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THE ISSUE OF "IDENTITY"

THERE are occasions when a reader of MANAS seems to function more effectively as an editor than those who try to carry out the job from week to week. It is a matter of some pride to the latter to admit this, since it means that MANAS has been successful in attracting readers who are acutely aware of the need for balance, and who, when they find it lacking, attempt to contribute a restoring perspective. In illustration, there is the following letter:

> It is unfortunate that I am moved to make this comment at a time and a place where I do not have immediate access to either a library or a sizeable collection of copies of MANAS. This disadvantage, however, may be outweighed by the consequent result in brevity.
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> For some time now it has seemed to me that a certain contradiction has been invading your pages—a contradiction which seems particularly out of place in view of your familiarity with Buddhism, Hinduism, etc. Specifically, this contradiction arises from the advocacy of search for and the finding of "identity"—a theme which characterizes the work of some of the psychologist-philosopher writers you quote or to whom you make reference.
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> In the Sept. 18 issue, your title (in "Children"), "Woman's Search for Identity" (the "identity crisis"), speaks for itself. The course proposed (and the problem as analyzed) herein is worse than dubious, in my view. In the same issue, "The Indian within Us," a review of Hal Borland's *When the Legends Die*, presents a similar viewpoint: "It strikes us that the spiritual crisis of such an Indian is, in more ways than one, also the spiritual crisis of technological man." Here, again, the concern is with personal identity. Perhaps this was not the impression intended.
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> Your lead article concerns itself with pacifist means. The idea you derive from Richard Gregg, to the effect that if nonviolence is to have meaning, "it must arise spontaneously as an attitude of mind," should not be brushed off too lightly. I fear that if we wait on "logic" to accomplish anything, we will wait too long.
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> I would suggest that a prior concern to all means and all logic, in this regard, should be the elimination of man's feverish concern over his "identity," his ego. If we cannot learn from Hindu, Buddhist, or mystic sources, then it seems to me that our crying need is for a contra (or anti) ego psychology and its integration into our philosophy and behavior.
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> As Arthur Guirdham points out in his *Theory of Disease*, the path to health in psychosomatic disease is self-forgetfulness. (Our war orientation is an international psychosomatic disease, or, as you say, "psychosis.") Doubtless it will be contended that in our culture, particularly in our competitive, status-seeking culture, such an approach is hopeless. Perhaps it is, but something going in this direction has to be prior, it seems to me, to all effective nonviolent "logic" or action.
>
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>
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A more important or more difficult subject for discussion could hardly have been devised by Mr. MacIntyre. The rules or priorities in human development are, after all, known with certainty only by those who have completed the course, and if we can assume that the rules do in fact exist, and can be known, and that, further, they are or have in fact been known by some human beings, then we are confronted by an all-important and unmistakable reality: the communication of these rules and priorities needs all the skill that sages, seers, and philosophers can muster, and even then it is seldom successful.

Directly or indirectly, there is discussion of these questions in all the high religions. But the counsels given, it seems to us, are either initially enwrapped in paradox, or eventually lead the student into paradox; whereupon, he must learn to find his own way.

Let us look for a moment at this question of "identity." Identity is a two-sided conception. It obviously relates to what the personality-cozening

psychologists mean by "self-esteem." In order to be "happy," these psychologists tell us, people need the comfort of thinking that they have some personal importance, and a sense of status helps to smooth the wrinkled brows of those whose defeats in life have given them unenviable positions on the social scale.

To be susceptible to self-satisfaction on these grounds will seem to most readers a weakness, and those who attempt to found a psychology of human relations on such pretexts can hardly gain the respect of people who believe that the meaning of the expression, "the dignity of man," depends upon high and ennobling callings.

Yet there are other uses of the traditional forms of self-esteem. Embodied in every culture are certain ideas of virtue. A leader who wants to gain supporters for a hazardous undertaking finds it necessary to evoke the qualities which the self-image of that culture provides. So Pericles, when the Athenians were hard-pressed, enlarged at length upon what it meant to be an Athenian. Spoken to in these terms, the people of the beleaguered city found in themselves new deeps of heroism to tap.

The French, when called upon for brave sacrifices during the early years of World War I, were reminded by their generals that their country was the first in Europe to proclaim the Rights of Man. Frenchmen had done this for the world, and now they were required to defend the citadel of freedom their forefathers had given their blood to erect.

It was a time of agonizing decision for French workmen who were also part of the radical movement. Now they had to decide who they were. The fraternal solidarity of the working class, regardless of national boundaries, had been proclaimed by Jean Jaures, the French pacifist and socialist leader. The decision came quickly. Jaures was murdered, and national identity triumphed over working-class identity, for Germans, Frenchmen, and many others. We cannot deny the importance of such decisions, nor that they are bound to be made, although we may point out that the alternatives of choice in 1914 left something to be desired. What is evident, however, is that a man has to *see* and *feel* alternatives, before he can choose between them. Such seeing and feeling are of the essence of the question of identity.

Spiritual teachers have not hesitated to use the leverage of the sense of identity to move men to action. When, on the field of Kurukshetra, the warrior prince Arjuna, in depression, laid down his arms, Krishna reproached him:

> A soldier of the Kshatriya tribe hath no duty superior to lawful war, and just to thy wish the door of heaven is found open before thee, through this glorious unsought fight which only fortune's favored soldiers may obtain. But if thou wilt not perform the duty of thy calling and fight out the field, thou wilt abandon thy natural duty and thy honor, and be guilty of a crime. Mankind will speak of thy ill fame as infinite, and for one who hath been respected in the world ill fame is worse than death. The generals of the armies will think that thy retirement from the field arose from fear, and even amongst those by whom thou wert wont to be thought great of soul, thou shalt become despicable. Thine enemies will speak of thee in words which are unworthy to be spoken, depreciating thy courage and abilities; what can be more dreadful than this!

In this appeal to Arjuna's sense of identity as a *Kshatriya*, Krishna pulled all the stops. Later on in the dialogue, he makes a different appeal, arguing from premises which rest on conceptions of being which are closer to the heart of reality; but here, at the outset, he speaks to Arjuna's despondent and almost petulant condition.

If it be said that people who are deliberating this question ought always to seek the highest ground, there can be no quarrel with this view. Yet there has to be a *ground.* If a man is to act upon a high conception of the self, that conception must have a reality sufficiently stable for him to stand on it against all comers. This aspect of the problem is interestingly explored in the eleventh discourse of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, in which Krishna's disclosure of *his* identity almost

destroys Arjuna by its terrible grandeur. Responding to the youth's appeal, "Show me, O Master of devotion, thine inexhaustible Self," Krishna allows to grow before his disciple's eyes the spectacle of Universal Being. Arjuna cries out:

> I see thee crowned with a diadem and armed with mace and chakkra, a mass of splendor, darting light on all sides; difficult to behold, shining in every direction with light immeasurable, like the burning fire or glowing sun. Thou art the supreme, inexhaustible Being; the end of effort, changeless, the Supreme Spirit of this universe, the never-failing guardian of eternal law: I esteem thee Purusha {the Eternal Person, in both gods and men}, I see thee without beginning, middle, or end, of infinite power with arms innumerable, the.sun and moon thy eyes, thy mouth a flaming fire, overmastering the whole universe with thy majesty.

Unable to stand in the presence of this awesome sight, Arjuna almost breaks down. Trembling, terrified, he says in "broken accents":

> Having been innocent of thy majesty, I took thee for a friend, and have called thee "O Krishna, O son of Yadu, O friend," and blinded by my affection and presumption, I have at times treated thee without respect in sport, in recreation, in repose, in thy chair, and at thy meals, in private and in public; all this I beseech thee, O inconceivable Being, to forgive. . . . I bow down and with my body prostrate, I implore thee, O Lord, for mercy. Forgive, O Lord, as the friend forgives the friend, as the father pardons his son, and the lover the beloved. I am well pleased with having beheld what was never before seen, and yet my heart is overwhelmed with awe, have mercy then, O God; show me that other form, O thou who art the dwelling-place of the universe; I desire to see thee as before. . . .

One should now comment, we suppose, that all this is "symbolic," as no doubt it is. And yet it would be a mistake to subtract from the vivid splendor of the *Gita* with easy words of "symbolic" interpretation. For it seems certain that some such experience of both horror and awe, both fright and transcendence, is in store for each one of us before he can contemplate the reality of the self-being within. And like Arjuna, we need to approach this vision by easy stages; not that we are without intuitions of the highest; Arjuna had these—after all, he chose Krishna for his charioteer; and he had the sudden and overwhelming flash of inward sight which shook him to his core and left him ever after a changed man—yet the grounding of this vision in daily behavior comes only from the resolution, from moment to moment, of the paradox of our dual identity, our universal and our particular being, until it is paradox no more, but the luminous reality of the nature of man.

There is very little of importance written today that is not in some sense a reflection of that light.

When Stringfellow Barr calls out to his countrymen, *Let's Join the Human Race*, his argument turns on the question of identity. When James Baldwin speaks of the fact that men who would debase others only debase themselves, he is making a declaration about the nature of man. When Gerald Sykes, in *The Hidden Remnant*, examines the "politics of shipwreck" and the "wisdom of the smashed," he is adding a gloss to the despondency of Arjuna and noting the beginning of his awakening to the self. When the Existentialists lampoon *l'esprit sérieux*, they are saying something about the human identity behind the masks of status and professional degree. When Albert Schweitzer wins for the simple expression, "reverence for life," an attention many men would have said was impossible, a generation ago, he shows the ability of a distinguished human being to touch and awaken feelings of selfhood which hide in countless other hearts.

Now what, exactly, is the point of our reader's criticism? He is saying, it seems to us, that preoccupation with the question of "who we are" too easily becomes an indulgence and even an exercise of egotism. The wise and good man, he is saying, is the man who forgets himself in the service of others. From this it follows, he suggests, that the man who seeks a sense of identity is working against his own higher development as a human being.

Basically, this criticism: presents a preachment we have no wish to resist. The ideal of self-forgetfulness is of central importance in the ethical development of mankind. We have the example of self-forgetfulness in all the truly great of the past; and we have, in our own personal experience, the salutary sense of relief which comes when we do in fact forget ourselves for some noticeable interval of time. There is a deep joy and freedom in impersonality. The cloying emotions of personal anxiety no longer get in the way of what we set out to do. The bias of pride does not cloud our judgment. Perception of the need of others is undistracted by an intruding self-interest. All the human qualities—moral virtues and intellectual capacities—are apotheosized by self-forgetfulness. Hamlet's account of the potentialities of man—

> What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! . . .

readily obtains thorough-going verification from the achievement. And this is not, we note, a matter of conventional measures of ability. The change is qualitative and applies at all levels of activity. A ditch-digger who does not think about himself shows the same rare quality in living his life as the man who practices impersonality in high estate. This forgetting of oneself, we may say, is spiritual being. It has something in common with what the religious people are trying to get at when they speak of "divine grace." Or Portia, when she declares that "the quality of mercy is not strained."

So we confess at once that self-forgetfulness is a desirable state to be in. But how do you reach this condition? Can one enter it at will?

Simply asking this question brings to the fore many of the paradoxes of man's psychological life. The clearest general formulation of the problem, today, is probably in the suddenly contemporary literature of Zen Buddhism. How, the disciple asks, can I seek enlightenment without wanting to be enlightened? How can I desire without desiring? How can I forget myself when the wish to forget is a *personal* volition and therefore an assertion of what ought to be denied?

But still the injunction comes, You must forget yourself. The inability of the individual to follow this advice, save by the aid of a conspiracy of circumstances which come upon him unaware, drawing him out of himself, focusing his attention on a work that desperately needs doing, becomes a source of spiritual frustration. Hence his reasoned study of the problem.

Within the individual there may take place a dialogue like the following:

I am, it seems, the sort of being who longs for release from self-interest, for release from the confining sort of self-awareness, and personal striving toward this sort of freedom only entangles me further in the web of self-delusion. Yet with the help of the world, I sometimes outwit myself, and gain my end. But then, when I think of it as *my* end, the achievement dissolves and I am back where I started. The process works, it seems, only when the self for whom I strive is recognized, without thought or deliberation, in others. Who am I, then? I am the others.

This, apparently, is an intellectual resolution of the paradox. It is distinguished from the self-forgetfulness our correspondent advocates by the fact that the latter is a resolution accomplished by feeling. The mind, it is clear, deals with distinctions and differences, while feeling is an expression of wholes.

Since the mind, on this hypothesis, cannot lead to self-forgetfulness, and since ethical good depends upon self-forgetfulness, what good is the mind? It seems that mental operations must somehow be abolished in order to reach the goal.

Now we come to the crux. Man is capable of feeling at various levels of his being. His emotions can declare him to be the sort of whole which excludes other wholes. A man can *hate.* A man's feelings are not infallible. They often lie to

him about the nature of his own good and the good of others.

His own wholeness, in short, is equivocal. There have been Neroes and Christs, Hitlers and Gandhis, Jack the Rippers and Albert Schweitzers. Why are there such moral polarities in human development? Did these men have anything to do with the direction of their becoming? Did they exercise rational choice, in addition to responding to their feelings? Did they, in short, *think about themselves?* Was there self-criticism in their lives? Did the self-criticism bear fruit?

Any sort of criticism is a rational pursuit. It requires mental operations. It compares what is with what might or ought to be. And when you say *ought*, you are asserting the reality of paradigmatic man. You are saying that there is an idea of the self to which all other ideas of the self ought to give way. We do not see how any of these things can occur in the life of a human being without intense reflection on the question of human identity. And we do not see how any man can leave these pursuits out of his life and remain human. The unexamined life, as Socrates said, is not worth living.

Actually, you can do quite a lot with the mind in relation to the goal of self-forgetfulness. With the mind a man can make resolves to behave in a certain way, and by this means cultivate situations in which self-forgetfulness becomes natural. With an ideal of the self in his mind, he can control some of the less desirable forms of self-forgetfulness. You could argue that he needs to remember his Self while forgetting his self. You can make up all sorts of tricky little formulas to use until you no longer need them. Men have been making up these formulas, for use by themselves and others, since the beginning of reflective consciousness in the human race, and not all of them are "little," but all of them are tricky. The record of these formulas is before us in the dogmas and tenets of religion, the injunctions of cultural *mores*, the platitudes of moralists and the reports of mystics. The record extends also to the mandates of patriotism, the obligations of humanitarian social philosophy, and the dictates of altruism.

For the most part, however, men have accepted from others—from teachers, philosophers, and priests, from leaders, politicians, and rulers—instruction in who and what they are. In the past, this has led to the wars of religion, and in the present, to the wars of ideology. And there have been other, equally serious consequences in behavior because men have taken their ideas of identity at second hand. Our present problems come mostly from the either ruthless or oversimplifying attempts of politicians and state-makers to by-pass the paradox of human selfhood with some superficial if plausible formula. Modern man, having neglected the internal paradox of his life, is now confronted by external dilemmas of overwhelming proportion. A laggard intuition informs him that he will learn how to resolve these dilemmas only by an inquiry into the nature of the self, with the fruits of which he will be able to direct his awakening sense of moral ought.

Here, it seems to us, is the most likely explanation, and justification, of the modern "quest for identity."

REVIEW
THE FIRE OF MR. BALDWIN

IT takes a thorough stint of reading to appreciate the depth, as well as the greatness, of James Baldwin's capacities as a writer. Our first prolonged encounter with Baldwin was in reading his novel, *Another Country,* which seemed then and still seems less than either good writing or profound thinking. But *The Fire Next Time* (Dial Press, 1963; $3.50) is literally incomparable, and reaches close to the heart of issues which only incidentally involve the historical alignment of blacks versus whites.

In the second section of *The Fire Next Time* ("Down at the Cross," which first appeared in the *New Yorker),* Baldwin creates the atmosphere of convulsions within a private purgatory. He speaks as Man, not as Negro, not as a sometime champion of bi-sexuality. It is with a detachment which blends into compassion that Baldwin gives us a picture of the Black Muslim movement, its antecedents, its compulsive ethos—and its quality of Karma-Nemesis. And it is also from this standpoint that he writes such passages as the following:

> I am very much concerned that American Negroes achieve their freedom here in the United States. But I am also concerned for their dignity, for the health of their souls, and must oppose any attempt that Negroes may make to do to others what has been done to them. I think I know—we see it around us every day the spiritual wasteland to which that road leads. It is so simple a fact and one that is so hard, apparently, to grasp: *Whoever debases others is debasing himself.* That is not a mystical statement but a most realistic one, which is proved by the eyes of any Alabama sheriff—and I would not like to see Negroes ever arrive at so wretched a condition.

The assumption that the black-white problem is to be solved by "intelligent Negroes lifting themselves to the white man's standard" may come from a kind of well-wishing, but it misses the real issue. When Robert Kennedy suggested that within forty years a Negro might become president of the United States, he may have said something that was good for him to say—but, however unintentionally, the statement reflects a patronizing outlook. Finally, this is one link of evidence in a conclusive chain that, as Baldwin says, "White Americans find it as difficult as white people elsewhere do to divest themselves of the notion that they are in possession of some intrinsic value that black people need, or want." He continues:

> There is certainly little enough in the white man's public or private life that one should desire to imitate. White men, at the bottom of their hearts, know this. Therefore, a vast amount of the energy that goes into what we call the Negro problem is produced by the white man's profound desire not to be judged by those who are not white, not to be seen as he is, and at the same time a vast amount of the white anguish is rooted in the white man's equally profound need to be seen as he is, to be released from the tyranny of his mirror.

Even wearers of the blinders of self-favoring Caucasians are able, of course, to study the facts which mean debasement for the Negro. President Kennedy's Civil Rights message, for example, contained this terse summation:

> The Negro baby born in America today, regardless of the section of the nation in which he is born, has about one-half as much chance of completing a high school as a white baby, one-third as much chance of completing college, one-third as much chance of becoming a professional man, twice as much chance of becoming unemployed, about one-seventh as much chance of earning $10,000 a year, a life expectancy which is seven years shorter, and the prospects of earning only half as much.

Loren Miller's "Prosperity through Equality" *(Nation,* Sept. 21) invites consideration of the Negro population "as if" it constituted an independent nation. Mr. Miller writes:

> If America's 19 million Negroes and all their property were tucked neatly away in a country of their own on the coast of Africa or in some island in the sea, their nation would rate a high priority in our foreign-aid program. And justly so. Theirs would be a country with a better than 90 per cent basic literacy rate, with a fair number of skilled workers interspersed with a preponderance of unskilled and agricultural laborers, an emergent middle class and a

good proportion of lawyers, doctors, schoolteachers and civil servants, all of them English-speaking and practically all of them with a deep commitment to the democratic way of life. But their nation would need aid, and need it quickly, because its growing unemployment rate would already stand at depression levels; its relief rolls would be bulging; a substantial percentage of its basic literates would be functionally illiterate; 16 per cent of its housing would be substandard; its illegitimacy rate and school dropouts would be high and its median family income low, its youth victimized by a high degree of hard-core family poverty and worst of all, the trends toward accentuation of its social ills aggressively increasing. Despite these shortcomings, the nation would represent a current $12 billion annual market with an increasing desire for consumer goods.

From the standpoint of self-interest, there are further considerations for Americans:

A rise in this theoretical nation's income could occur only with a drastic reduction of its functional illiteracy, an enormous retaining of its workers, wholesale improvements in its housing, a plummeting of its relief rolls, marked decreases in unemployment, illegitimacy and crime and juvenile delinquency rates and, best of all, a reversal of presently falling living standards and of socially undesirable and harmful conduct. In short, the nation would move toward white American standards. Foreign aid would have served its exact purpose: It would have assisted a friendly underdeveloped country and it would simultaneously have benefited the American economy.

Lillian Smith has articulated a psychological fact of great importance, something which the Buddha saw clearly, and which is conveyed in parable form in the Sermon on the Mount. That fact is that the debaser suffers more than the one debased, that the experience of suffering has its compensations, and that these compensations have nothing whatsoever to do with the notion of cheerfully accepting one's fate. Baldwin speaks in the same vein:

I do not mean to be sentimental about suffering—enough is certainly as good as a feast—but people who cannot suffer can never grow up, can never discover who they are. That man who is forced each day to snatch his manhood, his identity, out of the fire of human cruelty that rages to destroy it knows, if he survives his effort, and even if he does not survive it, something about himself and human life that no school on earth—and, indeed, no church—can teach. He achieves his own authority, and that is unshakable. This is because, in order to save his life, he is forced to look beneath appearances, to take nothing for granted, to hear the meaning behind the words. If one is continually surviving the worst that life can bring, one eventually ceases to be controlled by a fear of what life can bring.

It is impossible to read "Down at the Cross" without becoming aware of some uncomfortable truths about the role of orthodox religion in relation to psychological and sociological problems over color. Mr. Baldwin demonstrates his own courage of mind in the following:

"The white man's Heaven," sings a Black Muslim minister, "is the black man's Hell." One may object—possibly—that this puts the matter somewhat too simply, but the song is true, and it has been true for as long as white men have ruled the world. The Africans put it another way: When the white man came to Africa, the white man had the Bible and the African had the land, but now it is the white man who is being, reluctantly and bloodily, separated from the land, and the African who is still attempting to digest or to vomit up the Bible. The struggle, therefore, that now begins in the world is extremely complex, involving the historical role of Christianity in the realm of power—that is, politics—and in the realm of morals. In the realm of power, Christianity has operated with an unmitigated arrogance and cruelty—necessarily, since a religion ordinarily imposes on those who have discovered the true faith the spiritual duty of liberating the infidels. This particular true faith, moreover, is more deeply concerned about the soul than it is about the body, to which fact the flesh (and the corpses) of countless infidels bears witness. It goes without saying, then, that whoever questions the authority of the true faith also contests the right of the nations that hold this faith to rule over him—contests, in short, their title to his land. The spreading of the Gospel, regardless of the motives or the integrity or the heroism of some of the missionaries, was an absolutely indispensable justification for the planting of the flag. Priests and nuns and school-teachers helped to protect and sanctify the power that was so ruthlessly being used by people who were indeed seeking a city, but not one in the heavens, and one to be made, very definitely, by captive hands. The Christian church itself—

> again, as distinguished from some of its ministers—sanctified and rejoiced in the conquests of the flag, and encouraged, if it did not formulate, the belief that conquest, with the resulting relative well-being of the Western populations, was proof of the favor of God. God has come a long way from the desert—but then so had Allah, though in a very different direction. God, going north, and rising on the wings of power, had become white, and Allah, out of power, and on the dark side of Heaven, had become—for all practical purposes, anyway—black. Thus, in the realm of morals the role of Christianity has been, at best, ambivalent. Each leaving out of account the remarkable arrogance that assumed that the ways and morals of others were inferior to those of Christians, and that they therefore had every right, and could use any means, to change them, the collision between cultures—and the schizophrenia in the mind of Christendom—had rendered the domain of morals as chartless as the sea once was, and as treacherous as the sea still is. It is not too much to say that whoever wishes to become a truly moral human being (and let us not ask whether or not this is possible, I think we must *believe* that it is possible) must first divorce himself from all the prohibitions, crimes, and hypocrisies of the Christian church. If it can only be to make us larger, freer, and more loving. If God cannot do this, then it is time we got rid of Him.

Behind these perversions of Christ's teaching lie the perversions of mind which made them possible—distortions which today make us all "the center of this dreadful storm, this vast confusion."

COMMENTARY
"WEEK-END PANTHEISM"?

THE fact that this issue of MANAS seems largely devoted to redressing balances (see lead article, Children, and the quotations in Review from James Baldwin), gives a reason for referring once again to the Autumn, 1963, issue of *Landscape.* The opening editorial takes a second look at the dogma that only the forest primeval has purity and sanctity, while the haunts of man are everywhere vile. The critical spokesman cited is Edgar Anderson, assistant director of the Missouri Botanical Garden, and a frequent contributor to *Landscape*. His criticism of the "wilderness" cult is based on the following principle:

> Naturalists who will not face resolutely the fact that man is a part of nature cannot become integrated human beings. A nature-study movement which focusses its attention on remote mountains and desolate sea marshes is making a sick society even sicker.

The *Landscape* editorial develops this point:

> The wilderness movement possesses many admirable qualities and has accomplished many admirable things, but, like every other movement, it has its lunatic fringe which threatens to transform it into a stylish cult, a kind of week-end pantheism, and which often abjures social and intellectual responsibility for its utterances. Anderson's strictures on the more extreme aspects of this movement are merely part of his thesis that we should "accept cities instead of trying to run away from them, and in accepting them, mold them into the kind of communities in which a gregarious animal can be increasingly effective."

Landscape collects similar views in this editorial, including passages by Lewis Mumford, John Kieran, and Joseph Wood Krutch. The conclusion musingly reached is that "we must somehow learn to live in cities; we must somehow make our cities livable and put an end to our flight from the manmade environment."

The War Resisters League (5 Beekman Street, New York, N.Y. 10038) is now offering for sale its 1964 Peace Calendar—$1.50 each, $7 for five, postpaid anywhere in the U.S.A. Gift orders will be mailed to arrive by Christmas, with a card giving the donor's name. The theme of the 1964 calendar is the revolutionary tradition of the United States. It presents "the histories of a variety of American movements—from the Shakers of 1774 to the great 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom—some secular, some religious, some long-gone and forgotten and others vital and growing—but all inspired by the American vision of justice, freedom and peace for all. There is room to write down appointments for every day of the year.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
PSYCHOLOGY IN THE SCHOOLS

IN this phase of our "age of psychology," MANAS editors find much that is encouraging and, of late, even inspiring. Psychiatric influence in the field of penology inevitably moves toward elimination of capital punishment, and the eradication of societal vindictiveness in general; new perspectives on the nature of man are emerging in the writings of the "self" psychologists, and we have recently noted in Herbert Fingarette's *The Self in Transformation*, one of the most important *philosophical* books written by a professor of psychology since William James. On the other hand, whenever the representatives of psychological "science" become invested with authority, tremendous power and some consequent abuses are inevitable. Two sentences in a recent address by Robert Oppenheimer call attention to the mantle of responsibility now fallen on all "physicians of the soul":

> The psychologist can hardly do anything without realizing that for him the acquisition of knowledge opens up the most terrifying prospects of controlling what people do and how they think and how they behave and how they feel. . . . I can see that the physicist's pleas that what he discovers be used with humility and be used wisely will seem rather trivial compared with those pleas which you have to make and for which you will have to be responsible.

An article in the May-June *Humanist*, "Psychiatry in Public Schools," provides an example of necessary criticism within the fraternity of psychologists. The author, Dr. Thomas S. Szasz, a professor of psychiatry at the State University of New York, has grave misgivings about the wholesale introduction of psychiatric services to the school system. He says:

> I consider the introduction of psychiatric services into our school system undesirable. It is commonly assumed, nowadays, that such psychiatric efforts can do no harm. We hear a great deal about the dangers of fallout from testing nuclear weapons, but we never hear about the dangers of "fallout" from experimentation with psychiatric technology. The attitude of the educationists, the parents, and the public seems to be that psychiatry may perhaps help Jimmie; and if it doesn't, at least it can't harm him. But can't it?
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> Educational failure may certainly traumatize a child, but it is also likely to spur him on to greater effort. Psychiatric difficulty, on the other hand, stigmatizes the child, but does not stimulate him to greater effort along educational lines. It is true that a child like Jimmie, having been defined as maladjusted, will make efforts to become, or at least appear, better adjusted. But it seems unlikely that psychiatric influence will encourage him to achieve excellence in ways that will set him apart from others. The fear of *ab*-normality—of being different—is already rampant in the land.

Dr. Szasz constructs a hypothetical case to show how counseling psychologists in the public schools may, all in good faith, undertake "total guidance" on dubious assumptions:

> Jimmie, nine years old, is in the fourth grade. Until recently, his school performance and social behavior were considered satisfactory. If anything, he had shown himself to be brighter and more independent than other children of his age. Now, however, he shows little interest in school, neglects his homework, and tends to withdraw from other children. He reads avidly at home, and daydreams at school. Hard as his teacher tries, she cannot stimulate his interest in doing better work. Unless he does better, she will have to fail him. At this point, she may ask for psychiatric consultation. Jimmie will be tested and interviewed, and the psychiatrist will most likely conclude that he is a "gifted" child who has a "learning block." His difficulties in school will thus be ascribed to psychological conflicts, and he will be diagnosed as "emotionally disturbed" or "maladjusted." The sort of treatment that will be undertaken need not concern us. It is important to keep in mind only that it will be under psychiatric auspices. Henceforth, whatever educational problems Jimmie shows will be regarded as mere symptoms of a more fundamental, underlying "mental illness," which the psychiatrist is trying to cure.

So Dr. Szasz, who is neither a religionist nor a member of the Council for Basic Education,

urges caution on scientific and psychiatric grounds.

> The wholesale psychiatric treatment of school children should not be embraced as if it were something that might be helpful, and, in any case, could not be harmful. The fact that something is called "therapy" is not enough. Those who do the labeling are human; they may err or wish to deceive us. The history of medicine teaches us a twofold lesson. We learn about effective treatments; and we learn about procedures, once considered helpful, which with better understanding are discovered to be injurious, even deadly: too much oxygen, given to premature babies, that made them blind; roentgen rays, used to treat children who were thought to suffer from an enlarged thymus gland, that caused them to develop cancer of the thyroid, blood-letting and starvation, to treat patients with typhoid fever, that weakened their resistance and hastened their demise; severing parts of the brain, to treat mental illness, that made the patients subhuman. These are only a few of the examples that ought to make us "stop, look, and listen" before we heedlessly subject ourselves, and our children, to ever-recurrent attacks of that old ailment called *furor therapeuticus.*

What would have happened, one wonders, to an Albert Einstein or a Norbert Wiener if the program of psychiatric guidance had been in full swing during their early years? Wiener was riddled with psychic complexities and personal idiosyncrasies upon which most school psychologists would have leaped. He did not adjust "socially." He was "gifted," but did not "perform" in the schoolroom according to measured potential, etc., etc. In the psychologically oriented school system, such children would often become, as Dr. Szasz warns, captive psychiatric patients. (We call it "brainwashing" when we don't like such goings-on, but here we use the innocuous term "re-education.") What of the individuality and creativity of the child himself? Dr. Szasz concludes:

> Everyone wants children to be "creative." On this we all seem to agree, whether we are for or against compulsory psychiatric treatment in schools. It thus remains for us to determine which measures promote creativity in children, and which inhibit it. I have, of course, no simple answer to this question. But I should like to submit the proposition that creativity is not something that a child can be made to have, by doing certain things *to* him. Rather, we must assume that creativity is a disposition that many, perhaps most, children have; if it is to develop and flourish, we must simply let him exercise it. This means that, although we must educate and socialize the child, we must also know when to leave him alone. We must not interfere with his idiosyncratic ways of expressing himself—and, of course, "psychiatric symptoms" are one such way—unless his actions are likely to injure him more than our efforts to control him. In sum, we should respect his needs for privacy and autonomy—needs that are particularly easily infringed by psychiatric treatment methods.
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> Finally, we must truly value creativity ourselves. If, however, we rank creativity low on our scale of values, our children will learn that too, no matter how vigorously we protest to the contrary. Herein lies the greatest danger of controlling our children *too much.*

A discussion in *ETC.* for July, titled "Reflexivity: An Unfaced Issue of Psychology," contains some parallel reflections:

> As the psychologist attempts to bring his work to a state of fixity, he does so with much agility, flexibility, and imagination; this, however, *within* a fixed frame of inquiry that usually excludes values. There are questions that can legitimately be asked, and answered through experiment and observation; but limits are set to the questioning attitude, and beyond these limits opinions are not to be challenged. But truly to encompass man, to be truly reflexive, one's theory must focus on reactive man and creative man.
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> Too many psychological theorists wish to force man into a mold. Life does not respond to this force, and they fail to appreciate their own originality in attempting to fixate upon permanent elements in man's nature. As a case in point consider the persistent but unsuccessful attempts to stabilize the IQ.

These quotations are not meant to denigrate the motives of consulting psychologists within the public school system, but to indicate the unspoken assumptions that may underlie the benevolent "management" of pupils. The most dangerous assumption of all has been articulated by Harvard psychologist B. F. Skinner. In *Science and*

Human Behavior, Dr. Skinner pontificates in the very manner which Dr. Szasz condemns:

> The free inner man who is held responsible for the behavior of the external biological organism is only a pre-scientific substitute for the kinds of causes which are discovered in the course of scientific analysis. All these alternative causes lie outside the individual.
>
> Man's vaunted creative powers, his original accomplishments in arts, science and morals, his capacity to choose and our right to hold him responsible for the consequences of his choice—none of these is conspicuous in his new self-portrait.

Not all school psychologists are this sure that man is biologically conditioned in all of his responses, but a great many, we suspect, rush in with a little more managing than is good for either the children or themselves.

FRONTIERS

Alienation Through Culture

EDWARD T. HALL'S *The Silent Language* (Premier, 1963, 50 cents) is an anthropologist's treatise on the perennial failure of one culture to communicate with others. Oral or written contact, presumably to reach understanding, is far from satisfactory, and it is Prof. Hall's intention, as a social scientist, to show that we owe the world a lot of hard work to find out why this is so. His introduction begins:

> Though the United States has spent billions of dollars on foreign aid programs, it has captured neither the affection nor esteem of the rest of the world. In many countries today Americans are cordially disliked; in others merely tolerated. The reasons for this sad state of affairs are many and varied, and some of them are beyond the control of anything this country might do to try to correct them. But harsh as it may seem to the ordinary citizen, filled as he is with good intentions and natural generosity, much of the foreigners' animosity has been generated by the way Americans behave.
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> As a country we are apt to be guilty of great ethnocentrism. In many of our foreign aid programs we employ a heavy-handed technique in dealing with local nationals. We insist that everyone else do things our way. Consequently we manage to convey the impression that we simply regard foreign nationals as "underdeveloped Americans." Most of our behavior does not spring from malice but from ignorance, which is as grievous a sin in international relations. We are not only almost totally ignorant of what is expected in other countries, we are equally ignorant of what we are communicating to other people of our own behavior.
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> It is not my thesis that Americans should be universally loved. But I take no consolation in the remark of a government official who stated that "we don't have to be liked just so long as we are respected." In most countries we are neither liked nor respected. It is time that Americans learned how to communicate effectively with foreign nationals. It is time that we stop alienating people with whom we are trying to work.

The title of this book derives from Hall's thesis that attitudes—based on ingrained cultural responses—are a "nonverbal language," and that most communication fails or succeeds in this medium. *The Silent Language* is "the language of behavior," the "patterning which prescribes our handling of time, our spatial relationships, our attitudes toward work, play, and learning. Sometimes this is correctly interpreted by other nationalities, but more often it is not."

Americans typically behave as if they had some special right to ignore the existence of "the silent language." This is true not only in international relations, particularly with "underdeveloped" countries, but also finds expression in ethnic prejudice at home. In a chapter titled "What Is Culture?" Prof. Hall speaks of the "pressing burdens of the nation's minority groups." Following the depression of the 1930's intellectuals and scholars were called upon to aid the work of government, and anthropologists had their first chance to serve as advisers in the formation of policy. They found that the Indians were "living miserably depressed lives on reservations as wards of the government." Further:

> Most of these Indians had neither the dignity of their old ways nor the advantages of the now dominant society that surrounded them. Up to this point it had been the government's policy to treat all the different tribes alike, as if they were ignorant and somewhat stubborn children—a mistake which is yet to be really rectified. A body of custom had grown up in the government's Indian Service as to how to "handle" Indians and Indian problems. Like the State Department's Foreign Service, the Indian Service transferred its employees from post to post so often that they could put in a lifetime of service without learning anything about the people they were administrating. The bureaucracy that grew up was more oriented toward the problems of the employees than those of the Indians. Under such conditions it was almost impossible to introduce the disturbing anthropological idea that the Indians were deeply and significantly different from European-Americans, for that would have threatened to upset the bureaucratic applecart.

To learn "the silent language" of culture requires an atmosphere hospitable to its subtleties. In this respect, Prof. Hall finds the training of

American teachers woefully deficient. Under the heading "The Vocabulary of Culture," he says:

> The educator has much to learn about his own systems of learning by immersing himself in those that are so different that they raise questions that have never been raised before. Americans in particular have too long assumed that the U.S. educational system represents the ultimate in evolution and that other systems are less advanced than our own. Even the highly elaborated and beautifully adapted educational techniques of Japan have been looked down upon. Just why we feel so complacent and smug can be explained only by the blindness that culture imposes on its members. Certainly there is very little reason for complacency when one looks, not at others, but at ourselves. The fact that so many of our children dislike school or finish their schooling uneducated suggests that we still have much to learn about learning as a process.
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> In order to serve mankind, learning, like sex, cannot run wild but has to be channeled and at times directed. There is much to learn of the details of how this process works in different cultures, and it is just barely possible that by studying others we Americans, who pride ourselves on our efficiency, might actually learn things that would help us to break our educational log jam. Our current approach to the teaching of reading is one of the many obvious defects in American pedagogy. It is a symptom that something is wrong with our way of teaching. Instead of being rewarding for the child, learning has often become painful and difficult.
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> On Truk, the atoll in the Southwest Pacific, children are permitted to reach the age of nine or ten before anyone begins to get technical with them about what they are supposed to know. As the Trukese phrase it, "He doesn't know yet, he is only a child." Americans tend to correct children rather impatiently. With us, learning is supposed to be endowed with a certain amount of pressure so that the person who learns fast is valued over the one who learns slowly. Some cultures seem to place less emphasis on speed and perhaps a little more on learning correctly.
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> Americans like to think that children must "understand" what they have learned. What happens, of course, is that a good deal of material that would be simple enough to learn without frills is made more difficult by the complex, and often erroneous, explanations that go with it. Somehow the fetish of explanation and logic as a process does not seem to weigh down the Arab or the Japanese, yet both have made singular contributions to the world of science.

To sum up, Prof. Hall presents considerable evidence to indicate that American ways of thinking not only fail to develop sensitivity towards other cultures, but continually confuse group values and individual values—two entirely different things. We have a highly technical society, and while we often wax oracular about respect for the "individual," in practice we do little to understand the relationships of the two. For example:

> During World War II, when great numbers of trained technicians were in demand, it was assumed that those who had mechanical aptitude would make good airplane mechanics. A careful analysis of this assumption proved otherwise. It turned out that a good shoe clerk in civilian life would become a better mechanic for military purposes than someone who had fixed cars most of his life and learned on a Model-T Ford. The critical trait was not mechanical aptitude but the ability of the trainee to follow instructions. The Army then worked out its instruction manuals so meticulously that the best recruit turned out to be a mildly obsessional person who could read and follow directions. The last thing they wanted was someone with his own ideas on how to fix equipment.