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# LETTERS

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## Gershwin's Analysis

IN CONNECTION with Henry Miller's "Of Drugs and Theory" [ENCOUNTER, September] one important correction should be made. He referred in passing to the story that George Gershwin's psycho-analyst may not have been "medically qualified, and able or incompetent to distinguish an emotional disturbance from a brain tumour."

It happens I knew Gershwin's analyst—Dr Ernst Simmel, a distinguished refugee M.D. with vast experience in medical clinics and hospitals. I once asked him about the rumours (then rife in Hollywood) about his failure to suspect that Gershwin might have a brain tumour. Dr Simmel sighed, "How *does* one ever put to rest such a rumour? The fact is that soon after he came to me for treatment, I sent Mr Gershwin for a thorough series of neurological tests, at Mount Sinai Hospital, by one of the leading neurologists in America. I also advised brain examination. All tests were taken—and proved negative. Months later, again disturbed by certain symptoms, I urged a second examination. Again, this was done. Again, all neurological and brain-analysis findings proved negative. . . ."

It is not always simple or visible (at least it was not in the late 1930s) to catch brain abnormalities in their early states.

LEO ROSTEN

*New York City.*

## Public Patronage of the Arts

PROFESSOR BLAUG's and Miss King's examination of the activities and reports of the Arts Council [ENCOUNTER, September 1973] is timely and welcome. When public expenditure is huge and largely unrestrained, the spending of a mere £35 million a year is small. But as they say, it raises widely pertinent issues of public patronage and of the assessment of its costs and benefits, and (it may be added) of political influence on cultural life. As is evident from their article, Blaug and King are well qualified to address themselves to such matters. I hope that they will return to the subject; and in particular that they will develop further three topics on which they have already touched in their essay or which are clearly implied in it.

1. Blaug and King observe correctly that the attendance figures at Covent Garden and Stratford-on-Avon conflict with some remarks by the Arts Council that higher attendance rates would make it possible to reduce subsidies or even to eliminate them. Their case is stronger than they imply. For many of the performances at these subsidised theatres the demand for seats far exceeds the supply. This is evident from the high re-sale value of tickets; from the need for long advance bookings; from the issue of queueing tickets for which there are often queues. (Some years ago a

Metropolitan Police notice prohibited the forming of queues at Covent Garden more than 24 hours before the beginning of the booking period.) Higher prices for these seats would not, therefore, reduce attendances at these performances. Thus some of these subsidies go to persons and organisations (including large companies) with the time and the money to acquaint themselves with the forward booking arrangements and who can act on this information—or to those who can send others to queue for them—or to small-scale entrepreneurs who buy tickets in order to resell them. This situation throws into relief the wider question of the incidence of the subsidies provided by the Arts Council. The funds of the Council come from the general body of the tax-payers. Much of its expenditure benefits very small numbers of people among whom the modish, the foreign visitors, and the relatively well-to-do are rather disproportionately represented.

2. The ineffectiveness of much of the local expenditure of the Arts Council, mentioned by Professor Blaug and Miss King, is not surprising. The grants are distributed outside London, but the subsidised activities do not seem to be financed to any great extent from local funds. If much more of the expenditure were derived from local sources (notably local authority funds) this would establish or develop direct links between those who pay and those who enjoy the results, or at least observe them. Apart from stimulating and spreading interest in the arts, such a course would probably reduce the subsidies to activities and projects which are largely ephemeral, or even mere hoaxes, or uninteresting political propaganda. It would also make it easier to assess the incidence both of the benefits of the subsidies and of their costs between various groups. Perhaps most important, it would go counter to the apparently irresistible trend towards centralised decision in public expenditure and thus ultimately in public policy. What matters in this context is de-centralised decision and not de-centralised execution of decisions taken centrally as in the original expenditure of Arts Council grants.

3. There is in this country a long tradition of private patronage or mixed public and private patronage to the arts, literature, and science. There is scope for more mixed public and private patronage of the arts, both on a national and on the local level. There are probably not many activities supported by the Arts Council which have done as much to bring serious music to impressionable children, especially poor children, as the Robert Mayer concerts have done. More support to this kind of activity might be a more valuable patronage than much of the expenditure of the Arts Council.

P. T. BAUER

*London School of Economics.*

## Of Drugs & Theory

HENRY MILLER is at it again.

"The models of mental illness that appeal to the European neuro-psychiatrist", he tells us ["Of Drugs & Theory", September], "are those where a psychosis can be traced to an identifiable metabolic disturbance and improved by its correction." The deluded Americans, he explains, still cling to the notion that

mental illness is in some way related to the patient's personal and psychological problems, rather than to "disturbed cerebral function and biochemistry." But in Europe, it has come to be realised that "the basis of the disorders is metabolic and they respond not at all to psychological readjustment but only to correction of the biochemical deficiency or anomaly."

Now, it is just possible that in the emptiness of time, medical scientists will discover a biochemical factor in every mental disorder. It may even transpire that a sample of blood or urine will be enough to secure the appropriate neuro-psychiatric diagnosis which, fed into a computer with all the relevant information about the patient, will provide the prescription that will automatically correct the biochemical deficiency or anomaly. But so what? We still will not know the answer to the essential question: What caused the metabolic disturbance?

Admittedly the treatment may still be the same even if the predisposing cause was emotional—but it may not be. There are hundreds of thousands of people in this country who are being given the psychotropic drugs in which Henry Miller reposes such faith—anti-depressants, bromides, tranquillisers, and so on—for tensions, anxieties, "moods." Can he really claim that these drugs are needed simply because of a plague of metabolic imbalance, unrelated to the mental and emotional background? If so, on what evidence?

Certainly not on the evidence of the publication which reached me in the same week as his article in ENCOUNTER: the report of a symposium on psychotropic drugs sponsored by the Department of Health (published by the Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners). No doubt Henry Miller's new duties prevented him from attending; if he had, he would have found the prevailing mood about the drugs is by no means as breezily optimistic as his own. It is odd, for example, that the anti-depressants have not done anything to reduce the incidence of depression, as presumably they should have begun to do, by now. On the contrary, the rate of referral to psychiatric hospitals with that diagnosis—according to the *British Medical Journal's* editorial, 18 August, on the symposium—has been rising. The prescribing of psychotropic drugs, the *BMJ* suggests, seems to be excessive: "perhaps we need to be more concerned with care and less with cure; able to recognise . . . that the understanding, comfort and reflective discussion the patient seeks do not necessarily require a pharmacologically active vehicle. . . ."

BRIAN INGLIS

London

BRIAN INGLIS RAISES too many issues to be dealt with, except by another article.

There are a few mental illnesses that can clearly be related to biochemical disturbances and be relieved by their correction, with a fair degree of predictability. There are many more where no such anomaly can be identified, but where the natural history of the illness renders this a strong possibility. There is no "Either-Or" antithesis since severe emotional disturbance may indeed provoke metabolic changes (though these may also occur for reasons unconnected with the patient's emotional life). What is truly remarkable is that no amount of talk—or environmental readjustment—will relieve severe depressive illness; whereas it can be significantly ameliorated in three-quarters of all cases by drugs, without either specific attention to personal psychological problems or significant alteration in the environment.

There is no evidence of a "plague" of depressive or any other kind of psychiatric illnesses—which have been known to medicine throughout history. Nor is there anything odd about the fact that anti-depressants have failed to reduce the *incidence* of depression, since they are given only when the illness has made its clinical appearance. They are ameliorative rather than prophylactic. The rate of referral to hospital with a diagnosis of depression (or any other illness) reflects current professional attitudes, therapeutic accessibility, and even diagnostic fashion. The plain fact is that anti-depressive drugs in depressive illness—and phenothiazines in some schizophrenic episodes—produce improvement entirely different in rate and degree from that with which we have long been familiar in the natural course of the respective illnesses. Incidentally, bromide went out with the ark and its only medical use is to produce mental confusion and skin rashes.

Mr Inglis can have his psychotherapist—I will keep on taking the tablets.

HENRY MILLER

*The Vice-Chancellor,  
University of Newcastle upon Tyne*

## Alexis de Tocqueville

IN HIS SOMEWHAT confused letter Mr Hugh Brogan (ENCOUNTER, July, p. 93) has enlarged into a major issue my passing remark that Tocqueville, whose honesty is beyond question, was not the fervent advocator of democracy many suppose, highly conscious though he was of its irresistibility.

An aristocrat of the *ancien régime* and a victim of the French Revolution, he declared his strict impartiality in the preface to the second volume of *Democracy in America* as he did elsewhere. In fact, in this volume he implied that what was good for America was not necessarily good for France. That he was by no means certain mankind had reached the shore of its salvation is clearly conveyed in a significant quotation in the March issue of ENCOUNTER (p. 3).

This is not as soul-shattering a view as Mr Brogan imagines, for "lip-service" does not always mean dishonesty. There is the sincere hypocrisy of necessity that Tocqueville is aware of, as we can see for example in his mention (Vol. 1, *Democracy in America*, "The Sovereignty of the People of America") of the Maryland upper classes who turned democrat. Mr Brogan himself seems to acknowledge such a quality when he says Tocqueville "sometimes found it hard to make up his mind."

Tocqueville wrote a great deal of uncommon sense, unlike his contemporary, the racially-minded Gobineau, also a declassed nobleman, and it is for this rather than his admirable virtue of honesty that he earns our unreserved acclaim.

NIEL HIRSCHSON

Johannesburg

MR HIRSCHSON MAY WRIGGLE as much as he chooses, but he cannot convincingly assert that Tocqueville was either dishonest or an enemy to democracy. Yet such assertion is all his reasoning amounts to.

To settle the matter, let us quote Tocqueville himself. He is writing in 1839 to his friend and translator Henry Reeve about the second volume of the *Democrat*: Reeve must not let his aristocratic prejudices

colour his version of this volume as they coloured the first.

"I write in and for a country where equality has won an irreversible victory over aristocracy. In these circumstances I have felt it my duty to dwell particularly on the evil tendencies to which quality can give birth in order to try to prevent my contemporaries from succumbing to them. . . . So I utter truths that are often unpleasant as to French society today and to democratic societies in general, but I utter them as a friend and not censoriously. Indeed it is because I am a friend that I dare to speak. Your translation must present me as such. I ask it not only of the translator, but of the man." (For the French, see Professor Mayer's edition, pp. 47-8.)

Tocqueville was a friend of democracy who put his searching and impartial judgment, and his transcendent intellectual honesty, at the service of his cause. If Mr Hirschson will only accept this almost self-evident proposition, he will also see how his earlier remarks tended to obscure it, and why, therefore, I attacked him.

HUGH BROGAN

St. John's College,  
Cambridge.

## Wittgenstein

IN THE PERSONAL MEMOIR of Ludwig Wittgenstein by Fania Pascal which appeared in your August issue, she describes Wittgenstein's "Confession" as being told in confidence to a few people. My recollection is that the Confession was also circulated by word of mouth to a number of people (including myself) at Wittgenstein's request. It would not appear therefore that Wittgenstein regarded it as very confidential, though he might have been surprised if he had known it would be published in your magazine more than two decades after his death! If he had known, he might have said something like: Good. If they want to understand what sort of person I was, let them know the worst. . . .

Fania Pascal says that Wittgenstein was "a man of great purity and innocence." However, quite apart from the incidents in the Confession (of which Fania Pascal mentions two while I remember three), Wittgenstein's behaviour, and his views on moral and ethical matters, were by no means always pure and innocent. He himself constantly stressed his own moral shortcomings, and I see no reason not to take him at his own evaluation in this respect.

My knowledge of Wittgenstein is based on private conversations and correspondence with him over a period of several years beginning in 1935.

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