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Novum Itinerarium Mentis in Deum

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NOVUM ITINERARIUM MENTIS IN DEUM.

IT seems to be the fashion nowadays in Germany, both in philosophical and in military circles, to connect the war, or at least Germany's part therein, with the teachings of the great German idealists. It is not at all strange that this should be so. Whenever any nation is at war and patriotism rises to a high pitch, there is always a marked deepening of religious sentiment,—it is as much so in France today as in Germany,—and one fondly tries to tie up one's cause to the teaching of the great spiritual leaders of the past. "Our cause is the righteous cause, and the God of battles is with us." Thus it ever was, and ever will be, no matter what one's philosophy, for the nation that does not do this will engage in war listlessly and surely perish. To be sure, outside of Germany one finds a greater hospitality toward the spiritual leaders of other nations than one's own. The Germans have come to view themselves as in some peculiar sense the chosen people. God has spoken to them as to no other race, and they are convinced that they have a special mission and duty as the representatives of the fundamental ideas of civilization.

It is not strange that the Germans should invoke the imposing figures of Kant and Fichte. But one is indeed surprised to find thinkers of our own land making these idealists responsible, not only for Germany's part in the war, but even for the whole policy of 'frightfulness,' and seriously warning us that if we would be politically saved, we must once for all turn our backs on Kant with his antiquated belief in truth, in eternal principles of right, and in a spiritual realm distinct from the realm of nature—and be baptized in the flowing stream of pragmatism. It is true that in Fichte's writings, from the first, the concepts of God and the ego have a tantalizing way of running together; and, after the battle of Jena, the resulting exalted personality was thoroughly Teutonized. It is true that Hegel was a trimmer, and that he accommodated his philosophy so as to make it find its fulfilment

in the Prussian state, and that he Hegelized Christianity to give it religious sanction. But these are the weaknesses of great men, illustrations, perhaps, of the chief weakness of a great race. This is insolent egotism, not philosophy at all. But surely chauvinism was not invented in Germany, any more than jingoism was born in France. It is a temper of mind that is independent of race, and not limited to men of any philosophical persuasion. It is just a common human failing.

If any philosophy were to be singled out as on trial in this war, it would rather seem to be a ruthless materialism, which had found expression in *Realpolitik*, and adopted an elastic pragmatic interpretation of the true and the good. But as a matter of fact, we cannot settle our philosophical differences in any such simple fashion, or decide for or against any political philosophy by pointing to Germany as the *abschreckendes Beispiel*, either of idealism, or of pragmatism, or of realism, or of any other philosophy. To attempt to do so would merely result in calling each other names.

One thing is evident. The European conflict has brought each of the nations engaged therein to a collective self-consciousness unrealized before. There are indications of a similar awakening in our own land, and it is incumbent upon us to try to discover the political philosophy, if any such there be, that underlies our efforts after democracy. Is the older absolute idealism a menace to the establishment of free institutions, and to the peace of nations? The gravamen of the charge seems to be this:—The idealist, believing in absolute truth, and in immutable principles of morality, and in a spiritual realm which is not to be comprehended under the categories of the physical order, will come sooner or later to regard himself and those of his intellectual household as the sole guardians of this truth, the only true interpreters of this moral law, and as, therefore, justified in employing any means that may seem expedient in making their view prevail. Either the idealist views himself thus as the Lord's anointed, and becomes a menace to mankind, or else he doesn't take his idealism seriously and it becomes a milk-and-watery and negligible doctrine.

There could hardly be a more complete misrepresentation of the situation. It can only be given the slightest semblance of plausibility by rehearsing the chauvinistic and egotistical utterances of a few idealists, whose chauvinism was not only not the consequence of their idealism, but was in fact in direct contradiction to it. It is, on the contrary, a matter of plain history that genuine intellectual modesty among philosophers, and a broad and tolerant humanism, and an eagerness to learn from experience, first made their appearance with the dawn of absolute idealism. These are virtues she cannot be robbed of, even if at times some over-zealous devotees have betrayed her cause.

In one of Plato's Dialogues, Socrates tells the story of his own intellectual awakening, and it is most instructive with regard to the question at issue. He learned one day that a man named Anaxagoras had written a book in which he had shown that mind was the author of all things. "Eagerly," said Socrates in effect, "I sought the book, but imagine my disappointment when I found that, although asserting mind to be the author, the writer went on to explain the facts of experience without using that concept at all. If mind be indeed the author, then everything is as it is because it is best for it so to be, and the only true wisdom would consist in seeing all things in the light of this idea of the good." He himself, however, was equally unable to attain unto this wisdom. Nevertheless, he gets from Anaxagoras an inspiration that defines a program, the program of absolute idealism, and sets a task which ages will be required to carry out. For he has a second string to his bow; he cannot, of course, take his stand with absolute wisdom; that would be indeed to affect omniscience. He must begin in all modesty just where he finds himself, with what seems most plausible and then proceed to test this view by clear, consistent, and thorough-going thinking, brought ever to the touchstone of experience. In this undertaking he finds that he can successfully eliminate error, and substitute once for all the more complete for the less complete vision. The modesty of this position is obvious. Of what value then to this idealist was the conception of an absolute reason so inaccessible to mortal mind? It inspired and justified

an absolute and self-sacrificing devotion to the pursuit of truth; gave his mission, as he viewed it, the sanction of a Divine command; justified the belief that clear, straight thinking done by any man is done for all men; that men are brought together in the search for truth and freed through its discovery, because in mind they have a truly common nature. Socrates was never dogmatic. His life is a continuous experimental test of this position, an attempt, as we might say, to blaze the trail for the *itinerarium mentis in Deum*. The function of this concept of absolute reason has been, from Socrates's day to this, analogous to that of the conservation of energy in modern physics, and it was as revolutionary and as fruitful in philosophy as the latter concept was in physics.

But there is something of the mystic in Socrates, and this vision of completed truth toward which he is striving is even now there before him, and within, as the object of his continual longing, an object as beautiful and good as it is true. Plato, or is it still Socrates, under the inspiration of this vision, tries to depict a social order in which this ideal shall be realized among men. If he makes the mistake which most reformers make of trying to make vice impossible through legislation, and of trying by means of institutions to bring about the millenium day after tomorrow, a mistake that leads him into the errors of premature socialism, he has none the less grasped certain principles that must still serve as our ideal. The only real state, the only one worthy the name, is one in which every individual may find the opportunity to do that which he is best fitted to do, and in which this service shall always be performed with an eye to the welfare of the entire community. The root of evil in states as in individuals is selfishness, the desire for self-aggrandizement, the desire to get on at the expense of someone else. These are truths of political philosophy which we must still recognize, although nowhere have they been brought to realization. And yet they remain, as all universal truths do, formal. Whether any specific reform will help to bring about the desired result we can only tell by trying. But this ideal still sets for us the end with reference to which we pass judgment upon our several experiments.

With the work of the seraphic doctor, whose title I have borrowed, I am not especially concerned. Despairing of the state of the world as he found it, Bonaventura sought salvation for the individual by the pathway of withdrawal, and this gives his work, for all its beauty, a certain unreality. But it is worth noting that, in spite of his ambitious undertaking, this idealist suffers if anything from an excess of modesty; that moreover his book is an interpretation of his own experience, an account of the spiritual gymnastics whereby he had, as he supposed, himself reached the peace that passed understanding; and that the last thing that could have occurred to him would have been to attempt to force his view on any unwilling mind.

The modern idealist, and Professor Royce is my representative modern idealist, views, and must view, his life work as nothing less than an attempt to find and describe the *itinerarium mentis in Deum*. And yet no one, at least in his rôle as idealist, ever supposes that in so doing he is giving to the world the only reliable Baedeker to the kingdom of heaven. The very magnitude of his aim insures his modesty. His philosophy itself compels him to regard every serious student as a collaborator in his undertaking, and to view the task which he has set himself as one which the ages alone can carry to completion. Nevertheless, he believes that he does possess even now a sure compass to guide him in his quest, certain fixed principles of thought and action, call them categories or imperatives if you will, which are such as are implied in the very effort to deny them, and are, therefore, the pre-conditions of all our interpretations. He believes, moreover, and for reasons that do not here concern us, that this complete vision, which is the goal of his endeavor, is no mere distant ideal but rather an ever-living force, the life and the light of the world today. He has read his Socrates through the eyes of Kant, and in the spirit of Bonaventura.

Amongst the many contributions which Professor Royce has made to philosophy, there are three or four that stand out in special relief. The earlier idealists, intoxicated by their success, and ignoring the limitations imposed by their own vision, had dealt rather cavalierly with experience. Professor Royce has

done excellent service in making it plain that idealism not only permits, but compels, respect for the facts precisely as experience reveals them; counsels docility in interpreting nature, and adopts the experimental attitude toward all specific plans and institutions. The absolute is not to be found all at once, and the philosopher, not talking to the klepsydra, as Plato would say, but having his eye on all time and all existence, can afford to be patient, and will surely be suspicious of all Utopias.

He has also succeeded in cutting under the old Cartesian dualism of mind and matter, a dualism which has haunted all modern philosophy, and is still the fertile source of many of our misunderstandings. Mind is not all here within, objects yonder without; the unity of consciousness comes into being *pari passu* with the knowledge of the unity of experience; the interpreter is at once on the object as well as on the subject side of the subject-object relation. The object that one seeks is defined and selected in the idea that reaches out after it, and is indeed simply its more complete and individual embodiment.

Again, by showing the universal presence of the practical in the theoretical, he has helped to bridge the Kantian gulf between these two realms, and to establish the thoroughgoing primacy of the practical,—a pragmatism raised to the *n*th power.

But I find a new note appearing in the *Philosophy of Loyalty*, and prominent in all his subsequent writings. Here again our idealist is simply interpreting experience; his feet are on the ground of fact. But the center of interest is now our varied human life with all its tragedies, its hopes, its failures, its joys, as it has been lived by a very human and lovable person, as good as he is wise. In these works Professor Royce has bridged the gap which, in our fondness for abstractions, we are apt to set up between individuals. He has shown that the isolated individual does not exist; that we do not take our point of departure, as it were, in the prison of the inner life, and then argue ourselves into the belief in other minds on the basis of analogy, finding the behavior of their bodies like that of our own, and inferring the presence of a corresponding consciousness. The notion of a self-contained mind coming to believe in the existence

of other minds in such a fashion is a pure abstraction. We cannot even state the argument from analogy without pre-supposing as its own terms a consciousness that takes us beyond the limits of our private personality. Our consciousness is, in truth, from the first, social, and one rounds to a separate mind only by defining his own interests and purposes within the unity of the mind of the community.

The pursuit of truth is always a social enterprise where at least three minds are involved, one mind interpreting a second to another, or to other, minds. And the real world we seek is no other than the community of interpretation which can be found by no one except the spirit of the community dwell within him. This idea of the community, and of the divine spirit as dwelling therein, is no mere abstraction, no metaphor, no topic for mystical insight. Any highly organized community is "as truly a human being as we are individually human, only a community is not what we usually call a human being; because it has no one separate and internally well-knit organism of its own; and because its mind, if you attribute to it any one mind, is, therefore, not manifested through the expressive movements of such a separate human organism." Nevertheless, its mental life possesses a psychology of its own which can be systematically studied. It is, moreover, one through the possession of a common fund of memories and experiences. "As empirical facts, communities are known to us by their deeds, by their workings, by their intelligent and coherent behavior; just as the minds of our individual neighbors are known to us through their expressions." The difference between individual human beings as we ordinarily regard them in social intercourse, and communities, is properly characterized by describing them as two grades or levels of human life.

Thus our *itinerarium mentis in Deum* has led us to a concept of God as the spirit dwelling in the beloved community, a concept which in no wise resembles that spectre which the philosophical caricaturist delights in portraying, the otiose absolute of the schools. It is a God who makes a difference in the lives of men, inspiring them to loyalty, devotion, and self-sacrifice. And

from start to finish, our idealism has been in close contact with the facts of experience. If these find their interpretation in this idealism, they are not in any sense transmuted into something else. They remain with their value fixed unalterably, each in its own place in the temporal order, although their meaning, if ever it could be completely found, would involve their exhaustive interpretation in the light of the entire historical process, and in the full contexture of human intercourse.

And if all of our interpretations of experience are guided by the practical motive, we have here found the supreme practical principle in the call to be loyal to the principle of loyalty, for except through the acceptance of this principle, neither individual nor community could be; that is, to deny it is to deny life and reality.

I submit that if this view is true, the next task for idealists should be to reverse our telescopes, and, starting from this practical imperative, show how the principles and categories, by means of which we interpret experience on its various levels, issue from it, and are related to each other with reference to it. This would be to give a genuine deduction of the categories and to establish the primacy of the practical reason.

And have we not in this idealism a philosophy which helps us to define our own political aspirations, and to make articulate the vision that underlies our efforts after democracy? Most of the high sounding phrases that roll so glibly from the tongue of the Fourth of July orator are merely more or less flamboyant expressions of an aspiration common to all civilized lands today. Every land aspires to be a land of the free, and no one has come anywhere near realizing this aspiration. In our efforts in this direction we have been particularly favored by our geographical situation, and by our unsurpassed physical resources. But most of all are we favored in the varied assortment of our ancestors. We are indeed, as a nation, directly descended from England, and her institutions, and laws, and political beliefs, have been the most potent influence in making us what we are; and the very language that we speak must make her history, her literature, and her ideals ever specially dear to our hearts. At the same

time, the collateral branches of our ancestry reach back into almost every civilization. We are thus in a position to claim the living past of them all as our own past without being bound by the dead past of any one. We are, therefore, less in bondage to the past than other nations not so favored; less hampered by the claims of use and wont.

Great as are these advantages, they are very far from insuring the success of our political experiment, and there are many signs of coming storm. We are apt to speak and act as if freedom were a negative term, as if it meant freedom *from*, instead of freedom *to*. And so there is a great deal of mutual complacency, of easy-going live and let live, and a spineless tolerance of wrong that does not directly and obviously touch us as individuals. We are an irreverent and a pleasure loving people, devoted to luxury and ease. Hence the universal desire for self-aggrandizement, the mad scramble for wealth, selfishness on a scale unparalleled in history, a selfishness that is not overcome by occasional spasms of sentimental kindness. Hence, too, the tendency to seek reform by substituting the selfishness of the group, the class, or the majority, for that of the individual. Everyone thinks himself as good as his neighbor. There is an unwillingness to use the expert, and civil service reform makes headway with painful slowness. For "every human unit must count for one, and no one for more than one." So runs the shibboleth.

Does it not all come down to this, that the concrete ills which threaten us, spring from the fact that men have lost their belief in Truth, in eternal principles of morality, and in a spiritual order that transcends, even if it includes, the world of sense. If our democracy is to triumph we must find some way of combining service with freedom, the unity of the community with the independence of the individual. Were this consummation reached, we could then say every human unit counts for all, in counting for himself, for he only counts for himself if the spirit of the community dwell within him.

This ideal, like every worthy human ideal, calls for perfection, and, therefore, sets a task which ages alone can bring to realiza-

tion. Nevertheless, it defines our aim, and supplies the standard by which we may measure the value of the means employed, [our various experiments in righteousness, individual and social] and make sure of our progress toward its realization. It places clearly before us the vision of that state, at once ideal and real, where solidarity and liberty have joined hands, and where the familiar maxim 'One for all and all for one' is more than an empty phrase.

This is indeed not a new social philosophy, but Professor Royce has given it a novel interpretation, and has shown how completely it controls the work of theoretical reason on all its levels. The ideal state which it places before us has many of the marks of socialism, but it is a socialism that will be desirable only when it is no longer necessary. For any attempt to hasten the realization of this ideal by external means, by force, or by the mechanism of institutions, would only make sure its defeat. This is a *Kultur* which can only be spread by the sword of the spirit.

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