

many charitable deeds the American drugstore performs unknowingly! It feeds the hungry, it refreshes the thirsty, at times it clothes the naked, it visits the nostalgic, it consoles the sad, it teaches the uninformed with its books and gives advice for those who need it. How many on their way to commit a crime, perhaps to

murder or to take their own life, may have found a drugstore in their path and have changed their minds? In this country of statistics, one figure is lacking: the would-be suicides who had a change of heart in the drugstore and became reconciled to life. They ought to send a postcard to the census office.

Quo Vadis, America?

MORDECAI ROSHWALD

1

A MAN BORN in another land seldom looks upon the present place of his residence as the native-born do. The detachment required for criticism of a nation is more easily found by an alien, especially if he has not resided for a great while in the country concerned.

With this apologetic preamble, I embark on some reflections provoked by the first six months of my visit to the United States. I shall try to put my observations candidly, even at the risk of offending sensibilities. Nor shall I try to describe those facets of American life that seem to be salutary: there is no need to praise health.

What I say here is neither a judge's verdict nor a scientist's finding. I present only hypotheses. These may be confirmed or refuted by longer observation. But I advance them now in the belief that certain issues must be raised before intelligent discussion can proceed. It is easier to evaluate a dead culture than a living. Yet the criticism of a living civilization nurtures that culture; to withhold such criticism is to reduce that society's vitality. In order to endure, a civilization must invite constant criticism. This criticism may be offered by an outsider; but it should be absorbed by the people within. Mine may be the hypotheses; the Americans should do the job of examining their veracity, and thereby examining themselves.

2

David Riesman, in his *Faces in the Crowd*, expresses the opinion that in contemporary America appear adumbrations of a society which he ventures to call *other-directed*.¹ Riesman writes,

"In the place of lifelong goals toward which one is steered as by a gyroscope, the other-directed person obeys a fluctuating series of short-run goals picked up (to continue with metaphor) by a radar . . . the parents and other adults encourage the child to tune to the people around him at any given time and share his preoccupation with their reactions to him and his to them."²

The meaning of this is that people tend to adjust their behaviour to other people's likings and opinions, and disregard their own opinions, tastes, moral standards—in fact, do not try to elaborate a point of view of their own. If a whole society lives according to such an unprincipled principle, there is bound to develop a laxness in aesthetic, moral, and cultural standards that verges on a spiritual anarchy (which may take the shape of acquiescent uniformity). If Riesman is right in his diagnosis about these tendencies in some parts of American society, his term "other-directed" is a much too mild an adjective for the description of the individual character and of the social phenomenon he has in mind.

The point deserves some elaboration.

Other-directedness prompts people to imitate other people, not only up to a certain point and half-consciously, but unreservedly and with full consciousness. Imitation to such an extent results in manifestations of similarity and uniformity beyond the usual expectation in a western society.

As long as this other-directedness is expressed in the similarity of drugstores throughout the country, in the universality of Howard Johnsons, in the uniformity of innumerable industrial products—the offence may be limited to a few European tourists who expect more variety while traveling through a sub-continent. They may have expected more diversity in the classical land of “free enterprise.” Instead, they may be surprised to find that the relative lack of rules and restrictions does not necessarily encourage diversity in production. Rather, the law of the likings of the majority seems to operate and to guide industry and commerce, almost to the exclusion of the individual dissenting taste. The resulting uniformity is so much greater, if the society is inclined to regard as virtue what the society (or the majority within it) likes, i.e., if the society is consciously other-directed.

When this other-directed tendency to uniformity intrudes into the realm of art and literature, the menace may become greater. The musicals and big “new” hits in American songs may seem one-patterned to me, because of my untrained ear perhaps. When, however, the cinematographic industry is considered, I would suggest with more authority that the tendency to uniformity has a deteriorating influence on this typically American medium of art. In the great majority of pictures, one is able to predict the development and ending of the drama, because there are certain established patterns which are adhered to. If He loves her and She loves him right at the beginning of the picture, there is bound to emerge some illusory conflict, through misunderstanding, which will be cleared up at the end of the performance to pave the way for the happy

ending. A villain hardly ever escapes his just punishment, whether by the verdict of a judge or by the hand of God (or by a non-blind chance). The theme of the pattern of the cinematographic drama in the United States could be described in more detail, and with a few variations—such as the westerner, the love story, the crooked business affair, and the rest. I shall not embark on this. Suffice it to conclude, that the tendency to uniformity, so closely connected with other-directedness, has exercised a stagnating influence on this medium of artistic expression in America.

If the problem of uniformity is studied by investigation of the current writing, this seems to result in another disappointing confirmation of our reflections. Writing, as far as general periodicals are concerned, seems to express a certain pattern of verbiage, construction, approach. It reminds one of creative-writing-courses which, if successful, kill all the creative vitality of a potential writer, or bar such a person from success in publishing by preferring stereotyped mediocrity to sparks of individual genius. Our point can be tested in a simple way: take a Digest, which is a collection of articles and stories from a variety of magazines and periodicals, and try to identify the various pieces by distinguishing the style of one article from that of another. It seems to me that hardly a distinction can be made. Most of the articles are written in a pattern which excludes individuality altogether.

If we examine the problem of other-directed people in morals, we reach the crux of the issue. To be other-directed, to regard as the norm of one's own behavior what other people think and do, is to give up one of the qualities which make us truly human individuals. A human being who does not take the advice of his own conscience in matters of value, but looks for the likings of other human beings, anxious to please them by conforming to their behaviour, is an imitating anthropoid, who cannot claim to partake of what has been

called human dignity: a dignity that comes with the capacity to be a moral judge of behaviour.

Not every human being is a competent moral judge, and innumerable mistakes, some with horrible consequences, have been made in the name of moral judgment. But this does not mean that giving up such a judgment is a solution: that would resemble an attempt to win a game by refusing to play. An internal intent to judge and to have a point of view of one's own is a prerequisite of human dignity as well as of human creative culture. Other-directedness is an ideal—if it is an ideal at all—that, if successful, would produce a collectivisation of human beings; and no coercion would be needed to make them perfectly uniform in behaviour.

One result of other-directedness is imitation and uniformity. Another result is lack of purpose and of persistence in behaviour. There seems to be a bewilderingly frequent change in the activities of many American institutions. There is a blue-print for a certain project, much planning and discussing, and then suddenly the whole project is dropped, forgotten as easily as if nobody ever dreamed of it. American foreign policy suffers thus, it seems to me.

This lack of persistence in keeping with one's line of action, with one's promise, with one's principle, seems to be connected with other-directedness in the sense that the lack of a stability of conduct which goes with the lack of a moral standard is reflected in the mercurial character of conduct and behaviour. If one is always watching for others' opinion, one becomes accustomed to constant changes, and no longer understands or feels the significance of constancy in character and behaviour.

But other-directedness is not the only fashionable mode of behaviour in America. I do not refer to the old-fashioned norms which still may be significant throughout the country, though mainly perhaps with people of older generation. A directly opposed standard, which appeals to many, is the ideal of the smart and tough guy.

He is the man who is purposeful, who is persistent, and who knows how to achieve his purpose through tenacity, cleverness, strength. This might seem a counter-balance to other-directedness, but it is not. For the smart guy is not the man with a moral decision of his own, as opposed to the masses who desire merely to follow. He is the man, rather, with a private purpose and the will to achieve it, at whatever cost to morality. The public admires this type not for his purpose, but for his cleverness in handling situations and people. Their admiration is for the ruthless man whose power of will brooks no obstacles, but into whose conscience nobody inquires. The tough or smart guy (sometimes toughness is required, and sometimes smartness) is the new incarnation of Machiavelli's Prince, or of the ruthless disciples of the Greek sophists, with some allowance for the change in time and place.

Now the combination of other-directedness with the qualities of the smart tough guy is especially dangerous. One result of this is the monopoly of means of communication by commercialism. Most of American broadcasting and television is evidence of this. Through shows competing in degree of stupidity, the other-directed masses are urged to buy superfluities. It is true that art and culture controlled by a totalitarian regime must lose their value; it may be equally true, however, that art and culture controlled by promoters without norms also are bound to lose momentum and become mere means for fooling most of the people most of the time—even if the fooling be less sinister than in totalitarian states.

This combination of other-directedness and smartness on the political level results in the phenomenon of mass-hysteria, which can be started by a "wise guy" who is sufficiently ruthless. There are other forces, of a more conservative character, that may succeed in checking such developments, but the danger remains. The moment the masses are educated to consult the opinion of other people before consulting their own mind—or even *instead* of forming their

own judgment—they are a potential prey for a fanatic, or a ruthless man of ambition.

If we follow the example of some American social scientists, our point may be clarified by referring to a model symbolizing the situation examined. This is supplied by Rudyard Kipling's story about the Bandar-log and Kaa.³ The Bandar-log are the monkey-folk of the jungle, whose characteristics are not only that they live in a herd and obviously imitate each other (a point not emphasized by Kipling, though necessary for our model), but also show a peculiar lack of persistence in any undertaking:

"They have no remembrance. They boast and chatter and pretend that they are a great people about to do great affairs in the jungle, but the falling of a nut turns their minds to laughter, and all is forgotten."

Kaa, the big python, is the master of the Bandar-log, not only because of his strength, but also because he can hypnotize them. When he is at work, they suddenly lose their other-directed unsteadiness and know to concentrate and follow his commands:

"'Bandar-log', said the voice of Kaa at last, 'can ye stir foot or hand without my order? Speak!'

'Without thy order we cannot stir foot or hand, O Kaa!'

'Good! Come all one pace nearer to me.'

The lines of the monkeys swayed forward helplessly . . .

'Nearer!' hissed Kaa, and they all moved again."

The techniques used by the smart guys may be somewhat different: not hypnosis, in the strict sense, but suggestion combined with persuasion and propaganda. Yet the results may be, in their own way, not less disastrous.

3

This social situation, if diagnosed rightly,

has its sources in certain phenomena of American life. To unearth them all may be an intricate task which would require a more extensive study than the present one. But we may try to suggest certain hypotheses.

One of the reasons for this development in America may be sought in the vastness of the country, combined with the ease of moving from one place to another. It is a commonplace in human history that culture is closely connected with sedentary life. Incidentally, even the word *culture* is etymologically linked with cultivation of soil, the farmer's profession. That culture was more easily developed by agricultural rather than nomadic peoples can be easily explained by the fact that sedentary life facilitates leisure and reflection, accumulation of tradition, and establishment of norms of behaviour. Nomadic life accustoms people not to stick to forms and norms, not to be emotionally attached to a place or a home, not to reflect at leisure, but to think in connection with action only, not to stick to a certain way of life but always to be adaptable to new situations and surroundings.

Allowance being made for the general character of modern society, people in America lead a relatively nomadic life as compared with most other countries. This is usually referred to as the great mobility in American life. People living in New York, suddenly being offered a better job, sell their homes and belongings and move to Chicago or Los Angeles. This happens often and in most occupations: business, civil service, education, perhaps even agriculture. It is usually financially unreasonable to take many of one's possessions when moving to a distant place. So most things are sold, and a new start is made in the new place. People who do not actually move, usually expect the possibility of moving to another place some day. So they do not acquire possession to which they would be attached: home remains a sort of a luxurious tent, its function is that of a hotel; it is not an English home which proverbially

ally is one's castle. It is not significant in this respect that American homes may be more convenient and better equipped than many English homes. Perhaps it is typical that so many structures in the United States are of wood.

With the lack of attachment to a certain place and locality goes psychological instability and the flippancy of character. In place of the fixed standards of sedentary people, come the precepts of adjustability to environment and changing conditions of the mobile, "nomadic", people. Always to fit in, to be well-adjusted, seems the easiest way for the traveller, and the conclusion can be easily drawn that, to feel happy, one has to be well-adjusted not only to the material surroundings, but also to the human community. And the easiest way to be adjusted to other people is to accept their standards of behaviour, to be other-directed.

The great mobility in America has its effects in the disruption of the family life. It is almost a commonplace that when a boy, or even a girl, goes to college, he or she is leaving home for another place, and is not expected to return and live with his or her parents after graduation, even if he or she does not marry instantly. Families are dispersed through the country not of necessity, but because of business opportunities and lack of restraint to move through a sub-continent. If, however, families *can* be so easily dispersed, it is well to prepare for it in advance by reducing emotional family ties to the minimum. Thus the family, which could have been the bulwark of traditional norms and standards⁴, can hardly have its impact on the minds of youngsters, who care more for the opinion of the larger social unit outside the family, and thus become other-directed.

If the basic unit of human society, the family, does not contribute its due share in forming the individual's character, the harm could be undone—to a certain degree at least—if the educational system would take up the task of building the character of the young people. Here, however, certain

modern theories in psychology and education interfere with disastrous effects for the American education.

The psycho-analytic school in psychology may be credited with important discoveries. Its utilization beyond the treatment of certain mental disorders is more dubious, but I concede that it may be beneficial to take it into consideration in the education of children. Relaxation of authoritarianism in education, that comes with psycho-analytically-minded persons, should have been useful in Victorian England. But to base the *whole* of the educational system on psycho-analytical (or pseudo-psychoanalytical) premises may mean abandoning of education altogether.

American education seems to suffer from the fact that it is thoroughly permeated with some notions of the various psycho-analytical schools and their pedagogical modifications. To let the child freely develop, to see his always as the right side, to minimize or even discard the notions of right and wrong, to understand and to forgive, and not to blame and to punish,—all this may be as pernicious as it seems rosy. The child thus brought up (or rather allowed to grow freely with a minimum of education) may become a self-centered man, free from notions of right and wrong, free from moral distinctions. Perhaps some will be spared neurotic complexes, but many will develop psychopathic characteristics by not taking into consideration the moral aspects of behaviour. Many will be closer to a *tabula rasa*, in the emotional and intellectual sense, than to a cultured man who has to absorb much of tradition, as well as to confront conflicts, in order to become a complex human being, as a civilized man is. They may be spared the hardships of decisions—by trying always to be well-adjusted (and therefore other-directed)—but human relations will be the victim of such lack of capacity to arrive at moral decisions (and most real decisions are moral).

If the educational system in America promotes other-directedness on the one

hand, it is not altogether dissociated from the vogue of admiring the tough guy. The emphasis of pragmatic achievement, the stress laid on individual success—coupled with the lack of moral restraint—is a fertile ground for the appreciation of the *smart fellow*.

This appreciation has probably some other sources, too. It may be linked with the history of America, so closely connected with individual pioneering that required a good deal of toughness. (This does not mean, of course, that the tough guy of today is identical with the tough pioneers of a hundred years ago.)

The natural wealth of the country, which has facilitated the sudden acquisition of personal wealth, may be another reason for this appreciation of the smart. If the amount of a country's resources seems limited, and consequently has to be controlled by the society, a system of values tends to develop which stresses the virtues of self-restraint, of humility (including humility in acquiring possessions), of a just division of wealth. If, on the other hand, those resources seem unlimited (as they did till comparatively recent times in America and as they seem to many even now), the tendency is to grab them at full speed, and the more successful one is in amassing wealth, the more admired one is. Thus it is the wealth and prosperity of the country which seem to promote the appreciation of wealth and of the wealthy—sometimes to a degree irrespective of the ways money has been acquired. Hence ruthlessness is not frowned upon as it would be in England, and toughness is admired and envied by a great many other-directed people.

4

All that has been said so far is, as I stressed in advance, hypothetical and one-sided. The situation is not so grim as it may appear from the preceding pages, for the positive aspects of America have not been enumerated and analyzed.

Obviously, America is not divided between other-directed Bandar-log and ruth-

less smart guys only. There are people with a clear distinction between right and wrong and with a strong sense of duty. There are people, among business men and politicians, who do not forget their responsibility to the nation and even to humanity at large. Not everything is make-believe and advertising propaganda; there is also genuine belief and sincere argument.

If, nevertheless, I embarked on criticism and accusation, this was done because of a fear that the condition I tried one-sidedly to depict is gaining strength and may endanger the future of this country and, indirectly, the future of humanity. There are physical dangers to humanity nowadays which surpass the nightmares of the previous generation. But atomic warfare is not the only menace of the atomic era! The loss of individual norms in moral issues, the admiration of unjust power, the lack of tradition, the disruption of family, education without principles—these are dangers which can be called spiritual, though they cannot be disconnected from the material and physical aspects of human civilization. To warn against these and to fight them may be a second front in the fight for human survival, but it may be the first front in the fight for human dignity.

This country, and many others as well, need moral guidance. The potential instructors and leaders may be here, but their voice is not heard with sufficient strength, nor are they sufficiently respected and followed. And yet, unless some high-brows with really broad minds (and not merely excellent narrow specialists) take the lead, this country may degenerate into a herd of other-directed Bandar-log hypnotised by a false *élite* of Kaas.

¹David Riesman, *Faces in the Crowd*, Yale University Press, 1952, p. 5.

²*Ibid.*, p. 6.

³Rudyard Kipling, "Kaa's Hunting," *The Jungle Book*.

⁴This does not imply that all tradition is necessarily commendable and that no change in traditions should be welcome. But the change has usually to be made *within* tradition and not outside it; the tradition should usually be improved upon and not simply discarded.

History and the God of the Second Chance

STEPHEN TONSOR

The Dynamics of World History, by Christopher Dawson, edited by John J. Mulloy. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956.

NONE OF THE disciplines has been more adversely affected by the increasing fragmentation and social dissolution which has afflicted our liberal civilization than has the study of history. The pursuit of the Fact, isolated from tradition and devoid of social meaning, has degraded history from the position which it held in the nineteenth century as the queen of the sciences to the study of "one damned thing after another." The lectures of the historian are increasingly deserted; and the student has turned to those of the anthropologist, the sociologist, and especially those of the psychologist. It has seemed to many that history may be on the brink of slipping into the oblivion which the trivial merits and always suffers.

For the present predicament of history, the historian has no one to blame but himself. Lord Acton wrote, "The process of civilization depends on transcending nationality. Everything is tried by more courts, before a larger audience—comparative method is applied, influences which are accidental yield to those which are rational." Fifty years after this, the vision of most historians is still circumscribed by

what Oswald Spengler described as a "Ptolomaic view" of historical reality. This "pre-Copernican" viewpoint locks us within our particular cultures and leads the historian to the patient and tireless collection of parochial facts which in our expanded world of cultures and civilizations in conflict are largely meaningless.

This conception of the historian as a kind of glorified stamp-collector is a recent idea. The Judeo-Christian historical tradition is entirely opposed to the view that the values of history are at best humanistic or those of contemplative wonder at the variety and chaos of experience. Judaism and Christianity are not only historical religions but both assert that God is revealed through time and that His actions are justified by time. Time and eternity, nature and grace, are aspects of one reality; and prophet and historian interpret the meaning of events in both the natural and the supernatural order. Prophet and historian alike are engaged in the task of reading the "signs of the times." "Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, 'The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye' . . ." "Now learn a parable of the fig tree; when his branch is yet tender and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh." The prophet and the historian are not nearly so concerned with divining the future as with discovering the implications of the past and present.

The Renaissance, rationalism, and liberalism all tended to ignore the prophetic