

GENERAL SCIENCE

Religion and Being Good Not Necessarily Connected

Theory Advanced That Religion Is Culmination Of Tendency of Organism To React to Whole Situation

A SCIENTIFIC view that there is no necessary connection between religion and whether a person is good or evil was boldly presented to the second annual Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion meeting at Columbia University by Dr. Hudson Hoagland, Clark University physiologist.

Stating as a fact that "many, if not most, scientists are agnostics," Dr. Hoagland challenged religionists and some philosophers with the idea that the agnosticism of the scientists is as deeply ingrained as is the religious faith of other people.

Good and evil, Dr. Hoagland contended, refer to that which is good and bad for a particular organism at a particular time.

"Thus ethics may be something quite independent of religion," he said, "although when sound ethics can be combined with the basic religious drive, as has often happened, desirable social conditions are likely to follow. On the other

hand, when bad ethics become combined with a religious drive such as that behind Nazism, bad social conditions will follow.

"Scientists in general believe strongly in certain ethical activities and in ideals controlling them. Empirically there is such a thing as the good life, and one need not justify it by supernatural sanctions. The lives of such men as Socrates, Christ, and Lincoln, in contrast to Nero, Napoleon, and Hitler speak for themselves. Most agnostic scientists are as ready to fight for their ideals as they would be if they believed them to be sanctioned by God—or by science for that matter."

Dr. Hoagland explained that all that we know is a product of the functioning of our nervous systems and that our neurosensory apparatus is itself a direct product of biological evolution. One of the most fundamental characteristics of a biologically successful organism is that it reacts to situations as a whole.

"Religion appears to me," said Dr. Hoagland, "to be a culmination of this basic tendency of organisms to react in a configurational way to situations. We must resolve conflicts and disturbing puzzles by choosing some sort of configuration, and the religious urge appears to be a primitive tendency, possessing biological survival value, to unify our environment so that we can cope with it. This same basic urge is perhaps the source of esthetic pleasure in art and in science. Since art forms and scientific theories are limited in their scope, more extensive satisfaction is derived from religious interpretations of the meaning of life. These are especially satisfying if they can unify cosmology and views about values in one theology.

"The same motivation is the main-spring of many social philosophies which give a basis for extrapersonal unity of belief and action. For this reason the totalitarian faiths of the Nazis, Fascists and Communists appear to stem from the same basic biological source as does the faith of the devoutly religious man. The very name, totalitarian state, is suggestive of this."

Dr. Hoagland's paper, which resulted from group discussions in New England, was among those discussed at the opening sessions of the five-day conference devoted to the relation of science, philosophy and religion to the democratic way of life.

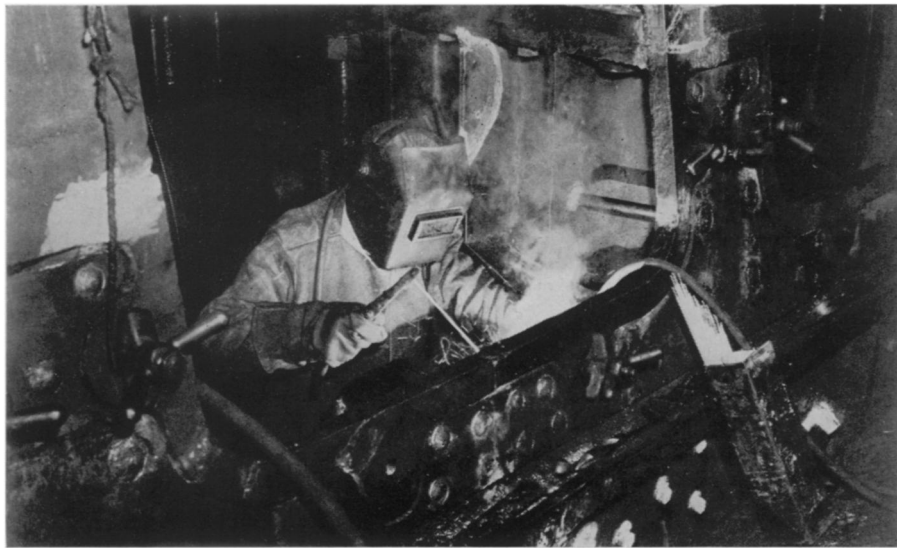
Religious people and agnostic scientists alike, Dr. Hoagland emphasized, can and should stand together in opposition to totalitarian threat that stresses the all-importance of the state and degrades the individual to insignificance. He urged the conference to promote a world federation too strong to be attacked and capable of popular self-government after the manner of our own federal government.

Science News Letter, September 20, 1941

Set Directions, Not Ends

DON'T WORK toward set ends, but instead strive in a desired direction, Dr. Margaret Mead, anthropologist of the American Museum of Natural History, advised the conference as a result of her studies of primitive peoples.

"A clear picture of the end—a blue print of the future, of the absolutely desirable way of life—has always been accompanied by the ruthless manipulation of human beings in order to fit them, by the use of rack, torture, concentration camp if (Turn to page 191)



REPAIRING SABOTAGE

After the Italian cargo vessel S. S. Villaperosa was sabotaged by the smashing of the bedplate of the engine into literally thousands of pieces, the job of putting this nautical humpty-dumpty together again was accomplished by electric arc welding. This photograph was made by the manufacturers of the welding equipment, the Lincoln Electric Company.