VOLUME XI, NO. 4
JANUARY 22, 1958

# THE PLATONIC CREDO

WHAT are the simple things that may be said with profit about human beings? This question is asked in response to a reproach from a reader who feels that MANAS articles are sometimes unnecessarily obscure, or "too complicated." The usual reply made by the editors to comments of this sort—which come with a frequency sufficient to support a continuous editorial uneasiness—is that the subjects which MANAS chooses to discuss are themselves obscure and complicated. But there is no pleasure in making excuses, while the possibility always remains that things *might* have been put more simply.

Are there, then, simple facts about man which, although unequivocally true, deserve more attention than they have been getting?

One fact which seems quite evident is that the main project of human beings is to resist the conditionings of their environment. The fruit of successful resistance to conditioning is a free human being.

This is a fact, however, which is by no means widely acknowledged. It may be said that the entire weight of scientific theory is against this fact. For science, insofar as it concerns itself with man, concerns itself exclusively with the forces which shape and affect human beings. Science regards man as an *effect* of a wide range of causes which are external to him. It explains what man is, what man does, by means of identification, description, and analysis of those causes.

Against this weight of theory there is only one resisting force: the human longing for freedom, for the right and the power to choose—and, it should be added, for the capacity to feel that the freedom so gained is not a delusion, that it is freedom in fact and not some subtler form of determinism.

In our time, no recognizable form of "knowledge" supports the idea of freedom. For such knowledge to exist—to be, that is, conceded by the world of scientific or academic authority—there would have to be a definition or description of man as a free agent, as an entity or "essence" capable of spontaneous or "uncaused" behavior. But science has no vocabulary for such a definition. It is a definition which requires metaphysical terms, and metaphysics is not the language of science. Science is able to tell you about the things which are made, but not about the things (?) which make other things. Science, curiously enough, is a creative activity of the human mind which omits absolutely from its field of observation all acts of creation or origination. For science, admission of an absolutely original act would be confession of failure.

So, to support us in our sense of freedom we have only the immediate intuition that we are capable of being free. Fortunately, this intuition is strong enough to contest every claim against it; and when, as in the present, a heavily armed orthodox view denies the possibility of human freedom, the intuition ignores the denial and goes right on with its endorsement of behavior which strives after freedom, being content that the freedom should be called something else.

It is doubtful that this argument between scientific method or theory and the intuitions of human beings will ever be settled at the level on which we have stated the problem. Here, the issue is too abstract, too "metaphysical." The scientist will say, "Well, *what* is free?" His opponent will say, "The *soul* is free." The scientist will say, "All right, *show* me a soul." And his opponent will stumble a bit, then argue, "But I can't show you a soul. I can show you—and you will look at—only objects, and the soul is not an object. The soul is *subject.* It sees, but it is not seen. *You* are a soul." And the scientist will say, "Oh yeah!" and that is the end of the argument.

It is much more likely that the argument will be settled by assuming that human beings are free and by dealing with practical problems of freedom without forwarding any metaphysical claims. From

doing this we develop functional conceptions of freedom without having to explain or justify them. And the scientists seem willing to go along—which means that they will not bother you or get aggressive about the occasional use of the word "freedom"—unless, of course, you use it in some journal of psychology. You can't expect to play the home team on its own field and get away with using an invisible ball. The referee won't stand for that.

But the area where you can use the word freedom with impunity is the field of education. You not only can, you must. Education without the ideal of freedom is completely meaningless. Even an educator with training in science is obliged to swallow his skepticism and talk about freedom when the occasion demands. He will probably excuse himself by saying that determinism is necessary for the methodology of science, but that freedom is allowed outside of classes in physics, chemistry, biology, and psychology.

What really relieves this argument of its strident tone among educators is a decent humility concerning all rigid doctrines and abstract systems of thought. Whatever the implications of the scientific method, the natural wish of human beings at their best is to do right and good, to understand, to be compassionate and generous, to live useful lives, to see widely and to leave the world a better place for their having lived in it—these qualities and attitudes, being the natural endowment of educators, give the latitude of the humanities to the educator's vocabulary, so that he may speak of freedom without self-consciousness or hesitation. This is the best possible testimony to the actual freedom of man.

We have an example of this kind of speaking by an educator in a talk by Arthur E. Morgan to a class of Freshmen at Antioch College, last fall. Dr. Morgan's subject was "Learning to Learn," and he spoke at length of the need of human beings—in this case the students—to find out what limiting conditions they have been subject to, and to learn to deal with them with greater awareness. Dr. Morgan said:

> In the ordinary unplanned courses of our lives there is a large element of accidental, fortuitous, random or chance circumstance. Such circumstances tend to condition our lives and to make us what we are. If such circumstances come early in life they tend to set limits to our feeling and thinking, and may make our lives less full and complete than they might be. The conditioning may be so deep and powerful that it becomes second nature, and we may feel that only when we live according to it are we free. We tend to accept our early conditioning so unconsciously and so completely that to suggest to us that we might be different and might be free from narrowing limitations seems foolish. Our feeling may be: "That is the way I am, and that is the end of it." . . .
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> It is the business of the higher education at Antioch to help students to see how early conditioning has set unnecessarily narrow limits to their lives, to get them interested in one of the greatest of all adventures—that of breaking through the barriers which the accidental conditions of our lives have made for us, of discovering new outlooks, new worlds, new powers in ourselves, including the power to master and discipline our animal impulses and our chance conditioning; in short, to make us free men and women—free to be the most we might be. It should be the aim of higher education to free us from whatever is trivial, chance, accidental, provincial and misleading in our earlier conditionings, and to replace it with what is true, significant, universal and in accord with the inherent nature of things.... Let me illustrate what I mean by a couple of examples of men who discovered that their early conditioning was not necessarily final.

The examples which follow are striking illustrations of the suggestion in the Jan. 1 MANAS lead article, to the effect (p. 7) that a man who gained freedom would very likely decide to go on doing what he had been doing, but with a "difference." Dr. Morgan continues:

> I recall the acquaintance I had years ago with Daniel Updike, one of the two or three greatest printers and typographers America has produced. At twelve or fourteen he quit school and went to work in a print shop to help the family budget. He hated his fate, he hated printing. It was simply a necessary evil. The men in the shop where he worked agreed with him that printing was a dog's life. He did not know what he wanted as a career, but he did know it would not be in printing. That was the conditioning with which he reached the age of about twenty-two.
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> Then suddenly he became free. The family no longer needed him. So he set about the job of

> planning his life. One thing he was sure about; he did not want to get into any other field which he would hate as he hated printing. If he should discover those reasons, that knowledge would help keep him from making another mistake as to a calling. He found himself examining his conditioning. *Just why was it he hated printing?* What would prevent him from hating another calling as much? Perhaps by accident he was undertaking one of the fundamental processes of human growth. He was asking himself why he was as he was; how he got that way. He was questioning the finality of his chance conditioning.
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> The unexpected conclusion Updike reached was that the cause of his hating printing was not in the calling, but in himself. If he had taken the same attitude toward any calling he might have hated it as much. He realized he had a foothold in printing and not in any other calling. The world must have room for a great printer as well as for great men in any other field. If he should continue as a printer it must be, not drudgery, but an adventure.
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> He finally decided to continue printing, and that whatever he printed, it must be the best he could do. If he were printing a laundry slip, it must be the best laundry slip that ever was. His work became known for its quality. He became official printer to Harvard University. It became a distinction for a faculty member to have him for a friend. J. P. Morgan, the financier, wanted some exceptionally exacting printing done, and called him in. The same was true of various Americans of distinction. His life was the outcome of questioning his early conditioning.

The other example given by Dr. Morgan is of an Antioch student who was failing in mathematics and had decided to leave school. Incapacity for mathematics ran in his family, he said. Dr. Morgan persuaded him to make a new beginning by suggesting that his case was so remarkable he owed it to the college to try again. Several years later this student was concentrating in mathematics: he had "fallen in love" with the subject!

As Dr. Morgan puts it:

> The aim of higher education is liberation and fulfillment; it is to incite and encourage students to break through the barriers of conditioning that form the invisible but hampering limits of our lives, and to discover larger and truer worlds to live in.

The point of this talk, "Learning to Learn," by Dr. Morgan, is that human beings obtain from external nature their animal endowment—the physiological base which is conditioned by the forces of nature, by the influences of environment. But there is a "plus" in human beings—an undefined reality which, whatever it is, enables them to break even "deep conditioning" and to begin to shape their own lives. Education can present examples of men who have become free in this way, and it can offer the fruits of human freedom in what is called the "cultural inheritance." One further comment by Dr. Morgan is of special interest:

> These two aims, of trying to break the limiting bonds of our conditioning, and of trying to learn from the past, may seem to conflict. Sometimes they do. Life is like that. On the African plain the antelope must get to the waterhole and get a drink, or it will die of thirst. Yet it knows that the lion is lying in wait for it at the water hole. It cannot wait long in indecision. It must dare to make the effort to get to the water hole and get a drink, but not get caught.

The entire secret of human freedom, we suspect, is locked in this paradox. The "cultural tradition" is both a key to freedom and a bond. The student—the man—must turn the key, use the freedom, and avoid the bond. It takes a free agent to be free.

There is a close relation between the philosophic quest—the searching out of one's basic assumptions—proposed by Richard Gregg in A *Compass for Civilization,* and the "plus" value in human beings which gives them the capacity to be free. When Daniel Updike asked himself why he hated printing, he was questioning his attitude toward life.

The difference between Updike's questions and Gregg's questions is the difference between metaphysical questions and practical questions. Updike's questions imply and suggest the metaphysical questions, but they do not necessarily raise them. Gregg raises them. What, he asks, am I?

The thing we have to face is that the Updikes of this world—and they are, we should admit, rare and unusual men—are much more successful in

answering their questions than the imitators of Socrates are in answering theirs. At least, the answer to the Updike question is easier to understand. Updike's answer is functional. What is the trouble with me? he asked. He didn't say, exactly. What he did say was that he would have the same difficulty with any other job, unless he changed his attitude. What he said, in effect, was, I am a versatile human being who ought to be able to do well whatever I set my hand to, and I might as well be a printer as anything else, since I know something about printing. This was a decision of dignity and intelligence.

What does Plato say? Plato says, The Soul is a self-moving unit. There are other units which are moved by outside forces, but the soul moves itself.

Now this is not so different from what Updike said, except that it has the—to us—misfortune of being a metaphysical declaration. To be human, said Plato, is to be an essence which is free in principle, although liable to failure, prone to fall back among the units which are moved by forces external to themselves.

We are of a time and generation which dislike metaphysics and essences. We are willing to accept the value of the Updike decision so long as we are not obliged to explain it, to refer it to some general or abstract principle. We are glad to accept philosophical conclusions in the form of anecdotes or in functional terms, but we do not like them to be "pure."

There is some sense to this prejudice. It is the sense that John Dewey put into *The Quest for Certainty* and *Human Nature and Conduct.* We are probably not ready to drink at metaphysical springs without falling prey to the predators of the mind which lurk in the theological thickets surrounding all metaphysical springs. It's just not safe.

There is also the hazard of letting the question lose its meaning by stripping it of the particular circumstances under which it arises. A man may say, "I don't want the answer to the mystery of the ages; I want to know what to do *now!"*

This was the problem of Arjuna, in the *Bhagavad-Gita.* Arjuna wanted to hang up his bow and go home. Krishna, his friend and adviser, wouldn't let him. Krishna insisted upon discussing the mystery of the ages. Finally, Arjuna got interested, and in doing so, he practically forgot his troubles. And this, of course, was what Krishna was after. Arjuna became a philosopher because he couldn't help it. The compulsions of his mind—of his "self"—replaced the compulsions of circumstances and tradition. His becoming a philosopher was a result—something you could call a "side-effect"—of this assertion of the self.

Every act of deliberation and independent decision has philosophic dignity, and reflects a partial answer, therefore, to the mystery of the ages. The study of philosophy, then, is not something to be undertaken, as Aristotle would have had it, during the peaceful closing years of a crowded life. Instead, it is an effort to see in some timeless light the immediate value and significance of the events and decisions which press upon us. All men possessed of independence and dignity require, we suspect, that they behave as units which move themselves. They are practical metaphysicians, if not theoretical ones. And if we can ever get rid of the shadowy presence of theological casuistry and its threat to intellectual freedom, we may gain the courage to discuss as openly as the ancients did our theories and convictions concerning the nature of the soul.

# *REVIEW*
## NOTES ON NOVELS

CERTAIN passages in Andrew Geer's *Canton Barrier* are forthright in their discussion of Chinese politics during the days of Communist ascendancy. Since it now appears that things are taking a turn for the better in Mao's policies, we should be able to appreciate Geer's cryptic dialogue concerning why various sections of China were quite ready to accept Communist leadership.

In the following conversation, the owner of a small "wildcat" airline in China explains to one of his pilots why it is not prudent to leave a plane overnight in a certain Chinese city:

> Jordan turned to Irwin. "You'll take the Douglas to Sining. It'll be a long haul, but you've got to come back tonight. I don't want a plane on the ground in that area overnight."
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> "Commies?"
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> "Could be, but my worry is the natives." Jordan stubbed out his cigarette. "Want a short history lesson? Some Air Corps laddie in Washington had a dream. . . bombing Japan from Cheng Tu with B-29's. So they built the biggest Goddamned airstrips you'll ever see . . . not only one, they did it up brown. They built Kwangshan, Fungwhangshan, Shwanglin, Chiunglai, not to mention a half dozen others. Chinese men and women built them with their bare hands; the bones of hundreds of Chinese are under those runways."
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> Jordan called to Duck Eggs for another cup of tea and lighted a cigarette. "Three hundred and twenty-five thousand men and women were enslaved and put to work on those fields." He moved to the window and peered out. The river fog was nearly gone. He looked at his watch—five-thirty.
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> "What happened?" Sang asked.
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> "Just what would happen to any primitive, confused people. They became more confused. They were forced into slavery to fight an enemy they had been told would enslave them. They had to bring in a whole battalion of psychological warfare boys to sell that deal." Jordan returned to his tea and, leaning against the table, spoke directly to Irwin.
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> "The economy of millions of people was disrupted. Whole villages were torn down and moved. They destroyed an irrigation system that had been built three hundred years before Christ by an engineer, Li Ping. That's why Mao and his Commies are finding it so easy in the northwest. The people will accept anything in preference to what we gave them. That's why you can't stay overnight where you're going."

Mr. Geer seems to know a great deal about what goes on in China, and while he by no means gives his blessing to the Communist regime, whose methods he exposes, he must have found the persecution of Owen Lattimore for his refusal to endorse Chiang Kai-shek an intolerable stupidity. Incidentally, *Canton Barrier* is Geer at his best. Readers may recall *The Sea Chase*, which also combined suspenseful adventure with insights into the working of the "enemy" mind. Geer has also produced three other books, *Mercy in Hell, The New Breed* and *Reckless*, which we propose to enjoy whenever we can get hold of them.

We are far from sure why James G. Cozzens has suddenly become so important—not only in his latest, *By Love Possessed*, "Book-of-the-Month," but in the renewed attention to his earlier novels. But it may be *hoped* that Cozzens' popularity has something to do with a healthy reaction against watered-down, over-simplified psychology—the sort one encounters on the religious side of the fence by way of Norman Vincent Peale, and on the "scientific" side by self-help books like Hornell Hart's *Autosuggestion.*

Mr. Cozzens finds it difficult to write very long about anything without gently probing and exposing the pretense, hypocrisy and superficial ethics in conventional religion. To show his refusal to over-simplify, and as an instance of how he treats false piety, we quote the following from *By Love Possessed:*

> "Miss Cummins is twenty-six. I had some semiconfidences from her, too. They've been engaged several years. She said she wasn't getting any younger; and she'd begun to wonder if she were going to go on being engaged for the rest of her life.

Women have a way of understanding women, so I expect she pretty well knew *that* was Mrs. T.'s whole idea. Mrs. T. meant it to last out her time. She was all for the engagement—a kind of insurance, I suppose. I suppose she saw that Miss Cummins was the sort of a girl a man can be sensible about; and as long as she was officially Whitmore's intended, he couldn't very well start taking an interest in girls a man couldn't be sensible about. I admit I wonder just what Miss Cummins did to beat the game."

Smiling, Arthur Winner said: "I'm not sure Miss Cummins did anything. I think we did it at the vestry meeting that voted to offer him the incumbency here. That changed the picture. Christ Church is well enough endowed for his stipend to be considerably more than the average parish could pay. He was an assistant, really a curate, while he did postgraduate work for his doctor's degree. Naturally, he wasn't making a great deal. I believe his mother has money; and, living with him, she must have helped with the expenses. While that was his situation, he might not have seen his way to marrying. Miss Cummins simply had to wait until he did see his way. I'm glad if we've been of service to her."

"Yes; good!" Clarissa said. "And that also clears up something Mrs. T. said. It seemed to be about money—rather veiled. I suppose she never realized I hadn't the faintest idea what a minister—a term she much dislikes—gets; what would be more, or what would be less. But I *could* understand that, for some reason, she wanted me to know that Whitmore had made important sacrifices to come here. I'm afraid she doesn't find us very fashionable—or stylish. In short, Whitmore, as a matter of religious duty, because Brocton needed him, had stepped down from the more distinguished social circles he was used to; and, by his own Christian choice, had come to live among the lowest of the low—I'm glad I didn't really know what she was talking about."

Another paragraph concerns the psychology of confession and repentance—as suggested by a religious institution. Condemnations of sin, however emphatic, are never meant to contradict the fact that every human being is *expected* to sin:

"Of course we'll sin, of course!" Man's baser nature, the subconscious (named as you chose) kept unkilled, stirring and convoluting as in a crowded, fairly well-secured snake pit, many unholy gross urges, many wicked dumb longings, many frustrate mean impulses, many unavowable dark desires. Only fairly well secured, never quite subdued by grace, strays were now and then bound to escape their subterrane. Creeping above ground, insinuating themselves where nature had fallen, they could strenuously work for a while their unclean wills.

But among the forewarned, forearmed faithful, such escapes were no occasion for panic, nor even for agitation. The strays were the devil's—bad; they worked evil; they spread confusion among pious or sacred thoughts and intentions; but what would you? Evil's energies must flag, too; and when they flagged, means to recapture and recommit the unclean spirits had been appointed. Grace, failing to confine, still enabled contrition; mercy saved the contrite—just keep your shirt on! Meanwhile, nature must take nature's course.

Thus the settlement with "reality," in conventional religion.

# *COMMENTARY*
## A CHANGE OF SCENE

WHAT doesn't quite come out in this week's Frontiers, but ought to, is the troubling thought that all this munificence of the arts, owing to technology and mass production, may give us delusions of grandeur. Is it really a good thing that anybody with two or three dollars can order a command performance of Mozart, and then, while it is being played, *not even listen?* There is something frightening about the way in which mechanical reproductions of great music—or great anything—become "fashionable."

The advantages of high fidelity reproduction of fine music are obvious—we are not here talking about the advantages. Further, we are going to have those advantages, whether we deserve them or not; and we are going to be exposed to what goes with them, whether we like it or not.

The fact of the matter is that music has had a considerable renaissance in recent years, brought by municipal symphonies, concerts in parks, the radio, and finally, high fidelity recordings. There has certainly been a net gain in this department, over the past twenty years. The same can be said of the mass production of inexpensive books of great value, and the reproduction in extraordinarily faithful color of great works of art. Further, taste itself has been upgraded by a kind of osmosis through the medium of the home and women's magazines. In the early 1930's, the merchandising miracles that could be wrought by industrial design were discovered, and commonplace objects began to be pleasing to the eye.

But, alas, too many homes now closely resemble department store windows. Women shop with a copy of *House Beautiful* in hand, to be sure that they do what is "correct," or "contemporary." People are somewhat of an intrusion in these carefully planned exhibits of other people's taste.

What we are trying to say, we suppose, is that the arts are something to be cherished, and that they should be enjoyed under conditions of respect. It is not snobbish to ask for this. The great, the rare, and the difficult—the supreme achievements of human beings—ought not to be handled like "merchandise." What a terrible thing to allow children to grow up in an atmosphere of incredible plenty of the riches of the arts, yet never to teach them respect for the genius which made these sounds, sights, and thoughts possible! How can they be enjoyed, loved, and understood, without respect?

There is a kinship in this argument with a discussion of toys in "Children . . . and Ourselves" a few weeks ago. Children can be utterly spoiled by being allowed to have too many toys. Having too much too easily, they never learn to live with their toys, but only "possess" them. So, for adults, with the riches of the arts. How curiously degrading a fate to "possess" the world's masterpieces without being able to live with and enjoy them! And not even to suspect what has happened!

This seems to be the peculiar difficulty and contradiction of our age—to have everything but to be able to understand and enjoy almost nothing. Our material riches are piled up at a dizzying rate, only to be snatched away from us and turned into the machines of war. The shallowest conversation is studded with the terms of "depth" psychology. The world is amazingly well supplied with men of insight and grasp of what needs to be done, but the world's managers never listen to such men. They might as well not exist. If a great scientist tries to do a little something to slow down the mad race toward self-destruction, he is hauled up before an investigating committee and branded as "unreliable" and "unwanted" in the service of his country. All that we are able to take is the *appearance* for a good man; the real thing is too much for us.

We might as well recognize it: we thought we left the jungle behind; but we didn't; it's still with

us. Life is still just as difficult, just as hazardous, as it was when men were confronted by the terrors and dangers of the wilderness. The only difference is that now you can be dead and not know it, or be hurt and not feel it.

This is not an article against technology. You can't be against the inevitable. The conditions established by technology are just as inevitable as the changes produced by a geological cataclysm. But if you want to survive, you have to learn to live under the new conditions.

The thing we have been tempted to overlook is that the essential human problems have remained the same. Technology has not changed them; it has only changed their face. Our technological culture has vanquished the wilderness. The beasts and the savages are no more. It is "safe" almost anywhere, today. But the need for daring and courage has not diminished. We need a different kind of daring and courage, instead. Without courage and daring you don't die, as you might have, on the frontier. You don't die, but your life slowly drains away, and when you wonder what has happened, it may be too late.

Technology is not our problem. Our problem is the delusions of grandeur we have allowed technology to produce.

# CHILDREN
## . . . and Ourselves
### ATTITUDINAL EDUCATION

MOST people know, or think that they know—or sound as if they know—that the most important element in "the education of the young" is the attitude of the parent or teacher. If the adult who occupies a position of influence is an inveterate complainer, the "attitude of complaint" will leach away at the value of any subject that is taught. If, on the other hand, the daily attitude is affirmative, constructive, and hopeful, the relationship of the child to the "subject" under consideration will take on something of the same tone. Just how important those rather obvious correlations are to the young person can be easily determined by recalling our own teachers, encountered at an impressionable age: If we were slow to catch on to the intricacies of mathematics or Latin, yet were blessed with an instructor who seemed not unpleased about life in general, this lack of capacity to grasp the subject seemed only a temporary setback. But the teacher of fundamentally negative outlook—revealed by asides of a cynical nature, or by a dwelling on "mistakes"—usually seemed to confirm our weakness.

Just how to help young people to cope with the varying attitudes of teachers is quite a question. There will be acquaintances as well as teachers met during later high-school and college years who represent influential extremes so far as attitude goes. A consideration of certain "types" of attitude may conceivably be helpful.

Let's begin with the assumption that those who seek for some means of attaining what men call "happiness," fall into three general classifications. First, there are those whose small claim to happiness is perversely negative. The desire to prove that someone else is even more hopeless than oneself is rooted in the persuasion that life presents little more than various degrees of illusion and error. The cynics, the perennial debunkers, belong to this class, which may be found among classmates and teachers alike. They are of no use to us, for any human being can manage to become miserable enough all by himself. Such negativism in a teacher should be seen to be the height of stupidity.

Then there is the avowed and presumably confirmed "sensualist." For persons in this class, life is to be exploited for every distillation of sensation one can collect. "Try anything which seems to be fun," easily turns, eventually, into "Try anything." What about these people? How is one to counsel his half-grown children to regard them? With contempt? But a contempt which is mere imitation of parental feeling has little depth. Of course, when the sensualist harms a fellow human, having become so self-centered as to forget that others exist, except for the fulfillment of his personal desires, we feel spontaneous censure. But it is not the sensualism, alone, in these instances, which earns our disrespect. Actually, we are never quite sure what to think of the person who lives chiefly to satisfy his appetites of one sort or another—unless those with whom he has contact can prove an injury for which they were not themselves responsible, and for which he was.

And then there are the "straight-and-narrow-pathers." No doubts exist about what is right or wrong—nor about what is wrong with the materialist and sensualist—among the members of this clan. The rules are there, and "everyone" knows that these are the right and best rules. But the trouble with the straight-and-narrow-pathers seems to be that they are trying to talk themselves into believing that they already reside in the Heavenly City—well, almost. Those who do not follow their rules are exiles, alien. Every man who enters their world with a divergent opinion is an intruder. As Lao Tzu remarked, the man heavily concerned with virtue first becomes self-righteous, and then, because he cannot always follow his own rules, a hypocrite. There are exceptions, of course. The Sermon on the Mount can be made

into a "straight and narrow" modulus, but this is a modulus of attitudes, a modulus for thinking rather than a stereotyped pattern of action. The "straight-and-narrow" people are often pretty good at self-discipline, we must admit, yet if this achievement be bought for the terrible price of narrow-mindedness and a tendency to condemn, we are left to wonder if this really *is* discipline. According to David Riesman, one may be "inner-directed" without being in any sense creative or autonomous, and without expressing even a faint glow of human sympathy or understanding.

It does seem as though most people are divided into those who follow one extreme or the other, pleasure-seeking or self-righteousness. The vital question is obviously whether or not some higher synthesis can be brought into focus. This is the work of philosophy—to relate the inclinations of the man who thoroughly enjoys the wonders of the sensuous world with those even more important goals which transcend personal enjoyment. The first step toward such a synthesis might be to follow Rilke's advice to "live the questions" from day to day. This means a polite refusal to align oneself with either the sensualists or the religionists, while viewing both attitudes with an attentive sympathy. Since factionalism is the death of ethical perception, the young need instruction in *not* becoming partisan in a negative or disparaging sense. If they read Emerson—and they certainly should be encouraged to do so—they should also read Walt Whitman. If they read the letters of Gandhi, they should also read Macneile Dixon's *Human Situation.* If they read the poetry of Blake, they should read Shelley, and if they are exposed, too, to any of the system-building moralists, they should probably read a little of John Steinbeck. Breadth of attitude is not, however, to be gained by a wide eclectic spread. What is needed is the capacity to search beyond specific arguments for the right demeanor and inclination of the author, and to test this in the laboratory of one's own feelings and ideas.

So it is not a man's politics, but the motivation behind his politics, which makes the difference. It is not the play or novel to which one responds with enthusiasm, but the reason for the response—what one reads into and out of it. It is not the company we keep but what we make of it.

*The God That Failed,* a collection of retrospective essays by now respected former Communists such as Arthur Koestler, Richard Wright, Ignazio Silone and Stephen Spender, showed that good men and true could be—indeed, had been—allied with the Marxist cause. What they put into the Communist movement was good, because they were men of integrity; they aligned themselves with the Party because, at the time, they believed the Communist answer to be the right one. If our young people grow up without realizing that men can be mistaken *honestly,* they run the risk of becoming intolerant prigs. In the field of literature, the same shifting scale applies. *From Here to Eternity* and *Baby Doll* appeared inspiring or corrupting, according to one's attitude, one's idea of what might be gained or lost, in human terms, by his encounter. So, as "everyone knows," it is our attitudes which define us, not our politics, our actions, our personal preferences. This the young need to know, more, perhaps, than anything else.

# *FRONTIERS*
## Art and the Masses

THE "Hi-Fi" record-player seems to be doing for music what the paper-back is doing for literature. Quite possibly, it is doing more, since the exquisite reproduction of sound gains its quality from technology, whereas the good or bad printing of a book does not change the quality of the ideas expressed, although it may affect somewhat the recognition of their importance.

This observation is hardly "news," since hi-fi is not something that happened in the last couple of years, but has been developing for at least a decade or more. But the observation is certainly something which will have occurred to anyone who, along with hundreds of thousands of other Americans, recently acquired a hi-fi player, after living for years without access to the listening opportunities which it supplies.

To have Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, and Brahms "on tap" in your living room, ready to perform for you at any time, is a rather extraordinary situation. You are privileged to enter at will a world of ineffable harmony or melodic beauty, and to experience, almost without mediation, its testimony to the greatness and dignity of man. You sit in the presence of a glorious imagination and witness its farthest reaches.

Yes, you can not only sit in the presence of musical genius—you can *lounge* while its full harvest of centuries is served up to you on a platter. You can even raise your voice and converse against the strains of the most beautiful sounds man has yet been able to devise. And you probably do. After all, you can always put the record on for careful listening when you're by yourself, and Beethoven and Stokowski aren't around to be offended by your casual inattention. It's no crime.

It might even be argued that to have Beethoven for the "background music" of what we call modern living is a good thing in itself. The quality of the sound penetrates, even if you don't consciously listen. The nuances become familiar, and once in a while you are bound to stop dusting the living room or set down your book and really give your attention to the record.

Well, we're not so sure about these things. Just as we're far from sure that millions of reproductions in fairly faithful color of great paintings in, say, *Life*, backed up by a beer advertisement in the next double-page spread, using the same inks, is necessarily worse than not being able to see the pictures at all.

This amounts to admitting the possibility that seeing, reading, and hearing the great achievements of the cultural tradition at the price of their association with the commercial, the trivial and the vulgar is a bargain we may submit to without a lot of complaint. After all, you don't *have* to read the ads. You may buy only the *good* paperbacks, and you can do what you like about listening to records. In all these matters, you're *free*.

But although you're free, certain losses are almost inevitable, affecting both yourself and your children. In the old days—days so far away they're getting pretty hard to remember—you waited with a spirit of wonderful anticipation for the time when your parents would take you to your first opera, or to the theater. And where now children get books for Christmas by the dozen, when you were a child you rejoiced in a single but exquisite copy of a book by Howard Pyle, with, perhaps, illustrations by Arthur Rackham. Then, with some ceremony and reverence, you read The Book, or portions of it were read to you.

In those days, the cultural tradition was not poured at you from a conveyor belt. Its transmission was an act of deliberation or devotion. The cultural tradition did not exist as a homogenized compound, pretentiously packaged by the best industrial designers and brought to your door along with the orange juice and the cottage cheese.

Well, you think about these things, and then you hear a phrase from Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 4, played by Oistrakh, and you reconsider. What a magnificent refutation of the slightest criticism of the mechanisms which make such things possible! And then you may even find that the twelve-year-old around the house now prefers Offenbach to Elvis. All is not lost!

You can say that technology has brought the democratization of the arts. Then you rejoin to yourself that for the arts, democratization also means vulgarization. Everything is so *easy* to get, so omnipresently "available." The frame of tradition, of selective enjoyment of the best, is gone. The presses turn and you get Max Brand and Edmund Wilson and Raymond Chandler and Santayana from the same turning cylinders. The trains carry them all across the continent and they turn up stacked in the same drug stores. The roaring avalanche of "merchandise" being shovelled at you silences the voice of critics. The books, the pictures, and the records are all around you by the million. There is no one to say what is "good," any more. There are murmuring paragraphs in the *Saturday Review* and the *Nation,* but this is a Lilliputian ripple in a Gargantuan sea. People of today are confronted by an enormous mountain of indiscriminate impressions, visual and auditory and mental, miscellaneously collected from the past and the present, with occasional snatches from the future—there it is; you take it, and try to decide what you like. Authorities can't be heard. The people are having to choose for themselves.

This is a part of the revolt of the masses which Ortega didn't write about, and it may not be entirely bad. In these terms, the movement of culture is as irrevocable as a glacier, except that it is a lot faster. Whether we "approve" or not, this is what is happening. You can do very little more than watch, and you are, of course, a part of it yourself. As a wise scientist once said, "Except for our specialties, we all belong to the masses."

Suggestive commentary on this general situation is provided by Lyman Bryson in *The Next America,* a book that deserves far more attention than it seems to have received. Concerning the decline of "taste," Bryson writes:

> The rich vulgarity of the taste of the American people is the natural result of freedom for commonplace invention, for the small independence of choice in so many aspects of his life that an American enjoys. . . . The craftsman of folk art cannot show anything but dignity and good taste under the restraint of custom. The modern industrialized democrat shows all kinds of trivial inventions of his own and chooses freely in a wild profusion of the trivial, mass-produced inventions of others. . . .
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> Vulgarity is the result because vulgarity is the inventiveness of small or inexperienced or too numerous minds. The question that democracy poses is whether or not the restraint of peasant custom is better than the vulgarity of popular choice. To the fastidious onlooker the peasant's good taste is better, of course; there is never any doubt that restraint of those who differ from ourselves in standards of taste is pleasant to the fastidious. Is it better for the persons who must either wear the costumes and use the utensils of their ancestors or pick casually among the products of mass production? In one case they use with indifferent habit the simple and beautiful things that ages have refined. In the other, they choose. The ease with which the shoddiest commercial gadgets invade a market of peasant buyers shows, first, how little attached they are by anything but habit to the fine old things and, second, how much pleasure they get out of choosing.

Mr. Bryson is on the side of the importance of choosing. He is also on the side of "history," for he approves of something that is inexorably taking place. He writes:

> The choice is philosophically simple: we can have men restrained from showing their commonness or we can see them as they are. I say philosophically because the practical choice is more complicated. In an industrial society, where material prosperity depends upon inciting an endless flood of small choices, difference in consuming interest between one man and another or, as is more common, between a woman today and the same woman next week, is as essential to mass production as deeper differences are to democracy.

One may quarrel, here, with Mr. Bryson for submitting so easily to the "incitement" of modern man to "an endless flood of small choices," as the condition of mass production. Why not at least a footnote advocating less incitement in the "next America"? His point would not break down because of this qualification.

He continues:

> There are philosophers and poets of freedom who want freedom for all men, provided its beneficiaries express freedom in the way their patrons like. But here, again, we have to be realists and stand by our faith. This is the way men and women are; that is our realism. Freedom is the means by which they will be the best personalities they are capable of being; that is our faith. There is no contradiction between faith and realistic knowledge here but the compromises are seductive to most reformers because their love of mankind is poisoned with disdain.
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> Do we pay too great a price for freedom by losing little things that add up to good taste? The price paid by the older systems, all of them in fact that have been above savage manners, has been in a tolerance of eccentrics and bigots of judgment among the aristocrats, a sycophancy in the hope of survival among the artists, and a compulsory simplicity among the peasants. What we pay for our system is to tolerate a vast rich vulgarity that covers up the peripheral fossils of aristocracy and patronage still left.

In *The Next America*, Mr. Bryson gives a fairly complete outline of the democratization and vulgarization of the arts, with statement of the issues involved along the lines of the above quotations. Those who mourn the refinements and aesthetic discrimination of an aristocratic past ought to read this book carefully. On the other hand, there is no reason to embrace the vulgarity of mass-produced arts simply because volume production reaches more people. One may wish that Mr. Bryson would come out a little more strongly for voluntary citadels of resistance to the vulgarizing tendency. A vulgar choice is doubtless better than no choice, but this is no tribute to vulgarity. The lesser-of-two-evils canon has little or no place in the arts.

But Mr. Bryson's final criterion is beyond criticism:

> We want a democracy of culture in which most of our citizens will enjoy the high experience of attempted creation, helping to make the culture in which they live. . . . I still believe that we can make the greatest use of art and thought as democratic experience if our future citizen thinks of himself as creator, and lives creation, and by doing whatever his powers will allow enjoys the basic good of choice and consequence. He may be appreciative of the work of the gifted even more deeply as a result of his own trials although that is not necessary. He can train his aesthetic skill in organizing all his experience in significant forms and will live a life of sensitivity and awareness, and this, according to each man's constitutional powers, will be for every man to do.

It is at least certain that we can place more trust in the free decisions of men who are trying themselves to practice the arts, than in a passively listening, reading, and looking population. Here, doubtless, lies our only salvation from the homogenization of a mass culture, and the overwhelming mechanical "productiveness" of a technological society.