

PSYCHOLOGY AND THE NEW HUMANISM

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WHAT a title—New Humanism which dreads the future, looks to and worships the past; a movement behind which one recognizes the echoes of deductive speculative thinking for the past two thousand years; a movement in which rationalization plays the chief part; a movement that throws psychology overboard as a pseudo-science, yet grounds itself upon psychological assumptions; a movement that does not realize the instability of all subjective standards in literature, art, morals, and religion; a movement in search of an objective basis for conduct; a movement grounded on the false assumption of the Middle Age logic, that words have fixed meanings in them: a movement looking for objective stability where only relative, partial subjective stability exists such are the characteristics this title suggests. So strong is this current that one thinks constantly of Robinson's *The Mind in the Making*, James' *Will to Believe*, or of Dewey's *How we Think*. When the great dramatist, Ibsen, was so drastically criticized for his literary departures he rightly replied: "In the world of ideals there is no stability."

But the struggle to stabilize the ideals of art, literature, morals, and religion has always been present. The struggle has given us our objective laws and commandments and a long line of stabilizing critics. They have failed because in these forms of conduct words have no fixed meaning and because the evolution of the human soul constantly furnishes us with varied and new ideals. Vast expansions take place in the use of the same words. Look at the use of the word Christianity for nearly two thousand years. Would anyone even think of maintaining that its use has been constant, either in practice or in content-belief? Think of what Chris-

tianity meant in the early days, in the Middle Ages and of what it means now. Yet it is Christianity.

Since the attack of the New Humanism seems to be on psychology, and since the Humanists constantly emphasize this fact, it seems that psychology should no longer remain silent and let the popular mind infer that the New Humanists are correct in their assertions and assumptions. They declare that "sociology and psychology are mere pseudo-sciences." P. E. More tells us that "the question at issue is thus ultimately one of philosophy and psychology." He also says: "As between the humanist and the naturalist it is the former who stands for the great affirmation; it is the latter who through obstinate ignorance or in the name of pseudo-science, limits and contracts and distorts and denies." How perfectly simple. Throw all possible scientific study of human nature over-board and then by "the great affirmation" assume as true an old ancient psychological foundation.

These assumptions are: an inherent sense of decorum, free-will, purpose, and rational guidance of conduct. However, it is perfectly clear that they were driven to assume this foundation. To assume, as P. E. More finally does that religious authority is the basis of the New Humanism is to carry us back to Medieval thinking. To assume that the Greeks were by some strange gift of the gods blessed with an intuition of true *decorum*, is not much better. Aristotle was perhaps the greatest scholar that ever walked the earth until modern times. Yet he was just human. To teach and act as if the great minds of art, music, literature and morals have all long since passed away is too pessimistic for a growing soul. With all due respect to the shades of the mighty dead, I will build by faith on the young, uncorrupted minds of the children of our generation and of generations to come. The Middle Ages furnishes us with a good example of a whole civilization being overcome by an inferiority complex. The distinguished scholar, Davidson, summed up the Renaissance as the rehabilitation of nature and the Reformation as the rehabilitation of reason. In modern psychological terms the whole transition depended upon the recovery of self-confidence,—the removal of inferiority. So there seems to have been only three possible foundations on which the New Humanism could build;—the assumption of religious authority; the reliance on ancient authority with Aristotle as chief corner stone;

or the assertion of deductive dogmas on which to build. What one really finds is the assumption of such a psychological foundation as I have named,—*which happens to be both ancient and religious.*

Let us examine briefly this psychological foundation of the Humanists. I make no claim to any knowledge of literary criticism, but I do claim some acquaintance with the fundamentals of psychology, and for many years I have given a course entitled Psychology in Literature.

The assumption of a *sense of decorum* as "that something in man's nature that sets him apart from other animals" and that makes "humanism differ from religion," followed by the assumption of free-will which "must simply be accepted as a mystery" constitutes the foundation on which Mr. Babbitt builds. When we learn historically the endless forms which *decorum* has assumed among different peoples and at different periods of human development we wonder if decorum made religion or religion made decorum. Or do they develop hand in hand? Who has been commissioned to select the original innate type which "sets man apart from the other animals"?

In our dictionaries *decorum* means "seemliness, propriety, usage required by politeness and decency"—rather a complex affair to be inherited. But politeness and decency have in the main been conduct sanctioned by religion. Have we, or do we need anything more than a combination of natural impulses and instincts of humanity on which to base both decorum and religion? An analysis of any specific human conduct will reveal the presence of tendencies and instincts common to the higher animals. The complexity of environment gives us almost unlimited variation. There are no grounds for assuming that we have something that is unnatural and that sets us apart from nature. Have not the chief contentions of religion been that man has "something in his nature that sets him apart from animals," and that free-will makes him a moral being? I fail to see how Mr. Babbitt can separate Humanism from Religion by either of his chief assumptions.

Seward Collins's attempt to protect Mr. Babbitt from the accusation of religious assumptions is equally futile. When a psychologist reads that long brutal tirade of words which Mr. Collins pours out in the *Bookman*, he wonders how such a writer can speak of others as being prejudiced and narrow-minded. He calls

the whole opposition a "myth-attack", and charges the opponents with reading into Professors More and Babbitt what they did not say. Yet he devotes half of his long article to reading into Mr. Brooks what he admits Mr. Brooks said little about; and then says: "But the point is it is actually the key to everything he has written." Perhaps he is right, but why should such a procedure be wrong when exercised by others? It is probably true that the writers on each side of this dispute are promoted consciously and unconsciously by their religious attitudes and previous training,—something quite different from their free-will. Even the U. S. Senate shows this much appreciation of psychology in appointing Judges to the Supreme Court.

The intellectual struggle for recognition of something called free-will seems to be as old as human thinking. The fact that so many seem *not free* to let go of the idea and look with dread upon all sciences that seem to threaten its validity, appears to argue more for the power of tradition and teaching than for freedom. But more than that there is a great family of beliefs that have attached themselves to this one. I have no intention of entering into a defense of either side. But I do want to offer a few suggestions concerning methods of attack and of escape for those who seem so distressed.

When Mr. Babbitt says that free-will "must simply be accepted as a mystery that may be studied in its practical effect", I fear he has stepped upon psychologically dangerous ground. Psychologists have invited all theorists to join them in a search for "its practical effects." The psychologist says "show me a simple act where adequate causes for its performance cannot be found in man's natural instincts, in his training, in his surroundings, in his physical and emotional make up, in the sum total of his mental relations, in the unconscious driving force of his endocrine glands." Nearly a quarter of a century ago the famous physician Dr. Lorand said that *will power* always means a healthy condition of the endocrine glands. Since then thousands of experiments on human individuals and animals have produced "practical effects." Many a poor Cretin child without will or push has been made into a normal being.

Let us open up a typical case in practical effects. A college student about thirty years old was sure of practical freedom. He was

asked if he felt that he could develop genuine hatred for his mother. He replied "Of course I could if I wanted to." Certainly such a universal dodging of the question can no longer exist among thinking people. We do not care anything about what he *wants*. We are seeking the forces which make him want to do so and so.

The gentleman was then asked to pick out from his long experience the one act he considered most certainly a free-will act. He said it was the night he walked the floor until 2 o'clock in the morning and decided to volunteer in the Spanish-American War. But it was soon revealed that he was president of the Y. M. C. A. in his college, that forty members had already volunteered, that his father served in the Civil War, that he had received a letter from his father on the subject just that day, that he was not married and belonged to the cadet corps. As psychologists we do not care to theorize about free-will, but to analyze the strongest practical evidence that can be produced in its favor. James long ago attempted a complete analysis of these practical examples and finally concluded that we cannot prove freedom on any practical or historical grounds. Nevertheless, he held that it was wise to assert freedom for moral ends. This we take to be the attitude of most of the New Humanists. But this attitude is built upon two wrong psychological assumptions. In the main conduct is not the result of any speculation or rational thinking which the New Humanism everywhere assumes. Even their critics seem to be laboring under the same mistake. I do not know anyone who is not either a blind worshipper of the past or has only a superficial knowledge of human nature, who still clings to the idea that man's conduct is regulated by rational thinking. I am here talking about human relations and not the building of canals and skyscrapers. Of course, he reasons much about his neighbor, Jones, about his *lost* generation, about his religion, about labor and capital. But only lift up the curtain and see what is guiding his reasoning. His original nature, his training, his associations and experiences in life will be found everywhere.

Again, I am not astonished that the Humanists should assume that we could have no moral world without the freedom of the will. Their past thinking almost insured this. But I am surprised that such a keen thinker as James should not have seen that the moral order of the universe may be as real as any other part of it, even

without freedom. May not moral responsibility be a natural part of human development by which certain lines of conduct and conformity are secured? Certainly no one would maintain that the feeling of a mother's responsibility for her children is a product of free-will; yet it has moral value.

Hunger and thirst are the safeguards to physical life. The feeling of responsibility performs a similar function for moral life. Responsibility is a moral medicine to the end of begetting healthy moral life. Man is not something apart from these internal forces, being pushed on by them; he is himself the sum total of these internal forces. Human conduct is not logic, but *feeling in action*.

This is, I suppose, what P. E. More calls a false psychology that robs life of its true values. Mainly of course because these values are not given objectively,—*dream values*, he calls them. Seward Collins cries out "pseudo-humanities of sociology and psychology." This search after objectivity, after fixed values, after the unchangeable elements in human conduct will never be satisfied without accepting objective authority, and Mr. P. E. More realizes that even Pascal and Aristotle are not sufficient. That is good news. Let us hope, that we will not return to the days when no one could graduate from Oxford without signing a pledge not to teach anything contrary to Aristotle. It is Aristotle's false law about the excluded middle that gives Mr. More and others much trouble. Man is either good or bad. A thing is either right or wrong, natural or supernatural. The sooner we forget such playing with words the better. Mr. More is distressed over Pascal's saying that, "unless man has the support of the supernatural, he will fall irresistibly into Stoic pride or Epicurean relaxation." Even if he should escape what he calls *dream values* by accepting objective authority he is still confronted with the fact that words have no fixed meanings, and that all assumed objective value must be interpreted subjectively.

"Thou shalt not lie" is a general formula of definite moral value, but it will always have varied interpretations. In what ways may one lie? By what standard will you declare any specific statement a lie? Has the physician who *acts* as if you are going to get well when he believes you will die, lied to you?

Values grow out of human needs, human desires, and the teach-

ings and experiences of the ages. When we believed "this world a wilderness of woe," wealth was not only valueless but dangerous. But why should values that so originate be called dream values? Those of us who believe in evolution believe that nature is continually begetting new products. Why could not the moral order be one of them? There seems to be no reason except that Aristotelian dualism might suffer therefrom.

It seems as if the Humanists are playing with a half dozen psychological assumptions all wrapped up together. P. E. More says: "Now in one sense humanism takes its stand unhesitatingly on the affirmation of purpose. Its animus against Naturalism is based on the evident fact that the rejection of free-will deprives life of any possibility of purpose." Is this really true or only one of the "great affirmations"? Is it theoretically or practically true? Can we escape the fact that animals everywhere manifest purpose? I know there are some psychologists who deny this. But I am not one of them. One of the interesting contradictions of our Behavioristic friends is their determined *purpose* to convert the rest of us. Children manifest push and purpose in a variety of ways, long before they have been corrupted by our theological beliefs. Physicians tell us that push and purpose depend largely upon certain secretions of the glands which they can now in part artificially supply. Not long ago a physician called my attention to a young lady who had so much push and purpose that a third of her thyroid gland had to be removed.

When I was a boy, I was much confused to learn that the Presbyterians in my community did not believe in the freedom of the will. Yet they never lacked in purpose to convert the rest of us, and, to their credit, no group in the community showed any more push and purpose for the good of the community. All their actions were directed with an eye to the *future good*. Could any one say that St. Augustine, John Calvin or Jonathan Edwards lacked purpose and push?

This is all due to our inability to recognize the modern scientific background of human conduct. We return to that false assumption that conduct depends on *rationalized beliefs*. So all of the assumptions of the New Humanism are ancient and, whether true or false, smell of the ages. The freedom of the will is the chief stumbling block in the whole fabric. When we come to realize that will is

only the resultant of all the forces acting on us at any one time, that conduct is chiefly the result of concentrated feelings and that we may have a moral world without free-will, it is like the passage from blackest night to brightest day. You may call it "obstinate ignorance," if you like, and we will call the "great affirmation" arrogant ignorance.

No, Mr. Collins, this is neither a "gas-attack" nor a "myth-attack." The myths are all on the other side. They reach back to the story of Adam and Eve, to the anthropomorphic conception of man, inherent in the story of creation. It is a struggle between assumptions and "great affirmations" concerning human conduct on one hand and of a modern scientific study of conduct on the other. The psychologist says: "We are just beginning a scientific study of human conduct. We realize that our shortcomings are many. There may be insurmountable difficulties ahead, but we have no intention of turning back. The present facts, inadequate as we know them to be, compel us to a different view of human nature. Just where other facts will lead us, we do not know. We may even prove your "great affirmations," but until we do we must so far as *possible* proceed as any other science proceeds. We are entirely indifferent whether we shall establish Aristotelian dualism or modern monism. We naturally wonder why you do not attack modern chemistry and physics. They have done more than any other science to interfere with free-will, to establish a monistic conception of the universe and even the subjective interpretation of all things than the "pseudo-sciences" of which you speak. Do you know that those deeply versed in these sciences constantly remind us of the subjectivity of the whole scientific structure?"