Book Reviews

Philosophical Anthropology and Practical Politics. F. S. C. Northrop. Macmillan, New York, 1960. x + 384 pp. $6.50.

Among the many arguments which Northrop presents in this book, the following are the most recurrent:

1) The "practical" power-politicians of the United States and its allies and of the Soviet Union and the Peoples' Republic of China are, in fact, dangerously impractical in their fundamental presupposition about international affairs.

2) On both sides, this presupposition (put, very simply, that only might can make right) derives ultimately from the naive realism of Aristotelian physics which holds that the only true entities are those which can be immediately intuited by the physical senses. On the "Western" side, this notion was translated from physics to politics most influentially by Thomas Hobbes, with his idea that justice can derive only from a sovereign and that, therefore, sovereignty per se is justice. Such a view applied today holds, among other things, that since there is no international sovereign, there is no international justice or law in any real sense. As one illustration of this point of view, Northrop several times scathingly (and welcomely in my opinion) cites Dean Acheson's contemptuous dismissal of President Eisenhower's invocation of international law at the time of the Suez crisis. On the "Eastern" side, this presupposition derives most immediately, of course, from the dialectical materialism of Marx in which social conflict is as axiomatic as it was in Hobbe's formulation.

3) This presupposition is impractical in the sense that it commits the power-politicians on both sides, wittingly or unwittingly, to playing a game in which, as Northrop rather nicely puts it, "clubs become trumps," but in which the "clubs" are now thermonuclear weapons whose use would annihilate mankind in its present form. Those who are unwittingly committed are as dangerous as the others since they cannot analyze and therefore reorient their courses of action. One consequence of this has been that United States policy vis-à-vis the Communist bloc has been defensively "unimaginative" and has taken the initiative only in the form of Hobbesian military and economic aid power plays. The latter have endeared the United States to no one, as Northrop discusses in a number of instances at some length, although he acknowledges that intervention by the United States in Korea was a dire necessity.

4) The confusion of the power politicians, and others, in the democratic countries is confounded by the fact that they inherit, in addition to the Aristotelian-Hobbesian-concepts-by-immediate-sense-intuition tradition, another tradition which is different from the Aristotelian-Hobbesian one not only in content but in its fundamental epistemology as well. This other tradition is the Lockean-Jeffersonian political philosophy, epitomized in the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, which ultimately derives from the law of contract, as opposed to the law of status (elucidated by Sir Henry Maine), which was developed by the Roman Stoic statesmen. They, in turn, derived the law of contract from the epistemology of Plato and the non-Aristotelian Greek mathematicians. This epistemology comprises imageless concepts by postulation rather than concepts derived from immediate sensory intuition.

5) That concepts by postulation are as pragmatically "real," "hard-headed," and "down-to-earth" as concepts derived from immediate sensory intuition is asserted by Northrop essentially in two ways. First, he devotes most of chapter 3 to a rather technical discussion of certain findings of neurophysiology showing that both types of concept are products of reverberating neural circuits in the cortex. Both types of concept can and do become "trapped" in neural circuits, or, in lay terms, become fixed and accepted notions in the mind. Second, he emphasizes that the most formidable club of the naively realistic "practical" politicians and military men—the atomic bomb—is a product of concepts by postulation of the highest order. Einstein's mathematics, ultimately also derived from the non-Aristotelian postulational mathematics of the Greeks, is revealed as an epistemological kinsman of the Roman Stoic-Lockean-Jeffersonian law of contract, so that if the one has proved to be eminently "practical," the other must be also.

6) The foreign policy of the United States, which began in the Lockean-Jeffersonian tradition, has in recent decades been formulated by the Hobbesian mentalities of corporation lawyers and generals, while during the same period the reverse tendency has been evident in British foreign policy (the Suez affair being a notable exception to both tendencies), with consequent misunderstandings between the two allies. It is primarily due to the lack of understanding among the American people at large and their practical politicians of the epistemological bases of their primary normative patterns that Americans are unable to define their cherished Lockean-Jeffersonian principles clearly to themselves or to anyone else in the world. It is also due to this lack of understanding that United States foreign policy fluctuates blindly and unpredictably between these two traditions. Clearly needed is an intensive philosophical education of the American people and most certainly of their diplomatic politicians.

7) Meanwhile, the various new nations in Africa and Asia, particularly, are writing constitutions (normative political cultural patterns) which incorporate Lockean-Jeffersonian law of contract principles. However, their leaders face, but generally do not see clearly, the difficulties of accommodating these principles to the "living law" (that is, the indigenous cultural patterns) of their people. These systems of "living law," though often very different from each other in detail, have in common the fact that they are based on the law of status. If these leaders are to succeed in establishing new nations whose domestic laws and international relations are based on the law of contract, they cannot merely impose the latter on the indigenous patterns. Rather, the indigenous patterns must be analyzed in terms of their basic assumptions, and ways must be found to

synthesize with the law of contract those parts of the "living law" which are not absolutely incompatible with it. As a model of such analysis, Northrop cites Kluckhohn's study of the basic postulates of Navaho culture, and it is in this general connection that his "philosophical *anthropology*"—a kind of cross-cultural epistemology—comes to the fore. Philosophical anthropologists are needed, therefore, not only in the councils of these countries but also in our State Department if the United States is to be able effectively to help the new nations reach their goals. It should be noted that Northrop is dealing here with a particularly subtle aspect of the whole issue of congruities and incongruities in cultural contact, and anthropologists, many of whom have dealt with the matter rather fuzzily, may very well find his approach to it a stimulating one.

The foregoing is an attempt to synthesize what seem to me to be the issues of greatest concern to Northrop in his book. It is not, however, the author's over-all summary, for in fact there is none. This, in a book which is so discursive as to be worthy of Toynbee unabridged, is an unfortunate omission. Opening with a statement related largely to item 7 above, Northrop then introduces his other points and proceeds in the rest of the book to put them through a sort of leapfrog exercise in which all of them reappear more than once. While this may seem repetitious to some readers, it serves a useful purpose, for Northrop's ideas generally need to be restated in different contexts in order that they may be fully grasped. Thus, there are some partial summaries and syntheses.

One suspects that this organization is a result less of deliberate planning than of the nature of the component parts of the book. There are 19 chapters, arranged in three parts, of which seven are reprints of articles which were published individually in the 1950's. These are concentrated in part 2; the composition of parts 1 and 3 would, generally speaking, appear to have been later. While cross references to chapters have been inserted, there is a disconcerting patchwork quality to the whole.

Part 1 consists largely of formal philosophical and logical expositions and proofs of the author's major points. Most of this part consists of some truly formidable prose, and one can fairly derive some wry amusement from the fact that it might well be a literal translation of that "cumbersome and wordy German philosophical prose" which Northrop, in part 3, disapprovingly associates with Immanuel Kant, saying that he should have used symbolic logic instead. If Northrop wishes his part 1 to be fully appreciated by readers who have not been trained to cope with formal philosophy, he will need to revise it someday. As matters stand, however, such readers will not go too far astray if they commence their reading with the beginning of part 2; those chapters are a series of applications of the author's ideas concerning such areas as political evolution in various parts of Latin America, the ideological failure of technical assistance in Ceylon, and the philosophical-anthropological reasons for the rapid transformations in Communist China, to name but three. From the point of view of an anthropological reader such as I am, part 2 is the best part of the book, for in it the author not only states his basic ideas in simpler terms than in part 1, but he also sets them in specific cultural contexts. There is good anthropology per se in part 2, and the reader may make excursions into part 1, as Northrop suggests at several points, for rigorous philosophical support, if he so chooses.

Part 3 has but three chapters, the first being a reprint which includes an eloquent statement of the pejorative image of itself which the United States has exported. The remainder concerns itself primarily with the necessity, and with suggestions of the means, for working toward the cultural syntheses which have been indicated earlier. The possibility that the democratic and Communist bloc nations may achieve, through philosophical-anthropological diplomacy, a mutual rejection of the Aristotelian-Hobbesian presupposition is discussed.

It is easy to find fault with a book which takes the whole contemporary world, several disparate courses of history, and the findings of half a dozen academic disciplines as its province and attempts a systematization of such knowledge. It can hardly be easy, however, to write such a book even when many years of reflection have preceded its composition. And so, while we may question whether all the social concepts which are subsidiary to the law of contract are actually so imageless as Northrop seems to suppose, we can also recognize with appreciation his point that concepts, of whatever epistemological derivation, are behaviorally significant. We can also appreciate that while Northrop proposes an epistemological dichotomy, he does not force it into becoming a generally cultural dichotomy. For instance, he recognizes that the law of status cannot be neatly and exclusively associated with primitive or nonindustrial cultures, nor is it "ancient" in contrast to any supposed modernity of the law of contract. Though he indulges in some irritating phraseologies of his own, he assiduously avoids the trite and misleading contrast between "East" and "West," and so these expressions, used for convenience only, are put in quotes in this review. While his personal predilection seems to be for concepts by postulation and the law of contract, he does not disown the contribution of concepts by immediate sensory intuition, particularly with respect to the esthetics of the Far East—this, of course, being a legacy from his earlier book, *The Meeting of East and West.*

Philosophical Anthropology and Practical Politics communicates a number of valuable insights to scholars and to "practical" laymen. It is unfortunate that it often says these things in a more abstruse manner than would seem to be necessary. However, the fact that Northrop forthrightly climbs out onto a number of limbs commands our respect, and the probability that many readers will attempt to cut off or severely to prune those limbs bespeaks the book's importance.

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A Collection of Mathematical Problems. S. M. Ulam. Interscience, New York, 1960. xiii + 150 pp. $5.

The unsolved problems in mathematics can be divided broadly into two classes. There are problems such as appear in number theory which are very easy to formulate and which require almost no mathematical background to understand. These "easy" problems usually turn out to be very difficult to solve. On the other hand, there are problems like those in this collection, which require the reader to have a good background in the subject matter in order to understand what they are about. While such problems are also difficult to solve, their difficulties are relatively easier to surmount. Thus,