

Reviews

CRITIQUE OF RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY, by *Walter Kaufmann*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958. xvii+325 pp. \$5.00.

This is an uncomfortable book to read, not because the prose is difficult (except for a few Germanisms), but because, in spite of the well-marked subsections, it is seemingly disjointed in its organization. The reader finds himself throughout in a running verbal battle with the author, objecting to a statement here, resenting an attitude there, and often wondering at the audacity of a man who can assume that what appears to be a random collection of jottings taken from the flyleaves of books in his library can be foisted on the public as a serious volume of philosophy. However, after one finishes the book, he recognizes that the author, though he has come to no conclusions, has done precisely what he set out to do—"to show the utter inadequacy of the popular pictures [of religion and philosophy], to see the familiar in new perspectives, to make suggestions for a new map—and to stimulate thought" (page 158).

The reader who exerts himself to catch the faintest notes of a unifying theme will undoubtedly be rewarded, even though he perhaps may never know whether what he thinks he hears is the motif intended by the author or even the pattern perceived by other readers. The thread which has helped this reviewer through the maze is one labeled "ambiguity," a word whose frequent use cannot have been an accident. The import of this word

must be understood against the background of Kaufmann's conception of truth. Its pursuit (and he consistently emphasizes "the excitement of the search for truth" [page xvii] rather than the complacency attached to its petrification in dogmas) is "the quest to fashion what is not bounded by the sense of sight or sound nor even by language" (page 47). Thus whenever we attempt to embody truth in a sentence, we construct something about which we cannot ask "Is it true or false?" but only "How true or false is this statement after we have interpreted it in its context?" (cf. page 55). It is quite consistent with this view that the history of philosophy, which the author calls a "history of heresy," should appear to him as a "series of snapshots in flight," and that he should praise Nietzsche for the fact that he "kept seeing things while writing." In the long line of those multifarious insights which constitute the history of philosophy, Kaufmann discerns certain "timeless tendencies," such as those of the Enlightenment and romanticism, exemplified in our day by positivism and existentialism—each embodying an important aspect of the truth (page 24). Because of the difficulty of using simple, straightforward language to express the complex nature of truth, the author seizes upon the word "ambiguity" (it might have been "paradox" or "contradiction" or "inconsistency") to shadow forth the clash, or the amalgam, of opposites, which he considers the hallmark of

truth. Thus he characterizes as ambiguous all statements about God, the stories of the Old Testament, the poetry of Taoism, the Zen concept of *satori*, the writings of Sophocles and Kafka, the Haggadah exegesis of Hebrew scripture, and, indeed, all the ultimate statements of human conviction, especially if they are "responsible" ones and have grown out of "encounter after encounter" (page 291).

What is striking about this position, in addition to its ultimate implications, which are manifold, is that it sets Kaufmann, although born abroad, squarely within an important American tradition—one which derives at least in part from the Orient. In so far as his conclusions center around the term "ambiguity," they have much in common with the Jain doctrine of *syadvada*, which holds that every judgment is a true one from the point of view from which it is made, and that ultimate truth would encompass judgments from all possible points of view. Emerson's "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds," the product of such thinking, has attained almost the status of an American proverb. Kaufmann rightly points out, with the help of a German critic, that the attempts by Westerners to construct an *Urgita* have all foundered because what the Europeans saw as "contradictions and leaps of thought" in the *Gita* were probably not experienced as such by the Indians, who do not consider pantheism and theism to be mutually exclusive. Likewise, the Eastern concept of "the essential circularity of truth" is one stressed by both Emerson and T. S. Eliot, as well as the injunction to risk everything for the largest truth and to make sure that one always functions as a disturber of intellectual complacency—Kaufmann's role.

If what has been said thus far in this review is a complete misunderstanding of the author's intention, that is because the reviewer has no other choice than to trace as best he can "the pattern in the carpet," even though the author is most caustic in his criticism of those—Toynbee, Bultmann, *et. al.*—who choose only the facts which they can fit into a pattern and reject all others. Kaufmann calls this philosophical gerrymandering. But it would seem that there is no other way to begin to make sense out of the chaotic facts of existence—or even of this book—and that if no one pattern is allowed to solidify, and if one's idols are changed frequently, no permanent damage can result. Though Socrates, one of Kaufmann's mentors, held that the unexamined life is not worth living, he nevertheless converged on at least tentative conclusions without endangering the intellectual flexibility of his public.

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THE INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS OF AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES: AN INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS. East Lansing, Michigan: Institute of Research on Overseas Programs, Michigan State University, 1958. vii+323 pp. \$3.00, cloth; \$2.00, paper.

This is the first publication of the Institute of Research on Overseas Programs at Michigan State University. For its limited purpose it does a careful and useful inventory job, which invites the hope that its later studies on the impact of overseas programs will receive wide circulation. The title is somewhat misleading, and will no doubt cause disappointment for many students of international relations who grab the book eagerly, as did this reviewer, expecting to find