

Dogmatism & Tolerance

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gins to teach its own philosophy and to make it compulsory in its schools, you may be sure that, in doing so, its ultimate purpose and aim is not to enlighten, but to bend the whole man to its will and to exact unconditional surrender to its authority. Strangely enough, many men today seem most anxious to become slaves; this is a matter of taste, and provided they could become so themselves without involving me, I would have no political objection. Unfortunately, we are all in the same boat, and if these men succeed in establishing a totalitarian State, even those among us who cherish freedom will have to endure slavery. This is where it may prove useful to resort to philosophical reflection.

Is it true to say that dogmatism in philosophy begets tyranny in politics? Or are not those who maintain this the victims of a dangerous sophism? At first sight, there seems to be a parallel between a philosopher who affirms that a certain philosophy is absolutely true, and the decision whereby a political party decides to turn a system into a State-enforced philosophy. Yet the two situations are different. When a philosopher maintains that a certain philosophy is true, he is simply yielding to the evidence of his own intellect. Now, each of us has his own intellect, and the power to see things in its light is precisely what makes us free. True enough, when we feel sure of something, we usually try to convince others that what is true for us is also true for them; and we do this not without good reason, for indeed truth consists in knowing things as they are, and since both intellectual light and reality are the same for all men, there is no reason why what is true for one of us should not also be true for all. But let us suppose I succeed in convincing somebody that what I think is true. He will not accept it as true on the strength or under the pressure of my arguments. He will see, in the light of his own intellect, the very same truth which I had seen before him in the light of my intellect. When a professor of mathematics gives his pupils a demonstration, those among them who understand it agree with their professor, and they cannot fail to agree with him; yet they are free, because their common agreement rests upon the fact that several distinct intellects happen to see the same thing in the same light. True enough, philosophical problems are more

of our intellects. For indeed dogmatism does not consist in the belief that all that seems to us to be true is true. It is neither rashness in judging, nor stubbornness in maintaining the conclusions of our judgments. The truly dogmatic mind is not such at the beginning of its inquiries, but at the end. Modest and patient, such an intellect will be the last to jump at conclusions or to withdraw them from criticism. There comes a time when a man simply cannot refuse to accept certain conclusions without refusing to trust his own understanding, whereby he is a man; and just as he himself accepts a truth, he states it, together with his reasons for so doing, so that other men may accept it too, in the light, not of his own mind, but of theirs. In this sense, dogmatism is but another word for the normal healthy condition of human understanding.

What is healthy for the individual man cannot be unhealthy for the body politic, whose members are men. To imagine that skepticism in philosophy favors tolerance is to forget that many tyrants expressly professed that they were sure of nothing. Even the so-called scientific relativism advocated by some philosophers as favorable to political tolerance is far from constituting a safe guarantee against eventual persecutions. Among the illustrations of his "empirical Liberalism" given by Bertrand Russell, there is one which I never read without experiencing a deep feeling of uneasiness. "If," our philosopher says, "it is certain that Marx's eschatology is true, and that as soon as private capitalism has been abolished we shall all be happy ever after, then it is right to pursue this end by means of dictatorships, concentration camps, and world wars; but if the end is doubtful or the means not sure to achieve it, present misery becomes an irresistible argument against such drastic methods. If it were certain that without Jews the world would be a paradise, there could be no valid objection to Auschwitz; but if it is much more probable that the world resulting from such methods would be a hell, we can allow free play to our humanitarian revulsion against cruelty."* In short, Lord Russell invites us

* BERTRAND RUSSELL, *Philosophy and Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 1947, pp. 24-25.

to live in a society where democracy is safe because there is a high probability that Marx and Hitler are wrong, although there remains a possibility that they may be right. Would we not feel safer in a society where it was understood that truth cannot be proved by burning any number of heretics at the stake; that dictatorships, concentration camps and world wars are criminal in themselves; that even if the murder of a single Jew sufficed to turn the world into a paradise, there would be no justification for killing him? I do not know if the world is destined ever to become a paradise, but the safest way to bring it nearer to being one would be strictly to obey the divine law: "Thou shalt not kill." Or else, if we prefer philosophy to religion, let us repeat with Kant: no human being should ever be used as a means to any end, because he, himself, is an end. This means not a single person, for any political reasons nor under any political circumstances. Quite recently, Russell stated as the first of his ten commandments to save society from fanaticism, "Do not feel absolutely certain of anything." My own question now is: In what type of a society will there be more chance for political tolerance to prevail? Is it in a society whose leaders are not "absolutely certain" that mass murder is not sometimes permissible? Or is it in a society whose leaders feel absolutely certain, with Kant, that political murder is a crime? Against political fanaticism, a philosophical relativism is the weakest conceivable protection.

There is no reason why political tyranny should be the sole attitude to enjoy a rational justification. Just as communism, Western democracy presupposes a philosophical notion of man, and unless we know that this notion is true, and for what very precise reasons it is true, there is no point in our denying the validity of the Marxian conception of man. Unlike the communist orthodoxy, our own philosophical truth makes room for an indefinite number of concrete political realizations, according to times and places, which are all legitimate as long as they respect the general notion of man which has inspired our preceding remarks, namely, that man is a person, that he is an intellectual being, able to decide for himself in all matters pertaining to human