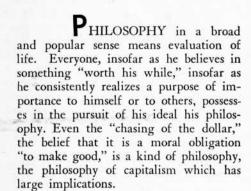
The essay which follows is the introductory lecture of a new course offered for the first time on the campus, «European literature and its philosophy.» It is given by Dr Gustav Mueller, poet, author and playwright who is associate professor of philosophy.

Literature and its philosophy

BY GUSTAV MUELLER



A trifle more technical, however, philosophy is not only to be found in this factual evaluation of life, this one sided pursuit of certain values and ideals, it is rather the reflection on them, the conscious attempt to become aware of them to weigh, compare and order them. An artist, for example, is a philosopher in that he not only wiggles his fingers, but when he asks what value or what meaning his particular art has within all arts and further when he attempts to see the meaning of art in comparison with other values of life. Philosophy evaluates life by distinguishing values and by asking what place they occupy in the whole of life. In this sense philosophy is the unifying interest in civilization, the craving for conscious clarity and unity of life. Unity of interests, tendencies, purposes in an individual is his soul or personality. Philosophy is the soul and center of a civilization.

But conscious evaluation also involves criticism. We know values tend to exaggerate their importance, to be blind for the just claims of other perhaps opposing values. This blind and measureless exaggeration, this loss of balance, is the contrary of a sane philosophical attitude. Philosophy tries to see not only the values but also their intrinsic limitations. A balanced, objective, critical, vigilant judgment is known as conscience of man. Philosophy in this sense is not only the soul but also the conscience of a civilization.

But the criticism must be constructive. It is the way in which you rate and range things with regard to their merit. Compare for instance Plato's State with Aristotle's Ethics. Both books survey the values of Greek life, make clear and unify the different ideals. But the difference in putting them together, the architecture so to speak of both systems is very different. It takes courage to have a conviction about the relative merits of ideals. Yet no man can escape this responsibility. If he does not take it consciously and intelligently, he will accept systems blindly, unawares and credulously. In this sense of personal risk and responsibility philosophy is the adventure of civilization to give meaning to existence.

Now in speaking of the philosophy of literature we do not mean to hunt for socalled influences of particular philosophers on particular writers. Nor do we mean to hunt for "wise" sayings, proverbial maxims that are found in good literature.

We rather refer to a fundamental similarity or kinship of great literature and philosophy.

For the writer also makes you aware



of the struggles, hopes and defeats of life. He also does not stay within his own private concerns but pictures in the clash of his personalities the character of his time. And if he is first-rate he even will transcend his time and portray concerns important as long as there is humanity alive. This corresponds to what we have called the reflective, unifying function of philosophy in a person or in a civilization.

The analogy goes further. The writer, the great writer, also is not satisfied with a mere portrayal or report. He also will have a convincing and unique way of "building;" he also has an "architecture" or a style. And "the style is the man," as someone long ago put it. Behind the panorama of life lies the attitude, the evaluation of things. In giving artistic form to it the writer manifests his philosophy of life.

This many will deny or misunderstand. They will protest that the artist shall never preach. But I do not say that he should. I do not advocate an explicit reasoning or moralizing. I mean the inner form of a work, the feeling of what is important and what is emphasized, that betrays a philosophy of life. An example may make this clear. When Zola in the Nineteenth century came out with his "experimental novel" theory, that the writer like a scientist should take everything as being equally important and write his novels as if they were results of laboratory investigations, he thought that he had inaugurated an "objective" epoch in literature. But what

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LITERATURE AND ITS PHILOSOPHY

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 176)

he had thereby inaugurated was merely a peculiar, in his case, a scientific philosophy of life, a bias of his epoch.

Philosophy and literature are similar but not identical. The difference lies in their medium. The vehicle of philosophy is logical thought, the vehicle of literature is the word. The word as medium of art does not point beyond itself to "things" outside of itself, but carries an emotional, imaginative fringe, it challenges you to build up an irreal, a seeming world, in which you believe as if it were a real one. Thus it emancipates you from the cares and problems of your environment and permits you to see life steady and see it whole.

And even in this differentiating medium lies a similarity to philosophy. By virtue of its entirely symbolic medium, the word, literature ranges over the realm of all the other arts. In imagination you build and chisel and paint and sing. Literature is a synthetic and therefore the most philosophical of arts. Philosophy has an analogous mystic function with regard to special sciences, whose methods and presuppositions are philosophical problems. If what has been said is valid at all, the conclusion seems to be inevitable that we should have a philosophical interpretation of literature. This philosophical interpretation should have its place side by side with a material informatory, philological method and a literary, artistic, reproductive, intuitive method. The philosophical method would be to interpret art as the symbolic expression of evaluation, which constitutes the adventurous history of philosophies of life or what is the same thing, of cultural epochs. It would have to approach great works of literature with the respect due to genial individuals, whose message is an actual challenge and a question rather than an indifferent, dead and gone fact.