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POLITICS, RELIGION, AND THE AGNOSTIC SPIRIT

THE lead article in MANAS for Dec. 5 had a paragraph which moved so rapidly to a far-reaching conclusion that some readers may have felt inclined to discount its claims. Discussing the politicalization of religion, the writer said:

> . . . is there any way to prevent politics from exploiting or corrupting religious ideas? No way that we can think of, unless the religious ideas in question are such that no man would seek power at the cost of degrading the meaning of his religion. And this, obviously, will not be accomplished save by a revolutionary reform in religious ideas. This is the same as saying that political power can never be the primary means of accomplishing any kind of religious good—a proposition which, under logical development, leads to the pacifist philosophy of Gandhi, war resistance, and the theory of nonviolent action as the means of countering injustice.

Taken as put, this statement seems to contradict certain ideas which are central to the political tradition of the United States. For example, it might be argued that the provision of freedom of religion in the First Amendment to the Constitution accomplishes religious good, and in this way has the support of political power or authority.

A further argument to the contrary could be taken from Admiral Mahan, the naval authority, who years ago declared: "The province of force in human affairs is to give moral ideas time to take root."

These two arguments have long been the major grounds for defending the use of either political power or military force in behalf of religion. It seems fair to say that the moral case for war or for less extreme measures of coercion stands or falls with these arguments. It is certain that the principled stand for an aggressive policy against Soviet Russia in the Cold War grows out of the demand that "freedom of worship" be protected against the atheist Statism of the Communists. This is the "clincher" in the argument which insists that it would be better to be dead than Red. The moral justification for American intervention in World War II came logically from Admiral Mahan's proposition. The hideous crimes of the Nazis had to be stopped; the perpetrators of these crimes had to be removed from power by military force, and punished by judicial processes; and then an interval would be needed during which, under the guidance of a regulatory authority, the Germans would have opportunity to establish a legitimate government and rejoin the family of civilized nations.

These, at any rate, are the familiar and widely accepted arguments for the participation in war by civilized peoples. One suspects that wars will continue until these arguments lose their force. There are of course many other reasons for going to war, but these arguments stem from the highest values of human beings and are the source of the emotional unity of entire populations on the subject of "justifiable war." It was, we have no doubt, awareness of these psychological processes in public opinion which made Tolstoy write, in *What Is Religion:*

> . . . they [the managers of modern nations] all know that power is based on the army, and the army, the possibility of the existence of the army, is based only on religion. And if the wealthy are especially pious and pretend to be believers, go to church and keep the sabbath day, they do all this chiefly because their instinct of self-preservation tells them that their exceptionally advantageous position in society is connected with the religion they possess. . . .

It was Tolstoy's view, and Gandhi's, that the highest values in human life are better served by non-violence. This is the root principle of all practical attempts to abolish war. It is the root principle because it removes the moral justification for war, by means of which good men are

persuaded to engage in slaughter of other human beings.

We were moved to return to this general question by an article in a small paper ("published occasionally") called the *Evangelical Agnostic*, issued by William Henry Young (3644 East Platt Ave., Fresno, Calif.). In the first number of this paper there is an interesting discussion of religion and politics within the confines of the United States. Titled "God and Governor Barnett," it reads:

> The attitude of Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett toward the issue of racial integration points up the problem of appealing to "God" to justify one's moral and social code. He campaigned for Governor during the summer of 1959 with a major plank of his platform being that "God was the original segregationist." Now he is committed not only to defend his personal views about segregation, which have enormous cultural overtones, but any compromise with the integrationists which he might make will indicate a lack of faithfulness to his God.
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> The same basic problem exists, of course, for those whose pro-integration views are based on divine absolutes or those who believe in the absolute authority of the Supreme Court and the Federal Government. They feel that any compromise with the segregationists indicates a lack of faith in the ideal of complete brotherhood and/or that any concessions to State authority would shake the very foundations of our Federal Government.
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> Under these conditions, in which we are inclined to appeal to God or some other absolute authority for the purpose of justifying our personal moral attitude, we are likely to forget, and possibly evade, our own responsibility for the moral choices we have made. This gives us an all-too-easy escape from accepting the consequences of our own decisions. Further, when we feel that we are on the side of absolute right, we are inclined to force upon others what we think to be divine directives or absolute authority. This would seem to be the case with many in evaluating the situation in Mississippi today. Perhaps it would be better for all involved, if the problems of segregation and integration could be approached in an atmosphere in which the participants propounded their goals with the humble realization that they do not know whether their "ends" or "ideals" are any more absolutely or ultimately right than any others.
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> Perhaps social concern which is intent upon solving contingent racial problems without attempting to express the Will of God—be it as God the first segregationist, God the Father of all mankind, God the author of justice, or God the authority of Federal Troops,—might accomplish more, more quickly and completely with less social confusion along the way.

This argument seems quite sound, insofar as it proposes to disarm the people who wish to do evil on the basis of a false moral authority, but how about the other application—which takes away from the good people their spiritual mandate to defend the Right? Is this writer actually inviting us to stop believing that racist doctrines ought to be combated? Should we not have hated the Nazis for their crimes? How are you going to get anything done without the resource of a high moral authority by means of which *to engage* people in the struggle for the Good?

This argument, you could say, strikes at the heart of organized society. The agnostic position, you might add, turns out to resemble in several important respects the anarchist position, so far as coercive authority is concerned. Humility and philosophical uncertainty, you might also say, are fine things at the subjective level of personal religion, but there are practical issues at stake, and how are you going to settle them with this shy approach to righteousness?

It should be obvious that a stance which attracts this sort of vigorous criticism will have to make its way slowly. Yet there are some extremely persuasive things that may be said in favor of an "uncertain" approach to governmental processes. Take for example the problem of crime. A judicial system which made no pretense at dispensing "justice," but which openly announced that its function was simply to impose *restraint*, might go far in the direction of supporting the dignity of man. There would be basic honesty in the judicial admission that no one is wise enough to measure individual responsibility or "guilt" in order to arrive at a proper penalty for a given offense against society. The offender

whose freedom is curtailed by the courts would be told that his imprisonment or "transportation" is actually an expedient to which organized society resorts to protect other people from the injury his behavior threatens. The court would not brand him as inherently vicious and assume the supernatural prerogative of punishing him for his sins. Capital punishment, of course, would not exist in such a system. Experience would no doubt lead to educational and therapeutic activities in connection with the courts, the idea to be made foremost being that social agencies and the offender would work out a common problem, without moral judgment and without procedures which have a deliberately degrading effect on the individual.

This agnostic approach to crime, social order, and moral responsibility, would lend every possible cooperation to the best intelligence of the social sciences, without interference, on the one hand, from the vengeful quality which so often confirms the alienation of the casual law-breaker, or, on the other hand, from the sentimentality which ignores the difficult problems of recidivism.

The idea is to subtract self-righteousness from the sovereignty of the State. Simple common sense should point to the advantages of this step. The literature of criminology is filled with illustrations of the fallibility of the legal process. Punishment overtakes the weak and the mentally retarded as much or more than it reaches the guilty. The judicial system which abandoned the fiction that it dispenses justice would gain the respect of all men, and it would discourage the hypocrisy which now has routine acceptance among administrators and the public at large.

But what about the problem of people like the Nazis? About all we can say to this point is that if there had been an honest attempt to apply Admiral Mahan's maxim after World War I, there probably would have been no Nazis. We do not challenge the maxim so much as we challenge the capacity of nations to apply it after suffering the emotional exhaustion and moral degradation of a modern war. In the *Atlantic Monthly* for May, 1920, Sisley Huddleston gave his impressions of the European scene, after covering for a British newspaper the peace conference which devised the Treaty of Versailles:

> Turn where one will, one finds only that the war has worsened mankind. Those who speak of the heroic virtues which are born on the battlefield which sprang, like the Phoenix, out of the ashes of war, are uttering the most stupid claptrap. The dominion of darkness has spread over Europe, and a slimy progeny of cruelty, of bestiality, of insensibility, of egoism, of violence, of materiality, has crawled into the light of day—a noisome breed, of which it will be long before we can dispossess ourselves.

If this is the fruit of war, we shall not put an end to people like the Nazis by military means. War only sows with dragon's teeth the field of tomorrow's harvest of hate, suspicion, and bitterness. As Norman Angell wrote in *Peace and the Plain Man:*

> Governments become prisoners of their own propaganda. They produce a certain type of mind or flow of emotions for the purposes of war. But that flow cannot be turned off like a tap when the war is over, as we shall see. The peace comes and then governments are compelled to make a peace they don't want to make, because the state of mind produced during the war clamors for that kind of peace. And then that kind of peace makes more war. Our governments and rulers and leaders become prisoners of their own Frankenstein monsters in another sense: they end by believing their own propaganda.

It must be admitted that an agnostic spirit in the councils of statecraft would soon render war impossible, since it could not permit the kind of propaganda that seems to be necessary to stir up a population to the fever that going to war requires. On the other hand, the agnostic spirit in government and international policy would soon create the conditions which peace requires—a give-and-take mood among the nations and an unwillingness to claim to be absolutely "right." The problem is to make the transition.

REVIEW
"MORE LIVES THAN ONE"

JOSEPH WOOD KRUTCH'S autobiography, with this title, has received many appreciative reviews. Such undeniable capabilities as those of Brooks Atkinson and John Chamberlain, however, are applied to Mr. Krutch's book by way of short essays evaluating the author's philosophic position, with no space given to quotation that indicates the flavor of the book. To call Mr. Krutch "urbane" or to say that he is one of the few "true intellectuals" of the time is to generalize too broadly to bring his work into focus.

Mr. Krutch confesses to sixty-eight years of living and thinking, an existence which reflects a rare talent for observation:

> My life has been interesting only in the sense that most of the time it was interesting to me. And to quote Thoreau: "I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well." I have lived long enough to remember ways of life which are now history and once well-known persons who are either history also, or nearly forgotten. The automobile, the phonograph, the moving picture, and the radio were all invented within my time and I can remember when I first became aware of them. I have also lived through one of the most rapid revolutions history has ever known in the accepted standards of decency. In my youth women had "bosoms" but not breasts, and "legs" was a dirty word. When they went swimming they wore stockings and men wore shirts with half sleeves. To borrow Franklin P. Adams' fine phrase: "I can remember when an ankle was way uptown."

Mr. Krutch achieved a certain small fame while still in high school. He was, in a literary way, an early figure in the history of aviation. Having won a high-school term paper contest in Knoxville, Tennessee, on the subject of "Flight," he was rewarded with an improvised trip in one of the first Wright airplanes. At about that time, too, he fell fairly out of religion:

> I don't suppose the flight lasted more than five or ten minutes or that we were ever more than two or three hundred feet above the ground, but after all most flights in 1911 were hardly more ambitious. Nowadays when anyone boasts of his exploits in the air I can always say, "I flew first in 1911," and I have never yet met anyone who could top that.
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> About two years before I accompanied Mr. McCurdy as he made these first faltering steps into the air age, I had said good-by to an important part of the old world. One night I suddenly realized that I no longer believed what I had been told in Sunday School and church. For a week or two I was terrified as I have seldom been since because, paradoxically, I feared that what I did not believe might nevertheless be true and that my lack of faith might have the most appalling consequences. I told no one of my agony and in a matter of no more than the two or three weeks, it faded away to leave me for years more firm in my assured, rather narrow rationalism than I now am.

But, as his works reveal, Mr. Krutch resisted identification as a "materialist," and with much the same reasons that he resisted enrollment as an orthodox Christian. He wrote as he felt, and his feelings compelled him to see, as Mr. Atkinson put it, that the "sovereign mystery" of life is beyond reach of scientific or "empirical" investigation. His first major work, *The Modern Temper* (1929), was a synthesis of ideas which had been long forming and which touched all three classifications of thought we now call psychology, sociology, and philosophy. This was a notable book, but it was not by a man whose primary aspiration was to produce a *magnum opus*. Mr. Krutch explains how he came to write *The Modern Temper:*

> Ideas, convictions, and attitudes, which had previously found no adequate expression and of the interconnection between which I was not fully aware, suddenly crystallized into a coherent discourse. I listened to what I had been saying to myself for several years, without being quite aware of the fact, and I simply wrote it down as I listened. Here were the conclusions I had come to as I digested or reacted against all I had read, heard, or discussed from the freshman days at college to the latest book I had reviewed and the latest conversation I had heard in *The Nation* office. For the first time I was prepared to say what I, at that moment, believed, just what, in my opinion, the "modern ideas" I had met came down to.

Mr. Krutch found deep flaws in "the modern temper of thought." Some of the reactions to the book are amusing, as recounted by its author:

> A defrocked Catholic priest who was one of the early reviewers remarked sarcastically that the motto on the second title page should have been, not the quatrain from Mark Van Doren which it was, but an exclamatory question from *Lamentations.* "Is any sorrow equal to my sorrow?" But though the sorrow was intellectually quite genuine a false impression would be created if I did not add here that it did not prevent me from enjoying some of the superficial pleasures of life. When, a few months after the book was published, I went on a cross-continent lecture tour and was to be met in Detroit by the president of a woman's club she approached me only after every other descending passenger had left the platform. "Are *you* Mr. Krutch?" "I am." Her face fell. "But you do not look as, as—*depressed* as I expected!"

Our last quotation is a long one, for we regard Mr. Krutch as primarily a philosopher in the classic and best sense. His refusal to become either a religionist or an all-denying skeptic is a manifest of the balance of his mind. Most politely, he points out why he has never felt inclined to employ the term "God"—since his only conceivable "deity" is a pantheistic one. "Why pantheism?" "Any pantheistic religion," he writes, "must have some sense of the oneness of man with the rest of the universe or at least with the animate part of it, but the Hebrew-Christian tradition is strong against such a sense. God is outside nature, man belongs only to Him. . . ." But of what does Krutch's "pantheism" or "naturalism" consist? We conclude with this passage from the last chapter of *More Lives Than One:*

> "The soul" is indeed a vague conception and the reality of the thing to which it refers cannot be demonstrated. But consciousness is the most self-evident of all facts and neither any machine nor any mere chemical process can be shown to possess it. The physiologists are very fond of comparing the network of our cerebral nerves with a telephone system but they overlook the significant fact that a telephone system does not function *until someone talks over it.* The brain does not create thought (Sir Julian Huxley has recently pointed out this fact); it is an instrument which thought finds useful. Biologists have sometimes referred to the origin of life as "an improbable chemical accident." But is not the assumption of an "improbable chemical accident" which results ultimately in something capable of discussing the nature of "improbable chemical accidents" a staggering one? Is it not indeed preposterous? Is it not far easier to believe that thought in some potential form must be as primary as matter itself?
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> The orthodox "sciences of man" are actually far behind the times. They are based upon an analogy with Newtonian physics in which every atom in the universe behaves like every other atom, is therefore determined and at least theoretically predictable. But every present-day physicist knows that Newton's hypothesis is demonstrably false. His "laws" are only statistically true. Individual atoms are not predictable; and to assume that so highly organized a creature as man is more completely determined and predictable than dead matter is absurd. It may possibly be . . . that the never yet defined difference between living and dead matter may be something like this: Dead matter is matter organized in such a way that the unpredictability of the individual particles is statistically canceled out so that Newtonian physics "works" in connection with every large aggregate. But living matter *may* be matter so organized that the individuality of the component is pooled and, hence, instead of being canceled out, is cumulative. If this should be true, then that minimal but basic unpredictability of the living creature which is most conspicuously evident in man constitutes, in fact, the reality behind the concept of free will. Granted this, then the Minimal Man is something to be reckoned with. He is at least as mysterious as uranium. If matter can, as is now universally admitted, cease to be matter and become energy, why should it not also become thought?
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> A famous Nineteenth Century scientist once said that he did not believe in "the soul" because he could not find it in his test tube. But surely, had the soul existed, a test tube would be the last place where one would be likely to discover it, and the fallacy of that chemist's argument runs through most Nineteenth Century science.

COMMENTARY
WHAT IS MISSING?

IT would be easy enough, after reading Walker Winslow's discussion of "business ethics" (see Frontiers), to conclude that business men are chiefly responsible for the breakdown of standards and the moral confusion of the age. But this would be a mistake. The business men, it seems to us, only illustrate an ill that is common to all.

Take for example the most recent instance of excess profits gained by business men, in connection with the stockpiling of tungsten by the United States. According to testimony gathered in a Senate committee hearing on Nov. 27, the General Electric Corp. and other companies made close to 200 per cent gross profit on tungsten sold to the government during the 1950's. (Los Angeles *Times,* Nov. 28.)

The accumulation of a national stockpile was begun during the Korean War. The U.S. has since spent $9 billion on tungsten, of which $4.6 billion worth is beyond the country's estimated need for strategic resources.

In 1954, the Senate investigators learned, General Electric sold to the Government tungsten taken from "one of the largest mines in the country," in which GE had a substantial interest. The going price at that time was $62.61 a short ton unit. "At the same time," John Croston, a defense materials specialist, testified, "the companies [GE and others] bought tungsten from foreign producers at the world import price of $23.36."

"There was nothing illegal about this," Mr. Croston said. Congress, he pointed out, had approved the tungsten purchasing program. The chairmen of the Senate stockpiling committee, Stuart Symington, told the investigators that Congress must also share a large measure of the blame for the excess stockpiling of tungsten—now "more than four times the supply the government says it needs and enough to last 20 years."

When, later in the 1950's, the heavy stockpile contracts ran out, tungsten prices plummeted from $62 a ton (in 1954) to about $17 (in 1958). Congress tried to extend the tungsten buying program, even though the supply was outrunning stockpile needs by more than 200 per cent, according to Mr. Croston. But the General Services Administration, which was doing the buying, didn't have the money to make purchases authorized by Congress. "What we were doing," Sen. Engle explained, "was subsidizing the domestic tungsten industry. It was well-known to everyone, including Congress." However, Mr. Croston cited cases of low-cost tungsten being smuggled into the United States and sold to the Government at far higher domestic prices.

Could you say that the high profits on tungsten sales to the U.S. were a proper reward to patriots who were willing to give their attention to building up a supply of this rare metal for use by their country? Congress, at any rate, had no criticism of the profits taken by General Electric and other companies, at the time. And "everyone," according to Mr. Engle, knew about it.

The interesting thing about all this is that we have no real yardstick for measuring such activities in ethical terms—only a vague feeling that something is wrong. So also with Mr. Benton's declaration that he always expects to make 100 per cent on his money. It doesn't sound right, but what rule do you go by, to decide why?

To fix a legal limit to business profits is something like having to give an opinion concerning how many wives a good Moslem ought to have. The moral intelligence of human beings feels the artificiality of such questions and seeks another approach.

About all that comes out in the story of the tungsten sales to the Government is that the profits were "legal"—does that make them "ethical"?—but that Congress must share the "blame." Why "blame"? The "blame," it appears,

attaches to the buying of too much tungsten, not to the price.

The moral factors in this situation are ostensibly about as follows. First there is the national requirement of a stockpile of a rare metal indispensable to the war machine. When you are preparing for war, you do what is necessary and ignore the expense. You *have* to do it. This makes us soft on waste for military purposes. So no one is going to be very critical of the excess stockpile of tungsten. The Congressmen *meant* well. This is the bearing of the Military ethic.

Then there is the question of Free Enterprise. The war, if it should come, will be fought to protect the free enterprise system. If you start condemning profits, there you are, arguing against what we are ready to fight for! And if we have a *good* free enterprise system, it ought to produce big profits, shouldn't it? So we'd better pass this point by. Two hundred per cent seems a little rich, but they made it for only a few years. And our big companies need to be strong in order to do research and pay better wages. That is the bearing of the Free Enterprise ethic.

What principle works for restraint or control? Well, there is the legality-illegality factor, which is vague and indecisive, and there is the rights-of-the-little-people factor which is also vague and indecisive. And you have to be careful about arguing for the rights of the little people. If you go too far, you might sound like a socialist. And if you don't mind sounding like a socialist, you then have the problem of criticizing the absolutism of the military effort and the ridiculous accumulation of tungsten far beyond any imaginable need. That is the bearing of the Social ethic.

In short, it becomes obvious that *no one is* going to make much of a fuss about excess profits, either from sales to the consumer or from sales to the government, in the framework of our present legal-social-political assumptions. So long as we try to measure or judge by those assumptions, we are going to have to be satisfied with making small indignant noises and feeling uncomfortable about such reports until we are able to forget them.

The fault is neither in our business *mores*, our government, nor in our stars, but in the almost total absence of a serious philosophy of human ends. Political-economic conceptions of the good are not serious human ends. They tell us nothing about how a man ought to spend his productive energies. They tell us nothing about what a man should seek from life, what goals to value and how they may be reached. There is no current serious thought on these questions, and therefore we have no real yardstick for the discussion of ethics in business or in any other field of human undertakings. We do a lot of desperate, emergency thinking, these days, but no serious or fundamental thinking about human ends. This situation will continue, it seems quite evident, until people begin to think seriously about human ends in total disregard of the partisan, institutional values which dominate very nearly everything we say and do.

Again, the War Resisters League offers for sale its attractive and useful Peace Calendar. It opens flat to desk size with space to enter daily appointments. The Calendar is dedicated to "the untold number of unrecorded and unheralded men and women throughout the ages who have endured injury, persecution, prison and death in their positive effort to establish a world of freedom, justice and peace." Each year's edition features individuals who have, in some cases, been all but forgotten by most history books. The Calendars are $1.50 each, $7.00 for five, postpaid. Send check to the War Resisters League, 5 Beekman Street, New York 38, N.Y. If requested, WRL will mail the calendars to those who are to receive them as gifts. This is the ninth year of publication of Peace Calendars by the WRL.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

TOWARDS REGENERATION IN EDUCATION

PAUL GOODMAN'S article, "For a Reactionary Experiment in Education" (November *Harper's*), is one of the most stimulating articles we have seen on the need for basic changes in our universities—stimulating because timely, and stimulating also because Mr. Goodman uses psychological insight to delineate the dilemmas in which students and instructors alike find themselves.

Many "proposals" have been made in behalf of the ideal of the Higher Learning—a college as a self-governing community of scholars. But the ever-larger university, even when providing Freshman seminars in the Humanities and later Honors studies, proliferates administrative problems in every direction. And, as Mr. Goodman puts it: "The effect of strong administration is to weaken the college by keeping the students out of contact with the teachers; the teachers out of contact with each other; and both away from troublesome or embarrassing controversy with the world. Whereas good teaching depends on close personal relations between scholars and students, modern administration isolates the individuals and groups on the campus one from the other; but, by using 'scientific administration' to coordinate them, *it reconstructs the campus as a social machine.* The ancient and often fruitful trouble spots of the college community—the inevitable result of vigorous personal expression and inquiry—tend to vanish under a smoothly managed consensus."

In the New York State school system there are presently more educational administrators than in all of Western Europe—not counting College Board officials and scholarship testers. While such experimental colleges as Sarah Lawrence and St. John's and the traditionally "purist" Amherst and Swarthmore have set student population limits, it is extremely difficult to convert unwieldy state institutions into centers for the enthusiastic pursuit of knowledge. Mr. Goodman has some proposals which frustrated teachers might put to work, given a little daring:

> Let us propose to go outside the present collegiate framework. The simplest remedy is the historical one—for bands of students and teachers to secede and set up small shops where they can teach and learn under their own simple conditions. Such a movement would be difficult but not impractical. If it could succeed in a dozen cases, I think the entire system might experience a profound and salutary shock.
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> A small secession from a dozen colleges and universities would now be immensely profitable for American education.
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> I propose that a core faculty of about five professors secede from a school, taking some of their students with them; that they attach themselves to an equal number of like-minded professionals in the region; collect a few more students; and set up a small unchartered university that would be nothing but an association. Ten teachers would constitute a sufficient faculty for such a community of scholars. (Jefferson's University of Virginia had eight teachers.) With individual classes of about fifteen, there would be 150 students. (I choose this class-size simply from my own experience. When the number falls to seven or eight, I begin to feel I am conducting group therapy; when it rises to twenty I begin to feel I am lecturing too formally. But the right number depends on the subject and the style of the teacher.)

Mr. Goodman gets down to cases on the costs of such "unchartered" attempts to establish scholarly communities. Adopting the national median salary of $10,000 for a full professorship and counting other necessary items of overhead—sans the high cost of complicated administration—150 students could support such a program at an individual tuition of less than $700 per year. While the unchartered college is regarded dubiously by prospective employers, this attitude might be changed. Mr. Goodman speaks for "a friendly arrangement whereby graduate and professional schools, competing for good students, would accept these students on their merits as set forth in the recommendations of their

teachers. Then their first accredited degree would be a master's or a doctor's." He concludes:

> How complicated this simple proposal may seem! We must get together 150 persons, subject the young to considerable expense, anticipate problems irrelevant to learning. And yet I have no doubt that many such faculties—both dissatisfied academics and professionals who would like to teach—are already in potential existence, willing to risk privileges and tenure if a good and willing group could be formed. Certainly there would be no dearth of students, although such academic and professional faculties would choose the students very strictly, probably too strictly.
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> There is no doubt at all about the authenticity of such a plan In medieval Paris, Rashdall tells us, *"the intellectual ferment was most vigorous, the teaching most brilliant . . . almost before a university existed at all."*
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> This spontaneous quest by the anarchic early community of scholars to understand their culture and take responsibility for changing it should be ours as well. Our children not only grow up in a civilization immeasurably more confused and various than any before, but they are now prevented from undertaking the quest itself by foolish rules, meaningless tasks, and an absence of responsible veterans to guide them. We must restore to them the chance to discover their culture and make it their own. And if we cannot do this within the universities, it would be good for the universities themselves if we tried to do it from without.

Mr. Goodman's "Reactionary Experiment" doubtless presents the central themes of his forthcoming book, *The Community of Scholars*. As we suggested last week ("New Schooling Opportunities"), an increasing number of teachers of all grades of learning are already trying such "secession" experiments. Mr. Goodman has himself been present in areas of constructive ferment, having taught at Sarah Lawrence and Black Mountain; and he has also been long concerned with the problem of improving communication between scholars and students. An echo of his *Growing Up Absurd* is found in the present article when he writes in partial justification of the "Beats." "Secession is inevitably occurring in any case," he says, "but it is occurring in the wrong way":

> Many dissatisfied young people—some of our most sensitive and intelligent among them—will not or cannot conform, and they leave the schools. Some form into little groups to find a culture or create it out of nothing—the vicissitudes of the Beat youngsters are by now familiar. What is wrong is that they have cut themselves off from both the senior scholars who know something, and the veterans who can teach them professions. They can hardly believe now that professional work might ever be possible for them. In a tiny community of scholars they might find both the cultural traditions and the veterans who could help them operate confidently in society, whether they succeed or fail.

FRONTIERS

Ethics—à la Mode

PLAYBOY Magazine is a curious success story of modern publishing which would have been declared impossible a generation ago. Now, after nine years of publication, it has become a semi-serious cultural factor on the American scene and, what with the night clubs it has established across the nation, and its huge circulation, a business factor as well. The Rev. Roy Larson, writing in *Motive*, the magazine of the Methodist Student movement, says: *"Playboy* is more than just a handbook for the young man about town; it is a sort of Bible which defines his values, shapes his personality, sets his goals, dictates his choices and governs his decisions." Larson goes pretty far in behalf of the magazine, for he adds that he is "upset by those people in his church who seem to assume . . . that averageness is more Christlike than distinctiveness"—the latter, apparently, being a quality that he recognizes in *Playboy.* In spite of the controlling influence he attributes to *Playboy,* the "distinctiveness" he recognizes is probably what made it so successful. If the magazine can be said to have any editorial line, it is that of combatting conformity on almost every front. While it once carried pictorial art that gave pause to the postal authorities, that is pretty much gone today and it would be my thought that among those of the far and conforming right there would be much more objection to the quite potent satirical cartoons of Jules Feiffer that appear in each issue.

Since *Playboy* is paying writers more than any other American magazine—$3,000 a story—and cultivates literary writers rather than slick ones, it is pretty apt to get their best wares and with a content chosen by themselves rather than dictated by editors. Hence, its literary content can be quite high as well as non-conformist. Make no mistake, *Playboy* is a commercial product, but one that can afford to dare a bit more than others. A case in point—and the subject of this article—in the November issue is a panel discussion on "Ethics and Business." The *Playboy* moderator pulled no punches and he was quite willing to let the members of the panel convict themselves, if such was their desire. Conspicuously absent was any editorial desire to convert *Playboy* readers to the executive way of life. No one would read the minutes of this panel for entertainment unless he were excessively morbid.

The panel consisted of such participants and authorities as Herbert L. Barnet, President of Pepsi-Cola; William Benton, founder of Benton & Bowles advertising agency, former Assistant to the Chancellor of the University of Chicago, and presently owner of Encyclopædia Britannica; James B. Carey, head of the International Union of Electrical workers; Marquis Childs, columnist; Sol A. Dann, a crusader for stockholders' rights; Sen. Philip A. Hart, who recently investigated fraudulent packaging practices; Sen. Jacob K. Javits; Vance Packard, of *Hidden Persuaders* fame, and Roger P. Sonnabend, President of the Hotel and Motor Hotel Division of the Hotel Corporation of America. Obviously, as fine a body of men, at least status-wise, as any panelist could bring together. They all have had a chance to cut sign on business ethics and trail it to its lair.

However, at the end of what must have been a fifteen-thousand-word discussion I felt obliged to look ethics up in the dictionary to make sure that I knew what it meant. It is, by the way, "The principles of morality, including both the science and nature of right." In a more narrow sense it is, "The rules of conduct recognized in respect to a certain class of human actions." Yet after this particular discussion I felt that it might have been more productive to have familiarized myself with the Penal Code.

The *Playboy* moderator opened the discussion with this statement:

> The corporate conscience—that insubstantial something that, according to some critics doesn't exist at all—is currently the subject of more concern, complaint and contention than at any time in memory. Steel companies are hit by anti-trust suits

> and accused of deceiving the President. Electrical executives serve time in jail. Steel executives defy a Senate committee's orders to turn over records. The senate investigates profiteering in the aircraft industry and misrepresentation in packaging. Mr. Hodges, the Secretary of Commerce, a former business man himself, appeals to industry to develop and abide by codes of ethical conduct. The Security and Exchange Commission investigates the American Stock Exchange and its president hurriedly resigns. The heads of Chrysler Corporation and the Prudential Life Insurance Company are accused of conflicts of interest. The Internal Revenue Service warns of a coming crackdown on expense account cheating. Television advertising, drugs—one industry after another—is pilloried for gulling or gouging the public. As we go to press, the stockpiling scandals and the Billie Sol Estes disclosures are headline news.
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> A business magazine, *Modern Office Procedures*, not long ago asked its readers: "Is it possible for a man to move upward through the ranks of management solely by honest, decent methods?" And an overwhelming majority of its respondents chorused "No!" . . . . Last year the American Management Association had planned a meeting on business ethics and was forced to cancel it when, out of the thirty executives it had asked, not one was willing to speak. . . .

Yet when asked if things were ethically getting better, most of the members of the panel—especially those with heavy business positions—agreed that business ethics have markedly improved. The idea expressed was that Business is now so much better off that one doesn't have to compete on the rough and tumble level of a few generations ago. This seems to mean that business can now afford to be ethical so long as the going doesn't get tough. The only dissenters about the improvement of business ethics were Carey, the union man, Childs the reporter, Packard, the writer (in a fence-straddling sort of way), and Javits, the legislator (with a bit of final hedging) .

My own feeling—if in such company I may have one—is that while in the past we were plagued by robber barons, business, by and large, was built on gaining customers through responsible practice. Before the days of corporate centralization the consumer had a choice and the smaller business men at least wished to enjoy the respect of their customers. When I saw an ad for a can of beef stew with a half dozen good-sized chunks of meat floating in a rich, vegetable filled gravy, I felt a great good will toward the packing industry, but today, when what I buy has two pieces of gristle-laden shank floating in a rich sauce of chemical preservative and bulked out with the cheapest vegetable on the market—carrots—I feel that the company executives ought to have to eat some of their own "ethics." The chances are now very good that the stew company is managed by a man who got his executive experience in ball bearings and that its stock has been acquired by International Freeloading, a road machinery company, that bought it as part of a diversification plan. Individual and family ownership of, and responsibility for, national corporations are becoming exceedingly rare. And if Mr. Dann, the stockholders' defender is to be believed, managers are apt to have as much contempt for individual stockholders as they have for consumers.

Samples of some of the reasoning that took place in this panel could be called "far out," if it weren't that the business people are so very square. At one point, Carey, the unionist, called attention to the fact that electrical companies were shortening the life of light globes by from one to three years so that they'd last weeks or months—planned obsolescence, as Mr. Packard calls it. Mr. Barnet replied to this that he was a Thunderbird man and expected changes in styling to make him buy a new one each year. American business is built on such policies, he implied, and he couldn't have been less than genial about it. That the American family should be plagued with a type of malicious obsolescence it can't afford was beside the point so long as he could enjoy his Thunderbirds.

The expense account was another matter that took on bizarre overtones. Mr. Benton, the encyclopædia man, explained that he simply didn't

have time to be entertained, and he is obviously too well fixed for a bribe to be meaningful. This took care of that ethical situation. The padded expense account, as one business man looked at it, is handy for getting money to employees whose salaries can't otherwise be increased without a tax disadvantage. "Ethically" he seemed to feel that he was doing the decent thing when he swindled the government out of this tax-free bonus for worthy employees. Anyway, as someone pointed out, the expense accounts cost the government only $100,000,000 to $200,000,000 a year—which is very small potatoes, scarcely worth rumpling up an ethic about.

Billie Sol Estes was largely overlooked. Perhaps a man who is up in brackets where he can apparently grab only 30 or 40 million dollars hasn't reached the place where his ethics are worthy of serious criticism. In any case Mr. Estes is still a deacon of his fundamentalist church and at worst can be accused of misreading the minor prophets.

Take Mr. Cordiner, former president of General Electric during its bid-fixing scandals, and now Chairman of the Board. Here is a gentleman whose state of grace in industry is at worst questioned by the panel with obscure quasi-theological references. It is his thesis that he didn't know what was going on when his company, in collaboration with several others, took various branches of government, foreign countries, and even private enterprise for hundreds of millions of dollars. That he was paid two million dollars in stock bonuses as well as an annual salary of $225,000 during the two-year period while this was going on seems, according to his spokesmen, to have done nothing toward corrupting his ethics. Rather, it would appear to have been a reward for corporate sanctity. It is highly possible, some of the panel members say, that he couldn't have known what was going on among his subordinates. In another context, one of the panel members likens the plight of the modern business executive to that of Eichmann—either you carry out your orders or the boom is lowered. In the case of Cordiner's subordinates they may have had to have produced spectacular profits, or else. In any case they went to jail and Cordiner didn't, and most have returned to their jobs without the stigma of having been jail birds hurting them or their salaries. It appears that they now feel the law to have been wrong and look upon themselves as harbingers of a new industrial ethic. Speaking of Cordiner's immunity, Carey, the union man, exclaimed:

> If Jay Gould and Commodore Vanderbilt were looking down—or up—from wherever they are, they'd probably be saying, "Great Balls of Fire, what we couldn't do with the capital gains tax and some stock options today."

We've heard a lot about the lack of incentive that is hampering American business, but nothing was said about this on the Playboy panel. At one point, shortly after the high mark-up on drugs was stressed, Mr. Benton, the Encyclopædia man, declared forcefully:

> I never go into a company unless I hope to earn 100 per cent on my money. Now some people would think that is unethical.
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> *Playboy moderator:* Is it?
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> *Benton:* No, under no circumstances. My standards of the profit motive applied to my business are very high. If I don't get a return on anything I touch I fold it up. One consequence is that when my personal taxes are added to the taxes on the companies I own, this makes me one of the biggest taxpayers in the world.

That a statement like Mr. Benton's carries its own ethics goes without saying. There'll never be a 100 per cent cash return on ethics that can be measured by the samplers of Madison Avenue or even *Playboy*. The best that can be said is that here we have a commodity for which there is dubious demand, which is questionable in quality and poor in supply.

However honest the moderator may be who deals with a panel on ethics in industry, he is dealing as if with a mythical beast, the horn of which is said to have certain salubrious qualities.

There can be talk of the cures wrought by the mysterious horn, but as for the beast that bears the horn, he is playing in different gardens—those where, I am afraid, the industrialists will be least likely to wander.

Of course, the thing that comes through most clearly in this discussion of ethics is that the big business members of the panel really don't know much about the subject. That success and big money are their own best defense comes through, too. The point is also made that the corporation president, or chairman of the board, can't know what his subordinates are doing until the Attorney General, or whoever, steps in and calls it to his attention. The idea that a man in a position of power can set a moral and ethical example for the lower echelons doesn't seem to mean anything to these people. That the profit motive and private enterprise are essential to our way of life goes without saying. It also should go without saying that without ethical principles and responsibility, we are hiding and condoning a subversive force that is unconsciously plotting our destruction far more efficiently and swiftly than any avowed enemies. It would seem that we have to believe in something more than a slyly filched dollar if we are to survive. It seems, too, that some of this belief will have to filter down from leaders whom we can respect for something more than their corporate status and power.

Also, as they centralize, under whatever guise and aim, they'd do well to remember that there isn't a great deal of difference between a board of directors and a board of commissars, and that in this day and age of political musical chairs there can be some very swift changes made.

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