VOLUME XII, NO. 42
OCTOBER 21, 1959

WHAT HAVE WE DONE?

IN the March 1945 issue of *Politics,* Dwight Macdonald reproduced a dialogue between an American war correspondent and an official of a Nazi death camp who had fallen into the hands of the Russians:

> *Q.* Did you kill the people in the camp? *A.* Yes.
>
> *Q.* Did you poison them with gas? *A.* Yes.
>
> *Q.* Did you bury them alive? *A.* It sometimes happened.
>
> *Q.* Did you personally help to kill people? *A.* Absolutely not. I was only paymaster in the camp.
>
> *Q.* What did you think of what was going on? *A.* It was bad at first, but we got used to it.
>
> *Q.* Do you know the Russians will hang you? *A.* (bursting into tears) Why should they? What have I done?

Macdonald comments: "What had he done indeed? Simply obeyed orders and kept his mouth shut. It was what he had *not* done that shocks our moral sensibilities. . . . Our paymaster was not a hero, and the Russians hung him for not being one—as they would have hung him for being one in *their* State."

It is the question, "What have I done?"—or in the plural form, "What have *we* done?"—that we wish to borrow as the basis of this inquiry. For this is the question before the modern world. The Nazi paymaster's plight may be an extreme instance, but it is not so far removed from the common situation as we might suppose.

How is the question, "What have we done?", asked? It is being asked in many ways. It is being asked in France, today, by people like Jean-Paul Sartre, who wonders if it is only a matter of historical accident that determines which people are victims and which executioners. Within the same generation, the French have been both—they were victims of the Nazis, and now are executioners of the Algerians. Sartre puts the question with clinical calm: "If nothing protects a nation against itself—if fifteen years are enough to change victims into executioners—it means that the occasion alone will decide. According to the circumstances, anyone, anytime, will become either the victim or the executioner."

The question was asked more broadly of Western civilization by Macdonald in the issue of *Politics* referred to, in his essay, "The Responsibility of Peoples." Some quotation helps the impact of the question to make itself felt:

> In the present war, we have carried the saturation bombing of German cities to a point where "military objectives" are secondary to the incineration or suffocation of great numbers of civilians; we have betrayed the Polish underground fighters in Warsaw into the hands of the Nazis, have deported hundreds of thousands of Poles to slow-death camps in Siberia, and have taken by force a third of Poland's territory; we have conducted a civil war against another ally, Greece, in order to restore a reactionary and unpopular monarch; we have starved those parts of Europe our armies have "liberated" almost as badly as the Nazis did, and if we explain that the shipping was needed for our armies, they can retort that the food was needed for *their* armies; we have followed Nazi racist theories in segregating Negro soldiers in our military forces and in deporting from their homes on the West Coast to concentration camps in the interior tens of thousands of citizens who happened to be of Japanese ancestry, we have made ourselves the accomplice of the Maidanek butchers by refusing to permit more than a tiny trickle of the Jews of Europe to take refuge inside our borders; we have ruled India brutally, imprisoning the people's leaders, denying the most elementary civil liberties, causing a famine last year in which hundreds of thousands perished; we have—
>
> But this is monstrous, you say? We, the people, didn't do these things. They were done by a few political leaders, and the majority of Americans, Englishmen and (perhaps—who knows?) Russians deplore them and favor quite different policies. Or if they don't, then it is because they have not had a chance to become aware of the real issues and to act

> upon them. In any case, I can accept no responsibility for such horrors. I and most of the people I know are vigorously opposed to such policies and have made our disapproval constantly felt in the pages of the *Nation* and on the speaker's platforms of the Union for Democratic Action.
>
> Precisely. And the Germans could say the same thing. And if you say, but why didn't you get rid of Hitler if you didn't like his policies, they can say: But you people (in America and England, at least) merely had to vote against your Government to overthrow it, while we risked our necks if we even talked against ours. Yet you British have tolerated Churchill for five years, and you Americans have thrice elected Roosevelt by huge majorities.
>
> It is a terrible fact, but it is a fact, that few people have the imagination or the moral sensitivity to get very excited about actions which they don't participate in themselves (and hence about which they feel no personal responsibility). The scale and complexity of modern Governmental organization, and the concentration of political power at the top, are such that the vast majority of people are excluded from this participation. How many votes did Roosevelt's refugee policy cost him? What political damage was done the Churchill-Labour government by its treatment of India, or by last year's Bombay famine? What percentage of the American electorate is deeply concerned about the mass starvation of the Italians under the Allied occupation? As the French say, to ask such questions is to answer them.

This is not only a "terrible fact"; it is also a fact for which people have an obvious distaste. Whenever you begin to recount material of the sort put together here by Macdonald, you notice that the people listening to you become restive. *"That,"* they interrupt, "was during the *war."* Or they point out that military operations always cause suffering and inconvenience, and what can you do? But mostly they don't want to think about it. Or they look at you suspiciously and ask, What are you trying to *prove?* They think you have an angle.

Even if you have nothing to prove, except that such and such did happen, and is likely to happen again—indeed, may be happening right now—you will have difficulty in holding an audience, for the reason that these things, according to our theory of the Right and the Good, are not *supposed* to happen, and if they do happen, they are exceptions. Or if they are more than exceptions, everything is pretty hopeless.

But there are the stubborn men who insist upon looking at such facts. One such stubborn man is Jack Jones, author of *To the End of Thought,* an essay first printed in *i.e.—The Cambridge Review* (reviewed in MANAS for Jan. 18, 1956) for November, 1955. It is the contention of this essay that the Western preoccupation with Rationalism and reliance upon what are held to be rational methods are destroying freedom in the West. Jones believes that the rational process or function is intrinsically self-destructive, and that a society which depends upon rational methods will end up repeating George Orwell's formula (in 1984), "Freedom is Slavery." The Communists, Jones points out, already have such a formula. Freedom is what the Communists say is freedom, according to the rules of their program and system. If it happens to mean what in human experience men have called slavery, then freedom is slavery. The system is the only reality. Facts which violate the truth of the system are not facts. Trotsky did not exist. Men of genuine Communist discipline understand this clearly.

It is something like the discipline of the astronomer who knows perfectly well that the sun does not move, even though the testimony of the senses plainly asserts that the sun *does* move. The correct ideology is the rational science of social truth. The correct ideology is like—not "like," but *is*—the law of nature. It disposes of opposition by a fiat of the cosmic process. This process cannot be cruel or in any way offend. It is completely *natural.* The Communist, in short, acknowledges no facts which are not connected with *value*—and all values are derived from the matured rationalism of the Communist ideology. In *Liberation* (July-August, 1959) Jones comments on this aspect of his analysis:

> I cannot write an essay upon science here and will only set down a few observations upon the ambiguous relationship between Marxist "scientific socialism" and science. The quarrel of Marxism with "objectivist" or "formalist" ("bourgeois") science is certainly not one with the rational virtue: it is rather that science as such has only left implicit an interpretation of its economic symbology. In this symbology, as has been pointed out, an increase in the rational power is equated with an increase in freedom, and the totalitarianization of this power (victory of the "proletariat"—*i.e.*, Party Elite—over the less rationalized capitalists) equals total freedom. When the Marxists jesuitically apply their "class" theory to science, they are not being anti- but hyper-scientific—that is, making the assumption of the omnipotence of the rational power no longer a compartment within a relatively less rational (*i.e.*, bourgeois) society, but the foundation of society itself. Thus Marxism reintroduces the question of the *raison d'être* of science itself, which many a bourgeois scientist would prefer to leave ignored or implicit, so that he can go on leaving the responsibility for determining value to others, and continue assuming (erroneously) that the pursuit of science *necessarily* results in social good.
>
> The Marxist knows better than that, but since his idea of the good is the total rationalization of society, his quarrel with bourgeois science is that it is not contributing enough to this end. To take an example, back in the 40's the Communists were denouncing Norbert Wiener's cybernetic theory as "antihuman" (again because of their basic ideological mechanism of projecting their own sur-rationality upon the capitalists and denying that it exists in themselves, though of course it does there to a *greater* extent). But not long ago they came to realize they were going to need cybernetics as they too reached the stage of automation. Magically, the bourgeois repression became the socialist virtue, the anti-human became the human, slavery became freedom, in Orwellian style. They have recently apologized to Wiener for the slight error. Should we then rejoice? Or should we not wonder ruefully whether even a paranoid grasp of the *functional* point is not preferable to a more "objective" attitude which loses sight of this point altogether? I fear that I cannot see Progress in either bourgeois or Communist science in other than this ambiguous light.

We might as well confess that we had to read this material over three or four times to make sense out of it. We went back to Jones's essay in the pages of *i.e.*, and read again the articles by Roy Finch and Jack Jones in the July-August and September issues of *Liberation.* (Afterward, it seemed worth doing.)

It may be helpful, at this point, to interrupt the discussion for a note on the kind of thinking that seems to be involved, here. Isaiah Berlin, in his essay on Tolstoy (Mentor), starts out with a quotation from Archilochus: "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing." The hedgehog man is the Big Thinker, the man who cannot do without a central vision and scheme of meaning. He has to see things whole, and the sense of even little things must be consistent with some integrating principle. The fox is more of an empiricist, a pluralist. He feels lost in the stately halls of metaphysics. He wants the touch of immediate, reliable facts.

It takes a hedgehog to create an ideology, and it takes a hedgehog, also, to explain what is wrong with an ideology, as Jones has done, although you have to be a fox to collect the evidence that something has gone wrong. Macdonald, by his own admission, is pretty much a fox, although, again by his own admission, in *The Root Is Man* he combined the functions of both hedgehog and fox, and, we may add, with a skill seldom matched in modern political criticism.

What makes the criticism of Macdonald and Jones important, and that of some others as well, is that it directs attention to common human problems, rather than singling out some enemy, some evil nation, class, or political group as a scapegoat to blame for our ills. So these critics properly belong with those who are asking the question, "What have we done?" The form of Macdonald's answer is an attack on the theory of the organic or totalitarian State, by which the individual is supposed to gain the maximum benefits of social organization, but which in fact erases him entirely *as* an individual, making him over into a moving part of the smoothly operating State Machine. The positive content of this essay is an appeal for a new political vocabulary, in the

terms of which *radical* would mean one who makes conscience and sensibility the primary yardsticks of the Good, who rejects all the crimes committed in the name of Progressive political theory. The position reached by Macdonald in *The Root Is Man* (from which he later withdrew) has been the foundation of much of the anarcho-pacifist thinking of the past fifteen years.

Here we should recall that Roderick Seidenberg's *Post-Historic Man* (University of North Carolina Press, 1950) searches the implications of scientific progress for human freedom, arriving at some frightening conclusions. Mr. Seidenberg found reason to think that the thoroughgoing application of "rational" methods would put an end to human freedom, and therefore to history. Science, by definition, knows nothing of freedom, since freedom involves the possibility of unpredictable action, and science is the absolute enemy of the unpredictable. For this reason, a society totally rationalized in scientific terms must totally close out freedom.

It is the contention of Jack Jones that the great delusion of our age is the assumption that progress through "rationalization" of our problems leads to freedom and the Good Society. It leads, instead, to slavery, but to preserve the ideological slogans, slavery is redefined as freedom. This process is illustrated most effectively by the Communist State, since Communism is resolved to practice "all-out" rationalism, but the same sort of reduction of freedom is evident in Capitalist lands. Discussing Jones's *To the End of Thought* in *Liberation* for September, Roy Finch writes:

> Mr. Jones is not an irrationalist, advocating, let's say, a new mythology or an irrational ideology. Rather he is pointing out a deep contradiction, which radicals in particular should ponder. It is the contradiction between the socialist principle of *the planned life* and the anarchist principle of *the spontaneous life.* Many socialists, including Marx, have believed that a planned society would release people for the enjoyment of the spontaneity of life. Mr. Jones points out that *it does not follow.* There is a gap here. Planning (or reason) can no more produce freedom than a duck can give birth to an elephant.
>
> Not only this, but Mr. Jones believes that the technological process so works that the failure of any planning can only be met with more planning (*so long as that is what the people really believe in*), and the whole process by its own momentum inevitably carries further and further away from freedom and even from the capacity for knowing what freedom is. Living in terms of more and more controls, people forget what it is to live spontaneously and how you go about it.
>
> . . . *all freedom is irrational* in the sense that it implies a spontaneous (*i.e.,* unpredictable) element in human life. This is the central idea of this discussion: *Reason can never lead to freedom.* Freedom has to be something you start with, not something you arrive at. There is absolutely no way to make the jump from planning to spontaneity unless you have made room for the spontaneity *at the outset.*

In his July-August *Liberation* article, Jack Jones says, "The meaning of this word [freedom] has become the ideological Rosetta Stone of our time." This seems a happy way to put the matter. To say that we must learn to understand the nature and meaning of freedom is to set the human problem in psychological and philosophical terms. Only after this problem is dealt with, or reduced to more workable elements, can we devise a politics that will be free of the self-deceptive elements of Utopianism.

Roy Finch, in his first review of *To the End of Thought (Liberation,* July-August), proposed that the use of the rational power need not be made into an absolute method. The mania for rational control, he says *"itself has to be controlled in the interests of reason as a creative activity."* He continues:

> A totally controlled and totally organized society would be one which would be neither free nor creative. (The element of chance is what makes creativity possible.) It may be that the Western world is moving in this direction, but there are powerful forces, including modern science in its more theoretical aspects, which are moving in another direction. The most unfortunate moment will be when reactionary capitalists realize that the Communists have done what they wanted to do, only

better. They may switch support to the more disciplined society prescribed by Communism. A certain sacrifice would be involved—giving up the money criterion of power, but in place of it real power might be retained.

What would be the advantages from their point of view? First, the liquidation of the trade union movement in the Western sense. The workers would be kept at their work—denied, as in Russia, the right to strike or to change their place or kind of work without permission. Second, the abolition of (what they regard as) tedious free speech, which enables malcontents to stir up people with promises of greater equality and personal liberty. Third, the end of even the remnants of the two-party system and its replacement by the self-perpetuating Central Committee system, which has always been the method used by American corporations anyway.

There is a lot more to this discussion, but from even these few extracts it should be evident that a new awareness of the processes of our society and of the nature of its assumptions is dawning. Here, no doubt, are the beginnings of another sort of social thinking—thinking as yet involved in the vocabularies of systems which new thinking will probably abandon—yet authentically new in the sense that it explodes certain delusions upon which many of the moral and political enthusiasms of the past have been based. Roy Finch sounds a keynote for the future:

A radical movement which can resist the totalitarian drift should be aware that the abolition of special privilege must be for the sake of freeing people, not for the sake of forcing them to submit to more rigid organization. This means today that radicals should concentrate on limiting, pluralizing and decentralizing power, *all* kinds of power. Above all they should learn to understand the profound meaning of the words of Tolstoy, speaking of the revolutionaries of his day: "Their chief mistake is the superstition that one can arrange human life."

REVIEW
TENACIOUS GHOSTS OF COLONIALISM

DONALD GRANT, St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* correspondent who recently toured Africa, brings to the June *Progressive* an unsettling account of "white man's burden" attitudes still existing in British and other "protectorates." Official policy in British controlled Nyasaland is conceived as a "partnership" between the races. But according to a current quip among the white settlers, this word is pronounced *apartheid,* and the partnership is indeed a peculiar one, since, according to Mr. Grant, "five per cent of the people, all whites, dictate to the other 95 per cent, all blacks."

The American reporter arrived in Nyasaland during a period of disturbance, dealt with by the harsh measures of traditional colonial rule:

> "We're giving 'em a good hiding," said the special constable. He was a big, beefy, red-necked Englishman, dressed in a khaki shirt and shorts.
>
> To emphasize his point he brandished what to my American eyes looked like a baseball bat. In official colonial police terms, however, it is a "baton," and Africans aren't clubbed, they are "subdued by a baton charge."
>
> "The blacks don't like it," said the special constable. The ugly scar on his cheek puckered when he grinned. "No," he repeated, "not at all they don't like it.

Mr. Grant says the native Africans are acutely aware of the difference between the point of view of the old-style rulers and that of visiting Americans. But the official United States "hands off" policy is something else again. Mr. Grant comments:

> Official United States policy is to put "getting along with our European allies" ahead of everything else. The State Department's African formula is to deplore racism and colonialism, softly and politely, but to be careful to do nothing about it.
>
> I suppose official Washington has convinced itself that whatever our European allies—who also happen to be African colonial powers—may do must be condoned in the name of the cold war. But after spending two and a half months in Africa and witnessing both the troubles in the Belgian Congo in January and the "emergency" in Nyasaland in March I am convinced that our policies in Africa are inexpedient as well as immoral.
>
> Both in Leopoldville and in Blantyre I found myself faced with hostility—as an American—on the part of the colonial authorities and their bully-boys. The men who were doing the shooting and the beating assumed that Americans would not approve, an assumption made evident before I had opportunity to express my own personal opinion.
>
> It is a profound error to think this hostility can be turned to respect if only the United States presents an outward, but false, image of approving colonial thuggery. One does not gain the respect of others by losing one's own self-respect.

The mood of U.S. policy differs little from the tendency of the British Home Office to let the doctrine of "gradualism" excuse the continuance of arbitrary colonial rule. What will be the results of this delay in the application of liberal principles? A novel of present-day colonialism in the Carribean area, *Rage on the Bar,* by Geoffrey Wagner, throws light on the attitudes of oppressed natives—not yet altogether violent, but increasingly sensitive to deprivations of dignity. *Rage on the Bar* reports the reflections of an administrator whose liberal tendencies have brought him dismissal from his government position:

> He lit a cigarette. The match rasped and he found that his fingers were shaking. He had not realized quite what a nervous strain it had been. The island was fast disappearing. Before turning to go below he paused. Leaning on the deck rail he imagined he could hear something, not that wailing beneath the waves which children thought they heard on Connaught, but a cry going up across the world, not merely an articulation of suffering but of denunciatory surprise at the behavior of the pale peoples, and their infatuate deeds. Patient and profound this sing-song of the races who had been led forcibly into servitude and danger and who had lived for so many centuries now in affliction and sorrow seemed again to take on to Teale the distant mutter of a brief tam-tam, like the throbbing membrane. And to this no echo was made in the world.

These psychological problems still obtain in the southern United States. Much of the hope for the future, according to Chester Bowles, will come from those Afro-Americans who have acquired a Gandhian perception of the need for *controlled* direct action. In the June 6 *New Republic,* Mr. Bowles writes:

> The bus boycott in Montgomery carried out with dignity and restraint represented an adaptation of Gandhian principles in democratic America. "We are seeking to improve not the Negro of Montgomery but the whole of Montgomery," said Reverend Martin Luther King on the occasion of the formation of the Montgomery Improvement Association which conducted the boycott. Instead of merely sitting by until the Supreme Court ruled bus segregation unconstitutional, the Negroes of Montgomery in amazing unity carried out a courageous, peaceful, direct action which took the nation by surprise. It served as a kind of electric shock treatment shaking Negroes and whites alike from their lethargy. The long-term effects of this Gandhian-type action on the white conscience may take time to register. But it had an immediate effect in changing the Negroes.

Such issues are indeed world-wide. To the question, "Has the North Clean Hands?", Mr. Bowles replies:

> My own perspective on this problem has been, I confess, affected by looking at it for some time from the other side of the globe. As a former Ambassador to India, I know how spectacularly American prestige rose as a result of the Supreme Court desegregation decision. While touring Africa four years ago, I sensed again how vital a successful solution of our racial troubles is for our future relationship with the two-thirds of the world's people who are colored. In the winter of 1957 in South Asia, I saw the enthusiasm generated by the successful conclusion of the Negroes' bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama. Later in the Soviet Union, I saw the Communists take full propaganda advantage of the bombing of Negro churches in the same state.

Assessing the "enforced underprivilege" of the Negroes in the northern states, Mr. Bowles establishes a point of considerable significance: Disdain for native populations in the remote still-unregenerated British protectorates tends to be excused on the ground that current policies are "better than" those of a century ago—or of twenty-five years ago. The American traveler, in turn, side-steps some of the issues of underprivilege in the United States by claiming that conditions are "better than" those in Central Africa. Likewise, American Northerners point the finger of criticism at their Southern countrymen because northern opportunities are "better than" those of the South. But the real culprit is the *apartheid attitude,* and, as far as Negro Americans are concerned, a few grains of this complacency are a worse dosage to swallow than still-unadjusted economic conditions.

Mr. Bowles has seen too much of the world with too sympathetic an eye to be a psychological party to *any* form of apartheid.

COMMENTARY
TO WHAT DO WE BELONG?

THE sort of question asked in this week's lead article, the sort of news that appears every day in the papers, the books by social scientists and social psychologists, the statistics of crime, of juvenile disorders, and the ominous generalizations about modern civilization made by the depth psychologists—all this is a fare discouraging enough to freeze the will and to make any kind of escape seem a desirable alternative to continuing the struggle.

But what our pessimism overlooks is the fact that both our ideals and our circumstances have changed radically in the past twenty-five years. Patterns of behavior which a generation ago were accepted as commonplace are now condemned as unworthy of mature human beings. At the turn of the century, conquest by arms was one of the means by which a laudable Manifest Destiny might be realized. Sectarianism in religion was hardly questioned by anyone, and the emotions of jealousy, of possessiveness, the desire for revenge, while not exactly seen as admirable, were at least thought of as "normal" human reactions.

The extraordinary thing about the present is not that we are confused and ambivalent, but that we are not *more* confused and *more* ambivalent.

The thesis of Jack Jones's essay, *To the End of Thought*, is that modern man is the captive of rationalism, that he has little hope of escaping from the mechanistically controlled processes which rational thinking devises.

But let us look at some of the other effects of rationalism. The rational spirit was responsible for the impersonal principles of government of the United States. Since these principles can be applied anywhere, without dependence upon local historical tradition or cultural particularism, they supply the foundation for an impartial morality in international relations. The prevailing legal traditions of the modern world consistently press nationalist claims into the background. For example, there is the principle established by the Nuremberg Trials, which asserts that no man can excuse himself of a crime by saying that he was "ordered" to commit it by a superior official or officer. National sovereignty, in other words, must give way to the universal rational standards of human good.

Even if modern nations show little practical allegiance to this principle, all enlightened individuals *judge* the nations by this principle, and the resulting rejection of nationalism grows more powerful, year by year.

What does this imply? It implies that a new concept of the good in history and of the human being in relation to all other men is emerging—a concept which places an intense moral strain upon those who find it difficult to discover the stuff of their moral lives in general principles.

The rage of political reaction is the rage of threatened identity. The men who live by partisan emotions find their very being menaced by the moral condemnations implicit in universal rational principles. They seize upon some tangible, irrational substance as a rock of irreducible reality that they can defend with a righteous passion: "Blood and soil"—*our* blood, *our* soil—these words are intended to generate a blinding emotion capable of obliterating loyalty to rational principle. "I did not become the Queen's first Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire." This was a more "symbolic" irrationalism, appealing to the glory of tradition and a valorous past.

As Sartre points out in his essay, "Materialism and Revolution," the Communists use both appeals—both the rational appeal and the compelling demand of irrational emotion. Until challenged on rational grounds, they insist that they embody the rational force of history—dialectical materialism is claimed to be the very logic and process of all nature. But when pressed in debate concerning the validity of certain points in their ideological analysis, they resort to the brute fact that the revolution must be *won*—that

oppressed peoples and enslaved workers must be liberated—and *then*, they say, we can return to these intellectual questions.

Devotion to the irrational, in short, is allowed only as a means to gaining the strength that is necessary to enjoy the order of rational procedures.

It must be admitted that the great historical change through which the world is passing is essentially a reconstitution of human ideals. Ideals, today, must have a rational ground. Political Rationalism, in this sense, is slowly consuming its opposition, just as, during the Middle Ages, Rationalism slowly consumed the dogmas of religion, producing the scholastic philosophy and preparing the mind of Europe for Rationalism's next great leap forward, the Reformation and the Renaissance.

The difficulty Jack Jones finds in Rationalism may exist only because of the identification of Rationalism with Scientific Mechanism. Non-mechanistic forms of Rationalism are possible, but difficult for the West to recognize because of its long war with Theology.

But the influence of Rationalism is even more pervasive in the matter of individual identity. The contribution of Sigmund Freud and of his numerous and talented successors is fundamentally a drive toward establishing rationalist-humanist principles in control of human behavior. The psychoanalyst helps man to expose the irrational elements in his feeling and concept of identity, *in order that* he may learn to control them. This means, in practical terms, the externalization of irrational motives and the internalization of rational motives—a transformation of the empirical self, from irrational to rational—the *Mahabharata* peculiar to Western Man.

Again, the problem of identity engrosses all those engaged in this transformation. As we change, who are we? So, the wonder is that we are not more confused and disturbed.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
A LETTER ON BEATNESS

A WHILE ago a friend called our attention to a letter written by a sixteen-year-old girl to the editor of the Pasadena *Independent.* The letter, which objects to an editorial article printed by the *Independent*, has that vigor and breath of originality which parents and educators claim to be praiseworthy. It is hard, of course, to find teen-agers who read editorials, and perhaps this is something that high schools should encourage among juniors and seniors—even though, in our observation, the average newspaper editorial is usually too stuffy to be worth much attention.

In this case, the editorial indulged in some sweeping generalities about "beatniks." Now anyone has a right to generalize, but when you pass from broad generalizations to specific character analysis, you are asking for someone to trip you up. This teen-ager has no affiliation with those described by the editor of the *Independent*, but she doesn't like the tone of the criticism.

The paragraphs to which her letter takes exception follow a description of a beatnik "colony" in Venice, Calif., characterized as "a weird rabble of semi-literate bongo drum beaters who apparently can rise to no higher expression of their emotions than, 'Man, it bugs me'." The editorial continues:

> They make a career out of the cynicism natural to youth. They might as well make this their career, since they have no other, lacking both the temperament and the talent to do more with their lives than breathe, eat and make the night hideous with their din. . . .
>
> The artistic life, creativity and culture are the raison d'etre of the beatniks. Culture is their justification for infesting Venice. They even defend playing bongo drums all night on the grounds of culture and a release from "frustrations," "anxieties," and "inhibitions."
>
> It is a shame that years ago their fathers didn't do a little more well-aimed drum-beating to remove "inhibitions." More's the pity.
>
> The culture they boast of is unusual. Most of their poetry, for example, consists of words more often found on latrine walls than in anthologies. Their expressionistic paintings would not fare too badly in competition with kindergarten finger painting. Their sculpture looks like—and may actually be—blobs of mud hurled at a wall. . . .
>
> We look forward to some criticism from Beatniks for this editorial, hoping that they can understand all the words of more than one syllable.

Despite the invitation contained in the last paragraph, the *Independent* neither published nor acknowledged the following communication, printed by MANAS in full:

> Editor, The Independent
> Pasadena, Calif.
>
> Dear Sir:
>
> I don't know exactly whom you consider beatniks. Are they limited to those who scandalize the countryside by their nonchalance, bongo drum beating, and keeping old ladies awake all night? Or do they include those who don't feel compelled by neurotic tendencies or excessive age to adhere to the black and white, Rose Bowl and Rose Parade, Old Guard and middle class standards of existence? Would you also consider for the title those who are interested in experimenting with new art techniques, or poetry that eliminates many barriers created by accepted form or sculpture that can't be labeled and filed away in a mental encyclopedia of respectability? Perhaps we could add anyone who talks differently, dresses differently, or happens to entertain a philosophy about life that is unusual.
>
> I ask, because I think I am in danger of becoming one. On the surface I seem to be an above average Pasadena High School student. I belong to the California Scholarship Federation, I'm on the Honor Roll, and I get straight A's. Last year I was accepted for both Girls' League Cabinet and News Bureau, and chose the latter, which I knew would entail much more work and would involve giving up the very great social prestige connected with Girls' League, because I knew it would be excellent experience. Second semester I was accepted for Publicity Board. I entered the First Annual Science Fair and participated in an extra-curricular American History Seminar. I took a Personality Measurement

> Test, The National Merit Scholarship Exam, The Advance Placement Exam in American History, and The French National Contest activities, was campaign manager for a candidate in a school election, and designed and executed the set for the annual talent show. Two years ago I was an editor for my Junior High's Yearbook For as long as I can remember, I have been told by my teachers; my parents, my principals and my commencement speakers that I should attempt to be different. That I should take advantage of my youth to "blaze new trails and find new horizons." . . That I should not be content with being average. I have believed them, I have tried to accomplish what they said I should try to accomplish.
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> But since reading your editorial, I have gotten a new message. Be careful, it says. Old ideas are the best ideas, Rembrandt is better than Picasso; Violins, but not bongo drums; leather sandals, not rope; truth as others see it. It appears that what I have been doing all this time has been beatnikism. In actuality, though I don't live in Venice or smoke or drink coffee, or beat bongo drums or wear leotards, I am a beatnik. Because I do paint impressionistic paintings and write sub conscious poetry and I am slightly cynical. On top of everything, I don't conform.
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> As you said in your last paragraph, I do not understand what you are saying. Not because I can't recognize the words. They are not, after all, so big. They are the words of some one who is really very small and who is hindered by a fear of the unknown, the new, the unusual. It's just that I can never understand someone who refuses to accept others who do not believe or act just as he himself does.

Possibly, the editor of the *Independent* could excuse himself from giving space to this manifestation of youthful polemics on the ground that it is wide of his specific mark—criticism of certain forms of behavior and attitude in the Venice colony. But the significant thing is that this high school honor student happens to feel like defending people about whom she knows very little and with whom she has formed no specific alliance. Her sympathy stems from a thoroughly justified annoyance with conventional pageantry, for which Pasadena is nationally famous on New Year's Day. Someone who beats his own bongo drum may indeed be closer than the paraders to discovering something about himself, closer to thinking and acting "autonomously."

Old ideas are sometimes the best ideas. But when the attitude of the older generations is that *"of course* they are," youth receives no assistance in the difficult business of making thoughtful comparisons. We question, in this letter, only the writer's confession of being "slightly cynical," for cynicism is often little more than the nonconformist's own sort of conformity.

In any case, and as we have said before, we have the beatniks to thank for something to talk about and for a challenge, however puzzling in itself, to so many of our conventionalities.

FRONTIERS

The Soul's "Enormous Claim"

IT was Freud, as we recall—or someone of similar insight—who said, "Tell me what people dream about and what they joke about, and I will tell you the kind of people they are." Here, then, is a joke (told by A. H. Maslow) in which we have found both pleasure and encouragement. Two psychoanalysts were attending a party. One of them walked up to the other and slapped his face. The abused man looked startled for a moment, then shrugged and walked off, saying, "Well, that's *his* problem!"

Another heartening sign of the times was the choice of Dr. Henry A. Murray as the man to give the Phi Beta Kappa Oration for 1959. Dr. Murray (of Harvard University) was one of the first of the academic psychologists to speak to his colleagues concerning the importance of psychoanalysis. Such recognition, years ago, of the new avenues of discovery into human mysteries opened by Freud and Jung has been instrumental in purging both psychology and the psychoanalytical movement of their sectarian tendencies. Today, when you say "psychology," the insights of the analyst are implicitly included. This was not the case twenty years ago. The analysts have had no better champion than Dr. Murray, who continues the tradition begun by William James—that of recording the fruits of wide-ranging investigations in language that invites and feeds the hungry mind.

Early in his address to the young men and women this year awarded the Phi Beta Kappa Key, Dr. Murray said:

> I suppose that most of you, just-honored intellectuals, will necessarily be occupied for the next years in thinking in a differentiated way, thinking as specialists—as lawyers, businessmen, doctors, scientists, historians, educators. There is vigor and ample creativity involved in all of these professions. But later, if not sooner, you will be pressured from within or without to think seriously once more about yourself and your relations with women and men, to think personally and then impersonally, to ask yourself embarrassing questions—knowledge for what? freedom for what? existence for what?—to think, in other words, as a free-lance philosopher, or generalist, about matters of profound and superordinate concern: ways and ends of being and becoming, morals, religion, the human situation, the world's plight. At such times each of you will be, in Emerson's sense, Man Thinking, and your reflections may beget a book or a brace of books fitting to your age.

Dr. Murray recalls that Emerson, one of a company of illustrious predecessors who also gave the Phi Beta Kappa Oration, said that each age "must write its own books." The task of the present, Dr. Murray implies, goes considerably beyond the world contained in the thought of Emerson. "Separating us incurably from that justly-venerated poet-thinker are the blights and blasts of more than forty lurid years of enormities and abominations perpetrated by our fellow-men on the sensitive bodies and souls of other men." Dr. Murray adds:

> Before the occurrence of this global epidemic of lies, treacheries, and atrocities, most of us Americans were temperamentally with Emerson, strongly inclined to optimism, and so to shun or to deny the fact that human creatures were still capable of surpassing all other species as callous and ferocious torturers and killers of their own kind. But now that we have seen all this, the darker vision of the once-rejected Herman Melville resonates with more veracity in some of us.

Dr. Murray fears that a shallow dislike of "unpleasantness" may prevent the present generation from accepting full awareness of these dark happenings, from acknowledging what they tell us about ourselves. For if we ignore the bitter verdict of contemporary history, we shall be unprepared to realize that "we must transform or fall apart."

Addressing himself to his subject, "Beyond Yesterday's Idealisms," Dr. Murray speaks with an authority generated by what he says:

> Today the really crucial problems, as I hook them, are all deep, deep in human nature, and in this country with our long preference for appearances, for tangible, material realities, for perceptible facts, acts, and technics, for the processes and conclusions of

conscious rationality, and for quick attainments of demonstrable results—with this native and acquired bent for things that one can plainly see, grasp, count, weigh, manipulate, and photograph, the probability of our solving or even seriously grappling with the strategic problems of our time does not appear to be encouragingly high.

Only if this appraisal is somewhere near truth can I discern a single reason for your President's election of a depth psychologist as orator for this day. What could his reason be except to have the depth dimension stressed, with the accompanying hint that the key to the more perplexing problems might be lying in the dark. . . . What Freud discovered in the dark of the unconscious was what Puritan and Victorian morality suppressed as Sin, spelt with a capital. But now those floodgates are demolished and sexuality is conspicuously in the open, running loose among the young without benefit of form, grace, or dignity; and what is nowadays repressed, if my reading of the signs is not awry, are all the hopes, yearnings, claims, both dependent and aspiring, which down the centuries were comforted and directed by the mythologies and rituals of religion. Here I leave Freud and stand with Dr. Jung.

If Dr. Murray will forgive an interruption, this is a place where the insertion of a further thought along these lines may not be amiss. It has to do with family life and with the record of family life found in the modern novel. In neither place—in neither life nor literature—do we find much concern with anything but personal problems. It is as though only private goals have importance to human beings. This lack of a wide vision has a smothering effect upon the human spirit. The novelists—ordinarily excellent diagnosticians—seldom speak of this effect. They are too busy trying to get their characters on the way to some merely personal fulfillment.

Possibly, having but recently recovered from the political excesses and emotional mistakes of the "social" approach to human life, the novelists are trying to find a home base in the individual, but their measure of the individual is as yet unpromising. Then there is the effect upon the young to be considered. In the *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead* (Lucien Price, Little Brown, 1954), there is the following from the distinguished philosopher:

"You get the best ability from children reared in an economic status without luxury, which admits them at an early age to the society of people responsible for a community. The community may be a big one but needn't be; merely responsible people doing public work. That is one [group]. The other needn't even be in a comfortable economic position, but the child must be born with or reared in ideas strongly moral or religious. . . ."

"America was founded by people of both these groups, with social responsibility and moral sense. It has often seemed to me that that was why the eighteenth century in England was so flat, the vivid people had come over here in the seventeenth. France did better in the eighteenth. And the principal result of the French Revolution was the American Revolution. It failed in France but in America it succeeded."

The children of our time are sadly without nourishment of this sort. But, as Dr. Murray stresses, each generation must formulate its own ideals—its own conceptions of responsibility for the community, its own grasp and application of religion and moral ideas. He addresses himself to this need by speaking of the present-day lack of idealism:

That a bent for the ideal is latent in the psyches of men and women of your age is not what I've been told by any confiding undergraduate, and it is about the last conclusion that a reader of modern literature would be likely to arrive at. For certainly most of the best poets, playwrights, and novelists, together with many psychoanalysts, behavioral psychologists, social philosophers, existentialists, and some angry others, seem to be conspiring, with peculiar unanimity, to reduce or decompose, to humiliate so far as they can do it, man's image of himself. In one way or another, the impression is conveyed that, in the realm of spirit, all of us are baffled Beats, Beatniks, or dead-beats, unable to cope as persons with the existential situation.

There is a small encouragement, however:

But tell me, what is the underlying meaning of this flood of discontent and self-depreciation? One pertinent answer comes from Emerson himself. "We grant that human life is mean, but how did we find out that it was mean? What is the ground of this

uneasiness of ours, of this old discontent? What is the universal sense of want and ignorance but the *fine innuendo by which the soul makes its enormous claim?"*

Yes, surely, "its enormous claim," and in the very midst of this American paradise of material prosperity. The enormous claim of the sensitive, alienated portions of our society—artists, would-be artists, and their followers—comes, as I catch the innuendoes, from want of kindling and heartening mythology to feel, think, live, and write by. Our eyes and ears are incessantly bombarded by a mythology which breeds greed, envy, pride, lust, and violence, the mythology of our mass media, the mythology of advertising, Hollywood and Madison Avenue. But a mythology that is sufficient to the claim of head and heart is as absent from the American scene as symbolism is absent from the new, straight-edged, bare-faced glass buildings of New York.

An emotional deficiency disease, a paralysis of the creative imagination, an addiction to superficials—this is the physician's diagnosis I would offer to account for the greater part of the widespread desperation of our time, the enormous claim of people who are living with half a heart and half a lung. Paralysis of the imagination, I suspect, would also account, in part, for the fact that the great majority of us, wedded to comfort, so long as we both shall live, are turning our eyes away from the one thing we should be looking at: the possibility or probability of co-extermination.

In his conclusion, Dr. Murray imagines a "mythology" for our own time, capable of stirring the imagination and strengthening the will of modern man:

If, perchance, a world testament with the mythic qualities I have mentioned became an invitation to the feelings and thoughts of men and women, it would gain this influence only through its power to enchant, charm, clarify, edify, and nourish. There would be no agents of sovereign authority with threatened penalties to enforce compliance, and, in contrast to the testaments of our established Churches, it would be always susceptible to revisions, additions, and subtractions.

Everybody, I assume—especially on reaching the accepted age for the retirement of his brain—is entitled to a dream, and this is mine, heretical at certain points, but not so visionary as it sounds. Works of the magnitude of this imagined testament have been composed in the past, notably in India. Much of what is needed has been in printed form for years. Ample energy and genius is available—literary critics, historians, social scientists, philosophers, and poets—in different quarters of the globe. Enough money for the effort is in the keep of men who are aware of humanity's dire strait. A provisional first edition of the testament would not be very long in coming. Translated into all languages, it might turn out to be the book this age is waiting for.

There is much to say against our age, but for it, this: Was there ever a time when the best self-consciousness of the contemporary spirit had clearer articulation?