

## CRITERION OF GREATNESS

FORTY-ONE years ago, Herbert Croly contributed to the *New Republic* (for Feb. 18, 1920) an article on Abraham Lincoln which goes far beyond most brief appreciations of the Civil War president. The pertinence of this portrait of Lincoln to contemporary issues must have occurred to the present editors of the *New Republic*, since they reprinted it almost entire in their Feb. 13 issue of this year. Last week's MANAS lead article borrows from Mr. Croly a paragraph which seemed to illuminate some of the questions concerned with the "image of man," and shortly after that issue went to press a reader similarly impressed by Mr. Croly's discussion sent in another paragraph of quotation from it, stressing what is perhaps a more fundamental aspect of Lincoln's character. Croly's point is that Lincoln, while he had determined upon a vigorous prosecution of the war by the North, was equally determined to remain a civilized human being in his attitude toward the human beings of the South. Having noted this moral balance so characteristic of the great president, Croly observes:

It is not only, however, that he harbored purposes, convictions and feelings which were incompatible one with another in the minds of other people. He expressed and acted on these usually incompatible motives and ideas with such rare propriety and amenity that their union in his behavior and spirit passes not only without criticism but almost without comment. His fellow-countrymen, who like to consider him a magnified version of the ordinary American and to disguise flattery of themselves under the form of reverence for him, appear not to suspect how different he is from them. He seems to them a simple man whose feelings, motives and words are composed of familiar and homely material and whose values they can sum up in a few simple formulas. He is a simple man in the sense that power, responsibility and intensity of personal experience never divided him from his own people who had none of these things. . . . But he is not a simple man as simplicity is ordinarily understood. He was an extremely

complicated and sophisticated product of a kind of moral and mental discipline which sharply distinguishes him from his fellow citizens both of his own day and today. His simplicity was not a gift. It was the expression of an integrity of feeling, mind and character which he himself elaborately achieved, and which he naturalized so completely that it wears the appearance of being simple and inevitable.

Having called attention to this passage, our reader singles out another:

His [Lincoln's] mind was capable of harboring and reconciling purposes, convictions and emotions so different from one another that to the majority of his fellow-countrymen they would in anybody else have seemed incompatible. He could hesitate patiently without allowing hesitation to become infirmity of will. He could insist without allowing insistence to become an excuse for thoughtless obstinacy. He could fight without quarrelling.

It is this capacity of Lincoln to "assimilate and live constructively with contradictions or a whole collection of contradictions" which impresses our correspondent, making him ask: "Is it possible that great men have a method of coping with contradictions which is qualitatively and fundamentally different from the methods used by most of us? If so, is this, perhaps, a specific criterion of greatness?"

This seems to be a way of setting the question of human greatness in which there is little chance that its essential meaning will be dropped out or lost in generalities. It is of course an approach which has few if any analogies in scientific inquiry. The title of Croly's article is "The Paradox of Lincoln," and science commonly begins by eliminating the paradoxical elements in order to arrive at some reliable conclusion. But here it is precisely the paradoxical element which must not be eliminated—not, at any rate, at the beginning. No doubt science has paradoxes of its own sort to deal with, but what Croly presents us with are paradoxes in consciousness or in moral judgment.

Perhaps we should begin by asking: What sort of an end would a man have which would lead him to discipline himself to the capacities Croly ascribes to Lincoln? We need an illustration of something that Lincoln did, and for this the Croly article supplies us with a passage from Drinkwater's play in which Lincoln rebukes a belligerent colleague. He said to Mrs. Blow:

"You come to me talking of revenge and destruction and malice and enduring hate. These gentle people (the pacifists) are mistaken, but they are mistaken cleanly in a great name. It is you that dishonor the cause for which we stand."

It was important, as Lincoln saw the issues, to win the Civil War, but victory, for him, meant service to the same ideals as those the pacifists were attempting to serve. He could not fail to acknowledge this while he prosecuted the war. The war was a means, not an end. When an excessive preoccupation with the means corrupted the image of the end, Lincoln protested. But why should he or any man find it needful to be involved in contradictory courses of action?

This, it seems to us, is the essential question which appears whenever you compare human problems with scientific or physical problems. In dealing with men, you deal with psychological and moral attitudes, while in dealing with matter you deal with fixed properties. In dealing with men, you deal with entities who are ends in themselves, and not means to your own ends, but in dealing with matter you deal with things which you are endeavoring to shape to the service of non-material ends. You don't putter with matter for the sake of matter. We ask, what is the good of man? We never ask, what is the good of matter?

Actions in the service of man, then, are actions in behalf of the development and promise of human beings. But human beings are not fixed quantities nor do they have fixed qualities. Human attitudes and ends vary greatly from one man to another. It follows that action in the service of man is *essentially* educational action. We stress "essentially" for the reason that

education is served in two ways. It is served, first, by the process of teaching; and it is served, second, by work on the practical environment in which teaching or education may take place. Lincoln, you could say, felt that in order for the educational values of American life to be realized, the Union had to be preserved. But when the Civil War threatened to destroy the image of man which Lincoln revered above all, he saw that the primary process of education was in peril.

A man like Lincoln, in public life, has to trace his course in a kind of contrapuntal scheme of action. He has his idea of the good, but in terms of political action the idea of the good can be served only indirectly, according to the "typical" views of the good held by the men of the time. For the idealist in politics, therefore, there is the constant necessity to balance the politically expedient against the tendency to compromise, and to estimate the general moral consequences that are likely to result.

This is a way of saying that a man devoted to the common welfare, yet using political means, is continually doing in behalf of others things he would not do in behalf of himself. A leader is obliged to muse to himself somewhat in this fashion: These people see by a certain light; it is not my light, although I understand their view; and while I have another light, this is the only light they have, and if it is ever to be brightened, they will have to proceed by it, until they see more clearly. So he adopts their light, works in it, while trying to brighten it for the common good.

Obviously, the leader becomes by this means openly vulnerable to criticism and the charge of inconsistency. Nor can he defend himself. His defense is hidden in his motives and in his moral and educational intelligence. The paradoxes in his behavior arise from his accommodation to the limited perceptions of those whom he would serve.

The archetypal symbol of this situation of the leader or teacher of mankind is the figure of Prometheus, the god who brings the fire of mind

to human beings and is ceaselessly punished for his pains. Because of the obscurity of essential moral values in complex human situations, people find it difficult to identify the Promethean example and sacrifice when it happens to occur within contemporary patterns of experience. They may feel the impact of a great moral presence but fail to understand it. Croly develops a portrait of Lincoln which helps to make this point:

The ordinary characterization of Lincoln as "a man of the people," who rose by his own efforts from the humblest to the most eminent position in American life interprets him as a consummate type of the kind of success which all Americans crave and many achieve. The superficial facts of Lincoln's life verify this interpretation, but it is nonetheless profoundly untrue. He did, of course, rise from the occupation of rail-splitter to that of President of the American Republic. He could not have won the confidence of his fellow-countrymen unless he had appropriated all that was wholesome and fruitful in their life and behavior. He shared their kindness and good nature, their tenacity of purpose, their good faith and, above all, their innocence. His services to his country and the achieved integrity of his personal life depended upon his being good natured, resolute, faithful and innocent. But these comparatively common traits were supplemented in his case by others of a very different complexion. By some miraculous flight of the will he had formed himself into an intellectually candid, concentrated and disinterested man and into a morally humane, humble and magnanimous man. These qualities, which were the very flower of his personal life, neither the average nor the exceptional American of his day or our day can claim to possess. Not only does the American fail to possess these qualities but he either ignores, misunderstands or disparages them. . . .

The usefulness of biographical insight of this sort lies in its replacement of simple expressions like "brotherhood" and "love of mankind." We need to use these expressions, but we also need *not* to use them, on occasion, and make ourselves more aware of their-meaning in difficult situations. Whenever a word shows a tendency to degenerate into a slogan, it should be shelved for a while, and some kind of particularized statement of its meaning should be given instead. Mr. Croly does remarkably well, however, in a general statement

. . . with all his essentially and intensely Middle Western aspect, he [Lincoln] achieved for himself a personality which speaks to human beings irrespective of time and country. He had attained the ultimate object of personal culture. He had married a firm will to a luminous intelligence. His judgments were charged with momentum and his actions were instinct with sympathy and understanding. And because he charged himself very high for his own life he qualified himself to place a high value on the life of other people. He envisaged them all, rich and poor, black and white, rebel and loyalist, as human beings, whose chance of being something better than they were depended chiefly on his own personal willingness and ability to help them in taking advantage of it.

Could you have a more exact account of brotherhood than this—the conviction that the chance of others to be better depends upon one's own willingness to help them take advantage of it? A man with this view can shut no one out of his heart.

We shall not argue extensively the question of whether Lincoln would be willing to countenance a war to "preserve the Union," today, were he here to offer an opinion. War was for him, as it must be for any decent man, the continuation of policy by other means, but today war is no longer a policy, but a simple reduction of people to nonexistence. Lincoln could hardly consider war a means to any humanity-serving end in our time. After all, Lincoln's basis for action was that it must help people to see more clearly their chance of making themselves better. When a means, once useful, perhaps, because of its role in the lives of many men, is so radically changed in both character and effect that instead of helping people to a position of clarity, it does nothing but paralyze, blind, and destroy, that means must be abandoned by civilized men. In short, we do not think that Lincoln would any longer say that the pacifists are mistaken, but that, instead, he would illuminate his opposition to war with the full social intelligence at his command.

To return to the question of our correspondent, we should say that the capacity to

hold and to act upon apparently contradictory views, yet remain morally uncompromised, is indeed a criterion of greatness, but that, like all important criteria, the use of it requires something of the greatness it is intended to establish. The reason for the contradictions does not lie in the greatness itself, but in other people, who represent the contradictions and who are the ones the great man wishes to serve. He has to approach them through their ideas, and he looks for a positive or plus-value in those ideas, and works with that. On another occasion, he will work with a similar aspect of another and possibly opposed set of ideas. The people whose ideas supply him with the terms of his action are not themselves in balance, but *he* is in balance. This capacity for reconciliation of opposing forces and ideas *is* his greatness. It is also the reason why he can be so easily misunderstood.

This is a dangerous doctrine, yet it can hardly be avoided if one is to take full account of the field, obstacles, and ends of human action. It is dangerous because the distinctions made by a great man in forming his decisions may be wholly lost on others, yet, sensing his greatness, they may imitate him without shedding their prejudices and come to both moral and practical grief. What they want is a *simple* account of their obligations, and there is none to be had. As Robert Hartman was quoted as saying, last week, in Review:

Our lore is full of exhortations and examples of men laying down their lives for the sake of some ideas; but none—except in the Gospel and in existentialist literature—of men laying down their prejudices for the sake of life. Rationalizations, systems, ideas have ruled supremely in history, and human beings have fallen their victims. If we examine history we find that all really great crimes, all the collective and individual slaughters committed legally by civilized men and nations, have been committed in the name of some abstraction—some concept of "nation," "God," "race," and now, of all things, "economic systems."

That is what comes of insisting upon *simple* accounts of duty and the path to the good life. And yet, someone is bound to say, "Well, didn't

Lincoln cleave to an idea when he insisted on preserving the Union with the Civil War?"—and you have to answer yes, he did, and then propose and defend the proposition that Lincoln made use of the idea, but that he was never its captive.

So, the criterion proposed by our correspondent, while a good one, will get us into endless arguments. But perhaps that is the best possible reason for using it.

## *Letter from* **WARSAW**

[This is a letter from a professor in a university in Warsaw, written to an executive of the American Friends Service Committee in the United States. The "gatherings" to which he refers in his opening sentence were seminars sponsored by the Service Committee. The writer has taught in the United States and has served as consultant in connection with AFSC international seminars and the Conferences for Diplomats program.—Editors, MANAS.]

WARSAW.—The four international gatherings I have had the good fortune to attend since 1959 made me again feel useful as a real citizen of the world. These direct contacts with people representing such a variety of countries, races, creeds and political or social systems gave me a much better insight into one of the basic problems of our times, namely the de-humanizing effect of modern technology, than I could have got from several dozen books on the subject. It goes almost without saying that despite the noble purpose of scientific progress to forward human welfare all over the world, it may easily push the human race toward a new hecatomb. Because all the loud talks about friendly international relations, economic cooperation, political coexistence, dramatic prospects of "one world or none," and so forth, will remain but empty words as long as millions of people the world over are set out in pursuit of nothing but still better and more sophisticated technology.

Meanwhile, more and more abundant genius is being displayed in various fields of destruction; the best brains are directly or indirectly responsible for the most horrifying instruments of war; racial, religious and political discriminations are not banished from the earth; the so-called avenues of progress in less developed countries are drenched with blood of innocent men, women and children; and independent minds are being persecuted because of "crimes of thought." People are certainly becoming more and more restless. They care much more for action than for contemplation. In fact, they are being taught day in and day out to prefer "new and more powerful" to "good and more beautiful." Thus, the awakened intellectual energy in the world is turned nowadays exclusively to science in the narrow sense of technological importance, which is supposed to assure

not only the welfare, but also the happiness of man. While I wouldn't be able to define happiness myself, I do know that one cannot feel himself to be living a full life without enjoying and appreciating the humanities and the arts. As Oscar Wilde used to repeat so often, "the arts are the only true civilizing influence in this world, and without them people are barbarians." How very true is the old trite statement that art teaches us, not only what to see, but what to be.

I personally reject the view that science must rob the world of its magic and beauty. Really great artists have never felt outdone by science. And a really great scientist, a creative thinker, must also be an artist. However, some modern artists—writers, painters and sculptors as well as musicians—are certainly too optimistic when claiming that creating beauty may suffice as an antidote to the science-dominated culture of our industrial age. They overlook the simple truth that it is impossible to create great works of art in isolation, being practically cut off from what is going on in the world. And with our present trend of education, the cleavage between art and science (*i.e.*, between knowing and feeling) is already so wide that pretty soon it may be almost impossible to bridge the gap. Since between any two isolated worlds there must grow up a kind of hostility, sooner or later one of the two will be the winner. It can hardly be art. And the less art there is in human life, the less need has man for independence and freedom. That, in turn, leads to the attempts of some governments to dictate to the remaining artists what they have to do. Finally, art degenerates or vanishes altogether. Yet I am of the opinion that this dangerous situation has arisen not because humanities and arts are incompatible with science and technology, not by any means for this reason—but because people in highly developed countries, in their fervor of applying science to all sorts of practical problems, have so far failed to apply it to the most important problem of all—how to use science itself. But I still hope that if we join hands and work in the right spirit, the job can be done in a not too distant future.

## REVIEW

### FUTILITY IN CONTEXT

PIERRE BOULLE is undeniably an artist with words, and also one who aims his talents in a particular direction. His last three novels, *The Bridge Over the River Kwai*, *Face of a Hero*, and *The Test*, all constitute delicately performed operations upon the corpus of the competitive society. In *The Bridge*, we see a glorious determination produce an absurd result in a by-water military situation, twisting the aims of the determination into paradox. The capacities of a model hero are hopelessly tangled in farce, yet Boule is able to retain, even in farce, essential elements of classical tragedy.

In *Face of a Hero* an apparently reverse situation is encountered, but the overtones are the same: the sanctimonious coward is mistaken for a brave man, and so comes to believe himself to be. Here it is the man himself who is farcical, in his supposed concern with a punitive administration of justice as a public prosecutor. It may be said that in both books Boule is pointing out that the mechanics by which men presumably seek "right" by force not only frustrate the right but also invite insanity.

In *The Test* we encounter insanity again—in this instance precipitated by the exposure of a man of the Pacific islands to "civilized" practices and biases. When the Japanese attack a small French plantation in 1949, a thirteen-year-old French girl escapes to a native Malayan village. Here she grows up in Malayan customs and identifies with the clear and classic values of her foster parents, finally marrying their son. A few years later, with the fall of Japan, the Occident returns to Malaya and a French doctor and a priest discover the girl. The priest, of course, conceives it his duty to restore Marie-Helen to her cultural heritage, but his companion is unaccountably troubled by the prospect of this new uprooting. The conversation between the two proceeds:

"She was born into our world. I realize that the fact of her living among pagans doesn't shock you at all, but surely you'll admit that she has a right to her own civilization and culture. We'd be committing a serious crime if we did nothing about her."

"I quite agree, Father," Moivre went on in the same tone of voice. "Of course, she has got a right to her share of our inheritance."

Being averse to discussing this sort of question, he had replied without fully weighing up all the implications of this point of view. Serious deliberation only followed a moment or two later. The older he grew, the more often did this short delay occur whenever he was faced with a tricky problem. Moreover, he had been deeply moved by the constantly recurring image of the white girl and by the memory of the passionate face glimpsed by her side. He remained lost in thought for the remainder of the crossing.

By the time the prau reached the coast of Sumatra, he had come to the conclusion that in all probability the priest was right. For surely, somewhere, scattered abroad, concealed beneath the superficial tinsel and almost impossible to unearth, there were certain elements of Western civilization that were more or less worth while. He remembered having come across two or three himself in the course of his life, after many years of research. He submitted this humble opinion to the priest, in qualification of his original reply. Father Durelle shrugged his shoulders and had to content himself with this lukewarm form of assent.

Marie-Helen is taken from her husband, whom she loves and trusts, and brought to France for education. The husband, with great determination and ingenuity, follows her and effects a reunion just as Marie-Helen is studying to pass the test for her General Certificate. They both conceive the passing of this test as an ultimate judgment by civilized society upon them—eventually upon their right to live together and return to Malaya. But fear of the test leads to failure, and a misconception of "the test" leads Moktuy to kill Marie-Helen so that she will not know of her disgrace and failure; he then kills himself as well. In the closing pages the priest and the doctor are trying to comprehend why it is that

their originally helpful intentions have led to this tragedy. The doctor speaks:

"I should have realized. The General Certificate . . . are you listening? . . . I tell you, there's nothing we can do about it, except perhaps give it a little thought. You can never make a Frenchman see what's staring him straight in the face. The decadence of France is due to the test, not to alcoholism . . . the test, at one and the same time both the cause and the symbol of our intellectual degeneracy. No other country has anything to compare with it. . . but it's not enough to shed tears over it, you've also got to explain. . . ."

Moktuy had handed Marie-Helen a false list so that she could see her name upon it and die without the sense of failure. The doctor explains the tragic sequences, following Moktuy's tender lie to his confused wife. Moktuy repeated:

"Look. Look for yourself: Your name's down. You've passed the test. We're free. Tomorrow we'll leave for Sanang."

What happened after that? After that he handed her the list and put his arm round her waist. She took a long time unfolding it. She was shaking with emotion from head to foot . . . the usual nervous crisis of the successful candidate, Father! He bent over her, still with the same smile on his face.

Old Marie did not understand what he was doing when he raised his free hand to his belt. There was an infinite gentleness in all his gestures. His arm shot out, then returned at once to its original position. Marie-Helen slumped forward. She uttered no more than a faint whimper: a sigh of deliverance, Father. He tenderly laid the body down on the ground. He rested her head against a stone, still with the same loving gestures. He fell down on his knees beside her. The old woman was still too petrified to move. She noticed another movement of his arms and saw something flash through the air. He lay down as though he were going to sleep.

Yes, the "tests" of a complicated society often lead to insanity, and often in the direction of death. This last novel by Boule carries the atmosphere of a true folk tale, reminding us of John Steinbeck's story of *The Pearl*.

## COMMENTARY THINGS WORTH DOING

OSCAR WILDE may have been exaggerating when he said that "the arts are the only true civilizing influence in the world," but it is certainly a fact that the arts create an atmosphere of acceptance of the high qualities of civilization. This atmosphere is generated in two ways: by the content of the work of art and by the intentions of the artist. You know, when you talk to an artist, that he does his work by reason of the meaning the work has for him, and not because, in a sense, he offers his work "for sale." The man and his work are of a piece in quality. The work is an extension of himself, a projection of his life and his life aims.

It is a privilege to spend some time with a person who works at what he believes in. People who do not believe in their work are corrupt in the measure of their unbelief. The corruption may not be "personal"; that is, they may regard themselves as victims of the social situation and unable to change their work to something they believe in; but for all that, they have submitted to the corruption of a society that sees nothing odd or immoral in obliging a man to work at something he cares nothing about. Of course, there is always the possibility that he might do nothing much better of his own inclination, but this possibility only compounds the corruption. What remains open to all of us is the development of at least some part-time integrity—doing what we believe in after working hours. It is just possible that if we learn to do it well, we shall one day get to do it full-time.

These thoughts are prompted by a recent evening at the theatre—the legitimate theatre—in a small house at 4368 West Adams Boulevard, Los Angeles. This theatre, Ebony Showcase, has been in operation since 1959 and has offered to the public professional performances of such plays as *Anna Lucasta*, *No Exit*, and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The producers are Nick and Edna

Stewart who, as someone has said, "have accomplished the almost impossible feat of sustaining legitimate theatre in Southwest Los Angeles for nine years."

The performance we attended was of *Kataki*, a play by Shimon Wincelberg, concerned with two men, both soldiers, who meet on a Pacific desert island during the latter part of World War II. One is a Japanese soldier, Kimura, who is there first. The other is Alvin F. Combs, an American air force tail gunner who bails out over the island. Kimura speaks no English, Combs no Japanese. You would think the action of a play with this situation could not hold up, but there is not a moment of flat, non-participation for the audience. In this production, Alvin Combs is played by a young Negro actor, Al Freeman, Jr., who speaks most of the lines. At first you wonder a bit if the part was written to be played by a Negro, but after a couple of scenes you don't care. Kimura is played by Yuki Shimoda, a master of pantomime and ceremonial motion. The role of the Japanese soldier has a dance-like quality, bearing all the feeling of an ancient oriental culture, and yet it is never mannered or unnatural.

The play is a tragedy. The men are brought together by an accident of war. You see first the reflexes of an instructed hate and a schooling in fear. Gradually, these "cultural" influences wear off as the men help each other, play as boys together, coming into touch with each other's humanity. The play ends in the bitter agony of the return of the cultural influences which arouse the old feelings, although with a difference, since now Combs struggles to prevent Kimura from seeking the traditional Japanese death with honor.

The situation is simple, the emotions familiar, the human qualities awakened and displayed basic. But somehow the tender plant of human dignity acquires a majestic growth during the three acts of *Kataki*. The play is not polemic, but its essential truth about men in the grip of institutions cannot be escaped. Commercial entertainment never gets this across except by sheer accident.



The fact of the matter is that you can't tell the truth for money. The truth runs away and hides. You cannot put on a play for money or act in it for money without opening a vein in the muse. The blood runs out and there is nothing left but a little money-making institution which once was acquainted with some artists, but which is now operated by the members of another ancient profession.

We are not being cavalier about the need of artists to have money to live on. We are, instead, reproaching the public for giving its support to the compromised forms of public entertainment when there are so many opportunities to enjoy a theatre created by people who are working in it from sheer devotion to dramatic art.

We saw this kind of devotion some years ago in a performance of *A Member of the Wedding* at the Horseshoe Stage, another "little theatre" in Los Angeles, and again at a Player's Ring performance of *A View from the Bridge*.

Sometimes people who patronize the little theatre feel they are doing something rather generous in supporting a commercially hazardous undertaking in the arts. The actual situation is quite the reverse. The artists who put on these fine plays and act in them are the generous ones. They are keeping the arts *alive*—"saving them," so to speak, for the day when people everywhere will begin to feel the need of doing things because they are worth doing. When that time comes, the man who has honored only the money-making motive will have to beg to get enough to eat, since no one will want to have him around. He won't know how to do anything worth doing.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves GROWING UP ABSURD

A REVIEW, here, of Paul Goodman's book of this title is not meant to slight the book or restrict its importance, for we agree with the *Nation* reviewer, Webster Schott, who said that "*Growing Up Absurd* is nothing less than the first full-length statement of a unified theory of the malaise of contemporary United States society." Noticing it here is to stress the fact that the nearly fatal defects of contemporary civilization appear precisely in the gap between the latent aspirations of youth and the world our young people must enter. Many critics have pointed out the consequences of a social science geared to producing "adjustment" in neglect of individual psychic need, but Goodman shows how socializing theories tend to alienate youths from the very society which expects their conformity.

Mr. Schott's *Nation* article (Nov. 12, 1960) is an evaluation which we hardly hope to improve upon. He says:

Mr. Goodman is terrifying. Utopians usually are when we take them (or they take themselves) seriously. And Goodman is all the more terrifying because he is a rational Utopian who has most of the analytical apparatus and theoretical formulations of modern sociology, psychology, historiography and aesthetics at his finger tips. His documented, relentlessly pressed argument that "the accumulation of the missed and compromised revolutions of modern times, with their consequent ambiguities and social imbalances has fallen, and must fall, most heavily on the young," making it impossible for the young to mature into responsible, socially constructive adults, is the most alarming—and the most comprehensible and well-reasoned—account to date of what has happened to our youth since the depression.

Since MANAS reviews mainly to introduce readers to writing they should know about, we have picked out some quotations from *Growing Up Absurd*. In the following, Mr. Goodman gives

examples of the systematic misdirection of human energy in our society:

Necessary behavior may or may not be honorable. To wrest subsistence is necessary and honorable. If a young man falls in love, a temporary psychosis his entire day is under the iron rule of necessity, foolishly and honorably; he has something to do, if only to watch under a window. When the class struggle against exploitation was lively, it was something necessary and honorable to engage in. Indeed, it is a major defect of our present organized system and the economy of abundance that, without providing great goals, it has taken away some of the important real necessities, leaving people with nothing to do. The void is soon filled. Behavior like going into debt on the installment plan, gives an artificial but then real necessity, something to do, paying up. This is the Rat Race, but I doubt that it would be run if people did not need its justifying necessity, for the commodities themselves are not that attractive. Young fellows drift into narcotics, and then find that they have something they must do all day, looking for a connection and a fix, and how to get the loot. Compulsive sex-hunting is something to do. . . .

Our society is *not* abounding in highly worthwhile goals available to average gifts and underprivileged attainments. Many goals that are busily and perseveringly pursued by some might reasonably seem not worth the trouble to others who have more animal spirits or plain sense. These really might have "nothing to do," and their aimless and sensation-seeking killing time might indicate nothing but chronic boredom. Yet they will be judged psychopathic personalities. But once they have hit on a necessitous and important activity like finding their dose of heroin or stealing twenty-six joy rides (in the teeth of two arrests), they become models of purposiveness and perseverance.

In a chapter titled "Jobs"—Goodman prefers this word to the stilted term "vocational opportunities," for reasons which he makes clear—we find a touch of the author's empathy for those who are growing up absurd:

I often ask, "What do you want to work at? If you have the chance. When you get out of school, college, the service, etc."

Some answer right off and tell their definite plans and projects, highly approved by Papa. I'm

pleased for them, but it's a bit boring, because they are such squares.

But the terrible answer is, "Nothing." The young man doesn't want to do anything.

—I remember talking to half a dozen young fellows at Van Wagner's Beach outside of Hamilton, Ontario; and all of them had this one thing to say: "Nothing." They didn't believe that what to work at was the kind of thing one wanted. They rather expected that two or three of them would work for the electric company in town, but they couldn't care less. I turned away from the conversation abruptly because of the uncontrollable burning tears in my eyes and constriction in my chest. Not feeling sorry for them, but tears of frank dismay for the waste of our humanity (they were nice kids). And it is out of that incident that many years later I am writing this book.

Part of the whole predicament can be explained by the typical attitude of the social scientists who, unlike their predecessors, are not, or simply do not know how to be, "interested in fundamental social change." As Mr. Goodman says: "To them, we have apparently reached the summit of institutional progress, and it only remains for the sociologists and applied-anthropologists to mop up the corners and iron out the kinks. . . . They do not like to think that fighting and dissenting are proper social functions, nor that rebelling or initiating fundamental change is a social function. Rather, if something does not run smoothly, they say it has been improperly socialized; there has been a failure in communication." But perhaps the "social message" actually has been communicated clearly enough, and simply found unacceptable.

At first glance it may seem strange that Mr. Goodman himself has some definite feelings on the subject of "patriotism"—which he calls one of the "areas intermediate between childhood and adulthood." But a true patriotism depends upon genuine pride in standards of national culture, and this is something we do not really offer. Here's a down-to-earth example of the failure, again in the chapter titled "Patriotism":

Not long ago there was a great to-do about the Russian censorship of Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago*. The

editorials and the rhetoric of organized friends of culture kept repeating freedom of speech, freedom of culture. (You would think that we did not have our own means of censoring, by commercial selection and by swamping.) But the outcry about Pasternak was not sincere, it was propaganda in the Cold War. In the same year, for instance, the Archbishop of Dublin effectually banned the spring theater festival because of plays of O'Casey and Joyce. (He refused to say the festival Mass if those plays were to be given. The director then canceled the plays. But the actors manfully struck and would not play at all, and this resulted in an important loss of tourist revenue. Such admirable behavior is inconceivable in my country.) On this theme, the *New York Times* ran no editorials, no, nor the *New York Herald Tribune*. For we are not at cold war with the Catholic hierarchy. (I wrote a letter to the *Times* asking that this and *Zhivago* be coupled for mention, but no one was interested.) But such behavior is patriotically disastrous, it teaches that our spokesmen are not earnest; they pick and choose when to stand up for freedom of thought. How then can a boy be proud? (But to be sure, we have little such freedom, compared with the British, for our *mass* media are not, like theirs, open to fundamental controversy. It is not surprising, therefore, that for English Angry Young Men an important topic is their outraged patriotism, whereas our Beats do not care about that. )

Finally, a short quotation from Goodman's concluding pages:

More generally, all the recent doings of problematic youth, whether in the middle class or among the underprivileged juvenile delinquents, have had a stamp of at least partly springing from some existent situation, whatever it is, and of responding with direct action, rather than keeping up appearances and engaging in role playing. There is also among them a lot of phony role playing, but no more than in present acceptable society, and rather less than in the average young man or adolescent who has a "line." I think that the existential reality of Beat, Angry, and Delinquent behavior is indicated by the fact that other, earnest, young fellows who are not themselves disaffected and who are not phony, are eager to hear about them, and respect them. One cannot visit a university without being asked a hundred questions about them.

Now the organized system is very powerful and in its full tide of success, apparently sweeping everything before it in science, education, community planning, labor, the arts, not to speak of business and

politics where it is indigenous. Let me say that we of the previous generation who have been sickened and enraged to see earnest and honest effort and humane culture swamped by this muck, are heartened by the crazy young allies, and we think that perhaps the future may make more sense than we dared hope.

Since Mr. Schott's review is so perceptive, we close our tribute to Mr. Goodman in Schott's words:

Whether or not Paul Goodman's vision of new possibilities for the good life in the United States will prevail is important; but the activist Utopian mood of Goodman—demanding that we seek solutions by viewing all of our experience as if it *were* new and subject to our will—is infinitely more important. It commits us to the future. It requires that we *continue* history at a time when the scholastic pack of our social critics counsels resignation to history.

## *FRONTIERS*

### The New Context, but no New Myth

IT is inevitable—inevitable for us, at any rate—that as the great debate concerning war and peace continues, fundamental questions about human nature and evolution demand attention. No one knows very much about human evolution. That is, our scientific information in this field is fragmentary and tells us almost nothing as to what or who, precisely, is doing the evolving. And yet, reflection on such questions is impossible to avoid. Is human evolution, for example, essentially moral?

People say that you can't change human nature. This may be true, but we hardly know enough about this mysterious subject to affirm it as a fact. People say that it is foolish to suppose that "moral force" can ever gain the strength to overcome aggressive military attack. Well, maybe they are right, here, too; but there are some curious historical facts about the relation between moral ideas and military aggression which deserve examination.

We have no lengthy studies to cite, but it seems plain enough that no important war could be undertaken after the epoch of revolution in the eighteenth century without first associating the military project with some appealing moral idea. Once the ideals of liberty and equality had been burned into the consciousness of human beings by the French and American Revolutions, a war for simple acquisition of territory and treasure was no longer a possibility. The people who were to *fight* the war, that is, had to be persuaded that it had a decent purpose.

Another way of putting this would be to say that, during the nineteenth century, a certain kind of propaganda—*moral* propaganda—became increasingly important for any nation contemplating a war, and that, in the twentieth century, moral propaganda is an absolute necessity, if you are going to have a war. In

short, the only kind of a war you can get people to fight in today is a *religious* war.

This brings us to the paragraph by Dr. Jerome D. Frank, Johns Hopkins psychiatrist, which provoked these reflections. Continuing his examination of the psychological problems involved in the elimination of war, in this paper Dr. Frank considers the "Motivational Aspects of a World without War." In one place he says:

Modern weapons of mass destruction have changed the context of dying for one's ideals in two respects. First, one cannot die for one's beliefs in a nuclear war without sacrificing millions of bystanders who may be quite indifferent to the beliefs in question. Secondly, death in nuclear war cannot preserve the ideals for which the martyr sacrifices his life, since the war would destroy the social organization necessary for their fulfillment. The task of the modern world is to devise forms of waging conflict in which it will still be possible for people to fight for their ideals to the death, but without destroying the uninvolved and also with some hope that the sacrifice may actually help to achieve its aim.

Is it so fanciful, then, to suggest that if people generally begin to understand that the ground has been dug out from under any possible moral argument for war, they will no longer be *willing* to go to war? Dr. Frank speaks of the "changed context" of dying for one's ideals. It doesn't work in nuclear war. The nature of an ideal is such that, if you are going to do anything for it, you have to believe that what you are doing will work. If it won't work, you may do it anyhow, but you won't be able to believe any longer that you are doing it for an ideal. You may be whipped into doing it, frightened into doing it, organized, chained up and forced into doing it, but by that time any idea of an ideal will be long gone.

Many years ago, the American naval authority, Admiral Mahan, wrote: "The province of force in human affairs is to give moral ideas time to take root." This made some sense, many years ago. It was the only possible excuse for the agony of violent revolution. Young people grow into maturity with the image before them of the brave patriot at the barricades. Shining in the

patriot's eyes is the vision of long vistas of peace for the good society he is fighting to make possible. This is the myth of the French and the American Revolutions. It is a myth which is no longer true.

A new myth is needed for the young people to grow up with. Where are they going to get it? Are they going to have to choose from little myths for alienated fragments of society? Hipster myths? Beatnik myths? When you turn young people loose in a world without any acceptable myths, they are obliged to make up their own, out of the immediacy of their own moral perceptions, and you get only what they are able to see and feel for themselves. There is no doubt about the fact that the young will always find a way to fill the void left in their lives by the default of the older generations. Even little children, when deprived of fairy stories, make up their own. Without vision, the people perish, and there is a psychological necessity in each one of us for vision of some sort. This, you could say, is just as much a law of nature as the hunger of the body for food.

Well, if, from musings of this sort, you get around to the idea that it is time to give some attention to a believable vision for Americans, and not only for Americans—since a vision for Americans can't be very different from the vision for other men, and still work—if you decide that planning with vision is now as important as putting foundations under houses and fuel in vehicles, where will you turn? Will you look up specialists in vision in the yellow pages? We don't have much practice in solving problems of this sort.

But ready or not, this may be the evolutionary requirement of our present situation. And if you go back into the past, there is at least some encouragement. Every great break-through in moral evolution seems to have begun long before most of the people involved in it thought they were "ready."