

Dialog on Olympus

Education

WALTER LIPPMANN, in *American Inquisitors: A Commentary on Dayton and Chicago* (Macmillan):

Socrates: I don't understand you. You say there were many people in your day who believed that God had revealed the truth about the universe. You then tell me that officially your citizens had to believe that human reason and not divine revelation was the source of truth, and yet you say your state had no official beliefs. It seems to me it had a very definite belief, a belief which contradicts utterly the belief of my friend, St. Augustine for example. Let us be frank. Did you not overthrow a state religion based on revelation and establish in its place the religion of rationalism?

Bryan: It's getting very warm in here. All this talk makes me very uncomfortable. I don't know what it is leading to.

Socrates: I don't either. If I did, I should not be asking questions. What is your answer, Mr. Jefferson?

Jefferson: I'll begin by pointing out to you that there was no coercion of opinion. We had no inquisition.

Socrates: I understand. But you established public schools and a university?

Jefferson: Yes.

Socrates: And taxed the people to support them?

Jefferson: Yes.

Socrates: What was taught in these schools?

Jefferson: The best knowledge of the time.

Socrates: The knowledge revealed by God?

Jefferson: No, the best knowledge acquired by the free use of the human reason.

Socrates: And did your taxpayers believe that the best knowledge could be acquired by the human reason?

Jefferson: Some believed it. Some preferred revelation.

Socrates: And which prevailed?

Jefferson: Those who believed in the human reason.

Socrates: Were they the majority of the citizens?

Jefferson: They must have been. The legislature accepted my plans.

Socrates: You believe, Mr. Jefferson, that the majority should rule?

Jefferson: Yes, providing it does not infringe the natural rights of man.

Socrates: And among the natural rights of man, if I am not mistaken,

is, as you once wrote, the right not to be compelled to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves, and abhors. Mr. Bryan, I think, disbelieves and abhors the opinion that man evolved from a lower form of life.

Bryan: I do. It is a theory which undermines religion and morality.

Socrates: And you objected to being taxed for the teaching of such an opinion?

Bryan: I most certainly did.

Socrates: And you persuaded the representatives of a majority of the voters in one state to forbid this teaching in the schools they were compelled to support.

Bryan: It was an outrageous misuse of public funds.

Socrates: May I ask whether you meant that nobody should be taxed to support the teaching of an opinion which he disbelieved, or whether you meant that the majority shall decide what opinions shall be taught.

Bryan: I argued that if a majority of the voters in Tennessee believed that Genesis was the true account of creation, they had every right, since they pay for the schools, not to have the minds of their children poisoned.

Socrates: But the minority in Tennessee, the modernists, the agnostics, and the unbelievers, also have to pay taxes. Do they not?

Bryan: The majority must decide.

Socrates: Did you say you believe in the separation of church and state?

Bryan: I did. It is a fundamental principle.

Socrates: Is the right of the majority to rule a fundamental principle?

Bryan: It is.

Socrates: Is freedom of thought a fundamental principle, Mr. Jefferson?

Jefferson: It is.

Socrates: Well, how would you gentlemen compose your fundamental principles, if a majority, exercising its fundamental right to rule, ordained that only Buddhism should be taught in the public schools?

Bryan: I'd move to a Christian country.

Jefferson: I'd exercise the sacred right of revolution. What would you do, Socrates?

Socrates: I'd re-examine my fundamental principles.

Science News-Letter, July 21, 1928

What Is Matter?

Physics

BERTRAND RUSSELL, in *The Saturday Review of Literature*, says: I think that if we were to search for one short phrase to characterize the difference between the newer physics and that of past times, I should choose the following: *The world is not composed of "things"*. To the metaphysician this is no new idea, but in the past the metaphysician could not point to the technique of science as being on his side, and he was therefore unable to combat the popular metaphysics which survived contentedly alongside of his speculations. Nowadays, physicists, the most hard-headed of mankind, the people associated more than any others with the intellectual and mechanical triumphs that distinguish our epoch, have embodied in their technique this insubstantiality which some of the metaphysicians have so long urged in vain. "We are such stuff as dreams are made on" was once a piece of poetic imagination; now it is among the presuppositions of physics.

Science News-Letter, July 21, 1928

Epidemic influenza appears about every 25 years.

In the half-second between raising the heel of the foot to step forward and planting it on the ground again, a man exercises 54 muscles.

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