1914

Literature and the New Anti-Intellectualism

Philo M. Buck, Jr.
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/midwestqtrly

Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons

http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/midwestqtrly/44

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Mid-West Quarterly, The (1913-1918) at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mid-West Quarterly, The (1913-1918) by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.
LITERATURE AND THE NEW ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM

Natura inest mentibus nostris insatiabilis quaedam cupiditas veri videndi. Cicero—
Tusc. Quest.

"Never has he drawn so deeply from the well that is the human heart; never so near those invisible heights which are the soul." The reviewer who wrote this sentence probably meant that the author of the book he so enthusiastically welcomed wrote with a little more than the ordinary insight. Indeed if we are to judge from the encomiums in our less critical reviews the world has never been so blessed with novels and plays which touch the secret springs of the heart. The old fiction had generalised, had conventionalised, much as the old art had done. This, to the new, is all wrong. The type characters, let us say, of Thackeray and even of George Eliot were interesting enough, but often as faulty as the old drawings of a galloping horse, which showed him with feet extended in an arc. As the art of photography has taught us that the horse has always one of his feet on or near the ground, so the new psychology has put us on our guard against accepting too literally such personages as Becky Sharp, Colonel Newcome, or Silas Marner. These pictures of life are entirely too set, far too regular for an adequate portrayal of life itself. The new fiction is to present life itself, "to draw deeply from the well that is the human heart," to mount "near the invisible heights which are the soul." And thus vivisectionist-wise, the writers of to-day stand, with scalpel and forceps delicately poised, before a clinic of admiring readers.

But all this implies a fundamental change in point of view. For of a surety the old writers of novels and dramas did not have a distrust of reality that led them to adopt an ancient maxim and when supping with it to use a long spoon; they did not feel that it was unreality they were picturing. Perhaps the change is as tersely put by Mr. Scott James in his Modernism and Romance as by any: "With the advent of science, metaphysics, and psychology, and the practical analogies of these studies, we have come, like Adam after the

74
fall, into a new state of knowledge which is altering our susceptibilities and our artistic standpoints." It is this new knowledge, then, that is playing such havoc with our literary tradition. We must back to reality by the route of science, and metaphysics, and their practical analogies. Whether it be a dreary one or no, the critic, too, must follow. Will the quest reveal a glimpse of the promised land or of a shimmering mirage?

I

The old ideal of science, when its method seemed on the point of swallowing all our manifold intellectual activities, was perfectly clear. It first fired the scientific imagination when Kepler enunciated his laws, came to be steadily discussed when Newton formulated his principle of universal gravitation, and finally became a fixed notion when Helmholtz gave us his law of conservation of energy and Darwin his formula for evolution. It was an ideal almost elementary in its meaning. The scientist, in reaching out his hands after laws or hypotheses, was doing so under the profound conviction that these hypotheses pictured reality, and that there was a rational order in the universe, ever immutable, whose lineaments the human understanding might some day read and comprehend.

The amazing simplicity of the ideal, its utter rationality, the equally amazing results which science was achieving with its aid in the physical world, made it one to which it was difficult to turn a deaf ear. Science became a word to conjure with, for it was expected to prove the open sesame to countless yet unopened mysteries. But like all terms much bandied about it fell upon evil days. Men spoke in its name to whom its method was never revealed. Besides, the glorious empire it was going to reveal seemed no nearer after the lapse of nearly half a century of most devout worship, so that even scientists themselves began to be divided in their belief of the final rigidity of the discovered laws. In addition, several of the most firmly entrenched hypotheses seemed threatened by the scientists' inability to force into them many newly discovered facts. Until it has finally come about in our time, that many persons in all fields have begun to turn their backs upon the ideal which but a short time ago promised so abundantly. As a result to-day an equally amazing thing is happening: orthodox scientists like Poincaré have been compelled
to reply, justifying the ways of science and accurately setting forth her limitations and her strength.

For many who find the ideal of science, as they fondly imagined it, to be an unrealisable one, or a faulty one, or an utterly fallacious one, are turning to unorthodoxy, a metaphysical science, a scientific gnosticism as it were; and while acknowledging that science gives knowledge that may be turned to practical use, they maintain that science fails utterly, if its empirical methods are followed, to give any comprehension of reality, which instead can be got only by an unscientific, mystic rapport with the Ding an sich. So to them science, to gain truth, must forsake the rational, inductive and deductive, or generalising method, and, cutting its own throat, rush immediately into the presence of living reality.

To these heterodox scientists science presents two phases, a positive and a negative. Within certain well defined limits it has still its amazing possibilities, but beyond these, as a measurer of truth or reality, or as an effort to unify our actual and possible knowledge, it can never be more than a chimera. In the words of Professor Royce:

"The splendid triumphs of special research in the most various fields, the constant increase in our practical control over nature,—these, our positive and growing possessions, stand in glaring contrast to the failure of the scientific orthodoxy of a former period to fix the outlines of an ultimate creed about the nature of the knowable universe. Why not 'take the cash and let the credit go'? Why pursue the elusive theoretical 'unification' any further, when what we daily get from our sciences is an increasing wealth of detailed information and of practical guidance? Why, then, does science actually need general theories, despite the fact that these theories inevitably alter and pass away?"

Instead of regarding the scientific hypotheses as attempts to come to an understanding of reality, why not frankly, ask unorthodox theorists, regard them as the conventions of our logic-mongering intellect and let them go at that? Then, at least, they can be altered freely and as often as our new accumulations of fact may demand, and yet our conception of reality and truth vary never a whit. Besides, this would be so easy a way out of the great difficulty. Hypothesis must follow hypothesis; the path of science is strewn with outworn hypotheses, and yet we are never the nearer, if we must take hypotheses as our criteria, to a glimpse of the final truth. Why not frankly change hypotheses as we change our clothes, accepting them as mere arbitrary
wrappings for the naked, living truth within? And this position has a horde of followers from the scientist LeRoy to the philosopher Bergson.

Besides, many of these hypotheses, because of their paradoxical nature, require of their devotees an amazing power of credulity. Indeed the opponents of orthodox science see in science a reign of empirical dogma which rivals that of the most literal of mediæval theological dogmatists. In order to explain the phenomena of light and electro-magnetism, for example, we must assume the reality of ether, a substance, all pervasive, which is so subtle in texture that it in no way offers the slightest resistance to the passage of even such ethereal bodies as cometary appendages, so resistless in its penetrating power that it finds not the slightest difficulty in making its way unimpeded through the most refractory of substances; it is at the same time a million times less substantial than our most perfect vacuum and a million times more uncompromising than the finest tempered steel. Before this the dogma of even the Immaculate Conception sinks into an easy exercise. In consequence the revolt of the mind caught by a love of freedom and by a desire for revolt from dogma has gained a multitude of adherents. The victories of science are all well and good in the practical world of conventional fact, but as to giving us a glimpse of reality, that is another matter. It is by such steps as these that there has arisen in our time a distrust of the intellect as a means of knowing reality. To be sure, this is not a new phenomenon. The old Upanishads of India are full of empirical and philosophical scepticism. Buddhism is founded upon the meagre achievements of man's intellect. The Greek Sceptics, the early Christian Gnostics, the scholastic Nominalists, the critical pietism of Pascal, are all influenced profoundly by the utter discrepancy between man's intellectual presumption and man's knowledge of reality and truth. But here there is this difference: these later anti-intellectualists attack the intellect in the field in which it had before been held to be supreme, the field of physical fact and science. The findings of science, save in the practical field of everyday life, are now meeting with distrust and hostile scepticism.

The intellect deforms, or conventionalises all it touches; and this process is still more evident when it attempts to translate its findings into discourse. For language is also an intellectual,
conventionalised thing, with its static concepts, generalisations, 
the words by which living, changing, ever flowing, highly indi
vidualised things must be communicated. The moment that 
language, the poor creature of the intellect, lays its strangling 
hand upon the living reality, its life is gone, its individuality lost, 
and we have only the poor husk, the shell, which hints no more of 
the life it once contained than the dead body of the beauty that 
once inspired it. All of us at one time or another have felt this 
fatal insufficiency of pure speech; it is this that has inspired our 
heart-born appeal to the unsounded depths of the emotion. And 
it is from the heart alone, then, these anti-intellectualists argue, 
with its Ur-sprung in the heart of reality, that truth and reality 
may be known. Our deepest emotions, and fleeting, ever chang
ing impressions, these alone can look truth in the face, for they 
share its nature; but even these when we attempt to communicate 
them, to translate them into words, turn to a shell of dust and 
ashes and vanish at a touch.

This seems to be what the science that has the popular ear 
to-day has to say of life and reality. Facts which swim on the 
broad bosom of the stream of life we may see, experience, even 
measure, but to understand them in their relation to other facts, 
to generalise upon them, reduce them into systems, invent 
hyotheses to explain their similarity and dissimilarity, and to 
feel that these generalisations and hypotheses are more than 
little systems that have their day and cease to be, to feel that 
these are more than broken lights—all this is a vain pursuit of 
intellectual will-o’-the-wisps. The intellect is on stable ground 
only when it deals with concrete facts. When we abandon pure 
fact we must also abandon intellect.

II

There is no great gap to-day between the metaphysical 
scientists and the scientific metaphysicians. After all that has 
been written about Bergson and especially about the Creative 
Evolution, any attempt to summarise his philosophy would be 
gratuitous. I shall content myself merely with pointing out 
where he is distinctly anti-intellectual, unorthodox, and sceptical. 
It is a little difficult, I confess, to take M. Bergson seriously, 
and not to feel that he is not with tongue in cheek perpetrating 
a gigantic hoax on our bewildered age. Is not his attempt to
prove that the intellect and intellectual processes and generalisations have no compatibility with living truth and reality, in which he is compelled to use the very methods and terminology he denounces, not a little like sitting on the branch he is sawing off? What is the worth of his argument on the insufficiency of the reason if in his argument he is compelled to use the same despised reason? Why discourse so lengthily and so charmingly with proof and argument, when his thesis magniloquently places him beyond reason and unreason in the flux of the infinite durée?

Bergson's chief contribution to modern thought is the new definition he has given to reality. In the first place he makes—apparently, for he is not always clear on this point—a capital distinction between life and matter. So we have, to begin with, a dual universe with parts really distinct, and in many ways antagonistic. Life, as he puts it, is a constant, restless energy, moving ever upward and forward, ever creating the new, without bounds, without limit, without aim, for the moment we presuppose either we curtail the one and the only characteristic we may unhesitatingly impute to it—its perfect freedom. Matter is also a movement, as constant and resistless, but in inverse direction. Unlike life it has no spontaneous, self-directing power; it is mere inert agency, uncreative power, ungenerative, un-self-impelled flux. Unlike life, which bloweth where it listeth, this blows without listing. Unlike life, which in its higher forms arrives at consciousness and free self-creation, matter carries no potentiality save its own movement; it may never hope for consciousness or for creative power; it may only combine to form new movements which are but the result of the meeting of two material lines of force. Life is mobility creating new forms of life; matter is mobility, combining, transforming, perpetuating its own mobility. Reality, then, is movement, a pure flux; and in essence Bergson's conception of it is closely allied to that gained some twenty-five hundred years ago by Heraclitus. The only new thing in Bergson is the way in which he relates this theory to the vast accumulation of knowledge and science gained since that time.

These ceaseless movements are the durée, true time, time in which clock hands do not move, nor ever cease from moving; time in which there is no past, present, or future, but all past, present, and future; time in which minutes do not crowd upon each other's heels, but in which minutes all disappear, or are spun to an eternity. For true time is not counted time, it is not clock
time, it is not sequence of isolated and individual moments, it is
time in which time shall be no more, when a thousand years shall
be a day and a day a thousand years, and when both shall lose
their name and sink into pure undifferentiated flux. For this, to
Bergson, is the secret of memory, when the past is caught up
into and becomes the present, when a life, which is said to be
spent in hours and days and years, suddenly flashes across the
memory in an instant, and all the *disjecta membra* of its past
history unite with the present in one moment of intense reverie or
action, and reveal that a man's true life is not measured by
chronometer or shadow on the dial, but by eternal and present
movement.

But these two movements, of life and matter, which are in
essence quite distinct, in reality sadly interfere with each other's
progress. Unfortunately for both they could not be or were not
confined each to its own universe, but each passing through the
other bewilders its energy, deflects its course, stays its passage;
and the result is a grand confusion of life and not life, matter and
not matter, where each apes the characteristics of the other.
Matter takes some of the characteristics of life; and life becomes
locked up in matter. It is this mutual confusion that causes
both to assume the appearance of form. But this appearance is
purely illusory; for though in appearance the form is static,
unchanging, in reality the movement persists, form giving place
to form, and naught abides but the utter changeableness of form
in the flux of life and matter. There are no things; for these
forms, which, to eyes clouded by the false concepts of time and
space, appear to have a fixed, unchanging, and mutually externa-
ised life, are in reality, when seen by unclouded eyes, far other-
wise; they are the already disappearing organisation of life and
matter which the restless flux exposes for an instant as it passes
from generation to generation, making "the whole series of the
living one single wave flowing over matter." One might wonder
if, in the last analysis, there were any difference between this
Heraclitan ideal of an infinite flux and the Buddhist ideal of an
infinite rest, Nirvana. Are not both equally meaningless when
measured in terms of infinity?

Doubtless this doctrine is a little hard for the unaided intellect
to comprehend. It was not meant for the intellect, Bergson
would reply; and were he intellect alone he would never have
arrived at this flowing conception of being. For the intellect to
him has a far different task from that of apprehending the nature of reality.

As reality is divided into what should be mutually exclusive movements, life and matter, so consciousness is dichotomised into intuition and intellect. Like life and matter these two functions of consciousness have also become subject to the grand confusion—it is marvellous how large confusion bulks in Bergson's universe. Instead of remaining each in the field it should have occupied, and which it might have explored with utter success, the two have been trespassing, and for so many years before Bergson made clear their several duties, that it is doubtful if poor humanity is ever again to have a moment of clear vision. The fault, if fault there were, is all to be laid to man's meddling and presumptuous intellect. Both intellect and intuition stand before the world of reality and seek to comprehend its true nature: intuition by flashes of insight which might, were they not so pitifully infrequent, enable man to apprehend reality; intellect by the laborious process of induction and deduction, the practical method of science. But both attain to indifferent success; for what the intuition sees, it may not for want of a language communicate, and what the intellect communicates is the result of imperfect seeing, for its horizon is bounded by form and organisation, things and their relation in time and space, all of which possess no reality beyond the moment of the flux which gave them being.

Now, by its nature intellect should have been fitted to deal directly with matter, as intuition with life, and man's consciousness of reality would then have been complete; but—and here again is the fatal disjunctive in all Bergsonian philosophy—experience gives us neither pure matter nor pure life. Instead we have matter and life that have interfered with each other, a deflected matter and an apparently tergiversated life, upon which our conscious processes greedily thrust themselves, forgetting that life is more than form and matter more than static relations. Besides, the powers of the intuition have become atrophied by neglect. The intellect was early found to be a practical faculty, useful in invention and for action; hence man as he became more and more human began to use the faculty that set him apart more and more from the brute, and which enabled him to invent ever new and useful devices for his protection, for his comfort, for his diversion. Thus he relied more and more upon
his intellect, glorifying it as the one human quality that rendered him unique in the series of living beings, forgetting that in his instinct, his intuition, there lay another and still more powerful faculty which united him with all life, and which, were it developed, as he had developed his reason, would have enabled him to penetrate into the highest mysteries of life itself, would have let him know that life is movement, and that this world of things which the intellect so indefatigably buzzes around is but a sham world, a mere transient form which life and matter assume and then pass on, a mere moment in the eternal process of becoming "in which nothing becomes, and in which there is nothing that nothing becomes." Philosophy, then, to be true must "free itself from forms and habits that are strictly intellectual." To know life and reality, "you must thrust intelligence outside itself by an act of will."

Thus Bergson is anti-intellectualist, not because he distrusts the intellect, that would be to recognise that it had at least the power to comprehend reality even were its interpretation faulty, but because the world it deals with is no world at all, but merely a series of utterly false generalisations of things and their relations. Naturally it can apparently make these generalisations good because they possess no counterpart in the world of reality. It may do with them what it chooses, for they are its creation. A false generalisation is in essence, then, no worse, so far as reality is concerned, than a true one; for false and true are but like all generalisations merely intellect-created terms. The intellect has nothing in common with reality itself.

There is something supremely dismal in this severe punishment of the pretensions of the intellect. We had been by the old philosophers urged to leave the world of daydreams, reverie, castles in the air, and set our feet firmly upon the intellectual world of fact and logical form. Now we are told that this world of fact and form is the only untrue reality, that its creator the intellect is the gayest of deceivers, that its methods are utterly incapable of arriving at reality, that the only world of reality is that which we were once led to regard as empty—the world of dreams, reverie, and castles in the air. And yet in his Les Données Immédiates and his Matière et Mémoire Bergson uses the very weapons of reason to make firm his contempt of reason. Is he not, again, a little paradoxical, like the painters of the Futurist School, who, to paint their hatred of form and their glory in
universal dynamism, as they call it, are compelled to use, though
distorted beyond recognition, the very lines and colours of the
classic artists?

And what is the significance of such reality? But to put such a
question is to betray one's ignorance of true reality. It has none,
for significance is an intellect-created term. Reality, the \textit{durée}, is
beyond all intellect-created concepts. It may not be generalised,
because it is the great unique, the \textit{supra} as well as the \textit{infra}
rational. We may not even speak of it, for speech is from and
for the intellect alone. This the old Brahmin knows, better than
Bergson, for de Voiding his mind of aught of sense and intelligence,
squatted cross-legged on the banks of the resistless and flowing
Ganges, the symbol of true time, and gazing at his navel, the pre­
sent symbol of the union of generation to generation, he mutters
the mystic vocables, \textit{Om, Mani, Padni, Hum}; and in their mean­
ingless resonance, because it is meaningless, he feels himself gra­
dually uplifted from all these trivialities and similarities and
irritating complexes, which those who have not wisdom call life,
into the very heart of life itself, the true reality. The trouble
with M. Bergson is that he is not thoroughgoing enough, he lacks
the courage of his intuitive convictions. I am reminded of a line
in the \textit{Upanishads} a friend quoted to me: "Children follow after
outward pleasures, and fall into the widespread net of death; but
wise men knowing what is the state of things immortal do not
seek for things stable here among things unstable." For, as the
Brahmin philosopher knows, the restless, ever-changing flux of
life, as we apperceive it in our emotions or our intuitions, has no
more stable ground for its truth than our reasoned abstractions;
hence, passing from intuition to intuition, he transcends the flux
and arrives at a static conception of pure being, of which nothing
can be predicated, Nirvana.

Nor is pragmatism essentially different from other anti­
intellectualist philosophies. In the last analysis it reduces
philosophy, which is usually defined as a search for truth, to a
matter of temperament. The corollaries, then, seem quite
reasonable, that inasmuch as there are many temperaments,
there must also be many philosophies; and that any philosophy
which furnishes a modicum of satisfaction, must, \textit{per se}, in that
measure be true. This is not so far as one might think from
Bergson's view that the heart alone is the criterion of truth. In
full accordance with these corollaries, truth is for the pragmatist
a relative thing altogether, for truth is that which has a distinct "cash value," it is "a class-name for all sorts of definite working-values in experience." There is nothing final about it, as there is nothing final about pragmatism itself. "It agrees with nominalism . . . in always appealing to particulars; with utilitarianism in emphasising practical aspects, with positivism in its disdain for verbal solutions, useless questions, and metaphysical abstractions."

Thus, again, in the metaphysics that passes current to-day we have left nothing but facts and intuitions, the one careless, discontinuous, insignificant, the other formless, everflowing, without aim and without end. The intellect deals with the one, the intuition with the other; and any attempt to reconcile them is effort put forth in vain. Is this an adequate artistic standpoint?

III

But literature and art are for their ideas more intimately dependent upon morals than upon science and philosophy. How, then, has ethics, the science of morals, as we have perhaps unadvisedly termed it, reacted during this widespread repudiation of reason and the intellect?

Naturally, of all possible subjects, ethics, the subject which deals directly with human conduct, was early and until quite recently believed to be the one that should be most easily apprehended by human reason. Why man does this or refuses to do that, and why this is a good deed and that evil, for such questions it was felt that reason and reason alone could furnish an adequate answer. The nature and content of the good and of the bad, surely in so far as these ideas possess a purely human value, they must be within the power of the human instrument to comprehend and to rationalise into a system. Thus arose the numerous systems of ethics from the earliest times to our own, which, though they might or might not take as their first premise a religious concept, yet in their organisations were purely rational, and were regarded as possessing universal validity.

When the heyday of science came in the eighteenth century and again in the nineteenth, ethics, because its facts so obviously challenge observation, naturally fell an early prey to the scientific method. Naturally, too, the positivists, with their eye to systematising all human knowledge upon purely rational lines,
and of casting forth from their intellectual workshop all possible metaphysical or theological explanations for purely physical or human phenomena, went gloriously to work to found a science of morals. Comte found the moral law to be no more than the expression of the social law, and that the highest. Ethics is thus no more than a chapter of what might be called social physics, a part of social science. Its laws are discovered, like laws in any other science, physical or biological, by observation and induction. Like the laws of physics, and chemistry, and biology, these laws may be stated and must be obeyed, for men in society have found that only by obeying them the welfare of society and the individual is conserved. That he reaffirmed the greater number of the laws of the decalogue only went to show that ethical laws are not mere matters of changing social caprice, but are truly manifestations of the abiding intellectual substrate of society.

But this evidently did not go far enough with the thoroughgoing positivist. The connection between the categorical imperative and the facts observed still left much to be desired. The method of science must be to observe facts and from these to come by induction to such laws as seem to govern human conduct. Now one postulate assumed by all earlier ethical theories seemed quite unwarranted, the notion of obligation, the idea that final necessity imposes such or such a line of conduct upon man and forbids the opposite. This imperative they could not by any observation of the mere facts discover behind human conduct. A pure induction, when it proceeds from facts of conduct to the generalisation that such modes of conduct are imperative, finds itself committing a most vicious saltum. For science does not recognise the categorical imperative. Even such laws in physics as that of universal gravitation do not connote to us any such notion as duty or moral obligation. Hence we must disabuse our minds of the idea that these so-called laws of conduct rest upon any final idea of logical or moral necessity. As Victor Brochard so aptly put it: "It is necessary to think of ethics quite differently from what is done ordinarily. It must be completely separated from theology, made to descend from sky to earth and in a sort to be laicised. . . . The ideas of obligation, of duty, and those that cling to these, must be thrust aside, as finding no place in an ethics purely scientific and rational."

Thus we find ourselves not far from the position of the anti-intellectualist in science, though to be sure here in Brochard and
in his followers, as we shall see, the appeal is always to logic and reason. But it is to a logic hobbled to facts merely of observation. The laws of morals are well enough in their way as statements of certain *modi operandi*, they are certain modes of social procedure, generalised more or less imperfectly from incomplete observation of facts; but they bear clearly the marks of their relativity. The only real things are the facts, the laws possess merely a transient reality, like that of a face seen in a mirror.

This position is made still stronger by the ethical generalisations of such men as Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl. To these, ethics is something which can be stated, modified perhaps, but to which can be given neither philosophical theory, nor practical system. It does not reside in intentions, but merely in acts. It can be observed in the *ensemble* of common acts which are universally approved by a given *milieu*. Those acts are moral which conform to the common habits, and those immoral which do not. Ethics is sociology.

Nothing is more heartlessly barren than this sociological ethics. Its origin is as commonplace as learning to eat with a knife and fork. "Collective habit expresses itself for all in a formula which is repeated from mouth to mouth and is transmitted by education, and fixed by literature. Such is the origin and nature of judicial laws, morals . . . articles of faith into which religious or political sects condense their beliefs. . . . Rules, judgments, morals, religious dogma, systems of finance, all depend entirely upon beliefs and recognised usage." These are imposed by society, and by society alone upon the individual. If we think these notions come from man's inner nature or from his reasoning faculties we deceive ourselves. "We are the dupes of an illusion which makes us believe that we have elaborated ourselves that which is imposed upon us from without. . . . It is necessary that sociology free itself of those false ideas which dominate the vulgar mind, that it remove, once for all, the yoke of the categorical imperative, which long habit ends by making tyrannical. . . . It belongs to the sociologist to escape the empire of vulgar notions, and turn his attention to facts."

From this it naturally follows that ethics must purge its mind of any notion that it has a part to play in the drama of saving or uplifting humanity. It sits at a broad window and sees the procession of humanity pass, but it must never lend a hand to meliorate human manners, for it has no eye for an ideal; it is the
stock-ticker, the impersonal recording clerk, while humanity strives, stumbles, falls, wallows, hopeful, dry-eyed, despairing, in this welter of conflicting forces that makes life. For ethics “is first of all independent of philosophy. . . . It has nothing to do with reform.” It has no ideal.¹

And this idea is still more mercilessly set forth by the sociologist Lévy-Bruhl. But why quote from his dreary pages. Ethics can state only what is done, not what should be done. Moralists should renounce the idea of giving men laws or normative principles. Poor humanity marches by a path, and we can tell how it is marching; science can throw a pale glimmer of light on the way. We may know how we are marching, but not where, and much less whither it were best to go.²

It was quite to be expected that the revolt from this suicide of ethics when it came would be a severe one. And revolt there has been, only it antedated the fullest exploitation of sociological ethics. If custom is the only morals, if it has no deeper roots in human nature than mere passive obedience to social habit, then let us at least break the bonds of this unmanly subservience. Let us at least have one ideal in human life; if it cannot be morals, then let it be the one thing that divides us from the supine tractability of domesticated animals; let us assert our free, human personality. Nietzsche, the disrupter of all social obligations, is in essence no more immoral than the sociologists, Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl. Rationality and logic and intellect are humanistically no more irrational and illogical and anti-intellectual in Nietzsche than in the school he so bitterly denounced. “The moral sentiment in Europe at present is perhaps as subtle, diverse, sensitive, and refined, as the ‘science of morals’ belonging thereto is recent, initial, awkward, and coarse-fingered.” As with the sociologist so with Nietzsche there are no morals, but only actions. “There are no such things as moral phenomena,

¹ Durkheim, Les Règles de la Méthode Sociologique, as before.
² See in this connection an excellent article in Révue des Deux Mondes, August 1, 15, 1911, by Fonsegrive, entitled “La Morale Contemporaine.” To show how general this idea is with even “tender-thoughted” sociologists I quote from a recent book. The writer has a New England conscience, but when inoculated by this virus writes: “All history shows us the truth of this principle. Moral forces, if fruitful, are not static; they are related to economic necessities of their respective periods. Obedience, for instance, so inoperative to-day, was rightly the chief virtue of mediaeval society.” Vida D. Scudder, Socialism and Character.
but only a moral interpretation of phenomena.” So, as the title of his Beyond Good and Evil indicates, he begins his disquisition on ethics by denying its real existence. “Every system of morals is a sort of tyranny against ‘nature’ and also against ‘reason,’ for it is a restraint.” And thus he begins his panegyric of Dionysian self-conservatism and self-glorification, for life knows neither good nor evil, it is free, creative, joyous, ironic, intense, self-actively triumphant over every obstacle. Its formula is as simple as its manifestation is complex; it is mere “Will to Power.”

But it is only the rare soul that can through intuition understand the full significance of this Dionysian spontaneity, and see the utter futility of the softer virtues. “The noble and brave who think thus are the farthest removed from the morality which sees precisely in sympathy, or in acting for the good of others, or in désintérêt the characteristic of the moral. They are the creators of values. They honour whatever they recognise in themselves: such morality is self-glorification.” Opposed to this is the “morality of utility,” morality of the slave. “It is here that sympathy, the kind helping hand, the warm heart, patience, diligence, humility, and friendliness attain to honour: for him these are the most useful qualities, and almost the only means of supporting the burden of existence. . . . Everywhere that slave-morality gains the ascendency, language shows a tendency to approximate the significance of the words ‘good’ and ‘stupid.’ ”

Thus at a blow Nietzsche would destroy the very foundations of a possible morals—its universality. Every act is purely relative, a fraction with its numerator, the creative agency of the spontaneous personality, and its denominator, the tantalisingly insistent, universal Will to Power. “Master-morality” is nothing more than the resolute, sleepless expansion of man’s personality, which Talus-like with iron flail levels every obstacle; it is an itch for action which no thought, no action may relieve. “Slave-morality” is an utter falsehood masking itself in pleasant sounding terms that deceive nobody but the slave. Communication, intercourse, save that between master and slave, there can be none. “My opinion is my opinion: another person has not easily a right to it. . . . One must renounce the bad task of wishing to agree with many people. ‘Good’ is no longer good when one’s neighbour takes it into his mouth. And how could there be a ‘common good’!”
Thus from opposite sides, but by their common ignoring of intentions and their apotheosis of pure action, the sociologists and the individualists in ethics bring their reasoning to a common end, the death of morals. The one kills slowly by smothering it under the accumulated load of social habit, the other poisons it in the perfumed and drugged atmosphere of personal caprice. The one makes good statistics, the other decadent poetry. The one brings men to haunt the market, the street-corner, the places unspeakable, the other to prostitute history and romance to glut its megalomania with the sins of arch-tyrants and courtesans. For grant, with the first, that all facts are, so far as human nature is concerned, equally significant; then we have only one touchstone by which we may test their artistic or literary fitness, their emotional value. Hence the ruck of pictures, poems, and stories dealing with idiots, paupers, monsters, misfits generally, in bizarre, demoralising, or dehumanising situations. Emotional significance is the only test the other school can find, and to realise it art and literature must seek the lives of those who defy humanity and human tradition. There is little to choose between them.

IV

There are two things that stand out in these scientific, philosophical, and ethical anti-intellectualists: first, a hatred of form, of generalisation, of meaning and significance, of concepts—in a word, of the static conception of life and reality, which to them implies dogma and determinism, and for which they would substitute a dynamic or flowing, meaningless conception of life and reality, which gives elbow room and fresh air for free creation and eccentric personality; and, second, a hypnotic worship of isolated fact and undirected action, wherein each fact, whether it be the sputter of an electric arc or the death rattle of disappointed endeavour, is of equal value on the stock-ticker's record which they call life.

It is not within my province to go far in a criticism of these anti-intellectualist scientists and philosophers, had I the power. In much their position owes its strength to the lengths to which the pseudo-intellectualists went in the heyday of Hegelian idealism on the one hand and of mid-nineteenth-century scientific materialism on the other. The pure intellect, as Pascal once for all, and Plato, too, pointed out, can never unaided arrive at a
complete survey of anything save its own limitations. But it is the chief aid we have in organising this welter of experience we call life, and without its careful generalisations we should be in a sorry way indeed. And the findings which it has by its powers of induction and deduction made good, the relations which it establishes between the separate details of experience, the significance and insignificance which it points out in life, must per se possess for us so much of reality. Determinism there must be in life, but freedom also in that we can wrest from the apparently fatal law of cause and effect a means to a nobler triumph of free personality and nobility of character. And this triumph is not less a tribute to our intellect than to our intuition.

But nobility of character, or true freedom, is not a quality which possesses merely emotional significance. It is not merely an end, but also a means to further conquest; and its sign is not cessation of action, or capriciousness of action, but action that reduces some part of the flux of reality into rational order. Nobility of character is nobility simply because it is able to act in a certain orderly way in spite of nature and in accordance with certain rational laws. That these laws may or may not be in accordance with nature is beside the mark—they are human, of human worth and significance. They are the sole bulwark which man these thousands of years has learned to set up against the awful ravages of brute nature; and in so far as he obeys them he asserts his humanity as opposed to his barbarism. Even a child knows that if he turns around a sufficient number of times and rapidly enough the earth and sky will seem to reel in wildest confusion, but is it the part of a man after gazing on the mad dance of life and nature to assert confidently that the rational order on which he stands has caught the whirl of his vertigo?

What then, shall we say of this new spirit of revolt against the tyranny of the intellect, as the anti-intellectualists phrase it? I believe it can be reduced almost to a formula. It is, of course, not a new thing in human thought, and its symptoms are easily discernible. In the eighteenth century, shortly after Locke wrote his famous Essay Concerning Human Understanding and Newton his Principia, there arose an immense faith in the powers of pure reason, and men devoted their lives to the solution of every problem by its unaided efforts. As a result there were

---

1 See an excellent article by my friend Professor H. B. Alexander in the Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research, October, 1913.
built up a series of organically developed and marvellously intricate rational structures to house all human activities and to provide room for human aspiration and emotion. The world has seldom seen such systematised intellectual effort as that of Leibnitz, Wolff, Lessing, Adam Smith, and Montesquieu. But the world of reality and human emotion, in its higher and lower manifestations, felt itself restricted in these orderly and, as their opponents said, mechanistically devised schemes of things entire. Besides there were a horde of lesser men, men like Voltaire, Diderot, Helvetius, and the Encyclopedists in general, who abused the reason they claimed to serve; and a host of artists and writers who contented themselves with slavish imitation of the form, not catching the spirit of the masters. The natural reaction followed in the anti-intellectualism of Rousseau, with its adoration of pure and unrestrained passion, and in the critical work of Kant, who showed by his antinomies the exact limitations of the intellectual powers. The anti-intellectualism of Rousseau was due to a complete misunderstanding of the nature and of the province of the human reason, owing to the misuse of reason by those who had attempted to speak in its name. The antinomies of Kant were due, mathematicians say, to the insufficient mathematics of his time.

The same phenomenon is taking place in our day. The mid-nineteenth century saw again a revival of science. With Spencer and Haeckel scientific dogmatism went so far as would have shocked its earlier votaries. Literature, history, sociology, almost every department of human thought, has felt its chilling intrusion.¹ Again there has arisen the feeling that the deeper problems of reality have been left untouched, and as a result men are turning to rend reason, because, they say, reason and science are synonymous. To show that reason and science are not always even in accord, and that, at best, scientific thought is but one of the many manifestations of our rational processes is no argument for them, for such men are above reason, using it only when they desire to set forth its insufficiency.

It is a truism that life and reality is a monstrum, horrendum, informe, ingens, to which the light of reason is denied. The humanist knows this as well as the anti-intellectualist. He knows

¹ See "Intrusions of Science," by my colleague and friend, Mr. S. B. Gass, Mid-West Quarterly, vol. i., i.
that his rational world is a thin veneer separating him from the
dormless welter, and his effort is directed to making its weaknesses
strong, to rendering human life amenable to human law; and to
do this he knows that he must renounce much in order that his
ears may not be stunned and his balance lost and his reason
swallowed up in the turmoil below. He sees that life itself is
essentially non-significant, therefore he strives to make that
part of it that falls to his lot significant for much; he perceives that
disorder abounds; he sets to work to put his little world in order;
in a word, his attention is fixed on that portion of life and reality
which he can take into himself and render orderly. Beyond that,
the nature of things themselves, he knows, is unknowable. The
anti-intellectualist also sees that the order in the world of reason
has little consanguinity with the great world of life and reality
without; and because of this discrepancy he lifts his heel against
reason. It is as though a man should spurn the raft that saves
him, and because it is not solid earth leap to his destruction. It
is all a question of emphasis,—which is more worthy of human
consideration, the reason that sets man apart from brute life,
whether of men or beasts or of stocks and stones; or the flux of
life itself, which also we may enter, "for wide is the gate and
many there be that go in thereat."

And now we may answer the question at the beginning of this
paper. Is this glimpse of reality, which anti-intellectualist science
and metaphysics so truculently announce can be gained only by
abandoning our rational birthright,—is this the promised land for
art and letters, or is it but a shimmering mirage? The question has
almost answered itself. If art and creative literature have as their
purpose to destroy the distinction between nature and human
nature, to reduce both to isolated fact or to the undifferentiated
flux of becoming, then the futurist in art and many of our near
futurists in letters are right. For both would lay bare the heart
and soul of life and nature in search for the "one touch of nature
that makes the whole world kin." But our literary and artistic
tradition has long pointed another way. There is no shuffling
here. Such essentially human things as character, reason, ideals,
morals, though we may look in vain for them in the flux, though
they may be conventions or more or less inadequate generalisations,
must not be regarded as a flippancy, an irrelevancy, a
comic jest. And it is with these human things that art and
literature have to do. One grows a little weary to-day at the
ceaseless iteration of the talismanic words "heart and soul." In itself it is enough to raise the suspicion that perhaps it is all an offering up of incense on the altar of a vanished deity; for "when love begins to sicken and decay, it useth an enforced ceremony."

PHILO M. BUCK, JR.

University of Nebraska.