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Philosophy in the Mass Age

Originally presented as "An Introduction to Moral Philosophy" for a general radio audience over the C.B.C. late in 1958, *Philosophy in the Mass Age**, a book of 112 pages by Dr. George P. Grant, is an outstanding contribution to contemporary literature and a devastating analysis of the ideas predominant in present day North American society. With intrepid thought and scholarship it brings before us the necessity of seeing these ideas for what they really are, their growth and their effect, and for making a vital re-assessment.

In *Chapter 1*, the author points out that present-day society has two characteristics: (1) A belief in dominance of man over nature through science and technology, and (2) the fact of dominance of men over men. "All our institutions express the way in which one lot of men dedicated to certain ends impose their dominance over other men." Dr. Grant illustrated this by referring to large scale capitalists. (The phrase "dedicated to certain ends" suggests the question of policies. It is a basic concern of history to record and study the manifestations of important policies, and thus reveal these policies. Modern historical studies fail in this regard).

The very belief of dominance of man over nature and the fact of dominance of men over men makes it difficult to think through a realistic view of society. "In this situation the individual becomes (whether on the assembly line, in the office or in the department store) an object to be administered by scientific efficiency experts." As a result, the idea of adjustment is over-emphasized in business and education—public relations being conceived as influencing men's minds so as to obtain support; successful personal adjustments being considered to be those which conform to what society puts a price on. Even religion becomes "the power of positive thinking"—adjustment to society's ways. "Thought which does not serve the interests of the economic apparatus or some established group in society is sneered at as 'academic.' The old idea that 'the truth shall make you free,' that is, the view of reason as the way in which we discover the meaning of our lives and make that meaning our own has almost disappeared." (Even though most catechisms begin: man's first duty is to learn to know God and his own responsibility to Him).

Pragmatism, which views reason as an instrument, and discards absolutes, is the philosophy typical of our society. It is an expression of the characteristic, already mentioned, of man's self-conceived divinity over nature.

However, Dr. Grant concludes his first chapter not quite so confidently as when he is analysing society, with a note that all is not lost. "Reformation and Enlightenment," he suggests, have contributed something over and above what existed before the times denoted by those terms, even though along with them there came some real deficits. The great contribution has been a sense of freedom, the conviction that each individual should be a free agent, free to fashion his own outlook on life, and to forge his own position in society. Grant holds that the Roman Catholic tradition can no longer hold modern man. "I for one am certain that a people who have passed through Protestantism can never go back to a traditional Catholicism." At the same time he recognizes that the Roman Catholic ecclesiastical body is unique in that it emphasizes a systematic study of philosophy and thus it remains possible that a "dynamic restatement" could arise from its fold.

This, incidentally, is the problem which Dr. Grant poses in his last broadcast: required a redefinition of man's concept of morality which will realistically accord this sense of freedom with the earlier concept of natural law; of man's capacity to control nature's powers to comfortable and energy-conserving ends and at the same time to recognize that man is part of nature, of an eternal whole.

In *Chapter 2*, entitled "The Mystic and Modern Consciousness," Dr. Grant points out that "Modern man is historical man—he believes that the chief purpose of life is the making of history." This sharply distinguishes modern man from ancient man. Ancient man (and medieval man) looked to a universal archetype. It was a fundamental of faith that the universe was divinely ordered. As a result, it was supremely important for man to conform to that order. "In all civilizations up to the last few centuries it has been in the doctrine of natural law that men came to know what was right and wrong in their actions. An act was right in so far as it was in conformity to the natural law, and wrong in so far as it was not."

To the modern, "liberally" educated man, on the other hand, natural law has come to be a term which is foreign and incomprehensible. History, or rather the making of history, is the great goal. "We have taken our fate into our own hands and are determined to make the world as we want it. Man and not God is the maker of history. Unique and irreversible events must be shaped by creative acts of human will."

Moderns, as Dr. Grant suggests, tend to believe that there was no history before the age of "progress." This term

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From Week to Week

The abrupt anti-anti-Semite propaganda campaign no doubt forebodes some new phase of international devilry, and suggests that 1960 is to be a fateful year—whether by the ‘victory’ of Communism as the outcome of the “most gigantic peace offensive in history,” or by the culmination of the plot revealed in *The Protocols*, is not yet clear.

What is clear is the persistent distraction of attention to events by comic-strip ‘news’ of space projects, and the doubtless real news of the tourism of ‘Leaders.’

That there is any serious anti-Semitism in the so-called West is not a credible idea, nor is the suggestion of a recrudescence of Nazism. The original rise of Nazism was possible because it suited the policy of international finance—but this policy is now carried on and further by the post-war spread of ‘Communism.’

Perhaps the anti-anti-Semite campaign foreshadows the disclosure of the Jewish nature of the Communist bureaucracy. We think it was never so necessary to keep our eyes on the ball.

The Philosophy of Communism

FROM *THE NEW TIMES*, MELBOURNE, OCTOBER 2, 1959, WE REPUBLISH EXTRACTS FROM A PAPER SUBMITTED BY MR. ERIC D. BUTLER TO THEIR 1959 SEMINAR:

An honest appraisal of the facts concerning the expansion of Communism must convince every realist that the World Communist State is “historically inevitable” *appears* convincing. But the truth is that the fostering of the idea of inevitability is one of the major psychological weapons being used by the Communists to help break resistance to their advance. Most of the major victories of the Communists have had nothing whatever to do with historical inevitability. Many of them have been the result of shortsightedness, lack of principles and, in many cases, outright treachery by those supposed to be resisting Communism. For example, there was nothing inevitable about the decisions made at the

Yalta Conference in 1945, decisions which paved the way for the vast Communist expansion in the post-war years. But whatever the real reasons for their advances, the Communists have persistently stressed the theme that these advances proved that the non-Communist world is doomed and that the advent of Communism is imminent. Although the theory of historical materialism has been disproved by events on numerous occasions since Karl Marx outlined it, the Communist leaders have retained it for the purpose of helping to convince their own followers that complete victory for Communism is only a matter of time and to persuade non-Communists that it is futile to resist the inevitable verdict of history. If people can be convinced that any development of human affairs is inevitable, that it is a manifestation of some natural law, particularly if this law has been proved “scientifically”, then they see no good purpose in resisting such development, even though they may not like it. It is appropriate to observe here that the Communists are aided immeasurably on the question of historical inevitability because of the dominant teaching of the historians of the West, the majority of whom accept the cyclic theory of history: that civilizations rise and fall because of their nature, and that today we are living during the decline of our present civilization. Although many of the historians preaching the cyclic theory stress the importance of religion in the growth of any civilisation, the important point to understand is that their views lead to the conclusion that the continuing disintegration of our present civilisation is inevitable. All theories of inevitability strike right at the heart of the philosophical view of the individual being able to use creative initiative to change the course of events from what they otherwise would have been.

And this brings me immediately to the central thesis of this Paper, which is that the true nature of the Communist challenge cannot be understood until it is first understood that every policy in this world stems from a philosophy, is the result of a conception of reality. Policies are *evidence* of things unseen, of ideas concerning the nature of man and the universe. Behind every policy there must be a philosophy, just as a bridge is the material expression of a conception which is first committed to paper in the form of a plan. The basic cleavage in the world is not geographical, but philosophical. Paradoxical though it may appear, the general failure to understand Communism in the non-Communist world, is the result of the spread of the same materialistic philosophy underlying Communism.

PHILOSOPHY IN THE MASS AGE—

(continued from page 1).

might suggest a better name for modern *man* than historical man — “progressive” man. To question “progress” is heretical. The author suggests that the most important activities in society are those of the engineers, business men, and administrators. Older persons have become a group who are regarded and regard themselves as cast out of the stream of progress-making. To be retired from this stream is to be cut off from society’s purpose and is something to be feared.

In *Chapter 3*, Dr. Grant brilliantly explains Natural Law. “The doctrine was the following: There is an order in the universe which human reason can discover and according to which the human will must act so that it can attune

itself to the universal harmony. Human beings in choosing their purposes must recognize that if these purposes are to be right they must be those which are proper to the place mankind holds within the framework of universal law. We do not make this law, but are made to live with it. In this doctrine certain assumptions are made, firstly, about the universe in general and, secondly, about human beings in particular."

As regards human beings, natural law assumes that all have a human nature of the same ultimate kind. Some external values fructify the human spirit, and sins or wrong values do not. Unlike animals, man has a rational soul. Reason is present in him potentially and it requires to be developed. Actually this development, or reason in a broad sense, is what can freely be called education (in contradistinction to training, as explained in a featured article of Vice-Admiral Rickover in *The Saturday Evening Post*, November 28, 1959).

This doctrine of natural law has produced the fundamentals of our legal system. Laws as legal enactments depend for their essential rightness upon natural law which is created, not enacted. The great English jurist, Blackstone, put it with clarity: "This law of nature being co-eval with mankind and dictated by God Himself is, of course, superior in obligation to any other . . . No human laws are of any validity if contrary to this and such of them as are valid derive their force and all their authority, mediately or immediately, from the original."

In *Chapter 4*, "History in Progress," Dr. Grant makes the acute and incisive assertion that "Christianity has been chiefly responsible for the destruction of the old religious culture and the coming to be of our modern secular culture."

He points out that the modern spirit first appeared in European culture. "It can be asked what is the most important difference between the old classical world of Greece and Rome and the European society of the 16th and 17th centuries, out of which the modern spirit was to arise. It was that the classical spirit had taken into itself "Biblical religion. . . . By Biblical religion is meant the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament and its culmination in the Incarnation of God, Jesus Christ. That religion was unique in its absolute historicity. It was the Jews who discovered the very idea of history. More than anything else, what has made Western culture so dynamic is its impregnation with the Judaeo-Christian idea that history is the divinely ordered process of man's salvation. This is an idea utterly foreign to any other civilization until Marxism took it to the East."

"The idea that history is the sphere for the overcoming of evil, and the hope of that overcoming, has never been far from the centre of thought among those people who adopted Christianity. Throughout European history the repressed have returned again and again to this hope. It is the very foundation of the revolutionary tradition. It is the ultimate reason why western man has taken wordly life and its arrangements so seriously."

Dr. Grant continues: "The mediating term between history as providence and history as progress is the idea of freedom (call it, if you will, subjectivity). Conscious of themselves as free, men came to believe that history could be shaped to their own ends. This consciousness of freedom

appears first in the modern world in the religious freedom and thought of the Reformation. . . . The Reformation protests against the idols which stand between man and God and in this sense the term Protestant is apposite. But it is more than simply protest, because it asserts that the principle of freedom must be regulative of any future theory or practice. It is more than negative in that the idea of freedom is the affirmation that the human spirit cannot be limited by any determinations."

To proceed by leaps and bounds over this, to say the least, stimulating chapter, Grant then moves to the idea that since instrumentalism drove a belief in God from men's minds, it would be likely to expect that it would be replaced by a disillusioned and rather sad humanism. Such, on the whole, was not the case. It was replaced by a humanism "of project and reform. It was a humanism which put science and technology at its centre, as the means of redemption."

In *Chapter 5*, Dr. Grant discusses Marxism. Whereas Marx is thought of by many as a rather muddled disturber of political thought, Grant gives him full due as being worth studying not only for the tremendous effect which his doctrine has had, but as a social theorist of the first rank. "Marx must be studied not so much as a political-economic propagandist than as a theorist who has brought together the varying streams of the humanist hope and in whose synthesis, therefore, the value of the doctrine of progress is most clearly exposed to us."

Marx begins from the indubitable fact that there is evil in the capitalist society. He discards religion and the idea of God as an incubus which would prevent the solution of the evil. In place of this he offers a new emotional ideal, the goal of better living conditions for *all* people in society. As the chief means of obtaining these conditions he sees natural science and, probably, organization, a relative of science.

Production, Marx saw, was advancing to a point where the world of scarcity could become a thing of the past. But certain classes which had gained power would naturally want to retain it. Hence this class must be dispensed with. Capitalism must be destroyed. Socialism, whose principles would show how to make arrangements to provide for all the world, would take its place. "Men will no longer be for each other objects of economic exploitation. Human beings will be able to give themselves over to the free play of their faculties, to the life of love and art and thought."

This theory of Marx has had a great influence, especially for those enthralled by natural science. It has given them a sense of mission. As the author writes, there are two reasons for its power:

- (1) it offers an objective of universal salvation,
- (2) it appears to offer a very concrete and practical means of achieving this objective.

In *Chapter 6*, "The Limits of Progress," it is pointed out that Marxism thinks of man as an object for whom idealistic and logically arranged administrations can be made on a totalitarian scale. But man is more than an object. He is always a subject, a thinker, a doubter, a questioner, a schemer, a freedom-user. Marxism has failed in the West because it does not allow sufficient scope for this spirit of freedom.

"We are always a project to ourselves, in that in any given situation we can negate what we are in the name of what we ought to be. It is this ability to transcend any worldly situation which we call the spirit of freedom. Freedom so defined is not then, simply the ability to reflect about what we should want. To use the traditional language of moral philosophy, it also implies that we cannot find our completeness in any finite object of desire." "My kingdom is not of this world."

Therefore Marxism is fatuously simple and idealistic. It claims that men would live well once they are liberated from scarcity and class domination. As Dr. Grant states, Engels and then Lenin carried the theories of Marxism further in this direction than Marx himself would ever have approved of doing.

Nevertheless it is just this unrealistic simplicity which is making Russia such a powerful force at the present time. "They can concentrate on definite objectives and find an immense and almost childlike satisfaction in their accomplishment."

In the final part of his chapter Dr. Grant comes to the thought expressed in the title of it. "On the one hand, does not the idea of a divine order encourage man to accept the conditions of the world rather than to improve them?" "But as soon as this is said the necessity for limits to man's making of history must be stated with equal force. It is understandable that the worst crimes of the twentieth century have been perpetrated in the name of progress and man's right to make history."

"But the idea of limit is unavoidably the idea of God. If we say that there is something which should never be done under any circumstances we have said that something is absolutely wrong. . . . The idea of God, having been discarded as impossible and immoral comes back in the twentieth century as men recognise that if there is no theoretical limit there is no practical limit, and any action is permissible."

In *Chapter 7*, Dr. Grant discusses American Morality—its roots. The dominant influence, he shows, has been Puritanism or Calvinist Protestantism. Calvinism was an intensely practical doctrine. It led naturally to a breed of men who had little time or use for the contemplative attitude and worked feverishly for material success. "Paradoxically, the rage to be confident of their election (Calvinistic predestinarianism) was what gave the Puritans such a sense of their own authentic freedom."

Calvinism led to a sense of egalitarianism. When each individual is capable of going out and grasping spiritual truth and partaking in revelation, with the assumption that that can be sufficient for him, the implication is that all are equal.

This has been reflected in our educational field. Educational experts have been trained or conditioned away from considering whether education must be basically related to a sound philosophic concept dealing with ultimates (it is doubted that there can be one). In place of that, what Douglas called the machine-tool concept of society is subserved. "What must be recognised is that the democratic and secular education system we have today in our schools and universities, far from being something to which Protestants have objected, is something they have largely built

themselves." ". . . the principle that ultimate truth had almost nothing to do with the educational process."

The Philosophy which has guided this educational viewpoint is pragmatism, the outstanding educational proponent of which has been John Dewey. Dewey's belief that the intellect is an instrument for living has directly led to a lowering of intellectual rigour in our own education. . . . Indeed, there is a new type of student who is a product of the Deweyite influence in our schools. Such students have been taught by the modern world to have an unlimited sense of their own freedom but have learned in their education no intellectual interest or discipline to give content to that freedom. . . . To sum up, the pragmatist's conception of freedom ultimately fails because it does not understand the relation between freedom and thought, that is, between freedom and spiritual law."

The final chapter of Dr. Grant's book is entitled "Law, Freedom and Progress."

For one thing, he concludes: "None of our traditional theologies seem to me to be able to provide an adequate account of what it is to think on absolute morality. From this it follows that the systematic formulation of a categorical moral law is a prime necessity for Canadians." Kant is quoted: "If the law is to be moral it must be a law which is freely obeyed. It is not a moral act to obey the law except in freedom." This will remind some of us of the phrase in the Book of Common Prayer, "whose service is perfect freedom." "To use Kant's metaphor, in morality men self-legislate the law. Yet the question immediately arises how this spirit of independence proper to morality can be reconciled with the spirit of dependence proper to adoration."

Thus we come back to what we would like to call authentic conservatism, based, as it should be at the heart of it, on natural law and an organic development of a balanced political system *versus* the liberalistic attitude of a freedom unregulated or restrained by any compunctions, or, as presented in another outstanding book reviewed about a year ago in these pages, *Freedom Wears a Crown* by John Farthing, the concept of freedom with an awareness of responsibility *versus* liberty to exploit anything for what appears of advantage.

Dr. Grant's views are on the side of order, of rightness. They are also on the side of a sense of freedom which he feels was born in its greater strength at the time of the Reformation. To see these together in wholeness, he feels, requires some real steps in thinking not yet taken.

—D. STEWART.

Shades of Mond-Turnerism

I.C.I. News, Calcutta, October 1959, under the heading "In Keeping With I.C.I. Tradition", reports the signing of a five years agreement between I.C.I. (India) and the I.C.I. and Associated Companies Employees' Union commenting that "Similar bipartite agreements had been concluded in the past and another Agreement this year emphasises the faith of the management and union in joint consultation and collective bargaining . . ."