Communication—

APOLOGIA PRO VITAE ALIAE

(AN UNCLINICAL APPROACH TO MENTAL HYGIENE)

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It could be that combining psychiatric principles with Schopenhauer realism might provide a clue to a better life, a rationale for a new ethic, and new insight into the origin of much mental turmoil and even illness.

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Anxiety is considered by those who are knowledgeable to be the one symptom common to all mental diseases. In turn, guilt—real or neurotic—has been found to be an underlying factor in anxiety. Everyone seems to be somewhat anxious, even in the absence of any visible threat. Ovid of old grasped this insight when he wrote, "There is no such thing as pure pleasure; some anxiety always goes with it."

The explanations for this pervasive sense of guilt submitted by two great disciplines of human thought just do not ring with the sound of ultimate truth. The founder of psychoanalysis postulated a legend of prehistoric patricide to account for the condition, while an early Freudian disciple dreamed up the idea of a "collective unconscious." Religion has merely assigned such feeling to the artifACTed concept of "original sin." Another school of psychiatry has been prone to dump this pathological phenomenon into a catch-all category by dubbing it with the vague nomenclature of "the inferiority complex."

It would seem that psychotherapists need not delve into prehistoric myth nor spin psychoanalytic theories to find a prime candidate as cause for man's universal malaise. It could lie in the worldwide workaday practice of becoming a parent. Is it not clearly evident that in creating life we actually subject another human being to an experience which at best is apt to be replete with physical pain and emotional trauma? For most persons, to live is to be tortured. Even the more fortunate of earth men feel

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Alder was very specific in claiming that the universal and frequently lifelong inferiority feeling has its origin in the child's recognition of his inadequacy to negotiate either with his parents or with the world at large. However, this does not detract from the interest of Mr. Dorn's central argument.
a twinge of recognition upon encountering Thoreau’s famous dictum—"The majority of men lead lives of quiet desperation." For all of us there is a gamut of physical disease, emotional turmoil, difficult ecological adjustments, and the fear of death. The psalmist sings of life as "a span of time and trouble." What is unfair and what possibly disturbs our conscience, either at the unconscious or conscious level, is that we impose human experience, such as it is, on another person without his consent. To argue that any prior assent to forced existence is impossible in the nature of things is merely to intellectualize the obvious, but may not quiet nor satisfy some deep misgivings in all of us.

The situation is somewhat similar to what we may observe in the case of wartime homicide, where, despite its social justification, the soldier still is so disturbed at having killed that he requires psychiatric help at a V.A. hospital.

With regard to this forced existence, it is interesting to speculate that adolescent rebellion, far from being an emotional phase of maturation, far from being rebellion without cause, is rather a logical course of retaliative conduct, albeit not an intelligent coping with reality. The child who complains that he didn’t ask to be born, and is therefore entitled to everything his parents can give him without earning it, may have an unhealthy attitude but a rather sound argument. Failure to face up to this basic premise is probably the reason society has as yet not learned how to cope with its delinquency and crime problems.

Strangely, our major hypothesis finds support in the story of Creation. Bible students will recall that Adam and Eve were enjoined from tasting the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, lest it make them "wise." By succumbing to temptation, they acquired wisdom and presumably their first lesson in science, consisting of the ability to foresee the consequences of sexual activity. Only after being able to relate effect to cause did they feel shame (guilt) for their nakedness (sexual attraction). Henceforth, with the realization that their pleasure led to babies (sufferers), a function that was inherently natural and amoral became spoiled by inner conflict. To this day coitus, even when legitimized by both church and state, is still felt to be "naughty," and sometimes so sinful as to cause frigidity. (That the very pangs of labor may be based on some neurotic conflict has been proved by the successes with so-called "natural birth" procedures and