

It seems to me that Mr. Isherwood should be able to put these defects right. A coat or two of the slick varnish that encases Mr. Norris and Sally Bowles, and an echo of their cheerful chatter, would brighten this play no end.

But the root of the trouble is simply lack of fusion. The various elements are not combined, and until the authors can construct a coherent play, until, in other words their message, their world view, becomes a play, they had better continue to use the revue rather than the drama as their vehicle. The world-view seems a bit synthetic too. We have now long been accustomed to having the bearded Nobodaddy, Marx, as President of the Immortals; we have been led to regard Professor Freud as the ghostly partner. Now, I believe, the Trinity is completed, the diet balanced, the pap shaken up and dissolved in the milk of human kindness. Is it possible that one discerns, however dimly, in the vague features of the third person, the lineaments of Dr. Buchman?

T. R. BARNES.

## ‘HUMAN NATURE’ IN SOCIETY

*SEX AND TEMPERAMENT IN THREE PRIMITIVE SOCIETIES*, by Margaret Mead (Routledge, 10/6).

Mme. de Staël, on being informed that Napoleon was unable to receive visitors since he was in his bath, is reported to have exclaimed ‘*Le génie ne connaît point deux sexes*,’ and, I suppose, at that time it was necessary to be a genius to achieve such ignorance. Readers of Dr. Margaret Mead’s book are more fortunate in that they will scarcely have needed genius to realize that now there can be no arbitrary sex-classification in terms of temperaments. Dr. Mead writes so convincingly and intelligently on the social determination of behaviour that one is tempted to throw up one’s hands in admiration and endorse the publisher’s opinion that this is an extremely valuable book, if not exactly so original as they seem to think. The documentation is very convincing, almost, one is inclined to believe, too convincing. The remarkable aptness of the illustrations leads one to give more credence than is their due, perhaps, to the reports of other anthropologists who obtained

very different results from the same tribes. But it is unreasonable to allow, as many distinguished anthropologists have allowed, the existence of this contrary evidence to discount altogether Dr. Mead's approach. Indeed, it would seem more profitable to use this additional evidence to correct the focus on the problem. The main trouble is probably that a great deal of loose thinking, largely prompted by party-politics, has been allowed to obscure the real issue, and at this time it does seem imperative to treat this question of the relation of the individual to his culture with that same cool detachment and precision with which Dr. Mead herself tackles the problem.

It is now becoming familiar knowledge that the attitudes and emotional responses of two individuals confronting the same situation may be remarkably different if they come from different social groups. Administrators in Assam declare that one may order flogging as punishment for an Angami Naga with some hope of benefit to the victim, while to order it for his neighbour the Lhota is to risk the suicide of the punished native ; the Dyak answers insults with revenge in terms of theft or murder, the Trobriand Islander in terms of suicide. Dr. Mead would immediately suggest that this is because the social patterns are different and different attitudes in the individual are induced by the different patterns

In other cases the outer, 'peripheral' behaviour of people may differ greatly from one society to another and yet leave their more intimate feelings much the same. One Naga tribe, believing dead souls to contaminate all that they have owned or come into contact with, burn everything belonging to the deceased except the livestock, which they turn loose into the jungle, so reducing the family to utter poverty. A neighbouring tribe, which holds contrary ideas and has a feast to induce the soul of the deceased to keep near them, is said to make not a little profit out of their neighbour's fears. But, observers report, the more intimate responses of the individuals in both tribes appear to be similar, *i.e.*, the reaction to a bereavement familiar to us in our own society.<sup>1</sup> This kind of evidence, of which there is a considerable

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<sup>1</sup>It is important to remember here that the familiar problem of the observer's own predispositions may have completely distorted the evidence.

amount, would seem to establish the existence of at least two modes of response, one public and one private, as it were.

This private conduct, it seems, Dr. Mead would impute only to the deviant. But ordinary observation of one's own society suggests that it is characteristic of the majority: some few people appear to have a public code only, some a private code only, but most people have both. The interrelations of the two levels of behaviour are complex and, as yet, little understood, nor can it be said that these modes of response are essentially different in kind. The outlines of the social pattern are forms which prescribe a fixed mode of response that is generally cruder, more limited, and, sometimes, altogether different in appearance from the actual living experience.

But at this point caution is necessary. We must beware of regarding this 'actual living experience' as revealing the 'innate disposition' which Dr. Mead takes as the chief contrast with socially moulded behaviour. Instead of any simple contrast we seem to find successive layers of socialization as we pass from the outer forms of behaviour to more and more intimate responses. In fact it proves exceedingly difficult to indicate any point at which we can safely say the culturally moulded responses end and those which are physiologically determined begin. The Trobriand son is bound by social custom to conceal disgust and shew reverent joy while sucking the bones of his deceased father; in actual fact he generally vomits.<sup>1</sup> One has heard it suggested that here there is a distinct opposition between the cultural form and the physiologically determined reaction, but if it is remembered that these people at this ceremony also *expect* the son to be sick it will be seen that it is quite impossible that the disgust reaction is socially conditioned. Nagas of Assam have been known to eat elephant which had been buried for a fortnight and was already in an advanced stage of decomposition. We have in fact no evidence, beyond a certain amount of rough observation, that could be used to prove that private behaviour is any closer related to 'innate disposition' (whatever that may be) than public behaviour.

Although Dr. Mead has done very valuable work in shewing the various ways in which the social forms may mould or distort

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<sup>1</sup>Malinowski *Sexual Life of Savages*, p. 133.

the personality it will be seen that her use of the term 'innate disposition' and her treatment of the problem of deviants are naïve. A more complete handling of the problem would examine the ways in which the different levels of response, which we have arbitrarily, and crudely, separated into 'public' and 'private,' *interact* as complementary parts of the same temperament. In such an inquiry 'temperament' would not be regarded as something detailed and arbitrary from which details are selected and moulded by the social forms but as a product of the interaction between the individual and his environment, differing not in kind but only in subtlety and intimacy from the solidified social forms. Considering the magnitude of such a task one is tempted to believe Dr. Mead's more limited approach to have more immediately valuable results. In any case it is increasingly obvious that the help of the psychologist must be invoked, since the difficulties of communication make the task more and more impossible in examination of members of primitive societies, particularly where the native is learning the 'right' answers. It is certain that anthropologists with a smattering of popular psychology will achieve only harm.

In any case, apart from the value we have ascribed to Dr. Mead's work, there is the tactical benefit of her book. Anthropological scholarship seems to have entrenched itself from such 'intellectual bombshells' (*vide* blurb) in the shelters of Frazerian collections, shelters which appear to the detached observer as fatuous as those advocated by the sponsors of A.R.P.

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