MAN'S SEARCH FOR HIMSELF

ROLLO MAY

"ANALYZES LIFE AS WE ARE LIVING IT, AND THE ANALYSIS IS TRUTHFUL AND PROFOUND." —*NEW YORK TIMES*

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Preface

ONE of the few blessings of living in an age of anxiety is that we are forced to become aware of ourselves. When our society, in its time of upheaval in standards and values, can give us no clear picture of "what we are and what we ought to be," as Matthew Arnold puts it, we are thrown back on the search for ourselves. The painful insecurity on all sides gives us new incentive to ask, Is there perhaps some important source of guidance and strength we have overlooked?

I realize, of course, that this is not generally called a blessing. People ask, rather, How can anyone attain inner integration in such a disintegrated world? Or they question, How can anyone undertake the long development toward self-realization in a time when practically nothing is certain, either in the present or the future?

Most thoughtful people have pondered these questions. The psychotherapist has no magic answers. To be sure, the new light which depth-psychology throws on the buried motives which make us think and feel and act the way we do should be of crucial help in one's search for one's self. But there is something in addition to his technical training and his own self-understanding which gives an author the courage to rush in where angels fear to tread and offer his ideas and experience on the difficult questions which we shall confront in this book.

This something is the wisdom the psychotherapist gains in working with people who are striving to overcome their problems. He has the extraordinary, if often taxing, privilege of accompanying

persons through their intimate and profound struggles to gain new integration. And dull indeed would be the therapist who did not get glimpses into what blinds people in our day from themselves, and what blocks them in finding values and goals they can affirm.

Alfred Adler once said, referring to the children's school he had founded in Vienna, "The pupils teach the teachers." It is always thus in psychotherapy. And I do not see how the therapist can be anything but deeply grateful for what he is daily taught about the issues and dignity of life by those who are called his patients.

I am also grateful to my colleagues for the many things I have learned from them on these points; and to the students and faculty of Mills College in California for their rich and stimulating reactions when I discussed some of these ideas with them in my Centennial lectures there on "Personal Integrity in an Age of Anxiety."

This book is not a substitute for psychotherapy. Nor is it a self-help book in the sense that it promises cheap and easy cures overnight. But in another worthy and profound sense every good book is a self-help book—it helps the reader, through seeing himself and his own experiences reflected in the book, to gain new light on his own problems of personal integration. I hope this is that kind of book.

In these chapters we shall look not only to the new insights of psychology on the hidden levels of the self, but also to the wisdom of those who through the ages, in the fields of literature, philosophy, and ethics, have sought to understand how man can best meet his insecurity and personal crises, and turn them to constructive uses. Our aim is to discover ways in which we can stand against the insecurity of our time, to find a center of strength within ourselves, and as far as we can, to point the way toward achieving values and goals which can be depended upon in a day when very little is secure.

Rollo May
New York City

MAN'S SEARCH FOR HIMSELF

To venture causes anxiety, but not to venture is to lose one's self. . . . And to venture in the highest sense is precisely to become conscious of one's self.

—*Kierkegaard*

The one goeth to his neighbor because he seeketh himself, and the other because he would fain lose himself. Your bad love to yourselves maketh solitude a prison to you.

—*Nietzsche*

Part 1

OUR PREDICAMENT

1

The Loneliness and Anxiety of Modern Man

WHAT are the major, inner problems of people in our day? When we look beneath the outward occasions for people's disturbances, such as the threat of war, the draft, and economic uncertainty, what do we find are the underlying conflicts? To be sure, the symptoms of disturbance which people describe, in our age as in any other, are unhappiness, inability to decide about marriage or vocations, general despair and meaninglessness in their lives, and so on. But what underlies these symptoms?

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the most common cause of such problems was what Sigmund Freud so well described—the person's difficulty in accepting the instinctual, sexual side of life and the resulting conflict between sexual impulses and social taboos. Then in the 1920's Otto Rank wrote that the underlying roots of people's psychological problems at that time were feelings of inferiority, inadequacy and guilt. In the 1930's the focus of psychological conflict shifted again: the common denominator then, as Karen Horney pointed out, was hostility between individuals and groups, often connected with the competitive feelings of who gets ahead of whom. What are the root problems in our middle of the twentieth century?

The Hollow People

It may sound surprising when I say, on the basis of my own clinical practice as well as that of my psychological and psychiatric colleagues,

that the chief problem of people in the middle decade of the twentieth century is *emptiness*. By that I mean not only that many people do not know what they want; they often do not have any clear idea of what they feel. When they talk about lack of autonomy, or lament their inability to make decisions—difficulties which are present in all decades—it soon becomes evident that their underlying problem is that they have no definite experience of their own desires or wants. Thus they feel swayed this way and that, with painful feelings of powerlessness, because they feel vacuous, empty. The complaint which leads them to come for help may be, for example, that their love relationships always break up or that they cannot go through with marriage plans or are dissatisfied with the marriage partner. But they do not talk long before they make it clear that they expect the marriage partner, real or hoped-for, to fill some lack, some vacancy within themselves; and they are anxious and angry because he or she doesn't.

They generally can talk fluently about what they *should* want—to complete their college degrees successfully, to get a job, to fall in love and marry and raise a family—but it is soon evident, even to them, that they are describing what others, parents, professors, employers, expect of them rather than what they themselves want. Two decades ago such external goals could be taken seriously; but now the person realizes, even as he talks, that actually his parents and society do not make all these requirements of him. In theory at least, his parents have told him time and again that they give him freedom to make decisions for himself. And furthermore the person realizes himself that it will not help him to pursue such external goals. But that only makes his problem the more difficult, since he has so little conviction or sense of the reality of his own goals. As one person put it, "I'm just a collection of mirrors, reflecting what everyone else expects of me."

In previous decades, if a person who came for psychological help did not know what he wanted or felt, it generally could be assumed that he wanted something quite definite, such as some sexual gratification, but he dared not admit this to himself. As Freud made clear, the desire was there; the chief thing necessary was to clear up the repressions, bring the desire into consciousness, and eventually help

the patient to become able to gratify his desire in accord with reality. But in our day sexual taboos are much weaker; the Kinsey report made that clear if anyone still doubted it. Opportunities for sexual gratification can be found without too much trouble by persons who do not have pronounced other problems. The sexual problems people bring today for therapy, furthermore, are rarely struggles against social prohibitions as such, but much more often are deficiencies within themselves, such as the lack of potency or the lack of capacity to have strong feelings in responding to the sexual partner. In other words, the most common problem now is not social taboos on sexual activity or guilt feeling about sex in itself, but the fact that sex for so many people is an empty, mechanical and vacuous experience.

A dream of a young woman illustrates the dilemma of the "mirror" person. She was quite emancipated sexually, but she wanted to get married and could not choose between two possible men. One man was the steady, middle-class type, of whom her well-to-do family would have approved; but the other shared more of her artistic and Bohemian interests. In the course of her painful bouts of indecision, during which she could not make up her mind as to what kind of person she really was and what kind of life she wished to lead, she dreamt that a large group of people took a vote on which of the two men she should marry. During the dream she felt relieved—this was certainly a convenient solution! The only trouble was when she awoke she couldn't remember which way the vote had gone.

Many people could say out of their own inner experience the prophetic words T. S. Eliot wrote in 1925:

> We are the hollow men
> We are the stuffed men
> Leaning together
> Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
>
> Shape without form, shade without colour,
> Paralyzed force, gesture without motion; . . .*

* "The Hollow Men," in *Collected Poems*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1934, p. 101.

Perhaps some readers are conjecturing that this emptiness, this inability to know what one feels or wants, is due to the fact that we live in a time of uncertainty—a time of war, military draft, economic change, with a future of insecurity facing us no matter how we look at it. So no wonder one doesn't know what to plan and feels futile! But this conclusion is too superficial. As we shall show later, the problems go much deeper than these occasions which cue them off. Furthermore, war, economic upheaval and social change are really symptoms of the same underlying condition in our society, of which the psychological problems we are discussing are also symptoms.

Other readers may be raising another question: "It may be true that people who come for psychological help feel empty and hollow, but aren't those *neurotic* problems, and not necessarily true for the majority of people?" To be sure, we would answer, the persons who get to the consulting rooms of psychotherapists and psychoanalysts are not a cross-section of the population. By and large they are the ones for whom the conventional pretenses and defenses of the society no longer work. Very often they are the more sensitive and gifted members of the society; they need to get help, broadly speaking, because they are less successful at rationalizing than the "well-adjusted" citizen who is able for the time being to cover up his underlying conflicts. Certainly the patients who came to Freud in the 1890's and the first decade of this century with the sexual symptoms he described were not representative of their Victorian culture: most people around them went on living under the customary taboos and rationalizations of Victorianism, believing that sex was repugnant and should be covered up as much as possible. But after the First World War, in the 1920's, those sexual problems became overt and epidemic. Almost every sophisticated person in Europe and America then experienced the same conflicts between sexual urges and social taboos which the few had been struggling with a decade or two earlier. No matter how highly one thinks of Freud, one would not be naive enough to suggest that he in his writings caused this development; he merely predicted it. Thus a relatively small number of people—those who come for psychotherapeutic help in the process of their

struggle for inner integration—provide a very revealing and significant barometer of the conflicts and tensions under the psychological surface of the society. This barometer should be taken seriously, for it is one of the best indexes of the disruptions and problems which have not yet, but may soon, break out widely in the society.

Furthermore, it is not only in the consulting rooms of psychologists and psychoanalysts that we observe the problem of modern man's inner emptiness. There is much sociological data to indicate that the "hollowness" is already cropping out in many different ways in our society. David Riesman, in his excellent book, *The Lonely Crowd*, which came to my attention just as I was writing these chapters, finds the same emptiness in his fascinating analysis of the present American character. Before World War I, says Riesman, the typical American individual was "inner-directed." He had taken over the standards he was taught, was moralistic in the late Victorian sense, and had strong motives and ambitions, derived from the outside though they were. He lived as though he were given stability by an inner gyroscope. This was the type which fits the early psychoanalytic description of the emotionally repressed person who is directed by a strong superego.

But the present typical American character, Riesman goes on to say, is "outer-directed." He seeks not to be outstanding but to "fit in"; he lives as though he were directed by a radar set fastened to his head perpetually telling him what other people expect of him. This radar type gets his motives and directions from others; like the man who described himself as a set of mirrors, he is able to respond but not to choose; he has no effective center of motivation of his own.

We do not mean—nor does Riesman—to imply an admiration for the inner-directed individuals of the late Victorian period. Such persons gained their strength by internalizing external rules, by compartmentalizing will power and intellect and by repressing their feelings. This type was well suited for business success, for, like the nineteenth-century railroad tycoons and the captains of industry, they could manipulate people in the same way as coal cars or the stock market. The gyroscope is an excellent symbol for them since it stands

for a completely mechanical center of stability. William Randolph Hearst was an example of this type: he amassed great power and wealth, but he was so anxious underneath this appearance of strength, particularly with regard to dying, that he would never allow anyone to use the word "death" in his presence. The gyroscope men often had disastrous influences on their children because of their rigidity, dogmatism, and inability to learn and to change. In my judgment the attitudes and behavior of these men are examples of how certain attitudes in a society tend to crystallize rigidly just before they collapse. It is easy to see how a period of emptiness would have to follow the breakdown of the period of the "iron men"; take out the gyroscope, and they are hollow.

So we shed no tears for the demise of the gyroscope man. One might place on his tombstone the epitaph, "Like the dinosaur, he had power without the ability to change, strength without the capacity to learn." The chief value in our understanding these last representatives of the nineteenth century is that we shall then be less likely to be seduced by their pseudo "inner strength." If we clearly see that their gyroscope method of gaining psychological power was unsound and eventually self-defeating, and their inner direction a moralistic substitute for integrity rather than integrity itself, we shall be the more convinced of the necessity of finding a new center of strength within ourselves.

Actually, our society has not yet found something to take the place of the gyroscope man's rigid rules. Riesman points out that the "outer-directed" people in our time generally are characterized by attitudes of *passivity* and *apathy*. The young people of today have by and large given up the driving ambition to excel, to be at the top; or if they do have such ambition, they regard it as a fault and are often apologetic for such a hangover from their fathers' mores. They want to be accepted by their peers even to the extent of being inconspicuous and absorbed in the group. This sociological picture is very similar in its broad lines to the picture we get in psychological work with individuals.

A decade or two ago, the emptiness which was beginning to be

experienced on a fairly broad scale by the middle classes could be laughed at as the sickness of the suburbs. The clearest picture of the empty life is the suburban man, who gets up at the same hour every weekday morning, takes the same train to work in the city, performs the same task in the office, lunches at the same place, leaves the same tip for the waitress each day, comes home on the same train each night, has 2.3 children, cultivates a little garden, spends a two-week vacation at the shore every summer which he does not enjoy, goes to church every Christmas and Easter, and moves through a routine, mechanical existence year after year until he finally retires at sixty-five and very soon thereafter dies of heart failure, possibly brought on by repressed hostility. I have always had the secret suspicion, however, that he dies of boredom.

But there are indications in the present decade that emptiness and boredom have become much more serious states for many people. Not long ago, a very curious incident was reported in the New York papers. A bus driver in the Bronx simply drove away in his empty bus one day and was picked up by the police several days later in Florida. He explained that, having gotten tired of driving the same route every day, he had decided to go away on a trip. While he was being brought back it was clear from the papers that the bus company was having a hard time deciding whether or how he should be punished. By the time he arrived in the Bronx, he was a "cause célèbre," and a crowd of people who apparently had never personally known the errant bus driver were on hand to welcome him. When it was announced that the company had decided not to turn him over for legal punishment but to give him his job back again if he would promise to make no more jaunts, there was literal as well as figurative cheering in the Bronx.

Why should these solid citizens of the Bronx, living in a metropolitan section which is almost synonymous with middle-class urban conventionality, make a hero out of a man who according to their standards was an auto thief, and worse yet, failed to appear at his regular time for work? Was it not that this driver who got bored to death with simply making his appointed rounds, going around the

same blocks and stopping at the same corners day after day, typified some similar emptiness and futility in these middle-class people, and that his gesture, ineffectual as it was, represented some deep but repressed need in the solid citizens of the Bronx? On a small scale this reminds us of the fact that the upper middle classes in bourgeois France several decades ago, as Paul Tillich has remarked, were able to endure the stultifying and mechanical routine of their commercial and industrial activities only by virtue of the presence of centers of Bohemianism at their elbows. People who live as "hollow men" can endure the monotony only by an occasional blowoff—or at least by identifying with someone else's blowoff.

In some circles emptiness is even made a goal to be sought after, under the guise of being "adaptable." Nowhere is this illustrated more arrestingly than in an article in *Life* Magazine entitled "The Wife Problem."* Summarizing a series of researches which first appeared in *Fortune* about the role of the wives of corporation executives, this article points out that whether or not the husband is promoted depends a great deal on whether his wife fits the "pattern." Time was when only the minister's wife was looked over by the trustees of the church before her husband was hired; now the wife of the corporation executive is screened, covertly or overtly, by most companies like the steel or wool or any other commodity the company uses. She must be highly gregarious, not intellectual or conspicuous, and she must have very "sensitive antennae" (again that radar set!) so that she can be forever adapting.

The "good wife is good by *not* doing things—by *not* complaining when her husband works late, by *not* fussing when a transfer is coming up; by *not* engaging in any controversial activity." Thus her success depends not on how she actively uses her powers, but on her knowing when and how to be passive. But the rule that transcends all others, says *Life*, is "*Don't be too good*. Keeping up with the Joneses is still important. But where in pushier and more primitive times it implied going substantially ahead of the Joneses, today keeping up

* January 7, 1952.

means just that: keeping up. One can move ahead, yes—but slightly, and the timing must be exquisite." In the end the company conditions almost everything the wife does—from the companions she is permitted to have down to the car she drives and what and how much she drinks and reads. To be sure, in return for this indenture the modern corporation "takes care of" its members in the form of giving them added security, insurance, planned vacations, and so on. *Life* remarks that the "Company" has become like "Big Brother"—the symbol for the dictator—in Orwell's novel, *1984*.

The editors of *Fortune* confess that they find these results "a little frightening. Conformity, it would appear, is being elevated into something akin to a religion. . . . Perhaps Americans will arrive at an ant society, not through fiat of a dictator, but through unbridled desire to get along with one another. . . ."

While one might laugh at the meaningless boredom of people a decade or two ago, the emptiness has for many now moved from the state of boredom to a state of futility and despair which holds promise of dangers. The widespread drug addiction among high-school students in New York City has been quite accurately related to the fact that great numbers of these adolescents have very little to look forward to except the army and unsettled economic conditions, and are without positive, constructive goals. The human being cannot live in a condition of emptiness for very long: if he is not growing *toward* something, he does not merely stagnate; the pent-up potentialities turn into morbidity and despair, and eventually into destructive activities.

What is the psychological origin of this experience of emptiness? The *feeling* of emptiness or vacuity which we have observed sociologically and individually should not be taken to mean that people *are* empty, or without emotional potentiality. A human being is not empty in a static sense, as though he were a storage battery which needs charging. The experience of emptiness, rather, generally comes from people's feeling that they are *powerless* to do anything effective about their lives or the world they live in. Inner vacuousness is the long-term, accumulated result of a person's particular conviction

toward himself, namely his conviction that he cannot act as an entity in directing his own life, or change other people's attitudes toward him, or effectually influence the world around him. Thus he gets the deep sense of despair and futility which so many people in our day have. And soon, since what he wants and what he feels can make no real difference, he gives up wanting and feeling. Apathy and lack of feeling are also defenses against anxiety. When a person continually faces dangers he is powerless to overcome, his final line of defense is at last to avoid even feeling the dangers.

Sensitive students of our time have seen these developments coming. Erich Fromm has pointed out that people today no longer live under the authority of church or moral laws, but under "anonymous authorities" like public opinion. The authority is the public itself, but this public is merely a collection of many individuals each with his radar set adjusted to finding out what the others expect of him. The corporation executive, in the *Life* article, is at the top because he—and his wife—have been successful in "adjusting to" public opinion. The public is thus made up of all the Toms, Marys, Dicks and Harrys who are slaves to the authority of public opinion! Riesman makes the very relevant point that the public is therefore afraid of a ghost, a bogeyman, a chimera. It is an anonymous authority with a capital "A" when the authority is a composite of ourselves, but ourselves without any individual centers. We are in the long run afraid of our own collective emptiness.

And we have good reason, as do the editors of *Fortune*, to be frightened by this situation of conformity and individual emptiness. We need only remind ourselves that the ethical and emotional emptiness in European society two and three decades ago was an open invitation to fascist dictatorships to step in and fill the vacuum.

The great danger of this situation of vacuity and powerlessness is that it leads sooner or later to painful anxiety and despair, and ultimately, if it is not corrected, to futility and the blocking off of the most precious qualities of the human being. Its end results are the dwarfing and impoverishment of persons psychologically, or else surrender to some destructive authoritarianism.

Loneliness

Another characteristic of modern people is loneliness. They describe this feeling as one of being "on the outside," isolated, or, if they are sophisticated, they say that they feel alienated. They emphasize how crucial it is for them to be invited to this party or that dinner, not because they especially want to go (though they generally do go) nor because they will get enjoyment, companionship, sharing of experience and human warmth in the gathering (very often they do not, but are simply bored). Rather, being invited is crucial because it is a proof that they are not alone. Loneliness is such an omnipotent and painful threat to many persons that they have little conception of the positive values of solitude, and even at times are very frightened at the prospect of being alone. Many people suffer from "the fear of finding oneself alone," remarks André Gide, "and so they don't find themselves at all."

The feelings of emptiness and loneliness go together. When persons, for example, are telling of a break-up in a love relationship, they will often not say they feel sorrow or humiliation over a lost conquest; but rather that they feel "emptied." The loss of the other leaves an inner "yawning void," as one person put it.

The reasons for the close relation between loneliness and emptiness are not difficult to discover. For when a person does not know with any inner conviction what he wants or what he feels; when, in a period of traumatic change, he becomes aware of the fact that the conventional desires and goals he has been taught to follow no longer bring him any security or give him any sense of direction, when, that is, he feels an inner void while he stands amid the outer confusion of upheaval in his society, he senses danger; and his natural reaction is to look around for other people. They, he hopes, will give him some sense of direction, or at least some comfort in the knowledge that he is not alone in his fright. Emptiness and loneliness are thus two phases of the same basic experience of anxiety.

Perhaps the reader can recall the anxiety which swept over us like a tidal wave when the first atom bomb exploded over Hiroshima,

when we sensed our grave danger—sensed, that is, that we might be the last generation—but did not know in which direction to turn. At that moment the reaction of great numbers of people was, strangely enough, a sudden, deep loneliness. Norman Cousins, endeavoring in his essay *Modern Man Is Obsolete* to express the deepest feelings of intelligent people at that staggering historical moment, wrote not about how to protect one's self from atomic radiation, or how to meet political problems, or the tragedy of man's self-destruction. Instead his editorial was a meditation on loneliness. "All man's history," he proclaimed, "is an endeavor to shatter his loneliness."

Feelings of loneliness occur when one feels empty and afraid not simply because one wants to be protected by the crowd, as a wild animal is protected by being in a pack. Nor is the longing for others simply an endeavor to fill the void within one's self—though this certainly is one side of the need for human companionship when one feels empty or anxious. The more basic reason is that the human being gets his original experiences of being a self out of his relatedness to other persons, and when he is alone, without other persons, he is afraid he will lose this experience of being a self. Man, the biosocial mammal, not only is dependent on other human beings such as his father and mother for his security during a long childhood; he likewise receives his consciousness of himself, which is the basis of his capacity to orient himself in life, from these early relationships. These important points we will discuss more thoroughly in a later chapter—here we wish only to point out that part of the feeling of loneliness is that man needs relations with other people in order to orient himself.

But another important reason for the feeling of loneliness arises from the fact that our society lays such a great emphasis on being socially accepted. It is our chief way of allaying anxiety, and our chief mark of prestige. Thus we always have to prove we are a "social success" by being forever sought after and by never being alone. If one is well-liked, that is, socially successful—so the idea goes—one will rarely be alone; not to be liked is to have lost out in the race. In the days of the gyroscope man and earlier, the chief criterion of prestige was financial success: now the belief is that if one is well-liked, finan-

cial success and prestige will follow. "Be well-liked," Willie Loman in *Death of a Salesman* advises his sons, "and you will never want."

The reverse side of modern man's loneliness is his great fear of being alone. In our culture it is permissible to say you are lonely, for that is a way of admitting that it is not good to be alone. The melancholy romantic songs present this sentiment, with the appropriate nostalgia:

> Me and my shadow,
> Not a soul to tell our troubles to . . .
> Just me and my shadow,
> All alone and feeling blue.*

And it is permissible to want to be alone temporarily to "get away from it all." But if one mentioned at a party that he liked to be alone, not for a rest or an escape, but for its own joys, people would think that something was vaguely wrong with him—that some pariah aura of untouchability or sickness hovered round him. And if a person is alone very much of the time, people tend to think of him as a failure, for it is inconceivable to them that he would choose to be alone.

This fear of being alone lies behind the great need of people in our society to get invited places, or if they invite someone else, to have the other accept. The pressure to keep "dated up" goes way beyond such realistic motives as the pleasure and warmth people get in each other's company, the enrichment of feelings, ideas and experiences, or the sheer pleasure of relaxation. Actually, such motives have very little to do with the compulsion to get invited. Many of the more sophisticated persons are well aware of these points, and would like to be able to say "No"; but they very much want the *chance* to go, and to turn down invitations in the usual round of social life means sooner or later one won't get invited. The cold fear that protrudes its icy head from subterranean levels is that one would then be shut out entirely, left on the outside.

**Me and My Shadow*, by Billy Rose, Al Jolson and Dave Dreyer. Copyright 1927, by Bourne, Inc., New York, N.Y., used by permission of the copyright owners.

To be sure, in all ages people have been afraid of loneliness and have tried to escape it. Pascal in the seventeenth century observed the great efforts people make to divert themselves, and he opined that the purpose of the bulk of these diversions was to enable people to avoid thoughts of themselves. Kierkegaard a hundred years ago wrote that in his age "one does everything possible by way of diversions and the Janizary music of loud-voiced enterprises to keep lonely thoughts away, just as in the forests of America they keep away wild beasts by torches, by yells, by the sound of cymbals." But the difference in our day is that the fear of loneliness is much more extensive, and the defenses against it—diversions, social rounds, and "being liked"—are more rigid and compulsive.

Let us paint an impressionistic picture of a somewhat extreme though not otherwise unusual example of the fear of loneliness in our society as seen in the social activities at summer resorts. Let us take a typical, averagely well-to-do summer colony on the seashore, where people are vacationing and therefore do not have their work available for the time being as escape and support. It is of crucial importance for these people to keep up the continual merry-go-round of cocktail parties, despite the fact that they meet the same people every day at the parties, drink the same cocktails, and talk of the same subjects or lack of subjects. What is important is not what is said, but that some talk be continually going on. Silence is the great crime, for silence is lonely and frightening. One shouldn't feel much, nor put much meaning into what one says: what you say seems to have more effect if you don't try to understand. One has the strange impression that these people are all afraid of something—what is it? It is as if the "yatata" were a primitive tribal ceremony, a witch dance calculated to appease some god. There is a god, or rather a demon, they are trying to appease: it is the specter of loneliness which hovers outside like the fog drifting in from the sea. One will have to meet this specter's leering terror for the first half-hour one is awake in the morning anyway, so let one do everything possible to keep it away now. Figuratively speaking, it is the specter of death they are trying to appease—death as the symbol of ultimate separation, aloneness, isolation from other human beings.

Admittedly, the above illustration is extreme. In the day-to-day experience of most of us, the fear of being alone may not crop up in intense form very often. We generally have methods of "keeping lonely thoughts away," and our anxiety may appear only in occasional dreams of fright which we try to forget as soon as possible in the morning. But these differences in intensity of the fear of loneliness, and the relative success of our defenses against it, do not change the central issue. Our fear of loneliness may not be shown by anxiety as such, but by subtle thoughts which pop up to remind us, when we discover we were not invited to so-and-so's party, that someone else likes us even if the person in question doesn't, or to tell us that we were successful or popular in such-and-such other time in the past. Often this reassuring process is so automatic that we are not aware of it in itself, but only of the ensuing comfort to our self-esteem. If we as citizens of the middle twentieth century look honestly into ourselves, that is, look below our customary pretenses, do we not find this fear of isolation as an almost constant companion, despite its many masquerades?

The fear of being alone derives much of its terror from our anxiety lest we *lose our awareness of ourselves*. If people contemplate being alone for longish periods of time, without anyone to talk to or any radio to eject noise into the air, they generally are afraid that they would be at "loose ends," would lose the boundaries for themselves, would have nothing to bump up against, nothing by which to orient themselves. It is interesting that they sometimes say that if they were alone for long they wouldn't be able to work or play in order to get tired; and so they wouldn't be able to sleep. And then, though they generally cannot explain this, they would lose the distinction between wakefulness and sleep, just as they lose the distinction between the subjective self and the objective world around them.

Every human being gets much of his sense of his own reality out of what others say to him and think about him. But many modern people have gone so far in their dependence on others for their feeling of reality that they are afraid that without it they would lose the sense of their own existence. They feel they would be "dispersed,"

like water flowing every which way on the sand. Many people are like blind men feeling their way along in life only by means of touching a succession of other people.

In its extreme form, this fear of losing one's orientation is the fear of psychosis. When persons actually are on the brink of psychosis, they often have an urgent need to seek out some contact with other human beings. This is sound, for such relating gives them a bridge to reality.

But the point we are discussing here has a different origin. Modern Western man, trained through four centuries of emphasis on rationality, uniformity, and mechanics, has consistently endeavored, with unfortunate success, to repress the aspects of himself which do not fit these uniform and mechanical standards. Is it not too much to say that modern man, sensing his own inner hollowness, is afraid that if he should not have his regular associates around him, should not have the talisman of his daily program and his routine of work, if he should forget what time it is, that he would feel, though in an inarticulate way, some threat like that which one experiences on the brink of psychosis? When one's customary ways of orienting oneself are threatened, and one is without other selves around one, one is thrown back on inner resources and inner strength, and this is what modern people have neglected to develop. Hence loneliness is a real, not imaginary, threat to many of them.

Social acceptance, "being liked," has so much power because it holds the feelings of loneliness at bay. A person is surrounded with comfortable warmth; he is merged in the group. He is reabsorbed—as though, in the extreme psychoanalytic symbol, he were to go back into the womb. He temporarily loses his loneliness; but it is at the price of giving up his existence as an identity in his own right. And he renounces the one thing which would get him constructively over the loneliness in the long run, namely the developing of his own inner resources, strength and sense of direction, and using this as a basis for meaningful relations with others. The "stuffed men" are bound to become more lonely no matter how much they "lean together"; for hollow people do not have a base from which to learn to love.

Anxiety and the Threat to the Self

Anxiety, the other characteristic of modern man, is even more basic than emptiness and loneliness. For being "hollow" and lonely would not bother us except that it makes us prey to that peculiar psychological pain and turmoil called anxiety.

No one who reads the morning newspaper needs to be persuaded that we live in an age of anxiety. Two world wars in thirty-five years, economic upheavals and depressions, the eruption of fascist barbarism and the rise of communist totalitarianism, and now not only interminable half-wars but the prospects of cold wars for decades to come while we skate literally on the edge of a Third World War complete with atom bombs—these simple facts from any daily journal are enough to show how the foundations of our world are shaken. It is no wonder that Bertrand Russell writes that the painful thing "about our time is that those who feel certainty are stupid, and those with any imagination and understanding are filled with doubt and indecision."

I have indicated in a previous book—*The Meaning of Anxiety*—that our middle of the twentieth century is more anxiety-ridden than any period since the breakdown of the Middle Ages. Those years in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when Europe was inundated with anxiety in the form of fears of death, agonies of doubt about the meaning and value of life, superstition and fears of devils and sorcerers, is the nearest period comparable to our own. All one needs to do is read fears of atomic destruction where historians of that twilight of medievalism write "fears of death," loss of faith and ethical values for "agonies of doubt," and one has the beginning of a rough description of our times. We too have our superstitions in the form of anxiety about flying saucers and little men from Mars, and our "devils and sorcerers" in the demonic supermen of the Nazi and other totalitarian mythologies. Those who wish more detailed evidence of modern anxiety—as it shows itself in the rising incidence of emotional and mental disturbances, divorce and suicide, and in political and economic upheavals—can find it in the book mentioned above.

Indeed, the phrase "age of anxiety" is almost a platitude already.

We have become so inured to living in a state of quasi-anxiety that our real danger is the temptation to hide our eyes in ostrich fashion. We shall live amid upheavals, clashes, wars and rumors of wars for two or three decades to come, and the challenge to the person of "imagination and understanding" is that he face these upheavals openly, and see if, by courage and insight, he can use his anxiety constructively.

It is a mistake to believe that the contemporary wars and depressions and political threats are the total cause of our anxiety, for our anxiety also causes these catastrophes. The anxiety prevalent in our day and the succession of economic and political catastrophes our world has been going through *are both symptoms of the same underlying cause*, namely the traumatic changes occurring in Western society. Fascist and Nazi totalitarianism, for example, do not occur because a Hitler or Mussolini decides to seize power. When a nation, rather, is prey to insupportable economic want and is psychologically and spiritually empty, totalitarianism comes in to fill the vacuum; and the people sell their freedom as a necessity for getting rid of the anxiety which is too great for them to bear any longer.

The confusion and bewilderment in our nation show this anxiety on a broad scale. In this period of wars and threats of wars, we know what we are against, namely, totalitarian encroachment on man's freedom and dignity. We are confident enough of our military strength, but we fight defensively; we are like a strong animal at bay, turning this way and that, not being sure whether to fight on this flank or the other, whether to wait or to attack. As a nation we have had great difficulty deciding how far to go in Korea, whether we should make war here or there, or whether we should draw the line against totalitarianism at this point or that. If anyone should attack us, we should be completely united. But we are confused about constructive goals—what are we working *for* except defense? And even the gestures of new goals which give magnificent promise for a new world, such as the Marshall Plan, are questioned by some groups.

When an individual suffers anxiety continuously over a period of time, he lays his body open to psychosomatic illness. When a group

suffers continuous anxiety, with no agreed-on constructive steps to take, its members sooner or later turn against each other. Just so, when our nation is in confusion and bewilderment, we lay ourselves open to such poison as the character assassinations of McCarthyism, witch hunts, and the ubiquitous pressures to make every man suspicious of his neighbor.

Turning our glance from the society to the individual, we see the most obvious expressions of anxiety in the prevalence of neurosis and other emotional disturbances—which, as practically everyone from Freud onward has agreed, have their root cause in anxiety. Anxiety likewise is the common denominator psychologically of the psychosomatic disturbances—such as ulcers, many of the forms of heart trouble, and so forth. Anxiety, in fine, is our modern form of the great white plague—the greatest destroyer of human health and well-being.

When we look below the surface of our individual anxiety, we find that it also comes from something more profound than the threat of war and economic uncertainty. We are anxious because we do not know what roles to pursue, what principles for action to believe in. Our individual anxiety, somewhat like that of the nation, is a basic confusion and bewilderment about where we are going. Shall a man strive competitively to become economically successful and wealthy, as we used to be taught, or a good fellow who is liked by everyone? He cannot be both. Shall he follow the supposed teaching of the society with regard to sex and be monogamous, or should he follow the average of "what's done" as shown in the Kinsey report?

These are only two examples of a condition that will be inquired into later in this book, namely the basic bewilderment about goals and values which modern people feel. Dr. and Mrs. Lynd, in their study of an American town in the middle west in the 1930's, *Middletown in Transition*, reported that the citizens of this typical community were "caught in a chaos of conflicting patterns, none of them wholly condemned, but no one of them clearly approved and free from confusion." The chief difference between Middletown in the 1930's and our present situation, I believe, is that the confusion has now gone

deeper to the levels of feelings and desires. In such bewilderment many persons experience the inward gnawing apprehension of the young man in Auden's poem, *The Age of Anxiety*,

> . . . It is getting late.
> Shall we ever be asked for? Are we simply
> Not wanted at all?

If anyone believes there are simple answers to these questions, he has neither understood the questions nor the times in which we live. This is a time, as Herman Hesse puts it, "when a whole generation is caught . . . between two ages, two modes of life, with the consequence that it loses all power to understand itself and has no standards, no security, no simple acquiescence."

But it is well to remind ourselves that anxiety signifies a conflict, and so long as a conflict is going on, a constructive solution is possible. Indeed, our present upsets are as much a proof of new possibilities for the future, as we shall see below, as they are of present catastrophe. What is necessary for the constructive use of anxiety is, first of all, that we frankly admit and face our perilous state, individually and socially. As an aid to doing this, we shall now endeavor to get a clearer idea of the meaning of anxiety.

What Is Anxiety?

How shall we define anxiety, and how is it related to fear?

If you are walking across a highway and see a car speeding toward you, your heart beats faster, you focus your eyes on the distance between the car and you, and how far you have to go to get to the safe side of the road, and you hurry across. You felt fear, and it energized you to rush to safety. But if, when you start to hurry across the road, you are surprised by cars coming down the far lane from the opposite direction, you suddenly are caught in the middle of the road not knowing which way to turn. Your heart pounds faster, but now, in