

THE ANARCHY OF IDEAS

THE case against the moderns is clear enough. Less than three centuries has been sufficient to allow the inductive method an uninterrupted passage through the domain of the physical sciences. And face to face with problems no longer of inanimate nature but of conscious behaviour, the modern mind (for our present purpose essentially the product of inductive procedure) continues unchecked in the impetus of conquest. Infatuated by his discoveries, the scientist incontinently postulates faith in wholly unverified theses—enchanting his disciples with the vague and the transcendental.

Psychology is substituted for metaphysic. Empirical introspection is found a more amusing pursuit than the problems of ontology. Subjective verification is the vogue. To criticise the interrogation of consciousness (to identify introspection with the arrestation of the process under examination) is to return amidst contumely to the Middle Ages. Psychology in its turn is content to take its *media axiomata* from physiology. There is little resentment at the annexation of mind to matter: attention is unduly urged towards the physical antecedents of what were formerly known as moral states and actions. Nor does the specialist abstain from aggressive dogmatism on matters which lie wholly outside his legitimate province. We are fairly familiar with the physician turned Father Confessor, the journalist turned theologian, the tradesman turned economist. And the hopeless diffusiveness which is mistaken for universality goes hand-in-hand with a mania for unification. No one can deny the uses of the Outline and the Much-in-Little Press, and at the same time none can help but marvel at the reliance of author (or editor) upon his subjectivity as an infallible principle of unification and implement of selection. The biographer (a numerous class) is a fair sinner in this respect, pitching on the isolated instance in his love of inducing some entirely subjective thesis, or theory of the interdependence of imaginary historical psychoses.

Sincerity is the catchword of the age. It is not presumably insincerity in the subjectivist to examine objective

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phenomena with perfect predecision as to his conclusions, to rest content when the desire to justify a thesis is the justification itself, to reduce his specimen to abstraction and laws whose intransigence and universality of application are, with a-priorist austerity beyond compare. A logocracy (amongst whose ministers are the eugenists and sterilisers of the unfit) becomes increasingly influential. We are faced with an Inquisition such as the world hitherto has known only in bogey-lore. And *this* (half-realised nightmare) is a creation of the specialists and faddists alone—and only half the picture. Dialectic materialism (providing in Leninism at least an eighth of modern philosophic impulse) pulls with rapidly increasing vigour towards a something of jack-o'-lantern stability.

A goal, this, that is shifty, of pursuit: the ways to which, however, because unattempted, do not (in the eyes of many) admit of over-certain discrediting: a goal, moreover, on which an absolute value has been placed, inspiring an absolute creed and a transcendent policy. Here are none of your empiricisms ('Fashionable philosophies,' 're-hashes,' as Lenin the atheist contemptuously termed the ebullitions of liberal bourgeois science). Here is a dialectic that must admit of no shifting idealist solution, that is not dependent upon the materialist metaphysic of the eighteenth century, nor upon the scientificism of the nineteenth and twentieth. Incorporating Hegel, it is yet not an idealist logic, but a principle resting on an objective and materialist foundation, explanatory of every social and historical metabasis. It is no mere epistemology nor anomalous rationale independent of reality: for it reduces materialism from stagnant metaphysical theory to a consciousness of historico-social immanation. Its scope comprises the relations of man to nature, and therefore (in its view, exclusively) to production and productivity. It contemptuously renounces the title to a spiritual force, but is in effect (this dynamic fusion of Marx and Hegel) an ideopraxism, eventually religious in type, tolerating no criticism, embracing the whole of man and resolving the whole of reality. It is amusing and perhaps a little pathetic to watch the shoals of Bloomsbury humanists and liberal scientificists (none suspecting the

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other) swimming about in their respectable ineffectual tributaries of daring outlines and brochures sublimely unconscious of what the flood-tide really means. For the affirmations of Bolshevism are not to be confounded with the religious doubts of 'democracy,' any more than is a picturesque radicalism to be associated with Lenin. So much for the heteroclitic nature of thought on the progressive side. Within the conservative pale, anarchy is insufficient to disrupt the academic community only because of the debility of the disseverants. Here, it is true, at the tail-end of the mechanistic procession of inorganic, organic, and sentient, a somewhat reduced Deity is permitted to follow, and amid a percentage of sniffs it has been affirmed that teleologic causation has been an essential factor in organic evolution. But mechanistic monism is unashamed of its inability to face the phenomena of will and conation. Still well within the pale of the elect an 'infinite personality' transcending credentials is admitted into the class-room. Here again it is the 'finite' personalities that are the chief interest and it matters little apparently if, after all, the indoctrinated are left to suspect that the Infinite is but a personalised projection into the class-room ceiling of the social and emotional needs of the hour. And when the professors are once again induced to abandon pragmatism for ontology, of what sort is their seeking for the truth? 'Let us save ourselves,' whines one of them, 'from those barren abstractions which dried up the vision of the schoolmen,' and again ultimate Reality becomes the great unpredictable. When at last the academy purges itself of verification by perception, when a whimsical apparatus supposed to represent the thirteenth century mind, of doubtful prehensile accuracy is turned out—what happens then? 'Truth,' says the Professor apologetically eyeing his badly mauled production, 'is a delicate thing. We should not really use forceps.'

Sect is dissected, *ad infinitum*: but here anyway is a chopping and churning irrelevant to the world at large.

The practical man, concerned with more influential issues, turns to journalism. Here is an American newspaper man whose thesis in effect is ours. 'We're through with the Universities for the run of the educated public. And re-

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member this, whatever you think of the *kind* of education, the world is very soon going to be educated. What with short instructive articles and the Broadcast. It's these short instructive articles I'm thinking about. Oh, I know all the cant about writing down to the public and it being impossible to boil down St. Augustine or Karl Marx into a page of the daily illustrated. But it's possible to convey an accurate and entire . . . impression of a reality in a single page, and it requires more art to do it than to write a book. I take it that Christian folk of every class five hundred years ago were pretty deeply learned in . . . the fruits of Catholic history and philosophy without direct contact with the University. But you've got to have the reality first—and a great reality at that, surpassing all misgiving and higher criticism. I only know of two such: the faith of Christians and the faith of Karl Marx.'

Only, of course, the faith of Christians must be the *Christian* faith and not the 'Venture of faith' for which material reality is the sole absolute existent, the soul a derivative, and the Deity a precarious and rather unnecessary subsistent. And it is pleasant, meanwhile, to hear a newspaper man suggesting that Thomism need not be merely a tool of the ecclesiastic (a 'clerical philosophy') or a diversion of the Schools, but (even in anomalous doses) a philosophy superlatively fit for the 'run of the world.'

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