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THE SHADOW AND THE SUBSTANCE

TO be better human beings than our theories of betterment allow, and to distrust, therefore, the theories that we have; yet to be too uncertain, too fearful or too unimaginative to make theories that will call out all our potentialities—this seems to be the situation of modern man.

Of course, we are not absolutely sure that we are better than our theories. Some of the time we remain persuaded that the men who have set the patterns of human activity in our culture were right. We agree, that is, with Trotsky, who said that great historical changes must be powered by aroused self-interest; or with the Free-enterprisers, who tell us that competition in acquisitiveness is a basic law of nature. But because we cannot agree with this low estimate of man *all* of the time, we become slightly cynical toward both our secret ideals and the programs of human betterment which sometimes get our support and sometimes not.

Men make various adjustments to this situation. A life of furious activity in behalf of some political cause is the way chosen by some. Perhaps one reason why politics seems so out of proportion, emotionally, is that the people who give all their energies to politics have to convince themselves that what they are doing is as important as they try to make it seem to others, and this places them under an unnatural psychological strain.

Illustrations might be found among the many individuals of undeniable integrity who, long before Pearl Harbor, were fanatically in favor of the participation of the United States in World War II. This is not to suggest that only fanatics and people suffering from emotional unbalance wanted the United States to intervene in the European war. The case for intervention could be and was stated without passion. We speak of the fanatics—the persons who tended to regard all those who disagreed with them as either moral sluggards, traitors to the cause of freedom, or dupes of Nazi propaganda. Politics has been called the art of the possible; more precisely, it is the art of the almost immediately possible; in other words, success in politics depends upon the ability of the politician to get large numbers of people to behave in a certain way, according to a given time-table. And when a human being lets his thinking take him to a point where he believes that the highest good depends upon some big political issue like getting into or staying out of a war—he becomes a fanatic; some would call him a potential if not an actual fascist.

A vague suspicion of the logic of this sort of sequence probably keeps many people from taking politics very seriously. They see the political issues of the day when they are presented—they hear the arguments and try, under the spur of conscience, to take a just position—yet their political life remains a kind of "going through the motions." Their hearts are not in it.

So much of the "challenging" rhetoric of the day falls into the same category as political appeals that we become tired of its importuning absolutes. Their champions are too *sure* of the "ultimate" importance of what they say, and it is just this finality which makes us suspicious. Actually, we know that the promises are too easily made—that the passage of a particular piece of legislation, that the formation of a new society or the drafting of another world constitution will not bring us closer to the heart of our existence.

Why don't these people tell us about their doubts instead of their certainties? Why don't they throw down their misleading banners of authority? Why is it that these certainties always have to do with programs that need the support of organizations, instead of ideas that need the questions and searchings of the mind?

We pick up the books written by our scholars, our intellectuals and our publicists, and we lay them down. If, while reading them, we bite into anything besides slogans, it is usually something which does

not matter very much. The fact is that we have reduced our allotment of idealism to two extremes—to ideals which are so remote and perfectionist by definition, so unconnected with the lives we lead, that they have only a fairy-tale reality for us; and to ideals which we may assent to, but will not give our hearts to because they can be gained without changing anything fundamental in our lives and our society.

If we have to have someone to blame for this, we can blame the churches for giving us unreachable ideals, and the pragmatists and progressive educators for limiting our "practical" ends to things which can be written into political platforms. For a multitude of reasons, we have become shy and ashamed of expressing our thoughts on matters which no one can do anything about but ourselves—as though such thoughts were of necessity ineffectual. Yet those thoughts are always with us, setting the key of our daily moods, illuminating what vision we still possess, sometimes pressing us on to belief in the midst of unbelief, sometimes planting the doubts that haunt our loudly proclaimed convictions.

The time has come to reflect upon the totalitarian implications of this state of mind. When we think it over, it may be recognized as a state of extraordinary mental and moral impoverishment, for it amounts to this: we have no natural channels of expression for the highest intuitions of what our lives are about. It shouldn't be difficult to admit to ourselves that the really important truths can never be organized—can never become the property of any class, party or cult. And it shouldn't be difficult, either, to see that our failures in politics are directly related to the attempt to make organizations do the work of independent thinking—to force social reform to atone for the lack of individual constructiveness.

Some human undertakings need organizations for their completion. You can't build a bridge or run a steamship without an organization. The efficiencies of economic production and distribution require an orderly pattern. But when it comes to the goods which are intangible—the goods we want and need most of all—organization and even the language and psychology of organization invariably get in the way. More than finding "the truth," for example, is finding out that "the truth" is never possessed by institutions. We used to think that if we could lose ourselves in the middle of the crowd, the crowd would carry us along to the right destination. Now, we are beginning to feel the terrible suspicion that the crowd isn't going any place; that it is caught—is impotent, fearful, and defenseless, because everyone has depended upon everyone else for directions.

Occasionally, someone writes a book which seems to have some of the living truth in it—some of that sense of direction that the world now fears it has lost. Carlo Levi's *Of Fear and Freedom* is such a book, but it is written in a strange cipher, an almost allegorical language. Yet in its elusive subtlety we may feel the substance of what our hearts have been seeking among the shadows of other men's pretended finalities. This substance is not only in books, of course. It is all around us, but a book can declare a man's capture of meaning and try to communicate it, so that a book may serve as a common reference-point for what we are all looking for.

Levi intimates—and such things can only be intimated—that a sense of the meaning of life is born from human willingness to accept the struggle for freedom, from refusing to take refuge behind the protective barriers of church or state, or to accept the shadowy symbols of freedom for its substance. What is the place where comradeship and cooperation change into cowardice and failure—into submission to the dark, undifferentiated Chaos from which we or some part of us came? Levi does not say, for to be free is to decide this for oneself—it is to ask no questions of the fathomless origin of things, but only of ourselves, who are the articulate representatives of life. There is only one human failure to ask and expect someone else to explain the mysteries to us, to be afraid for our souls or for our lives.

Is it possible that at last the world is growing up? That the pain of our lives in the present is only a prelude to some kind of rebirth into greater maturity? This is certainly an age when human beings are called upon, almost in the mass, to find security within themselves instead of in some kind of political or military or religious organization. This, at least,

would be one way to look at the disorders and ominous portents which haunt the people of every country on earth.

Every child, if he is ever to become a man, has at some time to stop living in dependence upon the personal knowledge and authority of his parents and teachers. Good parents and teachers start training the child, almost from birth, with this eventual emancipation in mind. From such training, the child learns responsibility and self-reliance. He learns how to keep from deceiving himself as to his own importance, and he learns how to respect in himself his dignity as a human being. Finally, he reaches the hour when both freedom and the weight of the world fall upon his shoulders. The freedom is limited, but so is the weight of the world, and if he were not able to exercise some freedom, to lift some of the weight, he would never grow up at all.

Some children are eager to step into the world of adult responsibility, while others fear it, avoid it, and delay acceptance of their freedom from parental authority and protection. Many people find new authorities to take the place of their parents—their "boss" or their priest or, more remotely, their political party or leader. Then, for the more sophisticated, there is the general cultural outlook of the time, the "climate of opinion," as the historians say, on which they rely for orientation and guidance. "Culture" may be thought of as the parent of gradually maturing generations, providing a stable environment of social wisdom in which men may find a starting place for new undertakings.

But today, instead of being its children, men are increasingly the captives of their culture. They are surrounded by intolerable moral contradictions. The traditions of the past have somehow grown into monstrous dilemmas, periodically resolved by the incalculable disaster of modern war. The power of organization—and organization for its own sake, devoted to power for its own sake, in its most uncompromising form, is *military* organization—is imposing a new kind of choice upon all human beings—a decision on which our "culture" sheds no light at all. It is as though we were a primitive tribe given to the periodic celebration of a dreadful orgiastic rite, in which every time we pay the highest tribute to one of our gods, according to the accustomed mode, it kills that god. We fight for freedom, and in defending it we turn the core of freedom into the soft pulp of fear. We worship abundance of the good things of the earth, but to keep it for ourselves we must spend nearly all our wealth in arming against those whom we suspect of wanting to take it away from us. We cherish liberty of speech and conscience, yet we find ourselves constrained to circumscribe speech and jettison conscience on the ground that free speech and conscience in actuality are a menace to free speech and conscience in theory—and so the ideal is turned against its own realization.

While these things are going on, the less tangible distempers of the spirit destroy the savor of our lives. Yet we know, somehow, that we are better than the slogans we repeat, than the compulsions we submit to, and the cultural half-truths to which we give assent. And if we did not know from within about these acts of self-betrayal, we would learn it from the monstrous weapons we are manufacturing—as overt symptoms of the vast cultural delusion that afflicts the world.

It should be evident that we cannot overcome these things on their own terms, but that we shall have to *outgrow* them. There is no mass-answer to mass-destruction and mass-betrayal. Masses do not grow; they only aggregate and disintegrate, according to some scheme of mass-phenomena. For human beings, this means that they must stop being parts of the mass, must begin to be individual intelligences who will make the secret hopes of their hearts the rule of their lives.

Letter from GERMANY

BERLIN.—When looking for the final outcome of the "cold war" between the USA and the Soviet Union, one gets—from developments inside the Eastern sphere of influence—some hints about the effects of the economic strategy which at this moment is being applied against the so-called "peoples' democracies." It will be the task of this letter: (1) to describe some features of this strategy in Berlin; (2) to mention an important development behind the "Iron Curtain"; (3) to consider the effects of this stage of the "cold war" on the situation of human beings in the Eastern sphere. (Naturally, in the space allotted, the discussion must be very brief.)

(1) Since the lifting of the "blockade" against West Berlin, there has prevailed to this day a "Window Policy" which includes the entire Eastern Zone. By comparing their situation with that of people in the Western Zone, Eastern Berliners and inhabitants of the Soviet area in general become conscious of their destitution; they likewise become aware of the fact that they not only *are* poor, but will *remain* so. The influence of this insight spreads far into the region adjoining Berlin.

It must be admitted that grave difficulties also reign in West Berlin, of which the unemployment problem is the worst. But people understand that this unemployment is mostly a problem of the severance of Berlin from its hinterland; besides, as long as a more or less favorable state of business prevails in other parts of the world, auxiliary measures of various kinds are possible and help to stabilize the West Berlin labor market.

The prognosis which forecasts a big depression in the USA and deduces from that an improvement of the political position of the Soviet Union forgets the general dependence of the economic structure of the SU on the world market; and it overlooks, also, that difficulties in the USA will make the position of the SU still harder, considering the extensive means at the disposal of the USA to ease her own difficulties.

(2) The "Window Policy" in West Berlin, which is only a part of the general economic strategy on the basis of abundance, already shows grave consequences in the Eastern sphere. Of the many signs of unrest which could be enumerated, only one will be mentioned, because it effectively illustrates the exasperation of the Eastern population at its permanent destitution.

In one East Berliner factory with about 750 employees, the introduction of a new wage-scale with marked decreases in pay was recently countered in a general meeting of all employees with open shouts: *"Down with the Government!"* The Union's speaker was chased from the platform with threats against his life. When the last point on the agenda came up for discussion—namely, "our competition with other factories"—*all* employees spontaneously left the meeting hall. The workers feel openly exploited and seek means of resistance. They already see through the game of "peoples' owned" factories, and of those 750 workers only about thirty declared themselves in favor of making their factory into a "peoples' owned" one. This shows clearly enough the weakening of the ideological grip upon the people, and foreshadows the collapse of the Eastern totalitarian regime by means of the resistance of its population—a resistance which is incited and encouraged by Western economic strategy and political and propagandistic means.

(3) In so far as Western strategy aims at the destruction of Eastern totalitarianism, it fulfills a humanitarian task—whether so intended or not. But it also is producing an autonomous spirit which the German population has lacked since the days of the beginning of the Hitler regime.

In short, it seems that, in spite of the threat of atomic weapons, the future holds for the Germans a further improvement of their condition. Seen from this side of the ocean and at this point of conflicting interests, the next war will not come, for the reason that the supposed adversary of the Western world is already too weak to wage open war on a world scale. He is *much too preoccupied with his own war against his own population!*

GERMAN CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
THE QUEST FOR A PARACLETE

THE novelist—the serious novelist, that is—has a unique service to perform in our culture. When no one but specialists of various sorts are reputed to have actual "knowledge," a great gap lies between the subtle problems of human hopes and motivations and the factual information of the scientists. It falls to the novelist to attempt to bridge that gap. In a very real sense, therefore, the novelist functions as a philosopher in our society.

This may be one reason for the exceptional respect commonly accorded to anyone who is known to be a "writer." Writers are supposed to possess a particular kind of understanding not given to common folk. *Someone* has to have such understanding, if what we call "civilization" is to be more than an accumulation of herded uniformity. Regardless of democratic credos, people seem determined to have their romantic beliefs about special individuals or groups, and although the honor paid to writers is exaggerated and sentimental, if not entirely unmerited in many cases, it is certainly true that the role of the philosopher ought to be played by someone, and that a particular respect for those who try to play it is a sound human attitude.

But it also seems necessary to suggest that novelists can serve as philosophers only among essentially conservative, unadventurous people. A novel can always be put back on the shelf. You don't have to take it seriously. The influence of a novel, in short, is always indirect—by "induction," so to say—rather than through its immediate impact on the mind. Reading novels is like the "play" of children—it is activity without responsibility. With this qualification, then, it may be said of the novel that it often reflects the philosophical mood of the West much more accurately than the researches and commentaries of specialists who write on "philosophy" as such.

In recent years, the yearning for the substance of a faith has led a number of novelists to write about psychiatrists and psychoanalysts. We do not mean simply the "psychological novel," but the novel that introduces the figure of the analyst as possibly a guide, philosopher and friend to the troubled people of our time. *Mine Own Executioner,* the work of an English novelist, Nigel Balchin, is one book that people who have maintained a slightly contemptuous attitude toward the "fad" of psychoanalysis ought to read. The leading character, an analyst, is in many ways an ordinary fellow like the rest of us; what is unusual about him is the deep determination which drove him to study the problems of the human mind and emotions. The hero gains in stature by being entirely believable. No secret omniscience dawns upon him. He has no dramatic "successes." The book tells about a long-drawn-out failure in one particular case, except that there is no sense of failure, at the end. This is an ancient psychological truism, perhaps, that circumstantial failures are different from failures in human striving, but it is a truism that we need to have repeated to us, over and over again.

Simply to read about a man who, with all his personal failings, and in the face of the harassments which orthodox medical professionalism imposes on the lay analyst, still works on, because he can do nothing else, is a peculiarly encouraging experience. This man has only fragmentary knowledge of human nature, and he knows it. He knows that his own personal life is not too successful, that he has let himself relax into the soft routine of specializing in patients whose real disorder is a bad case of indolence and self-preoccupation, yet, underneath all this he has kept alive the commitment that came over him as a student, and which makes a book about him worth writing.

In *I, My Ancestor,* by Nancy Wilson Ross (Random House, 1950), a psychically exhausted intellectual of middle age regains his self-reliance and self-respect through the influence of two men—one, an unorthodox psychiatrist who dies suddenly after treating his patient, thus forcing psychological independence on the latter; the other, the father of the sick man, who has the same rare serenity as the psychiatrist.

This book is notable for the way in which it ransacks the cultural resources of the modern world in search of ideas that will support psychological

idealism. The psychiatrist, who is certainly not drawn according to the conventional pattern, has this to say:

> "That the psyche is something more than the product of certain biochemical processes—that I believe," Ermanthal went on, as though sensing Philip's unexpressed need. "As to whether it is contained in a larger Spirit, a God, a Plan, a Higher Consciousness, that I am not prepared to assert. . . .
>
> "Yet I will say that there is, or appears to be, some source from which guidance can come—a new direction, for those prepared to receive it. . . .
>
> "I see," Ermanthal went on, in the voice now of a man in the presence of an intimate, "I see the ever rising and falling tide of spiritual interest rising again in the postwar world. This—it has little to do with organized religion. Perhaps even, one might say, the churches get in its way—for there the old truths lie too deeply buried under schism and dogma. This present tide of spiritual unrest rises—is, in my opinion, increasing rapidly—because thousands and thousands of human beings in the last few years have found the set schemes of their lives destroyed forever. This had to lead to new searchings, fresh doubts, and perhaps—we can at least hope—fresh affirmations."

Philip's father contributes other themes—but with the same detachment and calm as the psychiatrist—suggesting that the author sees in these two figures, in the psychiatrist and the forest-recluse who was Philip's father, the same extraordinary maturity, although wrested from life along very different paths. The father has been—in a sense, is still—a radical of the Gene Debs and IWW school. Through him Miss Ross introduces the ideas of philosophical anarchism and the cry of the human heart against social injustice. There is one more current of thought in the book—something like the Emersonian idea of the Moral Law—which Philip's father seems to have adopted from a wandering scissors-grinder who was a companion of his youth. The scissors-grinder was an anarchist zealot, but like many men of independent spirit, he had united his political philosophy with mystical conceptions gained from miscellaneous reading. Philip's father tells his son about this friend:

> "'There's an old Oriental law,' he [the scissors-grinder] said once, half-closing his burning eyes with their overhang of grey hairs, dry and twisted like grass in late November, 'an Oriental Law called the Law of Karma.' (And here he commanded my whole attention, for about the spiritual findings of the Orient, I had already acquired more than a Presbyterian's curiosity.) 'The Law of Karma says: "What you do you must pay for." Nations as well as men. So at least I take it, and so I say, America will pay for what she has done—misleading, misguiding, the poor and humble of the earth. The innocent son's sons of these villains will pay for this, mark you! Pay dearly! And in bloodshed! Just as they will pay for the sins of their grandfathers, for bringing slaves from Africa to cast a shadow on a free land! . . .'"

Presenting an extract or two from *I, My Ancestor* may give the impression that the author provides only a mechanical mixture of "doctrines" from a number of sources, instead of telling a living story. Miss Ross has been far more successful than this. There is a basic authenticity in the unfoldment of her characters, and if the combinations of influences which emerge seem bizarre, the America of which she writes is bizarre, affording all the things she writes about. There are people like the ones in *I, My Ancestor,* and many of them are the same salt of the earth as Miss Ross makes her characters appear. While the sensibility of purpose which finally comes to birth in Philip is not wholly explained—is rather an intuitive faith of the author in human beings than a diagram of the rules of human growth—this liberty of story-telling seems wholly justified by the deepest yearnings of our time. Both pettiness and insecurity drop away from Philip, and if the work he is going back to, in the city, is not worth going back to—if his rebirth to a new beginning at life seems somewhat artificial because factors are missing from the picture of his regeneration—the fault lies in the circumstances of our impoverished culture, and not in the writer's art. A novelist is not an avatar of supernatural wisdom, but only someone who tries to increase our perception of the hidden symmetries of life. Miss Ross has used what materials she could find—the psychiatrist, the anarchist, the nature-lover and radical—and she has used them well.

COMMENTARY
FOR THE RECORD

A FEW years ago, John Steinbeck published *Grapes of Wrath,* and Carey McWilliams produced *Factories in the Field,* showing that Mr. Steinbeck had not exaggerated the misery and hopelessness of the agricultural workers of California. Then the war came, and all lesser problems gave way to those of "national security." The "labor troubles" of the 'thirties were forgotten, and, in fact, the making of weapons greatly eased the unemployment in the fertile California valleys.

Just for the record, the problem of "the migrants" has not been solved. So far as we can see, there has been little attempt to solve it by the only people who—without a social revolution—have any possibility of doing so. The evidence points to the fact that many employers of agricultural labor in California prefer to have their crops harvested by worried, almost homeless people who can always be condemned as "dirty" or "irresponsible" and undeserving of a permanent place in the economic and social community. The only problem that seems to occur to the big farmers is how to keep the temporary workers in a subdued and submissive state of mind.

During the early months of this year, an unemployment crisis hit the San Joaquin Valley, due, in part, to an early cotton harvest. The relief load in Kern County swelled to three times that of the previous year. From last year's peak employment of 257,000 farm workers, the total dropped to half that amount. According to a report in the New York *Times,* seven California counties indicated "an average of 5,000 to 10,000 unemployed, each case representing a family of four." Another account in the *Times*—not exactly a "radical" paper—said:

> In Tulare County last November the deaths of eleven children . . . were officially ascribed to malnutrition. One hundred and fifteen deaths of infants under one year old in the county last year were flatly attributed by Dr. R Lynn Knight, county health officer, to inadequate housing, sanitation and clothing.

The ranchers "regret" that California agriculture gives only temporary employment to these thousands of people, but it is Nature's law, and not their idea, they point out, that makes the harvesting season short. "You can't," they say, "expect us to be responsible for them the whole year round."

They have been saying this for twenty or thirty years. If they keep on saying it, another kind of law of nature may produce a retort that will be much more decisive than books by Mr. Steinbeck and Mr. McWilliams.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

WE have been hoping for some time to find a way to discuss a subscriber's query about children's use of "undesirable language." The most important phase of this question cannot, we feel, be discussed without reference to the cultural origin of obscenity and profanity. Though many teachers, through the years, have developed clever psychological techniques for discouraging early addiction to "undesirable language," these are simply devices of social expediency, telling us little of its original causes. Yet the roots of origin are well worth digging for. It would certainly be reasonable to suppose that the teacher who adequately understands the factors responsible for obscenity will know best how to help children to forego its use.

Here, again, we apparently arrive at the necessity for speaking some harsh words about the psychological effects of conventional Christianity. For, in the first place, institutional religion may reasonably be charged with inventing obscenity—by classifying certain areas of human experience as inherently obscene. Obscenity in common expression grew as men succumbed to the temptation to impute an especially excessive amount of this inner corruption to their enemies, or, in other instances, where a man felt "devilishly" impelled to deviate from the wooden respectability he was enjoined to display. It seems to us that any psychologist would have to agree that a period of authoritarian morality is the starting point for the growth of obscenity. If we reduce the equation to even simpler factors, we might say that Authority, of any sort, and its acceptance, breed a receptivity to profanity and obscenity—"profanity," because all such expressions are invocations of power directed toward the destruction of anything hated, feared or envied. And the obscene word also is a way of telling other people to keep their places—very low places.

It is easy, however, to sympathize with a subscriber who makes some caustic comments about an Oregon American Legion Chapter's Attempt to Teach Morality. This subscriber apparently can put up with either the American Legion or God, but not with the two combined, especially when the combination is supposed to be "educational":

> An American Legion Chapter's poster reads as follows: "America may collapse for want of loyalty, decency, honesty and unselfishness. No child has a chance who hasn't been taught to pray and love God. Let's give them and America a new chance. Teach children religion."
>
> Apparently this campaign is limited only to Oregon but if successful no doubt will spread. Thus may begin an attempt to label every citizen who disbelieves in a personal God and prayer as disloyal, indecent, dishonest, and selfish.

Our subscriber is obviously startled to discover the Legion in the role of a purveyor of religion. We cannot, however, agree with the implication that this particular Oregon Post, or any other Legion assembly, is consciously working toward a totalitarianism of Church and State. "All things evil" may not rightly be attributed to the Legion, any more than to present-day "Communism," to select a not-so-opposite opposite. Also, on principle, we feel obliged to deprecate all wholesale deprecations, as most criticisms of the Legion are apt to become. Innumerable witty derogations of the Legion have long been steady diet for those who consider themselves socially élite, and, not sure that we belong to this elite, we are always willing to maintain that there are about as many good-hearted men in the Legion as anywhere else. It is even possible for a Legionnaires' Assembly, as we know from personal experience, to have a quiet dignity in serious debate.

Yet, having qualified our subscriber's lack of sympathy for the Legion, and without derogating the character of any particular Legionnaires, it is still our desire to assert that most Legion men would probably be better men if their original association with each other had not been focussed on military service. This is because the conditioning of military training inevitably influences one toward believing that the shortest distance between two points of major group conflict is force or violence. To whatever extent we can personalize or identify any group, we may say of the Legionnaires that "They" think A-bombs and H-bombs, in sufficient quantity—if "We" have them—make for peace. Perhaps, on this ground, it would not be too extreme to say that the Legion, as a social organism, seems to have a rather simple mind.

According to these recent indications of Legion interest in Religion, one might perhaps think that, from

now on, all clergymen will feel quite at home at American Legion Conventions. We doubt, however, that this will be the case. But the Legion's wish to have children believe in God and become religious (which would logically bar them from obscenity and profanity) is something more than ironic. It seems to us that a serious and praiseworthy side of the Legion effort at propaganda exists—good intentions. The Oregon Legionnaires happened to notice a "moral lag," and rushed up with the only sort of "reform" program they could understand—the re-enforcement of what one of our MANAS writers is forever calling the "Big Battalions." Organized religion and armies have so much in common that it can always be easy for the person who gets nicely adjusted to one sort of control to take on the other.

We do not share our correspondent's view implied in the rest of his letter, that some dark plot is hidden in the Legion's sponsorship of religion, but we think we can understand why he—or anyone, for that matter—may not like to see militarism and religion get together, on anything, at any time. The results of such a combination are always insidious, though the nature and degree will vary greatly. When we buy morality wholesale, as part of a combination offer which also brings us a handy size of Nationalism, we end by forgetting the *principles* of morality and remembering only a party line. So, if we must have Generals, Priests and Pastors, let us at least avoid both sanctimonious Generals and political Men of the Church. Unless such avoidance is well executed we may arrive at a time when the following Prayer, sent to us a while ago by a reader, could be accepted seriously, in the manner envisaged by George Orwell in his *Nineteen-Eighty-Four:*

A PRAYER FOR TODAY

May the Mind of Man, with Grace, accept the
Face and Platform Value of every Eminent
Human Being who, through Noble Thought or
Civilized Act, has Contributed His or Her
Full Measure of Devotion to the Development
Of Sacred Armies, Holy Navies, Benevolent
Air Forces, and Creative Bombs.

FRONTIERS

A Not Entirely Tame Metaphysicist

WHAT sort of a philosopher is Albert Einstein? The reading public has lately been favored with numerous quotations from Einstein on the subject of religion, gathered together by journalists and served up for the apparent purpose of convincing a doubting world that the greatest living scientist—and one, surely, who ranks with the great of all time—is not an "atheist." What these journals fail to point out is that their quotations give no evidence that Einstein is a "theist," either. They simply show a great man's reverence for truth and the search for truth.

There is very little clarity, today, on what makes a man religious or not, for the reason that the key idea of religion is supposed to be belief in God, and as the intelligent man never attempts to "define" God, it is possible for popular writers to compose "interpretations" of his religious attitude toward life without knowing anything fundamental about his outlook. Only when a man tells us what he thinks about the world and its meanings do we begin to learn something of what he really believes. For to speak of the meaning of the world is equivalent to saying what "truth" is thought to be, and how it may possibly be obtained.

It is one of Dr. Einstein's several distinctions that, in addition to his mastery of theoretical physics, he has never avoided the problem of what may be involved in philosophical knowledge of the world. It could be said that he is primarily a philosopher, because, for him, physics seems to be a field of application for his theory of knowledge. In the *Scientific American* for April, Dr. Einstein discusses his latest "extension of the general theory of relativity against its historical and philosophical background." This article, however, is of interest to this Department, not for its revelations as to synthesis in field physics, but for its general statement of Einstein's approach to the problem of knowledge. In it, he says he does not "feel justified in giving a detailed account" of his new work before a wide group of readers; we, in turn, do not feel justified in trying to discuss it at all, but will leave that to the specialists in explaining field theory to the general public. What seems of particular importance, here, is Einstein's clarity on the problem of knowledge—something which, with a little thought, anyone can understand.

Early in his article, he writes:

> What, then, impels us to devise theory after theory? Why do we devise theories at all? The answer to the latter question is simply: Because we enjoy "comprehending," *i.e.*, reducing phenomena by the process of logic to some thing already known or (apparently) evident. New theories are first of all necessary when we encounter new facts which cannot be "explained" by existing theories. But this motivation for setting up new theories is, so to speak, trivial. There is another, more subtle motive of no less importance. This is the striving toward unification and simplicity of the premises of the theory as a whole. . . .

This striving is apparently a basic fact of human nature. Our minds seek order (explanation) and simplicity (the most easily comprehensible explanation) with such ardor that it seems justifiable to say that the seeking is itself the essence of being human. Plants seek sunlight and water, animals seek food, but man seeks unifying comprehension. We can think of no better working definition of what men call "the soul" than that it is that element in or of reality which eternally pursues greater comprehension.

Einstein continues:

> There exists a passion for comprehension, just as there exists a passion for music. That passion is rather common in children, but gets lost in most people later on. Without this passion, there would be neither mathematics nor natural science. Time and again the passion for understanding has led to the illusion that man is able to comprehend the objective world rationally, by pure thought, without any empirical foundations—in short, by metaphysics. I believe that every true theorist is a kind of tamed metaphysicist, no matter how pure a "positivist" he may fancy himself. The metaphysicist believes that the logically simple is also the real. The tamed metaphysicist believes that not all that is logically simple is embodied in experienced reality, but that the totality of all sensory experience can be "comprehended" on the basis of a conceptual system built on premises of great simplicity. The skeptic will say that this is a "miracle creed." Admittedly so, but

> it is a miracle creed which has been borne out to an amazing extent by the development of science.

Before examining what Einstein may mean by "metaphysics," we should like to note what he says about children. Children, he affirms, have a natural wonderment at the world, and a natural hunger to know. Why is this hunger lost as people grow up? Einstein never lost it. What burns out in people? Why are their "souls" no longer active? These are questions which neither preachers nor psychologists concern themselves about to any noticeable extent, yet what more important inquiry could they pursue? Have they, like other "grown-ups," lost their passion for comprehension, so that they now busy themselves with merely the creeds and technologies of their respective professions ?

But how are physicists "metaphysicians," even if "tamed" ones? We may take as an illustration Isaac Newton, Einstein's great predecessor in physical theory. It is well known that Newton declared, "I make no hypotheses"—a statement which, if accepted, would rule him out as a metaphysician. But we cannot accept it. Specialists in the history of science have shown that Newton's great discoveries were the result of, not one hypothesis, but several. In order to see in the "facts" of the falling apple and the revolution of the moon about the earth the law named Gravitation, Newton had to regard these occurrences with certain well-defined hypothetical notions in mind. As Morris Cohen has pointed out in his *Reason and Nature,* formulation of the law of gravitation would have been impossible without prior knowledge of:

> (1) Galileo's law of falling bodies and Kepler's laws of planetary motion.
>
> (2) The analysis of circular motion into centrifugal and centripetal components—according to the principles of the parallelogram.
>
> (3) The daring and unorthodox speculative idea (which Newton derived from Boehme and Kepler) of a parallelism between the celestial and terrestrial realm.

Dr. Cohen also shows that the principles upon which Newton's theory was founded were likewise dependent upon earlier conceptions of the nature of things:

> Similarly we know that it was the Pythagorean conception of the book of nature as written in simple mathematical terms that led Galileo to look for and ultimately see the simple law connecting the increased velocity of a falling body with the time of the fall. Tycho Brahe's astronomic tables did not in themselves show Kepler's laws; indeed, they suggested quite different laws to Brahe himself. Kepler could see these laws only after he brought to his vision certain speculative ideas of Apollonius (on conic sections) and of Plotinus. To be sure, all these cases (as well as Darwin's discovery of natural selection) show a most painstaking checking up of preconceived ideas by accurately determined or measured facts. But without the well-reasoned ideas, the inquiries could not have been initiated, for there would have been nothing to verify.

It could be argued that the creators of new physical theory have always been metaphysical in outlook, or, at least, susceptible to the implications of metaphysics. Edwin A. Burtt's *Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science* provides abundant evidence to support this view, and Einstein, the greatest originator in physical theory since Newton, has stated quite candidly that the perceptions of the senses afford no foundation for generalized scientific knowledge. In the *Journal of the Franklin Institute* for March, 1936, he wrote:

> Physics constitutes a logical system of thought which is in a state of evolution, and whose basis cannot be obtained through distillation by any inductive method from the experiences lived through, but which can only be attained by free invention. The justification (truth content) of the system rests in the proof of usefulness of the resulting theorems on the basis of sense experiences, where the relations of the latter to the former can be comprehended only intuitively. Evolution is going on in the direction of increasing simplicity of the logical basis. In order further to approach this goal, we must make up our mind to accept the fact that the logical basis departs more and more from the facts of experience, and that the path of our thought from the fundamental basis to these resulting theorems, which correlate with sense experiences, becomes continually harder and longer.

Einstein seems to have found a philosophic balance between speculative cosmology and empirical research. The speculator, unless he can verify his theories, remains in a frictionless paradise of the imagination. He needs the laboratory of experience

in which to discover the multiple aspects of reality which his theory must comprehend. Conversely, unless the experimenter and observer of nature has a proposition about the nature of things to test, he will discover nothing of importance.

Propositions about the nature of things are always metaphysical. Propositions about matter and motion are mathematical in character, and modern physics enjoys the dignity and scope of a genuine science for the reason that physicists are not averse to proposing comprehensive mathematical relationships as the basis for examining the physical universe. But what about the mind and the moral nature of man? Can there be any "science" concerning human modes of behavior? The matter and motion dealt with by physics exist in what the physicists call an "inertial system"—which means that, within limits, physical activity is predictable. Human activity, on the other hand, is least predictable when it is most human—most free, that is. Could one say that the metaphysical hypothesis relating to human activity ought to reject the inertial system as the continuum of human behavior, and to postulate a radically contrasting system in which spontaneous, self-generated motion (or choice) is the first principle? It would seem that the idea of morality is completely dependent upon a postulate of this sort.