

CLOUDED CERTAINTIES

FROM the very beginning of things—whenever that was—men have wondered about the purpose of Nature, of the world about them, and whether, or how, it could be understood. It is customary, of course, when starting out on a discussion of this sort, to say something knowing about primitive "animism," which is supposed to be the earliest form of human wondering about the world. But since human beginnings are shrouded in mystery, it seems wiser to choose a later period as the point of departure. There is, for example, the God-centered universe—the viewpoint embodied in the idea that not a sparrow can fall without the awareness of the Almighty. In this system, the meaning of Nature is only a peripheral expression of the intentions of the Deity. Mundane happenings are all referred to the divine intent, while the divine intent, for the most part, is left obscure.

The scientific attack on the theory of divine intent began as a response of the integrity of the human mind to the gross inconsistencies of dogmatic religion. The first avowed atheists were profoundly humanitarian. They were unable to believe that large-scale deception of the human race could be benevolent. It is better, they believed, to think that nature is totally indifferent to human welfare, than it is to think that nature is the mirror of the will of an incomprehensible or fraudulent deity. The resulting doctrines of Materialism were uncompromising, therefore, toward any implication of some kind of innate moral intelligence in Nature. While Nature, in the theories of Materialism, was permitted an endless ingenuity in the development of form, no deep-seated purpose could be allowed, nor could the variety and abundance of the productions of nature ever be traced to any kind of indwelling spirit or intelligence, making itself manifest. The rock upon which evolution was founded, for these

thinkers, was Lucretius' famous "fortuitous concourse of atoms." Any other principle than that of "blind chance" was blasphemy for the scientific thinker.

This rule had much to recommend it. Fundamentally, it was a methodological guarantee of the independence of scientific thinking, or any kind of thinking. What happens when you consent to the postulate of an unseen intelligence behind or working through Nature? Well, several things, we suppose, may happen, but what the scientific materialists feared would happen was the return of the arbitrary will of God as a factor to be reckoned with in natural events.

Now the advocates of a hidden intelligence in nature could charge the materialists with being hard, insensitive, and callous to the splendor of existence. The aesthetic argument against Materialism is really much sounder than the religious argument, since the element of pattern and design is obvious throughout the universe, and the aesthetic argument is under no necessity of "justifying the ways of God to Man." You can thrill to the Milky Way without having to explain the benevolence of the Lisbon earthquake to the persistent intelligence of a Voltaire.

But when the believers in a "divine order" or "plan" get to the moral side of their argument, they encounter serious difficulty. The "goodness of God" is practically impossible to explain except by saying that it passes all human understanding. And then, what good is a good which is comprehensible only by God? That is not what *we* mean by good, so why talk about it at all?

This, then, is the real offense of the "hidden intelligence" idea. It seems to open the door to an irrational "good" in the person of "God." What is wrong with an irrational "good"? In itself, there is nothing especially wrong with it, except that it is a

nonsensical idea. The wrong comes when a select class of people begins to "explain" or "interpret" the incomprehensible will and good of God. This was the principle of the Dark Ages. It made the Dark Ages dark.

So, from this point of view, the Materialists were really on the side of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. They gave up a technical, abstract value—the intelligence of nature—for an immediate practical value—the good of man. They wanted a world in which men could think for themselves without inhibition and without prohibition. Getting such a world seemed dependent upon getting rid of Thought-Control by an extra-cosmic God.

Too often, the materialists are called bad names without any recognition of the good names they deserve. It is neither intellectually nor morally easy to deny meaning and purpose to the world of nature. It is in fact a kind of mutilation of a deep feeling about life. The materialists were willing to suffer this mutilation for the sake of the freedom they felt to be of supreme importance. The free world is the only *real* world, they said, in effect. We suspect that there is no more important declaration that human beings can make. What the devotees of religion must answer for is the creation of an atmosphere in which men who loved freedom felt that they had to become materialists in order to be free.

There is a sense in which the changing ideas of men about nature and the world they live in are far more instructive about man than they are about nature. For example, by the time the materialistic conception of nature had become well-seated—say, toward the end of the nineteenth century—a new theory of benevolence began to emerge. Prince Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid, a Factor in Evolution*, typifies this kind of thinking. Here, an effort is made to show that cooperative intelligence is inherent in living things, as a "natural" reality. Kropotkin's book has had a legendary popularity. It must have filled an extraordinary hunger for countless people who

were determined to be "scientific" in their views. It gave them on an apparently scientific basis what they refused to accept at the price of "believing in God." Kropotkin restored an element of "humanity" to nature, his purpose being to lay a foundation for ethics without resort to supernatural religion. This book is still quoted by writers with an interest in finding a naturalistic basis for ethics.

Of course, the general debate about whether nature has intrinsic "meaning" or not still goes on. Ostensibly, the debate is concerned with what kind of a world we have—whether it is ruled by some kind of "God," in the traditional sense of the loving Creator of the Christians; or by an impersonal teleological principle such as the Vitalists in biology have suggested; or by blind natural forces which are totally indifferent to what we call "human values." But these issues, we make bold to say, are only the ostensible issues. The real issue is what men think of themselves and what they think they require in order to live the good life. The earnest materialist cannot abide the thought of a world dominated by a Creator who does not make any rational sense. The provisions for the being and role of the Creator afforded by traditional religion are intolerable to the independent mind of the materialist. He is really arguing for his own freedom, much more than for a special kind of world. The vitalist, on the other hand, finds that he cannot think the long thoughts he wants to think in a world constructed from materialistic assumptions. The only characterization that we are able to find for the believer in dogmatic religion is a largely unflattering one: he finds that thinking for himself is really too much for him, and he wants help. So he believes. Added to this, perhaps, is an intuition of what we speak of as the "spiritual," but in conventional religion the "spiritual" is so overshadowed by the furniture and apparatus of traditional belief that it is only a shadowy image of truly spiritual conceptions.

Having come this far in maintaining that debates about the world are really debates about ourselves and what we need in the way of a world, in order to be human or free, it is necessary to admit that these problems are not entirely subjective issues. Something is found out about the world by investigating it. Our point is that what we find out about the world through scientific investigation is far less decisive than is commonly supposed. That is, *philosophical* judgment issuing from scientific thinking is much more often an expression of what the person making it thinks *ought* to be believed, because it is good for people to believe it and because it is a kind of "truth" which will help men to be free. Even a "depressing" truth can qualify under this definition, since a falsely founded optimism is bound to betray its enthusiasts, in the end.

Just exactly *how much* truth there is in a current scientific theory or hypothesis about the nature of the world is what people would most of all like to know, but it is doubtful if this sort of question can ever have a really definite answer without becoming dogmatic. If we were able to separate our moral motives for what we believe about the world from our rational judgments about the validity of scientific findings, we should probably be in a better position to decide such matters, but it is questionable whether this is possible for human beings.

It is a question, that is, whether a philosophical observation which ignores the moral longings of the observer is an observation of any importance. Now this suggestion, we freely admit, is horribly unscientific. It sounds as though we would allow any kind of sentimentality to dominate the experimental laboratory. But we are talking about philosophical judgments from scientific evidence, not laboratory conclusions.

In any event, judgments about meaning are inevitably related to the motives of the men who make them. These motives are not supernatural. They are a part of man, a part of life, and an element in every human situation. Accordingly,

they have a natural role in the judgments men make and ought not to be excluded from those judgments, whenever the judgments are about the world and the meaning of the world. Perhaps it is best to say, here, that the more aware we can become of our motives in making judgments about the world, the more balanced and impartial our judgments will be.

We have a letter from a correspondent who objects to some of the things said by Ward Shepard in his article (MANAS, Aug. 20), "Fallacies of Ethical Nihilism." Since Mr. Shepard's article and the comments of this correspondent concern the kind of a world we live in, portions of the letter may fit in with this discussion:

When Mr. Shepard says, "Moreover, evolution through the ages, has provided a remarkably successful system of interadjustment which is essentially ethical in its nature," one wonders just what he means. The tiger and its prey are interadjusted. Man and his energy-yielding foods (all living, once) are inter-adjusted. But why ethical? Mr. Shepard then goes on, "For it has meant that an ever-increasing array of species has been able to fit into the life community without crowding and without impairing the basic food resource." I won't quibble here, because I don't know Mr. Shepard's mental reservations, but I think of the millions in India, when drought comes, or the equal (or greater) reduction in animal or plant population when food or water fails. But what I would recall is Darwin's observation of a cupful of soil from, I think, his garden. Watered, dozens of plants sprang up, and not because this cupful contained more seed than other cupfuls. Manifestly, not all these plants could reach maturity in the cup; nor all the weeds that might have sprung up in the garden. Some plants may produce a million seed; some fish, a million eggs; yet, over the years, the number of individuals of the species will not increase. In most instances, chance determines which shall survive; in a few instances, chance and superior viability, the latter often genetically determined. The happy community Mr. Shepard speaks of is the resultant of innumerable chances and viabilities . . .

The contention, here, is that no "ethical" relationships are manifest, but rather "chance," or the rule of the jungle, "red in tooth and claw."

Well, this is a difficulty that Mr. Shepard would no doubt admit. He was, after all, writing from the viewpoint of the *community*. He had said: "Any valid system of ethics will have to take its start from the axiom that the good is that which favors fulness of life." Darwin's cup of earth was a tiny "plant community," and so is any ecological situation a community of some sort. Shepard holds that Nature has made "ideal" arrangements for the manifestation of plant life or the plant community to the fulness of its potentialities. We doubt if anyone can prove him wrong. For a classical statement of this case in modern times, *The Fitness of the Environment*, by Lawrence J. Henderson, cannot be improved upon.

Our present correspondent looks at the matter differently. He is thinking of the weeds which do not survive, of the fish eggs which remain unhatched, of the bullock which succumbs to the tiger—suggesting that the unhappy fate of these individuals destroys any element of "ethics" in the natural situation.

Well, maybe our correspondent is right. He is certainly right if he has selected the correct "individual" in his analysis. The bearing of ethics depends upon the identity of the individual. But if the *community* is the individual, then Mr. Shepard's argument holds. It is possible to say, however, that while the community may be the individual among plants and animals, this cannot hold for human beings. Perhaps our correspondent has imported human considerations into the plant and animal communities. Or perhaps, on the other hand, the term "ethical" ought not to apply to any but human individuals with their awareness of moral issues. It may be that, in considering this question, we ought to recall Thomas Huxley's assertion in his essay, "Evolution and Ethics," that it is man's ethical role to *oppose* the cosmic process. In this case, the "ethical" quality of the plant and animal kingdoms would be only a limited paradigm of what is possible for man.

We don't really know, of course, what life process is working itself out in the plants and animals. We know what we see. We see exquisite design, breath-taking beauty, elaborate improvisation, an incredible wisdom and at the same time a fantastic folly, in the works of nature. We see profligate birth and devastating death, and we see the balance of which Mr. Shepard speaks as well as the ruthless suppression noted by our correspondent. To whom or what is nature accountable in all these turnings and twistings, performed with such splendor, grace, and often with high indifference to visible purposes?

One thing seems certain: Nature remains entirely neutral toward all anthropomorphisms, whether of materialism or theology. Voltaire administered a crushing defeat to the believers in this "best of all possible worlds" when he asked what divine necessity was fulfilled by the Lisbon earthquake. And Henry Ward Beecher made the retort courteous to Robert Ingersoll when, after Ingersoll had inquired about the maker of an elaborate orrery which he much admired, Beecher laconically replied, "Oh, nobody made it; it just happened!"

The honest agnostic can do no more than admit his wonder and his ignorance in the presence of the unceasing miracle of the natural world, while refusing the theologian the privilege of turning nature into an argument for some impossible autocrat in the sky. But a great band of possibilities remains untouched by the extremes of materialism and dogmatic religion. What we cannot have is theories about the world which, on the one hand, restrict the freedom of scientific inquiry, or, on the other, sterilize poetic or mystical inspiration.

There is certainly a lesson to be had in the longings of men of great moral imagination—men like Kropotkin—to find in nature some suggestive evidence of the goodness of life. The orbit of cooperation or "mutual aid" in the kingdoms of nature may be limited, but it is there. In man, the potential of mutual aid is vastly extended—to

include all other men, and all creatures of the flowering earth, as by the Buddha, by St. Francis, by others. And we men are a part of nature—if we can be "ethical," then nature is ethical through us.

One more paragraph from our correspondent:

Mr. Shepard evidently imagines that genes "determine" (in a sense) only physical characters. Darwin believed that "the selfless devotion to their young" is also heritable. Assuredly mental characteristics are, talents, so on, or more correctly, the potentialities are in the germ plasm. The young of one species of cuckoo have flattened backs, which enable them the more readily to get under the eggs of their foster parents to hoist them and roll them from the nest. The tender solicitude for their young inheres, not in the parent cuckoo, but in the foster-parent. The cuckoo was, in effect, the-wife of an antebellum plantation owner. In regard to Mr. Shepard's opinion that evolution illustrates "Whitehead's definition of cosmic teleology . . . aiming at intelligence and beauty," the more evolutionists have looked at it, the less they have found. Fortuity is adequate. See George Gaylord Simpson on this question.

Well, the genes *are* a puzzle. We have long been fascinated by an experiment conducted by Dr. Ethel Browne Harvey, of the Princeton Department of Biology, back in 1937. She fertilized the egg of a sea urchin from which the nucleus had been removed by centrifuging and then watched it develop into the early stages of an embryo. No genes! No chromosomes! "Division takes place, cleavage follows in a fairly orderly fashion. More and more cells are formed, until there is a group of some 500 cells forming a fairly normal blastula." In 1937, Prof. Richard Goldschmidt, formerly head of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute, and then associated with the University of California, announced his conclusion that the gene is a fiction and theoretically unnecessary. Two years later he asserted that classical genetics is "chained to an outworn theory." Prof. Ross G. Harrison, of Yale, said more than twenty years ago (*Science*, April 16, 1937), that while "the whole development of the gene theory is one of the most spectacular and amazing achievements of

biology in our times, the embryologist, however, is concerned more with the larger changes in the whole organism and its primitive system of organs than with the lesser qualities known to be associated with genic action . . . he is more interested in the back than in the bristles on the back and more in the eyes than in eye color . . . Already we have theories that refer the processes of development to genic action and regard the whole performance as no more than the realization of the potencies of the genes. Such theories are altogether too one-sided." According to Thomas Hunt Morgan, Nobel prize winner in Medicine in 1933 for gene research, "there is no consensus of opinion among geneticists as to what the genes are—whether they are real or purely fictitious." (*Science Monthly*, July, 1935.)

We don't mean to pose as an expert in this field. These citations are simply to show that rather extensive uncertainty concerning such matters has existed for a long time among scientists. As for the heritability of the mental characteristics of human beings, their talents, etc., there is the following from Raymond Pearl, who, as authorities go, was pretty high in the scale. He wrote:

In animal breeding, it has been learned that the only reliable measure of genetic superiority is the progeny test—the test of quality of the offspring actually produced. Breeding in the light of this test may, and often does, lead to the rapid, sure, and permanent improvement of a strain of livestock. But when the results of human breeding are interpreted in the light of the clear principles of the progeny test the eugenic case does not fare so well. In absolute numbers the vast majority of the most superior people in the world's history have in fact been produced by mediocre or inferior forebears; and furthermore the admittedly most superior folk have in the main been singularly unfortunate in their progeny, again in absolute numbers. (*Smithsonian Institution Report*, 1935.)

Dr. Pearl regarded the analogy between human breeding and livestock breeding as "specious and misleading."

Dr. George Gaylord Simpson does indeed say that fortuity is adequate to account for the development of organisms. We have seen him and remain, alas, unimpressed. Some other intellectual of our time has argued that two apes, pounding typewriters for a period of immense duration would eventually, under the laws of chance, produce all the works of Shakespeare. And Athanasius, quite an intellectual in his day, said that we must neither divide the Substance nor confound the Persons. We have the same trouble understanding all three of these pundits.

What is the fruit of this discussion? It is probably pretty sparse, but what we should like it to be is the suggestion that, today, certainties about the world and nature are increasingly clouded. We don't have the assurance we used to have about what we know, or think we know. This is a period of criticism and analysis, not a time of Big Assumptions and Crusading for the Right. We're no longer sure what kind of a world we need in order to be free. So the muscle has left old-fashioned materialism. The intellectual energy of our time is not going into scientific portraits of the world. The heart's devotion is not reviving the dogmas of yesterday's religion. There is a lot of sound and fury about religion, but it is Madison-Avenue type sound and fury, and not the real thing. As a contemporary critic has said, the effort, these days, is going into a search for identity. When we know a little more about ourselves, then we can begin to talk about the kind of a world we need in order to be free. Until then, yesterday's certainties will continue to be clouded, while we learn to be sure of other things—what may turn out to be the most important things.

REVIEW

DILEMMAS OF TWO WORLDS

PEARL BUCK'S tale of the Dowager Empress of China, *Imperial Woman*, is an account of the dying out of an old order—the order of Manchu China which, for all its instability and ineffectual decadence, was possessed of elements of dignity and beauty. There is no use, of course, in talking about going back to the static relationships of Manchu China. What is mainly of interest in this picture of a now completely past civilization is the quality of the faith which sustained its life—a faith that is hardly possible for modern man.

Other "old orders" have given way to new, but the Manchu regime—if we can take Mrs. Buck's word—was distinguished from Western Medieval empires by its *humanistic* temper. The Chinese have never been tempted very much by supernaturalism in religion. There was ancestor worship, of course, and Taoist superstition, but the temper of Chinese thought was shaped by the civilizing humanism of Confucius more than by any other influence. Certainly it is fair to say that the Chinese ethic of the mid-nineteenth century was aesthetic and moral rather than theological. Duty, loyalty, family obligations—these were the primary ideas transmitted from generation to generation in the nurture of the young.

From the point of view of the Dowager Empress, the invasion of China by the raffish British was much more than an accident of history with which she had to cope. Chinese civilization, in her eyes, was practically the Order of Nature. The need to give the British and other white invaders Treaty Ports was not just a judicious compromise, but a shaking of the foundations of the world. The poor woman could not eat. She had kept faith, and if affairs of State would not adjust to her faith, then the very universe was askew.

The interesting thing is that there was so much of good in the education of this woman—so much that was admirable in the culture which gave

her this faith. Her generation of Chinese lived under what would seem to us an incredible self-restraint. The principle of respect for elders, for high office, for precedent and status, was so all-pervasive that a modern man would have been frustrated at every turn. And yet. . . and yet. . . there must have been an ancient truth hidden under all the froth and sententious display. There was tremendous conviction that a principle of order rules the world. It is this conviction which comes through above all in Mrs. Buck's portrait of the Dowager Empress. It doesn't matter that this strong-willed woman miscalculated, or that she seems born out of time. She kept faith, even if the world would not. She and China went down to ruin before the onslaught of Western civilization, much as the one-eyed cyclops gave way to the wily deceptions of the shallow but determined Ulysses. A decadent classicism always succumbs in a contest with up-and-coming barbarism, and the British were, in many ways, no more than barbarians, in contrast to the Chinese. Who but barbarians would insist upon a "legal" right to trade in opium?

Probably we should say that the virtues of Chinese culture in 1850 were merely "traditional." They lacked the vigor of the days in which they were born. The Forbidden City of Peking thronged with eunuchs and there were other signs of decay. The sacredness of the person of the ruler of China seems entirely ridiculous to us. So it is not difficult to explain the weakness of the Manchu Empire in its last years. It was effete, embarrassed by internal dissensions, and weakened by cultural delusions of grandeur. The British did not "conquer" China, but only administered the *coup de grâce* to a civilization already moribund. Yet, stamped upon the pattern of Chinese culture, were many graces inherited from the past—devotion to the arts, love of philosophy, and practical attention to the details of the Confucian discipline.

While Confucius was above all a practical moralist, there is an implicit cosmology in his

work. He preached a compact with reality and nature. In this he was like the Stoics. These philosophers were not pragmatists, except accidentally or incidentally. They believed that they were defining the Role of Man. Their persuasion, however, was a sweet reasonableness. No threat of hell-fire reinforced their commands. They spoke only of how an excellent man behaves, describing the principles by which he lives. Buddha, in India, had done the same. In the same mood Lao Tse set down the *Tao Te Ching* before he disappeared at the Western Frontier. They taught a life in conformity with Nature.

Today, their world is gone. Reading about these teachers, or about the times of people who believed what they taught, is for us like looking into a picture window. Talk of virtue, loyalty, duty and the felicities of obedience seems to have some kind of a "catch" in it, for us. We know that the world of the past has come apart at the seams, or rather, our forefathers took it apart and set about making the world we know. This world of ours is built upon other principles: freedom, equality, enterprise, progress, discovery, strength, power, wealth, acquisition, experiment, science. These are the things we believe in.

When you read about those people who were "faithful" to the Emperor, or the Dowager Empress, you think to yourself, "Couldn't they see that it was time for them to be getting on to their Revolution?" Such history has a story-book quality. As a matter of fact, we can put up much better with kings and princes and noblemen and peasants, so long as they are in story-books. Even the novelists of blood-and-thunder historical romance are careful to give their heroes a cryptodemocratic tendency to make sure of their acceptance by the modern reader.

It was natural enough for the virtues characteristic of the classical, hierarchical society to "go out" with that society. The virtues were real enough—their moral quality impressive—but they couldn't hold the hierarchical societies together. Something was happening to the world,

and the vigor of the world, the strength and the vision of the world, was appearing in other quarters. The Anglo-Saxons, for all their barbaric imperialism, were making certain discoveries about the good life. The French and the Americans had discovered another kind of order in the world, and they, too, proclaimed that their principles were founded upon the order of Nature.

A Manchu nobleman tried to explain to the Empress, Tzu Hsi, what was happening to China.

"Recall, then, Empress, that the end of the two Opium Wars left our nation defeated. This defeat taught us one bitter lesson—that we could not consider the Western nations as tributaries. Their greedy, ruthless men, though never our equals, can become our masters through the brute force of the evil engines of war they have invented. . . . We have yielded, alas, to every demand—the vast indemnities, the many new ports opened by force to this hateful foreign trade. And what one foreign nation gains, the others all gain, too. Force—force is their talisman." .

"What is our weakness?" Tzu Hsi demanded. . .

Prince Kung looked sidewise at her. . . . "The Chinese were too civilized for our times," he said. "The sages taught that force was evil, the soldier to be despised because he destroys. But these sages lived in ancient times, they knew nothing of the rise of these new wild tribes in the West. Our subjects have lived without knowing what other peoples are. They have lived as though this were the only nation on earth. Even now, when they rebel against the Manchu dynasty, they do not see that it is not we who are their enemies, but the men out of the West."

When the Empress urged the use of diplomatic devices, Prince Kung replied:

"You speak too simply, Empress. . . . It is not a matter of white men alone. The knowledge of foreign weapons, the might of cruel force instead of skillful reason, is changing even the Chinese people in subtle ways. Force, they say now, is stronger than reason. We have been wrong, the Chinese say, for only weapons can make us free. This, Empress of the Western Palace, this is what we must understand in all depth and distance, for I do assure you that in this one concept hides a change so mighty in our nation that unless we can change it, we who rule, the

Manchus and ourselves not Chinese, our dynasty will end before the Heir can sit upon the Dragon Throne."

The Empress, Tzu Hsi, lived on into the early years of the twentieth century, throughout the period of Chinese decline and submission to outside powers. Whether or not the simple, "philosophical" analysis of Prince Kung tells the whole story, it is certain that the ancient spirit which he spoke of died away. An attempt was made by Sun Yat Sen to combine Western social reform with traditional Chinese wisdom, but without success.

Today, another kind of confusion is overtaking the West. It is not a confusion that can be so easily explained as Prince Kung explained to the Dowager Empress what was happening to China. It cannot be said that the Western nations have been misled by the pacifist propaganda of ancient sages. Nor has the "faith" of the industrial and technological West been shaken by the superior weapons of an opposing power—unless, perhaps, the Sputniks are to enjoy this role. The confusion of the West lies rather in dilemmas which arise from tensions produced within Western culture itself. It is the *lack* of a sense of over-arching order in our lives that we find frightening, today. It is not the neglect of force, but the neglect of everything else, which is beginning to horrify us. And the result is as disheartening as the sense of doom felt by the advisers of the Dowager Empress.

There is one thing on our side, in this dilemma. We can hardly blame anyone else for our troubles. The realities of our historical situation do not permit a superficial diagnosis. No one, really, has stopped us from doing what we say we believe in, and no one can be made the scapegoat for the loss of enthusiasm and savor in our lives. Unlike the Chinese of the last century, who lacked the blessing of circumstances which would have made them search themselves more thoroughly, to see where they went wrong, we are favored by an independence not yet lost from within.

COMMENTARY

THE GOOD IN UNCERTAINTY

ONE broad conclusion seems to rise from recent articles in *MANAS* and from similar discussions elsewhere. It is that modern man experiences increasing difficulty in thinking "traditionally." By this we mean that he feels uneasy when he realizes that he is living on borrowed capital of ideas.

Here, perhaps, is the primary psychological characteristic of our epoch. On the one hand, we want a certainty that we get for ourselves, instead of a certainty which has institutional or cultural sanction; yet the anticipation of this independence has terrifying aspects.

It is obvious that a transition in the source of security as far-reaching as this one is likely to create boundless confusion. We are pressed by the need to change the base of our convictions, yet feel incompetent to do it. This feeling of incompetence can become so extreme that acts of desperation may result. A man may try to drug himself with alcohol, or with the subtler intoxicants of emotional religion, to blur or destroy his sense of personal inadequacy. Or a war, with its absolute and specific demands, may seem to offer a welcome relief. Anything to avoid facing the fact that we know very little about ourselves and what we can reasonably expect of ourselves.

If this is the case, or anything like the case, there is considerable importance in recognizing it. For the confusion of our time—he intellectual, moral, and political confusion of our time—is so extensive that an encouraging explanation of it should be helpful. And it is encouraging to be able to think of our confusion as a symptom of growth, as resulting from a difficult step toward greater maturity.

There are, of course, a lot of other ways of looking at present-day confusion. You can say it comes from "loss of faith," or that men have misused the forces of nature, or that we don't know how to inject moral values into the pattern

of a technological culture. You can say a lot of things that are true, and still miss the essential factor.

It is not easy to feel encouragement, these days. Most of the people who offer optimistic expressions are able to do so only by ignoring the dark portents of current history. But if a man can gain self-respect and at the same time admit that he is confused, and that the world is confused, and give a reason why this should be so, he has the makings of a strong position. The view that a lot of our trouble comes from "growing pains" may have more truth in it than any other explanation of what is wrong with our time.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves PSYCHOLOGY AND FUN

A READER who shares our appreciation of such "natural" teachers as A. S. Neill and Homer Lane, has recommended for review *Psychology and the Great God Fun* by A. E. Hamilton. Like Neill and Lane, Mr. Hamilton started teaching because he couldn't help it. He became known in the academic world, not through a steady march up the ladder of rank, but because his work has compelled attention—even when there was no "Hamilton School," but only a Winter Camp where the Hamiltons attempted to learn about children rather than to teach them. Hamilton felt that it was necessary to *live* with children involved in all sorts of emotional difficulties in order to help them. In his preface to *The Great God Fun*, he writes that "a healthy stream flows through all children, even those with the severest problems. It is the capacity to *grow*. We were caught in this stream, swam in its currents, floated on its still reaches, bucked its cataracts and kept young with the young." Here is where the "fun" begins, and the fun is the closest one can come to accounting for Hamilton's success. Hamilton believed that even children with the severest problems possessed a healthy stream of consciousness. He became a consulting psychoanalyst to schools and camps, kept up with university work in psychology, and took trips to mental hospitals and reform schools, but his real authority derives from his personal experience in his own "unorthodox" setting.

Goodwin Watson of Teachers College, Columbia University, says in his introduction to *The Great God Fun*:

In a real sense, this is an art book. It does not pretend to serve as a textbook of psychological science or educational philosophy. Its sound philosophy and pertinent psychology appear less in exposition than in demonstration. Here an artist in the relationships of grownups to children has set forth a drama of collaborative work. There are scenes that

are gay and others that are somber. The subject matter ranges from birth to death and beyond. But every incident reflects the genius of one creative artist. His special style emerges as each tale unfolds. His extraordinary empathy for the hurt or love-hungry child shines through the realism of dialogue.

Hamilton has thoughtful things to say on the relationship between sexuality and adolescence. Again like Lane and Neill, he became convinced that "our social culture has equated love with sex and then equated sex with sin." The result of this is that, for young people generally, there is practically no encouragement toward the realization that neither is a subject by itself—and that both must be linked by tenderness. In the course of time Mr. Hamilton was called in to help with frightened or guilt-ridden adolescents. Somehow, he possessed the knack, as revealed in the informal case histories recounted in *Great God Fun*, of not sounding like an adult when he talked to young people, yet he was able to speak to them with conviction and favorable effect. Therefore, when conditions and school personnel are adequate, Hamilton does believe that "sex" should have something to do with the curriculum, especially in a boarding school. In a chapter, "The Core of Adolescence," he relates how the head of one school became convinced that he should break down "a taboo of years' standing against including sex in the curriculum":

But he did so only after he was convinced that what was needed was not mere sex education, but a free and honest and complete approach to the meaning of the word love in the lives of young men and women. And that sex, as genitality, can be a harmonizing, wholesome component of love and that participation in sexual exchange without love is a denial of the fullness of human capacity. He also saw that it is not by avoiding, repressing, frustrating genitality, but by utilizing our biological, human energy in harmonizing love and sex that we may achieve a civilized, generically human objective. He liked the idea, and a group of seniors was organized to take it up, explore its possibilities, and come up with suggestions for further follow-through. "Bull sessions," which had begun with surreptitious, guilt-flavored nibblings at Kinsey, became open discussions. Mere curiosity was turned into

purposeful effort in accord with the fine, intuitive apperceptions toward the deeper meanings of life that are the birthright of our sensitive, intelligent, eager young people.

At the end of this chapter, which is the last, Mr. Hamilton sums up his philosophy—which belongs to no particular professional school of thought, but leaves room for the emphases of traditionalists and new educationists alike:

Speaking of intuitive apprehension (which is psychololingo for a hunch), my realistic hunch is that from such groups of young men and young women, meeting together, or separately, in company with one or more of their elders—chosen not for their knowledge, proud that they know so much, but for their wisdom, humble that they know no more—we shall find a key to some valuable creative discoveries concerning the meaning of the word love, both for psychology and education which should be one discipline; and, above all, for our young friends—the adolescents.

There are many ways of saying that good education is good conversation, though we are principally familiar with the word "discussion" and therefore are apt to think of the sort of talking that goes on at the collegiate or senior high school level. Mr. Hamilton stresses that young and even retarded children can be led into conversation which is more than simply rambling or indulgent. It therefore occurs to us that all parents and educators would do well to familiarize themselves with Shephard's *Life of Bronson Alcott*. In those blooming days of his fellow transcendentalists, Thoreau and Emerson, Alcott demonstrated that children could be taught effectively through conversation. Perhaps it was simply the natural genius of the man, but Alcott managed to blend the essentials of discipline and order with an atmosphere of complete ease for little boys and girls. Perhaps Alcott's secret is now shared by Mr. Hamilton.

This mood, unfortunately, cannot be taught in teacher's training courses. The teacher must feel an ever-fresh desire to discover some new dimension in what is being talked about, must read both books and people, not with a view to

cataloguing and classifying, but as the fulfillment of a healthy appetite for discovery.

Psychology and the Great God Fun was published by the Julian Press, Inc. in New York. This volume is a proper acquisition for those who believe, with Hamilton, that "birth, life, death, immortality: these words swim into the dawning consciousness of little people earlier, more often than we grownups think."

FRONTIERS

A Story Worth Following

DURING the past eighteen months, rabble-rousers have been building against the Supreme Court the same sort of righteous hatred which supported the activities of the late Senator McCarthy. Even those who have found it no longer expedient to speak of the late Senator in words of praise—after all, even the Eisenhower Administration withdrew any semblance of support—are now attacking court decisions upholding freedom of opinion and belief. All this, we think, should make it even more clear that those who wish to punish Communists for being Communists, Communist sympathizers for being Communist sympathizers, or friends of either for having such friends, are not so much worried about the Dangers of Free Thought. After all, how can anyone who depends upon a set of dogmas feel secure if he lives in an atmosphere wherein contrary dogmas are shown equal respect before the law?

The Supreme Court has firmly set aside, as having no statutory warrant, any procedures which discriminate against American citizens on the ground of their ideological persuasions. Moreover, in nearly every one of these decisions, the Court has attempted to lay the groundwork for a sadly neglected constitutional education—by redefining, and revivifying the original meaning of the Bill of Rights.

Playwright Arthur Miller was one of the last to be saved from continuing persecution by Supreme Court rulings. But the story of Paul Robeson, who for some eight years endeavored without success to obtain an American passport to travel in Russia, involves an even more tightly drawn battle. Secretary of State Dulles, last July, felt obliged to see that Robeson's passport was issued, and to accompany the passport with a formal request that Robeson be granted "proper courtesy and freedom of passage." For the Supreme Court had just ruled that the State

Department has no legal right to withhold passports from American citizens because of "beliefs and associations."

Soon after this, however, the same Mr. Dulles sent to Congress a bill which, if converted to law, would have deprived Mr. Robeson of his passport and kept him inside the United States. Mr. Dulles' bill was jointly sponsored by Sen. Theodore Green (Democrat, of Rhode Island), the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Rep. Kenneth Keating (Republican, of New York), the senior Republican on the House Judiciary Committee. Obviously, Mr. Dulles and his cohorts hoped to outmaneuver the Supreme Court by passing a new law. Then, of course, the Court would no longer be able to say that a denial of passport in a case such as Robeson's was without "statutory" basis. The next step—if the bill had become law—would have required the Supreme Court to accept a test case in order to decide whether the new law was unconstitutional. As an editorial in the *New Republic* for July 21 said:

In its decisions at which these bills are directed, the Supreme Court did not invoke constitutional prohibition. It invited Congressional reconsideration, pointed up certain values for Congress to give new weight to, and read Congress a lesson on the explicitness, the clarity, and the deliberation that, in Holmes' words, are not merely a duty but a necessity when important legislation is enacted. But in the end . . . the Court threw the ball back to Congress. However, the reluctance of the Court to render a constitutional decision, and to return an issue to Congress, is certainly not to give the legislature license to act foolishly. Nor is it to say that constitutional issues may not yet be reached. If Congress now, in the grip of adjournment fever, acts, as the President might say, imprudently, the effect will be to bring before the Court the constitutional questions that were recently avoided, and very likely to bring them there in the worst possible way from the point of view of men like Reps. Walter and Keating who are pushing these bills.

Unfortunately we cannot take comfort in the prospect of this ironic confrontation in the courts, because laws can do much harm before they are declared unconstitutional, and they leave scars

afterwards. And because in the longer view, foolishness in the legislature, no matter if counteracted by the court, must needs sap the strength of democratic government.

Alistair Cooke, American correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian*, reports on the Senate Internal Security Sub-committee's complaint that *surely* supporters of international Communism should not receive "the dignity and protection that our government affords." Cooke writes:

But neither Congress nor the President can so nonchalantly dispose of a Supreme Court's decision. And the question arises how soon and powerfully the court will have to enlarge the grounds on which it defied the Secretary of State. In its opinion of June 16 the court did not argue the Constitutional powers of the Secretary of State to conduct foreign policy for the President. It simply remarked that it could find no act of Congress, no "statutory warrant" for his denying a passport to any United States citizen on the basis of his beliefs or associations. The Secretary has promptly asked Congress to provide such a statute. And once it is law, the next test case before the court will compel it to seek other, and Constitutional, protections for travelling Communists.

Justice Douglas, who wrote the court's opinion, went so far as to say that "we deal here with a Constitutional right," but the 5-4 vote was not explicitly taken on this argument. Mr. Douglas said, "We must assume Congress will be faithful to respect" this right. Congress now proposes to be faithless to it, if indeed it is an implicit Constitutional right, in double-quick time.

Neither the *New Republic* nor Alistair Cooke was optimistic concerning what happened after Mr. Dulles' introduction of the bill. But for once, at least, optimism would have been justified. Congress did not convert the Dulles proposal into law, and Mr. Robeson proceeded abroad. A picture in *U.S. News & World Report* (Sept. 12) shows Robeson conversing with Khrushchev. As *U.S. News* says, the court ruled that Robeson "need not tell the State Department whether he was a Communist."

This has been a story worth following because it supports the hope that some sort of tide has turned and that there is a definite connection

between the slumbering conscience of the people on Bill-of-Rights issues and the courageous nine of the Supreme Court in their struggle to defend American government by educating its representatives, even at the cost of roaring disapproval.

A lengthy article appearing in the same issue of *U.S. News*, "Chief Justice of a Court Under Fire," reports Justice Warren's staunch stand on desegregation. The next January meeting of Congress, *U.S. News* predicts, will see "clamor for legislation to curb the Court's powers," largely because of the political repercussions of desegregation. In any case, through Chief Justice Warren and the Court, thousands of liberals who have long been at loose ends concerning their duty to their beliefs will have a point to rally around. The issue, moreover, is not simply national and of grave proportions, but also one which improves our thinking about the essential nature of the human being. MANAS, like the *New Republic* and the *Manchester Guardian*, may yet see the day when it is as easy to "point with pride" as to "view with alarm" the policies which guide domestic—and therefore international—affairs.