News and Comment

Intellectual Life in England: Leavis Views C. P. Snow; Boothby Views Leavis

Several weeks ago the English critic, F. R. Leavis, delivered an attack on the scientist-turned-novelist, C. P. Snow, which has stirred up about as great a furor as a literary critic can hope to stir up. Leavis delivered his broadside as a sort of valedictory on the occasion of his retirement after a career as a reader in English literature at Downing College, Cambridge.

Although the press was barred from the lecture, the austere London *Times* bootlegged a report, which it ran prominently placed on its lead page. Leavis then consented, in view of the "appearance in newspapers of garbled reports," to let the weekly *Spectator* publish the full text, which it did on 9 March.

"If confidence in oneself as a mastermind, qualified by capacity, insight, and knowledge to pronounce authoritatively on the frightening problems of our civilization, is genius," Leavis began, "then there can be no doubt about Sir Charles Snow's. . . . The peculiar quality of Snow's assurance expresses itself in a pervasive tone; a tone of which one can say that, while only genius could justify it one cannot readily think of genius adopting it. It is the tone we have (so far as it can be given in an isolated sentence) here: 'The only writer of world-class who seems to have had an understanding of the industrial revolution was Ibsen in his old age: and there wasn't much that old man didn't understand.' Clearly there is still less Sir Charles Snow doesn't understand: he pays the tribute with authority. We take the implication and take it the more surely at its full value because it carries the *elan*, the essential inspiration, of the whole self assured performance. Yet Snow is, in fact, portentiously ignorant." This is the beginning, after which Leavis goes on to explain, among other things, that, by Leavis's standards at any rate, Snow "is not only not a genius, he is intellectually as undistinguished as it is possible to be. . . . He doesn't know what he means, and he doesn't know he doesn't know . . . as a novelist he doesn't exist; he doesn't begin to exist. He can't be said to know what a novel is. . . ."

But, Leavis says, he is not after Snow himself. "Snow is a portent. He is a portent in that, being in himself negligible, he has become for a vast public on both sides of the Atlantic a mastermind and a sage. His significance is that he has been accepted—or perhaps the point is better made by saying 'created': he has been created an authoritative intellect by the cultural conditions manifested in his acceptance. . . . The commentary I have to make on him is necessarily drastic and dismissive; but don't, I beg, suppose that I am enjoying a slaughterhouse field day. Snow, I repeat, is in himself negligible. My preoccupation is positive in spirit. . . . I have not been quick to propose for myself the duty of dealing with him."

What makes Snow necessary to deal with, in Leavis's view, is his famous lecture on *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, which, Leavis tells us, is an "intellectual nullity" exhibiting "an utter lack of intellectual distinction and embarrassing vulgarity of style." It appalls Leavis that Snow's lecture is "continually being referred to —not only in the Sunday papers—as if Snow, that rarely qualified and profoundly original mind, had given trenchant formulation to a key contemporary truth"; and even worse, from Leavis's point of view as a teacher of undergraduates, "was the realizing, from marking scholarship scripts, that sixth form masters were making their bright boys read Snow as doctrinal, definitive, and formative."

But it turns out, a little surprisingly, that what really annoys Leavis is not so much the part of Snow's lecture that accounts for nearly all its fame, the elaboration of the notion of the two cultures, the scientific and the literary, but the last section of the lecture, where Snow argues for the urgency of putting the scientific revolution to work to speed the rise in living standards in underdeveloped countries.

Leavis picks away a bit at the two cultures idea, but it seems, like the attack on the novels, to be a peripheral matter, part of what Leavis apparently saw as his "duty" to demolish Snow generally before getting on to what he really sees as dangerous. Leavis does not challenge Snow's essential conclusion on the need for reforming education to give nonscientists living in a scientific age a clearer idea of what science is about. And although he dismisses this part of the lecture as unoriginal, in an offhand comment, he does not attempt to deny Snow the kind of credit the lecture has most widely won: that is, as a particularly provocative statement of the need for a reform, which has helped get things moving, or moving faster, and therefore a valuable piece of work despite the criticisms that can always be applied to efforts to provide a neat presentation of a complicated problem.

A Taste of Jam

What annoys Leavis most is Snow's firm advocacy of "jam" (Snow's term): the material things that the scientific revolution is bringing to the masses of people. As the term Snow uses suggests, Snow is by no means arguing that the standard of living is all that counts. But, without explicitly discussing the point, Snow leaves no doubt that he sees no great conflict between "more jam" and whatever other things the race ought to be pursuing, and further, on long-term political grounds, argues for the necessity of the rich nations' lending a hand to help the aspiring poor. Speaking of the opportunities for development in the backward nations, Snow says: "Jam today and men aren't at their most exciting; jam tomorrow, and one often sees them at their noblest." Leavis interprets this to suit his purposes and puts Snow in the untenable position of, according to Leavis, arguing for jam, jam, and nothing but jam. Leavis is appalled.

"The callously ugly insensitiveness of the mode of expression is wholly significant. It gives us Snow, who is wholly representative of the world, or cul-

ture, to which it belongs. It is the world in which Mr. Macmillan said—or might, taking a tip from Snow, have varied his phrase by saying—'You never had so much jam'; and in which, if you are enlightened, you see that the sum of wisdom lies in expediting the processes which will ensure the Congolese, the Indonesians, the Bushmen (no, not the Bushmen—there aren't enough of them), the Chinese, the Indians, *their* increasing supplies of jam. It is the world in which the vital inspiration, the creative drive, is 'Jam tomorrow' (if you haven't any today) or (if you have it today) '*More* jam tomorrow.' It is the world in which, even at the level of the intellectual weeklies, 'standard of living' is an ultimate criterion, its raising an ultimate aim, a matter of wages and salaries and what you can buy with them, reduced hours of work, and the technological resources that make your increasing leisure worth having; so that productivity—the supremely important thing—must be kept on the rise, at whatever cost to protecting conservative habit.

"Don't mistake me. I am not preaching that we should defy, or try to reverse, the accelerating movement of external civilization (the phrase sufficiently explains itself, I hope) that is determined by advancing technology. . . . What I am saying is that such a concern is not enough—disastrously not enough. Snow himself is proof of that, product as he is of the initial cultural consequences of the kind of rapid change he wants to see accelerated to the utmost and assimilating all the world, bringing (he is convinced), provided we are foresighted enough to perceive that no one will long consent to be without abundant jam, salvation, and lasting felicity to mankind."

What does Leavis want us to pursue that conflicts with jam? Or conflicts with Snow's urgent call for technical help to the developing countries? Leavis is unclear, although he says it will involve "creative responses to the new challenges" of the scientific revolution: "something that is alien to either of Snow's cultures." It apparently has something to do with intuitive responses apparently as opposed the cut-and-dried categorizing Leavis seems to see in both of Snow's cultures. There is a good deal of talk about D. H. Lawrence (for Leavis, the great genius of English fiction) and the importance of *living*. It becomes hard to follow: "for the sake of our humanity—our humanness, for the sake of a human future—we must do, with intelligent resolution and with faith, all we can to maintain the full life in the present—and life is growth—of our transmitted culture."

Leavis says he wants the university to serve neither the literary nor scientific culture but, at heart, to blend all in "a vital English school." ("A center of consciousness and conscience for our civilization.") For details we have to wait: "I mustn't say more now about what I mean by that. I will only say that the academic is the enemy and that the academic *can* be beaten, as we who ran *Scrutiny* [a literary review] for twenty years proved. We were, and we knew we were, Cambridge—the essential Cambridge in spite of Cambridge: that gives you the spirit of what I had in mind. Snow gets on with what he calls the 'traditional culture' better than I do. To impress us with his antiacademic astringency, he tells us of the old Master of Jesus who said about the trains running into Cambridge on Sunday: 'It is equally displeasing to God and myself.' More to the point is that *that*, I remember, was very much the attitude of the academic powers when thirty years ago, I wrote a pioneering book on modern poetry that made Eliot a key figure and proposed a new chart, and again when I backed Lawrence as a writer."

Counterattack

The effect of the whole production is a little confusing. Snow has greeted the attack with silence, but the *Spectator* received a prompt flood of comment from third parties, most of it anti-Leavis, although not always pro-Snow. The line of reasoning that emerges most clearly from Leavis's production is (i) Snow is worthless, (ii) that he has, nevertheless, been made a great figure, thus demonstrating that something is wrong with the society that has made him a great figure, and (iii) (suggested, perhaps unintentionally by Leavis, in the last excerpt quoted here) that if the society were what it should be the Leavises rather than the Snows would be the great figures.

This produced the principal line of criticism, that Leavis seems motivated by jealousy: in the formulation of one correspondent (Lord Boothby), Leavis is "spewing out the reptilian venom of those who have created nothing, and are concerned only to wreak vengeance upon those who have, and thus assuage their own sense of frustration. . . . The sort of criticism exemplified by Dr. Leavis . . . leaves one with a sense of desolation. I can tell him what D. H. Lawrence, the only one who gets a good word, would have said about it: . . . 'To hear these people talk really fills me with black fury: they talk endlessly, but endlessly—and never, never a good thing said. They are cased each in a hard little shell of his own and out of this they talk words. There is never for one second any outgoing feeling and no reverence, not a crumb or grain of reverence. I cannot stand it. I will not have people like this—I had rather be alone. They make me dream of a beetle that bites like a scorpion. But I killed it—a very large beetle. . . . It is this horror of little swarming selves I can't stand.' "—H. MARGOLIS.

On this side of the Atlantic, the Supreme Court decision on reapportionment will have an indirect, but very substantial, long-term effect on the extent and pattern of United States support for schools, conservation, and nearly the entire range of problems related to or affected by the scientific revolution; much more of an effect, certainly, than anything else that is likely to happen for a long time. A review of the dilemma that the courts faced in dealing with this issue appeared here on 24 November. Some report on the nature of the decision and its likely repercussions will appear next week.

Space Cooperation: U.S., Soviets Agree To Do Up There What They Have Not Done Down Here

United Nations, New York. While the United States and the Soviet Union made no headway last week in Geneva on such earthly problems as disarmament and Berlin, both were emphatically agreeing at the United Nations that it is time to team up on outer space.

This sudden amity has led some cynics to inquire whether Khrushchev has proposed to Kennedy that "you go first." Behind the humor is a natural curiosity over just what has led the Soviets to sudden enthusiasm for space cooperation. They showed no such response when Kennedy lyrically proposed in his inaugural address: "Together let us explore the stars. . . ." And their expressions of a desire for