

## WHO HAS DONE THESE THINGS

HOW do you answer the pessimists? There are so many reasons for being pessimistic, these days, that an answer to the pessimists will have to be carefully drawn. First, you have to distinguish between the foolish pessimists and the sensible ones. The foolish pessimists don't deserve much of an answer because they haven't attempted to find one for themselves. It is the sensible pessimists who require attention, since they are usually people who don't *want* to be pessimists, but have decided that any other view flies in the face of too many facts.

There are two major areas where pessimism seems justified. No doubt these areas are related, but it is at least convenient, and probably necessary, to look at them one at a time. The first is the area of private or personal life. Whether you make "happiness" the goal, or "significance," in the sense of accomplishing something worth while, the score for the modern individual is not very high. It would be special pleading to argue that people are less happy today than in earlier epochs of history—who knows about these things?—but it might be said that modern man is at least more self-analytical than his forebears and that he may be more consciously aware of the dissatisfactions in his own life. And you could add that modern man has suffered a traumatic loss of faith. Apart from the decline of religious belief and the disillusionment with science, there is the bleak uncertainty of the future of all human beings.

The other area of rampant pessimism concerns the collective record of human beings, organized into societies. "Dust and ashes" used to be a rhetorical image, but now it seems a rather precise description of what the modern nations may turn each other into, unless an extraordinary wave of sanity sweeps into the opinion-making and policy-shaping agencies of modern nations.

At this writing, the likelihood of such a change in feelings and attitudes does not seem great.

This level of analysis, however, is too general, too big and pretentious, to offer much help. We need to break up the scene of general hopelessness into particular regions of human failure or inadequacy. First, we might take that popular whipping boy, modern technology.

The first issue of a new magazine, *The Second Coming* (January-February, 1961), published in New York, has an article by Percival Goodman which concludes:

Good buildings are being designed, workable cars are made, there are usable tooth brushes. The most elaborate means are being used to accomplish the smallest end and the search for perfection is endless. But when all the little parts are added up they don't make a whole; in fact, by some ingenious paradox each seems to cancel out the other. . . .

The perfecting of each individual element weakens the whole for there is no homogeneous total idea. When a total idea is sought, it turns out to be totalitarian, when unity is sought, it turns out to be regimentation.

So it goes—we discover atomic power and blow people up; we'll soon find a way to go to the moon in order to spy on the enemy. It is told that Tolstoy after his first visit to a Moscow cinema said, "What a pity, the cinema might be one of the mightiest means of spreading knowledge and great ideas, and yet it only serves to litter people's brains." . . . these practical gadgets are not always what they seem.

Now this is either a practical problem, or it is a problem of ends, which would make it a philosophical problem. Mr. Goodman seems to think it is a problem of ends, since he says, "The perfecting of each individual element weakens the whole for there is no homogeneous total idea." At least a dozen books have been written making this point, which concerns the self-defeating aspect of a materialism which refuses to stay in its

place—a materialism which reaches out to substitute its low-grade satisfactions for the high ends of human life. The measureless energies which are spent in modern technological culture for the multiplication and refinement of "things" has had the inevitable effect of perverting the moral ideas of the age. Take for example the chief argument made in reply to the charge that the people of the United States are rapidly becoming a nation of "conformists." We are told that this is not so—that Americans have an infinite variety of "things" to choose from, and therefore no limit to the ways in which they can disport and embellish their "individuality"!

This argument is on a par with the claim that Americans enjoy the advantages of a free society because of the "individualism" of the capitalist system. Disregarding the fact that taxes and legal controls have worn away much of the "freedom" of capitalistic enterprise, there has never been a noticeable correlation between the acquisition of private wealth, and hospitality to great and original ideas. It is true enough that people who lack economic independence can often be compelled to conform for fear of personal want or the want of their children, but the assumption that a free enterprise economy is devoid of pressures to conformity will not stand inspection. The basic reality in this question is that people will be free when they value freedom above anything else, and that they will lose their freedom when they no longer care about it, or care about it less than other things. This is the rule, regardless of the economic system that happens to be in use.

The issue is not one of systems or of the comparison of one extreme with another, but a matter of proportion in the hierarchy of ends in human life. The problems of a community of people who have been schooled to lust after Things, who have been told that their "status" depends upon their possessions, and who, alas, have been seduced into moral complacency by this huckster's lie, will have no resemblance at all to the problems of a community persuaded of quite

other conceptions of value. "Plain living and high thinking" may be a New England cliché, but it describes a mode of life in which many of the conflicts and distempers of the acquisitive society could not exist.

The drive for perfection in small ends and "little parts" ceases to be admirable when we discover, not only that it leads to no higher goal than a Sybarite's dream of comforts and luxuries, but that the dream is in itself quite unattainable. The little parts, as Mr. Goodman says, don't add up to a whole—not even to the insipid whole which the TV commercials and the advertising copywriters have promised. Not only is there the crazy competition of manufacturers, each trying to convince us that his product—which is, after all, only a product—will be an open sesame to the Good Life; not only is there endless harping on the delicious sensations mystically compounded in soap, cigarettes, food, and beverages, until you begin to believe that no Nirvana could approach the pleasures that can be bought with money; not only is there an impossible situation created for the average wage-earner's budget, since all this wild variety of goodies required to outfit the free, independent, think-for-yourself, high-status person would take millions to buy—not only is the "good life" on these terms completely unattainable, but in the process of *trying* to attain it, we lose all sight of any other ends.

Then, when the inflated dream of all those little perfections we thought we were going to get collapses on the boot hill of exploded illusions, there is nothing to fall back upon except the cold, wet slush of personal defeat. You didn't make it. You don't belong. You can't walk in the parade. You don't even *believe* any more. You become a pessimist.

You keep it a secret, of course. You pretend to believe. You don't want your children to experience the pain of being nobody before their time. And jobs are for believers. The higher you get in the scale of free enterprise, the more you are supposed to believe. This makes things

difficult for a father and bread-winner. Pessimism is increasingly hard to avoid.

The world situation shows no more promise for those who habitually take a larger view of human problems, although there are still a lot of things people can do which don't involve them in the art-directed fraud of a material utopia. Not everyone succumbs to the compulsion to glut their lives with possessions. They listen to the commercials as though they were slightly amusing, but more often slightly nauseating nursery rhymes—samples of the "mass culture" drivel it is necessary to put up with in this world. What else is there to do? But if you can tolerate this sort of thing, the prospects of the larger view are still not good. There is the arms race and the "unthinkable" consequences of nuclear war. You can lose yourself and some of your depression in active labors for nuclear disarmament, but you don't really overcome your pessimism. You can make sermons to yourself and others about how we've just *got* to work things out with the Russians, but it isn't easy to believe you are going to win. You just keep trying.

And yet, underneath all these pressures, personal and international, there is still the private conviction that one ought to be able to find grounds for hope. People have the feeling that it isn't *natural* for human beings to be ground down in pessimistic negation. Perhaps you could say that we all practice a kind of peering about, looking for the promise of better things, telling ourselves that the *decent* dreams can't all be false, that joy in life must somehow be possible, if we could only hit upon the right way to go after it. This is the part of us that can't help but believe that there is an answer to the pessimists, and to the pessimist in ourselves, but it is a part that has no language in which to reply to articulate despair. We have the good feelings to argue with, but not the ideas and, of course, no words.

It is as though men lie prone, everywhere, bound by some self-induced impotence, from time to time emitting little cries of unbelief in the

disappointments and betrayals which keep on coming, one by one, clicking by, wearing away the very hope we cling to. In this image, perhaps, of men lying prone, there is a clue. Things happen to us. We don't see anything to do except to let them happen. How can we change the course of the world, the circumstances of our lives? What can one man do? We have to put the question this way, since we feel the pessimism singly, and our dreams and hopes, now fading, were private, too.

This is practically the symbol of our age—things happening to helpless people. When the dream starts to tear apart, it is not just a repairable rent here or there, but the disintegration of an entire fabric that seems to have gone bad, the threads themselves suddenly rotten and crumbling.

An article in *Current* for last November, reprinted from the *Texas Quarterly* for the Summer of 1960, presents a discussion by Robert B. Heilman (of the University of Washington) which is closely related to this idea. Prof. Heilman mourns the loss of any distinction between the words "disaster" and "tragedy" in popular modern usage. Summing up, he says:

*Tragedy* should be used only to describe the situation in which the divided human being faces basic conflicts, perhaps rationally insoluble, of obligations and passions; makes choices, for good or for evil; errs knowingly or involuntarily; accepts consequences; comes into a new, larger awareness; suffers or dies, yet with a larger wisdom.

Now this is quite different from popular or journalistic tragedy (here we come to the social dimension of the problem): young man drives fast, hits truck that drives out in front of him, and he and his fiancée are killed. This will almost invariably be called "Tragedy on Highway go" and for many people this is *all* of tragedy. The death-dealing truck might be a disease or a careless engineer or a defective airplane wing or an assailant; the essence of it is the shock of unprogrammed death. This is a rather long way from the tragic pattern that we are able to discern in the practice of the Greeks and the Elizabethans and at least in the intuitions of some moderns. Even in the most skillful journalism we would hardly be able to get inside the victims and see them as divided between options or struggling in a cloudy dilemma of

imperative and impulse; they do not choose but are chosen; something just happens to them; consequences are mechanical, not moral; and most of all they do not grow into that deeper understanding, of themselves and of their fate, which is the dramatic heart of the experience. For in that sudden death there is little to understand; consciousness is not sharpened but is bluntly ended.

Prof. Heilman draws his conclusion as to the meaning of this degradation of the content of tragedy:

To use the term tragedy indiscriminately for what Oedipus does and experiences and learns and for what happens to a car driver through his own or someone else's carelessness, I submit, is not a casual slip of the tongue or a laughable folk error, but a real confusion that can have undesirable consequences for our grasp of reality. . . . Tragedy comes to mean *only* accidents and sudden death or anachronistic death. As a result we tend to lose touch with certain ideas that are an indispensable means of contemplating human catastrophe: the idea that calamity may come from divisions within human nature and within the ordering of life. The idea that man may choose evil. The idea that potential evil within him may overcome him despite resolution or flight. The idea that brutal events may come out of the normal logic of character. The idea that man is never safe from himself. The idea that knowledge of such ideas is essential to the salvation of the individual and to the health of institutions. All these ideas are implicitly discarded if the word *tragedy* conveys to us only such a thing as a smashup on Highway go. And what do we put in place of what is lost? The idea that the worst that can happen to us is an unexpected shortening of life. The idea that this cutting short is the work of causes outside ourselves. The idea that we are innocent victims. This is a fantastic loss of tools of understanding and, implicitly, an unhealthy oversimplification of reality. . . .

Here is an almost luminous penetration of what Joseph Wood Krutch many years ago named *The Modern Temper*, constituting the externalization of the forces of man's being. Almost no one except the men who know literature are clearly aware of this loss of inwardness. They know it because they have read widely and deeply of people who thought of themselves as making their own lives, who believed that a moral relationship *must* exist

between a human being and the forces which shape his destiny or fate. There is the profound feeling of immanent justice in the classics of literature. Tragedy has moral meaning, and it is this meaning which enriches the one who suffers the tragedy. If he does not grow in understanding, he turns the tragedy into a mere disaster, of which he is the uninstructed and passive victim.

Well, Prof. Heilman has ordered his reproach in a bill of particulars, but what is modern man to do about it? Prof. Heilman says that we have lost touch "with certain ideas that are an indispensable means of contemplating human catastrophe." Agreed, but how shall we recover those ideas? In them, one suspects, lies the only answer to the pessimists. One of those ideas seems to be the idea of guilt. The more general term, however, is responsibility. How can we convince ourselves of our responsibility?

Is it conceivable that if we were to assume responsibility for whatever happens to us, we would have a better time? That our disappointments would diminish in number? That death would be less horrible, and irresponsibility more so?

You could even argue on pragmatic grounds that this feeling of responsibility is exactly what we need, but how are you going to prove it?

We have believed ourselves "innocent" for so long, and congratulated ourselves so highly for carving out a superior "way of life" from the dead matter of an unfeeling planet. We have laughed at the cosmic gales and shrieked as wildly as any Ahab, defying the elements. We knew how to master and use them for our own purposes. Are we yet prepared to admit that we may have cast ourselves in the role of the sorcerer's apprentice, and that accounting time has come?

On the whole, the answer seems to be no. We are not ready to make these admissions. We might possibly *like* to, if only for the relief any kind of settlement would bring, but for the action

that really counts, men need more than a plausible sanction. And in a matter of this sort, we want to be sure.

We need, to borrow Mr. Goodman's expression, a "homogeneous total idea" that will give proportion to our practical strivings, and it must be the idea of a self which is transcendent. We need an idea of the self that will give us larger and more important perfections to reach after—of another order than the ones that technology is knocking itself out to produce and then to sell to us in larger and larger quantities. We need an end to the endless prostitution of value-charged words in the name of our standard of living. Most of all, we need to be convinced of these things. For with conviction comes strength.

We can't say that the diagnoses we have assembled give us any kind of proof, but they do give us reason to look for proof, or evidence, or whatever it is that we need in order to be convinced that some kind of god sleeps in the human breast.

We may not be aliens on earth; we may scorn to confess that here we have only a momentary interlude in a "vale of tears," as the Christians tell us; we may still want to climb mountains, bridge rivers, burrow in the earth and fly into outer space, but these exploits, we must finally agree, are not the sole mark of our manhood nor the measure of our vision. There are other ways of transcending space than in a rocket, and better ways of achieving human brotherhood than herding men into national garrisons and mounting diabolic weapons of assault to protect them, as we say, from the other garrisons on the other side of the world. We can make ourselves into instruments for better things than this.

When we do no better than this, we feel sick all the time. We feel sick, not from the things that happen to us, although these are now bad enough, but from the sickening things we do. The only answer to the pessimists is to stop doing these sickening things. And in order to stop, we need compelling reasons. This is what Tolstoy found

out for himself, and it is what our whole society must also find out for itself and for the world. The answer to the pessimists has not changed. And for those who insist upon a low opinion of mankind and penurious estimate of human potentiality, what the pessimists say is all too true.

## *REVIEW*

### "COMMUNITY OF FEAR"

WITH a reporter's penchant for featuring the sensational, a New York *Herald Tribune* (Oct. 17, 1960) writer produced some startling paragraphs headed: "Military 'Elite' in U.S. Said to Bar Arms Cut." Explanation follows:

People spending most of their lives burrowed underground. . . . A military coup taking over America. . . . Unidentified submarines touching off an all-out war. . . . 60,000,000 Americans killed in the first attack.

These terrifying possibilities were advanced yesterday in a special report sponsored by the Fund for the Republic as consequences of the ever-growing arms race between the East and West "if the arms race continues, as it probably will."

Disarmament or arms control agreements with the Soviet Union—never 100 per cent sure as war preventives—are none the less being blocked not only by the Russians, but by a "military elite emerging in the United States," the report states.

This "military elite" is dedicated to "a position of perpetual hostility" to the Soviet Union, and it "wields enormous political as well as military power."

Such are the assertions in the report, entitled *Community of Fear*, issued by the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, which was established last year in Santa Barbara, Calif., by the Fund for the Republic. The study is one of a series arising from the center's Study of War and the Democratic Society.

Its authors are Harrison Brown, geochemist and professor at the California Institute of Technology, and James Real, a consultant to the center.

*Community of Fear* has an unsettling quality, but it is not, as the *Herald Tribune* story would have it, in any way a piece of sensationalism. The authors were asked to address themselves to two questions by the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions: "What is the nature of the arms race? What are the consequences of its perpetuation likely to be?"

Brown and Real confine themselves strictly to this task in the course of thirty-three pages. They

have done a painstaking job of synthesizing and correlating research and statistical materials, and they leave the reader with haunting questions. Reinhold Niebuhr says in a foreword:

There is a dim awareness in the general public of the magnitudes involved in weapons technology. But this study, for the first time I think, gives vivid images of the terrifying possibilities of destruction in the thermonuclear weapons, and of the annihilation of space and time which is the consequence of technical advances in the delivery system. This latter development makes war by miscalculation or misadventure more and more a probability rather than a possibility. There is, as it were, a time bomb under our vaunted security. Ultimately, the ever-accelerated pace of the arms race must lead to disaster, even if neither side consciously desires the ultimate war. That is why the old slogans of "bargaining from strength" and "arms to parley" and "detering attack by the prospect of massive retaliation" have become irrelevant. A fresh approach is needed, prompted by an awareness of the common danger, rather than by the complacent assumption of either side that they are strong enough to prevent an attack or to win the war if it should come.

The threat of thermonuclear weapons is measurable in two ways: first, by the amount of destructive energy released by transportable warheads; second, by the transit time from launching point to demolition point. At the present the power of nuclear weapons is 1000 times greater than the two atomic warheads dropped upon Japan at the close of World War II. One thermonuclear bomb releases more destructive energy than that released by all the bombs dropped on Germany and Japan during World War II—and that, friends, is a lot of explosion. During World War II blockbusters were carried to their destination with a speed of a little over 300 miles per hour, but it is now possible to transport thermonuclear explosives at speeds greater than 10,000 miles per hour. "In fifteen years, the transit time for a bomb flown between Moscow and Washington has been reduced from sixteen hours to less than thirty minutes." Brown and Real continue:

Production of nuclear explosives continues at full speed, and it is estimated that the U.S. and the

U.S.S.R. together possess explosive material corresponding to about 30 billion tons of TNT, or about ten tons of TNT for every inhabitant of the world. . . . But above all we can expect in the years ahead many more "break-throughs" which will lead to a number of startling and unexpected military developments. Even less expensive and more efficient methods for the destruction of large segments of life and the products of human intelligence are almost certainly within our grasp.

If one ten-megaton bomb were exploded over the city of Los Angeles, the result would be almost completely annihilative. The blast effects would exterminate all but the most deeply-sheltered living things within a radius of five miles, but, following the blast, at least a twenty-five mile radius would be immediately engulfed in a firestorm which would kindle everything inflammable, including all surrounding vegetation of the hills and forests. Fallout from the same bomb would also produce lethal levels of radioactivity over an area of about 5,000 square miles. It seems likely that, within a few years, any country possessed of the latest nuclear equipment will be able to mount a single attack delivering 20,000 megatons, which could easily obliterate an entire nation beyond a chance of recovery.

Under the head of "Deterrence and Stability," Brown and Real examine the belief that such attacks are not presently imminent because the aggressor would expect retaliatory action sufficient to destroy at least his own major cities:

When neither nation can destroy the other's retaliatory force in a first strike, it is believed that there will be no first strike. Such a system is often looked upon as being a "stable" one. . . .

In view of the fact that the combination of technology and international politics is leading us rapidly to the development of relatively invulnerable retaliatory systems, it is important that we examine factors which affect their stability. Can they really be stable? If they can, then in effect technology will have eliminated large-scale war from the world scene. Or is such a system basically unstable? If it is, and if we follow this path to its end, it is likely that we will perish.

But reliance upon deterrent systems will have its psychological effect upon "the enemy," which may cancel out its benefits at another level of complications:

The spread of nuclear military capabilities will almost certainly decrease the stability of deterrent systems. Thus, when China becomes a nuclear and missile power, or when we believe that she has become one, we must train our missiles upon the bases and cities of that country as well as upon those of the Soviet Union. And the Soviet Union will undoubtedly feel it necessary to deter China as well. In any event, as nation after nation arms—China, Japan, East Germany, West Germany, Yugoslavia, Spain, Argentina—we must make decisions as to whether or not we must establish systems to deter them. Are they potential enemies or friends? To what extent can they be trusted?

In addition, it is impossible to overlook the factors which newspaper reporters seized upon in describing *Community of Fear*, although the statements made by Brown and Real should be read in context and entirely—as, for instance, regarding the "military elite":

Although these men are not generally openly political, they are in every sense the paramilitary—civilian soldiers. They have spent most of their adult lives in the direct or secondary employment of one or another of the services, and their sympathy for and concurrence with their uniformed colleagues are often marked and open. Should a showdown between the military and the civilian sectors occur, this group could be relied upon to staunchly back the handlers of the weapons they have so devotedly evolved.

The military leaders themselves are quite naturally not enthusiastic for disarmament or for any steps that might curtail the freedom of action of the armed services. There is rather clearly a military elite emerging in the United States which is dedicated to a position of perpetual hostility toward the Soviet Union and which wields enormous political as well as military power.

The concluding paragraphs of *Community of Fear* deal thoughtfully with the optimistic belief that the arms race can only result in a stalemate:

Whether or not a war is potentially too dangerous to fight will depend of course upon individual outlook. How many deaths can be

tolerated? Who will do the "tolerating"? The political leaders? The people themselves? What are the chances for recovery? Will anyone *want* to survive and "recover"? What are the chances of recovery? In any event, it seems likely that continued use of the war system will involve the violent deaths of tens of millions to hundreds of millions of persons, coupled with the serious risk that economic recovery might not be possible. For as long as people and their governments are willing to take such risks—for as long as people and their governments continue to deposit confidence in violence as the *ultima ratio* of human disagreements—the war system will be the indispensable vehicle of resolution.

It is clear that ending the war system demands the common consent of *all* of the world's powers—those now capable of nuclear military adventures and those who one day may be. If any one nation which possesses nuclear potential believes that the war system is not obsolete, it will be retained. The arms race, already almost incomprehensible in its capacity for mass annihilation, will be elaborated with new elements—chemical, biological, psychological—until the arsenals are packed with devices to destroy all the peoples of the world many times over. Yet in the long run the grisly "race" can produce no winner. In any future war the consolation prizes can only be surrender, stalemate, or death.

The Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions will provide a single copy of *Community of Fear*, gratis, on request. The address is P.O. Box 4068, Santa Barbara, Calif.



## COMMENTARY

### IS WAR "PART OF THE UNIVERSE"?

DR. RIESMAN speaks of students who act as if the universities they attend are as unchangeable as "part of the universe." There is perhaps some excuse for this, since the institutions of modern society are so impressively complex that the idea of making them over may seem ridiculous. Yet such ideas do occur—as for example the idea that was the seed of Emerson College in Pacific Grove, California, described by Alvin Duskin in last week's MANAS.

The way to change an institution is to leave it—stop nourishing it with your energies and hopes—and start something new and good.

How about changing the "Community of Fear" by this means? It seems quite apparent that the adults who are in charge of national affairs regard the war system in much the same way as Dr. Riesman's students look at their schools. The war system is a "part of the universe" and you have to live with it. The point that Dr. Brown and Mr. Real make is that you *can't* live with it—not any more. Or if you try, it won't be really living—not in the inevitable community of fear.

But is it possible to stop nourishing these twin institutions—the war system and the community of fear?

Well, there are people who refuse to pay taxes for war. There are people who refuse to go to war or build or train for war. There are people who act in civilly disobedient ways in order to call attention to what they feel is the insanity of preparation for nuclear war. These people, at any rate, are determined to find some means of refusing to nourish the institutions of war and the community of fear. What they do is sometimes puzzling to others who have not attempted to work out a way of changing these institutions.

But what the critics of non-violent action ought to consider is that *any* attempt to root a new attitude toward conflict situations is bound to

have its puzzling aspects. These men and women are trying to institute a change. They are trying to take the first steps toward ending a condition which everyone admits is intolerable. You could say that the puzzling thing is not in what these people do, but in the fact that they are so few.

No evil institution ever died away until people generally refused to nourish it, giving their energies to other things. The war system and the community of fear will not be eliminated by tinkering with them, or by trying to make them so frightful that everybody will see that we need them as a guarantee of the peace of paralysis. Peace by fright could easily become more emotionally intolerable than an all-destructive war.

It is just conceivable that a time will come when people will begin to walk away in droves from the war system and the community of fear. In any event, the uncertainty will have to end, some day. In either war or peace.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

### THE PESSIMISTIC YOUNG CROWD

WHAT David Riesman has to say about the current generation of college students is certainly as provocative as the ideas developed in his *The Lonely Crowd* respecting the psychological behavior of the average adult, and in one sense more encouraging. In the November *Encounter*, under the heading "The Uncommitted Generation," Riesman indicates why he prefers this designation to many others applied to present-day youth. The reason: College students are not primarily "alienated" from either tradition or from the adult world, but they are often intelligent enough to *decline* commitment. Riesman explains:

In a recent lecture, addressing myself primarily to students already a highly self-conscious group, I was reluctant simply to list once more the labels the older generation has already pinned on them: apathy, conformity, security-mindedness "coolness," "beatness," and so on. Such labels do have a certain truth, and I shall try to delineate what it is; but they also conceal about as much as they reveal. They conceal the fact that the college generations of the 1920's and 1930's, now nostalgically admired, were on the whole far less responsive, serious, and decent than students in comparable institutions today. They conceal the fact that the apparently negative qualities of apathy and conformity must be seen as an aspect of the high intelligence and sensitivity of this generation of students, who know more than their elders did and who have justly, more to be afraid of.

Riesman's analysis focuses on the young person who is markedly apathetic concerning his chance for self-fulfillment through employment. Many of this generation seem to believe that work in large organizations—even for considerable monetary rewards—cannot be humanly satisfying. The aspect of life to which they look forward is

participation in a small "face-to-face" group, with tightly-knit family life "in the suburbs." Such attitudes develop gradually during the undergraduate years, and it is here that Riesman protests a kind of juvenile obtuseness. While the large university *is* an enormous organization, Riesman believes that the intellectual capacities of the faculty are rapidly improving. He asks a pertinent question:

Why is it that students, often so precocious about many things—about each other, about sex, about their families, and occasionally even about national and world affairs—are so comparatively inattentive to what concerns them so closely as does their curriculum?

For one thing, it seems to me that students don't want to believe that their activities might make a difference, because, in a way, they profit from their lack of commitment to what they are doing. I don't mean that they are not industrious students—they often are, much more so to-day, as I have said than prior to World War II. They go through the required motions of working, but they seldom get really involved with the content of their courses. It is here that the better, more conscientious students sabotage their own education. . . .

When I have discussed this with students, they have often told me that it doesn't pay to be too interested in anything because then one is tempted to spend too much time on it, at the expense of that optimal distribution of effort which will produce the best grades—and after all they do have to get into medical school, keep their scholarship, and "please the old man." Now I am convinced that grades contaminate education—they are a kind of currency which, like money, gets in the way of students discovering their intellectual interests—but here, too, the students in their realism are being somewhat unrealistic. They assume, for one thing, that it is hopeless to try to alter the curriculum so that it might penalise them less for serious interest in one topic at the expense of others, or so that there might be more emphasis on reading and discussion, and more opportunity for independent thinking. And here also, the students have a distorted image of what will actually make an impression on their teachers either now or later. On this point I have some evidence to back me up.

What is perplexing in this outlook is that the students appear to be so very realistic about the

organisation they are living in. They harbour no illusions about the faculty, the administration, the trustees. Yet they act as if the structure these men have created or inherited were part of the universe. It seems hardly ever to occur to students that a faculty is not a unit, but a set of factions, often in precarious balance, and that student activity might conceivably help tip the balance.

In other words, Riesman sees abundant opportunity for the student to try out his faith in the capacity of each human being to be "autonomous." As an independently thinking individual, he may have more "leverage" than he thinks, first on the campus and later in his selection of work or career—a selection which should *not* be made with negative prejudices. One of Riesman's graduate students at the University of Chicago produced a thesis which seemed to justify this point of view, for the students who were trying to be merely capable and smart "within the system" fared poorly in later life by comparison to those who were trying to be *intelligent*—often the equivalent of being a bit beyond the organization. This survey showed: "The students who were often most successful were a bit rebellious, a bit off-beat, though not entirely 'goof-offs'; these were the students apt to appeal to a faculty member who had not entirely repressed a rebelliousness of his own that had led him to be a teacher in the first place—a faculty member who was looking for signs of life, even if they gave him a bit of trouble at times. To be sure, such a student had to do well in something to earn this response, but he was often better off to have written a brilliant paper or two than to have divided his time, like an investment banker his money, among a variety of subjects. Those students who were the most self-consciously opportunistic and realistic in allocating their time and emotion were in fact sacrificing themselves unprofitably, suffering not only now during the studies which they regarded as an ante-room to life, but later on as well."

Riesman concludes his brief but well-packed treatment with the following paragraphs, which invite further discussion:

Let me again make it quite clear that I understand the positive functions of what sometimes appears as mere apathy or passivity among students; for passivity towards revivalist manias and crusades is a sensible reaction, a sign of maturity. Moreover, as I noted at the outset, students are not at all apathetic about many fundamental things, among them personal relations, family life, and in many cases the arts. But even these attachments may be in danger. If one is apathetic about one's work, with all that such an attitude implies for one's relation to social and personal creation, it is hard to prevent this apathy from spreading to other areas. . . .

My concern is that young people to-day, by "playing it cool" and fearing to be thought "squares," may create a style of life, not only in work but in every dimension of existence which is less full, less committed, less complex, and less meaningful than mid-century opportunities allow.

## *FRONTIERS*

### Two Letters

[These letters of comment from readers, one concerned with the meaning of Camus' *The Stranger*, which was briefly characterized in MANAS for Nov. 23, the other a general discussion of the psychological effects of specialization, do not seem to need much comment. No doubt the Camus book can be variously understood; in fact, this correspondent quite possibly comes closer to its meaning than our brief comment. However, it is plain from passages in the book that what turned events against Meursault in his trial was his apparently unnatural attitude toward his mother, enabling the indignant prosecutor to demand his execution.

The question of how to avoid the narrowing consequences of specialization is one which confronts us all. Fortunately, our technological system has one distinctive virtue—it leaves nearly everybody with a lot of extra time, during which we are free to experiment with a program of "wholeness." Human beings have the potentialities of great resourcefulness. Only a passive attitude toward the circumstances of our lives condemns us to unrelieved specialization.—Editors.]

MANAS: While on the whole I agree with the main idea expressed in "Self-Deception's Strange Fruit," the reference to Camus' *The Stranger* seemed not only labored, but actually a distortion of the meaning of that novel.

I admit to not being up on my Camus, since this is the only work of his I have read, and the rest of my knowledge of his ideas is hearsay.

But just considering the book, two interpretations come immediately to mind. It may be a very badly written book about a man not really worth caring much about—a character almost morbidly apathetic whose life is painfully depicted in terms of one meaningless event after another. Certainly Camus goes to great lengths to convince the reader that his "protagonist" is a man without values and without feelings.

Or it may have far greater significance.

But before giving my final analysis, let me comment on yours. You say of Meursault, the

"protagonist," " [his] . . . great distinction is that he cannot pretend to feel other than he does feel. . . ." But that's the point. He doesn't feel. It is true that he is not a hypocrite. There are times, when he allows others to have the wrong impression about him, however, simply because it's easier or less painful that way. For instance: "As I usually do when I want to get rid of someone whose conversation bores me, I pretend to agree. . . ." But mainly, if Meursault is not hypocritical, it is simply because nothing matters to him. This is not courage but apathy.

You have him "suffering death at the hands of a society which values conformity above the simplest sort of human understanding." I fail to see much justification for this statement. If you mean that society insists he conform by not going around shooting Arabs on impulse, then of course you are right.

The court looked for some sign of human understanding in the accused, and found none. Among other things, he had written a letter to inveigle an unknown woman to come to her former lover (Raymond), who planned to insult and beat her. Meursault says, "I wrote the letter. . . I wanted to satisfy Raymond, as I'd no reason not to satisfy him." The hurt that might come to the woman is of no concern to him, just as the murder of the Arab causes him no regret.

You find him "a victim of the legal process." Inasmuch as the law very clearly prescribes death by decapitation for wilful murderers, I fail to see how he has been victimized. Presumably we are not arguing the morality of capital punishment at the moment, which is a different question.

"His integrity at the end transcends his death." Nonsense. He doesn't even begin to consider his own death until after the trial, after the conviction. Then he gets panic-stricken, starts planning an appeal and wondering desperately whether he can make a last-minute escape. Eventually he gives up and faces the fact that he's going to die, whereupon he begins to anticipate the execution: ". . . all that remained to hope was

that on the day of my execution there should be a huge crowd of spectators. . . ." Once again, the sensations of the moment were all that mattered.

Now let's take a longer and hopefully more perceptive look at this strange book and its tragically futile main character. Today it is easy to recognize him. He is a beat. Or is he? Some of the signs are there: the immersion in the moment, the absolute indifference to conventional morals, authorities, goals. The refusal to create a phony part and play it. But lacking are the passionate convictions, the enthusiastic "digging" of the true beat. This semi-square jobholder never tries to do anything. He is like a sluggish molecule, mechanistically undergoing Brownian movement. When it gets hot, he seeks shade. When wine is offered, he drinks it. When a woman wants to marry him, he shrugs and says okay. Doubtless, if they told him to push the button to activate the missile, he would push it.

It begins to make sense. This man is no existentialist hero, committing himself to integrity and human worth. Nor is he a bohemian or a beat, sacrificing all artifice for art, crying to know the unknowable. Absolutely not. He is twentieth-century man, victim of the new philosophy that has pretty well murdered metaphysics and may do the same to mankind. Call it pragmatism, materialism, positivism, or togetherness: its massive bulk crushes all opposing systems.

What is the one thing that is *most* characteristic of Meursault? It is that he has ceased caring—for his motif he has adopted complete non-responsibility. As such, he is not concerned with choosing between good and evil, nor with seeking out the meaning of life. For him, there is no such thing as a decision. All decisions are ultimately based on "What is least disagreeable." To convict him of murder is like convicting a rock which got loosened by the rain and fell on someone.

We can understand his plight. He seems to be in a perpetual state of shock, unable to experience any emotions. Very well, he is

representative of twentieth-century man, who has hoped and fought and dreamed and then been crushed so many times that he is benumbed. All the great ideas seemed to have failed. (Actually they have been abandoned in favor of *That Which Works*—or seems to.) All that is left is to avoid unpleasantries—which means, of course, conformity, even to the point of rushing with your brother lemmings into the sea.

I'm not sure if this, and what follows, is what Camus meant; if not, perhaps, it is what he should have meant. Meursault, by avoiding decision and simply following biological impulse, and conforming to his associate's desires, suddenly finds he has put a bullet into an Arab. The Arab (the aggrieved brother of the unfortunate woman) had done him no wrong and meant nothing to him. But once the first bullet had been fired, something undefined makes him fire four more shots into the body. This is a common phenomenon. The act, however impulsive, becomes a "decision." As such it encourages implementation.

In like fashion, twentieth-century man, disillusioned and benumbed, failed to act decisively before it was too late. One day he discovered that he had blundered into World War II. All he could do then was implement it by atrocity after atrocity.

Could a clearer story be written, to illustrate the consequences of the unexamined life? Without exercise of the crucial power of choice, man is condemned to inevitable futile conflict, and ultimate degradation.

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MANAS: In spite of the brilliance of writers and thinkers of today, I am inclined to feel that all of us are becoming feeble-minded, due to the fact that we have become specialists, remaining very ignorant in areas of expression or knowledge not our own.

The progress of science has made things much easier for all of us. For example, housewives buy cake-mixes and prepared food

which they simply put in the oven. No more old-fashioned cooking. Most of the food they buy is already processed and chemicalized. In case of automobiles, we are becoming two-car or even three-car minded and we would drive a few blocks to do the marketing rather than take a good walk. We have elevators everywhere; we cringe at the thought of having to climb three flights of stairs. Newspapers, radio, television, magazines and books think for us; we simply follow directions given to us from the outside. When we get sick we go to doctors for help; we make no effort to understand our bodies and how they work. We have no time for that, preferring to leave everything to others. Doctors depend upon journals and drugs freely given to them without doing any independent research for themselves; they too prefer to let others do the thinking for them. While there are doctors who do serious research work, as specialists they continue to be ignorant in other areas of knowledge. Most people specialize in one or two things for the sake of making a good living, yet do little thinking for themselves.

Due to our specialization we find it difficult to establish good communications or relationships; how can we understand another's specialized subject, about which we hardly know anything?

The presidential election, to me, is a big flop. I realize that I know nothing about the fine points of politics as well as international affairs. This goes for most people.

It seems that we are "partial" persons and that most people are not even aware of how "partial" they have become because, once they are "partial," it becomes more difficult for them to recognize this condition.

And if a person realizes that he must break out of the confinement of his specialty, he is bound to run into difficulties—he must now be a specialist in despecialization!

I wonder how we can break away from all sorts of specializations and become "total"

persons. The trend towards specialization has become so strong that, in a sense, we need a modern Buddha or Christ to break the fetters of specialization.

Unfortunately, we think we need specialization very much in order to live as we are accustomed. Eventually, we will create "specialized" groups, with the result that we will have castes as in India. The Tower-of-Babel problem is to be continued.

I notice that in all conversations we tend to specialize in subjects close to our hearts and minds. If we happen to be interested in the same subject, we become very much absorbed, yet if one of us ventures to shift to another subject, difficulties of communications start at once. A non-specialist can hardly maintain discussions with specialists.

So we go in vicious circles. What are we going to do about this?