BOOK REVIEWS


After a brief estimate of the contemporary world, an arresting chapter on Mexico draws attention to the emotional and aesthetic features of that rich culture, and to humanistic influences which, in economics, have shifted emphasis from individual property rights, thereby raising political issues between the Mexican and United States governments.

Mexico provides a hint of the world problem, the conflict between the emotionally apprehended and theoretically formulated elements of man's experience throughout various cultures. The United States, Britain, Germany, Russia, the Aristotelian-Roman Catholic heritage, China, India, and Japan are surveyed in chapters remarkable for the range and amount of material and for the detailed analysis whereby economic, political, aesthetic, and religious developments are grounded in various historic philosophies.

In the West, the one-substance theory of Aristotle, with its science practically confined to common-sense observation, was challenged by Galilei and Newton, who on the basis of experiment required a distinction between knowledge gained from sense qualities and from theoretical concepts. Descartes and Locke thereupon separated material and mental substances; for Locke, the mental substance, or self, was a blank tablet until acted upon by the material substance so as to engender an appearance of external objects. The emotions were thus stifled; the person, however, had property rights which government was instituted to maintain. Locke's two substances were reduced to one by Berkeley and dissipated by Hume. Anglo-American economics grew up with emphasis on Locke's property rights, centered in Humean atomic individuals, and issued in the businessman's world. Protestant theology relied upon Locke for its conceptualized doctrines, even after its vital emotional experience was weakened. As Voltaire's and Hume's criticisms have gradually sunk in, Protestantism has become confused and vapid.

The chaotic bewilderment of the Anglo-American world is somewhat offset by the British attitude toward government as shaped by Hooker and Aristotle. This makes the course of government in England easier than it is for the New Deal in America.

In Germany, Kant in his reaction to Hume rescued the self and enabled Fichte confidently to postulate the moral ego. This, however, required the opposition of the nonego and eventual synthesis in an all-determin-
ing absolute. Objectified by Hegel, materialized by Feuerbach, and applied by Marx and Lenin, this led to Russian communism. Communism is inadequate because in its determinism it tends to identify the “ought” with the “is.”

The chaos of individualism and Protestantism, the inadequacy of ancient and recent Aristotelianism before experimental evidence, and the rigidity of the Russian system all show that the West in cultivating the “theoretic component” has undervalued the “aesthetic component,” making the latter a mere means to the development of the former. The painting of Georgia O’Keeffe is taken as a sign that in America the aesthetic component may yet come into its own.

Turning to the East, we find that China and India have for centuries emphasized the immediately given aesthetic component. Tao, jen, Brahman, chit, nirvana, and Buddhist “Thatness” all bear witness to the reality of an aesthetic continuum thus apprehended, as in yoga, and partially differentiated in particulate persons and things.

In accordance with this basic emphasis, religion, art, and in striking fashion contemporary economic and political problems in China and India are interpreted for the West.

On the world scale, the two opposite emphases of West and East must somehow be reconciled. The theoretic and aesthetic components, although irreducible (p. 304), must be recognized as related in a two-termed “epistemic correlation,” which may be many-many instead of one-one. This supplants the Lockean three-termed relation of observer, material substance, and appearance. With the two components thus joined, we may hope for more world unity, although practical wisdom indicates that progress must be gradual.

Passing over some minor questions of Northrop’s interpretation of historical materials, we can all agree that world problems need formulation and suggestions for their solution in inclusive philosophies. Books of this kind are all too rare, and the author has accomplished a prodigious task. A fundamental question, however, concerns the kind of philosophical formulation and suggestion which is most adequate. Northrop’s book, with all its unusual emphasis on aesthetics and economics, phrases both problem and solution in terms of epistemology, a theory of knowledge. In the reviewer’s opinion, it is a fair question whether any epistemology is big enough to serve the purpose, and even if we grant that the world is to be unified by epistemology, it may be asked whether the epistemology adopted in the book is the one to do it.

Let us take for granted that perception, more or less elaborate (i.e., the aesthetic component of our experience of the world), and thinking (i.e., the theoretic component) involve one another, and that there is of course
an epistemic correlation between them. The assumption is hardly debatable; without it we have Kant's percepts that are blind and concepts that are empty. Perhaps the two are irreducible, but at any rate each is used to convey the other. (Whether the connection between them is simple or, as for the critical realists, complicated, is beside the point.) In some art the conceptual element is at a minimum; in some mathematical physics and in logic the perceptual element is at a minimum.

All this may be taken for granted, but we should also note that both percepts and concepts are selective. Each temporarily picks out some portion of the environment, field, or universe and neglects the rest. Either portion may be denoted, or indicated, but only the portion temporarily selected may be described in any one set of terms with more justification than in the opposite set.

Northrop partially recognizes this selection-neglect, or horizon principle, on pp. 335 ff., 341 ff., but disregards it when he describes the neglected background as an undifferentiated continuum (it may be differentiated and discontinuous), or as all-inclusive, infinite, the same everywhere, or spiritual. For any percept or concept, always there is some neglected background which we must simply neglect and let it go at that.

Northrop's argument implies that we can experience the aesthetic continuum, undifferentiated as well as differentiated, immediately and directly, with deep and rich emotional content. But we must note that the Chinese sage (Plate XIII) is not "immersed in nature"; he is quite as distinguishable as an O'Keeffian composition on its canvas, and he becomes the more distinguishable the more fully he is described. To say that the aesthetic experience is indescribable is quite legitimate, but then it becomes only another kind of blank tablet; to affirm that the properties of our perception are the properties of the continuum (pp. 302, 331 ff.) is, in panpsychist fashion, to extrapolate a questionable epistemology into a tenuous metaphysics.

Unquestionably the world, Eastern and Western, if it is to come to unity, must have both the aesthetic and the theoretical component, and must do justice to man's inner experience as well as to the perceived or inferred world. But unity will be secured, if at all, among men's selections, with some nondescriptive reference to their neglects; in the conviction that matter and spirit are not opposites and, with proper understanding, not altogether irreducibles; and that, as both East and West have maintained for centuries, man and the universe resemble one another enough to be akin. This last is the great correlation that needs to be established, in an inclusive scientific metaphysics and in an enriched religion.

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