

## INTRODUCTION

**T**HOUGH the tendency is to pronounce the title of this book with the accent on *history*, so far as meaning goes the accent should be on *attitudes*. And by "history" is meant primarily man's life in political communities. The book, then, deals with characteristic responses of people in their forming and reforming of congregations. You might call it "Attitudes Toward the Incessant Intermingling of Conservatism and Progress." Or, translating into expressions now often encountered, we could entitle it "Statements of Policy on Problems of Organizational Behavior." Or, one more try: "Manual of Terms for a Public Relations Counsel with a Heart" (we shouldn't overlook the cardiac touch).

It operates on the miso-philanthropic assumption that getting along with people is one devil of a difficult task, but that, in the last analysis, we should all want to get along with people (and do want to).

To this end, the book makes three main inroads into its material, and then proceeds to a summary that, in discussing the terminology we had developed as analytic instruments for the first three inroads, becomes in effect a fourth (and longest) inroad.

The first section, on "Acceptance and Rejection," deals with those most basic of attitudes: Yes, No, and the intermediate realm of Maybe. To consider, as succinctly as possible without loss of depth, the various typical ways in which these attitudes are both subtly and grandly symbolized, this section inquires into the spirit of such literary genres as

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tragedy, satire, fantasy, comedy. For such expressive forms are viewed as recordings on the dial—and we aim to get our accuracy by the inspecting and charting of their accuracy.

Our second section, "The Curve of History," seeks to chart the over-all problems of merger and division (with corresponding confusion and profusion of orthodoxy, heresy, sect, and schism) that marked our particular Western culture. Dramatistically inclined, we conceive of these developmental stages after the analogy of a five-act play, thus:

Act I. Evangelical Christianity emerging out of dying, pagan Rome.

Act II. Mediaeval Synthesis.

Act III. Protestantism.

Act IV. Early Capitalism.

Act V. Collectivism, as imposed in some form or other by the conditions of modern technology and accountancy, encompassing such a variety of polities as Fascism, "Police States," socialism, communism, the "Welfare State," and the giant industrial corporations which are typical of our own nation at the present time (and which have aptly been called "business governments," as distinct from strictly "political governments").

The third section, on "The General Nature of Ritual," is necessary because of the ironies whereby a group's routines can become its rituals, while on the other hand its rituals become routines. Or, otherwise put: poetic image and rhetorical idea can become subtly fused—a fusion to which the very nature of poetry and rhetoric makes us prone. For the practised rhetorician relies greatly upon images to affect men's ideation (as with current terms like "power vacuum" and "iron curtain"), and a poet's images differ from sheerly

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sensory images precisely by reason of the fact that a poet's images are saturated with ideas.

Throughout these three sections we have gradually worked up a terminology, some terms of which recur quite frequently. These are our "attitudinal" terms for confronting kinds of quandary that *mutatis mutandis* recur under various historical conditions. That is, though every historical period is unique as regards its particular set of circumstances and persons, the tenor of men's policies for confronting such manifold conditions has a *synthesizing* function. For instance, if we feel happy on three different occasions, these three occasions are in a sense *attitudinally united*; they are *one in spirit*, regardless of how different they may have been in their particulars. And in this sense, history "constantly repeats itself."

One now sees the importance of our stress upon the term *attitudes* in our title. For all the terms which we consider alphabetically in our fourth section are of a strongly attitudinal sort. Even when they name a process or a condition, they name it from a meditative, or moralizing, or even hortatory point of view. And saturating the lot is the attitude of attitudes which we call the "comic frame," the methodic view of human antics as a comedy, albeit as a comedy ever on the verge of the most disastrous tragedy.

If "comedy" is our attitude of attitudes, then the process of processes which this comedy meditates upon is what we call the "bureaucratization of the imaginative." This formula is designed to name the vexing things that happen when men try to translate some pure aim or vision into terms of its corresponding material embodiment, thus necessarily involving elements alien to the original, "spiritual" ("imaginative") motive.

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We could best sum up this view of history by a story, an anecdote presumably invented by the late Lincoln Steffens. It is so basic, if there were such a thing as a Comic Book of Genesis surely this story would be there:

Steffens, as the story goes, was entering the New York Public Library when a friend of his came stumbling out. The man was obviously in great agitation. "I've found it!" he shouted. And he clamorously called for Steffens to go with him and listen while he told of his discovery.

Steffens obliged. The two bumped along Forty-Second Street and turned down Fifth Avenue while the friend somewhat incoherently explained.

Gradually, despite his excitement, his words began to make sense—and Steffens realized that his friend had found a plan for saving the world. And the more the outlines of the plan began to emerge, the better the scheme sounded.

Then Steffens became aware that someone was walking along beside them, listening to the account. And finally, turning, he saw a very distinguished-looking gentleman—then, looking again, he realized that it was the devil.

Steffens: "You seem to be interested in my friend's plan."

The Devil: "Decidedly!"

Steffens: "What do you think of it?"

The Devil: "I think it's an excellent plan."

Steffens: "You mean to say you think it would work?"

The Devil: "Oh, yes. It would certainly work."

Steffens: "But in that case, how about you? Wouldn't it put you out of a job?"

The Devil: "Not in the least. I'll organize it."

That is: As regards our notion of the "Bureaucratization of the Imaginative," the friend's plan would be the originat-

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ing spiritual vision (the "Imaginative"); and the organizing of it, its material embodiment or reduction to utilitarian routines, would be its "Bureaucratization." Such would be the mildly Machiavellian nature of this key formula.

In the twenty some years between the first edition of this book and its present reprinting, a momentous quantitative difference has entered the world; and as the Hegelians and their offshoots might say, this particular change in quantity has produced a critical change in motivational quality. It is almost as great as the change from No to Yes that struck down the thirteenth apostle, Saul-become-Paul, on the road to Damascus.

We refer to the invention of technical devices that would make the rapid obliteration of all human life an easily available possibility. Up to now, human stupidity could go to fantastic lengths of destructiveness, yet always mankind's hopes of recovery could be born anew. Indeed, had you reduced the world's population to but one surviving adult, in time all the continents could again be teeming with populates, if that one hypothetical survivor were but fairly young, and pregnant with a male child. But now presumably a truly New Situation is with us, making it all the more imperative that we learn to cherish the mildly charitable ways of the comic discount. For by nothing less than such humanistic allowances can we hope to forestall (if it can be forestalled!) the most idiotic tragedy conceivable: the willful ultimate poisoning of this lovely planet, in conformity with a mistaken heroics of war—and each day, as the sun still rises anew upon the still surviving plenitude, let us piously give thanks to Something or Other not of man's making. Basically this book would accept the Aristophanic assumptions, which equate tragedy with war and comedy with peace.

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Also, perhaps in another respect we should invoke the charity of the comic discount. For despite some revisions in this tiny *Universal History*, the work still clearly reveals its origins in the conditions and temper of the thirties (both the century's and the author's). So, let us hope that the reader, comically inspirited, will forgive the author those occasions when the author's efforts to transcend a local situation drastically tossed him back into the very midst of it.\*

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\* When this book first appeared, one reviewer objected to the profusion of footnotes. We grant that they are a blemish. But they were necessary. For the material "radiated" in various directions, and these "radiations" could not have been traced in any other way.

Another reader, who preferred the footnotes to the text, suggested that we should try writing a book that was nearly all footnotes, with but the barest minimum of central text.

Of the two extremes (either no footnotes or all footnotes), the second would certainly be the better suited to this material. And, looking again, perhaps we might discover that the last and longest section, on the "pivotal terms," is in effect one continuous series of footnotes alphabetized.

The problem of "radiations" forced us to consider repeatedly the labyrinthine way in which one term involves others. And after all, as you progress along a traffic-laden avenue, sometimes it's easier to see down the side-streets than up and down the avenue. Nor should we forget that all those side routes have their ways of connecting with one another, in the labyrinthine city of a terminology.