

IS IT POSSIBLE TO BE AN OPTIMIST?

[When future historians get around to naming the men who, in the present confused period, were most effective in pointing the way out, they will almost certainly name Norman Cousins as one who used his very considerable resources for little else. As editor of the *Saturday Review*, Mr. Cousins has consistently given high service to his readers and countrymen. He is perhaps the only editor in the field of the mass media—compared to "little" magazines, the *SR* is certainly a mass medium—who regularly makes an unequivocal focus for moral and human issues. He has on his side the fact that a literary magazine is a logical matrix for such expressions, but others have such opportunities without using them half so well. It was Mr. Cousins who gave Lewis Mumford voice for his magnificent outcry, "Gentlemen: You Are Mad!", at the time of the Bikini test shots; it was he who wrote "Modern Man Is Obsolete"; and it is Mr. Cousins, again, who, in *SR* for Nov. 5, 1966, formulates the central issues of the present in another fine editorial: "Is It Possible to Be an Optimist?" Mr. Cousins, we think, makes a full use of the opportunities genuinely open to him, and it was with this in mind that we obtained permission to reprint his Nov. 5 editorial, presented below, and have added some comment of about the same length.]

Is it possible to be an optimist in a world which has turned most of its organized brainpower and energy into the systematic means for debasing life or mutilating it or scorching it or obliterating it? What basis is there for hope when the human future is increasingly in the hands of men who do not comprehend the meaning of the new power and who are, some of them, puny and fretful and prone to act out of frustration or false pride or mistaken notions of grandeur?

Is it possible to believe in the ability of the human species to eliminate the mass injustice that leads to mass violence—or the mass violence that feeds back into mass injustice? Can anyone have confidence in the capacity of human intelligence to sustain the natural environment on which humans are absolutely dependent—at a time when the progressive despoliation and poisoning of air,

land, and water are fast outrunning efforts to protect the environment?

Questions like these are producing a profound upheaval within the body of contemporary Western social philosophy. For the essence of modern social thought is its belief in the idea of human progress. With a few exceptions like Spengler, the leading thinkers of the past few centuries have generally accepted Aquinas's idea that man "advances gradually from the imperfect to the perfect." Pascal underscored this notion when he said that man is a creature capable not only of undergoing experiences but of comprehending them, and that the unending accumulation of experiences is therefore bound to be reflected in his own learning, understanding, and growth. Bacon, Descartes, Kant, and Hegel, each in his own way, have attempted to break free from the Aristotelian concept of fixed limitations on human potentiality, or the Lucretian idea of cataclysmic disaster, or the Prophetic notion of doom.

No group of thinkers has had more to say about the potentialities of human beings, especially under conditions of freedom, than Americans like Franklin, Jefferson, Emerson, William James, Holmes, Peirce, Wallas, and Dewey. Each has added depth and strength to the idea that humankind is capable of almost infinite development. Indeed, emerging from the ideas of the American social philosophers is a definition of human uniqueness: the ability to do that which has never been done before.

Today, however, the bedrock of modern social philosophy has been badly shaken by a long series of somber developments pointing toward the ultimate decimation of the human species. The habit of violence is no less significant than the

technology of violence. There has been a growing desensitization to human hurt.

Albert Schweitzer perhaps reflected the dilemma of many of his colleagues when he said that any optimism he might have for the human future rested less on his knowledge of history or on his analytical faculties than on a pervasive wish that everything would come out all right. Yet there is no real contradiction between the two. The capacity to hope is not the natural enemy of the analytical intelligence. It is a source of energy for creating new options. It helps to create new uses for logic. It sets people in motion and thus gives rise to new swirls, new contexts, new combinations. It gives reality a new face.

History is an accumulation of causes and effects, but it is far from being a procession of inevitables. Time and again, supposedly inexorable forces have been reversed by human acts proceeding out of positive human decisions. To say that man is locked into error and delusion runs counter to human experience. This is not to underestimate his propensity for error. But neither should we underestimate man's ability through an act of will to create a wide and exciting range of new possibilities. The only ultimate prison he need fear is his inertia and indecision.

Pessimism has one thing in common with optimism. It is not only a mood but a movement. The main characteristic of pessimism is that it tends to set the stage for its own omens. It is self-fulfilling. It shuns prospects in the act of denying them. It narrows the field of vision, obscuring the relationship between the necessary and the impossible.

The prime fallacy of pessimism is that no one really knows enough to be a pessimist. It is unhistorical to rule out the conversion of imponderables into positive forces under pressure from powerful ideas. And the reason there is no inconsistency between the exercise of reason and the optimistic outlook is that the search for new approaches or answers often has to be built on

new grounds—and optimism is the rangefinder for locating such grounds. Optimism is also a way of paying our respects to the mysterious process of change in human affairs and to the marvelous suddenness with which new prospects are revealed when urgently sought. The achievement of a limited ban on the testing of nuclear weapons was one example. Extending that ban to all levels of testing and to all nations can be another. Creating a basis for a reasonably decent and war-free existence on this planet can be yet another.

It *is* possible to be an optimist in today's world—without having to strain or synthesize. It is necessary only to attach oneself confidently to a plan for accomplishing an essential purpose—and then to help bring that plan to life with advocacy and work. The only thing more dangerous than nuclear force in today's world is failure to perceive the lines of connection between the individual and the ideas and forces that shape his world.

N.C.

We should like to add what seems a reasonable—and surely acceptable—qualification to Mr. Cousins' statement that there is no "real contradiction" between analytical intelligence and the capacity to hope. The condition for this being true depends upon the kind of use made of the analytical intelligence. Mr. Cousins practically sets this condition himself, later on, in his last sentence: "The only thing more dangerous than nuclear force in today's world is failure to perceive the lines of connection between the individual and the ideas and forces that shape his world."

This is indeed the point. Too many of the present works of analytical intelligence show the individual no real *access* to "the ideas and forces that shape his world." Mr. Cousins' first paragraph is proof of this. The disturbances, demonstrations, and acts of civil disobedience becoming commoner year by year are in protest against the powerlessness people feel in relation to "a world which has turned most of its organized

brain power and energy into the systematic means for debasing life or mutilating it or scorching it or obliterating it."

The analytical intelligence devoted to this problem is too much committed to scientific objectivity and not enough to finding forms of action which are filled with the moral energy of change. Our sociological studies often have high indignation, but they do not tell us, as for example Jayaprakash Narayan has told us, that the system of parliamentary democracy as a means of access to the forces governing our lives no longer really works. We have plenty of doomsday books on what is wrong—Ellul's *The Technological Society* and Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*, to name only two—but these are not books by men who have connected themselves with action that accomplishes change. Analysis by men who are engaged in constructive work generates another kind of intelligence—the intelligence which involves the reader as subject, energizes him to move, to act, to play a part, instead of standing aghast at those terrible sociological profiles of "over-all" human defeat. We can't do anything about what is "over-all" wrong with society because of the degradations suffered by the political process, the vise-like grip of "liberal" hedonism, the bribery and moral decline of the academic community, and the lethargy of a people drugged by an endlessly sensate life.

In such circumstances the analytical intelligence must have a holiday from remote objectivity, lest it paralyze us all. Attention needs to be given to books of analysis by men in action outside the sluggish processes of existing public institutions. Never has this been so plain. Buckminster Fuller, a favorite of Mr. Cousins, is a good example of such a man. Richard Hauser, author, with his wife Hephzibah, of *The Fraternal Society*, is another. Not massive, manipulated results, which cannot be had, but *access*, is the thing. People all over the country are starting schools. Teachers are quitting their jobs, looking for places they hope exist where they'll be able to

teach. Such people need help, and many of them will find it. How many Black Mountains, or better, would it take to change the world? As Mr. Cousins says, "It is necessary only to attach oneself confidently to a plan for accomplishing an essential purpose—and then help to bring that plan to life with advocacy and work."

Let us look at one particularly valuable contemporary work of the "analytical intelligence"—Kenneth Keniston's *The Uncommitted*—and draw again the conclusion that was cited last week. The specialty of the "new" alienated youth is the "attempt to outdo their fellow students in discovering new proofs for alienation and for being uncommitted." In Keniston's words: "They are philosophers with hammers; their favorite preoccupation is destruction, reduction, pointing out inconsistencies, chicaneries, hypocrisies, and rationalizations—whatever, in others or in themselves."

Isn't this exactly what, on a high academic plane, our sophisticated sociological analysts do? And to whom—to what hypothetical public—do they appeal for remedy? The non-reading electorate? Their powerless fellow professors and intellectuals? The radicals who are already filled with more anger than they can contain? The legislature? The executive branch? If you have the dubious fortune to attend a meeting which has collected a large number of eminent practitioners of the analytical intelligence, you hear two stories—plaints of powerlessness, or pride at being sent for by Washington to improve, no doubt, the efficiency of "systematic means for debasing life."

If we don't get analytical intelligence from men who are actively engaged in the small but absolutely crucial metabolic processes of reconstruction, *outside* official and establishment lines, we shall get it, finally, from desperate protestors alone—from nihilists whose rage has eaten up their hopes, and whose denunciations

will be spread by the sick rhythms of mass neurosis throughout the land.

Ours is a still loose-jointed, still spacious, and incredibly prosperous country with all sorts of interstices for constructive action by free men. It is by no means too late for access to the forces which shape the life of the individual. A man of some ability and some resolve can still do about what he wants.

Well, what else is needed? At another level, there must be the spread of ideas which insist upon the vast competence of human beings. We need poets who, as Lionel Trilling says, believe with Keats and Wordsworth and Coleridge that poetry depends upon "a condition of positive health in the poet, a more than usual well-being," instead of the poet who "derives his power from some mutilation he has suffered." We need writers and essayists who do more than just lie there and bleed.

This means, of course, helping to create milieus of health; and health, as every psychologist who knows anything at all keeps saying, is a function of devoted action for something you believe in—something good. How many people in America "believe" in the work they are doing? Goals for America? Goodman was right. Where are the jobs that might fill the young with self-respect? A man could hardly do more for his country, right now, than to create an enterprise in which people can work with enthusiasm and self-respect. There aren't nearly enough of such enterprises.

Finally, there are those ideas about man which should be all-pervasive but are not—ideas filled with vision, inspiration, dignity, potential heroism. Where shall we get such ideas? If our literature cannot provide them, then men who realize this will have to start reading and writing to create such a literature themselves, and in the process evolve a high humanist faith that has a lining of deep mystery—and it will have it because it is born of human beings in motion and is no arm-chair, patchwork intellectual synthesis. The

ground for optimism in America may be only that in America—and perhaps only in America—there is still time, still what is called "the freedom," to do these things.

REVIEW

"ON THE SIDE OF THE ANGELS"

IT was in 1864, just five years after first publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, that Benjamin Disraeli laconically announced his views on evolution: "The question is this: Is man an ape or an angel? I am on the side of the angels." So light-hearted a settling of the issue which was destined to rage in the public prints, forums, and the pulpits of Christendom, and to become even a storm-center of political controversy, during some sixty years of the future was not calculated to earn the English statesman the respect of an early posterity, but today, with the fires of the evolution controversy well banked, if not entirely out, the phrase has its uses.

The last big public display of righteous passion on the subject took place in 1925, in Dayton, Tennessee, with William Jennings Bryan's prosecution and Clarence Darrow's defense of the young science teacher, John T. Scopes, who was charged with violating a state law which prohibited teaching evolution in the public schools. While Scopes was convicted, it is generally conceded that he won a moral victory, since the conclusion of the civilized world was that fundamentalist religion was now exposed in all its know-nothing bigotry as a force blindly opposed to both the facts and the progress of scientific inquiry.

There were, however, other consequences of the Scopes trial. The scientists taking part in the controversy—on the side of Scopes, of course—included men of high intelligence and public responsibility, and while they did not falter in their demand for free scientific education, it became evident to them that the iconoclastic side of their activities left something to be desired. A certain restraint began to appear in their claims, in some way responsive, one may think, to the same feelings which were behind Disraeli's preference for an "angel" instead of an ape for his ancestor. For evidence of this humanist respect for the

quality of being a man, one may look at the collection of essays by Henry Fairfield Osborn, published by Scribner's in 1926 under the title, *Evolution and Religion in Education*, with the subtitle, "Polemics of the Fundamentalist Controversy of 1922 to 1926." These thoughtful contributions of Osborn to the *New York Times* are impressive examples of the impartiality of the scientific spirit. At the same time, as president of the Museum of Natural History (New York) and a research professor of zoology at Columbia University, Osborn published during this period, or shortly thereafter, the results of work which tended to push back the origin of man millions of years into the past. In an article in *Science* (May 20, 1997), he wrote:

I regard the ape-man theory as totally false and misleading. It should be banished from our speculations and from our literature not on sentimental grounds but on purely scientific grounds and we should now resolutely set our faces toward the discovery of our actual pre-human ancestors. . . . The most welcome gift from anthropology to humanity will be the banishment of the myth and bogie of ape-man ancestry and the substitution of a long line of ancestors of our own. . . . Between man and the ape—not only the hands and feet of the ape, but the ape as a whole, including its psychology—you will find more differences than resemblances.

This view was not widely echoed among other scientists of that time, but similar testimony from anatomists and paleoanthropologists began to accumulate in studies published some twenty years later. Franz Weidenreich, for example, in *Apes, Giants and Man* (University of Chicago Press, 1946), observed: "The extent and manner of the adaptation of the human foot to standing and walking conditions indicate that this process must have set in during a very early phase, long before the three anthropoids could have claim to their present names. . . . In other words, the evolution of that primate branch which we call 'man' must have begun much earlier than we ever dreamed." In the work of such men, there is a distinct tendency to go back to the nineteenth-century views of such anthropologists as de Breaux

de Quatrefages. (The latter held it far more likely that the anthropoid apes should be discovered to be the descendants of man!) A particularly impressive contribution to the position that man has his own distinctive line of evolution, independent of the great apes, came in 1948 with publication (by Williams & Wilkins, Baltimore) of Frederic Wood Jones's *Hallmarks of Mankind*. Professor of human and comparative anatomy at the Royal College of Surgeons, Dr. Jones declared:

. . . considered solely from the point of view of structure, Man is an extremely primitive type, and . . . though more primitive in basal structure than the living monkeys and apes, Man has his own remarkable structural specialisations that distinguish him from all other Mammals and appear to be very ancient hallmarks.

Dr. Jones reached a categorical conclusion from his anatomical studies: the line of human evolution was well established in its own terms "before the ancestral stocks of the existing Anthropoid Apes had been developed." He has little patience with the nature fakery which makes man seem to resemble the apes more than the facts support, by means of distorted drawings which bend man over and straighten up the ape (a Huxleyan device), and put the case as follows:

There is no halfway stage in posture. It would be better to discard all the drawings that depict the early progenitors of Man as slouching brutes carrying themselves in postures incompatible with the dictates of gravity, and to relegate to oblivion all the speculations and theories concerning the gradual rise of Man from a quadrupedal pronograde to a bipedal orthograde posture.

Founding his views on the facts of anatomy and Dollo's Law of Irreversibility, Dr. Jones was convinced that South African remains do not represent apes on the way to becoming men, but early apes which had not yet reached the specializations of their modern representatives. The true ancestors of man, according to Dr. Jones, if they are ever discovered, "will be utterly unlike the slouching, hairy ape men of which some men have dreamed and of which they have made

casts and pictures during their waking hours; and they will be found in geological strata antedating the heyday of the great apes."

What may be called the cultural concomitants of such attitudes are well described by Julian Huxley in *Man Stands Alone*, published in 1941, in which he wrote:

Of late years, a new tendency has become apparent. It may be that this is due mainly to the mere increase in knowledge and the extension of scientific analysis. It may be that it has been determined by social and psychological causes. Disillusionment with *laissez faire* in the human economic sphere may well have spread to the planetary system of *laissez faire* that we call natural selection. With the crash of old religions, ethical, and political systems, man's desperate need for some scheme of values and ideals may have prompted a more critical re-examination of his biological position. Whether this be so is a point I leave to the social historians. The fact remains that the pendulum is again on the swing, the man-animal gap is again broadening.

There is considerable support for Mr. Huxley's analysis, because of the fact that nineteenth-century anatomists and zoologists of the time of Darwin proposed the same objections that are now heard with growing respect, yet were then ignored. Bertrand Russell's explanation of the general scientific bias in favor of "materialistic" doctrines—of which the ape-origin theory is one—is probably correct. "As a rule," he wrote in 1925, "the materialistic dogma has not been set up by men who loved dogma, but by men who felt that nothing less definite would enable them to fight the dogmas they disliked." Reduced need of heavy weapons to combat church interference with scientific inquiry has been an obvious trend since 1925—the year of the Scopes Trial—and at the same time the multiplying obscurities of the *processes* of evolution have had a clearly chastening effect on workers in research. Meanwhile, there is a sense in which evolution doctrine has been broadened and even "philosophized" into compatibility with ancient ideas of high religion, such that J. Arthur

Thompson, a distinguished scientist, could write in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* that "in the early ages of tentative men, hominid rather than homines, there was a re-definition and re-thrilling of the moral fibres under the influence of the new synthesis or mutation—Man." He added: "With reason and language and consciousness of history both past and possible, there must have been a re-tuning of the moral nature." A broad summary of this expansion of meaning for the idea of evolution is provided in *New Views of Evolution*, edited by G. P. Conger (Macmillan, 1929), showing its hospitality for at least some of the spiritual views of human origins, as found, for example, in Gnostic emanationist doctrines.

A valuable "revisionist" discussion by Lewis Mumford of familiar evolutionist theories appeared in the Winter (1966-67) *American Scholar*, with the title "Speculations on Prehistory." Mr. Mumford is probably the world's leading authority on the relation between human development and the use of tools and technology. Having just completed an extensive study of "the whole history of man's technical achievements," he now finds himself obliged to protest the oversimplification in the claim that man rose from an unknown past mainly by reason of his tool-using propensity. Concentration on this single evidence of human development, Mr. Mumford says, has led to neglect of what may be far more important factors in the emergence of true men. Subjective and psychic capacities, of which there is often little material record, are in his opinion the best identifying traits of being human: "the very existence of grammatically complex and highly articulated languages at the onset of civilization five thousand years ago, when tools were still extremely primitive, suggests that the human race may have had even more fundamental needs than getting a living, since it might have continued to do the latter on the same terms as its hominid ancestors." This view, developed at some length, leads Mumford to say:

There seems a likelihood that the earliest peoples, perhaps even before language was available,

had a dim consciousness of the mystery of their own being: a greater incentive to reflection and self-development than any pragmatic attempt to adjust to a narrower environment. Some of this grave religious response is still present in the legends of creation among many surviving tribal cultures, and notably among American Indians. . . .

Mr. Mumford's article is a strongly reasoned and well supported argument for identifying both the nature and the earliest history of man in terms of distinctive human qualities. He ends with this common-sense appeal:

By now, I trust, it should be plain that the chronic practice of describing man as a tool-using animal conceals some of the very facts that must be exposed and reevaluated. Why, for example, if tools were so important to human development, did it take man at least half a million years—or three times that period, if we place the dubious hominids of South America in the direct line of descent—to shape anything but the crudest stone tools? Why is it that the lowest existing peoples who support a hand-to-mouth existence with a few tools and weapons, nevertheless have elaborate ceremonials, a complicated kinship organization, and a finely differentiated language, capable of expressing every aspect of their experience?

Why, further, were high cultures like those of the Maya, the Aztecs, the Peruvians, still using only the simplest handicraft equipment a few centuries ago, although their monuments were magnificent and ancient roads like that to Machu Picchu were marvels of engineering? How is it that the Maya, who had no machines, were masters of abstruse mathematics and had evolved an extremely intricate method of time reckoning which showed superb powers of abstract thought? Once one dares to ask these questions the whole course of human history, from the earliest times on, appears in a new light, and our present machine-centered technology no longer seems the sole witness to the far-off divine event toward which all creation has moved.

COMMENTARY
"SELECTIVE CONSCIENTIOUS
OBJECTOR'

SPACE amounting to almost two columns in the Los Angeles *Times* for Dec. 29 was devoted to the general court martial faced by Captain Howard Brett Levy, an army doctor who is charged with promoting disloyalty among the troops and with refusing to train medical aid men for service in Vietnam. Levy will be defended against these charges by the American Civil Liberties Union, on the ground of his rights under the First Amendment to the Constitution, and his understanding of his obligations as a physician.

Stationed at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, Levy is accused of telling Negro soldiers they should not fight in Vietnam. Calling himself a "selective conscientious objector" who would have fought in World War II, Levy in no way conceals his opinions. One statement attributed to him is the following:

"The United States is wrong in being involved in the Vietnam war. I would refuse to go to Vietnam if ordered. I don't see why any colored soldiers would go to Vietnam; they should refuse to go to Vietnam and if sent should refuse to fight because they are discriminated against in Vietnam by being given all the hazardous duty and they are suffering the majority of casualties.

"If I were a colored soldier I would refuse to go to Vietnam and if I were a colored soldier and were sent I would refuse to fight.

"Special forces people are liars and thieves and killers of peasants and murderers of women and children."

In explanation of this last assertion, Levy says that special forces personnel are expected to use their medical skills "to further political objectives." The main purpose of teaching medical knowledge to Special Forces, he said, is to enable them to "go into the villages of Vietnam, practice healing and thereby win the people's allegiance." Stating his own view, Levy declared:

You practice medicine with no strings attached. You don't offer it as a bribe. There should be no ulterior motive. But here it was plainly being used to promote political objectives. It is just a prostitution of medicine. The medical art of healing is becoming the handmaiden of political objectives.

The maximum penalties under the charges against Levy are five and three years. His main concern, according to the *Times* story, is whether he will be able to practice medicine after disposition of his case, since a convicted felon is barred from medical practice in most states. The case, according to the *Times* reporter, may turn into a national *cause célèbre*.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves QUESTIONS, ANSWERS

THE ferment, wondering, and new beginnings throughout the field of education are among the most encouraging signs on the present-day scene. Not only individuals but occasionally organized groups connected with education are asking important questions. For example, the Learning Institute of North Carolina hopes to arrange a reunion of alumni and former teachers of Black Mountain College, to find out, among other things, why this enormously fertile center of learning was unable to continue its work. The following about Black Mountain is from the *Christian Science Monitor* (Dec. 17, 1966):

Black Mountain College, an educationally radical school in the western North Carolina Mountains, lasted only 24 years and never had more than 90 students at a time, but it turned out more than its share of successful people in the arts.

Black Mountain College was started in 1933 and closed in 1957. The founder was John Andrew Rice, a professor of Greek with strong, unorthodox views about education. Professor Rice clashed with the administration of Rollins College in Florida and was fired. Eight Rollins faculty members and 15 students quit the college and went with Dr. Rice to start a school in a rented hotel-like building near Black Mountain in the Great Craggy Mountains near Asheville.

It is not easy to find material about either Prof. Rice or Black Mountain, but an article he wrote on the use of the classics in *Harper's* for May, 1937, gives some of his views:

We do not read them {the classics} as tracts for the times which is what most of them were, but as distillations of pure reason, and we play the game of matching one abstraction against another until all meaning is drowned in a sea of words. Or we do worse, we worship ourselves in them. I have never known a Platonist who did not hold Plato up as a mirror of himself, nor an Aristotelian who did not think his own dry and brittle mind a duplicate of the master's.

Prof. Rice was obviously a tough-minded wielder of half-truths—a redresser of balances—but no one can quarrel with him when he goes on to say that we have failed "to follow the Socratic direction to teach the young how to become, not to be, philosophers, and to show them that in their quest for certainty the only thing on which they can rely with assurance is the experience of the quest."

For material on the College, Louis Adamic's *My America* may be the best source. Adamic tells how, at the beginning, students and teachers pooled their personal books to make the school library, and that teachers drew what they needed to live on from a common fund—a stipend, it turned out, which averaged \$7.27 per month per person!

Adamic visited Black Mountain in 1935, when there were seventeen teachers and forty-eight students. He pointed out that the education taking place there was possible only in a very small school, where *everybody* teaches:

The Rollins rebels . . . were unanimous on one objection—that college and university trustees or regents, presidents, and deans, most of whom were not teachers or scholars, but executives and disciplinarians, and sluices for influence from various non-educational sources, had the power to interfere with the teachers' function. The little group was determined to get back to the old American idea of "Mark Hopkins on one end of the log and the student on the other." And so Black Mountain has no trustees, no president, no dean. There is but one person in the office, a typist, who is not also a teacher.

The *Monitor* story continues:

Black Mountain . . . grew to about 90 students and twenty teachers. Eventually, with the aid of private and federal grants, several buildings were constructed. But financially the college was always a hand-to-mouth operation.

Students and faculty at Black Mountain had much freedom and the school was always a subject of controversy. There were no grades or semester hours. A student would apply for graduation when he thought he was ready. He was then tested for general

knowledge, and if the faculty thought him ready to graduate it invited an authority in the student's field to visit the college and test the applicant.

Among alumni and former teachers who have distinguished themselves in the arts are Elia Kazan and Eric Bentley, literature and drama critics; Joseph Albers, a design expert, Merce Cunningham, a dancer; and Elaine DeKooning, a painter.

Visiting teachers included Walter Gropius, the revolutionary architect of the Harvard School of Design, and John Dewey, who has been called the father of progressive education.

Both alumni and former teachers at Black Mountain will be invited to come to North Carolina, by the Learning Institute, to talk about their experience there and what it meant to them.

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A review in the Los Angeles *Times* Calendar section for Dec. 18 tells about the transformation wrought in P.S. 119 in the heart of Harlem, New York, by Elliott Shapiro, a principal with activist tendencies and a background in clinical psychology. The account is based on a new book by Nat Hentoff, *Our Children Are Dying* (Viking, \$4.50). The reviewer, May V. Seago, exposes in a few effective paragraphs the tragedy and wonder of children who live in the slums:

Slum children are kindly, generous, spontaneous, fun to teach, responsible beyond their years. They are as much harmed by poor schools as by the home and the neighborhood. . . . Shapiro taught the children to talk out what they were thinking instead of pulling down a curtain. He taught them to cry when they were hurt. He understood that negativism meant self-devaluation and that stealing from someone you like means taking a gift of sentimental value. . . .

He went out into the community. When an apartment was unheated during the winter, he tracked down the owner and forced action. He joined parent demonstrations. He helped parents get welfare aid, and found money to prevent eviction and to purchase food and clothing. His teachers visited homes only with consent, in deference to family pride.

His school was the heart of the community. As a principal he wandered a lot and his door was always open to teachers and children and parents. He

encouraged innovation and comforted when innovation failed. He conducted group therapy for young teachers. . . . His teachers taught Negro history the year round, for only by building pride in their unique heritage could Harlem's children develop loyalty to the country as a whole. He instituted ungraded classes for children who needed extra support . . . and set up a teachers' committee to handle problems others would send to the police. He sent books home for family reading. He found money for fifteen teacher aids from the community, and enlisted many more community volunteers for hearing children read . . . or just loving children who sought reassurance.

This seems a fairly full answer to the question: What can one man do? He had help, of course, but Elliott Shapiro knew how to call that help into existence.

FRONTIERS

Concerning Arguments About LSD

AMONG the letters from readers of Henry Anderson's article, "The Case Against the Drug Culture" (MANAS, Nov. 16, 1966), there were, as might be expected, some critical reactions. One well-expressed letter raised questions which go to the core of the differences of opinion on the use of psychedelic drugs. We are not printing this letter because it does not seem that any important purpose is served by extended controversy on the subject, and because our original reason for publishing Mr. Anderson's KPFA broadcast was more or less the same as his own for making it. As he said in reply to one critic:

I felt that the picture was seriously imbalanced. . . . In Berkeley there are not one, not two, but several journals devoted exclusively to psychedelica. KPFA devotes what I consider a seriously disproportionate amount of time to Leary, Alpert, and other true believers; . . . there are organizations . . . for the legalization of marijuana. This onslaught of argumentation—all of it from one side—is taking unfair advantage, in my opinion, of the fact that a great many high school and college students are terribly confused and "alienated" these days. . . . You would be surprised how many KPFA listeners and MANAS readers—including persons who had given the psychedelic drug route a full trial—wrote to me and said that they had been waiting for somebody to say these things.

What one notices, after only a little review of the spread and expression of opinion about the use of psychedelic drugs, is the deep level of attitude from which the arguments emerge—involving a kind of persuasion that is more influential than the cogency of the arguments. Indeed, the "cogency" is more an articulate display of conviction than tight reasoning from premise to conclusion. Or, as is sometimes said of any "logical" development, the conclusion is implicit in the premises. This may be true of all argument, but it seems to apply more manifestly to arguments about the use of psychedelic drugs.

There are really two questions involved. Is it "natural" to seek help in basic understanding through

a chemical preparation? Is this understanding achieved in *noticeable* measure, as a result?

If you are able to argue, as one critic (only two wrote their comment) of Mr. Anderson does, that anything that *is* must be admitted to be "natural," and then to claim that any protest against enrichment of being, such as users of psychedelics testify to having experienced, is narrow, partisan, and even destructive—especially when the protest comes from one who has not "tried" it—if you can believe in this line of argument, you may have what seems, on the face of it, an invincible case. The rest is clarity of words and rhetorical appeal.

Let us look at these issues. It should be obvious that the question of what is "natural" has never been more confused than at present. Much of the argument about the good and evil in technology—or in the present use of technology—turns on intuitive feelings concerning what is "natural," followed by pragmatic judgments concerning "the good of man." Involved are matters of basic existential stance—not the consequences of human conviction but its very roots. There are those who have deep, sometimes inexplicable, feelings which prevent them from "trying" psychedelic drugs, and others who experiment freely in this and other directions. Here the entire strength of the scientific insistence on empirical, first-hand "finding out" is often brought into play. And against this may be ranged the subjectively-grounded conviction of others that there are levels of man's nature at which adventitious aids, such as drugs, might be vastly deceptive in the array of phenomena they produce—accomplishing a desacralization, so to speak, of the very modes of perception involved. The argument, at this point, comes down to the issue of "authority" for such decisions, and it is obviously a matter of individual choice, since the evidence is almost entirely an exploration of subtle feelings of fitness and of the distinction between what are sometimes called the "sacred" and the "profane." Argument seldom changes peoples' views in such matters, although they may be swayed by the feelings of others, according to tendencies or susceptibilities already present in themselves. The advocate of psychedelic experience might insist that filling an abyss of

personal emptiness is responding to a longing for growth; his critic would call it a flight, an elaborately embellished evasion of "life." The advocate might declare the use of the drug an act of daring discovery; the critic would say that drug-induced psychic reveries are allowed to hide the vacuum of the inner life of the times, and this is no service to anyone.

From this impasse discussion might turn to an entirely hopeless debate about the quality and level of the experience. The one who has *had* the experience may naturally think himself better armed in opinion than the one who hasn't. This sort of confrontation recalls the differences between nineteenth-century advocates of mediumistic trance and certain of its critics. A study of this controversy, if enlarged to include all forms of psychic inspiration, suggests that the subtleties of psychic perception range all the way from the gross phenomena of clinical diagnosed obsession to the inspiration of high art. Participants in such debates often regard their own subjective experience as better evidence than anyone else can have. Perhaps it is, in some cases, but how do you tell? With Coleridge's "philosophic organ"?

So, at this point, there is a resort to measuring "results" in the literary or other qualities of expressions said to come from a proposed or admired source of inspiration. Here, also, opinions and counter-claims will obviously run the whole gamut of possible assertion. Sometimes, "medical" evidence is invoked. LSD, it is said, has shown its usefulness in the cure of alcoholism; and in reply there may be charges of brain damage from its extended use (in the work of Ungerleider and Fisher at UCLA's Neuropsychiatric Institute)—an effect which is denied by Dr. Timothy Leary.

Another order of values hovers in the wings of all such discussions. These are put clearly, although in another context, in A. H. Maslow's paper, "Some Frontier Problems in Psychological Health":

Some of my students, for instance, read a paper or two on self-actualization, and then have a kind of sudden conversion experience, and on Thursday at 2 o'clock, they decide they are going to be self-actualized *as of that moment*. Then I find I've let

loose on the world people who have jumped to the goal too quickly and have jumped over all the necessary humility, all the uncertainty, all the hard work, all the flexibility and openness that we must keep, if we are not to wind up with a kind of static philosophy, simply something in a package, a whole prefabricated "set" of values and ethics and guidance for action bought ready made instead of worked for.

The prerequisites described by Dr. Maslow, here, would perhaps not get the same attention from an advocate of LSD, who might speak, instead, of the extraordinary or oceanic character of the LSD experience, and its dissolving effect on artificial blocks. Yet who, after all, and by what canon, will distinguish for us between a "high" and a "low" nirvana sort of experience? There seems great possibility here for an elaborate theology, with many authoritative readings on the subdivisions of the inner psychedelic world, ranging upward to some climactic ineffable "reality." We have only to ask who would listen to a man who, by some mysterious achievement, knew *all* there was to know about such matters, to see the inconclusiveness of polemics at this level. How would he persuade anyone that he is *right*? He could probably launch a new religion, if he was of this mind, but *would* he? Debate will hardly settle such a question.

Instead of rehearsing arguments with no foreseeable end, we might better examine matters of mood and motive, to show the difficulties of certainty—and, perhaps, to wonder about the contributions made by difficulty. And in doing this we must not fail to mention the claim that "evolution" may now be making things easy for us—that at long last self-knowledge is *meant* to be easy, by some kind of new dispensation. Again, the decision on this question will come from one's basic intuitions about the nature of things. Elements of this sort of controversy are considered in a passage by Irving Babbitt in *Rousseau and Romanticism*:

The cult of intoxication has as a matter of fact appeared in all times and places where men have sought to get the equivalent of religious vision and the sense of oneness that it brings without rising above the naturalistic level. True religious vision is a process of concentration, the result of the veto power upon the expansive desires of the ordinary self. The various naturalistic simulations of this vision are, on

the contrary, expansive, the result of more or less complete escape from the veto power, whether won with the aid of intoxicants or not. The emotional romanticists from Rousseau down have left no doubt as to the type of vision they represented.

After citing Rousseau's admiration for the effects of alcohol, expressed with his hope that intoxication "be gentle, amiable, accompanied by moral sentiments," Babbitt quotes William James:

The sway of alcohol over mankind is unquestionably due to its power to stimulate the mystical faculties of human nature, usually crushed to earth by the cold facts and dry criticisms of the sober hour. Sobriety diminishes, discriminates and says no; drunkenness expands, unites, and says yes. It is, in fact the great exciter of the Yes function in man. It brings its votary from the chill periphery of things to the radiant core. It makes him for the moment one with truth.

Psychedelics are of course "different" from alcohol. We are looking for parallels, not identities. We know a great deal about the self-destructive aspect of drinking. But many drinkers who destroyed themselves did not know about it when they began. It is not *impossible* that the public ignorance of psychedelic drugs and their ultimate effect will turn out to have a correspondence to this private ignorance of the long-term effects of the use of alcohol.

Well, suppose we *have* evolved; this stipulation need not be denied; and suppose that in some sense all the involuntary beatifications of the LSD-imbiber are clues endowed with some meaning or other. Though the ecstasy be accounted "real," there is still the possibility that with this somewhat mechanistically conceived "evolution" to new subtleties of internal experience have also come new capacities for self-delusion. Quoting ends and bits of Oriental philosophy and mysticism does not diminish this possibility.

It is obvious enough that the wonders of psychedelic-inspired visions are a part of "Nature." It is quite possible that they contain *some* kind of instruction for human beings. But reading the code of Nature is not a capacity at which we are notably good. Every reaction we have to a natural fact contains instruction in some direction. We learn not

to eat green apples, for one thing. Pain and delight are the commonplace poles between which hedonistic man makes his judgments about good and evil. Ignorance and truth form another polarity. Control and self-abandonment make still another. Rigidity and freedom set the gamut of another range of criteria. With all these polarities to help us make up our minds, yet with undeniable uncertainties about their meaning or application, it is no wonder that we fall back on basic feelings of individual inclination, since, besides the difficulty of making logical analysis work to solve such problems, there is also the double-faced character of even the highest principles, when turned to partisan justification. One man speaks deprecatingly of rigidity. Another says you need a rock on which to stand. Both speak in psycho-moral metaphors, and both may be right. Both may also be wrong.

Human beings no doubt need or will have faiths to live by. One might say, at last, that only a faith which includes the full catalogue of the dangers or difficulties behind its own declarations of meaning is a faith useful to human beings. But when it comes to the final stance or ground on which any declaration is made, a man has to choose for himself. His state of mind *while choosing* is thus his most critical condition. There are those who think that a certain conscious loneliness at all such moments is the mark of a man. To feel unity in such decisions, on the other hand, may be the mark of a god. But to claim godhood before achieving manhood—well, we know that a lot of people have had this idea, but have not been able to demonstrate their status with much success.