Hershey is said to have pointed out that "peacetime killers are antisocial, but that now the armed forces need legalized killers to defend the free nations of the world."

Can it be that General Hershey doesn't like his work? Back in 1943, when Selective Service was busy "processing" many thousands of young men every month, General Hershey went on record with another curious statement. In June of that year, he gave a House Appropriations Committee some discouraging facts about the draft, observing:

> "When it appears that about a third of your rejections for white soldiers are for mental and nervous reasons you take pause to wonder how you can run a successful war. Maybe we are all unfit for modern war."

Maybe so. Either that, or unfit for peace. In 1947 Wm. C. Menninger pointed out that in peacetime the psychiatrist's job is to treat abnormal reactions to normal situations, but that during war, he has to adjust "normal" people to an "abnormal" situation, and that the abnormal situation has lasted so long that our present "normal" reactions may be pathological "by all previous standards."

Maybe General Hershey is a little confused, just trying to be "normal," along with the rest of us. In any case, Dr. Menninger's comment seems pertinent: "To such a turbulent world, one might legitimately ask, what is a normal reaction?"

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

Editors: In your discussion of June 28, I find a few places to pause. You write: "Many parents have developed a sin-complex about sex, either through exposure to theological fulminations or because of unassimilated or poorly conceived personal experiences." In other words, such parents are hamstrung by simple ignorance: They are aware of "sex" in part—"know" it *darkly,* as St. Paul did. They suffer from the delusion that bisects the human being into two rigidly antagonistic natures: the "higher" and the "lower," the "Good" and the "Sinful." As though "Mother Nature" herself had a Mind so sterile as this! Or as idly moralistic.

I would seriously question the main emphasis (in respect to parenthood) being put upon the factor of "responsibility," inasmuch as "responsibility" is a *sine qua non* once the child, or children, have arrived. It seems to me that a man, before he fathers a child, must ask himself: How much of *devotional* love goes into the making of the expected child?

No other consideration can come before this: for, as Nietzsche said: "The unresolved dissonances between the characters and sentiments of the parents survive in the child, and make up the history of its inner sufferings."

A mere "partner" in the act of procreation is hardly sufficient to sanctify the resultant "responsibility." You approach the whole solemn matter backwards. What I would ask in regard to parents is this: Never mind how "responsible" they would assume themselves to be. The paramount consideration is: How long will this marriage last? How long will the parents themselves remain, in the eyes of the child, actual symbols of reciprocal love? How *convincing* will the parents be as *parents?*

WE can hardly deny that these are pertinent comments: Our subscriber is saying, in effect, that the first consideration for potential parents is the breadth and depth of their idealism. "Idealism" is here a proper word, for it is the *ideation* of the home, the mental and emotional climate, which either gives or fails to give the child encouragement toward its own aspirations.

Our own discussions of the responsibilities involving fathering or bearing children, however, have been set in a rather special context. The introduction of the subject, as readers may recall, came from a subscriber's query about how best to discuss the "problems of sex" with adolescents. Here, it has been our contention, a parent can be of greatest service by restricting his ethical discourses to a minimum and focussing upon the reasonableness of a few suggested principles. It seems to us always important to refrain from expecting too much from the child, either in terms of understanding our own involved discourses on conduct, or in terms of living according to any Vision he has not yet had much time to establish for himself. If the adolescent is expected to hold a great number of social, religious, and philosophical values in his mind, all at once, he will likely acquire a sense of vague unreality about *all* the values prescribed.

One of the many difficulties attending conventional religious methods of instruction has always been precisely this. If, on the other hand, we establish some minimal ethical requirements, we avoid overloading the mind of the child and leave him opportunity to create further subtleties of value for himself.

But the first consideration in respect to sex involvements should be, for the child as well as for anyone else, a manner of viewing the Wholeness of these situations. While it may sound a little ridiculous to say that even the child should begin to consider the problem of sex in relation to a child of his own, there is no substitute for conscious awareness of this ultimate sort of responsibility. So we have said that "willingness" to bring a child into the world with whatever prospective partner is currently most fascinating can be a self-regulating criterion for the relationship between two young people.

The logic of this selection of emphasis perhaps goes something like this: First, one must learn that nature is not to be disparted, that we cannot treat our feelings and energies as of temporary meaning—their significance is in a continuum, their use has social and even, perhaps,

evolutionary consequences in a world governed by reciprocal law. Second, we must learn that to avoid "disparting" ourselves it is vitally important to retain in our minds at all times what we consider to be basic principles suggesting the specific extent of our interdependence in any major area of human relations. The broadest generalities will not do. Like religions, too broad ethical generalities are incantations rather than expositions of particular principles which the mind can clearly grasp for practical application. Only a religion which requires a fresh sort of psychological pondering can stimulate growth, and religion as we usually know it fails to encourage philosophical or psychological study. Finally, therefore, our attempts to help the child to educate himself should follow what Sir William Hamilton called "the principle of parsimony." Paraphrased, his claim is that the theory deserving the greatest scientific regard is the simplest one that adequately covers the facts.

In the particular field of sex-education, then, the first logical step is to define the fundamental requirement of a constructive relationship. And a feeling of willingness to share parenthood of a child seems the most natural and easily understood requirement to establish, since here, another part of human nature than that which inspires us to act on the basis of "passing fancies" must manifest, either positively or negatively. While, as our correspondent states, "responsibility" becomes a fact as soon as a child is born, the attitudes which make for a successful (because inspiring or enjoyable) discharge of that responsibility are of the greatest import in determining success or failure. Unless one can find the thought of sharing the responsibility of parenthood with another particular person inspiring or enjoyable, we have some evidence that the relationship will be lacking in sufficient mental and emotional rapport.

We are not here trying to encourage adolescents to have early families. What we are suggesting is that the adolescent needs encouragement to never settle for anything less than the best in quality that he can get—that he needs this encouragement in the field of emotional experience just as badly as he needs it everywhere else, and perhaps a little more desperately.

FRONTIERS

"We" and "They"

As the headlines shriek concerning "setbacks" and "defeat" in Korea, and as little groups of citizens gather to comment laconically on "the war" that is not a war, the passive role of the individual human being becomes increasingly evident. The chief reaction to the fighting in Korea seems to be either a tired indifference and fatalism, or an uttered expression to the effect that maybe it would be better to get the whole thing over "right away," as later on it might last longer and be worse.

Eight years ago, an anonymous private writing in *Common Sense*—a paper that was so good that it could not survive the spiralling publishing costs of the wartime period—summed up his own feelings and those of the men about him. What he wrote is an accurate enough version of what many feel today:

> They say that this is to be the last war, but already the seeds of the next one, provided we are victorious, are being sown. The soldier, even in his apathy, realizes this. He does not imagine that he is fighting the last of all wars (the last one was "Armageddon"), or that his children will grow up in a golden age. "They'll do it again," he says, "They'll do it again first chance they get." It is always *They*. It *is* never *We* any more, save in patriotic after dinner speeches. In a war like our own Revolution the soldier could be a good democrat because he knew what he was fighting for—land, representation, freedom. But now we are fighting economic wars, wars of trade routes, of food, of metals. Private X does not understand economics. Our school system, based as it is on dead issues, has not prepared him for any world view. He is a sheep surrounded by wolves. In a war involving a hundred million men, he may know two hundred to speak to. He is lost, and because he is, all realities vanish—his thoughts are only of what he has left and how soon he can once more return to these things. (*Common Sense*, April, 1942.)

There is a difference, of course, between that time and this. No ten million Americans are under arms, and nobody has said much about the next war, being the "last" one. There is something almost unclean about talking casually about the "next war," when the common people of every land look upon war with unutterable loathing and turn all their feelings of helplessness into a fierce longing that there shall not be another war. But what is really parallel is the expectation that "They," not "We," will decide what is to happen. "They" are the impersonal forces beyond our control, the vague, disaster-breeding men we do not know personally, do not understand, and cannot identify except as "They."

Much of the anti-war literature of the past has tried to: tell us who "They" are. After World War I, John Kenneth Turner wrote *Shall It Be Again?* in an effort to show that dividend-hungry capitalists engineered the entry of the United States into the struggle. Mr. Turner wrote as a socialist, and perhaps he was partially right about why we went to war, but socialism—socialism, that is, which has gained political power and wields the resources of the State—after dispossessing the capitalists in other countries, has hardly proved itself a force for peace in the years since. The people in those countries are ruled by a "They" that may become even more autocratic and arbitrary than the capitalist "authorities." As the years go by, there seems less and less hope of peace from establishing the "right" men in power, or by setting up a better political "system." Perhaps there are as many things wrong with "We" as with "They"—that by expecting and waiting for "Them" to straighten things out, we make it literally impossible for anyone to do anything constructive.

On the other hand, what can "We" do? We have a book written by a young artist, Lowell Naeve, who was twenty-three years old in October, 1940—a man who would not be drafted and went to prison twice for war resistance. His book, *A Field of Broken Stones, is* the story of his experiences in prison, what happened to him and how he felt about it. (Published by the Libertarian Press, Box A, Glen Gardner, New Jersey, at

$3.00.) Naeve's book is worth reading for a picture of the other extreme from the anonymous private who wrote for *Common Sense.* Naeve will astonish most of his readers, for he lived in a very simple world. That is, he felt no inner pulls to conformity. As a boy he had killed a rabbit. This made him reflect, and he decided he could never kill a human being. It was as simple as that.

There are doubtless many degrees of personal action between being a cog in the war machine and being a victim of the Federal Prison system, but neither extreme nor any of the degrees is particularly inspiring or admirable except in subjective terms. It is hard to see how any sort of objective relationship with a modern government at war can contribute very much to a better society. The complex arrangement of compulsions we have allowed to grow up around us seems to grind into nonentities the nonconformists as effectively as it absorbs and depersonalizes those who go along.

There is a sense one gets from reading Naeve's book that both "We" and "They" have become pretty much the same people; and also, that the extremes are finally meeting—at least, in terms of the reactions of sensitive human beings. Norman Mailer, for example, who wrote the war novel of lashing disgust, *The Naked and the Dead,* made this comment on *A Field of Broken Stones:*

> Although this may smack of sentimental exaggeration, I felt that the description of such incidents as the forced feeding carried symbolically all the emotional weight of the state laying hands upon the individual. . . . I hope that this book will receive as wide an audience as possible.

Edmund Wilson contributed to the *New Yorker* a long and thoughtful review of both this book and *Prison Etiquette*, a volume with similar contents by several writers; and Steig, the cartoonist, wrote to Naeve:

> I was very much moved by your book. . . . It was very inspiring to me to see how our brutal and stupid social machine, for all its "power,' can be embarrassed and confounded and almost put to rout by single individuals who, having somehow avoided being paralyzed by our society, have the sense of life to insist on simple, natural human rights.

A man can be a Private X, or he can be Convict XYZ. As Private X, he may have the virtue of an obedient servant; as Convict he may be able to stand as a symbol of the power of a single human being to say "No" to whatever he believes to be wrong, wasteful and futile.

But perhaps we give too much dignity to war and militarism and the State by allowing the relationship of a human being to these three to determine our definition of virtue or morality. If we do this; our definition will be of last-ditch morality in any case.

In a way, it must be admitted, Naeve succeeded in rejecting these standards himself. He was not a "career" pacifist, but a young man who had other things to do with his life than go to war. We need, perhaps, not more "pacifists," but more people with this turn of mind, until, at last, there will be nothing to fight about.

Has it Occurred to Us?

THE A-Bomb and the H-Bomb—dwarfing all previous Frankensteins—inspire quivering and craven minds to cry, "Peace! Brotherhood! Now war is too horrible to be contemplated!" But has it occurred to us that such people, in their desperate desire to protect mankind from itself, from war, from the Consequences of scientific progress—are still supporting war, psychologically, with every fibre of their being?

If force answers international problems inadequately, shall the private citizen continue to rely on enforcing ideas upon others? If fear among nations breeds hysterical and ill-considered policies, freezing generous motives at their source, how can an intelligent individual, anxious for an actual cessation of hostilities, fall back in his personal sphere on a policy directed at rabbits instead of men? If overconfidence in one's own superiority is really as serious, among political leaders, as our government spokesmen and our official propaganda would have us believe, then what right has one person or one group to set itself up as dispensers of *the* panacea for the malaise of the world ?

A sense of humor is indispensable. The Doom-spiers and Destruction-criers are agitated—and solemn; frantic, but coldly sure that Fear and Trembling and Listening to Experts must be the order of the day. It remained for an Indian statesman to strike a balancing note in the crescendo of H-Bomb hysteria. What Nehru said needs to be quoted again and again: "If the world is evil, let the H-Bomb destroy it. If the world is good, let it destroy the H-Bomb." *Where is our sense of humor?* Without it, the relativities will overwhelm us, and the Ultimate End will gibber at us around every corner. Even a sense of history would help: how many Armageddons has the human race not passed through, each Crisis seeming more "total" than all the preceding ones together?

"But we have never had an H-Bomb, before—this time is the worst of all!" And why should it not be? Is humanity becoming less intelligent, less experienced, that we should expect its trials to be diminishing? Our powers are great, our progress continually amazes us— shall our difficulties be those of children? Perhaps this has not happened before, but times like this are the only reason history was ever made or remembered. The story of the beehive may be told once, for all time: man's chronicle must always have blank pages at the end, for future chapters.

Suppose the worst were true, suppose a few men with their technical ingenuity have evolved a world-destroying instrument. Suppose universal destruction is a possibility (and why not?—since the world had a beginning, it must some day have an end), not merely in the dim future and when other millions tread the boards, but *soon*, in a generation, in a few years, or next week, and while we are the actors on the scene. Should the consciousness of an appointment with Destiny capsize our individual lives before the continents upturn themselves? As "the last men on earth," would we try to alter our way of life? Are there other things we would be doing if we knew that with us civilization was to vanish?

If the approach of Destiny, fully believed in, would tend to make us stop and think, or change our sense of values, or deepen the feeling of our responsibility for human progress, perhaps future generations may consider that the H-Bomb was a necessary catalyst for mankind's thinking in the mid-Twentieth Century. Looking backward, the historians of 2050 may decide that the older generations could not have done without the interval of searching thought embarked on—under the impetus of atomic and hydrogen bombs—by those who never before had been able to think of humanity as a whole.

Imagine that this morning's newspapers had carried the astounding report that the equipment for the production of the most dreaded

implements of war or "security" had crumbled suddenly last night in a mysterious explosion believed to have been detonated by remote control from the planet Mars. (The prospect is only slightly more fantastic than some speculations already coming from highly accredited sources.) Imagine further that none of the scientists whose brains had evolved the theories and formulas for this tremendous industry of destruction would hazard the re-formation of the production lines, it having been communicated to them (through an ingenious cipher which Einstein himself had interrupted his research to decode) that any efforts to restore such production would mean the instant annihilation of all concerned and the demolition, again, of the necessary equipment.

When absolute confirmation of this report had spread to all corners of the earth, and the conviction had entered every man's mind that a lid was miraculously forced down upon the boiling cauldron of Scientific Progress, what would be the reaction of the ordinary citizen? Would Peace still seem all-important, would the general welfare still be a burning issue, would a sense of the unreality of private concerns continue to pervade our minds? In fine, how much is the present fever for "peace" an outlet for frenzy, for fear and horror at what might be, and how much is the expression of a genuine desire for human welfare?

There may be some truth in the notion that man, whatever his origins, scientific or otherwise, is involved in a larger Scheme of Meaning than he has as yet conceived. Certainly, if A-Bombs and H-Bombs represent nightmares of man's collective mind, the human race must have a compensating capacity for vision that has scarcely yet been tapped.