

## THE PROBLEM OF KNOWLEDGE

ONE of the fairly obvious characteristics of the present period of history is the quest for a new theory of knowledge. There are today several vital schools of thought which could not have come into being unless the prevailing theory of knowledge—the scientific theory—had first gone into a decline. While the scientific idea of knowledge still dominates the practice of researchers and professional men generally—after all, what else are they to follow for a guide?—there can be no doubt that the primary inspiration of the scientific movement has practically disappeared. It has lost, that is, the moral and philosophical impetus with which it set out. This does not mean that individuals working in the sciences are uniformly without moral and philosophical inspiration. Such a judgment would be nonsense. But the broad world-view known as the "scientific outlook," once undergirded and carried forward by a great current of humanitarian optimism, no longer grips the imagination. And what cannot grip the imagination of men is doomed to be left behind.

It is important, therefore, to see as much as we can of how and why this has happened, lest we leave behind elements of human achievement that ought to be brought along. We have a letter from a reader that will help to set the problem:

I would be interested to read some of your ideas on the subject of science, both physical and social, as being only another form of blind belief; an exercise which makes all types of pretense as to objectivity, precision, etc., yet finds itself drawing conclusions which cannot (or at least *are* not) adequately explained. As for example, the belief in the hereditary transmission of "evil" or bad qualities (anti-social tendencies): Can science make such a conclusion without first demonstrating how such a process would be effected, beginning with the presence of this tendency in germinal form, and its development? If the process cannot be described step by step without involving a contradiction, then there

is no basis for a belief. To form a belief we must be able to at least show its possibility. And if the attempt to show such possibility is not even made, then the conclusion is nothing more than a gross assumption.

Thus science, which begins by making the assumption that what it observes is of a material nature, ends up, after its careful, detailed study of observed events, by drawing conclusions which are unexplainable assumptions ("mysteries"). The fundamental scientific description of physical nature as consisting of molecules, which are in turn nothing more than aggregates of atoms, which likewise are nothing more than aggregates of sub-atomic particles, ultimately involves the non-existence of any of these realities. Philosophy follows this irrational trend in many ways, when it is content to allow the co-existence of contradictory notions, as, for example, in the almost universal belief that ideas are derived from sensations (nothing in the intellect which was not first in the senses). The slightest exploration of the implications of such a belief would show that the process would involve a host of contradictions at every turn. Yet we are so chained by the belief in the physical nature of external objects and sensation that we refuse to consider any other possibilities. . . .

I am of the opinion that our modern world is too greatly reliant upon the dogmatism of physical and social science, and I would no more accept a dogmatic theory of science any more than I would accept a revealed dogma of religion. Authority of any kind eventually reveals its weaknesses.

The indictment of certain aspects of the practice of science drawn up by this reader is already a familiar theme of a number of critics—including some scientists of distinction. The term given to this alleged misapplication of science is "Scientism," defined by Gerald Holton as "an addiction to science." Prof. Holton, a Harvard physicist, continues:

Among the signs of scientism are the habit of dividing all thought into two categories, up-to-date scientific knowledge and nonsense, the view that the mathematical sciences and the large nuclear

laboratory offer the only permissible models for successfully employing the mind or organizing effort.

Since there is now available a new book, *Scientism and Values* (Van Nostrand, 1960, \$6.50), made up of essays critical of scientism by twelve well-known scholars, there is no need, here, to continue a statement of the indictment at length. It should be enough to take from F. A. Hayek (as quoted by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in *Scientism and Values*) the following characterization of scientism, under three headings:

1. Objectivism, i.e., the contention that the methods of natural science are the only way of knowledge and that all phenomena must be ultimately expressed in "physical language";
2. Collectivism, i.e., what we may call the application of personificative fictions to social phenomena, treating them as if they were concrete, organism-like objects and wholes;
3. Historicism, i.e., the contention following from this point of view that laws of social and historical events can be discovered which are similar in structure to the laws in natural science.

The main reason why scientism generates antagonism is that its representatives sometimes claim that they have a mandate from the laws of nature to pursue some line of political action. Communism, to take one illustration, has long been identified by its advocates as "scientific" socialism, this being the background justification for anything the Communist may do. Over the years, the insistence that Communism is scientific has resulted in that strange anomaly, a political test for scientific truth. Soviet scientists who had the misfortune to find evidence for views not in harmony with the Party Line learned that they had better suppress the evidence or prepare themselves for ostracism or even liquidation.

Another illustration of scientism, or of the abuses to which it may lead, is cited by our correspondent as the claim of the hereditary transmission of bad or evil qualities of human beings. This view was of course a popular belief

long before it gained scientific (more properly, "scientistic") support. The rules governing intermarriage among primitive tribes often have to do with the preservation of racial "purity," just as aristocratic classes of the past have made a great point of not allowing their children to wed "beneath" them. However, with the coming of the doctrine of world-wide reform and regeneration through scientific knowledge, what had been common folk belief was gradually raised to the status of a supposed "law of nature." The surge for general human improvement made countless men look to science for reliable means with which to proceed in the great task. And how simple the elimination of evil, if it were necessary only to control human breeding in a manner to assure the birth of only "good" human beings!

Whatever the facts which may be assembled to support this view (Sir Francis Galton began the compilation of data along these lines late in the nineteenth century), we know that eugenic doctrines had attained to a measure of "scientific authority" in the popular mind by the early years of the twentieth century. In 1927, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Holmes felt secure enough in the scientific backing of this claim about heredity to say (*Buck v. Bell*, 274 U.S. 200):

It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind. The principle that sustains compulsory vaccination is broad enough to cover cutting the Fallopian tubes. . . . Three generations of imbeciles are enough.

This was the social or humanitarian justification for a sterilization operation, and it manifestly depends upon supposed scientific knowledge for its validity. What was this "knowledge"? We don't know what books Justice Holmes had read on the subject of human heredity, but one may suppose that he was familiar with the report of Robert H. Dugdale on the descendants of Max Juke (1874) and with Arthur H. Estabrook's later (1914) review of Dugdale's work and approval of it as surprisingly accurate.

According to Estabrook, some 43 per cent of a total of 705 persons descended from Max Juke could be classified as "antisocial and a nuisance and an expense to the state." Of the 705, only 152 "could be called industrious." Many of the children did not get past the fourth grade, while others were said to be "vicious and untrainable."

The work of Dugdale and Estabrook was summarized by the columnist, Dr. W. C. Alvarez, in a newspaper article some years ago, in which the writer drew this conclusion: "Unless one assumes that he (Dugdale) was a colossal liar, his book stands as a remarkable bit of proof that in man, just as in other animals, a poor stock breeds a poor stock."

In any event, it seems likely that material of this sort weighed heavily in Justice Holmes' mind when he wrote the decision quoted above. Another sample of eugenic opinion concerning the transmission of traits of character by heredity is found in expressions by Sir Arthur Keith. Speaking of the Jews as an ethnic group, he said (quoted in the *Literary Digest* for April 25, 1931:

As the result of a self-imposed isolation, they (the Jews) have strengthened certain desirable qualities. In proportion to their numbers the Jewish race produces a greater number of men and women with aptitude for business than any other, it can claim more than its share of genius—mathematics, philosophy, and in every form of art.

Had the Jews been destitute of a deep love and sympathy for the weaklings of their own denomination—they might have been by this time a race of supermen. It is man's heart, not his head, which makes him eugenically blind.

Continuing his campaign for "racial" regeneration with all the ardor of a scientific evangel, Sir Arthur explains the necessity which the "new knowledge" of heredity imposes upon those who would pioneer the eugenic program:

Call it by what name you will, the eugenicist must have a stud farm, where he can secure control, isolation, and purity of breed.

The eugenicist at once comes up against his first difficulty; the men and women who are willing to

submit must be those who are destitute of the most desirable of all human qualities—*independence*—the urge for individual liberty. Even if he succeeds in assembling a selected community, what kind of men and women would they be that obeyed the dictates of the eugenicist?

And then the morality which must pervade such a eugenic establishment; there can be no soft-heartedness on the part of the man in charge; the undesirables have to be ruthlessly weeded out and cast mercilessly aside as soon as detected; mercy and charity become vices in such an establishment.

The reader of these words may wonder if Sir Arthur is perhaps writing in irony *against* any conceivable eugenic program, so plainly does he recognize what might be called the intuitive or humanistic objections to it. But that views of this sort can exist *without* being ironic is bitterly clear from the history of the first half of the twentieth century. Part of the indoctrination of the party functionaries of both the Nazis and the Communists was a deliberate attempt to stamp out any vestige of "humanitarian weakness." These men were performing a surgical operation on the body corporate of the political community. They were eliminating the "unfit," and mere sentiments could not be permitted to inhibit their efficiency. And in both cases, there was the claim of some kind of "science" as the basis for such measures. The Nazis were purifying the Master Race, while the Communists were creating the Perfect Social Environment.

But what about actual results of the practice of eugenic doctrines? Back in 1936, Waldemar Kaempffert, science editor of the *New York Times*, turned his attention to the national sterilization law which was in effect in Germany at that time—a law then much admired by a number of Americans, many of them in California—and made an analysis to show how the German measure might have affected two selected groups of the population of Britain:

One [of these groups] consisted of 103 mentally deficient parents with 338 children of whom 110 were deficient; the other of 626 normal parents with 1,032 children of whom 68 were deficient. Compulsory

legislation of the German variety would have spared us the 110 undesirable children of the first group, but it would not have prevented the birth of the 68 of the second group because even normal men and women may carry within them unrecognized taints (genes) which manifest their influence after the right matings have occurred.

The risk of losing something humanly valuable is driven home by a further consideration of the same two groups. Of the normal 228 children of the first, which would not have been born in Germany, 78 proved supernormal. A few were even touched with what seemed to be genius. Evidently there is more than a slight risk of suppressing Goethes, Bachs, Newtons, Einsteins and Shakespeares if a compulsory sterilization law is rigorously enforced. (*New York Times*, Nov. 29, 1936).

It seems obvious that Justice Holmes had *not* read material of this sort before he wrote his decision ending with the frequently quoted words: "Three generations of imbeciles are enough." The exemplary social rhetoric of his expression can no longer hide the fact that he was relying, not upon science, but scientism.

Another passage from Mr. Kaempffert is pertinent:

. . . it has been found here [in Germany] and elsewhere that the incidence of feeble-mindedness has no relation to social stratum. It is true that the "lower class breeds more rapidly than the upper," but the incidence of mental defect for every thousand in either class is about the same. British research leaves no doubt that "the supposed abnormal fertility of defectives is largely mythical." The numerous progeny of the Jukes, Nams, Kallikaks and other classic families are not typical.

Incidentally, Dr. Alvarez let it drop that the principal complaint against Max Juke, notorious forebear of so many "defectives," was that he "lived by hunting and fishing, and was averse to taking any kind of a steady job." In time, we may come to recognize certain incontestable virtues in Juke's decision to pursue this way of life, and be obliged to find some other explanation than his "genes" for the harlotry and petty crime which somehow infected his family line.

What, finally, can we say about the "science" of claims concerning modern knowledge of human heredity? "Finally" is a bad word to use in connection with science, but the statement of Raymond Pearl, distinguished American biologist, in a paper printed in the *Smithsonian Institution Report* for 1935, is probably still an authoritative scientific judgment:

The analogy often drawn between human breeding and livestock breeding is in part specious and misleading. In animal breeding it has been learned that the only reliable measure of genetic superiority is the progeny test—the test of the quality of offspring actually produced. Breeding in the light of this test may, and often does, lead to the rapid, sure, and permanent improvement of a strain of livestock. But when the results of human breeding are interpreted in the light of the clear principles of the progeny test, the eugenic case does not fare so well. In absolute numbers the vast majority of the most superior people in the world's history have in fact been produced by mediocre or inferior forebears, and furthermore the admittedly most superior folk have in the main been singularly unfortunate in their progeny, again in absolute numbers.

So, returning to our correspondent's letter, it is apparent that at least two major problems are involved. First, we must determine who is qualified to speak for "science," before we shape our judgments of the scientific position. Raymond Pearl, we might argue, is a proper spokesman, in the light of the facts, whereas the sponsors of sterilization or other eugenic measures have only the questionable authority of "scientism," which should not be confused with science.

The second problem is more difficult to deal with. It relates to the basic human resolve to put what knowledge we have to work for human betterment. How shall we control this resolve, or rather, how can we be sure that the avenues of its expression are shaped by *actual knowledge*, and not some scientific manifesto which lends itself to propaganda or revolutionary zeal?

Ought there to be some high court of the mind which will rule upon questions of what is scientific knowledge and what is not? Could such

a court be trusted, any more than the faculty of theology could be trusted, during the Middle Ages, when Theology was held to reign supreme over all issues of fact and value?

We can hardly suppress the desire to put our scientific knowledge to work. It would be as foolish to insist that science conduct its researches in a sterile and inconsequential ivory tower as it is to turn whatever half-truths or mere theories which we think we can use into strident propaganda for the "true way" of life. Nor can we hope for an impartial scientific board to "release" to us the *real* scientific truth. One AMA is enough—more than enough.

Well, we have not settled anything, so far as our correspondent's letter is concerned. What may be useful, however, is the relocation of the issue, changing it from a criticism of science to a question of the idea of knowledge—today an open question and a common human problem.

## *REVIEW*

### TRACTS FOR THE MAD WORLD

RICHARD HOGGART'S Report on Paperbacks in the Oct. 13 *Listener* reveals that England, as well as the United States, has developed a mid-century institution of easy-to-buy literature. In 1955, 25,000,000 such books were issued—and in 1960, 70,000,000. Mr. Hoggart feels that the mere inexpensiveness of the paperbacks does not account for the trend, and that "they are immensely and irrationally attractive" beyond whatever may be said concerning their convenience or economy.

For one thing, many readers seem to be still suffering from the formalities of education, so that any reading undertaken in a rather casual fashion has particular appeal. The "serious" elements in contemporary writing drop in unexpectedly, and are often more welcome than if they had been advertised in advance. This leads publishers to experiment with entirely serious titles. Last fall six British publishers tried out "the 'egghead' or quality or highbrow paperback."

John Steinbeck has always been popular in England and may be possibly representative of scores of lesser-known writers who unobtrusively bring in philosophy and social criticism. Certainly the war novels of the past ten years have helped people to articulate their resistance to the militarism in which governments are still involved. MANAS has given review attention to scores of novels of considerable merit which tend to awaken latent pacifist ideas. Not all of these have been good books, but the best parts of all of them put together show an impressive awareness of the frailties of conventional thinking on war.

A paperback version of John Horne Burns' *The Gallery*, first published by Harper in 1947, is typical in both these respects, having been through seventeen printings. The scene of the book is Naples after the American invasion, and in the following passage a paratrooper lieutenant is endeavoring to jolt a corporal into awareness that

all is not well just because an American victory seems assured:

"Since I came overseas I've been in a position where nothing has squared with the education I got. I have a good mind. And it's disciplined. I know Shakespeare and Mozart and calculus and how to hold my moxie. But nothing I learned at Yale has given me any preparation for the mad world in which I find myself. . . . Do you all think you're playing a game with high stakes? Are you happy to be a Joiner? Are you happy moving in herds and thinking as the newspapers and radio commercials tell you to? What sweet consolation to be able to say to yourself: I'm an American, therefore better than anyone else in the world! . . . We get smuggler all the time. We call forces of destruction and speed, the March of Progress. . . ."

"Born in the States, sir?" I said feebly after a pause.

"Born there, corporal, but probably shan't die there. I had ideas of aristocracy without class, of brotherhood without familiarity and sentimentality. And I studied and I read and I admired nature and art. And I said what a piece of work is man, and I believed it. But it looks as though individuality is going out forever. Yet the propaganda assures me that a new age is at hand."

"It's the turning point in history, sir, for the little man . . ."

I murmured this, for it was something I'd read that morning in *Stars and Stripes, Mediterranean*.

"The fallacy of the machine and the mob, corporal. If the murder gets over, everything will then be geared to the lowest common denominator, as it is in the American schools. The queer, the beautiful, the gentle, and the wondering will all go down before a race of healthy baboons with football letters on their sweaters. . . . I was a letter man at Yale. . . . And the end of the world will come as a tittering anticlimax, because we're going to shut ourselves out from the stream of truth, and drown in pettiness and small talk."

"You fear the little man, sir?"

"The term little man is a phrase of self-pity. Faugh, corporal. . . ."

From this the suspicious reader might wonder if Mr. Burns tends in a communist direction, but one of his characters makes it plain that the true

obligation of twentieth-century man is to work his way out from under *all* of the ideologies. In a rather weird sequence, a dead officer appears in a vision to a private; once more the theme is a special sort of psychological death preceding physical demise:

"I'm talking of the sorrow of those who think, rather than those who do. . . . In wartime the greatest heroes are the sensitive and shy and gentle. They're great because they have to live in a world which is dedicated in wartime to an annihilation of everything they stand for. They're the unsung. No one will ever sing to them. Except us, the dead. Their theme's too secret. . . . If a man all his life has oxidized his every mood the moment it entered his glands, if he insulted and slugged his way along, it's not a much greater effort for him to go into battle. The gentle die in battle. Your crude extrovert comes out of his ordeal more brutal and crass and cocky than when he went in. That's the way civilizations die, gradually. A premium is put on physical courage in wartime which kills off the gentle, because they're too noble to admit of cowardice. So they die. . . ."

"My death in Sicily," the captain said, "was merely a compensation for my life. My life was a mess. In the crazy camaraderie of silk and geronimo I achieved reality to my life. . . . Oh, there was nothing solemn or dignified in the way I took my exit. It was a bullet in my face, just after I'd landed, and was looking around for my men, to urge them on in the way that cameramen like. My death was the expiation of that ridiculous society for which I danced. . . ."

The following, while uneven, carries the message that is turning people toward the realizations which are necessary before new departures and directions in foreign affairs are likely to be demanded:

I remember that my heart finally broke in Naples. Not over a girl or a thing, but over an idea. When I was little, they'd told me I should be proud to be an American. And I suppose I was, though I saw no reason I should applaud every time I saw the flag in a newsreel. But I did believe that the American way of life was an idea holy in itself, an idea of freedom bestowed by intelligent citizens on one another. Yet after a little while in Naples I found out that America was a country just like any other, except that she had more material wealth and more advanced plumbing. And I found that outside of the

propaganda writers (who were making a handsome living from the deal) Americans were very poor spiritually. Their ideals were something to make dollars on. They had bankrupt souls. Perhaps this is true of most of the people of the twentieth century. Therefore my heart broke.

## COMMENTARY

### THE NEW SPIRIT

OUR lead article practically promises to give some account of the reasons for the decline in influence of the scientific theory of knowledge, yet, upon reading it over, we note that not much is said along these lines. Why has confidence in science as the source of Truth dropped out of the modern consciousness, except for those who practice scientific specialties and need some sort of code to tell them what to do next?

Science has lost its prestige with modern man because it seems to be either impotent or irrelevant in relation to the things human beings care about most. Science is no doubt a source of immeasurable power, but it is impotent in the control of that power. Of course, people expected too much of science—expected what science, in the nature of things, could not possibly deliver—but the enthusiasts of the scientific theory of knowledge encouraged all such expectations. Science is technique. It is incredibly brilliant technique, and often so complex as to seem to be considerably more than technique, but in the last analysis, its role in modern society has been amoral, while the scientists, considered as specialists, have operated as vastly intelligent *robots*. So, in respect to the Utopia once dreamed of as to come from applying scientific methods to all human problems, science has turned out to be irrelevant, *except as technique*, and technique, we are beginning to discover, is not enough.

For almost a generation, thoughtful human beings have been sensing the blind indifference of science to the high qualities of the human spirit. These qualities never—or almost never—get into the equations, and when they do they come out in a chewed-up form which does nobody any good—see Terman's *Genetic Studies of Genius* and similar works. You can't codify and process the high human qualities without losing them or changing them into something else. So the new spirit of the age has turned to immediate intuitions

of value as the primary source of knowledge. Thus the Existentialists, thus the Self psychologists, and thus the mood of the serious students of Zen Buddhism and of all the related currents in modern thought which represent the initiative in shaping the thought of tomorrow.

The Western world has worn out two theories of knowledge and concepts of cosmology—the old religious theory and its successor, the scientific theory. We are beginning to get the elements of a new theory of knowledge—call it an intuitive-rational theory, for the moment—which already has a variety of forms or expressions. But a theory of knowledge can never rest content with only its immediate apprehensions of value. Men are always driven to develop their new inspirations into a cosmological conception. Well, we shall have to do this, since we can't really help but do it, but it is here that we need to look out. For Satan as well as the fully developed word on Salvation lurks in cosmological doctrine. When you get a cosmology, you get a system, and when you get a system you usually get policemen who tell you how you've got to help to make it work. We need to be very careful of how we develop the *systematic* aspects of our new theories of knowledge. Perhaps we should start out with the proposition that a system of cosmology which justifies policemen is *ipso facto* a Cosmic Lie.

# CHILDREN

## . . . and Ourselves

### ISSUES IN EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

COMMENTING on recommendations for the curriculum of the San Francisco public schools, submitted by eight professors of California and Stanford Universities, Dorothy Thompson shows why educational policy should be within the scope of everyone's interest. Miss Thompson writes in the *Ladies' Home Journal* for last September:

For the first time in my lifetime, which has been long, the United States of America is not only hated but held in contempt by much of the world, including countries and peoples who have accepted unprecedentedly generous economic benefits and who are allied with us. Its domestic and to some extent its foreign policy has been marked by blunder after blunder; actions have produced results foreseeable by any informed and intelligent mind; its domestic policies (as the present presidential campaign demonstrates) have been, and are, determined by organized pressure groups, economic and ethnic each ruthlessly pursuing its own interests regardless of the effect on the nation as a whole.

Corruption is rampant in public and private life. What was once called "graft" is now, euphemistically and melliflously, called "payola." A disc jockey, testifying before a congressional investigation committee, said that payola is "romance"; "It's the American way of life." That, at least, was a testimony to truth.

Our export markets are shrinking as our commercially manufactured products become costlier and costlier, glossier and glossier, and shoddier and shoddier.

In attempting to outline and write an autobiography of myself and my times, which embrace more than the whole of this century, I have constantly been reminded of the danger of sentimental nostalgia. I came of age in the days of the "muckrakers" and radical reformers, when writers and others of great industry and ability were exposing, in a fighting press *The Shame of the Cities* (Lincoln Steffens), the commercial prostitution and gambling saloons (Jane Addams), the unconscionable means, legal and illegal, by which many of the great fortunes of America had been amassed (Ida Tarbell),

and the horrors prevailing in the slums of our great cities (Walter Rauschenbusch).

None of these has a comparable counterpart today.

In my lifetime great social advances have been made in America, and many of the dreams of the reformers of my youth have been more than fulfilled. Yet these reformers (were they still alive) would be sunk in deepest melancholy should they now be able to review the results of their fulfilled efforts. These men and women, almost without exception, were driven (against their own interests) by intense dedication to freedom and democracy—both in a sense that no longer vigorously exists. They were genuinely devoted to promoting "the dignity of the individual."

As Miss Thompson makes her criticisms explicit, they sound like a protest against the way the educational ideas of John Dewey have been applied. Much of what she says seems valid, but it is of interest to note that the policies now decried are seldom truly representative of John Dewey's philosophy, deriving instead from watered-down versions of what he taught. In the fall (1959) *Antioch Review*, Francis T. Villemain and Nathaniel L. Champlin show that Deweyan concepts have again and again been isolated from the total context of his life thought, and consequently misapplied. These writers are particularly interested in a "neglected major element" in Dewey's thinking which emerges for consideration when it is recognized that, for Dewey, educational technique involved only half the educational process. In his *Experience and Nature* Dewey wrote: "Art—the mode of activity that is charged with meanings capable of immediately enjoyed possession—is the complete culmination of nature, and... 'science' is properly a handmaiden that conducts natural events to this happy issue." In other words, what Dewey was really after was clarification of the two *correlative* ingredients involved in teaching and learning. Villemain and Champlin continue:

Such a statement as this should lay to rest the notion that Dewey makes knowing operations, or the scientific method the final good for human life. Science, law, medicine, schooling, or any human

activity or social arrangement are, in the last analysis, to be assessed in terms of their adequacy as "handmaidens" (an *instrumental* office) to the perpetuation and refinement of experience focally esthetic.

From this statement one can argue that, in any whole view of Dewey's philosophy, "room is thus left for an *other than* scientific intelligence." Finally one is encouraged to think that the area beyond the scope of scientific method affords a broad definition of the meaning of religion. For example, in *A Common Faith* Dewey "establishes the distinction between 'religion' and 'the religious'." The authors of the *Antioch Review* article comment:

The former makes reference to institutionalized beliefs and practices, while the latter is looked upon as a quality which may be said to pervade a wide variety of experiences, esthetic, scientific, political, moral, and others. If democracy is a distinctive and overarching ideal proposed for mankind and conceived as pervading all facets of social life, then it is to be revealed in those instances Dewey finds to have religious quality. "Any activity pursued in behalf of an ideal and against obstacles and in spite of threats of personal loss because of conviction of its general and enduring value is religious in quality." This thoroughgoing rejection of hedonism is joined by the acceptance of a creatively demanding conservatism.

It often seems that Dewey's disciples are not very clear on Dewey—a situation with innumerable precedents. As with other pioneering or challenging thinkers, a kind of cultus has grown up around him, distorting his true intentions. So far as we are concerned, it is the ethical impact of Dewey's outlook which is of greatest significance, his interpretation of "the esthetic" being but a means of conveying the conviction that there is no genuine morality without individual and spontaneous approach to the ethical issues in societal situations.

From this perspective, arguments between the "neoclassicists" and the "neo-progressives" in education are often beside the point. There are too many professionals on both sides who view successful education as a matter of successful

technique. The genius of education is a conveyance of inspiration by indirection—something which can be accomplished both by intelligent "learning by doing" in the classroom and by introduction to great thinkers and great ideas of the past, the latter becoming increasingly important as the mind matures and is capable of perceiving the subtleties of philosophic issues.

One thing is certain: before a teacher can give inspiration he must possess it himself. And if the young are to learn to appreciate "the dignity of the individual," they will need occasional dramatic examples of what it contributes to human life. John Dewey, whatever else we may say about him, qualified on both counts.

## *FRONTIERS*

### Fact and Fiction in the Cold War

"It hurts more to have a belief pulled than to have a tooth pulled, and no intellectual novocain is available."

—ELMER DAVIS

WE live in a world today, the major part of which is divided into two armed camps, each attacking the other with all the language of violence at its command. We have our "hate-the-enemy" orgies on both sides of the conflict, very nearly as organized (and with about as much connection with reality) as the two-minute hates in Orwell's fable of a fictional society that is permanently at war, the aim of whose ruling class is to keep the members of that society in the state of severe tension which constant war demands. That the current state of the world is not a hot, but a cold war, makes little difference, since that war is constant, and the ruling classes of both camps seem to feel the necessity of maintaining the tension. Certainly one of the paradoxes of our age is that Russia and the United States seem to feel that the only way to settle the issue between them is to shout at each other, in the most violent language possible, "defining" that issue in stark black and white.

That the words and symbols used by either side have little or no relevancy to the real facts at issue lends to this argument a fairy-tale quality. "Communism" and "capitalism" are the classic enemies delineated by this noisy badinage. That those words have little bearing on reality seems to deter no one, on either side.

If name-calling were all, if shouting "communist" at Russia and receiving in return a raspberry of "capitalist" were the extent of the foolishness, little harm would be done—the whole argument would be no more important than the over-the-back-fence name-calling of two boy bullies. But both sides not only believe the epithets they shout, they believe that their opponents are, in fact, just what they are being

called. As a matter of fact, the two things Americans and Russians are able to agree on emphatically are identification of the United States with capitalism and the USSR with communism. A citizen of the Soviet Republic believes implicitly, though vaguely, that he is living in a Marxist society. The American citizen, if asked, will be proud of his country's economic system—a system, according to a recent *Fortune* editorial, "based on private property, on the free play of prices, wages and profits, and on a minimum government control"—a capitalist system. That neither belief is true makes this all a weird exercise in doublethink. But if we examine closely these "beliefs," we can arrive at the real issue in the "ideological" cold war.

Communism has been defined by many as a religion. In his latest "inside" book John Gunther says, "Communism denies religion; but it became one. It gave millions a passionate, distorted faith." The religious quality of communism explains the attitude of the Marxist toward an opponent, for to the avowed communist, as to any believer in a faith, the opponent is not only in error, but in sin. Dissent is disapproved not only intellectually, but morally as well. In other words, communism is compared to a religion both because it attracts fanatical followers and because it delineates the "enemy." It is not, however, a religion just for those reasons, but more accurately because it supplies the basic myth system for a society. According to Robert Graves, "the function of myth is to justify an existing social system and account for traditional customs and rites."

The Soviet leaders appear to have no clearer picture of reality than their followers. They declare loudly that the conflict is a struggle between two totally different economic and social systems. They describe the Communist system as a classless society and insist that ownership is by the state. The enemy (capitalist) system, on the other hand, is tossed and torn by class struggles, and ownership is monopolistic. Any international

or internal difficulty encountered is blamed on the social and/or economic system predominant in the enemy camp. The leaders who formulate these polemics are the high-priests of the communist myth system.

Such a mythical view of the real world serves several roles. It reveals beyond doubt the face of "sin." It furnishes a scapegoat that can be handily blamed for any failure to reach some mythical goal (such as, for instance, the withering away of the state). By focusing the mass attention on the mythical enemy, the masses become organized and unified.

On the other hand, not many have suggested that capitalism is a religion in the same sense that communism is. Americans have, of course, been accused of worshipping at the shrine of materialism, and sometimes our fabled American "know-how" has taken on some of the aspects of a fanatic religious belief. Nevertheless, in the United States, "capitalism" serves as a myth system delineating the mythical goals of America, and pointing the finger at the "enemy." Communism is equated with sin, and can be handily blamed for any domestic or international ill that arises.

Both these myth systems, as pointed out previously, serve a variety of functions for their respective societies. The paradoxical fact is that the United States and the USSR are more similar in function than they are different, even though their mythical systems are poles apart.

The Russian leaders, while pursuing their mythical goals of classlessness and state ownership (together of course with the contradictory goal of the "withering away" of the state), have, in fact, emulated the achievements and effects of the capitalist enemy. While their standard of living has not reached its American counterpart, conditions have markedly improved, and the Soviet systems of public education and public health are cited by many first-hand observers as the best in the world. Although "competition" is officially taboo, Russian success

in the field of education is almost certainly due to encouraging children to compete for the privileges of higher education—not for the ideal of learning for learning's sake, but to enable the scholar in this "classless" society to become a member of the privileged class of engineers, scientists, and teachers. For there are manifestly several layers of "class" in this mythically classless society. At the top is the managerial or "ownership" class—the new class, whose privileges are the privileges of administration. In his book describing this new class of "owners" in a communist society, Milovan Djilas says:

For a long time, the Communist revolution and the Communist system have been concealing their real nature. The emergence of the new class has been concealed under socialist phraseology and, more important, under the new collective forms of property ownership. The so-called socialist ownership is a disguise for the real ownership by the political bureaucracy.

At the bottom of the Russian class strata are the workers, just as they have always been. Their standard of living has certainly been raised under the Soviet system, and they have become literate and healthier, but they are exploited by the managerial class much more surely than if they lived under classical capitalism. The worker must work for one employer only—the state. He may find it impossible to better his condition of employment by a change of job. He must sell his labor to the only employer who is buying labor. He must accept the employer's terms. The element cited as the worst of early, laissez-faire capitalism—the labor market—has been supplanted in Russia by the monopolistic control over labor and the industrial machine by the new managerial class.

The mass of workers, then, forms the base of the class pyramid; the middle stratum is formed of the intelligentsia—the engineer, the scientist, the teacher, and the writer; the administrative or "ownership" class is the peak of the pyramid. Legally (but mythically), all are equal with respect to material goods. The owner is the state. But

the rights of ownership—the right to enjoy, the right to use, the right to dispose of—are enjoyed by a relative few at the peak of the class pyramid.

What, then, is Russia today? It is none of the things it purports to be in its myth system. It is a technologically strong, highly competitive and stratified society—a "have" nation with a great and dynamic industrial system managed by a small segment of the population. It is a nation that emulates the institutions of the West while insisting that they are evil.

Capitalism in the United States today bears little resemblance to the specter constantly referred to in Russian propaganda. In fact, the old, classical capitalism that Karl Marx deplored—the capitalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when ownership was a personal, private affair, and decisions could be made arbitrarily, without negotiation—is hardly identifiable in the United States today. Americans are well aware that that sort of capitalism belongs to the past. There is no delusion on this point—there is, occasionally, some regret, but certainly no one believes any longer that it still exists as a dynamic *system*. But the words, the images, that we use to represent to ourselves and to others what we are and what we do are completely irrelevant to the facts of life as it is lived in the United States today. Nevertheless, we consistently talk about private property as if it meant what it used to mean in the days of classical capitalism. In reality, in a mass society, property is not much more private than anything else. Take land "ownership" for example—the man who lives in the house on that piece of land and whose name appears in joint tenancy with his wife's name on the deed, will probably, if asked, advise his questioner that he does, in fact, "own" that house and land. But his wife, the bank which holds the first mortgage, the government authorities who may have several sorts of tax liens, and the creditor to whom he owes an overdue debt, all have a fragment of ownership in that house and land. In the same way, on a different scale,

nobody "owns" the huge, faceless corporations that dominate the economic life of the real United States today. Many millions own a fragment of a corporation, but recent efforts to label this phenomenon as "people's capitalism" are an attempt to justify a system which does not exist.

The economic fact of life today in the United States is that ownership is irrelevant—the main thing is control. And control is exercised by a new class in the United States, just as it is in its Russian counterpart; by a new class which Professor C. Wright Mills has labeled "The Power Elite." This new class controls the industrial machinery of the country, and thus the labor force that operates the machinery. It enjoys the rights and privileges of ownership through administration, *not* through a system of private ownership, and one of the primary functions of the Federal Government has become, since the precedent was established during the New Deal, to protect the corporations, and, by osmosis, to protect this new class.

What, then, is the United States today? It is a technologically strong, competitive, stratified society that continues to delude itself and others as to its property system. The basic national power is its highly developed industrial machine, and at the center of that power are the corporations, run by a handful of self-designated managers.

The similarities of the United States and Russia today are obvious to all those who care to look closely. They are both "have" nations with dynamic industrial machines managed by a small segment of their respective populations. Both ruling classes have a vested interest in keeping the myth systems intact, to keep the masses unified and organized.

But if the similarities between the two systems are great, the differences are no less striking. The surprising fact is that the real differences are rarely discussed. Even though federal law reinforces and protects the corporations, the United States is still based on a

non-statist system of economic power. The United States citizen on the outside of the distribution system of economic power is an unemployed citizen—one figure in the total statistic cited monthly by some government bureau, and a cause of concern to his government. But the Soviet citizen excluded from the economic system is politically ostracized and disgraced, and he may end in a concentration (or labor) camp, no longer worthy of his government's concern. Figures available indicate that the number of Soviet citizens in labor camps has consistently exceeded the number of unemployed in the United States. This difference in the two systems is, in capsule form, the real difference between the two countries. The United States citizen, employed or unemployed, has some kind of voice in the affairs of his country, and it can be an important voice if he will but raise it. The Soviet citizen is under compulsion at all times to do the State's bidding. Struggle between the two systems exists, not because of their structural differences, but because they differ in their basic conceptions of the significance of men and the importance of the individual's free choice.

We must, if we are to solve the problems (or win the struggle, if you will), understand what those problems are. We must understand that "closing the missile gap" is hardly a solution to the security problem; that until total and mutual disarmament can be achieved, the real problem is preventing accidental war, and preventing the spread of nuclear arms to any additional countries. We must recognize that some of the current conversations going on, like the one between air force and navy leaders as to which sort of destructive force is better—the one which is poised and ready to effectively destroy all major cities of a potential enemy as a retaliation to attack, or one deployed to destroy that enemy's military bases on the first strike, if he looks too dangerous—are modern Mad Hatter's tea party conversations. We must understand that until we can sit down and talk with Communist China, we cannot begin to comprehend her.

Above all, we must be mature enough to remain unified without our hate orgies and begin to talk about these real problems that face our world today. One of our poets has said that "human kind cannot stand too much reality," but if we do not soon begin to understand and talk about the realities of our world, it seems quite likely that someone, mistaking the myth for the real thing, will bring the real world to its real end, and with a bang.

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