

by the fact that there are but very few footnotes and that the author does not substantiate every statement by a pertinent reference. This is not a peculiarity of just this book; it is a common procedure with French writers. There is neither a bibliography nor an index. Measured against the wealth of ideas and of information, however, these are minor defects. Reading M. Aron's book should prove rewarding to all who are concerned with the state of our world.

Reviewed by RUDOLF ALLERS

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**The Self and the Dramas of History,**  
by Reinhold Niebuhr. *Scribner.*

Perhaps nothing illustrates with greater force the decline of intelligence and the rise of banality in our present-day philosophy and social science than the fact that many of the recognized "leaders" in these fields either ignore, or are admittedly unable to understand, the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr. Even such a perceptive scholar as Francis W. Coker, in an article, "Some Present-Day Critics of Liberalism" (*The American Political Science Review*, March, 1953), does not grasp the subtle quality of Niebuhr's thought when he suggests that "he seems to be urging a sort of mystic pessimism that might lead to despair of any sort of action."

The basic trouble (which no one has better explained than Niebuhr himself) with our humanities and our social science disciplines of today is that they are in the hands of "leaders" who do not measure up to the tragic and complex dimensions of the problems of the twentieth-century world. To put it more bluntly than Niebuhr, the dogmatically "liberal" leaders of the American mind have *almost* succeeded in stifling, or at least disregarding, expressions of originality which are not in conformity with their own pattern of thought. More often than not they have kept from their

own as well as their students' and followers' minds anything resembling a realistic approach to perplexing social troubles, which cannot be resolved by persuasively easy rational formulas. By ignoring, deriding, or oversimplifying serious alternatives to their own uncomplicated ways of thinking, they unwittingly have aided and abetted the failure of the liberal principles of tolerance and free intellectual development—a failure which they are busily engaged in discerning everywhere, save in their own camp.

Before discussing the latest publication of a native American theologian, who ranks among the world's foremost philosophical realists, another introductory note seems in place. In an age in which social scientists indulge the "scientific method," it may not be amiss to recall the adroit admonishments of Wilhelm Dilthey to the effect that the historical and social sciences deal with human situations. No way can be found by which, on the strength of this, they can approximate the greater exactitude of the mathematical and natural sciences. The human subject is incomparably variable and elusive. Only superficially can the measurements, the rules of attraction and repulsion of the mere physical and biological worlds be applied to it. Of course we may use—in fact we even are urged by Dilthey to use—the scientific method in exploring and in "describing" actual human behavior, accomplishments and failures. Yet little of cultural significance is gained thereby, he reminds us, unless the social scientist also tries to re-create motivations, plans, ideals, drives and passions of an epoch, a group, a great personality of historic dimensions. One remembers that the American historians Carl L. Becker and Charles A. Beard—at times at least—similarly inveighed against a "science of history," although they were not always consistent in following this pattern. The danger which lurks behind the concept of "Verstehen" of Dilthey is that—while conveniently using it as an excuse—dilettantes may cavalierly dispense with *all* scientific self-discipline in these fields dealing with human behavior, with the research

and adequate observation antecedent to its understanding, with the precise description prerequisite to the analytical act. This has happened, and the pseudo-scientific pretensions of the "geniuses" match those of the naturalists; in the final analysis, the former may even inflict greater harm upon society than the latter, because their authors were, and are, more successful in spreading their word among the masses.

It may be said that Niebuhr tends to confuse the reader on this score. Insofar as he argues against the indiscriminating use of the "scientific method" by the naturalists and rationalists in the humanities, he is on safe grounds. But when he terms *all* historical and social interpretative effort as "ideological," he fails thereby to make proper distinctions and, incidentally and by implication, grades down his own writings. Dilthey himself was meticulous in insisting that "Verstehen," the process of analytical understanding of historic actions and actors, was overwhelmingly subjective. Yet he distinguished between the learned and the naïve attempts at reconstructing historic realities in this fashion. Niebuhr, unfortunately, does not consider this vital difference in his chapter on "The Problem of Historical Knowledge." His *methodological* analysis is therefore incomplete. A redeeming feature is, that in the *systematic* portions of this as well as all his other works he unfailingly applies the scientific tools of research, observation, introspection, analogy, description and exemplification to illumine his points. One may add, that what emerges is not an iron-clad proof, but partly artful inspiration, partly scientific result, precisely as it should be, and as it must. Through this combination of available means, he nevertheless has persuaded a highly sophisticated, philosophically and intellectually very alert portion of the American public, as well as equally educated segments of foreign populations, to become his ardent following. The "ideologue," in the strict meaning of the term, does not care about the real scientific prerequisites to historical analysis. Niebuhr,

however, does care very much about these. That there is always some residue of doubt left in these areas, which allows for considerably more argument and disagreement than there is normally in the fields of the so-called exact sciences, does not of itself, in this reviewer's humble opinion, make the former boundlessly "biased," as Niebuhr implies. Certain bounds in this respect, and in contrast to ideologies proper, are supplied by both the application of *some* available scientific tools and the philosophical awareness of the truly learned mind of its own limitations.

Niebuhr's self-devaluating error, then, is produced by his endeavor—more openly manifest here than in all his other works—to defend the prophetic-biblical tradition against the Hellenic rationalistic and the modern scientific approaches to the problems of selfhood and history. Within the self-imposed rules of the theological "bias," Niebuhr, to repeat this, is as "scientific" as the peculiarities of his historical, philosophical, and psychological subject matters permit.

The uniqueness of the human self is explained in this book as involving three dialogues: it is in constant dialogue with itself, with its neighbors, and with God. This biblical viewpoint, in Niebuhr's judgment, does more justice to the intricacies of man's nature than does the glib and simple identification of man with reason of the Hellenistic and modern schools of thought. The dialogue of the self with itself is an empiric fact, he states. It is interesting to observe how Niebuhr's artistry in exploring the innermost niches and operations of the human consciousness, on one hand, and his scientific precision in exemplifying and describing them, on the other, match anything that the modern psychologists can muster. In fact, a good portion of the book is devoted to the task of refuting with superb introspection and true psychological acumen the one-sided and exaggerated claims of the Freudians.

The self is also in constant dialogue with various neighbors upon whom it is not

merely dependent for its survival and outward security. It also depends upon them for the image which it has of itself and for its "inner" security. The latter is as essential to the self as is its "social security." Only in relation to a "Thou" and the community can a person become complete, truly "I." Finally, the self's dialogue with God is a terminology which, in Niebuhr's own words, "will immediately prejudice our analysis in the eyes of those who have drawn heavily upon either naturalistic or idealistic versions of the Greek tradition." It tends to take the inquiry beyond the limits of empirical verification. Hence, Niebuhr declares himself content with merely stating that the human self is distinguished by "a yearning for the ultimate." It *imagines* itself in an encounter with it.

More specifically, the dialogue within the self proceeds on many levels. "Sometimes it is a dialogue between the self as engaged in its various responsibilities and affections

and the self which observes these engagements. Sometimes the dialogue is between the self in the grip of its immediate necessities and biological urges, and the self as an organization of long-range purposes and ends. Sometimes the dialogue is between the self in the context of one set of loyalties and the self in the grip of contrasting claims and responsibilities." Both Freud and the subsequent "depth psychologists" have both illumined and obscured this inner dialogue. They have illumined the psychological facts surrounding it by proving that "the inner organization of the self is much more intricate than was supposed." But for all their therapeutic skills, they have confused the realities of the internal dialogue by obscuring the fact that the self is really in both the "id" and the "super-ego." The rigid naturalism of the Freudians prevented them from recognizing that the dialogue between the "ego" and the "super-ego" is actually a debate be-

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ween the self "as engaged and obligated to its various communities and the self concerned with its own ends." It did not occur to Freud that the self has "both the power to defy the community for the sake of its interests and for the sake of interests more inclusive than those of a given community." The inability of Freudianism to comprehend the scope and reality of the "free self" prompted it to ascribe the individual's sense of social responsibilities to the external pressure upon the self and to imagine the self resisting these pressures. Consequently, Freudianism became pessimistic about the possibility of extending any kind of social discipline to the extent required by modern society."

There is a tension and a potentiality for inner conflict on all levels of the self's inner life as it confronts itself and the external. Still, the self is capable of transcending its uncertainties and of achieving "unity." This latter end is achieved by the "spirit," which is "the self itself in its awareness of its freedom over its functions." The self and its conflicts, its paradoxical position as both a creator and creature of the historical drama, are superbly described.

Nevertheless, man "cannot find himself without finding a center beyond himself." "The self is so great and so small that its greatness cannot be contained in its smallness. It can only realize itself by endlessly being drawn into larger ends." The community is a larger end, although it cannot be the ultimate end. In contrast to the Hellenic thought which tried to equate the self with reason or with "organism," to reduce social institutions and history to "natural laws," and in contrast to what Niebuhr terms "modern culture," he stresses the ambivalence of man's nature and the complexities of the social and historical structures and possibilities. The self's freedom is paradoxically conditioned by the forces of nature and history. However, the tendency to reduce history to nature "has given rise, since the French Enlightenment, to a determinism which minimizes the

creative role of man." For instance, the economics of laissez-faire, drawn from the physiocratic theory, warned men against interfering with the "natural" balances of history. On the other hand, a contradictory theory propounded that "man is called upon to use scientific technics to manage history, as he has managed nature. Many modern social scientists have been influenced by this voluntarism since Comte." Niebuhr's warning is very appropriate, that modern Communism presents us with a similar, albeit "much more dangerous combination of such determinism and voluntarism," assuming, as it does, an elite which, by virtue of its supreme insights into the logic of history, determines historical events and "changes the whole human situation by making man the unambiguous master of historical destiny rather than merely both creature and creator."

The whole of "modern culture" does not understand how intimately and inextricably are related the possibilities of human freedom and corruption of the human will, creativity and destructiveness, reason and "ideological taint." Biblical faith grasped these ambiguities, and it follows that the historical meanings and fulfillments which "remain fragmentary to the end," point beyond themselves. In other words, history, which embraces man's dialogue with his fellows, necessarily remains unfulfilled. In its state of unfulfillment it points to the third dialogue: the one with God.

This dialogue reveals man in search of ultimate meaning. In clearer focus than ever before appears Niebuhr's thesis of the finiteness and incompleteness of a social ethics that is devoid of a consciousness of time and eternity, and which shuns the doctrine of divine forgiveness and grace as well as the sense of social justice and tolerance contingent on faith in this doctrine. Throughout the book he fights a running battle, not only with the perversions of justice and reason of an "empirical culture," but also with those of the Christian faith, its "liberal" and "orthodox" corruptions. Deeply implied and less explicit is

the rejection of such neo-orthodox positions as those held by both Karl Barth and Paul Tillich, with whose diverse views Niebuhr's own ideas often have been too lightly and thoughtlessly associated, if not confused, by many journalistic writers as well as some college professors.

One cannot do justice to Niebuhr's thought and style by trying to outline or interpret any of his works. His style is so peculiarly poignant and completely his own, his ideas and observations are so ramified, subtle and penetrating that, as one reviewer once put it, only Niebuhr himself can fully explain Niebuhr.

One last word, however, seems appropriate. One of the most effective and devastating criticisms of this book is directed against the spirit of the French Enlightenment and Revolution. "Probably no era in modern history has been . . . more engulfed in confusion about the nature of the human self and its dramas than the period of the French Revolution." This is, among others, the reason "why the promises of the French Revolution remain unfulfilled in France to the present day." The French Enlightenment is the fountain-head of "every error which infects a modern liberal culture." It also is the starting point of all the fallacies of materialism and false romanticism which reached their tragic crescendo in the "totalitarian democracy." The worship of reason quickly resulted in Jacobin fanaticism and cruelty. What gives this fact a particularly ironic touch is that "post-revolutionary" and modern "liberalism" has refused to learn its lessons from this historic failure. Liberalism remains chiefly informed by a very zealous, "a very religious anti-religious rationalism" derived from that French source.

These and similar pronouncements seem to place Niebuhr in close proximity to the

"new conservatives." Yet Niebuhr probably would be the first to deny this. There are several reasons for such denial. First, Niebuhr's idea of citizenship "in two worlds"—the "natural" world and the world of God—as well as his highly developed sense of social justice render him peculiarly sensitive to the shortcomings of *all* empirical vested interests, on the Right and the Left, while at the same time his realistic approach to political problems persuades him to their acceptance as simple facts of historical and natural dimensions. Furthermore, in previous writings he has criticized American conservatism for many of its misconceptions and confusions with regard to the social role of power and tradition, while simultaneously paying homage to certain aspects of British conservatism, and to Churchill personally. The virtue of conservatism, according to Niebuhr, consists largely in "its ability to gauge factors of power in social and international relations which liberals tended to obscure; and to trust the organic processes of social cohesion rather than the abstract schemes which liberals were inclined to advance." (*Christian Realism and Political Problems*, p. 66.) The real problem consists in finding "how to generate the wisdom of true conservatism without losing the humane virtues which the liberal movement developed." His feeling at the moment of that writing seemed to be that American conservatism had not sufficiently matured toward that end.\*

Reviewed by LUDWIG FREUND

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\* Dr. Niebuhr writes to Professor Freund: "You said exactly the true word in regard to my attitude toward conservatism and liberalism. Despite Mr. Kirk's including me among the conservatives, I am conservative only in wanting to recognize the 'organic' aspects of community and the elements of interest and power. But I want to remain a liberal even though I abhor the creed of liberalism which proceeded from the French Enlightenment."