

THE CAUSES OF ALIENATION

THE processes of alienation usually first attack a society at the top. That is, the feelings of disorder, of aimlessness and inner decay first overtake its most intelligent members. By "most intelligent" we mean those people who perceive, articulate, amplify, conserve and defend the cultural values of civilization. This means the artists, the writers, the teachers, the doctors, the moral leaders, sometimes the scientists and occasionally the statesmen.

We should have said that the most intelligent are the first to be alienated, when the society is one that is still viable—one that still has some hope of making itself over. Alienation at the lower layers of the pyramid brings blind, inchoate rebellion and nihilistic violence, with possibly some reconstruction afterwards, but then only in the terms of some narrow, partisan emotion.

The American society is already a society that is thoroughly alienated at the top. It is becoming extremely difficult, that is, for the most intelligent members of this society to feel any natural sympathy for or interest in the *characteristic* patterns of American life. There may be great sympathy for the people, and the wish, if not the will, to improve or change those patterns, but the dominant response of intelligence to the contemporary scene is and must be made up of distaste, disgust, frustration, and sometimes despair—in a word, alienation.

The role of intelligence in any society suffering from dissatisfactions is to provide alternatives. It is here that the American intelligence is weak. It is perceptive, but weak. It is weak for two reasons. The first reason is a failure or inadequacy of the imagination. American leaders find it difficult to define what ought to be done except in the most generalized terms. It is not that they are unimaginative, but

that the problems are so enormous. By this we imply that the alienation is almost *total*, and to plan for changes and to begin to make them, you have to have some solid ground to stand on. Men of intelligence are not sure where to look for this ground. The second reason for the weakness lies in the fact that, so far, the alienation is difficult to explain to those—the great majority—who are frightened by any explanation of their unhappiness and anxiety which does not point to some *concrete, removable cause*. Such people are better prepared to blame the Soviet nation or some other scapegoat for their troubles than to look into their own lives for what is wrong.

What, then, needs to be done, to arm our best intelligence? Two things. First, we need repeated exercises of the imagination. Not final plans and programs, but a kind of "brainstorming" concert of diverse possibilities—without fear and without reproach. We need to loosen up our minds, to exhaust our prejudices. For example, Sir Stephen King-Hall's volume, *Defense in the Nuclear Age* (Fellowship Publications, Nyack, N.Y., \$2.75), is a specialized exercise of the imagination concerned with what to do about the threat of nuclear war. It is a mind-opening book. A more broadly utopian volume is Simone Weil's *The Need for Roots* (Putnam, 1952, \$4), offering seminal discussion of ideal social attitudes and institutions. This work of a twentieth-century genius fires the imagination. Then there is Lyman Bryson's *The Next America* (Harper, 1952, \$3.50), a work of extraordinary insight into the processes of cultural change now proceeding in the United States, with sage counsels for the future. One more such book would be Erich Fromm's *The Sane Society* (Rinehart, 1955, \$5), devoted to the relationship between the qualities of human maturity and forms of social organization. These four books, one particular,

three general, in their approach to the design of a harmonious, unalienated society, make an excellent introduction to further efforts to exercise the imagination concerning plans and projects for the future.

The second thing we need to do to arm our best intelligence is to define with unmistakable clarity the causes and justifications of contemporary alienation. When enough people recognize the importance of this kind of criticism, by becoming able to relate their own pain to the causes thus set forth, there will be substantial hope of gaining mass support for the projects of change and reform that our best intelligence has to offer.

Where shall we begin? An obvious place to begin is with our health. Until recently there was little question of the good health of Americans. Now, however, it is necessary only to do a small amount of serious reading to discover that the ill-health of Americans is rapidly reaching the point of national disaster. A book noted in last week's *MANAS*, *The Poisons in Your Food*, not unreasonably associates the decline in the nation's health with the declining quality of the food eaten by the people. In his chapter on health, the author of this book, William Longgood, summarizes a revealing test:

What the future portends for the nation's youth is suggested by studies made by Bonnie Prudden, a member of President Eisenhower's Advisory Committee on Youth Fitness, and director of the Institute for Physical Fitness in White Plains. Miss Prudden, working with Professor Hans Kraus of New York University, tested more than 7,000 children in the United States, Italy, Austria and Switzerland. They found that 57.9 per cent of the American youngsters failed on one or more of six basic strength and flexibility tests, while only 8.7 per cent of the European children flunked.

Almost six out of ten American children were found to be physically unfit, compared to less than one out of ten in Italy, Austria and Switzerland. "President Eisenhower was shocked by these figures," according to *Reader's Digest* (July, 1956), "and slated a national conference to deal with the situation." If

this account of the nation's health needed a postscript, it was supplied by the *Digest*, when it added that the physical condition "of our young people is even worse than it was during World War II, when almost three million young men being drafted for military service were rejected for physical reasons."

Mr. Longgood's careful report on the practices of food growers and processors may not demonstrate an absolute correlation between poison sprays, chemical additives and adulterants, and the incidence of disease in the United States, but he points to a number of frightening parallels and is able to uncover the fact that at least several reputable physicians have lost important jobs because they dared to insist that the eating of poisons, even in small quantities, is not good for American children and adults.

This writer is only one of many investigators who have become seriously alarmed at the number and quantity of the toxic elements introduced into the American diet by one or another means. And more shocking even than the fact of the presence of these poisons in our food is the indifference of those who are for the most part responsible. A sense of desperation naturally grows in anyone who becomes aware of the extent of this indifference, which ranges all over the map, not excluding a prime source on Madison Avenue. As the desperation matures and becomes measured, it produces alienation.

A comparable analysis of another field directly affecting the health of Americans is provided by an article in the May *Harper's*, "The Strange Ethics of the Ethical Drug Industry," by Alek A. Rozental. Dr. Rozental (now associate professor of economics at St. Louis University) starts out with the familiar story of the excessive profits gained by the drug industry, repeating, for example, the admission to a Congressional Committee by the head of a drug concern that his firm was charging retail drug stores \$39.50 a thousand for tranquilizers also being sold to the government for sixty cents a thousand. But the disturbing part of Dr. Rozental's article is about

the effect on human beings of some of the new drugs. Dr. Rozental says:

Some four hundred new drugs are marketed every year. Since qualified clinical investigators are scarce, drug makers sometimes have clinical testing done by doctors fresh out of school. Others are persuaded to cooperate by prestige, publications, generous grants, and other subtle and not-quite-so-subtle lures. A mere social scientist, I was appalled by the quality of some of the resulting "studies" published in medical journals.

Every potent drug, Dr. Rozental points out, has some side-effects, and it is hardly "ethical" for the manufacturer of a new drug to soft-pedal undesirable side-effects or fail to investigate the possibility of them before putting the drug on the market. Dr. Rozental has several examples of this sort of irresponsibility. One is a tranquilizer which in a few instances caused agranulocytosis, "a rare blood disease which is fatal in about 40 per cent of the cases." A psychiatrist invited to test this drug did so and reported that it was effective, but that it also "presented some dangers." However—

In promoting the drug the company "edited" his findings so as to present them in a more favorable light. When the psychiatrist protested, he was dropped out of future ads, but not before his name had been used in thousands of mailings.

The sales promotional effort of the drug manufacturers costs four times the amount they spend on research, Dr. Rozental reports. He also provides a little "local color" on this subject:

In promoting tranquilizers to physicians, one firm spent \$100,000 on a single mailing. In its elaborate, multi-colored spreads, the industry combines quasi-scientific information with emotional, often subconscious symbols. Atarax ads, for instance, are said to favor blue on the advice of "motivational" specialists. Thorazine for menopausal upsets is illustrated by a heart-rending picture of a woman anxiously watched by her daughter. Doctors are reached by the frequent repetition of "O.K." words such as "synergistic," "potentiating," "sure-fire," and "low toxicity"

Little presents are often sent along with the literature and samples, such as lavishly illustrated cutouts, desk calendars, penholders, pillows, and

"Queeg balls." Roerig provides woolen socks embroidered with the name of the product. Recently Wallace Laboratories sent physicians a record with an Oistrakh violin solo on one side and a product plug on the other.

The drug companies are in the grip of the mania to market something "new." Over two thirds of the "new drugs," says Dr. Rozental, represent combinations of ingredients already on the market. Concerning antibiotics, he says:

In 1943 no antibiotics were sold under trade names. Now there are over a hundred sold under nearly six hundred trade names. With few exceptions there is no reason for using any of these mixtures. In fact, in some cases they may cause health hazards and play a part in the development of resistant strains such as those of the dreadful staphylococcus. Another hazard is the use of multiple vitamin tablets containing folic acid. Professors M. Nickerson and J. P. Gemmell of the University of Manitoba have called this "an example of polypharmacy that may do serious harm, such as neurological damage in unsuspected pernicious anemia."

Dr. Rozental piles up enough illustrations of carelessness or indifference, together with instances of actual misrepresentation of medical opinion, to make his reader wonder what the Food and Drug Administration and the Federal Trade Commission are doing about all this. The answer seems to be, not much. The pressure on these agencies is very great, while their staffs are small. Concerning the police power of the FTC, Dr. Rozental reports that since 1938 "there has been only one court decision involving an ethical drug and only two complaints, both against the same firm, of misleading advertising of a prescription drug."

Apparently, novels like Middleton Kiefer's *Pax*, the story of the wild and conscienceless commercialism of a pharmaceutical company, are not so wide of the mark (see MANAS review, March 16). Dr. Rozental makes sufficient commentary on the situation when he reminds us that George Merck insisted that "medicine is for people, not for profits," and that Edward Robinson Squibb did not believe in patents.

Food and medicine are concerns of health. What about our lives? The question of whether or not the United States ought to ready itself to prosecute a nuclear war may be "controversial," but the question of whether the people of the United States or any other country can *survive* a nuclear war is not controversial at all. In an address in Los Angeles on May 25, Dr. Brock Chisholm, Canadian psychiatrist and former director-general of the World Health Organization, spoke his mind on this matter. "No nation," he said, "can protect its people from attack, even though we are all pretending that we can." A Los Angeles *Times* (May 26) report summarizes:

There was a time when governments could promise protection, but this ended with the atom bomb and the perfection of biological warfare, he [Dr. Chisholm] said.

To persist with attitudes which are no longer applicable can result only in eventual mental stress and very likely an increase in the incidence of mental illness before there is a decrease, he continued.

For the first time in history groups of men can no longer survive at the expense of other groups. Now the ability to kill is so great that the whole human race is at stake. No government is yet geared to function according to this new concept, the psychiatrist said.

Governor Robert B. Meyner of New Jersey also has been outspoken concerning the foolishness of bomb shelters to protect the population against nuclear attack. In the *Progressive* for June, in an article, "The Cruel Deception of Civilian Defense," Mr. Meyner says:

The basic purpose in modern warfare is to kill an entire city. Today, one 20-megaton bomb contains more destructive power than all the bombs that were exploded in World War II.

If a city like San Francisco or Newark were to be hit by a few megaton nuclear bombs, everything in the civilian defense handbook would go out the window.

The area of total or near-total destruction from each megaton blast would be upward of twenty square miles. Most of the underground shelters would be

sealed under a mountain of radioactive rubble. But equally devastating would be the fire, spreading out from the center with jet plane speed in all directions.

Meanwhile a canopy of radioactivity from these high fission-fusion blasts would contaminate an area covering hundreds of square miles. The problem would be intensified because the dirt and the rubble would carry the kind of radioactivity that would retain its killing power not for hours but for months, and, in some cases, years.

Now let us suppose that people could come up out of the shelters. What kind of world would they come up to? What would they use for air? What would they use for food? What would they use for hospitals? What would they use for streets? What would they use for people?

Yet Governor Nelson Rockefeller of the State of New York is advocating the construction of bomb shelters—he wants one built in the basement of every home—thus participating in a gruesome charade of defense that is a defense only against the screaming reality that *there is no defense*. Meanwhile, experts in the logistics of mass slaughter speak casually of accommodating ourselves to the loss of five, ten, fifteen, or twenty million of our own people, before "massive retaliation" can begin.

New York City civil defense authorities dutifully jail a handful of pacifists each year for refusing to seek shelter during the annual, nationwide civil defense drill. Of the 1960 demonstration on May 3, in which 500 participants ignored the order of the auxiliary civil defense police to seek shelter, Murray Kempton, New York *Post* columnist, wrote: "We seem to be approaching a condition of sanity where within a year or so there'll be more people defying than complying with the civil defense drill." This comment was based on the fact that in 1955, the year of the first civil disobedience protest against the drill, only twenty-eight persons defied the order to take shelter, while this year the protesters numbered 500 and the police had to pick and choose among a great crowd to make arrests. By the time two police wagons were filled (with twenty-seven persons), the all-clear sounded and

the farce was over. Similar demonstrations took place in Haverstraw and Schenectady, New York.

Persons arrested in New York and Haverstraw were sentenced to five days in jail (or, in Haverstraw, \$25 fine)—a rather modest price to pay for advertising one's sanity.

What about work, jobs, ways of making a living? Paul Goodman's *Commentary* series (February, March, and April) has some revealing paragraphs on the alienation of the typical job-holder. In the first of these articles, he says:

It is hard for the young man now to maintain his feelings of justification, sociability, serviceability. It is not surprising if he quickly becomes cynical and time-serving, interested in a fast buck. And so, in the notorious *Reader's Digest* test—the car with a disconnected coil wire—the investigators found 63 per cent of the mechanics charged for repairs they didn't make, and lucky if they didn't also take out the new fuel pump and replace it with a used one. (65 per cent of radio repair shops, but only 49 per cent of watch repairmen "lied, overcharged, or gave false diagnoses.") . . .

In factory jobs the workman is likely to be ignorant of what goes on, since he performs a small operation on a big machine that he does not understand. Even so there is evidence that he has the same disbelief in the enterprise as a whole, with a resulting attitude of profound indifference.

Semi-skilled factory operatives are the largest category of workmen. (I am leafing through the U.S. Department of Labor's *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 1957*.) Big companies have tried the devices of applied anthropology to enhance the loyalty of the men to the firm, but apparently the effort is hopeless, for it is found that a thumping majority of the men don't care about the job or the firm; they couldn't care less and you can't make them care more. But this is not because of wages, hours, or working conditions, or management. On the contrary, the tests of Robert Dubin that show the men's indifferences to the company, show also their (unaware) admiration for the way the company has designed and manages the plant; it is their very model of style, efficiency, and correct behavior. Maybe if they understood more they would admire less. . . . The conclusion must be that workmen are indifferent to the job because of its intrinsic nature: the work does not enlist a man's worthwhile capacities, it is not

"interesting"; it is not his, he is not "in" on it; the product is not unquestionably useful; and he doesn't care about the enterprise. And research directly on this subject, by Frederick Herzberg, shows that it is defects in the intrinsic aspects of the job that make workmen "unhappy." . . . What a remarkable thing such studies tell us! That men want to do good work and work that is somehow theirs. But they are thwarted. Is not this "the waste of our resources" that is talked about?

Of the professionals of the entertainment world, Mr. Goodman observes:

Consider the men and women in TV advertisements, demonstrating the product and singing the jingle. They are clowns and mannequins, in grimace, speech, and action. And again, what I want to call attention to in this advertising is not the economic problem of synthetic demand, and not the cultural problem of Popular Culture, but the human problem that these are human beings working as clowns; that the writers and designers of it are human beings thinking like idiots; and the broadcasters know and abet what is going on: "*Fruitily, bubbily, Hoffman's is dubbily good as good can be!*" Alternately, they are liars, confidence men, smooth talkers, obsequious, insolent, etc., etc.

Mr. Goodman makes this conclusion:

. . . on the simple criteria of unquestioned utility, employing human capacities, and honor, there are not enough worthy jobs in our economy for average boys and adolescents to grow up toward. There are of course thousands of jobs that are worthy and self-justifying, and thousands that can be made so by stubborn integrity. Extraordinary intelligence or special talent, also, can often carve out a place for itself—conversely, their usual corruption and waste are all the more sickening. But by and large our economic society is *not* geared for the cultivation of its young or the attainment of important goals that they can work toward.

What remains to be examined? Politics? Education? Religion? The Press? We are more familiar with criticism of these fields, and the reasons for alienation from them are more obvious. In the April issue of *Commentary*, the editor, Norman Podhoretz, contributes a rejoinder to an article by Dwight Macdonald on the futility of politics, and what Mr. Podhoretz says makes an

excellent summary and conclusion for our brief outline of the causes of alienation. He writes:

I believe that issues exist. It is an issue that our society still lives by success, conceived in terms of status or money, and that the pursuit of success encourages the development of the worst human qualities and strangles the best. It is an issue that the curiosity of our children wastes away daily in the schools. It is an issue that work provides no satisfaction for the great majority of Americans, whether they sit at machines or behind desks. It is an issue that the air is filled with lies, that "public speech" has lost all connection with reality. It is an issue that everything we get *costs* too much—too much money, too much energy, too much spirit. These are not issues that will be raised in any Presidential election, but then so much the worse for Presidential elections. Intellectuals do raise them from time to time, but in a mechanical way, as though they had trouble remembering what once burned fiercely in their souls—a vision of what a decent human life on this earth might look like—and could only remember their bitterness at the refusal of others to share in the vision. . . . Do intellectuals wish to change the world? Then let them work on the consciousness of their age and forget about parties and movements. Let them attend to their dreams of the good life and the good society, while others fret about pushing bills through Congress or winning votes and elections.

Clearly, Mr. Podhoretz is helping to arm our best intelligence: he is defining with unmistakable clarity the causes and justifications of contemporary alienation.

REVIEW

THE ARTS IN OUR TIME

NOW and then a book comes along which one can treat only as a curiosity or a puzzle, yet which should not be neglected for the reason that it represents a wide focus of attention, either in the present or the recent past. The book whose content we have been wrestling with for the past couple of hours is *The Third Rose—Gertrude Stein and her World*, by John Malcolm Brinnin (Little, Brown, 1959).

We find we have lots of company in people who are disinclined to read Miss Stein, while those who do, and find reason to praise her, seem to do so because of some personal feeling for her; either this, or she is pointed to as an experimentalist who has pioneered new uses of words.

It must be admitted, from Mr. Brinnin's account, that Miss Stein's fame was not wholly undeserved. She brought a tremendous intensity and concentration to her work. (What that work was, and what it was supposed to mean, we leave to the reader to look up in Mr. Brinnin, who seems to understand it more clearly than we do.) There must have been evident, for those who knew Gertrude Stein, a sense of absolute integrity and commitment in her approach to life. And since she had no doubts herself concerning the validity and importance of what she was doing—her egotism obviously created absolute horizons—a kind of dramatic wholeness resulted. Mr. Brinnin would persuade us that she wished to contribute a cubist version of literature, and that she undertook this task with the fervor and meticulous attention to detail of a research scientist.

Great names appear throughout the book. Picasso, Matisse, Braque, among painters, were her close friends. Young Americans of the Lost Generation—notably Ernest Hemingway—sat at her feet almost as disciples. Picasso did her portrait, Jo Davidson a seated figure of her. The

period of her life was one of innovation and revolt in literature and the arts, and Mr. Brinnin is successful in making the reader feel its turbulence.

What is one to say of this period? Well, it is safe to say, first, that it was a time of furious search for a new vocabulary and new content in the arts. And it is necessary to add that the leaders of the search were accomplished, skillful and intense men, rich in imagination and ability. The third thing that seems important to say is that their time—the culture about them—gave them practically no nourishment at all. They were artists in isolation, thrown back on themselves; and they were men too independent to capitulate to the aimless bourgeois conventions of the day. Having no culture to interpret, they interpreted themselves; finding no philosophy in their world worth pursuing and investigating, they made a philosophy of their work. One of the results of their devoted activity has been the cult of art.

Who are these people—the best of them? They are men in search of a vision. They do the best they can and know in an impoverished world. In our world, the artist is driven into isolation by our ignorance of the fact—perhaps it is a law—that every human being is an artist. The subdivision of being produces distortion, and subdivision is the modern rule of life. We subdivide nature and we subdivide our talents and activities. We are continually delegating our natural functions. For justice we hire lawyers, for health we hire doctors, for beauty we hire artists, and for truth we hire priests. How, under such circumstances, can we learn anything of justice, health, beauty, and truth, which are known only through practice?

These fields become specialties, and since specialties require specialists, little groups with private jargons arise. Then, since jargons are the sign of status, privilege, and pretense, a new specialty becomes of great importance—criticism. We now hire men to interpret the jargons of the specialists, and this new, intermediate profession of interpreting the specialists becomes so large, so

all-important and so authoritative, that it develops into a cult of its own—the cult of *culture*, whose principal activity is talking and writing, not doing.

This cult is for the service of those who accept the specialties—in the arts and literature—as valid expressions of the creative spirit, deserving of serious attention.

There is also, however, the larger, more amorphous body of citizens which requires another kind of service—the service of popular journalists who justify the disinclination to learn the jargon of the specialists. This need forms the basis of another intermediate profession, founded upon opportunism and catering to pseudo-equalitarian simplicity and sturdy grass-roots virtue.

Finally, there is the two-way flow of influence from the masses to the élite and from the élite to the masses. Seeking vitality, the cults seek out "primitive" art forms. The barbaric beat of jazz is welcomed in the coteries and long, erudite articles in the intellectual magazines explore the under-meanings of comic strips and detective stories. Added to these tendencies is the strain of Dadaist contempt which regularly comes to the surface in artists who feel the phoneyess of the entire arrangement and don't know what to do about it except to turn themselves into exhibitionists of unmeaning and self-sacrificing vulgarity. The other direction of the interchange becomes noticeable in the organs of popular culture which periodically invade the cults for "story material" and preen themselves for bringing exclusiveness to the masses.

The result of all this is that people wonder longingly about what is supposed to be "good," usually coming to rest in some haven of prepared opinions which seems to approximate their own inclinations. It is an enormously confusing and stultifying situation. But since throughout this many-layered cake of custom and prejudice there are honest human beings at work, it is by no means all fake and folly. The problem is to separate the spontaneous and the meaningful from

the pretense and conformity, and sometimes the problem seems too complicated and not important enough to attack at all. So, for the most part, most people let it go. Which is why, we must confess, we have made no conscientious, serious-minded attempt to understand Gertrude Stein, but prefer to read Tolstoy on the arts, who seems to get at the heart of the matter, and presents fewer difficulties.

COMMENTARY A NEW RELIGION?

WHAT will fill the vacuum left by alienation? In another of his *Commentary* editorials (March, 1960), Norman Podhoretz wonders if "a new religion" will not "gradually take over the world." Inclined to think that something of this sort is going to happen, he discusses the possibilities:

Two main conditions seem to be necessary for the birth of a new religion. First, circumstances must so far have outstripped the ideas of the old religion as to make them incapable of renovation; they become irrelevant to experience in the sense that they can neither explain life satisfactorily nor offer consolation to the new psychological types that have quietly been produced by the accumulation of changed circumstances. . . .

The second necessary condition is the appearance of a prophet. Now a prophet may appear (as did most of the Hebrew prophets) to recall the priest-ridden people back from the letter of the law to the spirit. If, however, the law has finally been rendered obsolete by circumstances and psychology, he may find himself becoming—perhaps even to his own surprise—not a refresher of the old but a bringer of the new. Of course false prophets also appear from time to time, trying to do the same thing. How are they to be distinguished from the true? The only way, curiously enough, is by success. The true prophet is a man blessed with what may be called perfect spiritual pitch, the man who does in fact articulate the deepest aspirations of his age in terms which make sense out of a previously senseless situation. For the agonies with which he has been struggling in his own soul turn out to be the very ones that are running wild in the world around him, seeking expression and alleviation. "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" cried Paul, and I doubt whether his cry—or the answer to it—would have echoed so far if so many people were not about to experience a rush of oppression at their sodden corporeal weight during the next few centuries. . . .

"No true prophet," says Mr. Podhoretz, "has so far appeared in our time," but he adds that "it seems obvious that the stage is beautifully set."

The editor of *Commentary* is probably right on both counts, yet a little something ought to be added concerning those who are perhaps the

minor prophets of our time. Gandhi, for one, should be mentioned, as considerably more than a minor prophet, and the cry of Paul seems peculiarly appropriate to Gandhi's lifelong mission. Martin Luther King deserves notice as a distinguished follower in Gandhi's train, and Danilo Dolci, in Italy, shows a similar sort of moral genius.

The movement for non-violence is not, of course, a "new religion," although it may be one plank of salvation that is absolutely necessary to the modern world. One wonders, however, if we may not be expecting too much of a single exemplar of human greatness, if that is what a prophet is. A kind of prophet of the American struggle for independence, Thomas Paine, once said, "There is one thing stronger than all the armies in the world, and that is an idea whose time has come." The prophets of the future may turn out to be living embodiments of great ideas, rather than the personal leaders who capture human loyalty simply by the magnetism of their spiritual stature.

A great age of rationalism separates the prophets of old from modern times, and a "true prophet," to borrow Mr. Podhoretz' expression, would surely incorporate the gains of this period, while no doubt going beyond them. The *Commentary* editor seems well aware of this, since he says: "If a true prophet should appear, his revelation would be acceptable to reason because it would illuminate life so powerfully as to compel rational assent; it would, in other words, provide a new way of understanding the world, new categories, even a new logic."

The further point that seems to need making, however, is that a revelation with rational appeal requires considerable preparation on the part of the world. Are the men of our time *ready* to accept the deliveries of reason, no matter how inspiringly presented? Or would they deal with the prophet as the Athenians dealt with Socrates, that most reasonable man? Was Socrates "successful," or was he "false"?

One may suspect that the prophets of the future will not be able to relieve us of any responsibility—too often the role of religion, and too often *expected to be* the role of religion—but that they will make stringent demands upon the prophetic element in all men as individuals. For the crisis of the modern world is not really a mass crisis; it is a crisis of individuality. The meeting of such a crisis requires preparation; without it, the "savior," however great himself, remains sadly impotent.

CHILDREN

... and Ourselves

SUCCESS WITHOUT LEARNING

MOST liberal writers and nearly all educators are familiar with the criticisms commonly made of "the grading system"—from elementary school to the final stages of graduate work in the university. Generally speaking, it is conceded that the student should pursue learning for its own sake and not work for a grade, and that the tendency to work for a grade inhibits the pursuit of real learning. But this usually sounds like but another counsel of perfection, and those who make it may fail entirely to suggest a practical way to eliminate grades. Meanwhile, the problems caused by neglect of the adverse psychological effects of "grades" seem to be getting worse.

William Graham Cole, of Williams College, contributes an arresting article to the May 14 *Nation*, entitled "Cheating Your Way Through College." Seeking causes for the widespread cheating—ranging from the time-dishonored "crib" notes to paid ghost writing for Ph.D. theses—he points out:

First of the factors that require a long, long look is the heavy emphasis placed throughout American education on grades. Admission to college and university today requires more than ever before, a record liberally sprinkled with As and Bs. The graduate schools, becoming increasingly selective, also place a high premium on the marks received in college. This means that as the student climbs the academic stairway, he finds at each successive level a sign reading "Reserved for those with good grades." Thus, if he is not content to abandon his ascent, he must produce his passport.

But why must he cheat? Why should he not earn his marks by hard work? Of course, the answer is that many do, perhaps even the majority. But there is evidently a sizable minority who take the easier, less virtuous way, and when some do and get away with it, the incentive to hard work is perceptibly weakened. *Besides, it is the final mark received in the course, not what one has learned, that is really important.* The academic community rewards the A-earners, however little of their learning they may

retain or use, while it disapproves and may even separate the C- and D-earners, no matter how much of lasting and pragmatic value the latter have derived from their studies.

In the May 14 *Saturday Evening Post*, Charles H. Boehm, Pennsylvania Superintendent of Public Instruction, writes on "What You Don't Know about Your Schools." He lists numerous examples of disproportionate expenditure—such as the \$1,000,000 school in his own state which equipped a football field for night games at a cost of \$60,000, but had no funds left to stock the library shelves. On the day the school was dedicated, the principal pleaded with parents to donate "extra" books to fill the space. There are schools in many states, according to Dr. Boehm, which fail to even approximate the American Library Association's standard of ten books for each pupil, although the same schools are apt to be well-equipped for all sorts of athletic contests. The important question, of course, is just how we developed this pattern. Quite possibly, the general acceptance of the grade system has a great deal to do with it. When the students are allowed to feel that their obligations are fulfilled by making either passing grades or college entrance grades, their interests will naturally run in other directions. Subsequently teachers and administrators tend to accept the same point of view. The fault, then, does not lie with some particularized philosophy of education, but in the lack of one that is in any way adequate. Mr. Boehm's article prefaces his criticism with these remarks:

I am angry at those who say that education fails today because it does not emphasize the three R's.

At the same time I am appalled that we think it right that a student spends forty minutes a day on English—and two hours on foot ball.

But what makes me angriest of all are those who want a single scapegoat for public education's failures—and equally a single cure. There is neither. We have failed to look at the fundamentals of education.

The present writer—after some twenty years—is still overtaken occasionally by a vivid

repeating nightmare in which the pattern is always the same: Finals are scheduled for the next day, and he has entirely forgotten the existence of one of the courses he is supposed to be taking. Disaster looms, and the accompanying feeling of horror is intense enough to recall other nightmares which involved pursuit by lions and tigers during early childhood. Speaking to a contemporary who attended the same university at the same time, we found that he also is beset by recurring nightmares concerning final exams.

Now from this we are tempted to conclude that along with other things wrong with over-emphasis on grades, this practice appeals to the least worthy of human emotions. If there can be nightmares about exams which come back for more than twenty years, despite the fact that everything went successfully in the actual exams, it is apparent that deep fears were planted. And greed is awakened when one finds some way of getting ahead of the rest of the class, or envy, when one is left behind by others.

There is, fortunately, a growing movement in the United States to introduce the tutorial system at the college level, aided by the pioneering work of such men as Robert Hutchins, Alexander Meiklejohn, and Stringfellow Barr, and by Rhodes scholars who have experienced the tutorial system at Oxford. In "Cheating Your Way Through College," Mr. Cole puts the advantage of the tutorial system in context, after recommending that we "do something drastic about the whole grading system, which not only is a sheepskin curtain blocking effective communication and cooperation between teacher and student, but a misdirection of the entire academic enterprise":

It is not the A for which we want students to work, but rather for what that letter represents: comprehension, imagination, skill, sympathy, diligence. This almost every faculty member knows very well, but it is poorly projected to those who sit on the opposite side of the desk, the more especially when so many tests are "objective," graded by machine, requiring little thought or originality. To be sure, this is the easiest type to mark and it reduces to a minimum the teacher's subjective biases. But such

a test is a deadly bore for the student and, incidentally, is the easiest kind to cheat one's way through.

Why should it not be possible for American education to adopt the tutorial system so long effective in Britain, where the teacher works together with the student preparing for an examination which someone else will give? The examination is of the comprehensive type, virtually impervious to cheating. It is not a trap for the student to reveal how little he knows. It is rather an opportunity for him to show what he can do. Mere rote of facts will get him nowhere. He is asked to display his ability to reason, to relate, to react. It is the sort of examination which is fun for any student worthy of the name. It would be perfectly possible to give such a test "open-book" fashion, allowing the examinees to bring into the room any materials they like, since the material would be of little use anyway. This is the best way to deal with cheating—to make it impractical by making it undesirable to the student himself. At this point, it should be said in fairness to at least segments of American education that many teachers are regularly giving "open-book" exams, and almost invariably students find them a stimulating challenge.

But a change in grading system, in type of examination, in student-teacher relationship, is mere mechanical manipulation. More fundamental is the student's attitude toward education itself. American education, by and large, produces a maximum of passivity; students do not so much *learn* anything as they are *taught* something.

FRONTIERS EAST-WEST PHILOSOPHER'S CONFERENCE

THE third East-West Philosophers' Conference began on June 22, 1959, at the University of Hawaii—scene of both previous conferences—and continued until the first of August. Although attended by representatives from fourteen countries, including some distinguished names, very little news of this gathering has appeared, and it may be another year before a book based upon the various lectures will be published.

Not so with the first conference, held in 1950. This was rather an epochal event, recognized as such by most of the participants as the discussions proceeded, and conducive to a cross-fertilization of thinking which has since continued. The quarterly magazine, *Philosophy East and West*, was launched on a flood of enthusiasm awakened by the conference, and has made valiant attempts to continue publication. (Articles in *Philosophy East and West* have often been quoted in these pages.)

The present account of last year's conference, however, is drawn from other sources, which report remarks from such thinkers as Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, vice-president of India, Hu Shih, once Chinese ambassador to the United States, northern and southern Buddhists from Tokyo and Rangoon, and Zen interpreter D. T. Suzuki. The most active Westerners seem to have been F. S. C. Northrop, Sidney Hook, and Charles Moore of the University of Hawaii, who presided as the director of the conference. A brief report in the *Christian Century* for November 4 suggests one interesting development—that intelligent Christians can hardly avoid perceiving the relationship between philosophy conceived at the East-West level and matters of religion. As the *Century* writer, Niels C. Nielsen, Jr., puts it: "Even though the meeting was not primarily religious in purpose, its implications for Christianity should not be ignored. Unless

Christianity be identified simply with the West—with its faults and its virtues—the problem of the relation of Eastern and Western traditions must be faced by the church. It is not too much to venture that one of the most important theological questions of the coming decades will be the relation of Christianity to Eastern philosophies. The total rejection of natural religion in some Christian theologies is of no more help in promoting interreligious understanding than are the views of Westerners who have turned exclusively to the East for religious insight." Nielsen continues:

It must be remembered that other religions besides Christianity are trying to force themselves from obscurantism and the historical limitations of their past. Professor E. A. Burtt, a member of the conference's steering committee, emphasized that some distinction between the higher and the lower in religion must remain, in spite of all sociological and theological claims to the contrary. Such a distinction makes clear, in the simplest way, that there is much in the West's history which need not be defended. The growth of religious insight must be recognized, in disavowal of fundamentalist literalism, before there can be any real conversation.

Another report on the conference appears in *Asian Culture*, a quarterly review published in Saigon. The writer, Mr. Nguyen Dang Thuc, Chairman of the Vietnamese Association for Asian Culture Relations, was himself a member of the conference. Although Mr. Thuc becomes involved in an argument with Sidney Hook, who appears to still delight in needless controversy, interesting quotations are available in the Thuc article.

The chief problem of the conference was set as the exploration of the relationship between philosophy and practical affairs, but in order to get started on this the philosophers present decided that they must define philosophy all over again. Professor P. T. Raju, of the University of Rajputana, claimed that much of what we today call psychology is actually philosophy, and Professor Hook objected to this broad statement.

Professor Radhakrishnan tried to set a tone of unification:

In a conference of East-West philosophers, it will be useful to consider briefly the metaphysical presuppositions which are the formative forces of any civilization. Metaphysics is not an esoteric pursuit. It has an important place in the life of every reflecting person.

Philosophy is a wide term including logic, ethics, aesthetics, social philosophy and metaphysics. The last is concerned with the ultimate nature of things. The search for metaphysical certainty has been the source of much that is profound and significant in the history of thought. Metaphysics comprises two main fields, ontology derived from the Greek word for being. What is the reality which exists in its own right and is not dependent on anything else? The other is epistemology which is derived from the Greek word for knowledge. What can the human mind know with certainty? How does opinion differ from knowledge? What is real? What can be known? These are the problems with which metaphysics deals.

Later on in the conference Professor Herbert W. Schneider, of UNESCO, endeavored to show that philosophy is not necessarily devoid of contact with emotions and with the "heart":

Truth may be quite cold, and its pursuit may be more like a life of devotion than like a life of love; whereas there is a kind of living warmth in wisdom, which makes philosophy appear to be engaged in a kind of reciprocity or participation.

Philosophical truth is found only in the content of human life, and hence the philosophical mind must have a genuine concern for human affairs and a readiness to remain in human fellowship.

Both the pursuit of truth and the pursuit of wisdom may be endless, but they are endless in different ways. Truth remains eventual; it comes at the end.

But wisdom is more analogous to happiness, which is found along the way and not at the end of the road. Wisdom and happiness are not objects; they are ways of being human.

Mr. Thuc concludes his argument by an attempt to draw a larger circle to let Mr. Hook in:

In the conference Professor Sidney Hook maintained that philosophy has a multi-purpose

objective, and it is not necessarily linked to practical life but when he answered: "Philosophers have to change themselves, meanwhile admit the world as it is," not only was his statement similar to Reverend Vivekananda's doctrine, but it sounded very much like the teaching of Confucius, who believed that a discussion of the relationship between philosophy and practical affairs must be concluded by an appeal to "personal improvement." If a philosopher believes in his doctrine and tries to live up to it, the result will be "daily progress, more progress in more given days, more and more progress in more and more ways."