

The first series of lectures arranged by the department of philosophy during a summer session proved to be one of the popular features of the session this year. Dr. Charles M. Perry, head of the department, inaugurated the series with the lecture which follows. Doctor Perry, on leave of absence from the university, is editor of "The St. Louis Movement in Philosophy."

## Change and the quest for stability

BY DR. CHARLES M. PERRY

**C**HANGE breaks everything from the pound sterling to the milky way.

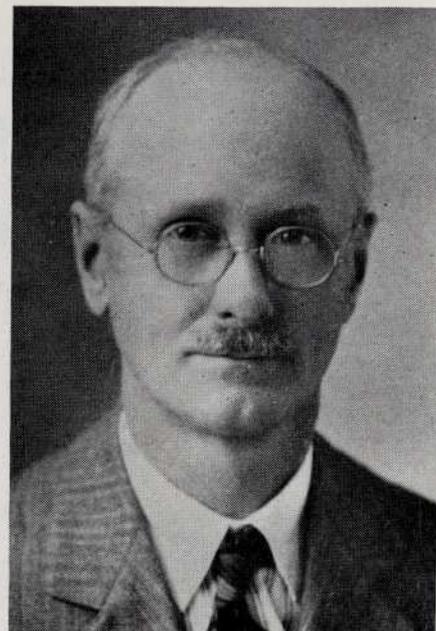
The moon, says Jeans, will some day in the remote future be broken up by gravitational tensions. The fragments will form a ring around the earth like the ring of Saturn. There will then be full moonlight all night long. The enthusiasm roused in us by this prophecy is dampened, however, by the statement that huge rocks will be continually falling upon the earth.

Social orders also are evanescent. In imagination we can see dark and savage migrations in prehistoric times streaming across illimitable plains, diverted by unearthly mountains, passing along forgotten rivers that thunder over vast niagaras. They vanish in mist. In the dawn of history we see the panorama of Egypt, Assyria and Babylon. They pass successively from the scene. The Hebrew people come into view, migrating, settling in a new homeland, building an independent kingdom, warring among themselves, going into captivity longing for the restoration of the throne of David, fighting desperately for national existence and then being dispersed over the world. Athens rises like a bright flame in the encircling gloom; then swiftly declines as a social entity though her light, like that of a burned-out star, continues for untold years to illuminate the world. Macedonia's young world conqueror, at the height of his power, hears Timotheus sing the fate of the vanquished Darius and reflects sadly upon human destiny. Rome with its marching legions, its military roads, and its brazen trumpets rises to world dom-

inion and falls of its own internal decadence before the hordes of the North. The mitred church assumes sway, labors a thousand years to discipline the savage heart of Europe, then yields reluctantly to the renaissance, the reformation, and the rise of nationalism. Industrialism comes upon the scene with its mechanizing technique and its struggle for empire. What will come next only the dialectic of history and accidents of personal leadership can tell. But something will come.

In the old college town where I took my undergraduate work a formidable mausoleum stood in the cemetery. The story was that seventy years earlier a wealthy atheist of the town had sworn that he would build a tomb that neither God nor the devil could break into. In my day a tree growing near one corner of the tomb was gradually prying one of the stones out of its place. I do not know whether God or the devil planted that tree—some of the local preachers had their own theory—but I do know that the old gentleman had not succeeded in defying universal change.

All the efforts of mankind are devoted to surviving in change, to preserving the objects of desire from change or to using change to accomplish purposes which then have to be protected from the inroads of change. The acquisition of wealth, the preserving and creating of customs, the establishing of civil government, the waging of wars are all devoted ultimately to the combatting or control of change. But all of those devices prove of only limited value. Wealth is swept away in depression, and social orders are frequently destroyed.



The most persistent effort at stability is philosophy. Philosophy may indeed upon occasion further a revolution. But its purpose is always the control of destiny.

In view of this ultimate purpose, what is the best philosophy? It is easy to tell some of the philosophies which are not the best. These inadequate philosophies may be characterized as follows: that which would abandon ultimate considerations for practical results; that which would abandon practical results to prove some idealistic thesis, like that of religion; that which, prompted by inductive modesty, would deny all certainty; and that which, discouraged by the incorrigibility of the actual, flies to the arms of the ideal in a philosophy of despair.

What kind of a philosophy, then, will best suit the needs of the various times? Only the worm is concerned exclusively with the actual, and there are those who claim that his occasional restlessness implies the ideal. Only the God is concerned merely with the ideal, and there are those who tell stories of conflicts even in heaven. Real life is an irrational mixture of the two. Philosophy will have to face this mixture candidly.

Strange as it may seem, there are absolute realities in this changing world—possibly there could be no stability at all except in a changing world.

In the first place, change is not mere evanescent flux. The past is not lost by being past. It is customary to think that a thing has no importance because it decays or that an event is negligible because it passes away. Both ambition and cynicism discount the present in favor

of an unrealized future. This attitude reduces experience to an empty appearance. At best it is only a means to an infinitely remote end. It is an achievement of stability to realize in opposition to this tendency that each moment, each changing thing, is in its own unique identity eternal. To accept this sets one free to live each moment in its distinctive character, to enjoy it with composure as it goes.

As a corollary of this principle of the immortality of the perishing comes the ethical doctrine of the worth of the perishing individual. Many years ago I read an article by Nicholas Murray Butler on the qualities of a cultivated man. It was in the days before I had read Immanuel Kant. In the article Butler made the statement that the cultivated man will practice the Kantian ethical principle that a personality should be treated as an end and not as a mere means. I read that statement several times. Suddenly its meaning came to me like a flash of light illuminating the whole world. Here was the pure essence of Christianity; here was the basis of a spiritualized democracy; in accordance with it there would be no more exploitation in factory or mine, no more slavery; no deception would be practiced anywhere; all human relations would become beautiful. In a word, the individual is not a poor departing ghost.

In the second place, actualities grow into larger and larger unities or situations. Organisms, social orders, cultures, and innumerable other levels of reality result. There is change, it is true, within these larger entities but it is contained in the definition of the entities and is predictable according to laws which are now being made ever more explicit. Actuality thus in becoming organized moves in the direction of a platonic ideal which in holding past, present, and future in one is a timeless organized whole. As the human spirit enters into this growth in organization it, too, gains stability and assurance.

Opposed to this grasp are confusion, irrational emotion, brutality and tyranny. The intellectual outlook involves the determination of what is worth doing and how to do it. It is therefore concerned with the nature of virtue, what constitutes the good life, what is the structure of the perfect society. It handles the whole problem of what man should be devoting his energies to. Should it be power, temporary security, quantitative production, pleasure, imitation of neighbors, or something else in the category of uncriticized desires? Or should it be cultivation of the personality in oneself or in others, the building of a state which shall administer justice, and the construction of the intermediate institu-

tions which furnish concrete media in which to accomplish these ends? The truly intellectual person chooses the longer program which demands perspective and self control. With this course of procedure intelligence has to be used to select the appropriate means of carrying out the plan. Here will be involved scientific method as it is used in both the natural and social sciences. Building the ideal state requires not only the humanistic prophet who can conceive it as a pattern in the heavens but also the physicist, the chemist, the bacteriologist, the economist, the political scientist. The best way of stemming the flood of change is to make it predictable by adopting a clear intellectual perspective.

With an intellectual grasp should go courage. Broad outlook often makes a man too complacent to take issue with evil. Farther vision should put a man definitely on record for the stable side of experience as against the demands of selfish interest.

Something over 2,300 years ago an old man stood before his judges in Athens. He had been living in a world not unlike our own in certain respects. Athens in the preceding seventy or eighty years had become a cosmopolitan capital. All kinds of enterprises had been undertaken and all kinds of people had walked her streets. Old customs and religions had broken down until it was generally accepted that man was the measure of all things and that each was entitled to all he could get. Socrates had taught the young men of his time that there was still authority in the world, the authority of idea and principle, which could be determined by critical analysis. As is usual in such cases, the religious conservatives and the go-getters, many of whom had been stung by his criticism, had banded together and brought charges against him. They accused him of impiety and of corrupting the youth. And here he was defending himself.

In general terms, his defense was that he had held a larger view. He had insisted on seeing farther than blind impulse and custom. In keeping with this vision he had sought to do his duty rather than to cater to the populace. He had taught for the improvement of men's souls and not for money. Believing in the merits of his case he would not beg for mercy, he would not bring his children into court to influence the judges. He did not fear death so much as he feared an unrighteous or unholy act, for it was his conviction that no evil could come to a good man in life or after death.

Socrates is the great exemplar of a calm intellectual view of life and the courage to live up to it. Everett Dean Martin tells a story of a college sopho-

more who had read the dialogues of Plato. A number of his fellows were discussing the question of who was the greatest man who ever lived. Statesmen, orators, and soldiers were mentioned. This boy said, "You fellows are just repeating what you have heard people say or have read in your history books. You will never know what a great man is till you know Socrates. I think he was the greatest man who ever lived."

Aristotle exalts the same type of courage in his picture of the great-minded man. Such a man, he says, will be, among other things, open in his likes and dislikes, he will talk and act openly, he will not yield to popular opinion and seek the productive and the profitable, but will seek the unproductive and the beautiful.

The permanent value of such great-mindedness needs no argument. Everyone is conscious of the tonic effect of the man who talks and acts openly. Such a man is inconvenient, he does not fall in with the social situation, he handles prejudices without gloves, he shows contempt for prevailing politics and business and theology. But without him we sink to the level of mere social and political adjustment. With him comes tension and vitality. Every university, every church, every political unit needs men who are inconvenient because of their grasp of more lasting things.

How can these conclusions be applied to life at the present moment?

Suppose one is suffering misfortune, as so many are at the present time. There may be no entirely successful event of one's efforts but a right attitude is better for all concerned than a wrong one. It is not necessary to concentrate, as so many do, on the downward trend alone. Life even at its worst is still many-dimensional. It is accordingly not necessary to fall into a panic of despair—one can still possess one's soul. A long-time view can be taken and some kind of a rational program of action constructed with reference to it. In such a program intellectual acquisition and the cultivation of a sense of competency can have a place. Compassion for one's fellows in misery, if not sentimental, helps to clarify the view and to stimulate invention in finding a way out. It is still possible to promote integrity and to encourage cultural influences in the community. The situation may be desperate but in this program lies sanity and hope and the health of the soul.

Even if one happens to be affluent the road to spiritual achievement is not closed. Until the advent of the depression, and even since then, the tendency to value everything in terms of money, mass-production, and magnitude of op-

eration has been dominant. In view of the foregoing discussion, men of means should adopt qualitative standards, both for themselves and for others, and place themselves imaginatively in the social process. The old marauders who became the aristocracy of England became through the centuries committed to social ends. Our own rich men can, in the course of time, as our society matures, be assimilated into the social purposes. They will find that to be a Pericles is immeasurably greater than to be a Croesus and to be an educational statesman is immeasurably greater than to be a captain of industry. They will find their self-expression, their poetry, their glory in the medium of social effort.

If one enjoys the good fortune to be a teacher of the foregoing philosophy applies in high degree. Teachers too often

have yielded to the claim that selfish interests are the main things in life. Students from high school on through college and university have accordingly been steeped in cynicism. All professions that have stood for the permanent interests of mankind have been measured by monetary standards and discredited. It is time to right-about-face, to teach that integrity, courage, and social responsibility are the glory of life. With this vision the teacher will not apologize for his profession, but will realize that if it does its duty it is the center of our national life. Just as the public schools and universities of England became the heart of the Empire so the schools and universities of America may become the heart of our great experiment in democracy.

sionals to revenge themselves on the philosopher by telling him that he does not understand their business and should keep his hands off. And to a great extent they are quite right. It is bad but it can't be helped. But if he points out their limitations he will also accept his own. The advantage of the philosopher lies only in the fact that his self-limitation is his own and is a philosophical problem.

The philosopher is interested in the whole, in the totality of life. In a just and well ordered social order he would find his intentions, his work, realized. But this idea of the true and the good necessarily remains an inward plan. It transcends the power of the philosopher. He alone remains without that external embodiment of his mind which is granted to every technician. True, he transcends the oneness of all those who are not philosophically awakened. But this transcendence remains without the "cash-value" of visible incorporation in the state. He transcends only in thought, but he has no power over the existential citizens. And we read of many philosophers who were imprisoned and poisoned and burned in their effort to live a bold, and free and critical life in the interests of justice and truth. And these extreme cases are only eminent illustrations of the real opposition and existential limitations which the philosopher has to face in his society.

A borderline between two states is neither inside nor outside of these states, but both could not exist without it. In a similar way the philosopher is neither in society, nor outside of it, but no civilized society can be without him. The idea of a good life cannot become adequately embodied in any one business or work, but no business or work can be good without looking beyond itself. In transcending itself it can find its only justification. And on the other hand, the idea of the whole is limited by historical reality. The philosopher is the limit of society and society is the limit of the philosopher. And in this mutual limitation they inevitably and inextricably belong to each other and demand each other. We must learn to stand and to understand our limitations. Willy-nilly we must be philosophical.

Let me illustrate with the perennial case of Socrates.

We find him in society as conversationalist. Others may be together because they share common business interests, or on account of habit and social traditions, or to watch a spectacle. If they seek the company of Socrates it is because they enjoy a good conversation. He likens this art to music. We might compare him with the leader of an orchestra. He draws people out and

## The philosopher in society

BY DR. GUSTAV MUELLER

EVERYBODY knows what a plumber is or a writer or a botanist, not to mention a movie star. But where in the address-book do you find the philosopher? He is like a puzzle. Turn the picture of society up and down; the philosopher is hiding. He seems to lack an honest-to-goodness work and practical people are very suspicious of him.

I shall never forget that good Swiss physician who had to see that the insurance company would not be cheated by accepting my body. He asked me what my profession was and I told him that I was a philosopher. He hesitated to put such an incredible thing in black and white. He looked at me over his glasses and said with Swiss frankness, that I was a fool. I smiled and thought that he thought that I was trying to make fun of him. After a pause he corrected himself and said: "Well, after all, we are all philosophers."

No doubt! Occasionally we all feel our limitations. And in such moments of uncertainty, of defeat and failure and death, we all of a sudden realize that the meaning of our life is not exhausted by our social specialty. Certainly perplexity and death is at least as universal as special achievements and successes. In-

dividuals and societies reach their "crisis." And then it happens that we begin to revise our foundations, to look beyond our stakes for help, to cry for "visions" and new "ideals." No wonder that the normal and secure citizen is ashamed of philosophy and desires avoiding philosophers. For the ever-presence of philosophers in all ages reminds him of the limits of his "will to live," reminds him of the fact that all is not as it might be or ought to be.

In meeting the philosopher the practical and professional expert meets his own limitation. Limits and borderlines, however, are intangible things. No wonder, the philosopher is hard to locate. He seems to be everywhere and nowhere as a sympathetic spectator and critic. For criticism is pointing out limitations and comparing special claims with larger and more comprehensive wholes. Thus he develops a sense for impartiality and justice and relativity. The critic turns into an artist of life, who knows and enjoys many and opposing values. For a moment the serenity of inner freedom smiles above the turbulence of troubled times. But let no one be deceived by this ironical smile; it is also a weakness.

It is a cherished habit of all profes-