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POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DELUSIONS

WE have two texts on which to found this discussion. One is from a recent novel, *The Tall Man*, by A. M. Harris (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, and Pocket Book), a story of the Korean war. The other is made up of quotations from "The Rigged Society" in the Winter 1960 issue of *Dissent*, consisting of comment on the recent TV quiz show scandals. These texts bring into focus the questions to be investigated.

The scene of *The Tall Man* is behind the Communist lines, the time, 1953. The Tall Man is an Australian soldier engaged on an espionage mission, contacting Korean agents who supply information useful to the United Nations forces. At this point in the story the tall man has a Chinese companion who has joined the Allies. Both are lying hidden beside a river, when they hear the voices of Communist troops:

> They peered cautiously through the brush and saw two men laughing and splashing in the shallows of the river like carefree children. The tall man, watching their antics, remembered suddenly that it was not very long ago that Hsiung, the man lying prone at his side, had been one of them, had lived and fought with them, and no doubt had laughed and joked as these were doing in the universal tom-foolery of the soldier off duty. He glanced covertly at the Chinese agent, and his mind recoiled at the naked hatred in the tight profile and slitted eyes beside him. He knew well enough that Hsiung had reason to hate the Communists, but not this poor pair of goats, who in all probability had never heard of his little village, and certainly didn't know his name or that his family had been scattered and robbed of their few miserable acres of farm land.
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> What is it, he wondered, that makes father hate son, brother hate brother, friend hate friend? When they speak the same language and worship the same gods and play the same games, who sets them at each other's throats with such ferocity? Could it happen in Australia?

A little later, the same thought comes again:

> Ten or fifteen Chinese soldiers, slopping around in the bedraggled wet, were filling in an old bomb-crater in the road. The agents lay prostrate and observed them in the diluted darkness.
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> As they watched, a thin figure moved along the road towards the soldiers. He stopped and spoke, telling them to rest. The men ceased their labours and huddled into a tight knot; one coughed throatily, another softly stomped his feet and crooned a lullaby. The tall man listened to the lullaby, a gentle song of home, of wheat, and of sunshine, and he clenched his fist to wonder at this man and at himself. They both wanted peace, and both desired the love and warmth that awaited them at home; but one lay in mud and filth wondering and another laboured there homesick and miserable. They were pledged to kill each other because each believed that his cause was legitimate and justifiable, or at least because his mind had been fashioned to believe it was so. . . .

There are several ways to look at these paragraphs. (We defer quoting from *Dissent* until later.) Their initial impact is in the revelation of the common plight of men who fight and kill each other in war. As persons, they have nothing against their enemies. As men, they are innocent—relatively innocent, at least—of the causes of the war. Often they do not even understand very well what the war is about. Yet they believe they must fight, and fight to kill; their minds, as Mr. Harris suggests, have been "fashioned" to believe that they must, and that the fighting is right.

What are they fighting for? For justice, freedom, hearth and home.

For life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. For the good of man, for honor and righteousness. There has not been an important war since the middle of the nineteenth century which was fought for any other reason. This is what the contestants all have said, and many of them believed it to be true.

Now it is possible to work up a fine radical fury over these claims and to charge the managers of modern societies with hypocrisy, Machiavellian craft, brain-washing, and the whole catalogue of infamies attributed to those who justify the ways of States to

man. But if we do this, we are in something of a dilemma, needing to propose an alternative to the ways of States. What alternative is there, except the ideal conception of an anarchist and pacifist community made up of "changed" individuals who will not allow organizational or "national" interests to dictate their behavior?

We do not decry this alternative; we say only that it is chosen by very few, and even if those few were indeed the best among us, the world will still go its own way, and make things quite difficult for the anarcho-pacifists—even, perhaps, to the point of spoiling their project and putting them all in jail. This is not an argument against the project, but a giving of notice that the discussion needs to be carried further.

So, if we are going to contemplate the existence of the State, it is necessary to give attention to the enormous differences which sometimes exist between the reasons of State and the reasons of men.

We say that these differences exist *some*times; obviously, if they existed all the time, men would not form or tolerate States. The State exists for the good of man. And for the American people, it is supposed to serve—safeguard and assure—man's life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. And if, as Americans say, all men in the world deserve and should have similar service from the State, then this feature of the State, at least, should be a universal requirement.

But the acts of the State take life, abridge liberty, and destroy happiness. That is what these soldiers in Korea were doing while executing the commands of the State.

So we have a dilemma of universal proportion. Wherever there are States, today, their chief concern is for their power to take more life, abridge more liberty, and destroy more happiness, than their competitors. States talk about other things and do other things, but these activities are now their chief concern. And the main excuse for these activities is that they are necessary in order, *eventually,* to preserve life, secure liberty, and establish happiness for future generations of mankind.

The great majority of men believe what they are told by the States. At any rate they *obey* their States, which is the objective form of belief among a supposedly self-governed people. Some may do what they are told from fear—not so much fear of what will happen to them if they defy the State, as fear of what would happen if there were no State at all. The State, in short, pursues its ends through a combination of appeals: appeals to duty, to necessity, to fear, and by picturing the condition of ultimate disorder that will result if its commands are not obeyed. And it may be admitted without too much argument that the managers and administrators of States believe in what they are doing. You find cynics and hypocrites everywhere; they are not just in high places, and the problem of the State is not erased by getting rid of the irresponsible men in power. Responsible men in power would have the same problems and would be confronted by the same necessities.

There is, however, a fundamental wrong, a basic deceit, in this situation. The managers of States say almost nothing about the dreadful dilemma which haunts all decent human beings—which haunted the Tall Man as he lay in the bushes watching the Chinese soldiers it was his duty to kill.

Modern political philosophers give little attention to this dilemma and the practical managers of modern States avoid it as though it were Original Sin. They act as though it did not exist at all.

The reason for this neglect of the tremendous moral contradiction in modern statecraft is plain enough: You cannot marshal the total energies of a nation for total war and at the same time encourage or permit the people to indulge in soul-searching reflections concerning the moral implications of their obedience to the State; and reflections concerning the practical implications of their obedience to the State are also taboo.

Even if they should decide, finally, that it is both practical and right to obey the State, the time spent in brooding on the question, and the indecision it would involve, would be fatal to the "war effort." People filled with ambivalence are in no condition to fight a victorious war.

It is at this point that political philosophy is severed from its roots in a philosophy of the good of man and becomes a system of thought which takes its assumptions from propositions about the good of the State. For now the State must discourage precisely what it was brought into being to defend: free and independent thinking by individuals. It becomes a principle of State welfare to hide, minimize, and suppress the realities of the situation of the human individual in the modern world. The philosophy of man becomes the philosophy of herds, packs, and armaments.

A new apparatus of arguments develops. What is good for herds, packs, and armaments is now said to be the good of man. What can be won in a war is said to be precious to human beings. You don't need old-fashioned corruption for this sort of change in the argument to take place. Not wicked men, but those whom we regard as good men repeat the argument. They tell you that our Way of Life depends upon the things that a war, or readiness for war, will secure. They insist that all the Higher Things are also connected with war and preparation for war. But they don't say very much about what they mean by the Higher Things.

We spoke of cynics as though they were undesirable citizens. Today, we could use to advantage one or two good cynics. It was Antisthenes, the founder of the Cynic School, who said: "If a boy is destined to live with the Gods, teach him philosophy; if with men, rhetoric."

Manifestly, we must begin all over again in our thinking as human beings. We have no excuse at all for allowing "political philosophy" of this sort to dominate our lives. The one thing that you can say about politics, today, is that it is shaped in abysmal ignorance of its own amorality, of its increasing indifference to the natural interests of free human beings. It is a nightmare system which takes its first principles from men with guns and men with bombs, men who know little about anything except the use and requirements of guns and bombs.

There need be no denial that enormous political problems exist. But it must be affirmed as at least possible that these problems have been created, in part, by the development of political ideas and systems autonomously, as though they had no need of direct relation to the good of man. And it must be insisted that a political philosophy which results in States which can survive only by concealing the moral dilemmas of modern man is an evil political philosophy that must eventually destroy itself and human beings with it.

The good of man is not a political question. It is a philosophical question first, and its answer can never be dictated by political necessity. Politics is concerned with the practical compromises to which men may decide to submit, after they have defined as well as they are able, the good of man.

But in order to compromise, you *have to have something to compromise.* The ultimate political question, for human beings, is the nature and degree of this compromise. Today, politics, for even so-called "free" peoples, is in danger of becoming an absolute system of thought. The good of man has been compromised almost out of existence. Meanwhile, politics is not even thought of as compromise. People talk about ideal political systems as though they could involve or provide the highest good. The only thing that politics can do in relation to the highest good is to get out of its way—or destroy it.

The most important truth to be known about politics is that it involves men in dilemmas and compromises. There are other truths about politics, but this is the most important one. Political education which neglects this truth is a pack of lies. This truth has been known to the Western world since the time of Socrates. It is stated in another way by a modern political thinker, R.H.S. Crossman, in his book, *Plato Today.* Discussing the role of Socrates in the Athenian community, he said that people like Socrates—

> are so uncompromising that they are quite unpractical; so simple that they make wise men look fools. Oblivious of the disastrous results of their idealism, they demand truth even where it may ruin a class or a city or a nation: and if their wickedness is pointed out to them, they merely reply, "where truth is concerned, compromise is impossible." All that is good in our Western culture has sprung from this spirit, whether it

> is found in scientists, or priests, or politicians, or quite ordinary men and women who have refused to prefer politic falsehoods to the simple truth. In the short term, they often do great harm, but in the end their example is the only force which can break the dictatorship of force and greed.

It is time to revive this view of the scope and limitations of the political activity of men, and to recognize the folly of hoping for any real solution for the evils of our time from politics. It is not in the nature of politics to give us this help.

Our second text begins with an extract from Murray Hausknecht on "The Rigged Society." (*Dissent*, Winter, 1960.) Rigging, this writer maintains, is of the essence of our acquisitive society, and Charles Van Doren could hardly avoid the total logic of the system. To illustrate this claim, the writer takes for illustration the automobile industry. Planned production includes planned obsolescence. For the plans to work out, the product must be replaced after a certain interval. Such plans, says Mr. Hausknecht, require the rigging of both the product and the market. He develops this contention:

> The rigging of a product, be it car or quiz show, is facilitated by the very nature of the market or audience to be reached. Effective control over the exploitation and manipulation of persons would require the existence of some organized community, in the broadest sense of the term. But a mass market or audience is by definition merely an aggregate of isolated individuals unrelated in any meaningful way. Such an audience cannot make the formal morality of the society a morality which effectively controls behavior. This leaves the way open for the counter-norm, the rigging principle, to become, in practice, the dominant morality. Indeed, the appearance of this norm is inevitable, since rigging is an important means of controlling the risks inherent in a "free market." In other words, given the structure of American business and society there was not only no reason why the quiz shows should not be rigged, there were good "sound" reasons deeply rooted in the social structure why they should be. . . .
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> While the exposure of the riggers and the rigged was inevitable, it has an important unintended consequence. One way of maintaining a mass audience is to breed the conditions which make it impossible for individuals to transcend their isolation. It is impossible to break through one's isolation from others when one is suspicious and distrustful of them. For the mass audience the quiz show scandal confirms the necessity for cynicism.
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> But the greater the isolation the more difficult it is to maintain a sense of one's identity, and therefore the mass audience is an anxious audience. Yet this anxiety is a necessity for successful mass distribution, since the fundamental attraction of the rigged product is that it will help prop up the wavering ego structure. Thus exposure and investigation of rigging can be regarded, paradoxically, as the necessary last act for the rigged products of television.

Jay Bentham and Bernard Rosenberg, two other contributors to "The Rigged Society," conclude their comment:

> The continuous public exposure of our heroes may well mean that sin has become more tolerable not only in private but in public life. To the extent that we identify with such figures we are likely to make fewer demands upon ourselves—and upon each other.
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> But it would be a mistake to suppose that the process we have described here is a self-contained one, a sort of equilibrium between deceit and revelation which might, to parody Marx, be described as Fix-Confession-Fix. On the face of things, they may seem true; but we suggest that each revelation of TV deceit, each announcement of corruption in government, each discovery that municipal inspectors connive in filching New York's poor of their proper weight of meat, must lead to a deeper social malaise, a profounder sense of *je m'en fiche*, a more crippling kind of cynicism. It is not only that corruption is warp and woof of our society: that is an old story. But the kind of corruption we have lately been witnessing testifies to something even more damning about our society: that an increasingly large number of people are doomed to "work" which they know to be rotten, wasteful, needless, soul-destroying. What we have been seeing in the past few months is but a symptom of this terrible fact. It makes people sick to have to live in a sick society and cry health!

One interesting thing about these comments on the TV scandals is that they are by socialist critics, yet what they say is socio-moral rather than political-economic in content. While the writers would no doubt argue that the "Capitalist" form of society is under indictment, here, they are primarily concerned with the multiplying psychological defects of mass

culture. It is perhaps possible that these devastating trends could be avoided in a socialist society, but there is no reason to assume that a change in the proprietorship of the instruments of production would itself institute the necessary transformations of human attitude. On the contrary, it seems quite likely that socialist managers of society would soon develop reasons of their own for the planned manipulation of supply and demand. Recent history suggests that there is no *inherent* power in the socialist political economy to turn the people living under this regime into better men and women.

But the point that is important to make, here, is that the moralistic claims in behalf of private ownership and free enterprise are developed from ideas about property and political relationships which pay absolutely no attention to the moral attitudes which have appeared, and now prevail, in the capitalist society of the United States.

According to free-enterprise *theory*, people are supposed to prosper in all ways under the beneficent conditions of the private ownership of property. Their material welfare, we say, is served by the dynamic impetus of individual "ambition," spurred by the goad of competition, while the cultural and spiritual aspects of their lives are given free scope by the absence of a controlling ideology watchfully administered by the State.

This is the doctrine. The trouble is that while the doctrine has the ring of truth in the abstract, the claims it makes constitute heavy-handed propaganda for a value system that works continuously *against* a life based upon genuine cultural and spiritual values. Further, the free enterprise system, in the form given it by modern technology, has developed so many insatiable requirements and compulsive behavior patterns that its full and progressive function leaves the members of our society little time and less emotional energy for the pursuit of happiness, in the philosophical meaning of the term.

To put the matter in another way, by growing into a "total" philosophy, the doctrine of Free Enterprise has lost the partial or limited truth it once possessed, and become a source of mutilating self-deception to its most ardent believers.

Here, again, as in politics, the remedy is plain. We need to start all over again in our thinking about the good of man. We cannot take our premises concerning the good of man from the functional requirements of any economic system, whether socialist or capitalist. We cannot derive any of the transcendent values in human life from the techniques of feeding, clothing and housing our bodies. That we have fallen into the habit of trying to do so, and into the habit of supposing that the big issue in human life is whether capitalist or socialist techniques are to be used for this purpose, amounts to a bankruptcy of thought.

What is called for is a rediscovery of man, his nature, and his authentic needs, as *man*—a rediscovery comparable to, but going further than, the rediscovery of man accomplished by the great Renaissance thinkers. How else can we gain a foundation in intellectual and moral conviction for the kind of life we seek?

Letter from **ENGLAND**

LONDON.—Coming in from my garden yesterday I found a TV play for children in full swing and sat down to see what manner of fare the BBC deems suitable for young and impressionable minds. During the period of my viewing the whole action was occupied by sadistic violence. Actors fell dead, shot down, struggling contestants were catapulted to deep cellars through cunningly operated trapdoors; fist fights, more sickening in realism than the film of a professional prizefight and, as a final consummation, death and maiming, completed a play that would have seemed somewhat overdone by an adult sadist in search of the satisfaction of a morbid psychopathological appetite.

The BBC has put out some of the best educational TV for children to be found anywhere. For example, some time ago I made a play of the origin of the microscope, discovered by Leeuwenhoek, which ran for an hour and was made the subject of a short series for the schools by Holland. Good material, with a cultural value, continues to be broadcast by the BBC for children. But whatever cultural good such propaganda for things worth while may do may well be deemed to be negatived by the sort of disgusting—there is no other word, save, perhaps, "criminal"—exhibitions of violence and crime as the particular display which moved me to write this letter.

Some time ago Dr. F. Wertham, of New York, with whom I have had a correspondence over a considerable period, and whose work for the Coloured folk of New York does him great honour, sent me a copy of his book, *The Circle of Guilt*, a well-aimed attack on the near-pornographic and sadistic type of magazine available to American children everywhere. I do not know what part that book had in the matter, but soon thereafter legislation was passed by the British Parliament to prohibit the importation of these magazines from the United States.

Now, it would seem, it is a matter of "Physician, heal thyself," for what I watched on the TV screen was as disgusting as anything from the United States. Sadist juvenile magazines, and a disgrace to the BBC. How foolish, surely, to broadcast, as the BBC does, religious programs, many, to my taste, somewhat on the mealy-mouthed side, while countering this presumable attempt to propagate decent rules of conduct in the young, by poisoning malleable minds with sadistic garbage.

Here, in fairness, I will admit that I have heard it argued that all children are basically cruel, and that the visual satisfaction of this characteristic provides an outlet and is completely harmless. Needless to say, I don't subscribe to that theory. I will go further, and say that the alarming increase of crimes of violence among young people in England, a phenomenon that is worrying Mr. Butler, the Home Secretary, and all socially-conscious people, is stimulated, and may even have its origin in this sort of debasement of decent instinctual reactions. The spectacle of small children sitting open-mouthed, watching this all-too-common type of broadcast, provokes anger against those who pander to that element of cruelty which is latent in all mankind, and stimulates it in the form of entertainment.

This country is somewhat tardily concerning itself with this social problem. Clubs are being set up aiming to take the Teddyboys off the streets and from the low-type coffee bars and cafés. But crimes of violence among our teenagers, together with amateur prostitution among young girls, are social evils now, somewhat belatedly, being dragged out into the light of day.

It is only fair to put on record that the BBC has stimulated interest in this problem recently, a circumstance that makes it all the more regrettable that these efforts towards social improvement among the adolescent and young, are

compromised by the prevalence of sadism in its programmes.

I have emphasized this degenerate tendency in broadcasts for children. It exists, also, of course, in material intended for adults. Sometimes, it would seem the brutal blow, the sudden discharge of firearms, is a sort of artistic *sine qua non.*

If this letter sounds somewhat censorious, I am obliged to ask how one could write of the subject without angry reaction against those who distill this, the particular poison of our time, into the malleable and pliant minds of the young.

ENGLISH CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
THE NOVEL, AND EDUCATION

ORVILLE PRESCOTT, in the New York *Times* for March 14, isolates some interesting paragraphs from J. B. Priestley's recently published *Literature and Western Man.* During labors which have produced a total of fifty-one plays and novels, Mr. Priestley has so often been able to entertain and provide philosophical provocation at the same time, that anyone interested in literature should especially appreciate portions of Mr. Prescott's summation. For one thing, it becomes plain that Mr. Priestley has never been willing to "over-simplify" in the construction of a play or a novel, and it may be for this reason that his ability to establish communication with an audience varies with subject-matter and other circumstances.

In the quotations selected by Prescott, we encountered one sentence which seems to illustrate Priestley's feeling that a mature writer will prostitute his art only if he deals with stylizations of goodness. "Genius and character," writes Priestley, are not the same thing, and it is only when we are young that we imagine them to be." On the other hand, Priestley has no use for writers who allow cynicism to spoil their view of human nature:

> What is essential is that the novelist, whatever else he does, should be able to show us people who by some means or other, through delighted fascination, repulsion, or mere conviction that in their own world they exist, catch and hold our imagination. If his characters fail to do this, then the novelist has failed.
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> Literature does not put life under a microscope, remaining outside it to observe and to record what it is doing. Literature thinks and feels and imagines its way into life, expressing it from the inside.
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> Obscurity can be wrestled with, if with meaning comes emotion: what is intolerable is verse that seems charged with nothing but a distaste for other people, one long slight sneer.

The *Nation* for Nov. 14, 1959, has one of the best answers to the question, "Why Read Novels?", that we have ever seen. The writer, Dan Jacobson, a South African now living in London, is himself a novelist, and in this article he is not so much trying to justify the existence of the novel as to indicate that a culture must justify *its* existence in order to obtain value from novels which stimulate a sense of wholeness about life:

> One of the first answers to the question, "Why read novels?" is that in an age of specialization the novel remains singularly un-special. So far from this being anything for critics or novelists to be ashamed of, it is one of the glories of the form.
>
> The novel really is knowledge: the recorded knowledge of the states of consciousness of different men at different times. For most of us, for most of the time, one kind of knowledge or way of knowing excludes every other; we know abstractly or we know intuitively, we know sensuously or we know mentally. But the novelist, ideally, knows simultaneously what we know only in alternation, and within any single work he is able to deploy one kind of knowledge against another, to imply one when he is writing about others, to remind us of the others when we would prefer to read only about one. In his creation of character, the novelist is continually shifting, moving, comparing, remembering, uniting his knowledge. The characters in a novel are the novelist's individual foci of consciousness; they, ultimately, are what the novelist knows, and the greater the novelist the more people he will be able to create and the more he will know about each one of them.
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> Already, here, we can see why the novel is so supremely important in this "age of specialization," when we feel the multiplication of abstract "knowledge" of all kinds to be, not liberating, but frightening and discouraging; when every publisher's crammed list and every learned journal is an invitation to us to give up the struggle for consciousness, with the feeling "It's too much, it's beyond me." The novelist—to put it very simply—can remind us again and again that what is important for us to know, outside our specialties, is not too much, is not beyond us. The novelist cannot be expected to know about the latest developments in physics or medicine, say, but he can be expected to know, as he has known in the past, what it is to *be* a physicist or a doctor. The novelist knows, or should know, what it is to be practically anybody: this is why he can so much help restore to us that sense of community which nowadays is broken not only by racial and ideological strife, but also seems to be

> shattered anew by every advance that is made in the accumulation of knowledge about the physical world.

Mr. Jacobson's second paragraph begins with a definition which may puzzle some readers, but if what is unique in the novel is "knowledge of the states of consciousness of different men at different times," the question naturally arises: Consciousness in relation to what? Implicit in Mr. Jacobson's idea is the assumption that consciousness is itself a primary reality, and not simply a by-product of the interaction between an organism and its surrounding environment. Jacobson's view may not be completely the "spiritual interpretation of history," but it certainly is not the "physicalist" interpretation.

Ours is a time of "realistic fiction," but realistic fiction often lacks the very qualities which Mr. Jacobson finds most valuable in the novel. In the same issue of the *Nation,* George P. Elliott points out that the realistic novel demands a realistic interrelationship between the individual and his environment. Some modern fiction suffers mortally from a failure in this. Mr. Elliott illustrates:

> An example of what happens when a writer takes his characters out of a social structure almost altogether and yet persists in treating them quite realistically, may be seen in Jack Kerouac's fictions. They are painfully repetitious and formless; this shortcoming is not at all because Kerouac lacks talent, for any one episode may read like a part of something very good; it derives, at least in part, from his using a technique one of whose essential qualities he contemns.

But, as Mr. Elliott points out, a great, imaginative character-novel can nevertheless supply an over-arching perception of the *psychology* of the social context in which the characters live, as is the case with Dostoevski.

Similarly, Mr. Jacobson affirms that a great novel is "a great act of consciousness." A true novel, in the classic and best sense, depersonalizes the connection between the author and the characters—that is, they are not means to the author's ends but ends in themselves, who, in a special sense, choose their own destiny. Mr. Jacobson continues:

> Plot is usually thought of as the great moral agent within a novel, what happens to a character being the judgment that is passed upon him. This is true enough, as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough; because in point of fact, as we have seen with Kuragin, nothing at all need "happen" to a character in any obvious, overt sense, and yet he can be placed for us within a moral scheme. If we are to talk of reward and punishment, we have to say that the novelist does not (or should not) punish his characters; they punish themselves, being what they are: he does not reward his characters, they reward themselves, being what they are. The novelist *knows* them, better than they know themselves or we know ourselves; he knows them fully, he illumines them to our inward view.

We are reminded here that much of contemporary writing reflects what Viktor Frankl calls "a tendency towards devaluation" of the human potential. "Inherent human freedom," Dr. Frankl has said, "obtains in spite of all constraints, the freedom of the mind in spite of nature, has been overlooked. Yet it is this freedom that truly constitutes the essence of man." It is for this reason, perhaps, that Mr. Jacobson concludes his defense of the novel by saying:

> I cannot help feeling that when people prophesy the demise of the novel they are looking forward to the demise of more than a single art form; they are half-hoping that the sort of power which is the novelist's will go out of existence. They no longer believe (or want to believe) that it is possible to try to know the human truth of every situation in which people find themselves; they resent the novelist's claim that we can be known, and shown, in our weakness and strength, through all the changing forms of our changing societies. If it is true that the novel is dying, then so too is modern man's ambition to know the truth about himself. If the novel lives it will be because that ambition lives still.

COMMENTARY
THE NEW HUMANISM

THE fact that two MANAS contributors both read Dan Jacobson's and George P. Elliott's contributions to the *Nation* for last Nov. 14 and both decided to quote them, selecting much the same passages, seemed a better reason for using the quotations a second time than for omitting them. (These *Nation* writers are discussed in this week's Review, and also received attention in MANAS for Dec. 9, 1959.)

The quotations concern the value and importance of the novel. The novel, especially the contemporary novel, is about individuals. We have had novels, of course, which neglected the individual. There was a time after the first world war when individuals seemed to have existence in serious fiction only as the symbols of the destruction of individuality. They were not men and women, but moving parts in a pageant of despair. Then came the social novels, in which individuals were important only as the protagonists of "movements" and revolt.

In the present, however, the individual has regained his central importance in the telling of stories. But now, unlike mere romances, and unlike the chronicles of a violent and assertive "individualism," the individual is in quest of a sense of meaning for his life—or, as some have put it, in search of identity. This is the unmistakable theme of many books.

The hunger to know oneself is of course nothing new. Religion and philosophy, when they are serious, are concerned with very little else. But that this longing for self-knowledge should become so pervasive among the thoughtful writers of the time as to emerge as a prevailing *type* of motivation, is both new and notable.

The great drive of the nineteenth century was to know about the world. In fact, this drive has been gathering strength for three hundred years, ever since the rebirth of the spirit of science in the seventeenth century. But in the twentieth century—perhaps we can say by the middle of the twentieth century—men began to realize that they knew too much about the world and too little about themselves.

Of course, a man cannot *really* know too much about anything. You cannot have "too much" knowledge, "too much" truth, but there can be an excess of information, a preoccupation with processes and manipulations to the neglect of actual meaning. It is plain that what we "knew" was not knowledge of important matters, so not knowledge at all, but only a collection of skills affecting the form and the external activity of our lives, but never touching the quality of life itself—except, perhaps, to thrust it aside as unimportant.

Men are still arguing about this, of course. Some say that everything we have done was necessary and good; that now, having made the forces of nature the slaves of human desires, we have only to order our desires.

They say this as though there were nothing to it—as though we have known all along how to live as wise and free human beings, and now we can just begin to do what we have always intended.

The people who make this argument usually turn out to be the same people who say that the only thing which prevents universal peace and harmony is the aggressiveness of the Russian Communists (and, of course, the Chinese Communists).

This is the dehumanizing credo of the mechanists and the real-politickers—the men who would make an end of Man, as the only way they can see to save Him.

Fortunately, the poets, the writers, the novelists, and a lot of ordinary people who simply know better are making themselves heard. By such means, old epochs are slowly but surely denied nourishment, and new ones are brought to birth.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

INTUITION AND CREATIVITY

IN a paper presented (January, 1960) in connection with a project, "Studies of Creative Thinking in the Early Years," at the University of Minnesota, Dr. E. Paul Torrence, Director of the Bureau of Educational Research, has this to say:

> Of the many exciting areas of research open to us, it seemed to me that the most significant and most exciting research in the whole field of education for the next decade would be in the discovery of methods for identifying, developing, and using creative talents. It also has the additional advantage of being easily related to all subject-matter areas, all levels of education, all of the fields of specialization from counseling and guidance to school administration. It seemed important from the standpoint of personality development and mental hygiene, in vocational success, in scientific discovery, and in the survival of our civilization.

As reported in Time (Feb. 22), a $40,000 grant from the National Science Foundation has been awarded the University of California's Education Department to evolve methods of teaching basic science which would evoke "intuitive perception" in elementary school children. In formulating a program for this project, Robert Cartless, a physicist, set out to "isolate a small number of ideas that underline all natural phenomena," and to make these "intelligible to children by direct intuitive perception."

Clearly, there is a natural relationship between "creative thinking" and "intuitive perception." An article which appeared many years ago in *The Mathematics Teacher* broadens the base of this discussion. The writer, Laura Blank, a high school geometry teacher, said in 1929:

> Intuition means immediate apprehension or cognition, the faculty or power of such apprehension: knowledge obtained or the power of knowing without recourse to inference or reasoning; innate or instinctive knowledge; a quick or ready insight. Intuitive geometry means therefore that body of geometrical concepts, facts, truths, which one is capable of discovering and using without complex deduction or reasoning.
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> Teachers and students of mathematics, because of the recent and current emphasis upon intuitive geometry, regard it as distinctly modern, as an invention or discovery of the last two decades. However, on the contrary, the Greeks before Euclid have been found in many instances to have stated a theorem, constructed the appropriate figure and added merely the laconic and startling comment, "Behold!" In some cases mathematicians of later times have spent a lifetime upon such a theorem before a satisfactory demonstration was completed.

If we turn from the physical sciences to the arts it is easy to see why the Greeks, beginning with Pythagoras, considered that the same intuitive principles were involved in all phases of education. In a fascinating book, *Children Discover Music and Dance* (provided by a reader), Emma D. Sheehy shows that appreciation of music must come out of children rather than be put *into* them. Children do have natural musical ability, she discovered long ago, and after sixteen years of experiment with a new sort of teaching Prof. Sheehy blames the schools for stultifying "intuitive music" with too much formal instruction. She writes:

> What do we do about this ability, especially in our schools? We clamp down on it and try to teach our children "music." We give them a course of study that has been logically worked out—a course that is simple and harmless, but usually too anemic to hold children's interest. We are blind and deaf to the vigor and vitality of the music children have within themselves. Many a youngster is labeled an "out-of-tune" and is the despair of the conscientious teacher or parent. How about turning the tables, how would it be if we ourselves got in tune with the "out-of-tune"? We might well consider Ruskin's idea: the only way to help others is to first find out what they have been trying to do for themselves, and then proceed to help them do it better.
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> One of these "out-of-tunes" was five-year-old Mary. When she sang with other children, she never seemed to be able to stay with them. She had a sweet, lovely voice to which she consciously listened when she sang, and the thoughtful way she used it and her

feeling around for a pleasant effect in sound restrained us from urging her to sing on the same pitch as the rest of us. One day, while we were singing *Ach, du lieber Augustin*, Mary's voice suddenly came through clear and steady. She was singing a third higher than the group, and she was able to go through to the end. Her eyes shone with delight—she had hit the spot that satisfied her and gave her a thrill, and "the moment of passage from disturbance into harmony is that of intensest life."

Of course, Mary could easily sing on the same pitch as the others if she wished; her mother told us that she sang a great deal at home. It happened, however, that at the time she started to school she was interested in singing in a different way and—as children so often do—she had accidentally tumbled into a significant musical experience. She would wait until the song was started, then she would feel around with her voice until she found a comfortable place. If Mary had been placed in an "out-of-tune" group or been compelled by adult pressure to sing on the same pitch, not only she but the entire group would have lost something.

Our subscriber comments:

Reflecting on the experience of five-year-old Mary, I thought this was an extremely important revelation. More is involved than developing and refining the child's measurable accomplishments, which, however desirable, are really only a veneer without the mysterious inner enthusiasm. It seems to me that here is also justification for the one who rushes ahead to achieve something new or make a discovery all alone. It's not that the others will not experience pretty much the same things, and thrill to the same ideas, sooner or later. But much as they may benefit from these experiences, they cannot in this way experience the intensity spoken of by John Dewey. That is the unique reward of the one who strikes out on his own. The other children in the group were all able in varying degree to do what Mary did. But satisfying as this no doubt was, it was not the same as Mary's experience.

FRONTIERS
Justice to Zen

IT is quite clear from our correspondence that MANAS will not be permitted to let alone the subject of Zen Buddhism for very long. This is probably appropriate, since it is increasingly evident that Western thinkers have found in Zen the sense of something real, of something almost entirely lacking—or at least seldom explicit—in Western thought. Zen feeds a profound hunger of the Western mind. Whether it is mere coincidence that the articulation of this hunger by such men as Erich Fromm and A. H. Maslow and Carl Rogers—to mention only a few—should come at about the same time that so skilled an exponent as Daisetz Suzuki began to explore for Western readers the untraveled spaces of Buddhist psychological philosophy, or whether this conjunction of events is some kind of natural and necessary convergence in the evolution of man, we are obliged to leave undecided. What seems manifest is that the advent of Zen is likely to precipitate some rapid changes in Western philosophy and psychology, and possibly Western religion.

As for our correspondence, we have this letter:

> Editors: Your remarks about Zen in your article, "Definition of Crisis" (MANAS, Jan. 13) trouble me very much—as much as the Beatniks trouble me in their way.
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> Zen, as anyone knows from all that has been written about it, is not an intellectual concept, but a spiritual experience which, if genuine, does away with fear, and therefore insecurity, and therefore acquisitiveness. As an experience of the universal, it does away with all sense of alienation. If this isn't going to the roots of crisis, beginning at least with the individual, then I don't know what it is.
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> The experience of Zen is often the result of personal crisis; the "illumination" which follows is such as to make one laugh at the manifestations of that crisis. They are not unreal, for they are a part of the experience; but they take their proper place, they are seen for what they are. Zen is "seeing."
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> In his book, *The Phenomenon of Man,* Pierre de Chardin devotes his first chapter to this "seeing." The rest of the book is man's *becoming,* through "seeing."

This letter has the quality of a personal testament, and is of value for that reason. Further, it differs from the declaration, "I *know* that my Redeemer liveth," in that, while denying the intellectuality of Zen, it has a ground of rational appeal: the operation of Zen is described as an impersonal, natural process.

In reply, however, we are obliged to repeat what we have said before: the denial of an intellectual content in Zen Buddhism is an oversimplification and extremely misleading. One has only to turn to Mr. Suzuki's latest book (we are in the middle of it) to see that the actual values declared by Zen gain their meaning from a framework of Buddhist metaphysics. There are terms such as *atman, vijnana, nirvana, klesha, dharma, kalpas* scattered throughout the pages of Mr. Suzuki's section of *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (by Suzuki, Fromm, and De Martino: Harper, 1960, $4), and these terms or their meanings originate in Upanishadic and Buddhist metaphysics. Zen teachings are intended to illuminate this sea of metaphysics by enabling the aspirant to cure himself of mistaking the intellectual experience of concepts for the egoic experience of the reality behind the concepts. But without the antique metaphysics of Oriental religion, Zen would be nothing but a big undistributed intuition in a class with the Christian enthusiast's assertion that he is "saved."

One can agree that, for the seeker after ultimate truths, intellectual formulas easily become box canyons of thought. The iconoclastic form of Zen is obviously designed to shock the logic-chopping learned out of their intellectual complacency. What Westerners ought to realize, however, is that Zen occurs historically in a *gnostic* context. There is no question as to the validity of Buddhist philosophy and its transcendental implications. The question has to do only with the human capacity for self-

deception in efforts to discover the meaning of that philosophy. For the meaning is not so much of the "philosophy" as it is of the Self, which is the "object" of the philosophy, but the subject-object of the search.

Transplanted into the agnostic context of Western thought, Zen often suffers trivialization and gross misinterpretation by people who imagine that it is some kind of spiritual "trick." *They* don't need the philosophic background every serious Buddhist has gained from study and reflection. Was it a mistake of the Arhats to record all the texts? Were these earnest men preparing a great waste of time for their posterity? Should the *Vedas* have been burned, the *Upanishads* forgotten, the *Bhagavad-Gita* left in incomprehensible Sanskrit?

It is true enough that the truth is not in books. But somehow or other, it turns out to be necessary to read the books in order to understand what is meant by the truth that truth is not in books.

If we accept the Zen Buddhist account of the nature of knowledge, what then of the entire cycle of Western civilization? Was it all meaningless adventuring? We, at any rate, do not think so. We think that history has meaning, and that Western history represents another great "dip" or incarnation into the complexities of existence, which will produce, at least, another great harvest of matured understanding. The insights and gentle symmetries of Buddhism belong to a past cycle, and while no really "new" truths, perhaps, can be added to essential verity, Western thought, when it reaches a corresponding maturity, will be richer by precisely the meanings of the obstacles met, the crises endured, and the materials mastered, of the Western experience. But by then, we trust, there will be neither "East" nor "West," and neither Buddha nor Christ, but one common mankind and one common spiritual reality shared in by all.