

Dishonest Philosophers

(By H. C. HENGELL, in America.)

Gertrude Atherton, noted novelist and expert delinquent of character, declares: "The Socialist mind is essentially dishonest, although in the case of the finer breed of Socialists not consciously so; but this subconscious dishonesty, the natural result of a weak cause, leads them to play up one side of any occurrence that gives them a momentary advantage and to ignore the whole truth."

Men and women who are radical and sensational in their attitude toward religion, morality, and social order do indeed seem to have minds incapable of sound and honest judgment. To be sensational seems to be more important to them than to be thoroughly honest in their conclusions. They readily sacrifice truth for an epigram or catch-phrase that appeals more to feeling or prejudice than to sober judgment.

Atheists and agnostics also build up their theories on half truths and misrepresentations. It is characteristic of the propagandists of agnosticism to misstate or to understate the arguments upon which humanity justifies its constant and almost universal belief in the existence of God.

I know a propagandist of agnosticism in a State university who persistently misstates the principle of causation, one of the fundamental principles of all sound and normal reasoning. He formulates it as "*everything* must have an adequate cause" instead of "*every event, everything that comes into existence* must have an adequate cause." Thus he argues: "If *everything* must have an adequate cause, how about God, the first cause? If the first cause, God, must have an adequate cause, then there is something, a cause, which is prior to Him. This is absurd because in that case either He would not be the first cause, or it is not necessarily and universally true that *everything* must have an adequate cause."

It is surely dishonest thus to ignore the correct formulation of the principle of causation so strongly stressed by logicians: Not *everything that is* must have an adequate cause, but *everything that becomes, that comes into existence*, must have an adequate cause for its *becoming or coming into existence*.

The obvious existence of beings that have come into existence demands a cause other than themselves. They could not give themselves existence for that would involve the absurdity of action on their part before their existence. Their cause must be sought in beings existing prior to them. These prior causes are either beings that exist forever and have never *come into existence* or they are beings that *have come into existence*, in which case they in their turn require an adequate cause for their *coming into existence*. And so on indefinitely.

The mind, however, finally and necessarily demands the existence of a first cause which is itself uncaused in order to explain how anything ever *came into existence*. The first cause is *not self-caused*. It is simply eternally existent and thus it alone finally explains how anything ever *came into existence*. To deny the necessary and eternal existence of the first cause as the only final and possible explanation for anything else *coming into existence* is to deny reason itself in one of its first and fundamental operations. If we cannot trust reason here we can trust it nowhere. If we can trust reason nowhere, then good logic and bad logic are one and the same thing, perhaps and perhaps not, wild movements in the brain of a bewildered ape.

The attempt to limit reason's fundamental principle, the principle of causation, to the world of experience and observation, and to deny its authority in the world that transcends sense experience is either consciously or subconsciously dishonest. Experience and observation themselves presuppose and take for granted the universal truth and validity of the principle of causation. Reason must have ready for use the principle of causation before it can see any connection between facts observed and their explanation.

It is not experience and observation that lead the mind to invent or create the principle of causation in order to find the meaning of what is experienced and observed, but it is the principle of causation, the fundamental essential

manier in which the mind functions, that leads the mind even to try to explain and to interpret what is experienced and observed. Thus the principle of causation is itself *prior* to all experience and observation. It is a necessary and universal principle of all reasoning, without which the mind would be helpless or non-existent not only in the sphere beyond the range of sense experience and observation (metaphysics) but also within that range.

Experience may indeed call our attention to the existence of the principle of causation in the mind, but experience does not put it there. The mind could not function, in fact it would not be mind, without fundamental laws or principles with which to operate. To discredit the universal application of these principles, including the principle of causation, is to discredit the mind itself and open the door to universal scepticism in which we should have to doubt that we must doubt that we doubt everything. What insanity! Yet universal scepticism can be the only outcome of those modern systems of philosophy, "huge syntheses of humbug" Chesterton calls them, which doubt or deny the necessary and universal validity of the principle of causation.

Agnosticism is like a serpent. Hit it on the head and the tail bobs up. Hit it on the tail and the head bobs up. Granting that the first cause must be eternal, our agnostic is likely to assert that the universe itself is the first cause, that it is eternal, and that all phenomena, events, changes, are merely "phases or manifestations" of one and the same eternal universe. The process, if such it is, is one of eternal evolution.

Point out that this implies a contradiction in ideas, that what is eternal or infinite can have no addition or divisions, and you may get the flippant but dishonest retort that the additions and divisions are merely "phases and manifestations" of one and the same eternal reality, the universe.

In other words, we are asked to believe that all events and changes in the universe, your birth and my birth, are not realities but merely phases or manifestations of the only thing that has reality: namely, the universe. There is but one substance, forsooth, and you and I are not ourselves but only manifestations of that one substance. No matter what virtues we may practise, no matter what vices we may indulge in, neither the credit nor the blame belongs to us. These are mere phases or manifestations of the one substance or reality that winds and unwinds itself forever.

Certain "highbrows," that is to say, certain university men and women who have too much education for their intelligence, are fond of saying stuff like that. It is such a cheap and easy method of appearing to be an advanced and original thinker. It is radicalism for the sake of radicalism, sensationalism for the sake of sensationalism. It is the spirit that animates "the callow minds of sophomores and undergraduates in universities," but it indicates "a mind consciously, or subconsciously, dishonest."

One of our illusions is that the present hour is not the critical, decisive hour. Write it on your heart that every day is the best day in the year. No man has learned anything rightly until he knows that every day is doomsday.—Emerson.

Sacred Heart College Auckland

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