

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGELER

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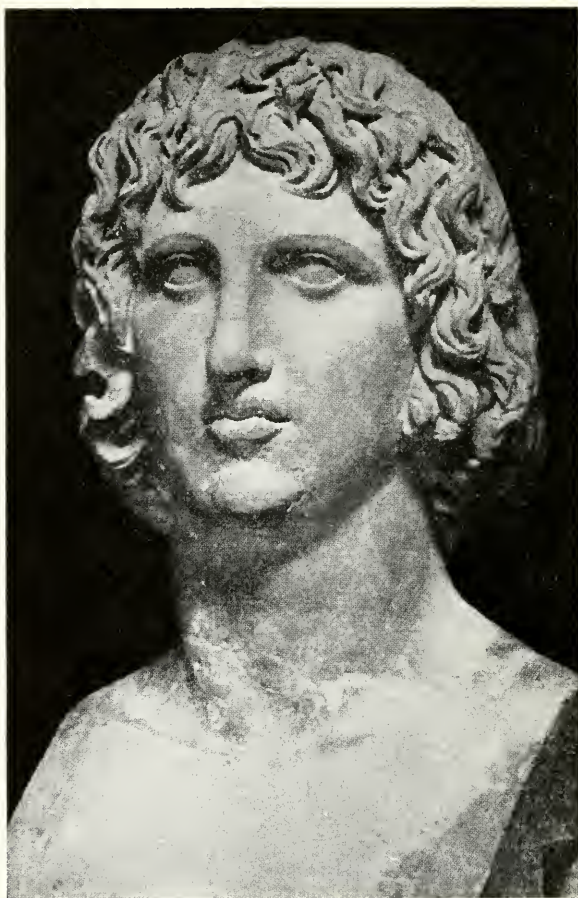
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VIRGIL

Bust in the Capitol, Rome

Frontispiece to The Open Court

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FROM SLUMBER TO WAKING

BY EDMUND NOBLE

THE universe, organic nature and man included, is a system of relations, of things connected, interdependent, helping to determine each other, and the efficient conduct of human life depends largely on our knowledge of these relations as they exist and are being developed. Nature works for relations from the electrons up, first forming matter units, then compacting these into substances, and finally giving rise to the material aggregates we call worlds, many of them linked up into systems, all of them more or less inter-related through gravitation. It is as a result of this process that highly complex forms of matter arise on the earth, to culminate in life: that plants and animals set up within themselves related structures and processes for carrying on self-maintenance, itself involving relations with the environment; and that after man appears individuals enter into co-operative relations with each other and much looser relations are set up, first between tribes and finally between nations.

Such constitutional relations as are involved by the nature of power undergo no suspension or disturbance. But after matter arises from the ether there is ample scope for absolutism and relativism in varying degrees. There are "loose" material units everywhere in the universe going much their own way so far as other units are concerned; vast aggregates of matter, suns and nebulae, are in process of being correlated into systems; perhaps, owing to distance, some of these tendencies, always disturbed and delayed, sometimes reversed, will remain in the making. Yet the same universe which is their home shows everywhere the march towards relation, with the connections and interdependencies imposed, not chosen. This is conspicuously the case in the non-living and lower

organic realms; it is also, if in less degree, the case with most of the relations set between human beings, for men move into them more by virtue of inherent tendencies than by plan aforethought. Without any striving towards an end consciously held in view the elaborate mechanisms of the living body were developed and organized; without conscious striving towards such an end the sensations were differentiated into classes and each of them received its conceptual name. Similarly unplanned in all languages were their parts of speech and grammatical forms; so the whole mechanism of knowledge and intercourse was evolved without anything of the nature of a program followed out or an end consciously pursued to its result. In like manner, our ancestors did not decide beforehand that division of labor and social co-operation would be useful: they moved into these adaptations as so many paths of least resistance, rendered such by the nature of the human organism and of the conditions by which it was confronted.

But the merely dynamic drift towards balanced motions and structures would have left evolution in its elementary stages. Beyond the elementary requirements of life, the mechanisms for which are imposed rather than chosen, there is the field of the thinking-out process, the successful exploitation of which has always had and must continue to have an enormous part in the promotion of human welfare. Much knowledge useful to man has been won without zeal in the pursuit of it, yet by far the most important acquisitions of the human mind are the result of the quest which is rewarded by conquest. And the advance of knowledge in all fields, especially in that of science, has been from its earliest beginnings an advance in the recognition, the comprehension and the utilization of relations. Progress of this kind might well be called the master art: the more man perfects himself in it the more will he be able to bend nature to his will, to adjust himself to his kind, and to increase the sum of human welfare. But it must be an advance from relations merely imposed to relations thought out and to that extent originated. Hitherto this art has been practised in progressive ways mainly by the thinkers, the discoverers and the inventors. Men in the mass, so far as the conscious processes are concerned, tend to "get along" with as few relations as possible and with as little knowledge of relations as possible. To concrete situations imposed, in the narrower acquaintance with and manipulation of things, they may show surprising alertness. Yet through it all the absolute attitude dominates them. They are supremely con-

cerned with the "here" and the "now," with the personalities and events that touch them intimately, with the show and noise of that part of the world in which their lot has been cast. They cling stoutly to things as they are, with only a minimum of concern regarding things as they might and ought to be. Lacking any adequate sense of their relation to others in either past or present, lacking also in knowledge of how they are related to life in general, these average representatives of humanity go on treating objects and events as largely unconnected, as existing and as occurring in their own right, as having an independent, a self-sourced value. The condition thus described resembles that in which the individual occasionally finds himself when meeting situations "absent mindedly." He enters a room in search of something, only to realize, for a moment or two, that his mind is not oriented on the object required. In a similar condition, for a like brief interval, he finds that the newspaper headlines, easy as it is to read them, fail to communicate their meaning value. So for a brief interval after arising from sleep the links which connect him with life fail of renewal: it requires an effort to adjust himself to the day's situation. And his return to it, as in all the other cases, is an awakening from the slumber of absolutism to the sense of relations.

Intellectual absolutisms—the taking of things as complete in themselves—come out in most of our intellectual operations. The names we give to objects imply all sorts of relations, yet these are not consciously recovered in our thought activities. We attend only to "face values," and never with such neglect of content as when we pronounce gregariously such slogans as "truth," "equity," "justice," "freedom," "culture," and "democracy." Our neglect or distortion of causal relations, with superstition furnishing the chief example, is notorious. We find it convenient to think of objects as being really "hot" or "cold," instead of being in different degrees of molecular motion. Our estimates of size depend mainly on the objects with which we happen to be familiar; we call a sand grain small, but how often do we contrast it with the electrons, millions of which go into the atom, itself invisible in our most powerful ultra-microscopes? A mountain is "big" for us, but what of the star Antares, recently estimated to have a diameter of 400,000,000 miles? A man is "old" when he is 70; a loaf is "old" when it has been left a few days uncut. An American reverts for 50 or a hundred years to something he calls old in his nation's life; a European expands the retrospect to 500 or a thousand; the historian's

range is ten times greater, for the ethnologist "old" means the time when the Cro-Magnons lived in Europe 25,000 years ago, and the student of geology looks back for his antiquity for a billion or more years to the age in which the earth's crust was formed. Meanwhile the average man treats as matters of course the length of our day and year and the regular recurrence of the seasons, nor would his mental attitude towards "things as they are" be other than it is were the day a month long, the years extended to fifty or a hundred of ours, and human lives proportionately lengthened out. And when he disbelieves in evolution it is mainly because it has not, like the making of a statue or the erection of a building, been an achievement before his eyes in the here and now, instead of a process requiring countless millions of years.

Reasoning and relating are bound up together, and both are largely swept aside by the absolute attitude. In this a prominent place is held by the individual's tendency to overestimating himself, his immediate environment and the events that occur within it. That sort of conceit, developing into group-egotism, has its most general form in the thought of man as "the lord of creation"—in the pride with which, ignoring the countless millions of other worlds, he occupies and dominates what Flammarion has called "the microscopical divisions of a little globule into several ant-hills." Its particular form gives us what we call "personality," and that avalanche of autobiographies and "memoirs" which seems to grow in volume with every passing year. Ours is an age when the flash of a ribbon or the glow of a gown often counts more in the popular mind than the wisest utterance of the past or the profoundest intellectual appeal to the present. Of what value are these compared with the events in which we are so eager to take part, from the last theatrical performance or "movie show" we attended to our share in the city's reception of its latest incoming "celebrity?" Conversations have become mostly of the "Dick, Tom, and Harry" type through inability to concentrate on serious subjects, or for fear lest they might be found disagreeable. Yet "smart" talking is still a recommendation: one who can "rattle off" the few words he knows and the few thoughts of which he is capable gets the estimation denied to those of slower speech and richer intellectual resources. Compare the lack of effect produced by a public discourse packed with ideas but delivered minus oratorical adornments with the "whirlwind speech" of some political candidate who knows how, by loudness of voice, gesture and facial expression, to carry his audience "off its feet."

All the while, on wheels or afoot, the citizen is kept alert to the here and now by the billboards, the illuminated signs and the newspapers. At home or abroad he is lavishly supplied with those useful aids to his activities, the local "happenings," and they bulk large in his imagination; somebody, they remind him, is always doing this, somebody always saying that. It matters not that a day later he will have forgotten most of the news thus eagerly acquired. Morning and evening he must return again to the sources and again relegate their yield to oblivion. Yet this "orgy of reading," as Ferrero has called it, with his thought on trashy books as well as on the indispensable newspaper, goes on in every country that calls itself civilized, involving far too many in what Schopenhauer described as "the foolish habit of reading nothing but what has just been printed." And wireless is another displayer of the here and now which the average citizen cannot ignore if he is to enjoy, on common footing with his fellow men, the benefits and wonders of radio. Day in and day out, week in and week out, flows the richly freighted tide of vibrations, some of it as musical performances, much of it as addresses, speeches, harangues and "deliverances" of all kinds, the bulk of them not in tune with the listener's mental trends and yielding only occasional contributions to his intellectual improvement.

At the beginning of egoism and its vagaries, its blunders and its disasters is the notion most men have that they "run" their own bodies and are in that sense captains of their souls and masters of their fate. Absolutism of the self—the view of it as unrelated, as quasi-spontaneous rather than as originated independently of our conscious utilization and guidance of it—comes out in the promptings of all sorts to which we yield as if they were chosen rather than imposed. Appetites, impulses, emotions, are all of them idealizations of what can be traced to physically organic causes; pleasure and pain are just as certainly founded on physical processes which have undergone that kind of transformation. Yet we treat these lures and dissuatives as the reality and fail even more profoundly in our subservience to them. A view taking relations into account for any given situation would "look before and after," with pondering over past experience and alertness to possible consequences. But the absolutist treats the "now" condition as the problem in its entirety, and reacts in ways of which his more deliberate judgment would disprove. Hence the yielding to moods of despondency, the loose rein given to affections and resentments; hence anger, hasty

words, quarrels and violence itself. Anti-social conduct of all kinds, whether due to temporary lapses or habitually persisted in, has the same failure at its root: all around us we see individuals who break loose, "run wild," treat themselves as absolutes, as unrelated, and thus make work for the criminal courts, the penitentiaries and the goals. And it is due to the milder yet not less serious form of the ego attitude that we have the "population problem" on our hands, and that social reformers are calling in eugenics to improve the quality of the race and safeguard future generations.

Observe, also, how concentration on individual interests takes effect when it is widened out to solidarity with a group or class. Men of a particular calling usually see things from its particular point of view or "frame of reference." Each has a special outlook on the world derived from the ways in which he "gets his living" in it, upon the people with whom he must associate, and upon the general influences that reach him within his occupation. The professions may be said to lead in this form of introspection, as illustrated by the lawyer, constantly dealing with clients and committed to more or less of court practice; the educator, whose problems are those of pedagogy; the legislator, zealous in prescribing metes and bounds; the physician, engaged in the fight against disease; the clergyman, campaigning in the interest of spiritual health; and by every type of specialist, from the engineer who builds a bridge to the biologist who dips down to the chromosomes for the secret of heredity. It is only here and there that such workers as these succeed, by use of the relating faculty, in relegating their vocation to its proper place in the scheme of things—only rarely that the trying demands of a profession give them either desire or leisure to strengthen their grasp of it with a really "all-round" view. For them, as for all kinds of toilers, from the floor-walker to the bank clerk, from the farm laborer to the factory "hand," there are special "atmospheres" to be reckoned with, under the influence of which the so-called "occupational complex" is developed. Dissolve this complex, and there would still remain the "group psychology" under the urge of which the individual so often, in his sense of relation to the crowd, allows himself to ignore those larger duties of relation which he owes to society as a whole.

A like concentration on the self and the self-group, on its conditions and experiences, is observable in the domain of religion. As many young people are led to take up the occupations of their fathers, so many adopt unquestioningly the creeds and the church

affiliations of the families into which they are born. Race determinations influence men's attitude towards religion profoundly. The Occident is mainly Christian; the Orient goes its own way, and, despite the efforts of missionaries, the chances of "the twain" ever meeting are still remote. And there are divisions within the divisions that separate East from West—Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism in China; Buddhism, Brahmanism, Vishnuism and Jainism among the Hindus, Zoroastrianism in India and Persia, and Mohammedanism throughout Islam. Even in the Occident the worshippers, though avowedly Christian, split up into denominations the points of difference between which resist all attempts at unification. "Exchanges of pulpits" from time to time show the underlying oneness of the religious attitude, yet the differences of special creed and ceremonial survive. Shall there be an altar in the church, with an elaborate background of sacred objects and symbols, or a plainly furnished platform from which the service is directed? Must the preacher come forward in simple civilian attire and unattended, or clothed in glittering vestments and ushered in by a procession of cross-bearers chanting as they go? Will speaking and singing suffice, or must the congregation receive some stereotyped formula read out from the pulpit with equally stereotyped responses of its own? Shall the sermon be limited to religious themes, or is the exhorter at liberty to branch out into other fields, taking up for comment any topic which happens to be uppermost in the public mind? Whatever answers to such questions may be forthcoming, each denomination clings to its own self-group attitude, sometimes holding its servants to loyalty by the threat of the heresy trial, far less frequently prefiguring the danger of eternal torment to those who persist in belonging to some other fold.

Absolutism may also be observed in the political churches, and it arises out of the same failure to relate. In many respects party politics are kept up as purely divisive expedients, with no substantial difference behind them: as James Bryce wrote, "each party pummels, not its true enemy, but a stuffed figure set up to represent that enemy." As a rule that has scarcely any exceptions, the program of the one political denomination is hateful to the other. If hard times come, whether in business, industry, commerce, or politics, it is "the party in power" which is held responsible. "Our party" is always absolutely right, and the "other party" just as absolutely wrong. Slogans sound out during election campaigns pervaded with the same self-group consciousness of wisdom and

right. Each of the parties spreads abroad the scroll of its achievements for the admiration of the country, yet in the same record the opposing party finds the evidence of blundering, of incompetence, even of fraud itself. In every political contest, as well as in all preparations for it, there are "blocs," "rings," and bosses to influence and direct the work of the "machine." Even after a decision has been reached at the polls, narrow insistence on particular policies, interested opposition to other policies, follow the successful side all through its exercise of power. It is true that no practical substitute for government by parties has yet been found—true also that no successful attempt has been made to modify the principle of majority rule. Yet there is nothing in the political system which should prevent the compromises which sanity requires, and nothing in party government which can justify the enthronement of the ego-group prejudice at the cost of reason itself.

Failure to relate, the take-it-for-granted attitude, a deeply rooted disposition to found judgment and action on the things of the here and now, all these go far to explain the wastes and failures of business, the clashes between capital and labor, the shortcomings and over-doings of legislation, the inturnd policies which the nations pursue towards each other. Our neighborhood, town or city is naturally the chief concern: unless business or other personal interests impel us we trouble ourselves little about other communities, and less in the degree that distance separates us from them. The nation itself may be neglected save as the doings of some particular government affect our lot. There is much thinking, as Prof. E. A. Ross phrased it, in terms of the section instead of in those of the country. Each of the countries continues to concentrate on the "here" of its position in the planet, and to busy itself, outside trade and travel, as little as possible, at least while peace conditions prevail, with the "theres" of the other countries. Great occasions, such as the need of help after some catastrophe, or the call for recruits in some military campaign, do occasionally rouse us to the existence of an outside world. But how often, apart from such experiences, does that world, whose doings influence us for good or evil in thousands of ways, enter into our thinking as a factor to be reckoned with? Most of us know no more of its great countries and teeming populations than the glimpse of them to be obtained in newspapers or books, or from the rare and distant contacts we make with "foreigners within our gates," themselves living more or less isolated lives in the colonies which they form. Even when the

privileges of foreign travel are open to us our ignorance of foreign tongues usually bars us out from direct speaking acquaintance with the peoples visited. By steamer and railroad we are flashed from country to country, from capital to capital, from art treasure to natural wonder; we return home with our emotional nature stimulated by a flood of agreeable impressions, but with little of the intellectual awakening that should have been ours. Is it strange, taking all these shortcomings and deprivations into account, that man's failure in the sense of relation should so frequently range the peoples who belong together into mutually hostile camps, and that the pugnacity of the ego, as ready for a public prize-fight as for a personal quarrel, should need only the occasion to expand into the collective and culminating absolutism of war?

It is a long road from slumber to waking. Man has been on the way since the first babblings of human speech, and the goal is yet far from being in sight. But progress has been made, progress is still in the making, and its rate may be accelerated if only the resources available are utilized and the optimism needed for the effort held at sufficiently high tide. Self must be cared for. Attention is needed to the here and now. Our first duty is to orient ourselves efficiently among the objects and events of our surrounding—to be alert to the concrete and immediate in whatever way or shape they may present themselves. There must be interest, and much of it, in the town and city, in the province or state, if those divisions of the larger community are to prosper; the nation itself needs to be buttressed in the affections of its people, or it will be like the house built upon sand. But these elementary requirements of sane living in no way interfere with the wider outlook, and are not likely to be fulfilled to advantage without it. Perceived or unperceived, subtly or obviously, the absolutist attitude defeats its own ends by depriving those submerged in it of the beneficial reactions that flow in from due recognition of the relational verities near and remote. There is no reason why the indispensable interest in self, in the community, in the nation, should not go hand in hand with the wider interests in which they are inextricably bound up—no reason why egoism, "little-townism," provincialism, even patriotism, should not accept the enlargement that awaits them from recognition of likeness where the narrower outlook puts only difference, and of unity where absolutism sees only division. Sense needs to be brought more and more under the control of mind for the due ordering of ego and ego-group impulses, for the elimination of the

take-it-for-granted attitude, for the substitution of the view of things and events as self-sourced, with only their "face-value" considered, by the view of them as system-sourced, with attention to their time-and-space values. Supremely important and insistently called for is an alertness to relations such as shall bring in the there for the comprehension of the here, the past for the illumination of the present, the now and the then, the here and the yonder, for guidance in our venturings towards the future. If science could do its marvellous work through relations discovered and utilized, why should not human life benefit by an ampler realization of them in its own sphere, thus aiding the individual to more helpful contact with his fellows, promoting harmony and co-operation between communities, and ending the slumber which still keeps the nations apart—ending it by the method Goethe must have had in mind when in "Faust" he stressed the relations that prevail in a universe which is made up of relations?

Wie alles sich zum Ganzen webt—
Eins in dem Andern wirkt und lebt!