

The Pleasures of Pragmatism

Philosophy and Public Policy, by Sidney Hook, *Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980. xii + 288 pp. \$17.50.*

THE INTELLECTUAL odyssey of Sidney Hook is, from a political perspective, marked by radical shifts. The philosopher began as a Marxist who, in 1932, campaigned for the Communist Party presidential candidate. In the next decade, after having been one of the very few Leftists to criticize Stalin, he abandoned Marxism.¹ In the 1960's, he attacked the excesses of student radicals and, in so doing, gained the permanent enmity of a large segment of academia. In the seventies, he opposed "reverse" discrimination with the same determination and polemical skill he had earlier used in opposing discrimination simpliciter. Today, in his seventy-ninth year, he is Senior

Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

Yet Professor Hook's journey from Greenwich Village Marxist to Fellowship at one of America's most prestigious conservative think tanks does not reflect intellectual inconsistency. For throughout the skein of his various political loyalties has run the thread of his commitment to democracy. Where the means for achieving a democratic society seemed to him to change, then he changed—as befits one who learned his pragmatism first-hand from John Dewey. To use Dewey's terminology, Hook's *intrinsic* goal—democracy—remained steadfast while his *instrumental* goals—the means for establishing democracy—altered. In 1930, he believed they could be found in the writings of Marx and Trotsky. But no longer.

Both his pragmatic philosophical method and his democratic politics are reflected in this new collection of Hook's

papers. It is divided into four sections: Philosophy and Public Policy; Freedom and Rights; Heroes and Anti-Heroes; Religion and Culture. In the first essay, from which the book takes its title, Hook contrasts his conception of philosophy with that held by most Anglo-American philosophers—linguistic analysis.

There is, he points out, much disagreement among philosophers. As a result, philosophy, unlike science, lacks a body of accepted truths. This lack has driven philosophers—disparingly, thinks Hook—to reduce the claims of philosophy to mere conceptual analysis. But even this attenuated view of philosophy does not end the disagreements; and the reason, according to Hook, is that there are no criteria for selecting one conceptual analysis over another.

The conceptual or categorical analyses of scientists seem to be controlled by the state of scientific knowledge or by the bearing they have on integrating what is known and furthering more fruitful inquiries. Thus Einstein's analysis of the concept of simultaneity and his contention that the simultaneity of events is relative, not absolute, recommended itself in terms of the consequences of its use. But there does not seem to be any comparable way of determining the relative validity of different philosophic analyses of the concepts of "matter," "self," "consciousness," "individual."

In fact, the situation for linguistic analysis is not quite so bleak. To take two of Hook's examples, the concepts of "self" and "individual" have, because of analytic philosophers, received greater clarification in the past seventy years than in the preceding thousand. And the criteria for accepting or rejecting those conceptual analyses have, to a great extent, been the degree to which they cohered with accepted scientific doctrines. The dualistic view of the self as an immaterial entity somehow connected to a material body to constitute a person was so widely held—prior to the work of Russell, Wittgenstein, and the logical positivists—that it was virtually a

dogma. They, and others, revealed the apparent conflict between that dogma and received scientific law. How, for example, could the amount of energy in the universe remain constant (as claimed by the Conservation of Energy Principle) if an immaterial mind could cause a material body to move (as claimed by mind-body dualists, *e.g.*, Descartes), thus introducing energy into the system? This is not to say that immaterial selves and mind-body interactionism have been proven nonexistent. Rather, that conceptual clarifications suggested by analytic philosophers can, in some instances, be judged relative to scientific standards. The result is not the elimination of disagreements but rather a shifting of the burden of proof.

Hook regards philosophy, when viewed historically, as "the normative conception of human values." While that may be an adequate description of philosophy prior to 1900, if applied today it would exclude the works of such influential philosophers as W. V. Quine, David Lewis, Saul Kripke, and David Kaplan, none of whom has addressed questions of value. 'Philosophy' may be one of those open-ended terms Wittgenstein described whose instances bear, at most, a family resemblance to each other, rather than share some one essential feature. If so, it is not surprising that Hook's definition leaves something out.

"How," he asks, "should the philosopher as a philosopher proceed in his discussion of public affairs in contradistinction to others?" First, the philosopher must be familiar with the relevant facts. As a pragmatist, Hook evaluates philosophical positions by their consequences. Therefore, having eschewed apriori solutions, he must direct the philosopher's attention to the empirical features of any problem. Second, philosophers should exhibit the methodological sophistication necessary to sharpen the issues in dispute. Third, they should be able to distinguish the factual from the ideological issues. Fourth, philosophers should make clear the ethical assumptions camouflaged within public disputes. Finally, philosophers must be

dispassionate about the issues they examine.

Hook exhibits each of these desiderated virtues in the section on Heroes and Anti-Heroes. In the case of Bertrand Russell, he practices the dispassion he preached when considering his virulent anti-Americanism during the Vietnam era, a quality Russell coupled with a remarkably benign view of Communism. Russell was not, as some suggested, becoming senile. Nor, thinks Hook, was he a captive of others who used his famous name to further their own causes. Russell was, Hook believes, simply terrified of war. So much that he would tolerate *any* régime as long as it was peacefully established. This "better red than dead" philosophy—a phrase actually coined by Russell—proves to Hook that "when great men err, they err greatly."

As the New Right gains converts, self-proclaimed victims of the Old Right are finding new careers selectively recalling their moments of martyrdom. Playwright Lillian Hellman's *Scoundrel Time* was a best-selling apologia for her activities during the McCarthy era, purporting to show how she was victimized. With the precision and logic of a prosecuting attorney, Hook attacks her brief point by point, revealing her long toleration of Stalinism. He concludes with a postscript quoting Miss Hellman on why she attacked Senator Joseph R. McCarthy but not Stalin. "I was injured by McCarthy for one thing. I was not personally injured by Stalin, which is not a very high class reason but it's a very—it's a good practical reason." Hook is unconvinced:

Lillian Hellman is an eager but unaccomplished liar. She was not German. Nor was she personally injured by Hitler. But she protested vigorously his terror regime. She was not Italian. Nor was she personally injured by Mussolini but she joined liberals in denouncing him. She was not Spanish. Nor was she personally injured by Franco but she was very active in the defense of the Loyalist Spanish cause. Only when called upon to protest against the in-

famies of Stalin and Stalinism did she suddenly discover that she was not Russian and that as an American she had no business abroad. But then if the fact that she was not Russian and suffered no injury at Stalin's hands exonerates her from failure to criticize Stalin's crimes, why then did she defend them...?

For more than fifty years Sidney Hook's has been a civilized, rational voice raised against a cacophony of irrationalism and brutality. This collection of his essays reminds us of that voice, and allows us to share the pleasures of his pragmatism.

Reviewed by J. BROOKS COLBURN

¹For an excellent study of the apostasy from communism of several prominent American intellectuals, see John P. Diggins' *Up From Communism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

Game Cock of the South

Jefferson Davis Gets His Citizenship Back, by Robert Penn Warren, *Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1980. 114 pp. \$8.75.*

DURING THE PAST four years students of Southern history have been offered three studies of Jefferson Davis, soldier, planter, senator, Secretary of War, and President of the Southern Confederacy.¹ Although these studies vary widely in quality, they are unanimous in their conclusion that of Jeff Davis was, in quite fundamental ways, a remarkable man. And, by implication, they pass favorable judgment upon the society that produced him. What are we seeing here?

The latest, and by far the most complex, is Robert Penn Warren's meditation upon the ill-starred Davis and his fate at the hands of both scholars and the great