MAN'S CHANGING IMAGE OF HIMSELF

by Lawrence K. Frank

Each cultural group has its conception of human nature which derives from and, in turn, gives support to its conception of the nature of the universe, of man's place therein, of his destiny in that universe, and of his relation to his social order. Its conception of human nature is therefore basic to its religion and its design for living, and operates to evoke selectively some of their human potentialities while denying and suppressing other potentialities.

Western culture has had a conception of human nature in which are combined a number of traditions. The Judaic tradition was infused by survivals from earlier religious cults, especially from the East, and was later modified and enlarged by Greek and Roman elements. The Christian conception that emerged from this amalgam was in turn altered, modified, elaborated, and given a fairly rigid formulation by successive theological pronouncements early in our history.

As I understand this development, the Christian conception of human nature was given a malign and self-defeating character, largely, I believe, by Saint Augustine, who through his great authority defeated the Pelagian concept of human nature as potentially good. The Augustinian concept of man—tainted by original sin, fallen from grace, and prone to evil—became the official Christian conviction. Later, Calvin reinforced and restated this by declaring that man was innately sinful and wicked so that both Protestant and Catholic versions are alike in asserting that human nature is bad.

Accordingly, for the past twelve hundred years and more, we have been vicariously atoning for Saint Augustine's guilt feelings, due, no doubt, to his self-confessed misspent youth. The consequences for Western man have been appalling. I believe that we have sufficiently atoned for Saint Augustine and that it is time we renounce his malign and self-defeating beliefs and begin to create a new conception of human nature.

But we should recall previous efforts to do this.

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In the Renaissance, a few courageous, imaginative individuals, responding to the art and literature and philosophy of classic Greece, enlarged that long-accepted conception of human nature to recognize man's larger capacities, encouraging his curiosity about the world and his relations to nature, and fostering scientific concerns.

In the Enlightenment, another small group asserted man's capacities for rational, volitional, purposive activities, giving man a new confidence in his ability to cope with life and to establish an enduring way of living, based on reason and the new conception of the universe as a rationally ordered mechanism. For the past two hundred years these ideas and ideals of the Enlightenment have been the major source of our active political and economic and legal efforts to cope with the world and to establish and maintain social order. Indeed, our Constitution and Declaration of Independence are products of the Enlightenment as our own reiterated political ideas and practices. Despite the immense service to our past strivings, these concepts and expectations have become obstructive to the contemporary efforts to cope with our persistent life tasks in the kind of social order we are now developing.

However strongly the Enlightenment guided political, economic, and social thinking and activities, apparently it did not alter significantly the traditional theological conception of human nature and its general acceptance by people in their personal lives. The few who were deists and rationalists did not change the accepted views of people.

The major challenge to our traditional conception of human nature came with the Darwinian theory of man's evolution from a primate and preprimate stock. This challenged the doctrine of special creation and gave a biological orientation to our thinking about human nature which has since been vigorously pursued by biologists and by medicine and psychology. It gave rise to the bitter controversies of the nineteenth century.

Following the Darwinian controversy came the Freudian doctrine, which asserted two highly significant ideas—that (1) the human personality is not given at birth but (2) develops in and through the early experiences of childhood—thus partially freeing human nature from the older assumptions that it was preformed and innate. Freud emphasized the biological basis of human nature, deriving human conduct from the repression of organic impulses and from the emotional reactions by which the individual is largely driven. He operated with a conception of biological impulses and drives that has been translated as instinct, and he insisted upon recognition of the immense role of sex, especially of repressed sexual curiosities and desires.

Darwin and Freud have given the strongest challenges to the teachings of the Enlightenment of man as a rational being. The behavior of various national groups during the past forty to fifty years, when supposedly civilized people exhibited the most atrocious and inhuman treatment of others and responded to the emotional appeals of neurotics and psychotics, has further undermined man's self-confidence and threatened his conception of human nature as rational.

Almost contemporary with Freud, there began a systematic study of other cultures, especially the so-called primitive, non-literate peoples. These studies have revealed the amazingly different ways of living which each group has developed and carried on for ages. These studies have revealed not only the group patterns and institutions but their customary modes of conduct and of interpersonal relations and have shown how their methods of child care and rearing give rise to their basic character structure or modal personality. These studies have emphasized the widely different conceptions of human nature held by these groups and how each group cultivates the version of human nature it believes to be appropriate or necessary for its way of living.

From these cultural studies it is becoming clear that human nature is exceedingly flexible and plastic, with a wide range of potentialities among which each group has selected what it will recognize, cultivate, and reward and what it will deny, reject, and often strongly suppress. Only as children are enculturated—that is, systematically indoctrinated, inculcated, trained, and continuously practiced in the group's beliefs, patterns of conduct, relationships, and expression of their emotion and feelings—can a culture persist. When parents falter in their devotion to tradition, cease to instil in children their traditional beliefs and aspirations, relax in their training of children in carrying on the accepted patterns of conduct and ways of living, then their historically developed culture begins to break down and their social order is disrupted.

All over the world today this process of acculturation is taking place as people everywhere are giving up their traditional conceptions and immemorial institutions and are either rejecting or ignoring what they have lived by and for during ages past.

We are discovering that a child from a given ethnic-cultural or racial group may be reared in another culture and as an adult exhibit most of the characteristic patterns of that adopting culture, indicating that the human nature that would have been developed in his native culture has been replaced by the human nature of his adopting culture. What we call rational behavior is apparently that which is governed by the beliefs and expectations of a culture.

A culture, we are realizing, is not a superhuman system or organization or a divinely imposed order, above and beyond human reach and control. A culture appears as the product of human imagination and striving for that which is sought as a way of living but never fully attained, a design for living wherein individuals can live as human personalities in a symbolic world of meanings and goal values which man imputes or projects upon the world. Culture is *in* people and is expressed in what each group calls human nature, which each member of a cultural group exhibits but always in his idiosyncratic way as a unique personality.

Both cultural anthropology, and psychiatry and clinical psychology, are showing that what we call human nature is what a cultural group does to form, mold, and pattern the emerging personality of the child so that he will display the common, characteristic patterns of his group and be able to live in its social order. They do not agree, however, on what are the potentialities of man that are selectively developed as human nature, but they do recognize the unique individuality of each person.

The often quoted remark that "you can't change human nature" has a validity we have failed to recognize. Despite centuries of indoctrination and often rigid patterning of each generation of children to fit into the traditional molds, human nature remains flexible and plastic, subject to whatever direction and focusing of its basic potentialities a group may give its children. Each child, however, must be enculturated and socialized, humanized, if you please, to become a person capable of human living.

What is human nature, what is persistent and unchangeable, what is modifiable in the human, and what is subject to patterning and distortion and regulation? These questions, therefore, have become the focus of intense interest, study, and bitter controversy as we seek some clarification of the question of what we can and should do to rear our children and to reorient our social order and renew our culture—what to do with our own lives now that the once coercive beliefs about human destiny are no longer controlling.

The various existentialist leaders and groups have focused attention upon these questions, explicitly recognizing that the long accepted traditional conception of human nature and man's image of the self are no longer valid or acceptable. They are pointing to the urgent need for a critical revision of our concepts of human nature and offering different ways of formulating a new concept that will be more relevant and responsive to the emerging new climate of opinion. But to a casual reader,

much of what they are saying seems to be heavily burdened with survivals from our intellectual and theological traditions, with many already obsolete assumptions and no longer credible ways of thinking. They rely upon various key words and phrases, almost like magic formulas, to provide a resolution of the perplexities which they derive from these traditional beliefs and anachronistic assumptions.

The development in psychoanalysis of ego psychology and Erikson's focus on problems of identity are emphasizing for the clinical group the significance of the individual's own conception of his place, role, relations, etc.

But we should remember that orthodox psychoanalysis is in agreement with Calvin in viewing human nature as destructive, antisocial, and resistant to socialization. Perhaps that is why some Protestant clergy are accepting psychoanalysis and referring individuals for analytic therapy—because they find the orthodox Freudian conception (of human nature as malign) congenial to their theological teachings.

We can say, therefore, that the conception of human nature is today a central problem for various scholarly and scientific disciplines and for theology and also the arts, as we see in contemporary novels and dramas. Each profession operates with its own conception of human nature which differs from that of others, as notably the contrast between the concepts and assumptions of medicine, psychiatry, and social work and those held by law, theology, and education.

We are justified in saying, I believe, that the confusion and conflicts over human nature today are as disturbing as were the famous controversies over religion and science. Some resolution of these conflicts should be sought as early as feasible.

CULTURE AND THE IMAGE OF THE SELF

While each cultural group has its conception of human nature—a basic concept in its cognitive orientation to the world, its eidos, as some may call it—each group also has an image of itself, as a people, which may be considered as part of its ethos, infused with emotional significance and affective tones.

This image of themselves—*The* people, as the Navajos speak of themselves—is derived from their conception of human nature and also reflects their other basic conception of the universe and their place therein. As such, it is infused with strong feelings and is portrayed in their religion, arts, their literature or folklore, drama, their songs and, some believe, in their architecture.

As the child in each culture grows up, he learns these concepts of hu-

man nature and also becomes aware of the image of his people as he is progressively oriented to the symbolic world of his culture and learns to live by and for these beliefs and expectations.

But each child develops an individual image of the self that is idiomatic and idiosyncratic, his individualized way of becoming a personality, a member of his social order, and a participant in his group cultural world.

This image of the self need not be considered as some esoteric entity. Rather, it appears to be one of the many images that a child learns to use as he learns to perceive the world, and especially persons, according to their symbolic, usually verbalized, definitions and significance, especially their emotional and affective significance. Thus, the child learns to recognize and use the symbols for mother, father, siblings, and also for himself as he learns to speak and relate to these persons.

It is not clear how this image of the self arises. But apparently the infant begins to relate himself to the world into which he has emerged at birth, initially through tactile communication with himself and with his mother or mother surrogate. The significance of tactile experience in early childhood and in later life has not been adequately recognized despite the crucial role of early tactile communication in the development of personality and in the primary orientation of the infant to the world.[1] Indeed, much of what the psychoanalysts call the primary process seems to be activated by tactile messages.

In contemporary thinking about the early development of the personality, emphasis has been placed on the child's learning to distinguish between *me* and *not me,* since this marks the beginning of the child's awareness of and his active relations to the so-called object world as distinguished from his own individual feelings, fantasies, and preoccupations with his own organism and its functions.

Apparently the infant's first recognition of the *not me* is of a highly idiosyncratic world, of *my* mother, *my* crib, *my* bottle, *my* blanket, etc. Only later does he recognize and accept the consensual world of *not me,* the public world as physically presented and symbolically defined. Thus, he begins to polarize himself to the so-called objective world with its varied properties, possibilities, and dangers and to other persons as sources of comfort and reassurance or danger, of rejection and neglect of his infantile needs. Thus, learning to live in the object world requires some self-awareness, the use of the symbols *I, me, my,* and *mine.*

The child is compelled to relinquish his reliance upon the primary process of naïve impulses, fantasy, and emotional response to the world

and to learn to recognize the world of events and people as culturally defined and socially presented. This transition is often described as orienting the child to object relations (learning to "face reality" is the phrase), that is, to the defined meanings and requirements of the public world as contrasted with his own imagining, fantasies, impulses, and feelings, all of which strongly differentiate the child from the world and from other persons.

But we should remember that this so-called object world is not given except as physical objects, relations, and events which the child must learn to cope with in terms of perception and motor activities. The crucial aspect of this object world is its symbolic character—the meanings, the evaluations as culturally defined and accepted by members of the group, an "as if" world or a "virtual world" of man's own imaginative creation which each child is expected to accept and to live in.

Each cultural group has developed its own highly selective awareness and its patterned perception of the "surround" in accordance with its basic concepts about nature and man. Each culture, therefore, has created its own selected version of the world and all its events as its "reality" and established that as the objective world. What we call scientific knowledge of the world is also a highly selected symbolic formulation of the order of events as nearly as they can be observed and formulated according to contemporary scientific assumptions and symbolic expression, such as mathematics. The child must learn to perceive the world, and especially people and himself, as his cultural traditions have patterned the group perception and established the permissible ways of relating to the world and other persons.

These remarks are relevant here because they help us to recognize how the child gradually learns to perceive the world and to live in the symbolic world of his people as defined by his parents and other more experienced persons. As he is inducted into their symbolic world, he learns these prescribed meanings and definitions of things, animals, places, events, and persons, always as he has individually understood and interpreted them in his own idiosyncratic ways and especially as he feels toward the persons by whom he is being indoctrinated.

Thus, the child learns to function as an organism according to the parental requirements for feeding, toilet training, sleeping, and reacting emotionally, but in his own individualized ways. But he is expected to live as a personality and exhibit the prescribed conduct for social order.

Probably the most difficult and traumatic requirement in some cultures, like our own, is for the child to learn to observe the inviolabili-

ties of things, animals, places, and persons. His early naïve, impulsive explorations of the world provoke almost continuous prohibition and often punishment as he meets the reiterated *don'ts:* don't touch, take, hit, bite, approach, break, or enter into that which is inviolable. Out of these prohibitions he is expected to develop the self-inhibitions that give rise to what we call private property and the integrity of the person but which also may relate to his own body insofar as his genitals are considered untouchable. Private property and the integrity of persons are products of learned conduct and emerge from our symbolic world of living.

Much overt disobedience, misconduct, and antisocial behavior is focused upon or is concerned with these inviolabilities, as our legal and moral codes clearly show, with these prohibitions against stealing, against violence toward another, and against unsanctioned sexual approaches and relations. As we will note later, the child is expected to exhibit awareness of and respect for these inviolabilities and if he impulsively acts or emotionally reacts to violate these prohibitions, he is subject to denunciation and often severe punishment. Our traditional morality is concerned primarily with the maintenance of social order, more especially as order may be jeopardized by failure to respect the inviolabilities, and much of human conduct is governed by fear.

The child also learns language with its prescribed names and definitions, the different explanations and sanctions of what his group believes, but always as he individually decodes and interprets these messages and reacts emotionally to their import for him and to the adult or other person giving him such instructions. He also learns the group-sanctioned modes of relating to and communicating with others, using the symbols, verbal and otherwise, and rituals required for each channel of communicating economic, political, legal, and religious meanings so that he can carry on his life activities in the public world of his group.

However carefully and conscientiously a parent attempts to teach a child the official, orthodox, and prescribed meanings, each parent will always warp and often distort these lessons by his or her own ethnic-cultural, regional, and religious background and personality, with a specific emphasis and tone of voice for some topics, also feelings toward those topics and the child being instructed. Thus, the child is always given a biased version of traditions and, what is more significant, he always further distorts it, omitting much and overelaborating or changing it in learning from his instructor.

A child therefore soon discovers that he is different from other persons,

and he builds these differences into his image of the self. Thus the child develops as a personality who lives in a private world of his own, his "life space," to use Kurt Lewin's term, or his "idioverse," as Saul Rosenzweig has called it, perceiving the world and persons as they appear to him and as he feels toward them in his private world.

We may think of the individual personality, not as an entity or collection of traits and similar static asumptions, but as a dynamic process by which the individual continually creates and maintains his private world, defends it against threats and attacks, repairing and re-building it when damaged as he seeks in the public world whatever goals and purposes he has set for his life career. Personality is the uniquely individualized expression of a culture as each person has learned and experienced it through interpersonal relations.

ORGANIC FACTORS AND THE IMAGE OF THE SELF

At this point we may find one clue to the many perplexities expressed about human personality and the human predicament. The individual as long as he lives continues as an organism, dependent upon his organic functioning to exist in the geographical world of nature. He must breathe, eat, eliminate, sleep, and, usually, have sex relations. But to live as a personality he must learn the various symbols and their meanings, the persistent modes and patterns of conduct and com-munication. Thereby he transforms his naïve, impulsive behavior into the patterned conduct required by his group and exhibits the relations expected of him at successive stages in his life career for living in that symbolic world of human creation.

Tillich has emphasized the necessity of recognizing what he calls the essential nature of man and also the existential nature of man. I am inclined to the view that the essential nature of man is his human organism with all his inherited mammalian capacities and organic needs and impulses and his unique human capacities. The existential man, to use that phrase, which seems to me a curious inversion, is what each culture has evoked from individuals as human personalities.

Thus, the essential organism may falter in his or her conformity to prescription, may respond to the biological and physiological signals to which he is continually exposed, failing to recognize and respond to the symbols with the learned conduct that his culture has estab-lished to replace those signals and the organic behavior responses thereto. Or the essential organism may react emotionally, that is, being physiologically disturbed to such an extent that he acts impulsively

and often violently, disregarding the inviolabilities and ignoring the symbolic patterns established for his conduct.

Learning to live in a social order, to participate in a symbolic cultural world has been a long, difficult task, and we are still on the way. It would indeed be amazing if the individual were able to encompass all the restrictions and compulsory patterns, to refrain from all impulsive reactions, to conform without deviations to prescribed patterns—yet that is what our Western culture expects and demands of the child, and it utilizes a variety of often painful and humiliating procedures to regiment the individual organism with his unique heredity and his equally unique life experiences.

We have stressed the weakness, the failures, the deficiencies of human nature, and by so much we ignore and neglect the strengths, the aspirations, the potentialities for growth and development, for maturation. We strive to compel a conformity that violates the unique individuality of each organism-personality, and by that denial of individuality we alienate the individual from himself and foster the individual*ism* that seeks power, prestige, and other compensation for the denial and rejection of his individuality.

We may find some clues to the image of the self if we think of the child as continually being exposed to treatment by others and especially the continual evaluation of himself as a person, about his organic functioning and behavior and his emotional reactions, while he is continually exposed to symbolic patterning.

Thus, the child is given a verbalized identity by his name, and he learns to respond to his name and gradually to conceive of *I, me,* and *mine,* as these symbols become meaningful in the varied context of interpersonal relations when he is required to recognize *I* as an actor, *me* as a recipient, *mine* as the owner, as polarized to *you, yours,* and *them.*

The young child learns to talk, not only to others but to himself, verbalizing about what he thinks and what he is trying to do in his play activities. Before long, however, the child ceases to verbalize aloud and limits this to inner speech as he talks to himself, sometimes criticizing or scolding himself as he has experienced such adverse verbalization from others. Often he tries to reassure and praise himself, explaining to himself what he is trying to do and justifying his conduct—rationalizing, we call it. He rehearses his past experiences and prepares for the future activities and approaches to others as he plays out the ever changing drama of his personal life.

While we are awake we are continually occupied with these sym-

bolic expressions of experience, and all our thinking, reflection, and self-communication occur in these linguistic symbols. Concomitantly, we may have images, fantasies, and daydreams in which the themes of our strivings, our feelings, and our anxieties and guilt are dramatized.

This inner speech may be considered as a feedback process, a continual flow of messages to the self, correcting and reorienting the individual, helping him to steer his way through the growing complexities of living. Perhaps this is what we call "conscience"? Obviously, years of experience are necessary before these internal feedbacks, continually reinforced by outside admonitions and often punishment, can operate effectively. And when once established, they will not operate at all times to avoid errors and mistakes, often tragic misconduct, since each person's ability to manage his career is subject to all the vicissitudes of early life experiences in becoming an individual personality, often with distortions and affective burdens. He is also exposed to the continual impact of biological signals and internal physiological signals evoking his naïve behavior.

During development of the personality and the gradual emergence of the individual, the image of the self undergoes a series of changes and sometimes acute transformations, as at puberty and during adolescence, and also later as a spouse, a parent, a grandparent, and in aging. Sometimes the image of the self is fixated, or may fail to emerge, at a specific stage in the life career or is traumatized so that the individual cannot attain the adult stage of personality development. Indeed, the number and variety of personality disorders, stunting, and warping is so great that those professionally concerned with their treatment are often perplexed and baffled, especially by the psychotics whose image of the self is especially self-defeating as well as antisocial, or has never developed, so that they continue in the early stage of the primary process.

How Children Acquire the Image

If we look at our traditional ways of rearing children and of inculcating them with our cultural patterns, symbols, beliefs, and aspirations, we may find some clues to an understanding of our contemporary confusions and perplexities, especially the need for a new image of the self.

In our Western culture there have been three dominant conceptions of human nature, as I understand them: that human nature is fallen from grace, tainted by original sin; that human nature is innately wicked and sinful; that human nature is recalcitrant and inclined to

disobey the law; at least these seem to be the core of the three major religious traditions.

We should recognize that these pessimistic, if not malign, conceptions of human nature contrast with those held by other cultures which do not believe man to be wicked, sinful, perverse, prone to evil, basically antisocial, and destructive. Nor do other world religions assert such beliefs about human nature, even if they do largely reject the world and emphasize the importance of escaping its limitations and deficiencies.

Some other cultures believe that human nature is benign, and they explain misbehavior and misconduct without assuming that man is essentially bad. They may believe a man is temporarily possessed by a spirit or devils, is temporarily disturbed and rendered incapable of correct conduct, or for various reasons has failed to learn to respect the group expectations. An anthropologist, Ruth Benedict, remarked some years ago that the way a people treat children was parallel to their conception of their deity. Those who had benevolent deities were kind and gentle to children, while those who had deities that were stern and implacable were hard and punitive to children.

As Eric R. Dodds has shown in *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), every culture has had to deal with and explain the misbehavior and impulses that individuals exhibit which, according to their standards, are irrational and antisocial. He describes how preclassical Greek culture was a shame culture in which individuals were expected to exhibit the prescribed patterns of conduct or risk losing their status and suffering from shame. He also describes the transition from a shame culture to a guilt culture that occurred after the preclassical period and describes how in a shame culture a man was supposed to be possessed of various spirits or robbed by the gods of his judgment when he made egregious errors and misbehaved.

Likewise, students of Japanese culture have emphasized the coercive control of shame in human conduct created by failure to meet group expectations.

In her *On Shame and Search for Identity* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), Helen Lynd has reviewed a wide range of studies on human personality and critically examined the concepts of shame and guilt as they are being employed currently.

Western European culture has long been a guilt culture, and the major emphasis has been upon man's lack of grace and his wickedness and sinfulness. We have been told that we are wicked sinners and

must have a conviction of sin to be saved from our deplorable human nature and the awful punishment that awaits us. But we also are assured that as a child of God solution is possible.

Little children are taught as soon as they are capable of understanding language that they are bad. They are also made to feel guilty not only for their own childish impulses and feelings, and even their fantasies and thoughts, but given the added guilt of being a human being. This is what might be called existential guilt, the guilt of existing as a person and by that existence becoming liable for all the misdeeds of the human race.

Children must acknowledge their unworthiness and their wickedness and confess their proneness to evildoing. Adults impute to childish impulses and naïve behavior an intentional, wilful perversity and treat the child as disobedient, often long before a child has any capacity to understand what he is expected to do or is accused of. But the child learns from the tone of voice and often the physical punishment he receives that he is not acceptable and may be unloved.

Withholding love and affection and inflicting physical pain have long been approved parental practices for evoking submissive obedience to parental authority, as the correct way of saving the child from his wicked nature. Indeed, parents have been told that it is their duty to break the child's will, to curb his unruly and sinful behavior and desires as the way to show their love for their child. Also parents have been told that they can show their love for the child by this coercive and often brutal punishment of his misdeeds, since thereby they may save his immortal soul.

While a feeling of guilt may be expected to arise when a child fails to meet expectations or violates the prescriptions, we habitually have created a feeling of intense guilt for being a human being by the doctrine of original sin and all the other theological doctrines that give a person this heavy load of guilt and unworthiness.

We should remember that much of the moral teaching and theological instruction of a child occurs when he is disturbed, has misbehaved, reacted emotionally, or exhibited some strong impulse. The parents, using a special tone of voice and a solemn manner of speaking, scold and denounce him, apply various kinds of punishment, usually physical pain or threats of future punishment, and by so much give their teaching a highly significant coloring and impact that reinforces guilt and anxiety.

Usually in these episodes the child is given his initial theological orientation as he hears that his misbehavior is wicked and sinful, and

similar characterizations that impress him with his deplorable behavior and his innate wickedness or lack of grace for which he will incur future punishment.

We may say that apart from the recurrent occasions when he is enjoying parental affection and ministrations, the child's relations with his parents tend to be a succession of episodes in which not only his behavior is being judged adversely but he himself is being told of his wickedness, his sinfulness, his depravity, or his naughtiness as he is accused of wilful badness. In Sunday school and church he may be further convinced of his wickedness and unique sinfulness.

Even learning his own formal name is often fraught with strong disapproval since the parents usually will address him with his full name only when he is bad, disobedient, or forgetful of what he has been told to do or not to do. At other times he is called by a pet name or a nickname or summoned by some neutral term.

Children are very sensitive to tones of voice and to facial expressions. Accordingly, it is not only the words a parent uses but the facial expression and specially impressive tones of voice, the suppressed but recognizable anger, chagrin, or hurt feeling that impress a child. The child may therefore ignore the words but respond to the tone of voice as more compelling.

Of special significance is the parental practice of scolding or denouncing a child as bad and insisting that he acknowledge his bad behavior, if not his own personal wickedness according to the traditional belief that an individual must have a conviction of personal sin as essential to improvement in his conduct. This has been the basic principle of prisons and schools. Thus the naïve, impulsive child struggling to learn the varied and often subtle perceptions for living in his social order faces an unending stream of prohibitions, scoldings, and denunciations of himself, all designed to make him into a well-behaved child and a future law-abiding citizen as well as to assure him whatever future life his parents believe requires the conduct they strive to establish. All this, I know, many have recognized and rejected, but these practices are followed by many parents today.

For this context, the significance of these practices of child-rearing lies in the image of the self which the child develops in response to the parental statements and treatment, reinforced by the various institutions and agencies, especially the school and church. He learns that he not only is John Jones but is bad, worthless, and heading toward a deplorable future if not a terrorizing prospect later.

He also develops what the analyst calls a superego, an internal per-

sonal censor, or similarly conceived self-critical governor, much like the belief in a traditional conscience, derived from parental teachings. This superego, or conscience, may become a harsh and oppressive master of the personality, inflexibly driving a person and maintaining a continual feeling of guilt, anxiety, and inadequacy. This superego, as I have suggested, is the inner speech, the linguistic feedbacks, that a child learns as his self-governor and critic. Superego or conscience is coercive and cruelly damaging because we have instilled such beliefs and expectations into children, establishing in their personalities this often self-defeating image of the self.

All of this, we must emphasize, is in the context of Christian theology with the doctrines of man's fall and of his redemption, of vicarious atonement and all the associated beliefs and rituals that have been established over the centuries to reinforce and also to mitigate these conceptions of a malign human nature with the hope of redemption, by faith and by works.

In view of the great achievements of Western culture and of Christianity, any questioning of these beliefs and practices may appear to be not only impious in the extreme, as striking at the very heart of Christian teachings, but also as a vicious and uncalled-for attack upon the core of Western civilization. But these conceptions of human nature are apparently the products of theologians and not essential to the ethics of Jesus.

If today these long-accepted and revered beliefs are becoming less acceptable, we may find some basis for this questioning, not only in the recent understanding of human personality, as discussed earlier, but also in our contemporary life.

PROBLEMS OF SELF-IMAGE TODAY

While we are probably too close to the present to be able to see clearly what has been happening, we can, however, find some clues to our perplexities and some reasons for the increasing failure of these traditional teachings to provide dependable guides to human conduct.

Until recently children who were reared according to orthodox theological teachings and who learned to think of themselves as wicked and sinful and to develop strong feelings of guilt grew up in a social order where these practices of severe child-rearing were used by all parents, with, of course, varying degrees of severity and punitiveness. Therefore a child shared with all other children much the same treatment and feelings. Moreover, they grew up to become adolescents and then adults who, with others, shared these same beliefs about

human nature and these same feelings of guilt and often acute anxiety engendered by the reiterated threats of punishment. As adults, individuals found in their family and their church and in other institutions the continual reassurance and strengthening and the approved ritualistic releases of guilt that enabled them to live with those feelings and to accept themselves as the inevitable and inescapable victims of man's fall and of original sin.

People who went to church regularly on Sundays, attended weekday prayer meetings, read the Bible, and said family prayers and grace before meals found a strengthening of their beliefs and aspirations and at least a temporary comforting and expression of this chronic feeling of guilt and anxiety, especially when shared with others.

The teaching of children and youth as bad, according to orthodox beliefs, continues today in families. But the varied group ceremonies and occasions by which these convictions of personal unworthiness and wickedness, these corrosive feelings of guilt were sustained, have lost much of their efficacy. Today, many whose parents were devout churchgoers, attended weekday prayer meetings, and conducted family prayers may never attend church on Sunday and may find little or none of the shared convictions and the feelings that their parents experienced. Nor do they experience the same release from guilt as their parents in religious beliefs and church attendance.

The situation today may be described as persistent indoctrination of children with the accepted traditional teachings about human nature and the self, but with the partial, and for many the complete, loss of the institutional and other sources of reassurance, comforting, hope, and strength to keep on striving which gave those teachings some meaning and some alleviation. Accordingly, we see many, many persons today who are carrying a heavy burden of guilt, an image of the self as worthless and bad, a conviction of their unique sinfulness, with depressive feelings of anxiety, who are trying to sustain these burdens within their own personality with little or no support or aid except for those who seek psychotherapy or resort to various anodynes (alcohol and drugs) and other escapes.

A crude, and perhaps to some unacceptable, analogy would be a society in which each child early in life is infected with a specific disease so that as he grows older he must continually go to the hospital to be treated, the treatment being both a reinfection and an alleviation of the acute symptoms. When the hospital no longer provides such alleviation and individuals suffering from that recurrent infection and reinfection believe they are uniquely ill and must suffer without

any reason or for no good purpose, we have a situation analogous to our contemporary life, especially as the existentialists describe it.

This brings us to the crucial question we should face today. Is it essential to religion that the individual be indoctrinated with these archaic conceptions of human nature, which operate to warp and distort the human personality by creating lifelong and intense feelings of corrosive guilt and anxiety, especially now when we are no longer affirming our traditional conception of the universe, of man's place therein, and of his relations to his group, which supported and explained these beliefs about human nature?

Can we continue to assert our enduring goal values and reconcile these traditional teachings about human nature with our belief in the worth of the individual personality and our conviction of the primacy of human dignity? Can we today say that these traditional teachings are the way to love little children, when we find that we are by these beliefs and practices creating unhappy, warped, and often neurotic personalities who are a threat to social order?

What image of the self can we help children to develop that not only will be congruous with our aspirations but will sustain the individual in his efforts to cope with his life tasks in the prolonged lifespan we are now offered?

Can we renew our disintegrating culture without a radical alteration or replacement of these ancient teachings which as a people we have lived by and for but can no longer accept as credible or desirable or even tolerable?

Theological teachings reiterated and reasserted man's unworthy and degraded nature while also asserting that he could be saved from disaster by professing the orthodox beliefs and performing the prescribed rituals for expiation and atonement. However strongly the hope for redemption and the promise of eternal bliss were emphasized, the conviction of man's sinful nature and the threat of awful punishment were equally, if not more strongly, emphasized. Indeed, the threats of hellfire and damnation have terrorized generations of children who found little genuine assuagement of their guilt and anxiety in the promise of divine love and compassion, however much adults could accept that hope of redemption.

Insofar as parents enacted in their homes these same roles of punitive but loving guardians, intent upon compelling obedience to their commands and offering little genuine reassurance and approval for good behavior (because it is expected of children), the cosmic drama was presented to the child continually throughout his childhood. These

teachings were reinforced and solemnly proclaimed with all the authority of the church to children and adolescents who often were perplexed and deeply disturbed by the esoteric doctrines they heard in church.

A candid appraisal of our culture with its theological basis in the light of what we now know about other cultures indicates that we have fostered personalities who spend most of their adult lives seeking compensations for their childhood unhappiness or releases from their guilt, anxiety, and often resentment—many times in ways that are antisocial and always self-defeating.

The image of the self that we have developed as the core of our personalities is rarely one we can accept and live with. Indeed, the product of our traditional teaching is to make the self unacceptable, to create a lifelong pattern of trying to convince ourselves that we are not as bad and worthless as we have been told and of trying to win or exact from others some kind of approval or reward that will assuage our acute feelings of inadequacy.

Orthodox psychoanalysts have asserted that man is antisocial and perverse and can become only partly disciplined and able to live in our social order. If man exhibits any virtues or socially desirable conduct, according to some psychoanalysts, these are reaction formations for his otherwise antisocial impulses and selfish needs, so that his generosity is to overcome his niggardliness, his love his dependence, his friendliness is a cover for his aggression, etc. In some ways orthodox psychoanalytic teachings reaffirm Calvin's doctrine of man's innate wickedness. But we should remember that psychoanalytic thinking has been formulated chiefly on the basis of study and treatment of pathologic personalities who have been reared in the Western European tradition and exhibit these destructive and antisocial patterns.

Now that we understand that a culture is a human creation, man's own efforts to establish a human way of living, governed by his basic conceptions and his symbol system, we can begin to reorient our thinking and alter our expectations toward creating a culture and a social order that are more nearly in accordance with our aspirations, that will recognize our human potentialities and foster the enduring goal values we cherish.

Moreover, now that we are learning to recognize our human potentialities, to realize our amazing capacities as organisms, with our uniquely human capacities for transforming nature and human nature in accordance with our aspirations, we can courageously undertake this Promethean task of redirecting human living. Indeed, we must essay

this great enterprise if we are not to succumb to a "failure of nerve" and become progressively demoralized.

We have struggled for centuries toward a recognition of the worth of the individual personality, seen as a unique person whose integrity and dignity must be respected, beginning at birth or before, if we are to attain our aspirations. But this struggle has been persistently blocked and often defeated by the orthodox beliefs about human nature, which have sanctioned teachings, practices, and relationships inimical to these aspirations and which have given man an image of the self that is incongruous with his aspirations.

Thus we have inflicted on individuals many forms of unnecessary frustrations and deprivations and many forms of injury, have humiliated and degraded them, and have given them an image of the self that becomes a lifelong burden as well as a threat to social order.

This does not deny that a few exceptional individuals have been able to develop their personalities in ways that are admirable, exhibiting a highly virtuous and lovable character despite these teachings or, some would say, because of these teachings. But for the few who have been able to do this, millions have suffered intensely and have exhibited patterns of misconduct that have made human nature a synonym for all that is deplorable and antisocial. We can say that a few individuals exposed to a virulent infection can develop immunity and thereafter are able to live without that disease. We use this principle in vaccination and inoculation, but we use only small doses, not a continual reinfection and undermining of their vitality and resistance.

SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS TO A NEW SELF-IMAGE AND THEOLOGY

What can we find in scientific thinking that can be used to help us construct a new conception of human values and give man a new image of himself?

We can call upon the growing understanding of human development that has taken place through the long period of organic evolution. This process has produced the truly marvelous human organism, with its amazing wisdom of the body and the capacities for functioning and behaving in a wide range of ways of human living. Indeed, this human organism is truly unique, with potentialities we have scarcely begun to discover and evoke.

In light of this, we can take one step toward a new image of the self by recognizing and accepting the human organism, no longer feeling ashamed and disgusted because we are organisms and must always be organisms. We need no longer believe we should neglect, abuse, and

mortify the flesh as the only way to "salvation." Rather, we can genu-
inely accept our organisms as the core of our personalities.

Also, we can radically reverse our traditional beliefs about human
sexuality, beliefs and patterns that have given rise to endless guilt and
anxiety, human defeat, and a variety of sexual misbehaviors. We need
not accept a doctrine of pansexuality, attributed to Freud, to recognize
that human sexuality permeates all of human living and social life be-
cause each individual is male or female and must assume the masculine
or feminine roles and cope with his or her sexual impulses and feelings.

Human sexuality, we are discovering, has evolved from the basic
mammalian patterns in which copulation takes place only when the fe-
male is in heat and ready to be fertilized because she is ovulating. The
male, with only a few exceptions, attempts copulation only when the
female is in heat, and accordingly infrahuman sex is primarily for pro-
creation.

Human sexuality is not governed by any specific mating season or
limited to the period of female heat or male rutting. Human sexuality
is an all-year-round, spontaneous functioning which man has used for
purposes that are not purely biological—for personal desires, needs, and
aspirations. Man has transformed sex into interpersonal relations and a
way of finding fulfilment of whatever his cultural traditions have taught
him to seek. Accordingly, the traditional conception of sex as low, nasty,
dirty, wicked, and sinful, although condoned by marriage to perpetu-
ate the race, is no longer valid or credible or tolerable. We can gain a
new conception of human nature and a more desirable image of the
self by revising our traditional beliefs about sexuality. Moreover, we
can release man from the burden of unnecessary guilt and anxiety
about sex that corrodes the human personality and begin to replace our
traditional sex morality with a sex ethic that repudiates the older doc-
trine of conjugal rights and duties and recognizes women as personali-
ties whose dignity and integrity must be respected even in marriage.

We also have some penetrating new insights into human personality
and a new understanding of how personality develops, coming not only
from psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis but from novelists,
dramatists, and poets, who help us to understand the personality of
others and of ourselves. The seemingly non-rational, so-called instinc-
tive basis of human behavior is often regarded as an insurmountable
obstacle to developing any better pattern of human conduct and rela-
tions. But the experience of other cultures indicates that each group
produces the kind of personality-character structure which its basic
concepts, beliefs, and aspirations foster through its practices of child

care and rearing. We have not learned how to utilize the non-rational because we have condemned what is essentially organic and emotional and expected man to live "from the neck up."

Western culture has frequently been urged by various leaders to accept the ideal of human conduct as wholly ascetic, a denial of man's organism, his capacity for feelings and emotions, for empathy, and for esthetic experience. In a word, the ideal is to dehumanize man as if thereby he would become some superhuman entity, an ideal that today we cannot avoid considering as pathological, as apparently many of those who have fostered such thinking have been.

Many now believe that the behavior of parents toward their children —all the coercive, vindictive, sometimes sadistic treatment of the child, as well as the continual denunciation, humiliation, and punishing—is the expression of parental personalities, their neuroses, obsessions, chronic anxiety, guilt, and hostility, and is basic to human nature. Accordingly, the only answer they can offer is that all parents require psychotherapy to free them from this unconscious pattern and from these repressed feelings, which are expressed in treatment of the child.

We cannot attribute such parental behavior to human nature since it is not found in all cultures, indeed seems almost peculiar to Western European cultures and Christian peoples. Moreover, all these adverse patterns of parental behavior are learned by individuals who were indoctrinated with our accepted beliefs about human nature and brought up according to traditional patterns by their parents. Traditions, we are discovering, can be as coercive as physical heredity, and our major task is to interrupt the continuity of traditions that are now revealed as self-defeating.

Many parents would like to treat their children in more desirable ways, but they are fearful of criticism and are timid about criticizing traditions. Moreover, when they do renounce traditional practices, they often accept formulas that are primarily reactions against previous practices and not always dependable guides, as we saw recently in the violent swing from coercive discipline to extreme permissiveness, which deprives the child of much needed guidance and help in curbing his impulses and learning to live in a symbolic cultural world.

Accordingly, we should ask, to what extent can we self-consciously seek to reorient our culture? Can we envisage something like a public health program to clean up our cultural environment, recognizing the archaic conception of human nature and the anachronistic patterns of child-rearing that need to be replaced in order to provide a more favorable milieu for the development of the human personality?

Perhaps the most difficult situation we face in any attempt to develop a new image of the self is in our theological teachings, most of which not only support these parental practices but reinforce the guilt and anxiety in children and continue to declare human nature is bad.

If, as suggested earlier, we consider the conception of human nature as an integral part of the basic conceptual framework of a culture, more explicitly of the conception of the nature of the universe, of man's place therein, and of his relations to his social order, we may regard this early formulation of human nature as no longer congruous with, nor appropriate to, the new conceptions of the universe, of man's origin and development, or of culture and social order.

Indeed, we may consider that the historic concept of human nature, which fosters these self-defeating images of the self, has now become a major obstacle to man's aspirations.

Is this theological conception of human nature perpetuated as crucial to the doctrines of vicarious atonement and redemption and the related beliefs of Christian churches, and, if so, are these beliefs still credible and acceptable? What would happen if we were to renounce these long accepted teachings about human nature being fallen from grace and innately wicked and sinful, asserting that in the light of contemporary knowledge and understanding the idea of man's fall is no longer credible, as we have recognized that the belief in the creation of the world by fiat is no longer credible? Even if we say these beliefs are analogical truths, they are misleading and adverse to human development.

We can assert that, if man is to have any genuine dignity and be regarded as worthy of recognition as a uniquely individual personality, we cannot continue the teachings about a malign human nature but rather can emphasize that we create the kind of personalities who are antisocial and self-defeating, largely under the domination of these archaic beliefs and expectations about human nature.

We can resolve the ages-old controversies about free will versus determinism by recognizing that the individual personality is dominated by his forgotten childhood as long as it is forgotten. This is the rationale of psychoanalytic therapy, to free the personality from these forgotten "unconscious" patterns. But we can foster socially responsive personalities who can act autonomously and exhibit desirable human conduct, always within the limits of their culture. To develop such personalities, we must radically alter our conception of human nature and our practices of child care and rearing so that the individual will develop without the frequent burdens that block his becoming an autonomous person. But we must also give up the expectation that we can

develop personalities who are perfect and cease to hold up that ideal for children to emulate. We need not abandon our human aspirations when we relinquish these archaic doctrines and unhuman ideals. Rather, we can aspire to a way of living that will evoke man's potentialities for living as a personality with dignity and a justified self-confidence.

While psychiatry, psychology, and religion are coming closer together, especially in regard to the treatment of individual personalities in distress, this rapprochement should be focused upon the recognition of these questions and the need to reformulate our traditional conception of human nature as a product of what a culture does to and for our human potentialities. In such an endeavor, I believe that both religion and psychiatry may find a common ground for the great tasks of "saving mankind" by seeking together the new conception of human nature and a revision of man's image of himself.

For such an undertaking we can rely upon our enduring goal values as guides, recognizing that today we can and must genuinely recognize the worth of the individual human personality and respect his dignity and integrity, beginning at birth. Instead of looking for sanction for such beliefs and aspirations elsewhere, we can assert that human dignity is inherent in man's capacity to live in a symbolic cultural world and to maintain that cultural world through his individualized personal participation and especially through his relations to others.

We can also invoke the ancient injunction to love little children as a sanction for replacing the long-accepted patterns and practices of child care and rearing and for giving the child an image of himself that is congruous with his potentialities as a developing human personality.

NOTE

[1] See my *Tactile Communication* ("Genetic Psychology Monographs," Vol. LVI [1957]).