

TOWARD A MORAL VOCABULARY

DURING the past seven or eight years, a new "freedom of speech" has been acquired by American novelists: the capacity to use almost any word they choose—four-letter or otherwise—and to describe in detail matters that were once left entirely to a shy little row of asterisks. No one who reads the offerings of current fiction can have failed to notice this trend, or have avoided reacting to it in one way or another.

Probably most MANAS readers react more or less as the editors react—ambivalently, with mixed feelings. In theory, at any rate, a writer ought to be able to say what he pleases, without fear of censorship or prosecution for "indecency." That is, a good writer, we may assume, should be free to use the full resources of language, on the hypothesis that he is a practicing artist whose work embodies integrity of expression. We ought not to constrain the good writer because there are also bad writers who misuse language or use it with contemptible motives. A censored art-form permits no free expression, and therefore no good art at all, whereas a free art-form will provide some good art, along with the bad, which is always with us, anyhow.

We have, in short, to trust the artist, just as we must trust the citizen in general, in order to assure a free society for all.

So, the enlarging freedom of the writer to use the language he wants to use may be taken as a mark of progress. That is one theory.

Another theory—not opposed, but of an amplifying nature—is that a number of writers are using their increased freedom, not with balance, but with the eager excess of a small boy with a new toy. They are trying out all the new words, seeing how it feels to write without the pressure of any restraint, either external or internal. Some of them have become "nature-boys" with a

vengeance—vengeance on yesterday's puritanical restrictions. If you ask them what they are doing, they will explain that the "morality" which created the restrictions was a wicked distortion of the natural life. They will quote you Freud—or better yet, Wilhelm Reich—to prove their case. They will ridicule the idea that they are perhaps "reactionaries" of a new sort—people who are trying to make an affirmative gospel out of their angry polemics against the fear-laden morality of the nineteenth century. They are not even suspicious of their own self-righteousness.

Well, we shall probably have to put up with this, since it is the kind of a reaction that time alone can adjust. It takes no great wisdom to notice that unconstrained people find balance much sooner and more easily than people who are threatened or cajoled in order to make them "change." Only the people who are left to change themselves ever show any real change for the better. Then, of course, there is always the remote possibility that they are "right" and should eventually convert us! It is dangerous, if caressing to our own sense of certainty, to leave this possibility out of account.

The obvious comment on our deliberations thus far is: "Well, are you going to permit, and this means encourage, actual *obscenity!*" How can we argue ourselves out of that unhappy situation?

Somewhere, during the past few months, we saw a reference to a language which has no obscene words at all. We've forgotten what language it is, but it seems likely that the people who speak it are far above average. What, after all, is obscenity—not classically, but as we experience it? An obscene word or expression is utterance that makes us feel guilty or unclean or ashamed. By association it calls up imagery of

conduct we wish to avoid or avoid thinking about. Or, to put it more complexly, it calls up imagery which we don't want others to think we are interested in or think about. The slightly hysterical giggle with which people sometimes respond to an off-color story illustrates one of the difficulties we have in this shadowy if somewhat lurid field of experience. In short, whatever else it may mean, "obscene" has to do with an area concerning which we have very little maturity, since the response to it is usually emotional rather than reflective or measured. It is simply *unspeakable*. Often it *is* unspeakable, and then what is wrong is not our dislike of such speech, but our angry or emotional dislike, suggesting that our character is attacked by toleration of such words.

Generally speaking, obscenity is comprised of a vocabulary of defiantly vulgar and irreverent terms referring to physiological functions, principally the sexual function. This vocabulary is acquired by human beings for a variety of reasons. In some social groups, doubtless, its obscene character is lost from the fact that the people know no other words for those functions. For others, obscenity is a language of protest against hypocritical piety and moralistic pretense. It may be an unjustifiable form of protest, but a protest nevertheless. The man who uses such words deliberately does so as a way of announcing his contempt for the mannerisms of "respectable" people, whose polite immoralities of another and perhaps far worse sort he abhors. Such a man, incidentally, may have far more genuine delicacy, despite his indisputable crudity of speech, than some of those who use only the "nicest" words. He has, at least, a kind of inverted morality; while the "nice" people have only conventionality.

One result of a "wide open" vocabulary for writers should be to release such rebels from the constraint to use "forbidden" words as the cipher of their protest. When no words are forbidden, an essential good taste will begin to dictate the writer's choice of language, instead of a

resentment toward what he regards as the hypocrisy of the "nice."

But to get at the meaning of obscenity, we have to uproot the sense of guilt that is attached to physiological actions and discover its origin. Quite plainly, guilt in regard to sex is related to the traditional religious evaluation placed upon sex by Christianity. Sex, in Christianity, is inescapably connected with the Original Sin. The celibacy of the Catholic clergy, the virginity of Mary, mother of Christ, the condemnation of the "lusts of the flesh"—these are plain evidences of how sex is regarded in Christian teaching. Obscenity, then, is in some measure a naturalistic and "pagan" rejection of Christian morality—an underground movement in human nature against the authoritarian judgment rendered against sex.

Nor is the suspicion of sex only a "Christian" idea. Continence is taught by other of the world religions, although seldom is the result an anxiety-reaction of the sort generally produced by Christianity.

But why should any religion make a case against sex? The act of procreation can hardly be dispensed with, and nature's device of erotic desire is an entirely understandable means of perpetuating the human species. This question can be answered very simply. Philosophical religions have contended that a point is reached in the life of human beings, after procreative functions have been fulfilled, when sex becomes a distraction. This seems a reasonable idea; at least, it is nothing to make a fuss over. It occurs to a lot of people without benefit of religious instruction at all. The decision, at any rate, is obviously a personal one, and should never be embodied into a moral *code*. We can think of nothing more destructive to genuine morality than an attempt to make decisions of this sort for other people, since the values involved are of the greatest subtlety.

But Christianity, alas, was determined to simplify matters with categorical judgments. Priests were to be automatically celibates, as evidence that they had "outgrown" sinful

temptation, and all the rest would live in a state of unbroken intimidation as repeaters of the original sin. This procrustean program was amazingly successful—probably because of a deep-seated intuition in human beings that sex *can* become a distraction and a consuming waste of energy, so that the Christian doctrine there being nothing else to compare it with—seemed justified. It was supported, moreover, with the full pomp and authority of a powerful "spiritual" institution, which could burn you at the stake if you made too much trouble.

In the light of this psychological history of Western culture, is it any surprise that, along with other rebellions, various sects have arisen to proclaim that sex, instead of being the original sin, is the original virtue, by means of which salvation is to be obtained? This reaction *had* to come, and has come, "in all seriousness."

The unlimbering of the vocabulary of modern writers on the subject of sex naturally reflects this reaction, as a phase—a somewhat confusing one—of the new-found verbal freedom. As fast as postal regulations relax and decency leagues lose control of the situation, the writers press on to new pastures of uninhibited expression. They'll reach a limit, some day—perhaps they've reached it already—and then stop being "reactionaries," and start working out a hierarchy of values which are their own, and not merely a revolt against the artificial standards of a culture that has plainly been neurotic on the subject of sex.

But, to turn the subject about, what is the writer's responsibility? The writer, after all, is an influential member of society. He is one of the architects of culture, and since the making of culture cannot be constrained, but comes about best under the conditions of maximum freedom for everybody, the writer's responsibility, while great, must be voluntarily assumed.

We were led to think about this by some of the more extreme examples of literary "freedom," cases where there was manifest sincerity on the part of the writer, and wholly constructive

intentions. And yet, we experienced a feeling of reticence and withdrawal. These things, we felt, should not be written about this way. We felt hurt, and that others might be hurt, too.

This led to a reconsideration of the meaning of "obscene." After all, even if we are able to get rid of our special "obscene" vocabulary, by taking away the pleasures of rebellion which lie in using it, there will still be questions of judgment on what is to be written about, and how it should be written. A simple meaning to give to "obscene"—possibly a meaning it once had—would be to say, "something which ought not to be displayed." Everything, however, which exists is worth looking at, if only to understand it so that you don't have to look at it again. But not everything needs to or should be looked at at all times. There are, in other words, appropriate and inappropriate displays, and morality and obscenity have to do with what is fitting and unfitting, not with what is good or evil in itself.

To define the fitting and the unfitting is to declare a complete philosophy of life. We don't propose this here. But a writer, it can be said, is necessarily involved in telling some kind of truth, and the truths worth telling—since a writer is always selective—are the truths which enrich. A writer can enrich his readers in various ways. He can inform, he can widen and deepen judgment with criticism, and he can inspire. The more naturally he does these things—without, that is, didactic mood or intent—the better he does it. The writer who sets up as a "teacher" usually bores his readers or makes conformists of them when they are timid and insecure.

But, supposing the writer's motives are sound, and his art sufficiently spontaneous, there remains the question of communication. How will he *affect* his readers? Will his intent be realized by his form and content? Geniuses, perhaps, can forget these questions, but an element of deliberation usually enters into the work of most writers, so the questions are worth asking.

In asking them, let us leave the subject of obscenity for a moment and look at other matters. After we discharge the ugliness which dark theologies have connected with sex and derived from the supposed wickedness inherent in the human body, we have yet to wonder about such words as purity and nobility and dignity. Have they still a meaning? We think they do, but have unhappily lost most of their significance by being chained to obscenity and made to mean little more than its opposite. It will probably be a long time before we can use these words with the freedom we should like, since we shall have to grow new meanings for them. What a terrible disaster to the arts, to culture and to human character, that we should have fallen victim to the notion that the only important immorality is sexual immorality, that the chief virtues to preserve are marked by avoidance of what we suppose is sexual immorality! Hypocrisy and self-righteousness may be far worse crimes against the human spirit, yet these, alas, are often the working versions of purity and nobility!

We know something of the purity of innocence, and delight in it, but who is able to describe the purity of wisdom without sounding pompous?

To think about this is perchance to realize that no mere *word* need offend our sensibilities except as it seems to attack beliefs about the good life upon which we have become dependent. And here lies the writer's responsibility. For the sage, an obscene expression will have no more emotional charge than a clod of earth which is out of place. It will be the symbol of a special vocabulary used by human beings at a certain stage of their half-knowledge and half-confusion—not a word, but an artifact of a dead language, so far as he is concerned.

For the writer, on the other hand, who is dealing with what he regards as popular misconceptions, that word is a lever he uses in order to create an impression that he believes is worth creating. He is tearing down false

standards or showing how the word is natural to some human beings in certain situations, and what is natural can never be intrinsically evil, although the word may serve as commentary on and disgust for those situations.

Yet the writer's readers may not enjoy his high emancipation as yet, nor be able to perceive the kind of moral balance which justifies, for him, the choice of his vocabulary. Some kind of dignity of utterance is the need of all writing. Even the portrayal of the loss of dignity of utterance ought to convey at least the *feeling* of the loss, so that the reader is not left without orientation.

What we are trying to say is simply this: When a writer uses words which used to be accounted "obscene," this should not have the effect of vulgarizing all speech. A man may use any word he likes, so long as the idea of a right choice of words is retained as an ideal. An attack on false or artificial standards, in other words, must never be permitted to degenerate into an attack upon standards. For this is an attack on man.

If a writer can prove his reverence for the high and noble qualities in human beings, even though he writes about their opposites—which, after all, are a part of life—he then earns the privilege of freedom of speech. Of course, it is a privilege he awards to himself, but not one to be taken lightly.

The writer, in these days of omniverous reading by practically everyone, has a special obligation to combine tenderness with his strength. He, perhaps, is growing up, but so are all his readers. And he is growing up in a world where conventional standards are everywhere falling down. People are falteringly stepping forward, trying the stepping stones that lie ahead, to see if they are solid, or will rock and perhaps slide away. New freedom, for the people, for all of us, ought not to be charted altogether with the harsh acids of rejection and the bold overthrow of pretense. There is a gentility in us which has too

long been hidden by all the formal pieties of our past—a love which has grown small and timid behind the false faces of sentimentality. Freedom is also for this.

But writers are notorious for their indifference toward those who preach at them. If necessary, we shall be glad to settle for freedom, without a bargain. What we all need most of all, whether we are writers or not, is confidence in the decency of one another, and in the capacity of human beings, if left alone, to do the best they can, precisely because they are human, and because we leave them alone to *be* human.

The pleasant part of this conclusion is that there is no other—none, that is, that will work. Once we realize this, we have opportunity for wholehearted support of freedom, as much or more freedom than we can afford, without reservation and with all the optimism we can muster. This, in the expression of a contemporary writer whom we much admire, is to be "on the side of life."

REVIEW ASIAN BOOKS

SINCE learning of the formation of the Asia Book Club of New York City, founded to select and see printed in America, "from among the writers in all the Asian countries, those books which have the greatest interest for American readers," we have been hoping to augment our knowledge of trends of fiction in the Eastern world. To select and secure manuscripts for American publication, however, is apparently a difficult task, only two of the several titles originally in prospect having reached us for review. The first, a collection of Korean folk tales, entitled *The Story Bag*, is not likely to be of general interest, although, as with some of the simpler folk tales of India, these stories illustrate how much easier it is for peoples not steeped in western "rationalism" to enjoy free flights of imagination. In the East, the completely incredible is never given a semblance of credibility, and perhaps this is a good thing.

The second volume to reach our desk, *Mano Majra*, by Khushwant Singh (Grove Press, New York), is instructive in many ways, and will be particularly liked by MANAS readers who are familiar with Edmund Taylor's *Richer by Asia*. The story is set in 1947, a year of terrible conflict between Muslims and Hindus. Mr. Singh writes tersely, in the Western style, and with emphasis on the typical Western attitudes of sophisticated despair and brutal realism. Most of Singh's characters are anachronistic, obliging the reader to reflect on the psychological confusion which obtains in a land caught between two radically different cultures and four or five differing religious traditions.

The most ineffectual person in *Mano Majra* is the conscientious but bumbling Communist ideologue, sent by the Party to promote "a people's movement." Arriving unheralded in the little village, he finds no one interested in his credentials—though he is stripped naked by the police in order to determine whether or not he is a Mussulman on the basis of circumcision! The vast turmoil of fratricide revolves around him as though he did not exist, but, even if his actions are of little significance and no effect, some of his thoughts reveal a point of view which characterizes the half-taught disciples of Communism in India.

One of Iqbal's reveries:

India is constipated with a lot of humbug. Take religion. For the Hindu, it means little besides caste and cow-protection. For the Muslim, circumcision and kosher meat. For the Sikh, long hair and hatred of the Muslim. For the Christian, Hinduism with a sola topee. For the Parsi, fire-worship and feeding vultures. Ethics, which should be the kernel of a religious code, has been carefully removed. Take philosophy, about which there is so much hoo-ha. It is just muddleheadedness masquerading as mysticism. And Yoga, particularly Yoga, that excellent earner of dollars! And all the mumbo-jumbo of reincarnation. Man into ox into ape into beetle into eight million four hundred thousand kinds of animate things. Proof? We do not go in for such pedestrian pastimes as proof! That is Western. We are of the mysterious East. No proof, just faith. No reason; just faith. Thought, which should be the sine qua non of a philosophical code, is dispensed with. We climb to sublime heights on the wings of fancy. We do the rope trick in all spheres of creative life. As long as the world credulously believes in our capacity to make a rope rise skyward and a little boy climb it till he is out of view, so long will our brand of humbug thrive.

No ambitious political worker in India, who feels for India's past only disdain or revulsion, will ever help his people. For there *is* "reason" in the basic structure of Indian metaphysics. There is profound poetry and beauty in the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Upanishads*, and the results of these inspirational currents are fully as apparent in the Hindu temperament as is the fanaticism induced by familiar religious factionalism. Though Iqbal thanks that "India explains the unattractive by pretending it is esoteric," there is much that *is* genuinely esoteric and not unattractive in India's most ancient religious symbolism. Mr. Singh, however, does not really make this point, being content with the presentation of anachronistic people, and with a stark recital of the history of communal riots. It is Mr. Taylor who supplies the philosophizing most needed there, and we wonder if the Asia Book Club has considered *Richer by Asia* as a general recommendation to its readers. Taylor's chapter, "New Wine in Old Bottles," provides practical philosophical background for fiction like *Mano Majra*.

Both to illustrate Mr. Singh's competence and to remind ourselves of the terrors through which India so recently passed, we quote from the author's setting for his story:

The summer of 1947 was not like other Indian summers. Even the weather had a different feel in India that year. It was hotter than usual, and drier and dustier. And the summer was longer. No one could remember when the monsoon had been so late. For weeks, the sparse clouds cast only shadows. There was no rain. People began to say that God was punishing them for their sins.

Some of them had good reason to feel that they had sinned. The summer before, communal riots, precipitated by reports of the proposed division of the country into a Hindu India and a Muslim Pakistan, had broken out in Calcutta, and within a few months the death roll had mounted to several thousand. Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped. From Calcutta, the riots spread north and east and west: to Noakhali in East Bengal, where Muslims massacred Hindus, to Bihar, where Hindus massacred Muslims. Mullahs roamed the Punjab and the Frontier Province with boxes of human skulls said to be those of Muslims killed in Bihar. Hundreds of thousands of Hindus and Sikhs who had lived for centuries on the Northwest Frontier abandoned their homes and fled toward the protection of the predominantly Sikh and Hindu communities in the east. They traveled on foot, in bullock carts, crammed into lorries, clinging to the sides and roofs of trains. Along the way—at fords, at cross-roads, at railroad station—they collided with panicky swarms of Muslims fleeing to safety in the west. The riots had become a rout. By the summer of 1947, when the creation of the new state of Pakistan was formally announced, ten million people—Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs—were in flight. By the time the monsoon broke, almost a million of them were dead, and all of northern India was in arms, in terror, or in hiding. The only remaining oases of peace were a scatter of little villages lost in the remote reaches of the frontier.

One of the little villages is Mano Majra, and its heterogeneous population, existing in a back-water of time and circumstances, has always managed to resist the urge to religious fratricide. But some one is forming an army to secure reprisals against the Muslims, and brash young officers are prepared to exalt themselves by preaching the necessity for violence. The one heroic figure in Mano Majra—again anachronistically—is a professional thug who, like his father before him, lives openly on robbery. But Jugga

is the one man who is willing to sacrifice his own life to save a girl—and thus frustrates the massacre of a trainload of Muslims leaving for the border! Unconcerned with either religion or politics, Jugga is able to accomplish this because, while not much of a man, he is nothing else. His heroism is primitive, standing out in sharp contrast to the confusion into which religion precipitates so many. *Mano Majra* seems worth reading because it focuses attention on the psychological structure of religious antipathy in simple people. Fanaticism is not really the right word; partial obsession and confusion provide better description.

One misses a truly affirmative note in Singh's writing, and if his despair is borrowed from the many somber war novels of the West, we wish he would send it back where it came from. B. Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers*, once reviewed in MANAS but never issued in an American edition, is a welcome contrast in this regard, and an ideal candidate for the Asia Book Club's attention. For India is not all despair and confusion. Here and there, as in the early days of the United States, men and women of exceptional intellects and exceptional vision somehow find their way to the forefront of Indian affairs. Further, not all men of inspiration are known through political action—a point beautifully expressed in *So Many Hungers*. However, whether or not the Asia Book Club is interested in such proposals, we hope they will be able to continue their work. As the President of The Asia Foundation has said, the Asia Book Club has particular appeal for friends of Asia "because its purpose is to bring to American readers the creative writings of contemporary Asian authors and to encourage recognition in this country of Asian literary efforts. All of this can only lead to enlightenment and understanding between the peoples of Asia and America."

COMMENTARY

HIGH VIRTUE IN LOW PLACES

LOOKING for an editorial common denominator for the contents of this issue, we thought of the short story by Somerset Maugham, *Rain*, later made into a play starring Jeanne Eagels, which ran for years on Broadway. The plot is well known. A prostitute named Sadie Thompson is thrown into association with a revivalist preacher. The scene is a tropical island, and the preacher resolves to save Sadie's soul. Sadie is moved by his impassioned appeals, and is converted, but the preacher, mightily moved by Sadie, falls from grace, with Sadie the humble instrument of his downfall. The preacher drowns himself, while Sadie reverts to the manners of her profession, once again convinced that men, after all, are men.

The interesting thing about the play is that the figure of strength and dignity in it is Sadie. There is no pretense in her life. She is what she is. Her morality isn't much, but it is what it is. The preacher, on the other hand, has been hiding things from himself and from other people. He has spiritual ambitions. His trouble is that he pretends to a condition of blessedness when his tastes run to something quite different. It wouldn't have been so bad if he had kept his pretensions to himself, but he made a profession out of trying to convert others to them. Only by understanding that the preacher, in his way, is as much the victim of society as Sadie is in her way, can we generate sympathy for the preacher, and even then some effort is required.

It is a curious thing how the fascination of books and stories reveal our true sense of values. Why should most people be so delighted with John Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat*? There are two reasons, perhaps, one admirable, the other not so admirable. The admirable delight is in the completely unambitious life of the *paisanos* of Monterey. We feel their freedom from the requirements of the System. Their graciousness is spontaneous, uncalculating, their friendliness

without an object. They can't get anywhere, they have no stake in our society, so that their world has all the charm of a Never-Never Land imagined by Lord Dunsany.

The less admirable pleasure from *Tortilla Flat* grows from the fond recognition that the *paisanos* are delightfully free of responsibility. Of course, this may sound like a contradiction, since ambition always creates responsibility. But this may be the only good thing about ambition!

The upshot of these reflections is that we often allow the shadow of our philosophical intuitions to justify our weaknesses. The failure in business will plead an interest in mysticism and exhibit contempt for commercialism. The man who fears decisions and hates to take a stand on anything important often becomes a philosopher of the "relativity" of all knowledge, and is eager to show you that there is no certainty in this world.

Fortunately, the world seems so constituted that there will always be Sadie Thompsons around to laugh at our hypocrisies, until, at last, we learn the importance of being honest with ourselves, and so achieve at least the virtue practiced—of necessity, perhaps, but practiced—by the people at the bottom of the social scale.

CHILDREN and Ourselves

COMPARATIVE THEORIES

DIFFICULT though it may be to peek successfully behind the factionalism of differing educational positions, it is possible to gain a synthesizing insight now and again. And when we do, as is often suggested here, the children or young people in whom we are interested are likely to benefit. After all, the various "philosophies" of education have all grown out of the human mind; the Aristotelian, Platonic, and "scientific" or experimental theories, all reveal elements natural to human thought—and if they fail to contain "truths" about anything else, they represent variations of *this* truth, at least. The *Forty-First Yearbook* of the National Society for the Study of Education, published by The University of Chicago Press, should be a valuable assist to anyone attempting the synthesis of viewpoints on education. First published in 1942, the *Yearbook* was issued nearly every year for a time, although the last edition appeared in May of 1950. This is not, however, a "dated" book.

Time for July 9, for instance, reports the attempt of an education philosopher to base *his* particular theory on arguments showing the disparity of other systems—with the author claiming a synthesis. Professor Theodore Brameld, of New York University's School of Education, has invented a new term—"reconstructionism." In summary of Brameld's *Toward a Reconstructed Philosophy of Education*, recently published by Dryden, the *Time* writer reports: "In general, says Brameld, there are four major philosophies that dominate educational thinking today. The perennialists, e.g., Robert Hutchins, hold that 'the supreme end of education is the possession of everlasting, timeless and spaceless principles of reality, truth, and value.' The essentialists emphasize the cultural heritage and traditional subject matter. The progressivists treat the schools as laboratories

of experience in which students learn chiefly by pragmatic problem solving. From all these, says Brameld, the reconstructionist has borrowed, but he finds each, in its own way, inadequate. Perennialism leads to dogma and false orthodoxies; essentialism stagnates in the status quo; the progressivists, while strong on method, are not sure what they should be educating for."

According to Brameld (as described by *Time*), we encounter a number of half-truths—worth studying *because* they are half true, and also because of their inadequate phrasing. Apparently Brameld, like so many others, feels there is no essential distinction between the philosophy of a "perennialist" like Robert Hutchins and the theology of the Roman Church; yet the Catholics have been careful to point out the definite divorce of Hutchins' metaphysical approach from the Catholic line, as has Hutchins himself. Hutchins simply holds that, since inquiry into the aims and ideals of education is a metaphysical matter, and since no philosophy of education is possible without such an inquiry, one must first frankly admit concern with metaphysics. One of his basic objects, consequently, is to make sure that his metaphysical speculations are rational.

When Brameld insists that the "progressivists are not sure what they should be educated for," this is even more confusing. Progressives are determined to rid education of the notion of absolutes. *This* is their own particular absolute, which is in open conflict with Brameld, who asserts the right of the educator to decide that "group opinion" is the only and final authority. He holds, for instance, that "truth is only what the majority says it is," and that both schools and society are to determine what goals men should strive for by appeal to "social consciousness." Social consciousness, then, becomes the absolute of reconstructionist education.

On all such questions, the three-hundred-page collection of articles in the *Forty-First Yearbook* throws considerable light. The Chairman of the

Yearbook Committee, John S. Brubacher, of Yale, describes the intent of the volume:

On the surface diverse educational practices are much in evidence. This family brings up its children this way; that family rears its young in another way. So too are these differences to be noted when one compares private with public schools, progressive schools with more conventional ones, or the teacher in the fourth grade with the one in the fifth or with another fourth-grade teacher.

Even where there is agreement on aims, there is such a wealth of means of instructional methods at hand that there may still be a clash of views as to how given or accepted aims are to be instrumented. Some, for instance, would adopt progressive methods and others more conservative ones; some favor employing interest and others discipline.

Through the midst of such diversities of practice, how shall the parent or particularly the teacher thread his way? How can he pick his aims, his curriculum, his methods, and have some confidence in the result? For one thing, he might read history, especially the history of education. But since history affords hindsight rather than foresight, it has only limited usefulness in writing the prescription for the present and the future. For another thing, he might consult science, particularly the science of education. But science too has only a circumscribed utility. It can tell within limits exactly what the existing state of affairs *is* but it has no authority to recommend what *ought* to be done. Finally, the parent or teacher might study philosophy, emphasizing of course educational philosophy. Here he would find a discipline peculiarly competent to tell what should be done both now and later on.

What, as a matter of theory, educational philosophy has to offer the practitioner, is a subject of dispute among the schools of thought represented in the preceding chapters. For the moment, however, before comparing these theories let us still endeavor to approach the need for educational philosophy from the point of view of one continually immersed in the practical aspects of education. It has already been noted that the chief problems that confront the parent or teacher are those of aim and those of means, notably, content and method. Some progress in their solution can be made at once by arranging these questions in the order of their importance. It almost goes without argument that the selection of curriculum and methods of instruction, being instances of ways and means, must await a decision

first as to what the parent or teacher is trying to do, what he is aiming at.

As Brubacher later states, "discussion of comparative philosophies is a complicated affair." One discovers that the Aristotelian position of Hutchins is not really Aristotelian at all; Aristotle held the individual should be educated not only by the state, but also *for* the state. Hutchins holds that the individual is an end in himself. The Catholic theologian, on the other hand, merely substitutes the theocratic state for Aristotle's political community, and regards the individual as significant only in so far as he achieves satisfactory adjustment to the moral plan of God and Church. Aside from the Catholic position—and even here one might speculate that dogma may contain something of symbolic truth—all the diverse philosophies of education summarized in the *Yearbook*, as Brubacher points out, "carry a very compact and concentrated cargo of meanings." He concludes:

It cannot be overlooked by those genuinely interested in promoting cooperation and communication that these general statements offer a common starting place for enlarging the areas of mutual understanding and defining more precisely the next points of attack.

How successful one can hope to be in resolving this age-old problem of unity and diversity or, as Plato called it, the problem of the one and the many, is very difficult to say. However if in addition to setting forth differences of viewpoint, this *Yearbook* can aid ever so little in reducing conflicts, in promoting communication, and in increasing cooperation, it will have been eminently worth while.

FRONTIERS

The Decline of Ambition

How many of several generations of American students, upon encountering the denunciation of Julius Caesar's "ambition," in Shakespeare's play of that name, have been puzzled—and let it go, as an incomprehensible peculiarity of the ancients—we do not know. We are sure, however, that this has been the reaction of the great majority, for to be without ambition has always been the unpardonable sin of American youth. No virtue has been so obliterating of blemishes of character as the drive which leads to success. A kind of secular halo hovers over the man who has vindicated the dream of American individualism. Nor is the radical rejection of private ambition a rejection of ambition itself, since the radical with a program has only socialized ambition and turned the drive to success into a humanitarian crusade.

There are signs, however, that the ancient suspicion of ambition is now beginning to be understood. The artist, for one, has always understood and shared it, since there is an immediacy about artistic expression which is corrupted by the ulterior motive of ambition. For others, however, disillusionment with the compulsions of ambition comes rather as the crumbling of a faith. The rewards of ambition, these days, are bewilderingly unsatisfying, and men feel betrayed before they have gone very far in achieving their ambitions.

A recent novel, *The Fugitive Romans*, by William Murray, has a passage which sketches this transformation. An American in Rome is trying to explain himself to an English girl:

"What's the matter with success?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all."

"Then what in the blazes is all this about? Why are you and Conway and Poland and all the rest of you running so hard?"

"We're not believers," I said.

"What do you mean?"

"To be a success you have to be a believer. It's a religion, like Christianity.

"In my country you can't just say you're in business to make money," I explained. "No. What you say is, 'We're in business to save souls.' When a man lies to you about his product, it's not because he wants to buy a new car or a new coat for his wife, it's because he wants to make you part of the American Way of Life. You have to buy his product because you, too, must believe."

"It sounds quite complicated."

"It isn't, really. It's very simple."

"But why are you running?"

"It's easier than fighting, Pamela. Much easier."

A more conventional version of the failing of the faith is provided at the end of Sloan Wilson's *Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, when Tom Rath confesses to his executive boss that he is willing to do a day's work for his money, but he wants no part of the religion of industrial achievement. *Executive Suite*, we suspect, was something of a swan song for the romance of big business. So far as "success" is concerned, and so far as the existing type of society is concerned, the accountant, while the villain of the piece, had the right idea.

The growing disillusionment with ambition—or, less philosophically, with the dissatisfying *fruits* of ambition—probably grows from multiple sources. Taxes, quite obviously, as the rugged individualists maintain, have skimmed most of the cream from the rewards of free enterprise. Then there is the ever-present shadow of war, which must infect all decent men with a degree of aimlessness. Why dream of a future which may be blown into a million fragments by thermo-nuclear explosion?

On an entirely different level is the slow increment of influence of books like Karen Horney's *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*. Dr. Horney's fundamental charge is that, without exactly intending it, we have erected a culture with sham moral foundations and schizoid tendencies. Until their adolescence, we

indoctrinate the young with the ideas of the traditional virtues, and then we quietly tell them that if they want to get on in the world, they must learn to be "practical." Complex personalities capable of sustained and conventionalized hypocrisy are usually able to adjust to this double standard, but barbarous types revolt, and simple types often go under. A psychiatrist in a large state institution recently remarked that the patients under his care do not represent the classical forms of mental disease half so much as *simple inadequacy*: they cannot cope with the demands made upon them by modern culture, and so they withdraw—give up.

There are other filtering influences. It is becoming evident to intelligent people, for example, that simple decency and honesty represent actual hazards, these days. By this we mean, in respect to the learned professions, that to be a conventional man is often to be a cowardly man. An ambitious man is likely to believe with ample reason—that he cannot afford any liberal opinions; at least, he cannot afford to express them, which is practically the same as not having them, or perhaps worse, since not to express one's liberal opinions is to betray them. Ambition, in these terms, is the maker of little men.

So the decline of ambition in our times is not quite an Oriental disavowal of the world and its works, but only of *our* world and *its* works. It springs from a deeply-felt disgust for the current quotation on "success."

But there is something more than this affecting us—the slow leaven of a profound psychiatric or psychoanalytical insight which does indeed find parallels in Oriental philosophy and psychology. Fundamentally, this insight seems to be exposing the inhuman and self-betraying effects of using means which are not consistent with the ends which are sought. Trigant Burrow was one who made a frontal attack on the follies of seeking success or some sort of status in terms of an intellectual formula which ignores immediate human needs.

Take for example the learning of a musical instrument—which is not, incidentally, an illustration given by any psychologist, so far as we know. Too often the standards of "professionalism" destroy whatever pleasure from music may be possible for the young hopeful who takes up the piano or violin. To learn an instrument conventionally means to prepare to play before an audience, the larger the audience, the better. The idea of giving oneself and others pleasure may be spoken of ritually, but this is not permitted to be the real motive for studying music. Things are not done for themselves, but as part of a pattern dictated by ambition, or by the cultural reflexes which are supposed to represent ambition. Friends and relatives gather around, paying routine compliments hinting of "success," as though the practice of an art were only a step to "greater things"—to fame and "recognition."

We are not so foolish as to suggest that no one who gains fame and recognition can be a genuine artist. This would be too extreme a condemnation of our society. The point is that only the very talented human being or the very courageous and honest human being is *capable* of practicing the arts in our society. And he must do so against the grain of the culture and in spite of its myth of "success." All the rest succumb to the hypocrisies bred by ambition and the conventional measuring-rods of achievement.

It is all a vast imitation, the sole virtue of which is its increasing transparency, so that when imitation becomes universal, its structure quivers and shakes, and eventually falls like a house of cards.

But if we should be right, and ambition can no longer win converts to the eager-beaverism of conventional success—what then? There can be no doubt that ambition has kept a great many people safe from the dissolutions of aimlessness. What will give structure to our lives, if not ambition? If we cannot any longer say to the young, "Go West, young man!" or with any heart

give some twentieth-century equivalent of this exhortation, what *shall* we tell them?

Neither the major nor the minor pieties of our time are fitting substitutes for ambition, since they all, from Billy Graham's brand to the unctuous counsels of Norman Vincent Peale, have collaborated too long with the mandates of ambition to have much meaning by themselves. The loss of faith, when it comes in earnest, is more likely to be a landslide of disgust and a Roman relapse to bread and circuses, than a spur to renewal of any of the traditional religions.

. . . Well, we seem to have written this subject into a rather deep well of depression. About the only hope that we can see is in the unpredictable resilience of human beings, and in the fact that an age of criticism and analysis is usually followed by a cycle of new inspiration and creative endeavor. Man, as much as Nature, abhors a vacuum, and there are bound to be those who will learn to savor the meaning of their lives from day to day, and who will refuse the false promises of a salvation that is always being put off until tomorrow. We might even turn the ancient Roman license for riotous abandon, *Dum vivimus, vivamus*, into a philosophic credo. A life without ambition can go up as well as down.