

## THE ARGUMENT ABOUT "CONFORMITY"

ON the one hand you have people who say that Americans are the victims of several kinds of conformity. Americans do what is expected of them. They respond to stimuli as predicted. They fear to be "different." When they have problems, they try to solve them by buying the services of specialists. If you need to go to war, you hire an atom scientist. If you are unhappy, you see a psychiatrist. If you want justice, you get a lawyer. If you feel in need of more faith, you go to church. If you are going to high school, you wear blue jeans and a scarf (girl) or a butch haircut (boy) on your head. You are always looking around to see what is the "thing to do."

This, we are told, is conformity. Is there a deeper analysis? Psychologists, we suppose, would say that the conformist part of the human being is in search of identity. He wants to be a somebody. He gets to be somebody by being like everybody, since everybody, unquestionably, exists. He has the evidence of his senses for this. One can get a pretty sure identity by being like all those people out there. If I do what everybody else is doing, he says to himself, I will be as real as they are. I see them, and they will see me.

There are of course high identities and low identities. The conformist picks his image and imitates it. He may want to look like a man of distinction, so he buys Calvert. She may want to be known as a gracious hostess, so she reads the women's magazines, learns to plan menus, and gives dinners. The psychologists call this "role-playing." In quest of a particular identity, you study the part and read the lines, hoping that people will recognize you for what you are supposed to be. (A wit at a seminar of psychiatrists once spoke of the "all-the-good-roles-are-taken" neurosis to illustrate the frustration of a person who was having trouble deciding upon an image to conform to.)

Then, on the other hand, there are the people who say that all this talk of conformity is only an intellectual fad.

The people who pooh-pooh the dangers of conformity are usually businessmen or sales experts who are charged with being guilty of setting up roles for people to conform to. They reply by pointing to the enormous "diversity" of American life. They speak of the incredible variety of goods and services available to Americans. Everybody wants to have something "different"! Is this conformity?

A defense of this sort is made in an article, "What Is Advertising Good For?", by Martin Mayer, in *Harper's* for February. In the portion of his discussion devoted to this subject, Mr. Mayer writes:

Finally, there is the relationship between advertising and what a large number of people call "conformity." This relationship is difficult to discuss, because the alleged "conformity," as a new development in society, probably does not exist outside the imagination of the people who talk about it. It is true, of course, that a large mass of citizens drawn at random from within a single culture will have more things in common than not. It is also true that modern communications have produced some breaking down of old and perhaps valuable regional distinctions. And it is true that developments in the past thirty years have raised the economic condition of the nation's lowest tenth and lowered that of its highest tenth; raised the educational level of the lowest tenth and lowered that of the highest tenth. So the community appears to be more homogeneous, from a distant look. But the same developments which have created the appearance of homogeneity have also brought about an astonishing increase in the variety of entertainments, of housing and furnishing possibilities, of hobbies, of consumer goods—even of intellectual pursuits, for those so minded.

It is the poor, Mr. Mayer asserts, who are condemned to conformity. They don't have the

money to purchase the marks of originality—they are not free, in Mayer's odd phrase, "to indulge their individuality." Advertising, on the other hand, acts "to increase diversity." The implication here is that advertising is actually *against* conformity. Mayer thinks he has an explanation of the charge that advertising creates conformity:

What lies behind the cry of "conformity" and the accusation that advertising promotes it is the deep disappointment following upon the arrival of the millennium. We have achieved the nineteenth-century dream: practically everyone has enough to eat and decent clothing; by any standards but our own nearly everyone is well housed; the workday is short and leisure is ample.

But the millennial culture turns out not to be very interesting: the average man remains a mediocre fellow, and pleased with himself, to boot. Which is, certainly, well within his rights. Perhaps advertising *ought* to do something for the culture, but it won't; says it can't; says it shouldn't be asked. In his most defensive moments, the advertising man will hammer on the table and say the majority must be *right* to like garbage because it buys so much garbage. Holding up an inescapable mirror which reflects disappointment, and refusing for reasons of trade to comment on the picture in the mirror, advertising asks to be disliked by that element of the culture which aspires to a higher culture. It is.

Mr. Mayer is a clever and articulate writer, but there is no difficulty in showing that he misses the point entirely in what he says about conformity. Conformity, as we have defined it, results from an impoverished sense of selfhood. All that he demonstrates is that advertising tends to supply variety in the ways in which people may conform. And when he excuses advertising of any guilt in the encouragement of conformity by saying that our "millennial culture" reveals the "average man" as still average—"a mediocre fellow, and pleased with himself, to boot"—it has to be added that advertising does its level best to keep the average man average and mediocre. We have Mr. Mayer's own words for this:

"Advertising has concentrated," writes *Fortune's* Daniel Bell in the *New Leader*, "on arousing the anxieties and manipulating the fears of consumers to coerce them into buying."

Stripped of its emotional language, . . . this argument means that advertising creates feelings of insecurity for the purely commercial purpose of increasing the value of a brand. Reduced to cases, the charge is that Listerine and Colgate force people to worry about mouth odors to persuade them to use a product which, it is claimed, eliminates bad breath.

And there is no way around it: the accusation is true. (Though it must be said that advertising has only a relatively minor influence on fundamental attitudes, and cannot create a fear or an anxiety not already present in the consumer—at least in the latent form of an experience not fully considered—before he comes upon the ad.) Advertising undoubtedly does magnify the pains of modern existence so it can sell products which are supposed to soothe them.

Mr. Mayer is a tolerant fellow who believes that sometimes people *do* feel better from doing what the advertiser asks them to do, even though the benefits may be all "in their minds," and sometimes the products "actually will produce some of the physical benefits claimed." All in all, he is mostly amused by the situation:

Measuring the damage done to the national psyche by the additional fears created by advertising, as against the soothing of the national psyche achieved by removing the same fears from a number of people who previously suffered them, is a task for a subtle metaphysician indeed.

One thing more, and then we can excuse Mr. Mayer from further testimony. He points out, in his first paragraph, that there is very little "intelligent" material in print on the advertising business (he has a book of his own on the subject, *Madison Avenue, U.S.A.*, coming out this month). Why should this be? Mr. Mayer gives the obvious reason—that specialists in advertising are of necessity lightly endowed with the critical faculty—but there must be a more important reason than this. The reason we come to is that really effective criticism of advertising must press on from the almost self-evident judgments commonly made to a revolutionary attack on the basic philosophy and "way of life" of Western civilization. While a man might make such criticisms, he would find it difficult to get them published—especially in a culture in which the

profits which may be reaped from advertising have raised the charges for printing far beyond any sensible level of cost for the mechanics of human communications.

What is at issue is the sense and conception of the self. An advertising-dominated culture is a culture which has no real respect for the human self. This follows from the fact that our culture has no respect for the capacities of the human self. How is this so? The human self has various capacities, but chief among them is the capacity to speak, to communicate ideas and judgments about the meaning of things. These communications, when made, are ends in themselves. Their purpose is to raise the level of common human understanding. We might call them or compare them with works of art. A work of art is an end in itself. Its reason for being is in itself.

There are some publishers, no doubt, who publish to give expression to communications which are ends in themselves, and not merely a means of selling goods to consumers. But a publisher who is not simply a philanthropist, or who, however philanthropic in spirit, has not the money to be a philanthropist, usually finds it necessary to put into print things which have no reason for existing other than that they are expected to make money.

Now a philosopher is a man who would rather tear out his tongue than use it to speak for the purpose of making money. It is not really necessary to use the capacities of the human self in order to make money. You can make money with your hands. You can use the body for satisfying the needs of the body. You don't have to prostitute the mind in order to stay alive.

But in a culture so habituated to disrespect for the capacities of the mind—the *knowing* faculty—it becomes very difficult to survive without a misuse of the capacities of the human self. There ought to be a better way to put this. It becomes difficult to survive, we might say, because it *seems* necessary to use the mind for ulterior purposes, to obtain ends which are

beneath the true capacity and dignity of the mind. What, then, is advertising? Advertising is omnipresent graphic evidence of the preoccupation of men's minds with issues and ends which are beneath the dignity and capacity of the mind.

So here we are, back with the old question: How can we possibly release ourselves from this Babylonian Captivity? What can men do—what can they do as individuals—to shape their lives in a way that is consistent with the true nature of human beings? The "system," as we say, is against them, and the system governs the very processes of life.

The familiar answer, the one that immediately comes to mind, is that we shall have to redesign the system. But this answer is a fallacy. It is fallacy because it assumes that the system really has the power to control our lives. It is a fallacy because it shows too much respect for the system. To want to change the system *first* is to admit that the system is all-powerful, and this is exactly what we must never admit if we are to have any hope of breaking with the system.

The unfamiliar answer, but the one, it seems to us, which must be made, is to develop so much respect and even reverence for the self and for the works and capacities of the self that the limitations and demands of the system—any system, even a "good" system—are found to be laughably irrelevant.

For nobody is going to take the trouble to break with the system—which means, in a changing world, with "systemism"—unless he has strong convictions that this is the only way to live. Thus the idea of the self is the key to human freedom. The idea of the self needs to be of such a character that the individual can without too much fear and sense of loss get rid of his role-playing tendency and discover the irrepressible reality of his own life. His self must take possession of himself.

Inevitably, when we get on this subject, we are driven to a discussion of art and the artist, for the reason that the artist is a type of man giving expression to ends in themselves, responding to an irrepressible, inward urge. The artist, if he is genuinely an artist and not some sort of poseur or imitator, leaves behind him a track of enriched meanings. Every work he produces is a more or less excellent portion of some universe of human discourse. Whatever he does is a statement about the meaning of life and human awareness.

Better than the artist, perhaps, although not so serviceable as an illustration, is the philosopher. The philosopher will never say anything in order to get you to do something. The aim of the philosopher is to understand what *he* is doing and to help you to understand what you are doing. It may be changing a tire or comprehending the stars; the activity does not matter, so long as it is a natural and necessary part of life.

But philosophers, as we are so often told, must eat. There is nothing anti-human or unphilosophical about eating. Philosophers, we suspect, eat better than most people, because they don't eat too much and are able to enjoy what they do eat.

Well, what is this philosopher going to do in our society? How is he going to fit himself in with the mechanisms of an acquisitive culture which has no respect for the mind and its ends? He may have a tough time, of course, unless he is so strong in nature that he is able to cut through all the nonsense and ulterior mouthings of words, so as to command attention. Unless he is a Gandhi or a Schweitzer, people will tell him he is "impractical." But a man becomes strong by not listening to such people, and by refusing to talk about things he doesn't care about or believe in. He will be a man who stops going around saying, "I have to compromise; the system makes me." He is no innocent. He is a member of the human race and the human race made the system. The system is a part of his life, a bad part. He will be a man who begins by fighting each "compromise" in

whatever way he can. If he is in the advertising business when he starts thinking about being a philosopher, he can get out of the advertising business, for a start. He may have to take a cut in income, but he will not be the first man to do this for a good reason. Every man who takes a cut in income for a good reason is a man who weakens the idolatry of income and strengthens the freedom of the individual. If he says, "But my children will suffer," he is a phony philosopher. No child of any man ever suffered from his father's integrity and desire to be an honest man, a philosopher. The child may of course suffer according to the standards of the acquisitive system and according to the ulterior ends held up by the advertising business, but aren't those the standards we are trying to abolish? To worry over-much about a cut in income is like working in a brothel to get the money to buy all those expensive vitamin pills.

But where do you draw the line? That is the point. When you are setting up to oppose systemism, you draw your own line, and you let everyone else draw his, and you trust in the essential nature of human beings to draw the right lines, sooner or later, no matter what lines you or they happen to be drawing, now. You can't be against systemism and at the same time become an authority on how to draw the lines. You can only draw your own and maybe explain why you do it the way you do. Other men will draw theirs; or are you so much better than they, that you can tell *them* what to do? You won't want to tell them, if you have faith in man, although you may discuss generally the question of drawing lines.

But that, it will be argued, makes everything subjective, and nobody will know what is really right! Of course it will make everything subjective, which is what, in the long run, all morality worth reaching after has to be. And *why* won't anybody know what is right? Do the people who say nobody will know—do *they* know? And if *they* know, why can't other people know? Are *they* somebody special?

This is the place in the argument when somebody, after a cautious look around to see who is listening, reminds us of the "masses" who, for all their wonderful qualities, are in need of help. One must agree. The masses do need help. But do they need it from *our* system? Do they need right and wrong explained to them? Do they need to be *sold* something? Selling, after all, is what we're good at. It is time to consider the simple fact that people who go around selling other people things and systems they don't thoroughly understand are people who are going to get their throats cut some dark night. You don't help people by trying to hurry them along some predetermined path to salvation or prosperity, or to whatever it is the missionary salesmen believe in. You help people only when you help them to be and understand themselves, and this has nothing to do with selling; in fact, it is absolutely opposed to selling.

Well, how do you help the masses? You help them by valuing above all the human self and the capacities of the human self. If you do this, you will never corrupt communications with ulterior purposes, and the startling moral power of honest communications which respect the essential humanity and freedom of those to whom they are directed will be enough to produce a new kind of helpfulness. With honesty in communications, there will be no wars, no missionaries, no nationalism, no cultural egotism, and lots and lots of money left to buy plenty to eat for everybody, if that should still be a problem, anywhere in the world.

## *REVIEW*

### "THE OFFENDERS"

THIS volume by Giles Playfair and Derrick Sington constitutes the most thorough examination of the consequences of capital punishment we have yet seen. (London, Secker & Warburg, 1957.) The book seeks answer to this question: "What are the motives which induce societies the world over to condemn some men and women to death, to punish others by imprisonment, to treat some as mentally ill, to allow others to go scot free?"—an inquiry which seems to us much more important than even the study of the psycho-pathology of the criminals themselves.

Playfair and Sington explain the scope of the book in their Preface:

In the first part of this book, we relate six stories of crime—against property, against the person and against the State. Three of the cases are famous; three relatively unknown; and they are drawn from various countries of the world. As we interpret them, they have no heroes and no villains. Our aim is not to show either that a guilty man met his deserts or that an innocent man was unjustly convicted but to state, implicitly and dramatically, some arguments concerning the problem of crime and punishment that we hold to be essential truths.

These arguments are set forth fully in the second part of the book—the summing-up; but for convenience sake they may here be listed briefly as follows:

1. That all punishment by killing is wrong.
2. That to demand the abolition of the death penalty for one crime (say, murder), while advocating its retention for another (say, treason)—the ground upon which the majority of abolition campaigns, notably the recent one in Britain, have been fought—is illogical and ultimately self-defeating.
3. That abolition should not be fought for, as it mostly has been, merely as an end in itself, but rather as the first essential step in a programme of penal reform.
4. That society, through the practice of the deterrent-retributive theory of punishment, not only violates the rights of the individual, but fails in the end to protect itself.
5. That the only rational approach to the problem of crime, if the rights alike of the individual

and of society are to be properly considered, is the clinical or curative approach.

The authors devote more than half their pages to case histories of apparently psychotic killers. What they endeavor to show—with considerable success, we think—is that many of those who have been executed for their crimes have been either hopelessly sick (irresponsible), or "potentially valuable." The authors are not conventional opposers of capital punishment. Beginning with a full statement of the horrible details of murders committed by warped minds, they show that they have no intention of glossing over either the crimes or their perpetrators. But along with the gruesome facts of outrageous crimes, the case histories present evidence that the actual motive behind the decision for execution was that of revenge. And when revenge is the motive, it is impossible to secure a fair trial. Care in documentation does not inhibit Playfair and Sington from speaking out their own opinions with no reserve, as when they say that "an almost foolproof technique has been developed in both Britain and America for the legal extermination of psychopathic murderers." This technique, they continue, "is dependent upon the co-operation of forensic psychiatry and the law; it is born of ignorance and prejudice; it reflects the public's desire for vengeance on the so-called 'monsters' and 'mad dogs.'"

The story of the execution of Neville Heath, an obviously mentally deranged murderer, is summed up in a similar mood:

The routine of a civilized practice had been gone through, and the way was now clear for the simple act of vengeance, which it had all along concealed, to take place. It took place ceremonially, and though privately, hardly out of earshot of the howling of the mob. On the morning of October 26th, 1946, Neville George Clevely Heath was hanged at Pentonville Prison.

And so other parents mourned; and there was another mutilated body, as irrecoverably dead as those of Mr. Gardner and Miss Marshall; and nobody in his heart doubted that sooner or later another man of Heath's misshapen kind would come, and that when he did he neither would nor could be deterred by what had been done to this one.

Playfair and Sington do not neglect one of society's most atrocious crimes—the execution of men and women for treason. There was no justifiable psychological or sociological reason, for instance, for the "example" execution of the Rosenbergs in the United States, nor for the legal killing of William Joyce in England. The motive of revenge was obviously present in both these prosecutions, since it is quite plain that "treason, by its very nature, is a relative conception. All history teaches that the traitor of one nation may be the hero of another; that the traitor of today may be the martyr of tomorrow. From Jesus Christ—indisputably a traitor in the eyes of his race—to Sir Roger Casement (execrated by the British and revered by the Irish) the lesson is clear."

Anyone interested in the issue of capital punishment will benefit from a careful reading of Playfair and Singtons's account of the Swedish penal system—an almost unbelievable reversal of both the psychology and practice of other "civilized" nations:

In Sweden, murderers are not executed; nor, unless they are adjudged incurably insane, are they kept in confinement for the rest of their natural lives. Ten years is the very maximum sentence they are likely to serve, and upon their release they are considered to have paid their debt to society in full. Regardless of how brutal and shocking their crime may have been, they carry with them the faith of the Swedish Penal Authorities in their capacity to lead fruitful and peaceful lives in the free world: a faith which statistics show is almost invariably justified.

But the Swedish Penal Authorities recognise that a released murderer's chances of rehabilitation, and of personal happiness, would be greatly reduced if he were obliged to live in a society that might still be hostile or antagonistic towards him; that might, at the very least, be distrustful of him. For this reason, they usually advise him to change his name and to make his home in a different town, or part of the country, from the one in which his crime was committed. They regard it as part of their responsibility to find him a job and, if necessary, living accommodation. It is likely that the man for whom he eventually works will be the only member of the community aware of his true identity, and this man will be sworn to secrecy. In short, it is a cardinal principle of Swedish penal policy to protect the anonymity of released offenders, particularly of

released murderers, and to make as certain as possible that their privacy will not be invaded by such as newspaper reporters.

The authors of *The Offenders* feel that both America and Britain are gradually moving toward rejection of executions, since the "extreme penalty" is now exacted so seldom. But much remains to be done:

It may be wondered whether capital punishment remains a problem worth bothering much about; whether, since it appears to be falling into disuse, and though a barbarity not nearly as barbarous as it used to be, it couldn't be safely left to die out on its own. But there are two good reasons why this is not so. In the first place, so long as capital punishment remains a legal weapon in theory, the chance and the danger remain that it will be wielded in practice. This was shown by the traditionally abolitionist Dutch, Norwegians and Danes after the war, and, much more terribly, by the Nazis before and during it. In the second place, capital punishment symbolises a penal system based on principles of retribution and deterrence. While this system failed in the eighteenth century, when it was practiced largely through violence (the stocks, the whip, the branding-iron and so on) it failed equally in the nineteenth when it was practiced largely through solitary confinement in penitentiaries, with capital punishment as a sort of anachronistic appendage. But so long as the death penalty is retained in principle, and employed, however sparingly, in practice, it blinds the public to a realisation of this failure, and stands in the way of a genuinely new and revolutionary approach to the problem of crime prevention. The saddest proof of this is that organized antagonists of the death penalty themselves make the mistake, by and large, of treating abolition purely as an end in itself, with the result that they try to buy it with promissory notes of alternative punishments, which they claim will prove no less retributive and no less deterrent.

Yet capital punishment, in spite of its symbolising an outworn and hopeless penal system, is not, as we have shown, used any longer in conformity with the principles on which that system was originally based. Accordingly, we cannot believe that the arguments advanced for it by its proponents, whether sound or not, account for its continuance. To understand the real reason why it is retained one must go beyond the realm of rational thinking.

*COMMENTARY*  
**IN THE INTEREST OF CANDOR**

FROM time to time, friends of MANAS, learning of the budget problems of a magazine of this sort, ask why we do not sell advertising to supplement the income obtained from subscriptions. We have felt it necessary to look at this suggestion rather carefully. After all, survival is desirable for a magazine as well as the effort to maintain editorial integrity, and even the most conscientious publisher is inclined to want both.

Good book advertising, surely, it is pointed out, cannot be objectionable. Then there are food products of merit. And why not run "personals" such as you find in the *New Statesman and Nation*, as a service to readers?

These suggestions are all reasonable. After all, whatever one may say about the horrors of the "psychology" of advertising as practiced by the experts in manipulation, a man who makes something does nothing immoral in printing an announcement of what it is and how much it costs. There is a place in the best of societies for such communications.

The difficulty, as we see it, is this. MANAS publishers might welcome some ads, as performing a legitimate service to readers in notifying them of the availability of certain products—say, the nuts packed by Koinonia, the sandals produced (at one time) by the New Jersey contingent of the Bruderhof, or the woodworking of the Bruderhof in Paraguay. Doubtless hundreds of other products and services could be found which might, in the opinion of the publishers, be appropriately advertised in the pages of MANAS.

But we would also be asked to accept advertising concerning things about which we know nothing, and about still other things of which we would have a very low opinion. Such advertising would have to be refused, and this would constitute, in many cases, a quite arbitrary censorship.

Plainly, this idea would not work at all. It would not work, that is, if the publishers continued in their resolve to publish nothing that they are unable to believe in themselves. Thus, taking the view that it is wrong to offer for sale to other people things that you have no confidence in, yourself, MANAS is obliged to refuse all advertising, even though there might be many things we should like to tell about in these pages, if we could afford the space.

So, our present thinking is that we are unable to increase our income by the sale of advertising.



## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

### DISCUSSION OF A GENERATION: IV

JEAN MALAQUAIS, in "Reflections on Hipsterism," in the Winter number of *Dissent*, points out that the violently disrupted members of this generation are a *world*, rather than a peculiarly American, phenomenon, and cannot be explained by saying, as Norman Mailer has suggested, that they identify themselves with the language and "beatness" of the underprivileged American Negro. Malaquais reminds us that "the American hipster has his counterparts and equivalents in countries with no Negro population: Sweden, England, Russia, Poland, France, to name only a few places. The Swedish youth runs properly amok. The British Teddy, the Russian *besprizornye*, the Polish hooligans, the French pseudo-existentialist fauna, don't behave differently toward life than the hipster. All are the product of an identical social phenomenon prevailing in highly industrialized and more or less paternalistically ruled countries: extreme inner insecurity dipped in a State-sponsored 'welfare' at the price of a terrific loss to the individual's self. That's one reason why, as a rule, they react on the level of a purely personal idea of 'recovery'—but from what and toward what none of them really knows." Or, as John C. Holmes put it in the February *Esquire*:

There are indications that the Beat Generation is not just an American phenomenon. England has its Teddy Boys, Japan its Sun Tribers, and even in Russia there are hipsters of a sort. Everywhere young people are reacting to the growing collectivity of modern life, and the constant threat of collective death, with the same disturbing extremity of individualism. Everywhere they seem to be saying to their elders: "We are different from you, and we can't believe in the things you believe in—if only because *this* is the world you have wrought." Everywhere, they are searching for their own answers.

For many of them, the answer may well be jail or madness or death. They may never find the faith that Kerouac believes is at the end of their road. But

on one thing they would all agree: the valueless abyss of modern life is unbearable.

By now, perhaps, we have covered the most discouraging aspects of the hipsters and of the "Beat Generation" in general. There remains the more important task of looking for signs of hope. And there are such signs, even among the uninteresting members of this generation who have turned to super-conformity. In Burling Lowrey's letter to the *New Republic* (Jan. 6), we find suggestion that the young who are not in the least interested in the way the adult world is run are nevertheless capable of sympathy for those whom it has *run over*. After commenting on the complete indifference of his freshmen college students toward English and history, and noting their preoccupation with the technical details of the speed age, Mr. Lowrey adds this postscript:

Most freshmen can talk and write intelligently on the subject of *juvenile delinquency*. They know something about the subtleties of gang warfare and are capable of getting excited about the social factors which breed delinquency. A few of them appear to have done a little reading on the subject.

Another area in which Johnny seems to be intellectually curious is that of *race relations* in the United States. He is vaguely aware of the fact that the Supreme Court handed down a decision that has caused a social upheaval climaxing in Little Rock and he could probably identify the NAACP on an examination.

These particular adolescents have not lost their capacity to identify—unlike Gold's "frozen thugs gathered west of Sheridan Square"—but they incline only to honest identification with people who are oppressed or confused. They are, at least psychically, aware of the meaning behind a sentence penned by Andrea Caffi (in an essay printed by Dwight Macdonald in an appendix to *The Root is Man*). Caffi wrote that "what distinguishes 'mass politics' is the fact that it reduces human beings and their occasional spontaneity to the function of undifferentiated and interchangeable particles of energy of which the only thing that matters is how quickly they can be agglomerated into large numbers." With even

half-closed eyes on history, the younger generation can sense that whatever "mass politics" (*i.e.*, war-gearred society) may mean to the politicians, it means a zeroing out on the chance of the single person to realize individuality. And so, perhaps consequently, the "hipster" may be seen as trying to make one stab in the dark to reach his *own* detachment or submergence before society accomplishes it for him.

Holmes' "The Philosophy of the Beat Generation" in *Esquire* for February is good on this point:

In his most enlightened state, the hipster feels that argument, violence and concern for attachments are ultimately square, and he says, "Yes, man, yes!" to the Buddhist principle that most miseries arise from these emotions. I once heard a young hipster exclaim wearily to the antagonist in a barroom brawl: "Oh, man, you don't want to interfere with him, with his kick. I mean, man, what a *drag!*"

On this level, the hipster practices a kind of passive resistance to the Square society in which he lives, and the most he would ever propose as a program would be the removal of every social and intellectual restraint to the expression and enjoyment of his unique individuality, and the "kicks" of "digging" life through it. And, as Norman Mailer said in the afore-quoted article, "The affirmation implicit in [this] proposal is that man would then prove to be more creative than murderous, and so would not destroy himself." Which is, after all, a far more spiritual, or even religious, view of human nature than that held by many of those who look at this Beat Generation and see only its excesses.

This conviction of the creative power of the unfettered individual soul stands behind everything in which the members of this generation interest themselves. If they are curious about drugs, for instance, their initial reason is as much the desire to tap the unknown world inside themselves as to escape from the unbearable world outside. "But, man, last night," they will say, "I got so high I knew *everything*. I mean, I knew *why*."

In the arts, modern jazz is almost exclusively the music of the Beat Generation, as poetry (at least until Kerouac's novel) is its literature. If the members of this generation attend to a wailing sax in much the same way as men once used to attend the words and gestures of sages, it is because jazz is primarily the

music of inner freedom, of improvisation, of the creative individual rather than the interpretive group. It is the music of a submerged people, who *feel* free, and this is precisely how young people *feel* today. For this reason, the short, violent life of alto-saxist Charlie Parker (together with those of Dean and Dylan Thomas) exerts a strong attraction on this generation, because all three went their own uncompromising way, listening to their inner voices, celebrating whatever they could find to celebrate, and then willingly paying the cost in self-destruction. But if young people idolize them, they have no illusions about them as martyrs, for they know (and almost stoically accept) that one of the risks of going so fast, and so far, is death.

Joseph Campbell's *Hero With a Thousand Faces*, a book of many values, may help us here. An examination of "the heroic image," as depicted in classic literature and as described by the perceptive psychologist, throws considerable light on the state of mind described by Mr. Holmes. We think it is safe to say that members of the "beat generation" have no conception of a heroic image. They don't pretend to be heroes, to know any heroes, or to want to find them. The characters of Kerouac's *On the Road* seem to be caught or lost somewhere in the middle of a classic process.

In his description of the mythology of the hero, Campbell endeavors to show that for any man to realize fulfillment, there must be a passage of the soul through certain catalytic processes, symbolized by the achievements of the impressive characters of myth and legend:

The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation-initiation-return*. A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.

Campbell continues by remarking that to understand the man of the hero image, one must not only be willing to be crucified, to be unperturbed by the immanence of death, but also

must wish to be reborn—and being reborn means a transformation "by which the higher spiritual dimension is attained that makes possible the resumption of the work of creation." The more articulate members of the generation under discussion seem to have reached "the first step," which is that of "detachment or withdrawal—a radical transfer of emphasis from the external to the internal world, a retreat from the desperations of the waste land to the peace of the everlasting realm that is within."

But the true hero's "retreat" is preparatory to a return to society with a "boon." He is seeking, not immolation, but a new identification with the world of human value at a higher level. Today, it appears, we have none of those helpful initiatory rites which encourage the man in travail to conceive of a meaningful rebirth. Whatever we may say about the psychological stress caused by the immanence of war, by social and family disorganization, so far as any meaningful linkage with the past is concerned, it seems to us that it is precisely the lack of the image of the hero which causes the energies of "the beat generation" to fly off in such frightening directions.

## *FRONTIERS* Letters on India

WE have two letters concerned with the state of modern India, one a reply to C.V.G.'s article in *MANAS* for Jan. 15, "Disillusioned India," the other a comment from an American now in India concerning the causes of the "disillusionment" which C.V.G., our correspondent in Madras, had written about. The first letter is from an Indian now residing in the United States:

C.V.G.'s "Disillusioned India" reflects, to me, an attempt at genuine analysis of modern India and a sense of frustration peculiarly his own. Lest your readers think that this sense of frustration has come over the whole of India, I would express my feeling as a fellow Indian.

It is true that the government machinery is working through serious trials and tribulations and it is no wonder that unobserved and unpunished corruption still exists in certain quarters to a large extent. In fact, it is a little too much to expect of even a superman, or a band of supermen, that these evils can be eradicated within a few years of self-rule. Only a body of highly energetic and momentarily inspired young fanatics resorting to totalitarian means could undertake the task of a quick remedy for all evils. But I am glad that even the young fanatics of India realize the stupendousness of the task.

Politics, as C.V.G. points out, is a kind of corruption. If the great men of India shun the corruption of politics and remain indifferent to the growing evils in their country, then by no standard do these men deserve the title of "great." I am sure that the leaders of India come from the ranks of the great. They have developed an infinite capacity for taking pains with the evils of politics and for enduring calmly public censure. They are by no means under the illusion that they enjoy the hero-worship of the masses. Most of them are philosophers in intellect and saints in attitude. Consequently they command a great deal of respect, by their personal character, from the rising generation. This may be an emotional appeal, but it is also an appeal guided by an intellectual discrimination and love of the good and great.

India is, as she has always been, almost divinely inspired. The root of that inspiration lies not in the struggle for independence against a foreign power,

but in the process of rejuvenation initiated by the leaders of the Indian renaissance—men like Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Vivekananda, Devendra Nath Tagore, etc. We, the children of modern India, are products of that force. For some, that force expresses itself as an industrial revolution and this has also a necessity, too, in keeping engaged those incapable of higher ideas and in stirring them from mental apathy. In the searching young minds, the forces of this renaissance are creating an alertness to duty superior to nation-building. But nation-building is necessary for feeding the hungry millions.

We must first concentrate on the mundane task, otherwise we shall be mere wishful thinkers.

Taking stock of India as a whole, not necessarily including the government, the picture of the future as viewed from the present is hopeful. Never before, for instance, have the villagers showed such bursts of enthusiasm as they are doing now in participating in the community development program. While the project has been launched by the government, it is being carried on by the voluntary work of the inspired villagers. Within India's "socialistic pattern of society," there has been a tremendous rise in private enterprise and in the fields of individual and collective creativity. Hindu monks, with their eyes lifted to Brahman, are energetically pursuing humanitarian tasks which remind one of the days of Asoka.

I see, in India today, a rising consciousness, sometimes unperceived, which offers the greatest hope for the future.

B.K.D.

Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

The thing that is engaging about this letter is its unembarrassed declaration of high mission ("almost divinely inspired") for the nation and its measure of India's contemporary leaders as "philosophers in intellect and saints in attitude." To say such things to the peoples of the West is almost like waving a red flag at a bull. Yet the letter is without conceit. It is by a man who believes what he says and has no reason for hiding his convictions.

In judging such communications, a lot depends upon the choice of words. We, for example, would feel no reticence in claiming for the Founding Fathers of the United States an

inspiration of historic importance. They brought into being the theoretical basis and the concrete reality of a social order erected upon general principles of right and justice. If we cared for the feeling-tone of the words, "divinely inspired," we should not be reluctant to apply them to the authors of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. We take the view that every man who thinks justly and acts impartially can qualify as being divinely inspired. What is more divine than this? Divinity may encompass other qualities as well, but nothing, surely, which would be at odds with justice and impartiality. Any man who brings a universal dimension to human affairs is divinely inspired.

India, moreover, is a treasure-house of sublime religious philosophy and transcendental metaphysics. These resources have given India a clearly apparent mood in many of her undertakings. We do not object to calling this a kind of "divine inspiration," since it could happen to any people who would philosophize in the same way. According to this idea, divine inspiration is something which is won by extraordinary human effort, and not a privilege awarded by a supernatural power.

To have the responsibility of being "divinely inspired" is quite a burden to carry around with you. You have to be sure that you are living up to the opportunities afforded. So, rather than object to such an assumption, we take pleasure in the fact that a great culture of the Orient has preserved this idea of the role of man, and that modern skepticism and empiricism have not been able to obliterate it from the consciousness of Indians.

Our American correspondent takes another view:

I'm not surprised at the gloom of the Indian intellectuals. The amount and extent of corruption is indeed appalling. But why should it be otherwise? When you tear a culture to pieces, especially by means of industrialism, commerce, and money processes, of course there is a dreadful mess. Destruction always stimulates the greed and other

evils latent in people. It certainly is distressing to see. What a contrast there is in the India of today and India as I knew it under Gandhi's leadership in 1925-28! All one can do is to work for what one believes is right and let the effort bear fruit some day, in its own time, maybe. After all, England went through her period of corruption in public life, the rotten boroughs, etc. Apparently, mankind learns only the hard way, by making bad mistakes and then paying for them.

But it especially burns me up to see the greed operating here in India. In the U.S.A. we still have a margin of natural resources we can continue to waste for a few more years before the pinch and crash comes. But here, in India, with the soil so badly exhausted, and erosion continuing in a big way, with 380 million population, and four and a half million babies born every year, it seems to me folly for Nehru and the rest of the Congress and industrialists to be straining their credit to import big machinery from the West, to import NPK fertilizers and put up factories to make them here so as to give the Indian soils another shot, and then be overwhelmed with plant disease and insect pests and all the rest of the follies of thinking they can outsmart Nature. The continuing exploitation of the peasants ends in exploitation of the soil. The soil is in one sense like a person's skin. When a person gets as much as one third of his skin burned, he cannot recover; he dies. The topsoil is like that. When it gets eroded to a certain point, the desert takes over and marches on like a slow-moving horde of locusts.

In one of his books, Alfred North Whitehead says something to the effect that all the great advances made by man in the past nearly wrecked by the process of their realization the cultures where they arose. As I said before, these times are mighty distressing, but anyhow they are not boring!

The interesting thing about modern India, whatever one's opinion may be, is that everyone feels that developments of importance are going on there. With the possible exception of China, India represents the oldest civilization on the face of the earth which is still a "going concern." The culture of China, it might be argued, is now experiencing so radical a transformation that it can hardly be identified as continuous with the Chinese civilization of the past. India, however, is plainly carrying forward something of the spirit of her ancient traditions, and it is this quality of

continuity which impresses the rest of the world. India may now be ending only the first stages of a long process of regeneration. As our American correspondent in India points out, Indian leaders are now imitating in some measure the "progressive" methods of the West, and India is experiencing the growing pains which might be expected to afflict the first efforts at self-government of a people so long under the sway of first medieval and then colonial administrations. But of one thing we may be certain: The rest of the world is watching India's struggles with sympathy, friendliness, and some admiration.