

## DISCUSSION

## SOME ASPECTS OF PROFESSOR FITE'S INDIVIDUALISM

I FIND myself with considerable sympathy for what I interpret as Professor Fite's purpose in his recent book. Indeed I am not sure that what I have to say involves much more than a change of emphasis. I am ready at any rate to agree that the logic of a fully conscious individualism looks in the direction which he urges. The principle of democracy, as distinguished from what may loosely be called communism, is indeed just this, that each man shall, not surrender his aims to the general welfare, but adjust them to a full and free recognition of the similar aims of other men, on the faith that only thus can he fulfill his own life most abundantly.

But along with a communistic ideal of the state, such as Professor Fite seems to have chiefly in mind to criticize, motivated by altruistic feelings, and logically dependent, therefore, upon the somewhat remote hope that men can be induced voluntarily to surrender such advantages as they possess to their less successful neighbors, there is an alternative position which, though sharply opposed to the conception of democracy, adopts equally with it the presuppositions of individualism. It differs, however, in giving to certain individuals a preference, and in holding that their more important claims can only be met through the absence of a complete autonomy and satisfaction in a considerable number of their fellow men. Of course no one who is not entirely stupid can fail to see that the logic of his own private interest demands that he allow *some* other men to get their way, too. But plenty of people do believe, with much confidence, that they can and ought to stop short of a universal tolerance.

Now at this point I have not been able to make up my mind with certainty just what Professor Fite's attitude is. On the practical side I suppose he intends at least to say this: first, that people can never be largely benefited until they have an intelligent understanding of their own needs and purposes and are ready to assert these for themselves, instead of leaving them to the good will of others; and, secondly, that schemes of social reform, to be effective, must be framed primarily to appeal to interests, rather than to benevolence and charity, to supply their motive force. So far I am inclined very largely to agree, as a question of where the emphasis had better lie in the promoting of political and social measures. Talk about humanity and disinterested justice has indeed an important preparatory value in breaking up the inertia of the public mind in the face of new proposals, to which I doubt if Professor Fite is altogether fair. But after all if concrete changes are to be brought about and

are to continue to work well in practise, men have got to be shown that these are to their interest. The average citizen, for example, must be made to realize that his taxes are increased or his business opportunities lessened by public graft, before he can be held in line for municipal reform; and the disposition to substitute such definite economic considerations that come home to self-interest, for humanitarian exhortation, is one of the best guarantees of the probable success of any wave of reform. Back of this there may be, and indeed I have no doubt there must somewhere be, a temper of moral fervor. But the less we talk about this and accentuate it as the professed motive, and the more we apply ourselves to the rational business of working out the situation in a form to enlist a sufficient multitude of private interests, the more reforms are likely to lose their spasmodic character and become settled principles of action.

But now while this is good advice to the reformer and to those in whose special interest a change is sought, I do not feel so clear about the state of mind which it recommends to the powerful classes who are already in possession, or who by their superior intelligence have the immediate directing of the future. So far as bringing influence to bear upon them goes, I agree, because it seems to be the fact that we are foolish to trust much to exhortation. We ought rather to gird up our loins and convince them that they can not disregard us with safety to themselves; and in so far as they are intelligent they will doubtless in the end see the point and act accordingly. But what is the temper of mind that Professor Fite would ethically approve and justify on their own part? Does reason prescribe that they wait passively for the corresponding development of intelligence in other men, exploiting them meanwhile as without rights until they are able to enforce these rights? or does justice demand that they take such men into account from the start as potentially capable of autonomy, and so, as having rights to be respected? Professor Fite gives some ground for believing that the first is his meaning; if so, I have no wish to defend him. But his idealistic logic seems to me rather to look the other way. Much of this appears without point unless it intends to hold that a complete self-interest will find itself imperfectly fulfilled, except as others are equally self-conscious and autonomous; and if this is so, one is failing in duty to himself unless he does what he can to further the development of security for equal rights to all, even before these can be enforced upon him. The same claims would thus rest upon him as on the ordinary showing; only the *source* of these would be his own welfare, rather than something from the outside that calls for sacrifice and altruism. Subject to correction, I am inclined to suppose that this is really Professor Fite's meaning, and that apparent evidence to the contrary is due to the

fact that he has not sufficiently separated two different standpoints—the standpoint of the reformer, who asks what he can safely presuppose in other men as a working basis of reform, and the inner standpoint of the intelligent man himself in face of the question what rights he shall concede voluntarily to his weaker neighbor.

But here another query arises about Professor Fite's philosophy. He has, as I understand him, a twofold problem. Primarily, perhaps, he is trying to refute what he considers the sentimentalism of the humanitarian. But also he is attempting to justify rationally the claims of social conduct apart from such an altruistic motive. Now it is when the aristocratically-minded man is to be convinced of this that I feel a lack of conclusiveness on Professor Fite's argument. I agree that the most likely way to reach him is by showing him that he is playing the fool, is ignoring facts which he ought to face, and which are preventing the best attainment of his own desires. But I hesitate to believe that this demand is always capable of being met completely, or that it is sufficiently met by an appeal to the nature of consciousness as such. And the reason, on the side of theory, is this, that I find it difficult to separate intelligence from the particular nature of the desires which it may endeavor to serve. The inclusiveness with which a man is going to admit foreign ends within his own system will depend upon the character of the objects which he thinks worth while attaining; and this can not be assumed forthwith as of just one standard quality. What am I to say, for example, if I come across an ideal which apparently gets satisfaction through compelling as many other men as possible to do its bidding—which seems to aim at the very act of keeping others under, because this affords an enjoyable sense of superiority and power? The only thing that can be counted on with certainty is that a perfect intelligence will aim to take account of all the facts, but not that it will necessarily accept as among these facts the legitimacy of another person's ends. It is conceivable that as much intelligence may be shown in recognizing such a competing end and then finding ways to override it, as in accepting it and adjusting action to its requirements.

And to this there are only two answers that I see. It may be said that you are losing something, after all, from the content of the world when you exclude the contribution which another man might bring if he were permitted to follow his own bent. From the world, perhaps, but why of necessity from *my* world, unless I happen to be built so that I want it more than I want its exclusion? His economic contribution I may easily be indifferent to, even if it were clearer than it is that some of it would flow to me. There may be a chance that he may put some obstacles in my own path, but possibly I enjoy the excitement of combat and exploitation. If it is claimed, again,

that by admitting him into my circle I realize the finer spiritual joys of cooperative fellowship, this may very well be so in case I find myself caring for an enlargement of this sort, but not at all if I happen to have an aristocratic taste for power. It will not do to say that no man actually does prefer this last ideal, and that his nature will in reality get a fuller expression in the other way. I may hold this as a faith; but I can not demonstrate it while so many are convinced to the contrary. And in any case the ground for my faith will be, not the abstract character of consciousness, but the concrete nature of the being who is to make use of intelligence to further his ends, those ends being set by his inborn make-up and natural disposition, which apparently differs, within limits, in different people. If a man has seemingly other wants than mine, which look to empire rather than cooperation, I can not refute him by pointing out that intelligence—and he of course wishes to be intelligent—is never complete until it has thoroughly grasped the standpoint of every would-be competitor. He will answer that he intends to understand them; but as for sympathizing with them and accepting their claims, that is another matter. To do this may be precisely to defeat his own particular aim. To enter into their hopes with toleration and sympathy would require that he be another sort of being from what he is—that he be of a nature to suffer directly some diminution of his own sense of attainment through an outlying loss to another man. Assume a satisfaction in fellowship independent of the special character of the task to which cooperation is turned, or an intrinsic disinclination to view with indifference a loss to others over and above the indirect effects that this may have on my own enterprises, and you may indeed expect results. As a matter of fact I suspect that Professor Fite does assume this, and that to it his argument owes the generous quality that might have been quite lacking. But this looks suspiciously like bringing back again the notion of a disinterested side to human character on which the effective appeal of motives to social conduct depends, and the proof of this carries us beyond the abstract logic of self-consciousness.

Accordingly, while I agree that ordinarily the best way of proving to any one that he ought to regard the rights of others is by showing him that he is acting unintelligently otherwise, I should expect to be able to do this, not by a deductive argument from the nature of consciousness, but rather in an empirical way, by calling his attention to the actual nature of the world in which he lives, and the circumstances of the case. But then I should have to give up the hope of convincing him that the harmony was bound to be a complete one. I should be content if he were persuaded only that this was the *better* way, though not of necessity a way which involved no elements what-

ever of loss to him. I might fall back on the faith that apparent loss will after all prove real gain. But so long as knowledge confessedly is incomplete, this would have to be faith, and not philosophic insight. Even if I came up against an ultimate difference of ideal I should not despair of finding solid reasons for my own side. But in that case, at any rate, I should have to admit a solution which was of the nature of a compromise, which came about at the expense, to some degree, of a real preference, and was, therefore, a reconciliation only partially complete.

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## SOCIETIES

### NEW YORK BRANCH OF THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

THE New York Branch of the American Psychological Association held its final meeting for the current academic year on May 22, in conjunction with the Section of Psychology and Anthropology of the New York Academy of Sciences. An afternoon session was held at the Psychological Laboratory of Columbia University. After dinner at the Faculty Club the evening session was held at the American Museum of Natural History. The following abstracts are of the papers presented at the two sessions:

*Group Differences in the Interests of Children:* GERTRUDE MARY KUPER.

That interest plays a very important dynamic rôle in the educational field is only too evident from such treatises as Dr. Dewey's article, "Interest as Related to Will" and Dr. Montessori's "Pedagogia Scientifica." But interest is a general term and can not have an absolutely universal value for every individual or every subject of thought or desire. Individual interests are as important in the social world as are individual capacities. They should, therefore, be a fruitful field for scientific investigation. The experimental work done with advertisements has brought to light group differences in the preferences of men and women for various appeals. The investigation to be reported was of a like nature, except that it dealt with children.

The formal experiment consisted in asking an individual child to arrange nine pictures in the order in which he liked them best. The nine pictures were chosen to represent nine specific appeals: landscape,