

THE DEFINITION OF MAN

THE key to any age is its definition of man. It seems quite plain from history that if you pick a time when men have become timorous of their future, convinced of their inability to meet their problems, you find a time when human society is sliding into a cycle of poverty, ignorance and static despotism. The most destructive force in life is not found in the modern arsenals of war, but in man's contempt for himself.

The present is like certain periods of the past in which men began to hate themselves and fear for their future, save for the fact that there is today a great deal of self-examination going on. If a high estimate of man is not possible, today, we at least have a strong tendency to ask ourselves what we think about ourselves—to be, that is, *self-conscious* in the estimate we have made. And self-consciousness is a prerequisite to deliberate change.

The impulse for forward rushes of history seems in the past to have always had some environmental explanation. The awakening of the European mind from the night of the Dark Ages had definite causes. It took more than a few Europeans meditating in the Night to bring about the vast changes which led to the Renaissance and the Reformation. Greek wisdom filtered into France over the Pyrenees from Spain, where it had been preserved by learned Arabs and Jews. This was an objective, fertilizing influence which made itself felt in the writings of the great scholastic doctors. The Crusades were a factor in stimulating the minds of Europeans, still crude with the barbarism of centuries of inactivity. The fall of Byzantium to the Turks brought another dynamic impact of ancient learning to the European side of the Mediterranean World. Greek art, literature, science, and philosophy gained rebirth in Italy after a thousand years of obscurity. Add to these stimuli whatever

Unknown Quantity you will—for there was surely more in play than these conditionings—and you have at least several of the major causes of the rise of European civilization. And what, essentially, were the Renaissance and the Reformation? Essentially, they were a new definition of Man. Man, said Luther, is competent to save himself. Man, said the artists of the Italian Renaissance, is a being capable of joy, beauty, and greatness. He is the being who forever remakes himself, declared Pico, the Florentine Humanist. A great cycle of "re-making" was thus under way.

In a little less than five hundred years from the days of Pico, we have fallen back to a low estimate of man. We are beginning once again to think of him as impotent and forever afraid. Or rather, we have thought of him in these terms for a generation or more. The only real encouragement in evidence, at this time, is that the critical intellects now at work are becoming very much aware of this definition. Furthermore, they do not admire it. While they have little to put in its place, they know that a low estimate of human beings is fatal to the future of civilization—at least, of *our* civilization.

In illustration of the self-consciousness of modern criticism, we offer a quotation from a review by Delmore Schwartz in the January-February *Partisan Review*:

. . . the classic choice of the American writer has been either uncritical affirmation on the one hand, or on the other hand some form of rejection, the rejection of satire in Lewis, the rejection of social protest in Dos Passos, or the rejection of tragedy in Dreiser and Fitzgerald. The point can hardly be overemphasized: Huck Finn is in flight from civilization; Milly Theale is swindled of, above all, her desire to live; Lambert Strether (or William Dean Howells) discovers in middle age that he has not really lived at all; Lily Bart tries to commit suicide; Richard Cory blows out his brains; J. Alfred Prufrock feels that he "should have been a pair of ragged

claws"; Frederic Henry makes "a separate peace"; Quentin Compson has to say four times that he does not hate the South; Clyde Griffiths is electrocuted; Jay Gatsby is murdered. There are many other instances of the same kind, almost none of which can be considered as tragedy, but more precisely as catastrophe: Clyde Griffiths and Jay Gatsby perish because they are Americans, Agamemnon and Macbeth because they are human beings.

Here is the quality that we need to focus on—the quality in literature which proclaims *catastrophe* as the ruling force in human life. Such books—and books, after all, reflect the temper of the people they are written for—see man as an unhappy pawn wandering miserably in a world of irrational forces he cannot control and cannot hope to control. The problems of life are not man-size; they are inhuman and monstrous. Things, as Macdonald says, happen *to* people. Fate closes in. The artist or the writer, from whom we discover what we think man to be, simply chronicles the defeat of human beings.

A generation ago, when "social struggle" was the theme, the worker could be celebrated as a symbol of affirmative force in man. Like a Goliath, the worker would rise and declare his dignity and power; like a Sampson, he would shake the walls of the temple of finance; like the *Golem* of Hebrew legend, he would demand that wrongs be righted, that truth be known again. Such a theme, while primitive, was at least a belief in man. Now the forces against us are not man-made, but cosmic; what chance have we got?

We like to read the *Partisan Review* because of its acute self-consciousness in the field of criticism and analysis. Probably no publication reflects so accurately the temper of the modern intellectual. These days, *PR* is filled with accounts of the frustration of the creative intelligence of human beings. It is an almost luminous discovery, or would be, save for the fact that, having made it, there seems to be nothing further to do.

Another review in this issue deals directly with the dilemma of the intellectual. It is a study by Hans Meyerhoff of a book written some years

ago by an obscure Austrian writer, Robert Musil, which has recently gained attention through partial translation into English. Its title is *The Man without Qualities*, its point that the intellectual ceases to have significance in a thoroughly organized and institutionalized world. The reviewer writes:

Now a man without qualities is, as Musil realized, paradoxically enough also a man possessing all qualities. There is no position he cannot theoretically defend, none in which he cannot see some partial truth, hence, there is none with which he might not be identified or identify himself. Thus Ulrich [Musil's leading character] longs at times to be relieved from the elusiveness and pluralistic ambiguity of thinking about problems the solution of which can only be found in the "unequivocation and finality of action."

There is, however, one ambiguity, or dilemma, which Musil singled out as crucial and to which he returned constantly throughout his work in search of a solution. The dilemma arises as follows: The function of the intellect is to think clearly and precisely. This is the way a scientist tries to think when engaged in experimental research aiming at a truthful description of certain aspects of the objective world. What we call the logic of science sets the conditions for this inquiry into meaning and truth. Musil acknowledged this discipline of the mind—just as he practiced a highly exaggerated form of physical discipline for his body. It is this logical clarity and precision, ruthless and uncompromising, which is the function of the intellect in search of truth among the falsehoods of the world; and science, or a scientifically trained mind, is an indispensable prerequisite for exercising this function.

Now this quest for clarity and precision, which cannot be abdicated by the intellect without self-betrayal, encounters formidable and apparently insuperable obstacles in certain areas of life. Musil encountered them when he turned from positivism to art and literature, from the precise logic of the science *descriptive* of an objective reality to the elusive "logic of the soul" (as he called it) *expressive* of man's inner world of dreams, fantasies, feelings, and values. In other words, there seem to be aspects of life, frightfully significant in terms of human existence, to which the precise logic of the sciences is not (or not yet) applicable and to which we seem to have access only through the purely subjective, emotional expression and symbolism of the poets. Musil

became obsessed with this dilemma, this "two-facedness of life," this "ambiguity of the world,"; this "pre-established disharmony"; and his work may be seen as a prolonged attempt to come to terms with this experience and to find a way out of this dilemma.

Musil's solution, as Meyerhoff says, is a "higher humanism" which finds precarious balance between the two disciplines of the mind—the discipline of science and logic and the discipline of the soul (or the arts). The difficulty, of course, is in equating the two disciplines, for the validity of each seems as unrelated to the other as, say, the validity of wave mechanics in physics is unrelated to quantum mechanics, even though, without both, modern physics would not exist.

These parallelisms appear all through our culture. The dilemma of the disinterested intellectual in a society which requires that everyone go into "business" or offer something "for sale" is not entirely unlike the dilemma of the characters in modern novels who are overtaken by impersonal catastrophes. The dilemma of the intellectual *as* intellectual, who cannot reconcile the partisan discipline of science with the intuitive discipline of feeling or the "soul" is like the dilemma of the modern political philosopher who cannot balance the contradictions of a free society versus an orderly society. In a way, these dilemmas amount to the assertion that the world as it is, or as we have made it, is too much for us, as we conceive ourselves to be.

We may long for the fresh enthusiasm of the Renaissance Man, and for the uncomplicated world he set out to conquer, but we cannot have them. If we are to "believe" in man, as did the makers of the Renaissance, we have to say that we are as equal to living in the world of our time as they were in theirs, but we don't seem to have the heart for it. Somehow, we have let the world get out of scale. It is beyond us, outside of us; if we made this world, we made it as a man sick in mind makes a psychosis—without reason or measure. Feeling our weakness, we adopt a low opinion of ourselves.

Is there anyone about who is able to set the modern world against some grid of rational understanding? Someone who can do for the world what Gandhi did for India? Gandhi may have understood the demons of the West, but only in Indian terms. To enlarge our view of modern man, a wider sort of rationalizing power is needed. It is a question of regaining the free-ranging imagination and daring which we once possessed, or of ignominious surrender. It is a question of being able to convince ourselves that the problem really is one of imagination, and not of eternally dodging mindless intrusions which come unbidden into our sphere to reduce us to shivering submission. As always, it is a question of who and what we are, and whether we are any longer the proud dreamers we once thought ourselves to be.

Letter from **CENTRAL EUROPE**

SALZBURG.—Millions of families and individuals have during recent centuries left Europe for new homes somewhere overseas. Their reasons have been various. Some were adventurers, others wanted to get away from intolerant systems or narrow bureaucracies, but most of them looked forward to better means of existence or direct material advantages. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that, after World War II, the desire to emigrate, particularly from Central Europe, became greater than ever before.

This time, however, the reasons were more far-reaching: most of those who wanted to leave their more or less devastated homes were fed up with their native continent altogether. They saw half of it occupied by the Soviets, thinking it likely that the Communists were sufficiently vigorous to conquer the rest of it, eventually. They were convinced that a third world war would ruin the regions of Central Europe spared between 1940 and 1945.

A high proportion of those who desired to go were certainly under the impression that life "overseas"—besides being safe in case of another war—would offer opportunities for building a house, driving a car, and enjoying other comforts which their homeland (for economic reasons) had not permitted. But most of all, they were longing for nothing more than an existence in Peace.

The fact that, immediately after the war, Austrians as well as Germans were excluded from emigration, and that Displaced Persons (actual and pretended) had first chance to go, rather increased the desire to get away. But even when the restrictions were lifted, in most countries a quota permitted only a small number to enter.

Many Austrians would probably have liked to settle in the U.S.A., but could not obtain the necessary permits. Some succeeded in going to Canada, others to South America, to South Africa, and Australia.

In the meantime, certain countries decided that it would not be well, in the long run, to issue permits to individuals of all kinds of professions. Moreover, it was found that in many cases the statements of the emigrants were not reliable and that they soon

disappointed the authorities in the countries of their destination.

For these and other reasons, the immigration boards of a number of overseas governments—especially those undergoing rapid industrial development—decided to admit only experts from ruined Central Europe. To be sure they make no mistakes, they sent (and still send) delegations to Central Europe to screen applicants who wish to immigrate.

But not only experts are selected! One commission looks around and chooses only men in approved health, between 21 and 28 years, not married, with some knowledge in technics. Another commission wants men between 18 and 23, well-built, not married, who are willing to go as mine workers. And a third country offers all kinds of privileges to men not over 35 who would like to go in for tropical agriculture.

In short, Central Europe is being stripped of her most promising citizens. Yet the fact that some of these overseas countries seek Austrian youths, despite their own numerous populations, shows, for instance, what is meant by "tropical agriculture."

Older people and those who are ill or handicapped have to remain here, of course, and already make up the majority of the inhabitants. Since the best and strongest people are lured away, it seems that the biological future of Central Europe will become darker and darker. Bolshevism, moreover, which is partly instigating this development, will be the gainer. The Soviets rub their hands smilingly, observing that broad streams of power and knowledge are leaving Central Europe, year by year.

CENTRAL EUROPEAN CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW

UNUSUAL PRISONER

ALFRED HASSLER'S *Diary of a Self-Made Convict* strikes us as one of the best books ever issued by Henry Regnery of Chicago (1954, \$3). A thirty-four-year-old worker in the office of the Fellowship of Reconciliation at the time he was ordered to report for induction into the armed services, Hassler received a three-year prison sentence for failure to comply. While he managed to secure parole to a mental hospital in less than a year, his months at Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary (1944-45) were apparently enough to provide the basis for a most impressive prison document.

Hassler was one of six thousand conscientious objectors incarcerated in federal institutions for failure to comply with the Selective Service Law of 1940, and while many of these men endeavored to make their prison tenures profitable to society through articles and books, Hassler's book seems in a class by itself. But the author makes clear at once that the book is not focussed specifically upon C.O.'s in prison, but upon the "prison problem" itself, and upon all the men subjected to prison's supposed cures.

A growing body of literature on prison life and penological theory is one of the more encouraging signs of our times. MANAS has given special attention to several such volumes, including Warden Duffy's *The San Quentin Story*, Kenyon Scudder's *Prisoners Are People*, and Donald Wilson's *My Six Convicts*. Further good material, surprising some, appears in mystery writer Erle Stanley Gardner's *Court of Last Resort*. And, in respect to books written in prison, Nehru's prison autobiography, *Toward Freedom*, is a classic. *Diary of a Self-Made Convict* seems to us to belong to this library.

Historian-penologist Harry Elmer Barnes, who contributes the Preface, says: "I have written nearly a dozen books on criminology and penology, but all of them combined provide no such authoritative and first-hand impression of the

realities of life in a penal institution. Mr. Hassler's well-trained mind, sensitive personality and acute perception enabled him to discern and describe with accuracy so many cogent details of prison life that any expert penologist would be tempted to comment on his material in such extended fashion that he would write a Foreword longer than the book itself."

Mr. Hassler is not primarily an emotional man, but he is a sensitive observer, and an honest self-appraiser. Most of the fears and angers which loom so large in the lives of convicts, he discovered, began developing in himself. Thus his sympathy for the plight of prison inmates grows from a direct understanding as well as from his ethical convictions. What he says in the following paragraph, for instance, contains nothing new for those familiar with the books already mentioned, but another dimension is added by the fact that Hassler actually wrote in a cell:

I hear men pace their cells for hour after hour, hear them muttering unhappily to themselves, hear them, sometimes, sobbing quietly or cursing with a deep and bitter loneliness.

And with this I know, so often these days, the background of a friend's behavior, dug out of the surreptitious looks at his file that I manage in the parole office. Here is a youth deprived of everything: raised in a family dominated by a brutal, drunken father, with no toys, no friends, no love, sent out to steal before he was ten, beaten savagely when he failed to bring home all that his father thought he should. How can it be surprising that he should have turned to crime and wound up in a federal prison at the age of twenty-two? And what will prison do for him, or for society, in the ten years he has to serve? When he is released, six or seven years from now, how will he have been improved, and how will the phenomenon of crime have been dealt with?

It is this that lacerates the spirit of the onlooking friend. Punishment and retaliation will not help. He has known them all his life, and they have driven him deeper and deeper into ruin. It is mercy he needs now, and it is only mercy and compassion that will do either him or society any good. He needs to know that men are not all his enemies, and that forgiveness and love exist, and can be extended to him. And so it is that a score of "over-sensitive" conscientious

objectors keep filling their three letters a week and their one visit a month with pleas that somehow, somebody arrange to extend some mercy and compassion to Bill or Joe or Smitty or Bob. It does no good, most of the time. Society is not geared to the expression of compassion. But we go on pleading because we have to, because we could not live with ourselves if we did not.

"Whatever one's basic convictions," Hassler writes, "one is tempted to feel hostile and resentful toward almost everyone in the official organization of this monstrosity. One reacts with violent indignation." He continues:

We do not really like anyone who happens to be placed over us in authority, but we can manage to tolerate him if he seems to be trying to say to us that this authority is purely a mechanical device for getting things done, and has no implications concerning moral worth or even personal ability. We can get along with the person whose authority rests on clearcut superiority in abilities or skills, even though he may do some open rejoicing in his high estate. But we can really work up a hate for the man whose authority somehow rests on the assumption of moral superiority and is a part of a whole conspiracy to humiliate and degrade us. This is what happens to the parole officers, and with all their training they seem quite unable to see it.

Thoroughly aware of the comparative ease of his own job of "doing time," Hassler reflects on the long sentences of other inmates and their complete lack of outside friendships of the sort he enjoyed. He was appalled by the probable emotional effects of this isolation:

I was thinking, yesterday, though, of how strange it will seem to be free again: not to have to line up for everything one does, not to be ruled by whistles and shouted commands, and to be cast once again on one's own initiative. I can understand how fearful and reluctant to leave some men become after really long periods in prison. When one has had one's whole life completely ordered down to the minutest detail, it becomes a fearsome thing to face the prospect of freedom and responsibility again. This, of course, lies at the heart of the total inability of the prison to accomplish the thing it is supposed to do. For men who need, almost more than anything else, training in self-discipline, it provides a complete system of rigid discipline externally applied. The result, of course, is to make the man even less capable

of coping with the problems and temptations that come to him than he was to begin with. And the men who "adjust" to this unreal kind of life—who, in other words, are able to submerge completely their individual personalities in order to fit the prison-envisaged stereotype—are assumed to be those most ready to return to society, and therefore most suitable for parole!

In his concluding chapter, Hassler reevaluates the contributions of psychiatry to prison reform. Psychiatric insights, he says, "need to be absorbed and understood by those who deal in any way with the criminal individual. But even these, administered with the best will in the world, will have only a minimum effect until psychiatry and psychology shift their focus from the criminal personality to the nature of the community itself, and the values to which it does homage. When these are examined, it becomes plain that the criminal is not so much a deviate from the norm as he is its mildly distorted reflection."

As almost all Hassler's pages invite comment, we here give as much space as possible to the author himself. These are his closing words:

Tolstoi observed that "the criminal justifies his crime," and this continues to be the crucial fact of what we call anti-social behavior. Most of the men who land in prison are neither psychopaths nor schizophrenics. They are cynics. They observe a society in which wealth, the acquisition of things, ranks as the highest value. They are the products of a culture whose chief characteristics, as Margaret Halsey observed in *The Folks at Home*, are aggressiveness, competitiveness, and skepticism. Overwhelmingly, they come from the part of the community that has come off worst in the socially approved expressions of this competition, so that to their skepticism is added frustration.

The United States marshals who took us to Lewisburg in their car exercised their little graft on our meal on the way out. A guard at the penitentiary endured the unspoken jeers of the inmates when his wife was exposed as a black-market operator. Men who had connections with the underworld could, and did, tell which judges and district attorneys had paid how much for their jobs, and a former procurer was in the interesting position of having been sentenced by a judge who was a regular client of the house for which he worked. Another of my felon-compatriots,

convicted of a minor embezzlement, entertained us for one stockade hour with stories of the bribes he had given over a period of ten years on behalf of the company that had preferred charges against him.

These are the facts of life as the "criminal" knows they exist, and they account for his contemptuous scorn for chaplains, parole officers, and every other official manifestation of society's hypocritical self-righteousness. So long as they continue to be the facts of life, they will continue to undermine every well-intentioned new approach to the problem of criminal behavior, even including the "kindly and understanding" individual treatment.

The problem of prison is indissolubly bound up with the morality of the culture of which it is a part. The criminal is our own reflection, staring out at us from the mirror of our own desires and ambitions. Our humanity drives us reluctantly to eradicate the more brutal aspects of prison life, and to make conditions inside the prison more tolerable for the wretches confined in them. But the problem of crime will not be affected seriously until we tackle it in our own lives, and put into our relations with all men the only thing that will work with any of them: love and forgiveness.

It was the Master who showed the answer long ago when they brought to him a woman caught in the very commission of a crime punishable by death.

"What shall we do with her?" they asked him, hoping to trap him.

"Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone," he suggested mildly, and, when the whole crowd of accusers had slunk away, and none remained save him to judge the guilt of the "criminal," he said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more."

COMMENTARY
PREOCCUPATION WITH SYMPTOMS

THE simple and obvious comment to be made about Alfred Hassler's book (see Review) is that the people who seem to understand the problems of our society are seldom the people with power. A man like Hassler, oddly enough, is placed in opposition to society almost as much as his fellow convicts guilty of authentic crimes—they, because of their nakedly predatory ways, he because of the predatory habits and the large-scale ignorance and blindness of society itself.

Why aren't there more men like the Scudders and the Duffys running the prisons? Why, so often, does "society" frustrate the intelligence of such men, and imprison a man like Hassler?

It is as though some hard core of indifference to human good prevents the common practice of understanding and intelligent action in relation to our prisons, and in relation to many other situations of public interest.

The reality of that core of indifference is plain as day, yet our social theories take no account of it. Revolutionary theories take account of it, but after the revolutionists gain power they have their prisons, too, which are usually just the same, if not worse. And then the former revolutionists ignore in themselves precisely the symptoms which in others made them rebel against an earlier *status quo*.

Plainly, men of intelligence are quite able to say what is wrong with our society, but cannot tell us the causes. The revolutionists and reformers treat only symptoms—they never seem to get at the disease itself.

The only conclusion we can see a way to is that we have no "science of society" at all—no real knowledge of the natural relationship between the individual and the group. What are the steps which will make a world that needs no prisons, and by what means can we persuade ourselves to take them? Perhaps we must understand why so

few are even interested in such questions before we think about looking for answers.

It seems quite possible that, after trying for two or three centuries to live without any recognition of the mystery of evil—of the fact that evil is real, and difficult to explain—we are now suffering a progressive infection from this aspect of nature. Evil, in short, to be overcome, must first be understood. Meanwhile, the social sciences which propose to deal with the effects of evil are wholly unwilling to recognize its *metaphysical* character, and lack, therefore, a theory of the good society worth talking about.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

NOTES IN PASSING

SINCE we and doubtless others know very little about the internal side of Soviet culture, a current report on children's books in modern Russia is a welcome find. Claire Huchet Bishop, author of *All Things Common* (about the Communitarian movement of Europe), recently contributed to *Commonweal* (Nov. 20) a survey of children's books in several lands, and since the material appears in a Catholic journal of opinion, written by one who, also of this faith, is strongly opposed to Communism, the charge of bias would be hard to justify. In other words, Miss Bishop's sympathetic view of the Russian books cannot be taken as a deliberate job of whitewashing. Her interest is rather to identify hopeful signs wherever they may be found, even in what some regard as an "enemy" land. So, if this writer is able to admire Russian children's books, it seems to us that we, less concerned about "atheism," may be encouraged to generate a little of the same admiration.

Though her survey deals only with children's literature in Italy, Germany, Russia and America, Miss Bishop has a disarmingly "one world" view; children, and those who mean well for them, are the same in all lands, regardless of ideologies. Concerning Russia, she writes:

What strikes me first is that Russian children's books are inexpensive looking, paper-bound, thin, humble, books of poor people. The general impression is pleasing but quiet. Nothing flashy about them. They are old-fashioned too; hardly any modern technique. Colors are soft; even when brilliant they retain a sort of velvety quality. These unassuming little books surprise me by the blending to text and pictures. The artists seem to have an uncommercial approach to the subject. One never gets the feeling that they have filled in pages of a dummy. What they seem to have done is to re-live the story so completely, in terms of lines and colors, that what they give us are illustrations of the story from within.

There are many folktales retold, stories of animals and animated objects, gay and amusing stories of slovenly children, reprints of Gorki, Pushkin, Lermontov. Few adults are portrayed in these books, except for an occasional mother and a father. And I saw very little about machinery or scientific discoveries except in straight textbooks.

What might have been least expected is so much poetry. Poetry galore. For small, middle age or older children. Everything is a pretext to make verse.

Russian writers and artists have always had a cozy, intimate relationship with the child, without sentimentality but with a wealth of feeling. They are not childish but childlike. Effortlessly, they enter the child's world. Soviet writers are no exception. They too seem to have taken the child by the hand. They know what can interest him, move him and talk to him. Postwar Russian books have retained the touching quality of nearness from within. . . .

This is the bright side. There is, of course, a certain amount of propaganda in some of these books. When there is a picture of a child holding a book, it is ten-to-one that it will be opened on a portrait of Lenin or Stalin, and if any interior is shown most likely one of the two pictures will be on a wall.

But the militant tone of some of these books is part of the process of setting before the young something to work for.

Peace in the future is the dominant theme of Soviet Russia's children's books. A single theme like this inevitably becomes monotonous. However, as far as I know, no other children's literature matches this challenge which rings through Soviet children's books.

Since we recently discussed positions taken by draft-age pacifists, as a way of reminding ourselves that the "peace on earth, good will to men" credo hasn't disappeared, we may note in passing that not only pacifists, but all who earnestly hope for world peace, will be glad to see Claire Bishop's evidence that the Russians endow their children's books with gentleness and sensitivity. (A stock argument against the use of pacifist methods in relation to Russia is that the Russians are too "barbarous" for response to kindness and good will.)

MANAS for Jan. 20 contains (page seven) a statement for which we have discovered what seems impressive support. The MANAS writer, after discussing educational traditions, remarks how easy it is to "become persuaded that the only Eternal Verities worth fighting for are those which declare for a temper of mind, a spirit of impartial inquiry. The most ancient truth, then, and the most honorable one, is the truth which tells us that tomorrow we may see more clearly."

This, in a sense, is the position of agnosticism as applied to educational theory. There is also the "gnostic" argument, which calls attention to the fact that there is such a thing as accumulated wisdom—a body of wisdom, if we like which has existed since the earliest antiquity, and which merits our attention and study. Gandhi has written appealingly for a combination of the cautious and fair-minded spirit of the agnostic with recognition of moral truths as *facts* in human history and experience:

I claim to have no infallible guidance or inspiration. So far as my experience goes, the claim to infallibility on the part of a human being would be untenable, seeing that inspiration too can come only to one who is free from the action of pairs of opposites, and it will be difficult to judge on a given occasion whether the claim to freedom from pairs of opposites is justified. The claim to infallibility would thus always be a most dangerous claim to make. This, however, does not leave us without any guidance whatsoever. *The sum-total of the experience of the sages of the world is available to us and would be for all time to come.*

What we particularly like about this passage is its notation of the fact that philosophic *study* of the writings or teachings of the sages of the past need not lead to sectarianism. The "all-denying" skeptic is invariably much more dogmatic than a man like Gandhi, much more convinced of his own infallibility. Similarly, modern classicists like Robert Hutchins, though often accused of being intellectual partisans, are actually more concerned with the asking of important questions than with attempts to answer them with finality. The man who insists that Plato has no message for us today

is the dogmatist, not the one who tries to learn something of philosophy from Plato.

In the 1953 edition of *Discovery* (a Pocket Book devoted to the publication of essays, stories, and poems not previously published), we encountered something which, though short and unpretentious, strikes us as a classic on the subject of "sex education." The contributor is Murial Rukeyser, whose delicacy of touch is most notable in her poetry. She concludes a short episodic treatment entitled "A Pane of Glass" with the following conversation between herself and her five-year-old son:

That next morning, though, my little boy was putting on his socks. Our timing was good, and he was going to be able to play before school. He suddenly began asking.

"Mother," he said, "what are babies before they're babies?"

"Well," I said, "they grow to be babies. All the time before, they are growing to be babies out of something like a seed. Then they're ready to be born and be babies. Embryos, they call them."

"Something like a seed?"

"Yes," I said.

"Inside their mothers?"

"Yes."

Let him know this well, I thought. Let them all know it well.

"How do they get inside their mothers?" the little boy asked.

"Well," I said. "The father gives life to the seed, life is planted, it's something like planting. The man gives it to the woman."

"But how does the man get inside the woman?"

"All right," I said. "What does a man have to get inside a woman with?"

"Love," he said.

Finally, we submit another quotation in continuation of the educational criticism supplied

by Nathaniel Cantor in *The Teaching-Learning Process*, reviewed here last week. This passage, from Trigant Burrow's *Science and Man's Behavior* (1953) affords hints as to why the egocentric predicament may not be the natural birthright of children, but rather a dubious heritage from elders and teachers:

Our studies brought home to us the fact that the commonly accepted sense of right governing our human relations is fundamentally so defective as to impair its validity throughout the entire field of man's behavior. They further made evident that this artificial sense of right and wrong is coeval in man with a false sense of identity—with a socially conditioned image of the self. This false principle of the self is the social entity.

With the word "right" as it is applied by the parent in regard to the child's behavior, the child does not receive a signal or symbol of any objectively stable circumstance or situation or law. What conveys itself is the emotional response of the parents, the social *affect* attached to this symbol. The child senses the authoritarian mood of the parent and, like the parent, becomes the possessor of an absolute, authoritarian mood. He, in turn, will henceforth legislate as to the meaning of "right." Were the child employing logic, his reasoning would run something like this: "Says my Mother, 'I am right.' Well, if this 'I' is always right since I also am an 'I', I am right too."

FRONTIERS

On Getting to Heaven

SOMEWHERE during or a little after the Reformation, the idea of getting to Heaven began to imply that salvation might be a "group" or perhaps a "collectivist" affair. Search as we will the scriptures and relics of ancient religion, we can find little evidence of an expectation on the part of a group of people that they would all be swept up to the bosom of divinity simply by virtue of "belonging" to the group. There might be different versions of salvation, but in each case the individual was the potentially salvable unit, not the group.

But, starting with the Protestant notion that "true belief" is the crucial factor in getting to Heaven, and with the growing consciousness of sectarian differences, men began to think of themselves as gaining salvation by association. If one had the good fortune to belong to the fraternity of "saints," as the Pilgrim Fathers modestly identified themselves, salvation was at least a likely possibility for him, provided he conformed to the customs of the group.

The emergence of numerous competing sects doubtless caused a similar sentiment among Catholics, as among all those religious groups which assert definite *systems* of salvation, each with the distinctive claim of being the one true system. The medieval Christian, having only the haziest notion of the non-Christian world, was less likely to think of his religion as being a "system," one among many. Since all men within his experience were Christians, his own salvation was much more of a personal affair, depending on himself rather than upon his alliance with the Church. It is only when systems compete with one another that mere membership takes on a mysterious power.

There are other reasons, of course, for the prestige of "systems" as opening the way to salvation, but it seems historically evident that the claims of a "system" or an "organization"

regarding the benefits of membership increase in direct proportion to its attempts to exercise practical control over human affairs in this world. One suspects, also, that the fanatical bitterness typical of religious wars is due to the fact that the contestants hope through victory on the battlefield to show that theirs is indeed the one true system, and thus gain further assurance of appropriate reservations in Paradise.

The transfer, in modern times, of salvation by system to the area of political life hardly needs pointing out. Actually, the attainment of collective benefits through the choice of the "right" or "best" political system makes a lot more sense than collectivist entry into Heaven, since social morality depends quite obviously on doing things together, and therefore involves some sort of system or type of social organization, whereas getting to Heaven can at least be conceived of as an individual affair. To hope to ride a doctrinal omnibus to the Pearly Gates is at best an unimaginative sort of aspiration, even if natural enough to those who understand patriotism to be the same thing as marching off to war, or those who, when "music" is mentioned, automatically think of the radio. (This is not an expression of contempt for radio itself, nor even for war, but rather an effort to distinguish between things which lose by being standardized, and other things which do not even exist without standardization, since they are of the nature of supplying or depending upon standards.)

There is another comparison to be drawn between collectivist religion and collectivist politics. Collectivist religion—the sort of religion which makes membership practically all-important—seldom offers any pretense of bettering man's lot in *this* world. Its promises have to do with getting into Heaven—or even getting one you love into Heaven (through a special technology of prayer repeated by one who occupies the proper place in the System). Collectivist politics, on the other hand, starts out with an avowed interest in human welfare, here

and now. It speaks with respect of the Brotherhood of Man and dreams of a classless, Stateless Utopia where everyone will have what he needs. Heaven is brought down to earth. The *time* of salvation is not very much changed—it is still in the future—but the place is very much changed, also the source of Power. The System is no longer designed by God, but is said to express a Law of Nature, and this law is to be made to operate successfully by a small but disciplined group of individuals known as the Party.

The fact is, however, that after the System comes to power, observant men begin to note the similarities between the way it works and the operation of older systems which promised salvation in the next world. Eventually the differences between the two, which at first seemed tremendously important, are overshadowed by these practical similarities. At the outset, the benefits of the political system of salvation may seem doubly attractive to the man who has worn out his faith in another world. But when the claims of the Collectivist System of salvation on earth lose their plausibility through bad performance, it begins to seem as though there is no use in struggling at all. It is then that some men develop an interest in anarchist doctrines, that others formulate a bleak stoical faith such as Existentialism, while still others discover hitherto unrecognized virtues in the *status quo*. Gradually, the tensions which have periodically produced revolutions and waves of reform give way to "adjustments" that erase the inner schisms in society, which itself begins to assume the appearance of bland uniformity.

What has actually happened, at a juncture of this sort, is the dying out of any sort of transcendental vision—the kind of vision which caused Archimedes to exclaim, "Give me whereon to stand, and I will move the world." It is this which is gone from the modern world—the idea of a place whereon to stand. Plato proposed that the philosopher who left the cave, who lived in the sunlight for a while and then returned, brought

back with him a place on which to stand, so that he could move the world to better things. Then, all too soon, the theologians substituted the word of God for the vision of the philosopher. It was only after centuries that men realized that their religion was not being used to change or move the world, but to keep it the way it was. So they began looking about for other places to stand. But because of the conditioning of religion, the tendency grew to look for places in *systems*. Several were found and put into practice, with varying success, although a fanatical belief in salvation by system always threatened to replace the vision whenever it grew weak.

There was progress, of course. But after the progress lost its novelty there finally emerged a sickly suspicion that all the "places whereon to stand" were now used up. Today, quite literally, we can't imagine any more Systems—at least, none in which we can place our faith. If we could manage a new adaptation of the Plato's story of the cave, we might be able to develop a new inspiration. We might stake out some high place of vision from which we could try to move the world forward. But when you consider what has happened—how from the Platonic idea of the philosopher we turned to Christian Revelation, and from Christian Revelation we turned to this-world Revolutions, and thence to Collectivist Systems—it becomes apparent that familiar wells of inspiration have dried up. We might define Plato's doctrine as faith in philosopher-man; the Christian scheme as faith in God and not in man; the eighteenth-century revolutionary credo as the Deist faith in man-as-scientist-and-rationalist; and the nineteenth- and twentieth-century scheme of Collectivist Society as faith in a rigid social system and not in individual man. Now all these faiths have been more or less exhausted. Even the liberal democratic version of the Platonic myth is failing rapidly, wounded by its growing fear of the aggressive energies of those who still have faith in salvation by a Political System. For these disillusionments do not come at the same time for all the world, so that those who still think they

have a place whereon to stand are able to rally forces which more sophisticated cultures can duplicate only by the most strenuous and self-betraying methods.

It is no wonder that Original Sin is being rediscovered with new fervor by theologians; that artists and writers are developing special sympathies for the popular arts of mass entertainment; that, in short, a vast and complicated process of rationalization of the *status quo* is under way. *What else is there to do?* Confronted with the drab reality of a world which can believe in no Heaven, no Promised Land, here or hereafter, the great majority are getting set for a long cycle of Byzantine quiet—or would be, if the atom bomb would let them.

Against almost all our principles, we are obliged to confess that the ominous threat of atomic weapons—man-made devices which have developed into such monstrously inhuman forces that they could easily operate in this century as the Black Plague affected Europe hundreds of years ago—may prevent a lapse into a new Dark Age of sluggish despair. These weapons are, perhaps, merely an overt witness to the failure of the world to find a new fulcrum-point of moral idealism. These are the fruits of our faith in System instead of in man.

Yet the general loss of faith is not without its promise. Men seldom give up their efforts in one direction until the folly of continuing is unmistakably plain. And Fear, we may note, is celebrated for its tenacious struggle almost to the bitter end. The Nazis did not give up until literally the last minute. If we fear, we cannot look ahead, remaining unaware that profound changes and heartening discoveries may be closer than we think. While the champions of dying faiths and failing Systems grow stentorian in their effort to hide their own anxieties, the work of the Resistance of Fear goes on in an "underground" of growing connections and communications. Unlike Resistance movements of the past, its workers

recognize no human enemies, but only old delusions born of absolutist systems of Salvation.

Meanwhile, we may find comfort in the fact that those explorers who sail full circle and arrive back at familiar shores have no choice but to seek other seas. A tired and disillusioned partisan is still a man, and very close, perhaps, to becoming a non-partisan man. This we have to remember, that in a world hag-ridden by the partisans of Systems, non-partisan men will sooner or later raise their heads.