

## THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF KNOWLEDGE

THE historical explanation of modern skepticism is incalculably useful for understanding the caution practiced by people with scientific training when invited to embrace metaphysical or "spiritual" interpretations of experience or natural phenomena. As a psychologist of great talent and insight once remarked, "I am suspicious of big intuitions." So often, sweeping assertions as to the nature of things seem to imply that hard thinking is no longer necessary because the assertions are "idealistic." The right to question, to insist upon evidence, to ignore conclusions which lack the hypothesis by which they were reached—these are prerogatives painfully won through centuries of struggle by the practitioners of science, and to fail to appreciate the importance of that struggle is to be unable to understand the modern mind.

There is, however, another side to the problem. It is quite conceivable that a scientific specialist will limit his work to a narrow band of investigation simply because this enables him to avoid all large and bewildering thoughts. Just as "big intuitions" permit the idealist to spin speculations and build systems without much responsibility for how they will work out in practice—for him, abstract symmetry is the thing—so the specialist protects himself from the responsibility of synthesizing conceptions by crying "metaphysical" whenever anyone tries to draw his attention beyond the grooves in which his method operates with such pleasing efficiency. Too often the idea of scientific method becomes a license to exile the moral problem from intellectual inquiry. In fact, there are those who claim for science just that: for them, science is chiefly blessed because it seems to secularize the problem of knowledge and place all human objectives on a quantitative basis. This sort of scientist never has to ask himself embarrassing questions about his

motives; his purity is as certain as the Calvinist "elect"; his method has secured him immunity from all sin, and he lives happily in a world without philosophical dimensions.

There is a kind of pressure in the idea of knowledge. As the French proverb has it, "To understand all is to forgive all." But much of the time, we don't *want* to forgive all, for then we should have to open our hearts to things and people we don't like. Human susceptibility to knowledge, in other words, seems to be governed, in some respects at least, by the polarities of feeling. A man may be looking for reasons to overcome his prejudice or dislike of another, or he may be looking for reasons to support it. All knowledge of this sort, then, has clearly a moral foundation. And cosmological theory is affected by similar considerations. Suppose, for example, that the Platonic account of the universe were in some sense a true one that the world of forms and experience is a transient expression of a more ideal reality. At once the question arises: What sort of canons of behavior result from this idea of the universe? What does it signify for man?

Such questions are complicated by the fact that there are many alternate or competing explanations of the nature of things, and there is no known means of establishing at once the superiority of one over the other. If Plato may have been right, why not Moses or Mohammed? The difficulties multiply so rapidly that the refuge of a universe of perceptible and definable matter, not indeterminate idea, becomes doubly attractive. It is here, of course, that the argument in behalf of metaphysics becomes pertinent. For metaphysics is the pruning hook of idealistic speculation and the censor of theology. If we are familiar with only the historical criticism of religion, we shall probably embrace the same atheistic materialism which became so attractive to the *philosophes* of

the Enlightenment. But if, on the other hand, we give attention to metaphysical criticism of religion, we may find that the idea of spiritual reality may vary all the way from the extreme anthropomorphism of the local tribal deity, Jehovah, to the abstract philosophical conception of the *Tao*, or *Parabrahm*, or the Neoplatonic Super-essential *One*. Similarly, the notion of universal process may range from the wholly unaccountable and miracle-performing "will-of-God" to the simple, logical Law of Compensation proposed by Emerson. These are all metaphysical or pseudo-metaphysical conceptions, and, as background ideas of human culture, they give direction to human behavior.

Metaphysics is the discipline which enables us to separate the reasonable philosophies of life and nature from the unreasonable ones. The unreasonable systems tend to be bad because they suggest that reason is unimportant, that decisions supported by irrational authority do not have to be explained. What we are suggesting, in short, is that a view of life which can survive metaphysical criticism is the most likely to survive the judgment of history.

But why must we have any far-reaching philosophy at all? Why can't we get along with a few ethical principles and our inherent sense of justice to guide us? These are necessary questions. But it seems germane to remark, not as an "answer," but as reference to a fact bearing on the questions, that there is an ineradicable tendency in human beings to go beyond the obvious answers to the obvious questions—to seek for some unifying conception of the nature of things. There is a further fact, one of pragmatic significance: that the social order seems to *need* the integration supplied by the idea of a transcendental order. This latter fact has of course been made the excuse for all sorts of religious absolutisms. The State gods of the Romans had a socio-political function; Thomas Hobbes, himself an unbeliever, advocated religion as an instrument of social control. On the other

hand, the *laissez faire* social philosophy of Lao-tze and the quiet integration of the Quaker meeting grow out of a sense of the ultimate unity of the principles of things. Even the American tradition of self-government has the metaphysical underpinning of the idea of *Natural Right*.

So, it might be argued that, true or false, metaphysical ideas are a social necessity. The difficulty with this justification, however, is that it amounts to an invitation to an elite to devise a religion for the benefit of the masses. Thus we cannot afford to let the need for metaphysics rest upon the pragmatic sanction alone. The temptations of expediency are too attractive.

Perhaps there is no real "proof" that philosophy is necessary, except the broad argument; itself laced with metaphysical assumptions, that all nature expresses itself by an unfoldment of its inner nature, and that man, therefore, as a being who is a part of the natural order, is subject to the same inevitable process. Human growth and development, however, are different from biological development in that the crucial aspect of human behavior is focussed in *moral* problems. And, further, a dictated moral decision is neither moral nor a decision, so that the blueprints of instinct supply no useful analogy in determining the "ideal" pattern of human unfoldment.

The trouble with all or most past metaphysical systems is that they tend, in practice—and by "practice" we mean their integration with social systems—to frustrate the primary need for complete freedom at every point of actual human decision, and, therefore, become anti-human systems instead of actual guides to life. Recognition of this potentially anti-human factor in both philosophical and political systems is the great and indispensable discovery of the anarchist philosophers—whether in the European tradition of politics or the Zen tradition of Buddhism.

The only way out of this dilemma that we have been able to think of—if, indeed, it is a way

out—is the idea, suggested by Jesus, of an *inner* way, by means of which a man emancipates himself from the literal character of the system:

And the disciples came, and said unto him, "Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" He answered and said unto them, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. . . . Therefore speak I to them in parables: Because they seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand."

Or, again, by the *Bhagavad-Gita*, in the idea of the knowledge which can make a man indifferent to all systems which have been taught, or are yet to be taught.

This solution, we must be frank to admit, involves a kind of wisdomism preached by the mystics of all time. But the beauty of the idea of mystical, incommunicable truth is that it destroys the theoretical *finality* of all systems. If we are right in thinking that individual decision is the key value in human life, then it follows that this value must be cherished above all others—that the longing for unity, wholeness, and metaphysical consistency, important though it is, must not be permitted to invade and control the primary region of freedom. This makes of every system a kind of transcendental *hypothesis*, awaiting confirmation from an order of experience for which we have no ordinary definitions, and which we perhaps ought not to attempt to define. Compensation for the suspense which results from this view lies in the fact that it may, conceivably, protect us from endless self-deceptions and false certainties.

## *Letter from* **CENTRAL EUROPE**

SALZBURG.—"A man committed suicide by shooting himself. He was recognized as Mr. J.F.K., a former high official." Another report states: "The corpse of a man was found near Betzingen. It is said that he committed suicide because of an unhappy love affair."

In many such cases, while a love affair or some personal grief is said to have led to self-destruction, it eventually becomes known that the man in question had been a spy.

Austria is still occupied by the four "Allies"—the British, the French, the Americans, and the Russians. As a matter of fact, Austria is the only country in the world where these four nations can meet freely, undisputed and unmolested. But they have no interest in this sort of meeting, per se. They want to find out as much as they can about each other's intentions. In politics, no such thing as trust or confidence exists. One tries to look behind the other's front, even while calling him his best friend, in public.

Moreover, Central Europe is a region which is surrounded by a number of other nations, which often belong to different "hemispheres." It would be practically impossible to travel from Poland to Western Germany, and vice versa, or (from Poland) via Western Germany to the Tyrol, but it is rather easy to go via Czecho-Slovakia. Austria is a turn-table, in its present position. No barriers in this small country! Going from Poland to Western Germany would mean breaking through the Iron Curtain, but to go from Poland to Eastern Austria (Soviet occupation zone), and from there to Western Austria (the Tyrol), means to penetrate one or two curtains of a much lighter material. In other words, Austria is the ideal territory for the "Allies" to "collect information" about each other. And who are used as spies? Austrians, of course. They have the best chance to observe the "occupiers" and their institutions, or make their acquaintance in the villages or cities where they live. Austrians are not conspicuous in Austria. A Britisher would be noticeable consorting with Soviets, and a Frenchman with Americans. But an Austrian is only the poor inhabitant of this little country. And, luckily enough, there are so many experts and specialists among "those Austrians." Not that they have been

spies before, but many of them were high officers, officials or experienced technicians in Hitler's day. What does it matter if they were then Nazis? The secret-service chiefs of the four Powers do not care about the past of these men. What they desire is "news."

Many of these former officers and engineers declare themselves ready to do the work of secret agents. Their reasons are obvious: First, as former Hitlerites they have in most cases been deprived of their positions and stripped of their property and will do almost anything to make a living—particularly something that allows them to make use of their knowledge and brings good pay; second, they do not regard themselves as traitors because the U.S.A. means no more to them than France or any other country.

The organizers of espionage activities find it a happy circumstance that Austria is such a small country. They travel an hour or two, meet their Austrian informers at Salzburg, Innsbruck, Linz, Graz or Vienna, and return in the afternoon to the country where their headquarters are set up, and where they are out of reach for any warrant of apprehension, be it Italy, Switzerland, France, Western Germany, Eastern Germany, Hungary, or Yugoslavia. It depends on which nation they work for. After they learn from the informer what they want to know, or if he has no success, or is already under observation by the "enemy," they drop him; and when, from their point of view, he knows too much already, then a news story appears—"The corpse of a man was found. . . ."

There is also an unsolved legal problem. The Westerners assume that the Austrian "secrets" belong to them and that anyone who hands them over to "others" is subject to prosecution for espionage. But the Soviets make the same claim. Court cases in Karlsruhe have lately showed that even lists taken from address books or telephone directories, and handed over to somebody else, were regarded as "secret material," the offender being brought to trial.

CENTRAL EUROPEAN CORRESPONDENT

## *REVIEW*

### GLADIATORS FOR PROPAGANDA

TIME was when the captured slaves of Rome were served up in the arena as beast-fare; now, two thousand years and many despotisms later, the gladiators have been called upon to enter the struggle over "communism." The motion picture, *Demetrius and the Gladiators*, for instance, clearly belongs to the "entertainment" trend which has brought us a plague of religious movie extravaganzas. Here the inspiration seems to be a furor about God, Christ and Church—inappropriately stemming from political worries.

The other evening, while suffering through a showing of this film, a MANAS writer almost transformed himself into a CP enthusiast. During the actual unreeling of this lengthy horror—a likely candidate for worst show of the year—one had to think about something, and the most obvious thing to think about was its hypocrisy. (C. Lloyd Douglas must be blamed for the character Demetrius, since D. was borrowed from one of Douglas' novels, the gladiator movie being billed as "beginning where *The Robe* left off," and if Douglas really created Demetrius, it is our opinion that D. and D. deserve each other.)

The popular appeal in "Demetrius" is sexiness and violence, according to time-honored formula, but the audience is supposed to fool itself into thinking that piety is the keynote. The young D., however, when a thoroughgoing young Christian and practicer of non-violence, would have been a box-office flop. What happens is that Demetrius conveniently renounces God and Christ long enough to hack his way through numerous opponents in the arena, and to live gloriously in sin with Susan Hayward before he sees the light once more by way of a miracle. So you can have your cake and eat it too, by golly, with all forgiven in the end and Christ's cause eventually served by someone who has himself a whale of a time getting squared away for the True Faith.

But to get on to "communism." Howard Fast, number one novelist proponent of the class-struggle view of history on which revolutionary Marxism is based, also wrote a book about gladiators, called *Spartacus* (reviewed in MANAS for Dec. 24, 1952). But Fast created a moving story about the oppressed, kindling in readers a flame of appreciation for the thrill

of revolt. In our opinion, this is the radical view of history at its best; not without sentiment, either—a sentiment which at least brings one to feel a fierce identification with the hopelessly downtrodden. The gladiators, in other words, may make some sense in illustrating a Marxist argument, but when cast in a supporting role to religious "drama," they lose all dignity.

For much the same reasons, Arthur Koestler's *The Gladiators* is often quite a story. Now republished as a pocket edition, this book utilizes the drama of the Spartacus revolt as a way of seeing behind the vast social injustices of the past. Koestler, it seems to us, writes from an underlying cynicism unknown to Fast, hence gives us more sordid realism and less inspiration, but he, too, finds a historical place for the gladiators, and recognition of that place is undeniably conducive to radical sympathies. These fighters, condemned by an exploiting state to butchery and being butchered, are symbols of all men whose backs are against the last wall. And there is that in everyone which responds to a fight wherein there's nothing to lose, a fight coming only after every avenue leading to better things has been closed. Koestler sounds this note when he makes Spartacus reflect upon the horrors of the path to human freedom, as he sees his dream of a just society, created by slaves, swallowed up by the ignorance of the mob—men who have suffered so long that they can only strike out blindly:

What good was knowledge. Impotent, it faced the happening; withered and sour was the taste of wisdom when the black saps of enthusiasm flowed through the veins of the thousand-headed monster.

No, one could neither guide it from outside nor from above, not with the pride of the lonely seer, nor with the cunning of detours, nor with the cruel kindness of the prophet. The century of abortive revolutions had been completed; others will come, receive the word and pass it on in a great wrathful relay-race through the ages; and from the bloody birth-pangs of revolution again and again a new tyrant will be born—until at last the groaning human clod would itself begin to think with its thousand heads, until knowledge was no longer foisted on it from outside, but was born in labored torment out of its own body, thus gaining from within power over the happening.

Another powerful "communist" sentiment emerges in a dialogue between Spartacus and Crassus, when possible terms of honorable surrender for the embattled gladiators are discussed—and rejected by Crassus. It seems that utterly selfish Crassus knows well the injustices suffered by the slaves, and also the utter corruption of his own state, but is not in the least moved. Spartacus cannot understand:

"If you know it all so well," he said hoarsely and so loudly as to make the generalissimo arch his eyebrows, "if you know so much about it all and yourself say that the devil will carry off that State of yours—how then can you ask for our unconditional surrender and make the injustice even worse?"

He was going to say more, but Crassus cut him short with a gesture of his burly arm.

"Pardon me," said Crassus. "Have you ever stopped to consider that a human being lives only for approximately fifteen thousand days? Quite a lot more than that will pass before Rome goes to the togs. Since I do not have the honor of knowing my great-grandchildren, I see no occasion to humor them in my actions."

Finally, Crassus offers Spartacus personal indemnity in return for the surrender of his fighting men, so that Rome can be placated by a sufficient number of crucifixions:

"One must keep on the road to the end," said Spartacus in that tone of voice in which one explains to children something they refuse to understand. "One must keep on walking to the end, else the chain is broken. That is what it must be like, and one may not ask the reason."

But as he saw that the fat man still did not understand him, he took up the wine cup from the little low table. "One must not leave any dregs," he said and smilingly drank the last drop out of the cup. "So that one may hand it in a clean slate to the Next One who will come."

One of the most telling passages in the Koestler book, however, discusses the ease with which champions of "the masses" turn into tyrants. Even Spartacus falls into this trap for a time, as one of his followers sees:

"Still, the Emperor surely means well, whatever he does."

But these seemed to be the very words the other had been waiting for. He even put his spoon down and, gesticulating frantically, fairly pounced on poor Publitor:

"He means well, you say? Of course he means well, that's the worst of it. There is no more dangerous tyrant than he who is convinced he is the selfless guardian of the people. For the damage done by the congenitally wicked tyrant is confined to the field of his personal interests and his personal cruelty but the well-meaning tyrant who has a lofty reason for everything, can do unlimited damage. Just think of the God Jehovah, my lad: ever since the unfortunate Hebrews chose to adhere to Him, they've had one calamity after the other, from lofty reasons every time, because He means so well. Give me our old bloodthirsty gods every time: you throw them a sacrifice now and then, and they leave you in peace."

To this naturally Publitor could not say anything either. But that was unnecessary anyhow, for Zozimos talked on irrepressibly. Publitor noticed that the other men at the table who never used to listen to the rhetorician and had always got up as soon as they had finished their meal, were now staying on and listening attentively.

"But," Zozimos went on, "we aren't talking of gods but of human beings. And I tell you, it is dangerous to combine so much power in the fist, and so many lofty reasons in the head of one single person. In the beginning the head will always order the fist to strike from lofty reasons; later on the fist strikes of its own accord and the head supplies the lofty reasons afterward; and the person does not even notice the difference. That's human nature, my lad. Many a man has started out as a friend of the people and ended up as a tyrant but history gives not a single example of a man starting out as a tyrant and ending up as a friend of the people. Therefore I tell you again: there is nothing so dangerous as a dictator who means well."

So Koestler is equivocal, and this is as it should be. Fast's burning enthusiasm for the class struggle makes the better story, while history, in this case unfortunately, like Koestler, declines to simplify. But Fast, at least, as well as Koestler, lets us find in the story of the gladiators something worth thinking and feeling about—which a motion picture, catering to conventional tastes, will never do.

**COMMENTARY**  
**"GLADIATOR" FOR PEACE**

THE heroic revolt of Spartacus, briefly noted in Review, made us think of the very different revolt of a young citizen of Israel, Amnon Zichroni, who recently defied the attempt of the Israeli Government to make a soldier of him. He refused to be drafted into the Israeli army, and when the Minister of Defense, Pinchas Lavron, ruled against recognition of the scruples of Israeli conscientious objectors and caused Zichroni to be arrested, the youth began a hunger strike against the combined forces of the army, the government and the press. As William Zukerman says in the *Jewish Newsletter* for August 2, Zichroni was "clearly determined to die rather than violate his convictions."

Throughout the twenty-three days of the young man's ordeal, the entire Hebrew press with one single honorable exception, conducted one of the most vicious and shameless campaigns against pacifism in a manner reminiscent of Italian and German Fascists in the days of their power. The Socialist *Davar*,... led the hounding campaign against the "traitors" and "deserters" who put humanitarianism above the Vaterland. . . . *Haaretz*, the only liberal independent newspaper in Israel, kept up a lone fight for the young man, as a symbol of conscientious objection, and warned the government that if Zichroni died, Israel would be branded forever as a state that puts force above convictions and militarism as the highest value in the land.

Finally, on the twenty-fourth day of the fast, when Zichroni was near death, the government yielded to liberal pressure from within and without Israel, and set him free. Zukerman called this a victory for "an ancient ideal of the prophets" over "a government and a people who have deliberately exchanged the centuries-old faith in the supremacy of the spirit over force for the glorification of the state."

An ironical aspect of the happening lies in the fact that the government of Israel recently agreed to exempt from military service some 2,000 Yeshivist students because of their "religious"

scruples, and to exempt all orthodox young women from civil defense work, while at the same time denying the right to exemption, allowed until a year ago, of conscientious objectors belonging to the War Resisters League. "To complete," as Zukerman says, "this fantastic paradox," there is the further fact that Pinchas Lavron, the Minister of Defense who engineered these policies, and who will probably be the next Prime Minister of Israel, was himself a member of a pacifist group when he first came to Palestine twenty years ago, and then "preached exactly what Zichroni does now."

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

THE recently published *Antioch Review Anthology*, edited by Paul Bixler, contains an article on education to which we should like to call special attention. The title is "Education for Vocation," and the author is Sidney Hook, whose reputation as a gifted thinker and writer is well-deserved. Dr. Hook's remarks, moreover, are obligatory reading for those who share enthusiasm for the "Robert M. Hutchins position" in educational debate, for Hook brings into clear focus the merit of a contrasting emphasis. Here, as is always the case in educational controversy, the extent to which factional partisanship is avoided while considering another's point of view determines the measure of constructive insight we may hope to gain.

Let us begin with Hook's criticism of a passage from Hutchins, recognizing that it is easy to criticize on the basis of a single passage, but also, that Hook's point is a good one—and one to which Hutchins has not given a great deal of attention. Hook quotes John Dewey, and then writes further about an educational program which would interrelate liberal and vocational studies:

This minimum program of interrelation, according to John Dewey, should contribute an essential part of modern liberal education:

"A truly liberal, and liberating, education would refuse today to isolate vocational training on any of its levels from a continuous education in the social, moral, and scientific contexts within which wisely administered callings and professions must function." As an illustration of a typical misunderstanding, let us consider a direct comment on this position made by Mr. Hutchins:

"A truck driver cannot learn to drive a truck by studying physics, chemistry and mathematics. . . . The truck driver, both as truck driver and as citizen, needs to learn to control himself, to take his place in a democratic organization, to discover the meaning and aim of his existence and of the society of which he is a part. Musing over the laws of thermodynamics as

he drives is doubtless better than musing over some other things; but it is not likely to prevent him from wrecking both his truck and his life."

Mr. Hutchins' illustration speaks worlds. There is no vocational curriculum on "How to Drive a Truck" in any reputable institution in the country. I doubt whether there is even a course! There are courses in the physics of gas engines which is something quite different. But aside from what we will find or not find in our congested curriculums, driving a truck is precisely one of the things which it is *not* the business of vocational education to teach because it is learned in the same way that everybody learns how to drive a car or a bicycle. It is even questionable whether piloting or navigating a plane, which requires skills that cannot be safely learned on the job without considerable previous instruction, should by itself constitute the subject matter of a vocational course. Vocational instruction should be given *in the basic principles that govern a whole class of practical skills for which the individual has a bent or interest*. It should not aim at robotlike conditioning of human machines to other machines. Truck driving is as honorable a pursuit as any other but why assume, as Mr. Hutchins apparently does, that whoever begins with it must necessarily remain with it? The function of knowledge of thermodynamics wherever it is pertinent to vocational education is not to be mused over by the driver in the cab of a truck. That would be almost as dangerous as musing over "the meaning and aim of his existence," which Mr. Hutchins would apparently substitute in its stead. The function of such knowledge when it has been given vocationally is to enable the truck driver if he so desires to master other tasks, to make himself eligible for other vocations, perhaps better paid, perhaps more congenial, perhaps more interesting.

In other words, Dr. Hook applies scientific method in its pure sense to the practical problem of interrelating culture and work, recognizing (1) that this is not an either-or choice, and (2) that a synthesis will require a great deal of philosophical understanding on the part of teachers who set out to achieve it. Like Hutchins, in this instance, Hook notes that stress on mere job-training results from a shallow conception of the potentialities of human beings:

Vocational education conceived as job training represents the greatest threat to democratic education in our time. It is a threat to democracy because it



tends to make the job-trained individual conscious only of his technological responsibilities but not of his social and moral responsibilities. He becomes a specialist in "means" but is indifferent to "ends" which are considered the province of another specialist. The main concern becomes with "getting a job" and after that with "doing a job" no matter what the political direction and moral implications of the job are. Social programs are judged simply by whether they promise to provide the jobs for which the technician is trained. If a democratic community can supply the opportunity for work, well and good; if it can't, and a totalitarian party or government offers the opportunity, why not? Observers have noted that the technically trained students in institutions of higher education in Germany and Italy have in the mass been much more susceptible to totalitarian propaganda than students whose education has primarily been in the pure sciences. An education that is narrowly vocational without cultural perspective or social orientation, unilluminated by knowledge of large scientific principles considered in a large way, undisciplined by a critical method that sets the range of relevance for methods of technical thinking, is even worse for democratic purposes than a narrow and pure scientific training which, as a special kind of professionalism, is bad in its own way.

Hook now develops his main concern—that our youth recognize that pure science is as necessary a part of our liberal heritage as the great literature and philosophy of the past, and therefore learn to apply *specifically* critical intelligence to both social and industrial problems:

We could well forego the difference in national wealth that would result from keeping young people out of the labor market for a few years, if it added to the immeasurable but more genuine wealth of a well-informed, critically minded youth.

Such a critically minded youth would think not only about jobs but about the economy as a whole which provided the jobs and sometimes took them away. Such youth would not be educated to "adjust" themselves to an economic and social order as if it were as perennial as the course of the stars. They would be encouraged to view it in its historical development. They would be taught to recognize its present-day problems as *Occasions for choices* which they, among others, had to make. They would adjust not to the present but to the future as if it were present. To adjust to the future as if it were present is

never an automatic reaction in human beings. For it is the essence of reflection.

We recommend "Education for Vocation" in its entirety (The *Antioch Anthology* was published in 1953 by the World Publishing Co., New York) and regard Hook's article as sound support for the MANAS contention that the debate between the "Progressives" and the "Liberal Arts" advocates needs to be broken into two divisions and argued separately, first, in the area of elementary school training, and, second in the area of high school learning. For it is the dearth of critical and theoretical learning at the high school level which occasions the just criticism of men like Hutchins. In the elementary schools, however, no pretense is made of training youngsters for jobs, and it is here that the best "progressive" contributions are made.

## *FRONTIERS* THE SEARCH FOR ROOTS

IT seems very clear that the world of culture and learning—as well as the world of ordinary men—is longing for stability, for a place to send down roots. It is the men who have too many roots—who have become, so to say, potbound and immobile who have need to break away from the safety of tradition and go adventuring in far places, devising new theories of progress as their guides.

The West has had a long season of adventuring. An open break with tradition came in politics somewhere in the nineteenth century, with the revolutionary doctrines of the socialists, which was united with the progressivism of scientific philosophy. The scientific break with tradition had really come earlier, having first been expressed by Isaac Newton, when he said, in the "General Scholium" of his *Principia*, that the principles of a physical theory should be derived by induction from experience. That the theories of Newton were rather *confirmed* by experience, and derived from a multitude of sources, some mathematical, some philosophical, and even mystical, was apparently not noticed by the great discoverer. He was too busy liberating science from the dead hand of medievalism to be concerned with such inconsistencies. As he wrote at the end of the second edition of his *Optics*:

To tell us that every species of things is endowed with an occult specific quality by which it acts and produces manifest effects, is to tell us nothing; but to derive two or three general principles of motion from phenomena, and afterwards to tell us how the properties and actions of all corporeal things follow from those manifest principles, would be a very great step in philosophy.

Physics made great progress for some two hundred and fifty years without any philosophical theory of matter; and similar strides were made in politics, without any philosophical theory of man. But today, when the science of physics is largely controlled by the practice of politics, and the

practice of politics is in a state of extreme anxiety from being frightened by the science of physics, we have reached a place where we need a philosophical theory for both theory of matter and man—a theory, that is, of order and control for both.

In politics, the quest for roots is manifest in the new enthusiasm for conservatism. There is a growing suspicion of any sort of advocacy of change, on the ground that the present is bad enough, and even a little change may release new demons which we cannot control. The high and eager rationalism of twenty or thirty years ago has been bitterly disappointed. Further, as a writer in the September-October *Partisan Review* remarks, "Conservative irrationalism may have a strong appeal to many of us who are offended by over-rationalized life in a dehumanized and impersonal industrial society." The fountains of yesterday's conservative philosophy find strange companions meeting to drink from the same waters. Herbert Spencer's thoughts about the State and the failure of the liberal movement to set men free attract both bitter Republicans and former liberals who are now doing informal research in anarchist notions. Albert Jay Nock is by no means a "superfluous man" for a new generation of enthusiasts who read with pleasure and enlightenment his *Our Enemy the State*.

To be sure, there are mixed motives in all this questing about. One man may be seeking no more than respectable intellectual ammunition to strengthen the defenses of his prejudice, while another may be absorbing a point of view that he has ignored for ten or twenty years, and becoming the wiser for the lessons learned. We might distinguish between the two by saying that some men are seeking a principle of *measure*, while others would like to find justification for *control*, the difference being that "measure" is an idea that a man uses for and on himself, whereas control is commonly applied to others.

Naturally enough, much of the new conservatism is allied with religion. That Mr. Buckley, by being for McCarthy and Christian orthodoxy, has gained a host of admirers, was to be expected. The conservative is inclined to like stable reference points, and here the question

should be: Is the stability sought in philosophic reference points, or in the relative immutability of lethargic institutions? The *PR* writer, V. E. Walter, discussing a recent volume, *The Conservative Mind*, by Russell Kirk, illustrates this point by commenting on what another reviewer, Gordon Chalmers, has to say:

Gordon Chalmers says he believes that the author has summed up most political problems in the question: Do men have souls or do they not? Upon one's resolution of this inquiry rests the basis of politics, he concludes, and if the answer is no, men will then be treated as parts of a machine. This much may be true, but the question does not go far enough. It should continue to ask: What are we to do when we recognize that men do have souls? The conservative answer may be just as inhuman as that of the materialist. By identifying the principle of a man's soul with the principle of the social order, and by requiring that his own individual law of development be determined for him by the state, a conservative regime enslaves him as effectively as any machine. Conservatism would impress on the soul of man its own structure and deprive the soul of the autonomy which is its life. Thus, although it may begin as a revolt against mechanism, conservatism ends in coercive organicism.

The point, here, is that, for the conservative who is fearful and insecure who wants not the intellectual stability of a principled outlook on life, but a rigid pattern of social relations to protect him from disturbing novelties—religion is only a political utility. It is peculiarly useful to reactionary politics since it enjoys supernatural or irrational sanctions which cannot be questioned by ordinary means in political debate. If the going gets rough, a reference to Sacred Values will help to silence objection.

Walter is very good on the difference between genuine religion and mere "piety," for it is piety, and not religion, which serves the purposes of conservatism:

Piety is conservative, religion is not. Piety in the sense of Roman *pietas* is a complex of secular loyalties and civic virtues. As a substitute for religion it is epitomized in the Latin saying: "Pious is he who loves his country." The failure to distinguish between

piety and religion, however, is a self-destructive weakness in conservatism. Recognizing that piety is the substance from which custom and law are spun, and also that it is the impulse that gives inward assent to legality, conservatism prefers to make it the cornerstone of society. But by calling it religion and allowing religion to come in with it, conservatism leaves the door open to radical forces. Hocking has pointed out that "Worship is the radical and deliberate cult of revolution. . . . The will which has met its god confronts the world with new tables of the law. . . . An honest religion is thus the natural ally of an honest revolution." But the religious revolutionary differs from the nihilist by remaining responsible to his religious and ethical ideals.

This latter idea—responsibility to religious and ethical ideals—is really what is good about conservatism, it seems to us, just as irresponsibility is what is bad about radicalism. The frightened conservative wants the "control" aspect of responsibility without the integrity from which it grew—the form without the substance. As a British statesman of the early nineteenth century said to an eager clerical reformer: "Things have come to a pretty pass if religion is going to interfere with private life."

The power of *traditional* religion in controlling of human behavior lies in its mythic or non-rational element. Great truths may be embedded in myth, but great tyrannies may be supported by irrational belief. It is not, therefore, the rational aspect of religion which conservatives honor. Walter's observations about Plato in this connection seem especially valuable:

Plato, one of the greatest mythmakers, became the professed enemy of myth in the political realm. Plato's solution to the problem of justice should not be confused with his formulation of the question. The Republic itself was intensely conservative, but his dialectics were revolutionary. He demanded that the state be, first of all, *understood* and developed a method to search systematically for the unifying principles. Then, he declared, a choice must be made between the ethical and the mythical conception of the state. The legal state, the state of justice, excludes mythological construction. . . . to construct moral and political life on tradition, Plato argued, meant building on shifting sands. In the *Phaedrus* he told us that the man who is impelled by tradition,

proceeding from habit and routine, is blind. Tradition cannot guide him for it is blind itself, without a guiding principle, following impulses neither justified nor understood. Thus the blindness of tradition would be an impasse to the conservative if he had not intended a *deus ex machina* to deliver him from it. This device is teleology; he has given tradition direction from the highest source, namely Providence.

Together with his belief that the guiding hand of Providence ultimately controls political life, the conservative holds the belief that piety and veneration constitute the cornerstone of society.

This is about the clearest exposition of the relation between religious orthodoxy and political conservatism that we have ever seen.

While on the subject of Plato, however, we might take note of the difference between even the myths Plato constructed for philosophical purposes and the role of the earlier myths in the life of the people. Plato was determined never to support reasoning with supernatural buttresses. If the reasoning should be bad, let it fall without help from On High. If one feels like taking an organic, evolutionary view of the development of Western civilization, Plato seems to mark the stage where the controls which had previously been embodied in irrational tradition began to be reasoned about. At any rate, Plato took many of the ideas present in Pythagorean and Orphic tradition and placed them in a rational context. It was when these ideas were too obscure for effective treatment by means of reason that he constructed his myths—which were intended to be suggestive rather than dogmatic and conclusive.

Ernst Cassirer, in his last work, *An Essay on Man*, completed before his death in 1945, contrasts the mythic treatment of the idea of immortality with its very different treatment by Plato. The unity of all life is the great theme in mythic religion. The breaks and discontinuities so evident to modern, rational man have small importance in the myth. As Cassirer says:

We need by no means assume that these differences are completely overlooked. They are not denied in an empirical sense but they are declared to

be irrelevant in a religious sense. To mythical and religious feeling nature becomes one great society, the *society of life*. Man is not endowed with outstanding rank in this society. He is a part of it but he is in no respect higher than any other member. Life possesses the same religious dignity in its humblest and its highest forms. . . . we find the same principle—that of the solidarity and unbroken unity of life—if we pass from space to time. It holds not only in the order of simultaneity but also in the order of succession. The generations of men form a unique and uninterrupted chain. The former stages of life are preserved by reincarnation. . . .

Many mythic tales are concerned with the origin of death. The conception that man is mortal, by his nature and essence, seems to be entirely alien to mythical and primitive religious thought. In this regard there is a striking difference between the mythical belief in immortality and all the later forms of a pure philosophical belief. If we read Plato's *Phaedo* we feel the whole effort of philosophical thought to give clear and irrefutable proof of the immortality of the human soul. In mythical thought, the case is quite different. Here the burden of proof always lies on the opposite side. If anything is in need of proof it is not the fact of immortality but the fact of death. And myth and primitive religion never admit these proofs. They emphatically deny the possibility of death. In a certain sense the whole of mythical thought may be interpreted as a constant and obstinate negation of the phenomenon of death. By virtue of this conviction of the unbroken unity and continuity of life, myth has to clear away this phenomenon. Primitive religion is perhaps the strongest and most energetic affirmation of life that we find in human culture.

But it is not mythic religion's grand affirmation of life, designed to uphold the men of primitive races in their trials and misfortunes, that the conservative admires, but its irrational *authority*. For this use of religion, the Platonic dialectic becomes subversive, as would any independent religious thinking.

But not all those who are renewing an investigation of religious truth have the motives of political conservatives. There are plenty of serious men who sense, as Hocking puts it, that honest religion is the natural ally of honest revolution, and they are convinced that the world

needs an honest revolution. The search for roots has its Platonic side as well, and the new idea that is spreading is that transcendental religion may also be rational religion—religion with an inner sanction instead of traditional, mythic authority, even though it embody the same basic truths.

Little space remains for a return to modern physical theory and its renascent transcendentalism. There is, however, a clear trend to restore to physics conscious philosophical foundations, after several generations of anti-metaphysical, positivistic thinking. An article in *Science* earlier this year (April 23) describes developments in physical theory, and after some attention to the revolt against dualism led by the logical positivists, presents the views of Pierre Duhem, noted theoretical physicist. Duhem had little patience with the view that, without a larger idea of the nature of things, science could become much more than high-class technology. He believed that there are realities which transcend experience, saying:

Concerning the very nature of things, or the realities hidden under the phenomena we are studying, a theory conceived on the plan we have just drawn teaches us absolutely nothing.

Duhem felt that physical theory, by itself, could never accomplish explanation, but only representation and classification. He denied that the nature of ultimate reality is the object of physical theory, although there may be a kind of parallelism:

Physical theory never gives us the explanation of experimental laws; it never reveals realities hiding under sensible appearances; but the more complete it becomes, the more we apprehend that the logical order in which theory orders experimental laws is the reflection of an ontological order, the more we suspect that the relations it establishes among the data of perception correspond to real relations among things, and the more we feel that theory tends to be a natural classification.

Finally, at the close of a discussion of "The Value Physical Theory," Duhem declared:

. . . the physicist is compelled to recognize that it would be unreasonable to work for the progress of physical theory if this theory were not the increasingly better defined and more precise reflection of a metaphysics, the belief in an order transcending physics is the sole justification of physical theory.

The age of arrogant contempt for philosophy seems about to come to a close. Already, the strength, common sense, and even beauty of thought rooted in philosophy seem so evident that one wonders why it was ever abandoned—or would, if there were not available excellent histories of the almost incredible abuses committed in the name of religion and dogmas in pseudo-philosophical disguise.