

PHILOSOPHICAL NOTES

A well known statement in the New Church is that "there is power in ultimates either for good or for evil." When this is applied to reason, it can be seen that philosophy may be directed toward the discovery of truth or not. A current trend that has almost become a conviction for many people is that reason is to be used solely as a "regulator." In the history of thought, certainty has been regarded as the sole aim of philosophy by some of its students. Because philosophy has been unable to establish such certainty beyond all doubt, the very use of philosophy itself has been questioned.

Man fights for his own survival against all odds. Philosophers also fight for their survival as philosophers. The power of history leads to a faith that philosophy must be of *some* good. There seems to be an innate force which leads mankind to admit some sort of meaning in that which persists through the ages. And so some moderns have endeavored to give a meaning to philosophy by emphasizing its regulative nature. However, this very nature seems to deprive the philosopher of faith or belief in anything as a philosopher. This commits him to a sort of continual fence-sitting on all questions that require a decision between an "either" or an "or."

It seems that the philosopher is in a weak position or no position with respect to his principal tool "reason." The dangers of reason have deprived him even of a place upon which to stand. As Hume put it when faced finally with the disadvantages to which his speculations led him: "So much the worse for reason."

While Hume as a philosopher was committed to a strict adherence to reason as to its logical restrictions, he was at the same time a reasonable man in the practical sense. Moderns who regard him as the father of so much of present thinking that is downright agnostic, that is, of continually suspending judgment, forget this.

Because of its expressed opposition to this powerful negative attitude of today, we would like to call the attention of readers of this column to a review of a book *Academic Freedom* by Russell Kirk in *Time*, March 28, 1955.

Kirk feels that freedom's most earnest champions are actually gnawing away at its roots; many teachers do not begin to under-

stand the true basis of academic freedom. Much of what passes today for arguments for academic freedom arises in a misunderstanding of the proper meaning and significance of democracy.

"'Education for democracy' is a barren one, for democracy can work for evil as well as good. Democracy is . . . simply a means to certain ends. . . . And those ends, Justice and Freedom, are in large measure the products of religious faith, of the religious conviction that the human person has dignity and rights because divine wisdom so ordained. . . ." "Unfortunately," says Kirk, "the fear of any dogma has led to a completely erroneous definition of academic freedom. [Certain] 'doctrinaire liberals' . . . think of the Academy as a place where professors, like the Sophists, talk perpetually of the impossibility of knowing anything with certitude, and the necessity for considering every point of view, and the need for being ever so liberal. [One is reminded] of Bacon's famous line: 'What is truth? said jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer.'" Kirk says that the theme that "everyone ought to dissent from everything for dissension's sake . . . is all a negation, praising liberty because liberty gives opportunity to demolish ancient things, and praising the Academy because the Academy may be utilized as a safe corner from which to dislodge the wisdom of our ancestors. . . . If the Academy is to preserve its liberties . . . it must be defended by men loyal to transcendent values."

Kirk's own position, however "dangerous" in modern terms, is not negative. For in answer to the question "But to what values precisely?" he answers:

"To the proposition that the end of education is the elevation of the reason of the human person, for the human person's own sake.

"To the proposition that the higher imagination is better than the sensate triumph.

"To the proposition that the fear of God, and not the mastery over man and nature, is the object of learning. . . .

"To the proposition, Socratic and Christian, that the unexamined life is not worth living.

"If the Academy holds by these propositions, not all the force of Caesar can break down its walls; but if the Academy is bent upon sneering at everything in heaven and earth, or upon reforming itself after the model of the market place, not all the eloquence of the prophets can save it."

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