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## The Changing Concept of "Human Nature" in the Literature of American Advertising

*¶ In their debates over the functions of advertising (such as "tell versus sell" and "inform versus manipulate"), practitioners have employed various conceptualizations of the "nature" of man. Implicitly and explicitly, as Professor Curti reveals, these views also tell us much about the "nature" of American society in the twentieth century.*

A new chapter in the long history of the advertising world's interest in "human nature" had recognizably opened in 1953 when *Printers' Ink* announced that "overwhelmingly a group of top-drawer advertising agencies and advertising executives, representing many of the nation's outstanding advertisers, favor the increased use of social science and social scientists." This was evident in the increasing emphasis on finding more reliable samples and on more sophisticated statistical analyses. It was especially evident in the growing zest for "motivation research." In the effort to discover and measure motivation the movement's enthusiastic missionaries within the advertising guild, Pierre Martineau, Ernest Richter, and J. George Frederick, were successfully publicizing the uses of free-word association and projective tests, focused group interviewing, and depth interviews. The vocabulary and techniques of motivation research gave a new dimension to arguments over the relative effectiveness of all that was represented by the slogans "tell versus sell" and "information versus manipulation." The arguments, still current and still lively, indicate a relatively new and important phase in the advertising profession's changing conceptions of "human nature."

However new, such arguments are, nevertheless, related to earlier conceptions of "human nature" which historians of advertising have almost entirely ignored. An examination of the meanings of the term "human nature" and the uses made of it in the decades between

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the 1880's and the 1950's illuminates several matters of interest and importance in one of the most characteristically American sectors of business thought. One of these, certainly, is the way in which advertising experts' understanding of "human nature" was influenced at different times and in varying degrees by trade lore, "common sense," empiricism, traditional and newer psychologies, and shifting situations in the economy.

The sources for such an inquiry include, in addition to advertisements themselves,<sup>1</sup> autobiographies of advertising men, texts on the psychology of advertising, and trade journals among which *Printers' Ink*, launched in 1888 and continuing without break, invites special consideration.<sup>2</sup> Founded by George Presbury Rowell, who had played a prominent part in the advertising business since 1864 in Boston and New York, *Printers' Ink* addressed itself for the most part directly to the manufacturer, the wholesaler and, after the spread of such institutions, to the advertising agency.<sup>3</sup> Most of its articles were written by merchandising and advertising executives of corporations and members of advertising agencies although the staff itself contributed editorials and comment. While the sampling methods used in the study of the bulky files of this journal from 1888 to 1954<sup>4</sup> do not establish beyond doubt all the meanings attached to the term "human nature," they do show that such a journal offers a fruitful field for the investigation of the changing reputation of "human nature" and, in addition, warrant generalizations that seem, within present knowledge, to be reasonably valid.

One might expect on the basis of the varied and independent authorship of the articles in *Printers' Ink* the unlikelihood of finding a clear consensus about the meaning of "human nature." This is

<sup>1</sup> Although not directing his main attention to the idea of human nature, Otis Pease, in *The Responsibilities of American Advertising: Private Control and Public Influence, 1920-1940* (New Haven, 1958), reports continuities and changes in advertising appeals in the 1930's by examining ads in selected issues of *Woman's Home Companion* and *Saturday Evening Post*. Such a direct analysis of themes by content and technique in actual ads is a promising way of investigating changing ideas about human nature.

<sup>2</sup> *Advertising and Selling*, an important trade journal, seemed less suitable for study since it merged with several other advertising periodicals and since occasional breaks in publication occurred.

<sup>3</sup> Rowell's formal education was limited to study at the Lancaster Academy in New Hampshire where he probably was introduced to a watered-down version of the Scottish common sense or realistic philosophy which dominated mid-nineteenth century textbooks on mental science. For a biographical portrait see *Dictionary of American Biography*, XVI, 197-98. From 1909 to his death in 1948, Richard Wesley Lawrence was a dominant figure in the *Printers' Ink* Company. A second-generation Irish-American and a graduate of New York Law School, Lawrence was prominent in the business community and in the civic affairs of New York City. See *National Encyclopedia of American Biography*, XXXVII, 196-97.

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Sharon Smith MacPherson and to Dr. George P. Rawick who, as my research assistants, did a good deal of the spade work for this article. Initially, Mrs. MacPherson studied one volume for every fifth year; as a check on subjective judgment, Dr. Rawick studied alternate volumes; and as a further check, I made spot-checks of the volumes that had already been examined.

especially to be expected because it was assumed, as it was in the common speech of the day, that since everyone knew what the term meant, no formal definition was needed.<sup>5</sup> However, a great many contributors agreed in their understanding of the term although dissenting opinions were to be found for any belief that was prevalent at a given time. Before reporting the results of the study it is appropriate to note that there seems to be no valid alternative to taking at face value statements about "human nature." Nor is there any way of knowing how many advertisers the country over held the view that dominated contributions to the magazine at any given time.

In the study of *Printers' Ink* from 1888 to 1954 three "periods" can be discerned if these are measured by changes in concepts of the nature of "human nature." However, the dates are approximate: the shifts were gradual, never abrupt; and contradictory opinions were expressed in the same time span. Roughly, however, the three "periods" may be thought of as, first, the years from 1889 to 1905–1910; second, from 1905–1910 to 1930; and third, from 1930 to the terminal date of this investigation – the early 1950's.

#### THE DOMINANT RATIONALISTIC IMAGE OF MAN CHALLENGED, 1890–1910

In the first period, 1890 to 1905–1910, contributors and staff made scores of references to "human nature." To the casual reader the terms seems to have been used so vaguely as to be of almost contentless generality: "Human nature is a great factor in advertising success, and he who writes advertisements without it is apt to find that he has reckoned without his host." Or, "a knowledge of human nature is a greater desideratum in advertising than skillful phraseology."<sup>6</sup> Such typical admonitions to take account of human nature left some doubt as to what view of "human nature" was being put forth. Another example of the vague generality with which the term was commonly used is the comment of a writer in an early volume of the magazine to the effect that "above all other qualities, the

<sup>5</sup> The first explicit definition of "human nature" I have found in the professional literature of advertising is that of Daniel Starch, a psychologist: "Human nature is composed fundamentally of a large number of inherent wants accompanied by capacities or abilities to carry out the necessary behavior to satisfy these wants." *Principles of Advertising* (New York, 1923), 255. Also exceptional, even among professional psychologists who used the term, in defining it were Arthur J. Brewster and Herbert Hall Palmer, *Introduction to Advertising* (New York, 1931), 93: "The instincts, emotions, desires, needs, impulses, interests, and habits of people are many times referred to in popular speech as 'human nature'."

<sup>6</sup> *Printers' Ink*, XII (October 2, 1895), 2, XXIX (October 11, 1899), 28. Unless otherwise indicated, citations are to *Printers' Ink*.

advertising solicitor should possess tact. He should be a student of human nature. If he is enthusiastic and magnetic, as well as tactful, he's almost certain of success. He should be a good talker and a good listener. Sometimes he should lead the conversation, at other times, follow. He should be persistent, but not offensively persistent."<sup>7</sup>

Some note of what *Printers' Ink* held to be the purpose of advertising in this period may provide a context for understanding more clearly the implications of the term human nature. Broadly speaking, two objectives, one representing majority opinion, the other minority views, informed what was said about the functions of advertising. The majority conceived an advertisement to be a method of *informing* the public that such and such an item was on the market and that it had certain uses. The advertisement was in other words an educational device.<sup>8</sup> The minority held that the advertiser was not to inform the reader but to *persuade* him.<sup>9</sup> Advertising meant, in other words, the creation of a desire.<sup>10</sup>

Each view about the function of advertising was associated with a particular emphasis on one or another component of human nature. Most experts who held to the informative purpose of advertising emphasized the basically rational, logical, and sensible qualities of man without indicating whether these were innate or acquired — in other words, without reference to the “nature-nurture” controversy, a dominant movement of thought in the 1890's and early years of the new century. In regard to the advertiser himself, the assumption about the basically rational quality of man expressed itself in the claim that people would not be deceived by exaggeration, dishonesty, or sensationalism in advertisements. Harry A. Rand, to cite an example, contended that the public, educated and uneducated, was skeptical to excess, the ignorant presenting the most solid refusal to accept the advertiser's claim.<sup>11</sup> Other contributors in the majority category agreed. The continual reminder in this early period that the public possessed common sense took the form of a warning against comic ads on the score that people were more likely to be convinced by dignity and logic than by flippant appeals.<sup>12</sup> The

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Bowers, “Advertisements and Solicitors,” V (November 25, 1891), 620.

<sup>8</sup> N. C. Fowler, “Bargains in Advertising,” II (January 8, 1890), 235; Editorial Comment, XLV (December 2, 1908), 27; Editorial Comment, XI (July 2, 1902), 25; LXII (January 29, 1908); LXX (January 19, 1910), 73.

<sup>9</sup> Joel Benton, “The Persuasive Art,” XL (July 16, 1902), 12.

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin Webster, “The Line of Least Resistance,” V (September 30, 1891), 323; “What Is It?,” XL (July 23, 1902), 12. Artemas Ward, a leading expert, claimed that “advertising seems to be the starting of a thought wave which furnishes the mass of people with a new idea,” XL (July 23, 1902), 12.

<sup>11</sup> “The Public's Skepticism,” XIII (December 18, 1895), 33.

<sup>12</sup> “Comic Advertisements,” II (January 5, 1890), 264.

general assumption was that the public is always open to sensible, rationally presented information and that, despite the success of P. T. Barnum's misleading sensationalism, the superlative, circus-like advertisements were neither necessary to convince people nor desirable from the standpoint of good taste.<sup>13</sup> It was above all important to give readers careful reasons for they all knew that "legitimate advertising is simply calling people's attention to a good thing, and describing it."<sup>14</sup> Nor was the public disposed "to take the business man's mere word that certain facts are so."<sup>15</sup> The reasons presented must be "grounded in human nature. Readers are not content to be told that a watch is part of a varied stock, to be closed out at unheard of prices. First, human nature wants to know the Price. There are altogether too many unheard of Prices in advertising. Then it wants to know whether the watch goes, how it goes, how long it will go, and what you propose to do about it if it stops within a year, or within five years. When human nature has all this evidence in hand it can come very close to knowing whether it is worthwhile to drop in and see the watch."<sup>16</sup> Artemas Ward,<sup>17</sup> a regular contributor for a time and generally the most cynical of the advertising experts, seems to have reflected a widely held view in stating that "all men may be liars, but the hatred of a liar is equally universal."<sup>18</sup>

The emphasis on the rational, sensible characteristics of human nature colored the discussion of the extent to which it was possible to mould public opinion. During this period, writers in *Printers' Ink* overwhelmingly agreed that people are not only capable of making their own decisions, but that they resent efforts by the advertiser to usurp that function.<sup>19</sup> Claude C. Hopkins spoke for many in holding that advertisers, not being philosophers, should do their job of winning people rather than trying to make them over. Or, as another writer illustrated the same position: "a man convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still."<sup>20</sup>

Advertising experts of the period, in the main, agreed that the keys to human nature are rationality and a rational understanding of

<sup>13</sup> D. J. McDonald, "Dont's for Advertisers," III (October 1, 1890), 312.

<sup>14</sup> Amos R. Wells, "Advertising from a Religious Standpoint," II (June 18, 1890), 953.

<sup>15</sup> Charles F. Jones, "Store Management," XXIII (June 22, 1898), 14.

<sup>16</sup> "Reasons," XL (September 10, 1902), 30.

<sup>17</sup> Ward was apparently one of the most successful advertising experts of the late nineteenth century. He was advertising manager of the Sapolio Soap Company, known as one of the most advanced advertisers; eventually he started his own advertising agency in New York. During 1891 he wrote a weekly column for *Printers' Ink*.

<sup>18</sup> Artemas Ward, "Stray Shots," IV (April 29, 1891), 571.

<sup>19</sup> Only one dissenting opinion was discovered. An article quoted from the *New York Sun* in the spring of 1900 stated that people have no idea of what they want and that therefore the advertiser is obliged to convince people that they really want just what is offered. XXX (March 21, 1900), 48.

<sup>20</sup> Claude C. Hopkins, "Sensational Advertising," XIII (October 30, 1895), 548; John Irving Romer, "Do Deceptive Advertisements Pay?," I (June 1, 1889), 578.

self-interest, an idea associated with classical economic theory. The advertiser should assume that all men are, like himself, rationally out to maximize profits. Therefore, "instead of resorting to the old-fashioned method of claiming to sell at less than cost — which claim is always met with incredulity or indifference — he promptly admits his willingness to make a fair profit on his sale and thus avoids throwing an air of improbability over his subsequent statements."<sup>21</sup> In appealing to the consumer's self-interest the advertiser must of course keep in mind the fact that self-interest involves concern for the family.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, being selfish, men valued their time: hence the importance of not making it hard for a man to read advertisements. To do so would make no more sense than to thrust a poem before the eyes of a busy merchant searching for market reports.<sup>23</sup>

This dominant image of man as rationalistic and self-interested was not only associated with the conception that the purpose of advertising was merely to inform and with classical economic theory. It was also related to the prevailing so-called faculty psychology which assumed the priority of "reason" and "will" over "feeling" and which was essentially static rather than dynamic and functional.<sup>24</sup>

But this dominant image of man as rationalistic and self-interested was not the only view of human nature to find expression in *Printers' Ink* in the years roughly between 1890 and 1910. A minority of writers, holding that the aim of advertising was to create wants rather than merely to inform, doubted the rationality and intelligence of men. This view resembled a conception of human nature subscribed to in the eighteenth century by such writers as Bernard Mandeville and favored by such early nineteenth-century Americans as John Adams and other Federalists. An extreme statement of this "low" or "dim" view of human nature went so far as to admonish: "When you write your advertisements and circulars you must remember that you must write to impress fools. Don't prepare them for ministers and college professors, but for ignoramuses, and you will be just as likely to catch college professors and wise men as you are any other sort."<sup>25</sup> But, by and large, exponents of the minority position were more moderate. For example, *Printers' Ink* editorialized in 1899: "The statement that advertising is merely the presentation of facts, and therefore not an art, appears with increas-

<sup>21</sup> Editorial Comment, II (June 11, 1890), 924.

<sup>22</sup> G.T.C., "Financial Institutions," XII (June 19, 1895), 6-7.

<sup>23</sup> Wilder Graham, "The End of It All," V (December 9, 1891), 696.

<sup>24</sup> Merle Curti, "Human Nature in American Thought," *Political Science Quarterly*, LXVIII (September 1953), 354-75 and (December 1953), 492-518.

<sup>25</sup> Editorial Comment, V (December 30, 1891), 809.

ing frequency in articles devoted to the subject. That advertising is merely the presentation of facts will be readily acknowledged, but that such a presentation is an easy matter many who have attempted it are ready to deny." Certain artistic skills of cajoling people into buying, of appealing to other facts in man than his rationality, are needed.<sup>26</sup>

The tendency to sentimentalize self-interest struck writers of the minority view as an important aspect of human nature. "The human race," wrote one specialist of this persuasion, "is an odd mixture of shrewdness and folly, and the old adage that 'a sucker is born every minute' would seem to be abundantly justified by the observations and experience of men of the world who utilize their knowledge for their own prosperity. We are," he went on, "all grown up babies. Pains which disturb the physique affect our mentality and really seem to undermine our common sense. You have a bellyache. You take this, that and the other. You meet a friend who advises something else, and you try that. You meet twenty friends with twenty remedies, and by the time you go home your internality is a box of pills, a demijohn of whisky, a bottle of brandy, half a pint of ginger, a few ounces of peppermint—the whole conglomeration super-adding an indigestible load to an already overburdened stomach."<sup>27</sup>

The non-rational minority image of man stressed the emotional overtones of egocentricity, universally admitted to be an important trait of human nature. Thus everyone was deemed to be involved with personal sorrows of the past and hopes for the future.<sup>28</sup> A few writers also represented man as universally vain, prejudiced, and eager for compliments,<sup>29</sup> and, even in the case of the most sensible, susceptible to flattery, a tendency capable of causing them to make judgments in opposition to the facts of the case.<sup>30</sup> If egocentricity was a central trait of human nature, the question was naturally asked why many men did not cultivate the necessary persistence for success. Artemas Ward found the answer in the abundant evidence that "men prefer to figure the simple and low interest of the present, rather than to build deep foundations on which to erect a far nobler and more profitable success in the end,"<sup>31</sup> an impulse strengthened by the narrow world to which humans so largely confined themselves. Important though egocentricity was, it did not override man's

<sup>26</sup> Editorial Comment, XXIX (October 18, 1899), 28.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Howard Jr., "The Secret of Success," V (September 23, 1891), 291-92.

<sup>28</sup> *Printers' Ink*, II (March 20, 1890), 532; III (October 15, 1890), 375; IV (May 13, 1891), 634.

<sup>29</sup> Oscar Herzog, "Human Nature as a Factor in Advertising," XIII (October 2, 1895), 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Printers' Ink*, III (July 2, 1890), 16.

<sup>31</sup> Artemas Ward, "Stray Shots," IV (April 1, 1891), 442.

susceptibility to emotional appeals of children. "Everyone," commented one writer, "has a tender spot for the children and likes to look at their pretty, innocent faces. Advertising shows considerable knowledge of human nature by approaching the public from this side."<sup>32</sup>

A quality spoken of as "earnestness" also seemed important to these early "non-rationalists" in the advertising field. One writer said outright that "earnestness in advertising is a prime essential. Other qualities may be lacking. The ad may be crude and unfinished as a child's mud-house; but just the same, if it has the saving grace of earnestness; if it comes from the heart, it will strike up a wireless connection with the hearts of its readers and do its duty despite its defects. Earnestness is hypnotism; earnestness is inspiration. If you are properly earnest words will come, ideas will develop, arguments will tumble over one another in their rush for expression. And results are bound to come."<sup>33</sup>

Because of man's susceptibility to emotion and sentiment the judicious use of art and pictures seemed to holders of the minority view helpful in advertisements inasmuch as "a picture appeals to all classes, races and languages, irrespective of culture or intellect." The picture tied sentiment to man's self-interest, for it conveyed "an idea to the reader that the article advertised . . . is necessary to comfort and well-being."<sup>34</sup>

In the years between the founding of *Printers' Ink* and 1910, the majority of commentators, whether holding the rationalistic majority view or subscribing to the non-rationalistic minority school, agreed that advertising was not and could not become a science, that, in fact, it was too much a matter of chance even to make it worthwhile to test statistically the results of a particular advertisement.<sup>35</sup> In the words of an editor "it is never possible to say in advance what the results of any particular advertising will be."<sup>36</sup> "Theorizing" was of little value: "A grain of sound, everyday common sense is worth a bushel of reasoning in the abstract."<sup>37</sup>

It was within the context of such a skeptical attitude toward the possibility of making advertising scientific that Professor Walter Dill Scott of Northwestern University published, in 1903 and 1908, the first of his reports on the psychology of advertising. Scott's psychological eclecticism included the Wundtian emphasis on

<sup>32</sup> "The Reviewer," IV (July 1, 1891), 849.

<sup>33</sup> Editorial Comment reprinted from *Judicious Advertising*, XLV (October 28, 1903), 30.

<sup>34</sup> J. H. Phinney, "A 'Cut' Argument," XXIII (June 15, 1898), 3.

<sup>35</sup> Bert Moses, "The Element of Chance," XII (June 10, 1895), 29.

<sup>36</sup> Editorial, II (April 16, 1890), 636.

<sup>37</sup> Editorial, XLV (December 9, 1903).

measuring sensations through laboratory experiments and the Jamesian view of mind as an evolutionary and functional adaptation of that organism to its environment, an adaptation profoundly influenced by a great number of inherited "instincts," by emotions, and by habit. Scott's original contribution was to show how the advertiser might use these principles to induce the consumer to purchase the advertised products. The editor of *Printers' Ink* summed up the contributions he thought Scott's 1903 book made and then commented on them. "In the various chapters he [the author of the book] discusses the habits of the average mind, the laws by which it is led to give attention in advertising, the association of ideas, the value of suggestion and direct commands in advertising, the necessity for appealing to the emotions in certain fields of publicity, and the advisability of playing upon the senses, as the taste in exploiting foods, the sense of harmony in advertising musical instruments, and the sense of touch in articles that are designed for bodily comfort, as shoes and clothing. While his theory and conclusions are valuable by reason of clearness and system, it must be confessed," the editor went on, "that the book contains nothing new. Advertisers have reached all of the Professor's basic laws by the very serviceable kind of psychology called 'horse sense,' and his principles, while reduced to scientific facts, are all drawn from actual advertisements."<sup>38</sup>

The sense in which the term "scientific facts" was used in this comment illustrates the position of the relatively few writers of this period who did speak of advertising as a science. To them the term meant classification and codification of rules of thumb arrived at by impressionistic observations. For example, one of the laws of "the science of advertising" was held to be "the principle of repetition." There is no evidence of the use of the term science in the sense of providing scientific explanations and predictions, claims which the "new psychology" was making as early as the 1880's and 1890's.<sup>39</sup>

If in the early years of professional advertising no clear understanding of "science" or "scientific" is evident in references to human nature, some writers took a step in that direction by recognizing the relation of social role and social status to the allegedly universal traits shared by all human beings. In addition to universal traits, man behaves at times and in particular situations in terms of special

<sup>38</sup> Editorial, XLV (December 9, 1903), 34. For the disapproval of Scott's professional colleagues for venturing into this field, see Loren Baritz, *The Servants of Power: A History of the Use of Social Science in American Industry* (Middletown, Connecticut, 1960), 27-28.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, the piece "Advertising Past and Present," reprinted from *American Advertising Reporter* in *Printers' Ink*, II (January 22, 1890), 291.

attributes. Not many writers, to be sure, explicitly recognized the point which Charles H. Cooley and George Herbert Mead were beginning to make, the point, that is, that in social communications human beings were seldom if ever encountered as "man" but rather as men, women, the old, the young, workers, the leisured class, and members of the American or other national and ethnic groups. Although a good many writers in *Printers' Ink* did not explicitly acknowledge that an advertiser should direct different kinds of appeals to different classes of people and some even took strong exception to such a position, several made a point of doing so.<sup>40</sup>

The treatment of sex and what appeared to be sex differences is a case in point. No example was found that suggested the desirability of recognizing "sex appeal" in the erotic sense that, in time, was to be taken for granted.<sup>41</sup> But alleged differences in the interests and tastes of the sexes did find recognition. Representative is the statement that "a curious thing is the difference there is between advertising for women and for men. For a man an advertisement must be short and to the point. It ought to treat but one subject and to be written as tersely as possible. Men read advertisements on the jump; they seldom deliberately sit down to go through the advertisements in a paper. For the women, on the contrary, you can put in as much detail as you please; once a woman is attracted to an advertisement she will read it all through, no matter how long it is or how fine the type is."<sup>42</sup> Writers contradicted each other in ascribing to women a high measure of the cautious and calculating faculty on the one hand with a proneness to an uncritical zest for "bargains" and for a highly endowed intuitive faculty.<sup>43</sup>

Recognition of alleged differences of nationality and of class were frequent. "The American is progressive and expansive. He is also adaptive," argued one writer. On the other hand, "the Germans, as a race, are well-to-do, intelligent and clear-headed. They are good readers and have money to buy with."<sup>44</sup> Both sides in the argument made references to class differences. One position was that the "lower classes" were less intelligent and therefore should be ap-

<sup>40</sup> For example, Editorial Comment, XXIX (November 22, 1899), 35.

<sup>41</sup> Disapproval was expressed of the use of vulgarity as offensive to women, XL (August 13, 1902), 29. A leading authority in advertising, A. D. Lasker, once remarked that of the three major things that ever happened in the advertising field one was the introduction of sex by the J. Walter Thompson Company: "the skin you love to touch," James Webb Young, *Diary of an Advertising Man* (Chicago, 1944), 101.

<sup>42</sup> Rogers, Peet and Co.'s Advertising Manager, II (February 5, 1890), 344. See also Louis H. Wall, "The Advertiser's Best Ally," V (December 23, 1891), 765.

<sup>43</sup> *Printers' Ink*, XX (September 22, 1897), 39; XL (September 3, 1902), 2 and (August 13, 1902), 35.

<sup>44</sup> Editorial Comment, XL (August 27, 1902), 29; "The German Press," II (May 7, 1890), 725.

pealed to through sensationalism.<sup>45</sup> The other contended that no appreciable differences existed among classes.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, some writers recognized what might be called the sociological aspects of human nature, the point, that is, that many of its expressions depended upon the fact that man lived in a particular kind of society. One advertising specialist argued that men emulate those higher in the social scale than they themselves, that "while people cannot all have palaces and the other paraphernalia of show and state, they can drink the same beverages and wear the same clothes as royalty and thus fulfill "a certain nameless and indescribable satisfaction."<sup>47</sup> In a sense, of course, this idea is related to the principle of emulation, an idea with considerable appeal to nineteenth century Americans and one that Thorstein Veblen featured in a notable discussion in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*.

In the first "period" of the reputation of "human nature" in *Printers' Ink*, then, the term itself, while loosely used, meant in the dominant view an essentially rationalistic image of man, to the minority, a non-rationalistic view. These two views in turn were related to two different conceptions of the purpose of advertising — the informative and the persuasive. While most writers doubted whether advertising could become scientific and held to an empirical, common sense, and trade-lore conception, a few moved in the direction of a "scientific" view of human nature, less in response to the pioneer work of an exponent of the "new psychology" than to an observation-oriented view of "human nature" in relation to sex, ethnic identification, and social role.

#### THE UPSWING OF THE IRRATIONAL CONCEPTION OF HUMAN NATURE, 1910–1930

In the second period, the years roughly from 1910 to 1930, *Printers' Ink* continued to use the term human nature and, as before, in a vague, contentless way. A single example, chosen from a great many, illustrates the point. In 1925 the editor wrote: "The Schoolmaster wishes to call the attention of the Class today to the fact that selling is after all a very simple thing. It is really only a matter of taking advantage of human nature, provided, of course, the thing one wishes to sell has merit. In the complexities of modern commercialism one is apt to become confused in regard to this proposi-

<sup>45</sup> Jno. C. Graham, "School Advertising," XXIII (May 25, 1898), 4.

<sup>46</sup> Editorial, II (February 12, 1890), 368. See also Editorial, XXIX (November 22, 1899), 35.

<sup>47</sup> Joel Benton, "The King's Preference," XII (June 19, 1895), 8.

tion of selling goods and stray from the straight path of common sense.”<sup>48</sup>

The continuing vagueness in the use of the term human nature did not mean that there were no changes from 1910 to 1930 in what it implied. The change was related to a reversal of what had been the majority and minority views about the purpose of advertising. The dominant purpose was no longer a merely informative function, but the creation of a desire through advertising. Typical of such indications was a statement from the head of one of the largest advertising agencies in 1910: “General advertising introduces an article, familiarizes people with its qualities, explains its merits and gradually educates the consumer *to a desire* for the article advertised.”<sup>49</sup> Another writer, in 1925, talking about window displays, argued that “a display is 100 percent effective only when it actually creates a desire.”<sup>50</sup> Changes in the nature of the economy, particularly the need for product differentiation in an oligopolistic system, went far toward explaining the newly dominant emphasis on advertising as a means of creating desire. “It is a shift,” commented one authority, “from product to ‘want’ competition. That is to say, it’s not now so much a question of persuading consumers to buy one product rather than another in satisfying one want as it is a problem of persuading consumers to satisfy one want rather than some other want. It is competition to arouse desire for, say, electric refrigeration against desires for some other product or products, such as an improved kitchen cabinet or an electric stove or a vacation trip to Yellowstone Park.”<sup>51</sup>

The minority that clung to the older view about the merely informative purpose of advertising continued to think of human beings as rational, intelligent individuals. Thus, James H. Collins wrote in 1910 that “it always pays, somehow, to appeal to people on the broadest human basis, to give the man in the street credit for knowing more than you do, and to make your appeal to him as though he had a million dollars. If there is one thing more than another that limits advertising effectiveness, it is the narrow reasoning which

<sup>48</sup> “The Little Schoolmaster’s Classroom,” CXXX (February 18, 1925), 184.

<sup>49</sup> J. Walter Thompson, “Relation of Advertising to Work of Traveling Salesmen,” LXX (January 19, 1910), 39.

<sup>50</sup> Frank R. Peck, “Window Displays That Are More Than Mere Reminders,” CXXX (February 21, 1925), 17–20.

<sup>51</sup> “Analyzing the New Competition,” CXL (July 28, 1927), 182. John Bates Clark, in “Economics and Modern Psychology” (*Journal of Political Economy*, vol. XXVI [1918], 1–30 and 136–66), held that the new ideas regarding the complex and instinctual nature of man forced a revision of many basic economic doctrines, especially those concerned with the psychology of the consumer. Clark recognized that the consumer did not necessarily choose those goods which would most benefit him. Thus, support from a leading academic economist, based on his understanding of new currents in psychology, reinforced the emphasis in advertising on shaping consumer’s wants.

leads so many business men to talk down to the public, and tell readers only as much as they think that they will understand or believe, and to confine the advertising story more particularly to that select coterie of readers who seem to be our kind.”<sup>52</sup> In a speech before the advertisers’ convention in Cincinnati in 1913, J. Stokes linked the need for altruistic advertising with man’s rationality.<sup>53</sup> The editor of *Printers’ Ink* reaffirmed in 1915 his belief that advertising is a logical process, that “the buying impulse is intellectually developed,” and that “buyers do reason.”<sup>54</sup> And, in 1927, the editor again argued that “the public is not so dumb.” The importance of the continuing if receding use of the rationality argument is that, as before, it was associated with the classical economists’ contention concerning “economic man.” That is, each man was out to maximize his own profit and was quite rational about the whole process.

In this period, however, the dominant idea came to be that man is in actuality more “irrational” than “rational.” Merchandising techniques, techniques to appeal to various non-rational impulses, now received the emphasis. Advertising and the sales plan became linked in an effort to utilize these nonrational impulses.<sup>55</sup> Thus advertising was to operate by suggestion,<sup>56</sup> the use of forceful concrete details<sup>57</sup> and pictures,<sup>58</sup> by attention-arresting stimuli,<sup>59</sup> by playing on human sympathy,<sup>60</sup> and by appeals to the senses.<sup>61</sup> These non-rational appeals became the stock-in-trade of the advertising man.

The years between 1910 and 1930 not only saw a majority of advertising experts accepting the non-rationality of human nature; these years also witnessed a marked shift of attitude toward science. With a few notable exceptions, the language and methods of applied science now became the order of the day. The particular emphasis was on scientific market research: how to find out the precise reactions to advertising, the actual preferences of the public, the measurable habits of customers.<sup>62</sup> An advertisers’ convention in 1924

<sup>52</sup> James H. Collins, “Human Nature in Advertising,” LXX (March 30, 1910), 35.

<sup>53</sup> Charles L. Benjamin, “Advertisers Debate Crucial Questions at Cincinnati,” LXXXV (October 2, 1913), 23.

<sup>54</sup> Editorial Comment, XC (February 8, 1915), 94-97.

<sup>55</sup> James H. Collins, “Advertising and the Sales Plan,” LXX (January 19, 1910), 3.

<sup>56</sup> Fred W. Hunter, “Suggestion in Advertising,” L (March 15, 1905), 20.

<sup>57</sup> “The Little Schoolmaster’s Classroom,” C (September 27, 1917), 114.

<sup>58</sup> See advertisement of the Ethridge Association of Artists, C (September 13, 1917), 15.

<sup>59</sup> See advertisement of the Niagara Lithograph Company, C (September 6, 1917), 115.

<sup>60</sup> “A Curious Place Is Adland,” XC (January 28, 1915), 89.

<sup>61</sup> Charles W. Mears, “Advertising that Appeals to the Senses the Coming Type,” XC (January 21, 1915), 132, 134-35.

<sup>62</sup> See as examples of this concern with market research, CXV (June 30, 1920), 140; and, in the same volume, 142-44, 149-50.

applauded Professor Wesley C. Mitchell of Columbia University when he declared that statistical research was to be the keynote to modern business, from cost accounting to market research.<sup>63</sup>

In view of the widespread acceptance of a scientific basis for advertising one might expect approval of such pioneers in the technical psychology of advertising as Walter Dill Scott, Hugo Munsterberg, and particularly Professor Harry L. Hollingworth who in 1913 demonstrated how the strength of an appeal to a prospective customer could be measured.<sup>64</sup> And some approval there was. Thus, E. St. Elmo Lewis urged the adoption of psychology as an auxiliary science for advertising, buttressing his argument with the statement that art was daily submitting to the dictates of science. In fact, Lewis held that science is the panacea for controlling the unpredictability of human action in response to advertising. He was particularly concerned with the necessity of discovering the premised natural law governing man's conduct. "When we fix in our minds that Nature makes no leaps — that she never skips — that she acts in a rationally intelligible way by shortening processes, we'll get along better."<sup>65</sup> The reliance on psychological findings of the Victor Talking Machine Company and the Globe-Wernicke Company evoked a significant if amusing comment: "The latest method to stimulate interest is 'New Thought,' 'Christian Science,' or whatever you choose to call it. Some call it psychology, some ginger, and perhaps a few impertinence. But at least two of the ablest and most extensive advertisers are using the methods, and evidently with success."<sup>66</sup> Another writer held that the findings of psychologists had proved that an unpleasant image automatically closes the readers' minds to further suggestions by the advertiser.<sup>67</sup>

Yet it is easy to overemphasize the shift away from the earlier distrust of technical psychology. Many writers for *Printers' Ink*, including its editors, continued to belittle the use of psychology until at least the late 1920's. For instance, in 1915, the editor defined psychology as "a word often used to explain the meaning of some-

<sup>63</sup> Editorial Comment, XC (January 7, 1925), 64.

<sup>64</sup> The first experimental work used in business is associated with Professor Walter Dill Scott's studies of 1903-1905 and with those of Professor Hollingworth in 1910. For a brief summary, see J. George Frederick, *Introduction to Motivation Research* (New York, 1957), 30 ff., 75 ff. For comments on the early work of the psychologists, see "The Psychology of Advertising Discussed," LXX (February 9, 1910), 66; "Dr. Hollingworth on Advertising Psychology," LXX (March 9, 1910), 46; "Noted Speakers at the Annual Dinner of Poor Richard Club," XC (January 21, 1915), 86, 91.

<sup>65</sup> E. St. Elmo Lewis, "Developing Exact Knowledge About Advertising," Part II, LXX (August 25, 1910), 65.

<sup>66</sup> Frank H. Holman, "Applying 'New Thought' or Psycho-Therapy to the Dealer," LXXII (August 25, 1910), 36.

<sup>67</sup> F. W. Nye, "The Affirmative vs. the Negative in Advertising Copy," LXXII (September 15, 1910), 22.

thing which we don't understand after it has been explained, and which, if we did understand it, would not do us any good. The psychology of advertising means that some one who hadn't the ability to succeed at it tries to reduce to a mental formula the method of those who do succeed at it. Psychology, in short, like the policeman after the fight, comes around after the thing is done, swings its club, and looks wise."<sup>68</sup> Charles Austin Bates, who had been a regular contributor to *Printers' Ink* since the 1890's, contended that too much of human nature is unpredictable to make psychology a useful tool. For example, Bates continued, even if psychologists could predict human reaction to a particular idea used in a booklet, it would still be impossible to say with assurance that seven gross of thumb tacks would be sold as a result of the reaction. Bates apparently had a sentimental attachment to the excitement and uncertainty of advertising and feared the New York University's "Psychology of Advertising" could ultimately eliminate selling problems from the manufacturer's life.<sup>69</sup> In a blistering piece another contributor, H. L. Allen, held that "all the cohorts of psychology can't formulate a single law of popular fancy that will work three times in succession. It is easy to explain why, after a given incident, but to predict results with certainty is far riskier than the weather man's job."<sup>70</sup>

Despite such qualms, advertising experts increasingly showed a sympathetic awareness of the implications of technical psychology for their work. It is possible that an ad in which a woman handed two men a cigarette was the first use of Freudian concepts;<sup>71</sup> but as yet academic psychology was in the saddle. In this broad spectrum the movement throughout the 1920's was away from the structural, instinctive, or "old" psychology, which conceived of the mind in terms of separate faculties and instincts, toward the behavioristic or "new" psychology with its image of the mind as a functioning, adaptive unit; away from a traditional psychology concerned with how the mind thinks, to one concerned with how the total organism behaves or acts. In making this distinction Henry C. Link, himself a psychologist and an advertising expert, argued that the "new" psychology helped practitioners discover what ads are most effective in getting people to buy old and new products. In other words, the new psychology revealed human nature in terms of how men acted and why they acted as they did. Elaborating on the

<sup>68</sup> "The Little Schoolmaster's Classroom," XC (March 18, 1915), 88-90.

<sup>69</sup> Charles Austin Bates, "Old Time Expert Tries to Pass the 'Varsity' Advertising Exam," LXXII (July 7, 1910), 26.

<sup>70</sup> H. L. Allen, "Popular Fancy and Cigar Advertising," LXXII (July 7, 1910), 17.

<sup>71</sup> Edward Bernays, *Biography of an Idea* (New York, 1965), 395.

term human nature, Link argued that neither a common sense nor an introspective psychology nor mere lists of faculties, emotions and motives could teach us what human nature is: it could be known only by the way men act. Such a position ruled out a *prioristic* concepts of human nature. Yet, at the bottom, behavioristic psychology, broadly understood, did involve a concept of human nature, one which did not assume the rationality of man and one which, in Link's words, could not be thought of as timeless and unchangeable.<sup>72</sup>

Within this frame, human nature involved the malleability of the human mind. An early example was the statement of E. St. Elmo Lewis, a vocal proponent of psychology in advertising, that psychology has an importance beyond the measurement of certain powers of the human mind; it can likewise teach advertisers how to control such powers.<sup>73</sup> *Printers' Ink* at about the same time reported the letter campaign of the Victor Talking Machine Company to teach its dealers how to alter mental processes of consumers and a similar campaign of the Globe-Wernicke Company.<sup>74</sup> Other writers contended that in creating new wants advertising could assume a positive, active role in directing human behavior.<sup>75</sup> "People can be made to believe almost anything with proper salesmanship," another writer argued. "If people are conditioned gently they do not feel compelled to buy particular products."<sup>76</sup> The Ralston Purina Company put under the glass top desk of all its copy writers an indicative admonition: "It's your job to shape the thoughts of your prospect and customer. Your power over his thoughts can be stupendous. Don't abuse it or trifle with it. Make his thoughts simple, sane, conservative and so dynamic that they will lead to confidence and action."<sup>77</sup>

The ability of the advertiser to take advantage of the malleability of human nature depended, of course, on his recognition and successful channeling of certain basic impulses. Of these competition, fear of public shame, and appreciation of approval and reward ranked high. "The psychological effect of a gift or award," a writer in 1915 noted, "seems to be about the same on all men. It helps to

<sup>72</sup> Henry C. Link, *The New Psychology of Selling and Advertising* (New York, 1934), 80 ff. The foreword was written by John B. Watson, the chief proponent of "behaviorism." Watson left his professorship at Johns Hopkins for a highly paid position with the J. Walter Thompson Company, a leading advertising firm.

<sup>73</sup> "Developing Exact Knowledge About Advertising," LXXII (August 25, 1910), 70.

<sup>74</sup> *Printers' Ink*, LXXII (August 25, 1910), 36; *ibid.* (August 5, 1910), 18.

<sup>75</sup> Henry R. Mulvaney, "Can the Masses be Taught to Buy Germ Destroyers?," LXXII (August 17, 1910), 17.

<sup>76</sup> A. H. Deute, "Removing the Pressure from High Pressure Selling," CXXXV (June 3, 1926), 49-52.

<sup>77</sup> Edward T. Hill, "Do Most People Really Think?," CXXXV (June 17, 1926), 150.

keep them pleased and in a happy state of mind, and that is surely what we want. . . . It seems to me that this is because human nature is so constituted that these recognitions appeal to practically all men. The effect of something extra offered to a man may change his whole mental attitude, and that is where psychology comes in.”<sup>78</sup> With similar import, another writer held that the contest idea is, on the whole, sound, being based on “the most primitive and consistent of emotions; the spirit of competition, the will to win, the natural rivalry of each of us with the other and the urge to break records.”<sup>79</sup> To satisfy the human desire for compensation for the performance of extra work diplomas, prizes and other rewards needed to be offered.<sup>80</sup>

Along with the malleability of human nature and its competitive and reward-loving propensities, susceptibility to emotional appeal bulked large in the non-rational image of man. Several writers in *Printers' Ink* subscribed to the idea that most men are unable to weigh the pros and cons of evidence with a judicial mind; emotional factors interfere.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, emotional reaction to the beauty of specific products now seemed to be as decisive a factor in purchase as the consideration of utility.<sup>82</sup> A writer quoted Charles W. Mears of the Winton Motor Carriage Company to the effect that “buying is seldom, if ever, induced by any mental process whatever but is generally done as a result of some sort of inspirational hunch.”<sup>83</sup> In order to create new desires, argued a writer some years later, “emotion must be aroused, for only through an emotional mental picture do men experience empathy with conditions described. When a man is sold purely by an appeal to his reason, he usually is doing a thing he doesn't want to do because his reason has convinced him that he should. In other words, the appeal to reason doesn't contain the elements that make a man want to do the thing you want him to do.”<sup>84</sup> In 1925, a writer considered pathos, formerly frowned on in advertising, to be an effective selling agent, “for all people are interested in tragedy as the movies' successful use of heart-throb devices testifies.”<sup>85</sup>

<sup>78</sup> G. W. Littlejohn, “Prize Contests that Spur Salesmen,” XCII (July 1, 1915), 81, 84.

<sup>79</sup> J. K. MacNeill, “The Secret of Success in Sales Contests,” CXXXV (June 17, 1926), 4.

<sup>80</sup> Louis Brendel, “37 Tested Suggestions for Training Distributor's Salesmen,” CCXXXI (April 7, 1950), 30.

<sup>81</sup> F. W. Nye, “The Affirmative vs. the Negative in Advertising Copy,” LXXII (September 15, 1910), 25.

<sup>82</sup> C. L. Watson, “The Hygienic Idea in Advertising Copy,” LXXII (July 14, 1910), 21.

<sup>83</sup> Charles A. Bates, “Old Time Expert Tries to Pass ‘Varsity’ Advertising Exam,” LXXII (July 7, 1910), 26.

<sup>84</sup> E. P. Corbett, “The Sales Letter and the Personal Appeal,” CX (February 12, 1920), 161-69.

<sup>85</sup> W. Livingston Larned, “The Tragedian Strides across the Advertising Stage,” CXXXIII (October 15, 1925), 145-51.

Writers also reasserted the idea that generally speaking human beings are shortsighted in caring only for their immediate wants. Appeals to personal appearance, prestige, family and home seemed to be the most effective means of selling goods. Thus, one expert argued that “tracks, animal and human, are good advertising copy, for they remind men of the most primitive of instincts — that of self-preservation. The interest was so firmly fixed in human nature that many centuries of civilization have not erased it.”<sup>86</sup> Or, to cite another example: “All people are flattered by personal attention. To the advertiser this means the chatty letter and telephone calls.”<sup>87</sup> Nor should advertisers forget the universal concern with health, a concern that old age accentuated.<sup>88</sup>

It is impossible to say whether the development of sociology as an academic discipline had anything to do with the growing but still slender recognition on the part of a few writers of the relevance of sociological factors in any concept of human nature. In any case, with the United States moving at the time of World War I from the status of a debtor to a creditor nation and with expanding contacts with other peoples through trade and participation in international politics, an interest in the cultural differences of peoples found some expression. In 1915, for example, a writer observed: “Another thing that we Americans should remember now that we are thinking about getting after the export trade in earnest is that while human nature is the same under every sky, the outlying veneer differs widely, East and West and North and South. It is quite as important to study racial and national characteristics as it is to inform oneself about business laws and customs of foreign peoples.”<sup>89</sup> Other articles expressed similar ideas.<sup>90</sup> A few advertising specialists, moreover, seemed aware of sociological concepts. Thus Andrew M. Fox, advertising manager for the Benjamin Manufacturing Company of Chicago, made use of a concept similar to that of George Herbert Mead’s “significant other” in writing that “at all events you unconsciously contribute those faculties of your own mind to the aggregate mind which you feel others are contributing; in other words, you see and hear with the eyes and ears of those about you as well as with your own.”<sup>91</sup>

<sup>86</sup> “Man’s Primitive Interest in Tracks and Feet,” CX (January 29, 1920), 90.

<sup>87</sup> Hiram Blauvelt, “Advertising Can Sell Coal During the Dog Days,” CXXXIII (October 8, 1925), 58.

<sup>88</sup> Earnest Elmo Calkins, “The Pursuit of Happiness,” CXXXV (June 3, 1926), 3.

<sup>89</sup> Thaddeus S. Dayton, “Foreign Opportunity and Difficulties in the Way,” XC (January 7, 1915), 80–81.

<sup>90</sup> “Changing the Product to Suit Export Markets,” CXL (August 18, 1927), 103–104, 108, 112.

<sup>91</sup> Editorial Comment, XC (January 7, 1915), 64.

Despite the persistence among a minority within the profession of the earlier predominant view of man's rationality, of advertising as informative rather than persuasive, and of skepticism about the usefulness of the social sciences, by 1930 the majority had come to believe that human nature is essentially non-rational and emotional, and that the social sciences, especially psychology, offer effective aid in persuading the reader of ads and in manipulating his buying behavior.

#### DEPRESSION, AFFLUENCE, AND THE BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

During the lean years of depression, writers in *Printers' Ink* devoted a good deal of effort to polemics against the New Deal and to expressions of confidence in the indestructibility of capitalism. But they also continued to talk about human nature. Much that they said about it resembled the dominant theme of the preceding two decades — its instinctive and non-rational aspects. Advertisements themselves often reflected an extension of this image of man, particularly in the more frequent use of sex appeal and the techniques and overtones of the popular comic strips and sensationalism.<sup>92</sup> On the other hand, in the actual references to human nature many writers in *Printers' Ink* spoke about the fundamentally rational nature of man, an emphasis similar to the idea dominant in the decades before 1910.

Several specialists now found sanction for changing the nature of appeals in advertising to the realization that man after all was more willing to listen to reason than many had supposed.<sup>93</sup> The Frigidaire Division of General Motors Corporation, to cite a specific example, played down the emphasis on personal comfort in advertising air conditioners and appealed to reason in stressing the increased efficiency of the staff in an air-cooled office and the bearing of air-cooled stores in attracting customers.<sup>94</sup> Gurden Edwards, advertising director of the American Bankers Association, also stressed the rationality of men. "The public," he wrote, "wants more facts and less fancy, for there is a great deal it will no longer take for granted."<sup>95</sup>

Advertising advice in the 1930's talked more about "satisfying consumers' wants" than of "creating" such wants. The formula

<sup>92</sup> Otis Pease, *The Responsibility of American Advertising*, 186–88; Ralph M. Hower, *The History of an Advertising Agency* (Cambridge, Mass., 1949), 147–57.

<sup>93</sup> W. Livingston Larned, "When the Appeal is negative — Edit the Illustration Wisely," *CLII* (August 28, 1930), 110.

<sup>94</sup> J. J. Nance, "Training Course for Salesmen," *CLXXII* (April 4, 1935), 24.

<sup>95</sup> Gurden Edwards, "Bankers Get Close to the Public," *CLXXI* (June 27, 1935), 73.

changed from "people's tastes are static, therefore industry should create changes of taste" to "the people's tastes change, therefore, industry should cater to these changes."<sup>96</sup>

In the same vein specialists played up "consumers relations programs" and the related idea that the success of business in part depends on the general attitudes of society toward business and, in particular, toward advertising. Thus Glenn Frank, editor of *Rural Progress*, declared that the tasks of advertising included the education of the American people in the accurate, sincere, honest use of words, in the uses of prosperity, and in moral strength and sanity in times of duress.<sup>97</sup> Another example of the accent on the rationality of man was an editorial comment to the effect that "neither the weather of the heavens nor the errors of demagogues can change human nature or dissolve common sense. It is the common sense of the people, assured that we are living under the best-working economy that ever has been devised, that has preserved our Union; and their common sense will continue to protect it."<sup>98</sup>

It is, though, doubtful whether a real change toward visualizing man as a rational being took place, for, in the more prosperous years after 1940, advertising specialists again asserted that human motivation is largely emotional. "Psychologists," according to one authority, "have found that whatever decision we make, however purely rational it may seem, is deeply influenced by emotional forces, conscious, subconscious or unconscious."<sup>99</sup> Of special importance was the increasing recognition of symbols in evoking emotional responses. Two illustrations, taken from many available ones, may illustrate the point. A leading Chicago advertising expert claimed that the major portion of human reaction is stimulated by non-rational symbols, particularly by non-verbal ones: the profession was learning of the great force of such symbols "in convincing the customer on an emotional ground." On a very different level, a distinguished literary critic analyzed the emotional appeals and the relation of these to symbols in advertisements for Sunkist oranges.<sup>100</sup>

The war and postwar years brought to a crescendo the emphasis on two themes in advertising, each of which reflected similar attitudes toward human nature. The first, a heightened emphasis on "selling business to the public," was sociological in orientation.

<sup>96</sup> See LeRoy G. Reed, "Above All, Advertising Should be Intensely Human," *CLX* (August 25, 1932), 53-55.

<sup>97</sup> Glenn Frank, "Four Jobs for Advertising," *CXXC* (September 30, 1937), 83.

<sup>98</sup> "Beware of the Dog," *CLXIII* (April 11, 1935), 102.

<sup>99</sup> Jerry Albert, "For Better T.V. Commercials, Try This Formula that Goes Beyond AIDA," *CCXXXI* (April 7, 1950), 32-33.

<sup>100</sup> Pierre Martineau, "New Look at Old Symbols," *CCXLVII* (June 4, 1954), 33; Leo Spitzer, "A Method of Interpreting Literature" (Smith College, 1949), 102 ff.

It implied great flexibility in human nature and the ability of advertisers and public relations experts to change men's habits, their ways of doing things, their very nature. Charles Mortimer, Jr., chairman of the Advertising Council in 1948, explained that the reasons for advertising's having switched from a public-bemadned philosophy to a socially responsible one were twofold: "First, business itself has learned a new concept of enlightened self-interest — that what is good for the country and its people is also good for business. And second (hand-in-glove with the first), business now knows that the advertising mechanism can be used in promotion and sales of ideas as effectively as for products and services. Thus business, seeking expression for a vital shift in its thinking, has found a new voice in a revolutionary new use for advertising."<sup>101</sup>

The second shift was toward an acceptance of the high-powered techniques of the behavioral sciences. It is true that not all authority in the advertising world accepted the thesis that social science, and especially psychology, would ultimately reveal the natural laws governing human behavior. But it was a minority view that James D. Woolf, former vice-president and director of the J. Walter Thompson Company, expressed in holding that "advertising, like human nature, is not a measurable thing,"<sup>102</sup> and that *Printers' Ink* upheld in arguing that advertising, even when based on the most carefully conducted public opinion polls, could not always predict human behavior.<sup>103</sup> Most of the articles in *Printers' Ink* in the 1940's reflected a maximum concern for pinpointing buying behavior.<sup>104</sup> The contention was that advertising could sell anything if it worked hard enough at copy and promotional devices. In a piece calling for a campaign to sell austerity during the war, the writer concluded that "anyone can sell silk shirts. Somewhere there is advertising that can sell the via dolorosa that leads to victory. Somewhere there is a copy writer who can sell hair shirts."<sup>105</sup>

Other articles, citing the work of well known social psychologists, showed the implications for advertising of their findings on such fundamental traits as self-esteem and the impulse for creative expression.<sup>106</sup> An article carefully discussing the value of social science to the advertiser, illustrated by the impact and effectiveness

<sup>101</sup> Charles G. Mortimer, Jr., "New Dimensions in Advertising," CCXXV (October 29, 1948), 80-81.

<sup>102</sup> "Goodbye to the Advertising Blitz," CCX (February 2, 1945), 90.

<sup>103</sup> "The Confusing Customer," CCX (January 12, 1945), 110.

<sup>104</sup> *Printers' Ink*, CCXX (July 3, 1942), 48.

<sup>105</sup> John L. Love, "Can Advertising Sell Hair Shirts?" CC (September 1942), 90.

<sup>106</sup> J. Paul Taylor, "Do It Yourself Trends," CCXLV (October 2, 1953), 27-39.

of the media and techniques Standard Oil Company (New Jersey) used in its public relations program, was evidence of the prestige the social psychologist had come to have in an important sector of the business community.<sup>107</sup>

By the 1950's, then, *Printers' Ink* had moved a long way from its early skepticism about the usefulness of psychology and social science. It had also responded to changes in the general reputation of human nature. Its editor, J. George Frederick, was frankly impressed by the Freudian emphasis on the unconscious and its implications for advertising. He was also an enthusiastic champion of motivation research, which he defined as "an attempt to dredge up out of the hidden depths of human nature . . . some good practical hints as to how to sell a particular item of goods more readily and agreeably."<sup>108</sup> The majority of articles in *Printers' Ink* followed Frederick's lead in holding that it was possible not only to guide but to control the non-rational and unconscious as well as the conscious and rational forces in man's makeup.

This view of human nature was, of course, very different from the image of man as a rationalistic creature whom advertising was merely to inform, an image that dominated the periodical from 1888 to 1910. That conception of human nature was related to traditional faculty psychology, to what was thought of as common sense empiricism, and to an economy not yet dominated by the idea that the masses were able to buy the output of an unlimited expansion of goods and services. The leading, if often challenged view, of human nature of the years from 1888 to 1910 continued to find expression in *Printers' Ink* until 1930. But the dominant image of man in this period shifted to one emphasizing the non-rational, emotional, and manipulative aspects of human nature. This shift was in part related to the decline of the older static and structural psychology and to its replacement by psychologies more functional and dynamic in character. One of these attached great importance to a large number of alleged instincts; many advertising specialists assumed that it was only necessary to appeal to the appropriate instinct to achieve the desired result. More significant was behaviorism which, with its exaggerated emphasis on the conditioned reflex, stimulated the advertising world to accept an image of man as malleable and manipulable. The general shift in the reputation of human nature in the years from 1910 to 1930 was also related to the expansion in the productivity of the economy and to an emphasis on mass con-

<sup>107</sup> Robert O. Carlson, "How Can the Social Sciences Meet the Needs of Advertisers?" *CCXLV* (October 30, 1953), 44, 46-47, 50-51, 54-56.

<sup>108</sup> Frederick, *Introduction to Motivation Research*, 10-16, 18.

sumption. In some ways, the depression reenforced the older but still extant rationalistic conception of man's nature. But on the whole, the period from 1910 to the mid-1930's was marked by a continued accentuation of the reputation of human nature as non-rational, emotional, and susceptible to manipulation.

The period between the early 1930's and the early 1950's was characterized by an accentuation of these tendencies save for a temporary backswing during the depression to the image of man as, in the main, a reasonable being. The impact of totalitarianism and of World War II seemed, however, to demonstrate anew man's non-rational, manipulative nature. The advertising experts' discussion of human nature reflected these influences. It also reflected the expansion of the middle classes in an economy that had, as John K. Galbraith has emphasized, solved the basic problems of food, clothing, and shelter and that offered an abundance of hitherto highly restricted creature comforts, luxuries, and services. Advertising was quick to publicize these possibilities and opportunities. In doing so, its spokesmen urged taking advantage of the increasingly refined techniques of the behavioral sciences, techniques operating on the assumption that human nature is not only subject to feelings and desires but extraordinarily flexible in behavior when knowledge about it is sufficiently precise and inventive. If the predominant image of human nature in the advertising world between the early 1930's and the early 1950's was not revolutionary, it was a far cry from that of the early years of the profession. The intermediate changes go far toward explaining how and why the reputation of human nature in a leading advertising journal shifted in response to changes in economic and social conditions, needs, and possibilities and to new theories and knowledge about man.

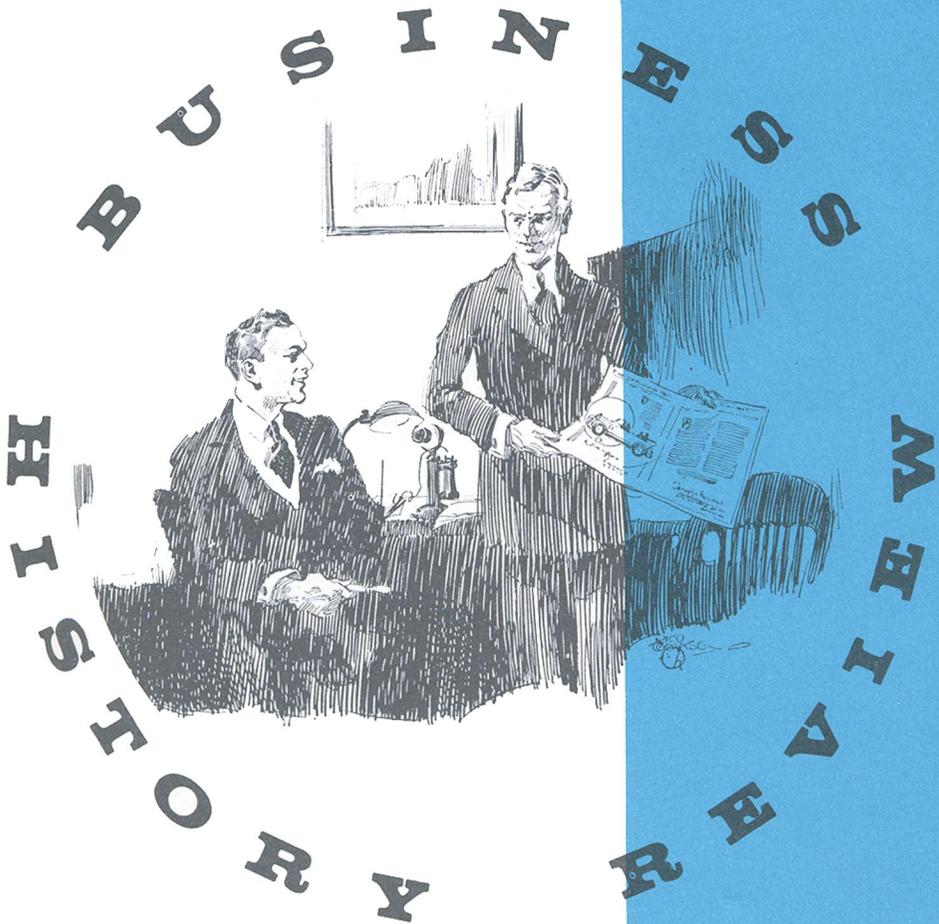
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1967



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COVER: "Your Hopes Fulfilled" (detail from  
advertising agency advertisement,  
1920), see pp. 335-357.