

A. Tate

Hound + Horn

1.3

THE FALLACY OF HUMANISM

IF the necessity for virtue could tell us what it is and ensure its practice, the doctrine of the American Humanists would stand with the minimum of easy, even perfunctory revision. There is a general belief that this doctrine is fundamentally sound, and it is rejected, where it is rejected, because it is not "flexible" enough, or because it ignores contemporary literature, or because the Humanists lack the "aesthetic sense." Unhappily, however, Humanism is obscure as to its sources; it is even more ambiguous about the kind of authority to which it appeals. And yet all believers in reason, tradition, and authority, who are obviously disbelievers in impressionism, pure contemporaneity, and license — among whom this essayist numbers himself — will approach the writings of Messrs. Babbitt, More and Foerster with more than an open mind; they will have in advance the conviction that

the rightful concern of man is his humanity, his world of value . . . that marks him off from a merely quantitative natural order;

but, after a great deal of patient reading, they will come away with that conviction — and with no more than that conviction. They will have got no specific ideas about values — that is to say, they will have gained no technique for acquiring them; and such a technique, they will reflect, is morally identical with the values themselves. Values are not suspended in the air, to be plucked. They will reflect, suspiciously, that the vague method of Humanism resembles the vague method of the so-called Romantic in the very respect in which agreement or difference is fundamental: the Humanist pursues

FALLACY OF HUMANISM

Humanism for its own sake — or, say, restraint for restraint's sake, or proportion for proportion's sake — and while this is doubtless better than pursuing disorder for disorder's sake, the authority of the worthier pursuit is no clearer than that of the baser. They will decide, moreover, that this defect of the Humanist is a central one and that, critically examined, it will turn out to be the philosophical malady of the so-called naturalist. Doctrinal differences in themselves may be negligible; the man who supposes himself a naturalist may practice the Humanistic virtues (Montaigne): the Humanist in doctrine may exhibit the method of naturalism (More). But if the appearance of mere doctrine is deceptive, the operation of a technique cannot be. The Humanists have no technique. How, under the special complexities and distractions of the modern world, they intend to validate their values they do not say; they simply urge them. And this discrepancy between doctrine and method their hardier readers will find adequately described in Book II, Chapter IV, of the Nicomachean Ethics:

. . . Yet people in general do not perform these actions, but taking refuge in talk they flatter themselves they are philosophizing, and that they will so be good men: acting in truth very like those sick people who listen to the doctor with great attention but do nothing that he tells them: just as these people cannot be well bodily under such a course of treatment, neither can those be mentally by such philosophizing.

The Humanists have listened not only to one doctor but to a great many doctors, and they tell us what they say; but they have not learned, and they cannot teach us, how to take the medicine.

I propose, in the first place, therefore, to analyze the position held by those Humanists in whom the minimum of doctrine appears: I mean by the minimum of doctrine that

THE HOUND & HORN

their thought refuses to exceed the moralistic plane; they steadily repudiate all religious and philosophical support. The Humanists of this type are Babbitt and Foerster. Secondly, I shall try to discover how this Humanism differs, if it differ, from that of Mr. More, who appears to lean heavily upon religious values. Different as the religious and the non-religious brands of Humanism seem to be, they will turn out in the end to founder on the same reef. At the last, if Humanism shall save itself — that is to say, if it shall find a method — what is the position into which it will be logically driven?

The Humanism formulated by Mr. Norman Foerster in the last chapter of his *American Criticism* is actually a summary of the views of Professor Babbitt. Mr. Foerster adds nothing of his own, but he is more explicit than his master has ever been; he attempts an exact definition of his authorities. He no longer leaves it to the critic to infer the points of attack. An analysis of Foerster is, then, in all the essentials, an analysis of Babbitt. The assumptions of Humanism, according to Mr. Foerster, are as follows:

(1) “. . . that assumptions are necessary.” Foerster points out the self-deception of the naturalist, or the anti-authoritarian, who thinks he has got rid of assumptions.

(2) “. . . that the essential elements of human experience are precisely those which appear to conflict with the reality explored by naturism. It [Humanism] recognizes, indeed, the service of naturism . . . in showing the power of the natural man's impulses.”

(3) “. . . the central assumption of humanism is that of a dualism of man and nature . . . the rightful concern of man is his humanity, his world of value and quality that marks him off from a merely quantitative natural order.”

(4) “Finally, humanism assumes the freedom of the will to con-

(236)

FALLACY OF HUMANISM

form to a standard of values, as opposed to the deterministic assumption of naturism.”

From these assumptions Mr. Foerster proceeds to a doctrine which I reproduce in an abridged form:

(1) An adequate human standard calls for *completeness*. This includes “natural” human nature.

(2) But it also calls for *proportion*: it demands the harmony of the *parts with the whole* (italics mine).

(3) The complete, proportionate standard may be said to consist of the *normally or typically human*.

(4) Although such an ethos has never existed, it has been approximated in the great ages of *the past*. Foerster looks mainly to Greece, but he includes the Romans, Vergil and Horace; the Christians, Jesus, Paul, Augustine, others; the Orientals, Buddha and Confucius; the moderns, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe. (But he has misgivings about Shakespeare.)

(5) Unlike Romanticism, Humanism is true to its Hellenic origin in its faith in *reason*. It seeks to deal positively with the whole of human experience, including those elements of experience that do *not* fall within the scope of what is termed science.

(6) Unlike the conceptions of life that grow out of science, humanism seeks to press beyond reason by the use of *intuition* or *imagination* . . . the human or ethical imagination, as distinguished from the natural or pathetic imagination, which is below the reason.

(7) The ultimate ethical principle is that of restraint or control.

(8) This centre to which Humanism refers everything . . . is the reality that gives rise to religion. But pure Humanism is content to describe it *in physical terms* . . . it hesitates to pass beyond its experimental knowledge to the dogmatic affirmations of any of the great religions . . . it holds that *supernatural revelation must be tested by the intellect* . . . it should be clear that Humanism, like Greek philosophy, *begins with science* and *not* with religion.

The assumptions and the conclusions of Mr. Foerster's Humanism I have given in some detail so that the reader may, by

(237)

THE HOUND & HORN

the merest inspection, see for himself the jungle of vague definition and contradiction in which the Humanist program is lost.

Mr. Foerster says that human values are those which *appear* to conflict (do they or do they not?) with the reality explored by naturism; and yet Humanism demands the cultivation of all human nature, including "natural" human nature. He says, too, that Humanism rejects the elements of experience that fall within the "scope of what is termed science." Can it cultivate them and reject them at the same time? However this may be, Humanism puts its faith in reason (because of its Hellenic origin) and it is based upon science, and yet it is unlike the conceptions of life that grow out of science. It demands a dualism of man and nature opposed to the monistic assumption of naturism; but how, it may be asked, is this dualism to be preserved along with that other requirement of a "harmony of the parts with the whole"? Mr. Foerster has just denounced the monistic whole. And, further, it may be asked, upon which side of the duality does reason take its stand? If science is naturism, and reason science, the question answers itself. Humanism is based upon science, which is naturism, and yet it is unlike the conceptions of life that grow out of science. And here it may be asked upon which science Mr. Foerster performs his miracle of accepting rejection? Is it just *science*? Or is it a *Weltanschauung* whose vision of reality is mechanism, a popular version of genuine science? In this case, it is the quantitative natural order of which he speaks; but how did it get quantified? Is it *naturally* quantified? The only plausible answer is that it was quantified by Mr. Foerster's kind of reason, but that he is so unaware of this that he can, with an effective "chaser" handy, drink "reason" off neat.

The chaser is the "ethical imagination," which presses be-

FALLACY OF HUMANISM

yond reason. We have seen that he puts his faith in reason, and it is difficult to see why he wishes a faith beyond faith, or why he selects this particular super-faith: he refuses to press beyond reason in favour of religion.

His desire to go beyond reason is his desire to escape from naturalism, and his conception of reason is disastrously contradictory. The mere desire to get out of gaol will not unlock the gate, and you remain a prisoner: Mr. Foerster remains a naturalist. He says that "supernatural intuition" — the phrase smacks of romantic Bergsonism — must be tested by the intellect. This is the naturalistic, eighteenth-century "rationalistic," conception of religion: irrational constructions of reality which "reason" (naturalism) may break down and reject. When Mr. Foerster says that religion must be tested by the intellect, he therefore means by naturalism. For naturalism contains the only idea of reason that is available to the Humanist.

If this were not true, the Humanist would not be forced to exceed it. Mr. Foerster is a century behind the thought of his age: he is a romantic post-Kantian who can find no way out of mechanism except intellectual suicide. (The *thoughts* of the age is *not* naturalistic.) This intellectual suicide was the ethical imagination which Schiller found to be the only way out of scientism, and its origin is betrayed by Schiller's description of it as the ideal representation of Causality. The difficulty for Mr. Foerster and Schiller is the question, How is this moral imagination to get moralized? You get nowhere by saying that the ethical imagination is above the reason, the pathetic imagination below; you have first to give them a motive for being what they are; without this you have a logical hypostasy, and the above and the below become, as any professor of logic will tell you, "picture-thinking."

Mr. Foerster will have to decide to be scientifically reasonable, or not to be scientifically reasonable; whether he wants the parts to harmonize with the whole, or whether he rejects the whole for a dualism of the parts. He cannot have reason checking the natural and still keep it natural. Unless he can make up his mind, his dualism is merely verbal; for he is expecting naturalism to un-naturalize itself—or, in other words, the imagination to make itself moral.

But perhaps, after all, he has a way out: he holds an unplayed card and it may be an ace. The ultimate ethical principle is restraint or control, and the motivation of the ethical imagination is restraint; or at least it acts under the influence of restraint for the creation, it seems, of the "normally or typically human." This is the ideal towards which Humanism strives, having based its effort upon the ancient approximations to the ideal. But, if the ethical imagination is the instrument for creating the normally or typically human, what is its motive for doing so? Is it restraint? Or can you say, Because it is ethical? Or, perhaps, that the restraint restrains? This will not do. You have got to refer to certain prior conditions under which an ethical imagination is possible. However wicked the personal life of Villon may have been, his imagination, under the conditions of the time, was bound to be ethical because it had an authority for being; it could not escape this authority in some form.

These conditions are by no means fulfilled by recourse to Sophocles, to Vergil, to Augustine, or to a mixture of these writers taken alone. You cannot get out of them a "philosophy" or a "religion"; literature is no substitute for religion, or for its defence, philosophy. It is this vague understanding on the part of the Humanists of the nature of philosophy, it is their lack of an exact logical and philosophical discipline,

which betrays them not only into the muddy reasoning that we have just seen; it leads them to expect to find in literature, ancient or modern, an explicit philosophy sufficient unto itself—a philosophy, in short, that does not already exist in some purer, instead of a derived and literary form. You may as well burn the *Summa* and study Aquinas, *as Aquinas*, in Dante. The Humanist idea of philosophy and of literature is confused; and both, in their hands, as we shall see, are corrupt.

The belief held at various times since the Renaissance that the ancients are models of attitude and value was an innocent and useful delusion; it was useful so long as it was not necessary to expose it—so long, in fact, as the ancients could be assimilated to an already existing centre of authority. Without this centre you get eclecticism; you get Professor Babbitt. The sole defence of eclecticism is naturalistic—that is to say, it rests upon the ability of the individual mind mechanically to combine, upon a *tabula rasa*, a variety of unlike elements into a unity. We know that mechanical interaction (were it possible) could not yield a whole, but an aggregate. Humanism, lacking a centre, is an aggregate; it expects Sophocles and Vergil to fuse without the action of some prior principle of unity: you could as well get a philosophy out of Racine and Alexander Pope, or Coleridge and Austin Dobson. The Humanist conception of literature is mechanical and naturalistic.

Its idea of the past is infinite regression. When it is asked for authority, it is constantly driven back from one position to another. We arrive at last at the "wisdom of the ages," but are we sure that this wisdom can be assimilated, evaluated, by a mind that has no authority for being wise? Professor Babbitt is learned, and he seems to be wise, but for the latter we have only his word for it.

The idea of infinite regression to authority inheres in all

Humanist thought, and it is probably the subtlest fallacy to which it is committed. In the first place, it takes all the *time* out of the past. Obviously the Humanists do not consciously involve themselves in such an error. What they do perform is an unconscious transformation of the idea of an increasingly distant temporal past into the idea of a logical series which is quite timeless. This is another pitfall of picture-thinking: time is confused with logical succession which, of course, may run in any "direction" or all directions at once. The Humanist thus convinces himself that his logical series is a temporal past, and, as such, contains a stopping-place, some fixed doctrine, an external authority. But there can be no absolute in a logical series because all its terms are equal and it never ends. Logical series is quantitative, the abstraction of space. The temporal series is, on the other hand, space concrete; it may end, for persons in the West, with Christ. Concrete, temporal experience implies the existence of a temporal past, and it is the foundation of religion; that is to say, the only way to think of the past independently of Mr. Foerster's naturalism is to think religiously; and, conversely, the only way to think religiously is to think in time.¹ Naturalistic science is timeless.² A doctrine based upon it, whether explicitly or not, can have no past, no idea of tradition, no fixed authority. The "typically human" is a term that cannot exist apart from some other term; it is not an absolute; it is fluid and unfixd.

¹ Mr. Wyndham Lewis understands this, but his Time fiends are really Space fiends. If his reader will go through his books, and change Space to Time, Time to Space, he will get what Mr. Lewis really means.

² Mr. Foerster (*American Criticism*, p. 238, footnote) says: "Science measures . . . phenomenal happenings viewed in retrospect." Since Mr. Foerster lacks the first elementary idea of the method of science, it is no wonder that he is caught in its assumptions. The fundamental concept of natural science is the Law of Reversible Action: every natural occurrence can, under the same conditions, be repeated; events are never lost in the passing of concrete time; there are no events in retrospect or in prospect; there is simply timeless process.

The "historical method," says Mr. Foerster, rose in the age of naturalism, but he wishes to keep it as a valuable adjunct to Humanism. This may be due to his fallacy in the concept of reason; or it may be that he does not wish to embarrass the American academic system, to which he belongs. His hope, however, that Humanism may rise upon its own débris is another instance of naturalism unnaturalizing itself. Men cannot be naturalists with one half of the mind, Humanists with the other; or does Mr. Foerster desire the growth of two co-operating classes — naturalists and Humanists? The convictions of the one class are bound to undermine those of the other. The "historical method" has always been the anti-historical method. Its aim is to contemporize the past. Its real effect is to de-temporize it. The past becomes a causal series and timeless; and as a quantitative abstraction (as Foerster himself sees) valueless. Are we to infer that, after the historical naturalists have done their work, the Humanist will intercede and evaluate? This is the Victorian illusion all over again — that good may somehow be the "goal of ill."

Professor Babbitt has acutely charged the experimental moderns with not being experimental enough — they have not, he says, questioned the assumptions of their time, but swallowed them whole. He himself continues to experiment, but, as Mr. Eliot has pointed out, we cannot go on experimenting indefinitely. The reason why Professor Babbitt remains an inveterate experimenter is that he, in his turn, has not been philosophical enough. The Socratic method, which he, and Mr. Foerster after him, apply so ably to contemporary society, is a method only, and it may be used by the Humanist and his enemy alike. Torn out of the Platonic Dialogues, it is an instrument for the exposure of contradiction; it brings with it no motive for the exposure; it yields no ab-

solutes. This will be clearer in an analysis of the Humanism of Paul Elmer More.

If Professor Babbitt's Humanism is eclectic, Mr. More's is equally so—but the apparent synthesis takes place on the religious plane. Humanists like Babbitt and Foerster have to meet the problem of access to truth beyond the personality: it is obvious that Babbitt, in some sense, is a sound man, that his views are sound because he is; but there is no other guarantee of the soundness of his views. He is a "personality," and there is nothing to do about personality but to feel that it is sound or unsound. Mr. More, however, compels us to answer the question: Is his religion sound or unsound?

The problem is harder than that of personality, but in the end it is the same. What, in the first place, is Mr. More's religion? Is it Christianity? It is possible that it is. He has written time and again about the insight afforded us by Christian writers, and to them he has brought no inconsiderable insight of his own. There is also, according to Mr. More, a profound insight in Plato—perhaps the profoundest. Again, his studies in the Hindu religions and philosophies have stimulated him to some of his best and most sympathetic writing: the Hindus teach a deep religious dualism. Mr. More's *Studies in Religious Dualism* is a kind of breviary of the good he finds in half a dozen or more religious attitudes. The question remains: which of these religions is Mr. More's? The answer to this, I believe, is: Mr. More's religion is Mr. More's.

He has written a great deal on religion, but it is not easy to put one's finger on his idea of it. The truth is simply that his explicit statements on the subject tend to be vague—some-

thing like pulpit rhetoric. And yet he does have definite ideas. But their most significant expression is in incidental remarks, when he is off his guard. About twenty years ago he took to task an interpreter of the Forest Philosophers for trying

to convert into hard intellectualism what was at bottom a religious and thoroughly human experience.

Is intellectualism hard (or soft) incompatible with religion? If the experience was thoroughly human, was it also religious? Mr. More thinks that it was. If intellectualism has no place in religion, where does it belong? Mr. More's reply to this is undoubtedly Mr. Foerster's conception of reason: reason is the exclusive privilege of what the Humanists call naturism. Religion is an indefinite, unutterable belief. Mr. More, as well as Babbitt and Foerster, cannot get out of this notion of reason. Now, if religion is not allowed to reason, what may it do? Shall it be contented with visions? I think that Mr. More would say no; but he could not rationally say it. Mr. More repeats the dilemma (which is very different from a dualism) of Messrs. Babbitt and Foerster; you have on the one hand scientific naturalism; on the other, irrational belief—the "illusion of a higher reality"² which is only an illusion. This is the familiar doctrine of the *philosophe* that religion is an aberration of the intellect—an aberration of naturalism. Mr. More would say that the religious and the human join in opposing the natural. But if the religious and the human join, in the present state of the religious, you are opposing naturalism with opposition, or at best with itself. You cannot overcome naturalism with an illusion of higher reality; the illusion is a property of the thing to be overcome. In spite of Mr. More's religious attitude, the objections to Professor Bab-

² The phrase is Goethe's, who used it in a different sense.

bitt and Mr. Foerster apply to him. This is because Mr. More's religion is only Mr. More's.

He gives, in the first chapter of *Studies in Religious Dualism*, something of his religious history up to that time (1909). He had repudiated Calvinism; he was drifting; but suddenly he found a book that initiated him into the "mysteries of independent faith"—the kind of faith, it will be observed, that the detested romantic, the naturist, the Rousseauist, or what you will, has argued for all the time. Calvinism, it seems, was not independent enough, and yet no faith was too independent. Now, just how much independence was necessary? Mr. More had to make his decision unassisted, and he had no rational means of knowing when he had come to a stop. It comes down, I suppose, to some sort of belief in God, which Mr. More shares with the hero of *Vathek*, Lord Byron, and Shelley.⁴

⁴ That this is the chief issue of Mr. More's thinking I have been able to infer from the great bulk of his miscellaneous writings on religion. The correctness of my inference is now explicitly confirmed by Mr. More himself in an essay entitled "An Absolute and an Authoritative Church," *The Criterion*, July, 1929. Mr. More, harrassed by the "Demon of the Absolute," tries to find religious authority apart from the Protestant claim of infallibility for the Biblical texts, on the one hand, and, on the other, from the Roman claim of absolute interpretation of these texts. He asks both of these absolute and presumably erring parties some very shrewd questions, which he believes to be most adequately answered by the Greek and the Anglican Churches—"the kind of revelation which neither in book nor in Church is absolute, but in both book and Church possesses a sufficient authority." I am not concerned with the merit of any Church, but with the idea of Mr. More's authority, which he fails to make clear. He admits that his idea may bring "the reproach of uncertainty," but any sensible reader will sympathize with this if Mr. More's uncertain faith also bring him consolation; and yet the sympathetic reader will have to conclude that this is only an explicit statement of his persistently "independent faith." The value of this new essay is, in short, that of a summary of Mr. More's religious thought; its distinction is the fearless and forthright honesty of his discussion; for otherwise it ends in vague appreciation of tradition tempered by individualism. The dilemma of absolutes remains untouched because, however sound Mr. More's impulse may be, he seems to lack the philosophical equipment to *think* himself round his dilemma.

His critics have accused him of defect in the "æsthetic sense"; he has seemed to be preoccupied with the content of literature; he has little to say of style, almost nothing, except what he says impatiently, of the craft of writing from the point of view of the writer. He never permits us to forget his conviction that the problems of craft are secondary and "æsthetic" and that, if the writer is virtuous, his writing will take care of itself. The reply to this is not that such confusion of thought is unworthy of Mr. More—which it is. It is not enough to oppose to it an equal confusion—that his is due to a lack of æsthetic perception. His failure to understand the fundamental significance of style explains his failure to understand most of the literature that he has read. It is his intention to extract from any given book the doctrine that coincides with his own. We have just seen that it is difficult to find out what Mr. More's doctrine is. With what is literature, then, to coincide? Mr. More entertains false hopes of literature; he expects it to be a philosophy and a religion because, in his state of "independent faith," he has neither a final religion nor a final philosophy prior to the book which he happens to be reading.

In his most recent volume, *The Demon of the Absolute*, he remarks, somewhat complacently, that he is not concerned with artistic means; only with "results." This distinction runs all through Mr. More's writings: he is not concerned with the letter of religion, the means through which it exists and is preserved—the religion itself. Religious results, separate from religious means, become—if they become anything—independent faith. Such a faith is incommunicable; it lacks the means of communication. When Mr. More tells us that a writer has a sound moral attitude, he may be right, but there is no reason to believe that he may not be wrong.

His judgments, for us, are thus neither right nor wrong: they are meaningless; there is not an ounce of authority for one of them. He cannot cite his independent faith; it is rationally inarticulate; there is no way to communicate it.

Nevertheless, Mr. More evidently supposes that he is conveying it; else he would not continue to write books. His reasons for this supposition not only command attention; they are of great interest in themselves. Mr. More is, among other things, a Platonist. What is a Platonist? Is he a man who believes what Plato believed? Or is he a man who uses the Socratic method for the exposure of contradiction? If he is the latter, to what end does he expose contradiction? Since Mr. More obviously believes things that Plato did not, he is, if he be a Platonist at all, one by virtue of his use of the Socratic method. But why does he use it? There is only one answer: for the support of independent faith. He is a Platonist only in the sense in which all men are said to be either Aristotelians or Platonists.

And yet he constantly draws upon Plato for quotations and analogies (he has written a book on the subject); he has the air of delivering his opinions from quoted authority. But owing to the distracting influence of the other authorities—Christ, the Forest Philosophers—which compose his independent faith, it is difficult to ascertain just how authoritative, at a given moment, Plato is.⁵ The real authority at all times,

⁵ This would be difficult if Mr. More quoted Plato alone. Plato's method not being formal and abstract (personal) but allegorical and symbolic (dramatic), critics have always unloaded upon his lack of system a private system of their own: Mr. More is not the first to do it. With More, it is difficult to decide who is speaking, More or Plato, but the question must usually be answered in favor of More. An interesting feature of Mr. More's devotion to Plato is the former's almost stubborn belief in "common sense" and the latter's rejection of it. Mr. More seems to ignore this inconsistency. Plato does not demand exact thinking of the reader, who may come away without knowing if he has done more than follow an argument or unravel an allegory.

of course, is Mr. More. I need hardly point out that Mr. More logically drives himself into the position of spiritual exile and, if he speak at all, of arrogance to which he has consigned the romantic enemy.

The belief in the authority of Plato when More is the actual authority explains the poor quality of his literary judgments. Moral judgments are never more irresponsible than when the judge deludes himself into thinking that the high and mighty of the past are behind him. Mr. More is a man whose moral habits are not subject to the purification and correction of a specific external authority, and the delusion that they are only increases their irresponsibility. In the name of restraint he is able to evoke the limit of his personal distastes.

Mr. More's fallacy is identical, as I have said, with that of the non-religious Humanists.⁶ Because he cannot find an adequate conception of concrete tradition (experience) in terms of authority (reason), he gives us abstract, timeless, rootless, habitual ideas that closely resemble, in structure, the universe of the naturists; authority in More becomes the spectral sorites of infinite regress. There is no conception of religion as preserved, organized experience; you have a mechanism of moral ideas. Take this passage by Mr. More:

True art is humanistic rather than naturalistic; and its gift of high and permanent pleasure is the response of our own breast to the artist's delicately revealed sense of that divine control moving like the spirit of God upon the face of the waters.

So far I seem to see my way clear. If you should ask me by what rhetorical devices or by what instrument of representation one poem . . . appeals more successfully than another to the higher faculty within us, how, for instance, Milton's *Paradise Lost* accomplishes

⁶ When this essay appeared in *The Criterion* (July, 1929) I had not read Mr. More's *Christ the Word*, the fifth volume of his well-known work called

this end better than Blackmore's *King Arthur*, though *both poems were written with equally good intentions* (italics mine), I would reply frankly that the solution of this problem of the imagination may be beyond my powers of critical analysis.

The first part of this passage is a fair example of the pulpit rhetoric into which Mr. More plunges when he speaks of the relation of literature to religion, and the reason why his thought is vague is that, like Professor Babbitt, he has not been philosophical enough; he has not examined his own assumptions. It is difficult to distinguish, in the above quotation, any reason why true art is Humanistic; for the "high and permanent pleasure" and "the divine control" are only pleasant ways of saying mechanical habits of thought. Mr. More has never philosophized his ideas into ultimates — those fixed yet interpretative flexible positions from the viewpoint of which the ghost of naturalism and the otherwise disembodied spirit of morality become, not things, but descriptions of tendencies in the life of men. As Mr. Eliot has pointed out in the case of Babbitt, More ignores the conditions out of

"The Greek Tradition." I am not competent to judge the scholarship of *Christ the Word* — the sole title in his voluminous writings that I had not read — but a careful reading, in the light of his recent essay in *The Criterion* (see note, p. 672), which I understand is part of the final volume on *The Greek Tradition*, makes clear two things, and confirms my argument: (1) Mr. More is dissatisfied with the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition of the Church, and (2) he is dissatisfied with it because it will not let him be in it and cling to his independent faith at the same time. Therefore: he argues that the true tradition is Plato, whose lack of system goes well with primitive Christianity, and that the Church sold out to the Demon of the Absolute — Abstraction, or Reason — when it let Aristotle in. So far, this is only a restatement of the view of many Protestant writers; the next step is that the Eastern Church is free of the taint of reason and thus better than the Western. This may or may not be true, and Mr. More may or may not be a communicant of the Eastern Church. If he is, his readers will wish him well; if he is not and does not intend to become one, his readers will continue to wish him well — knowing that he must either found a religion of his own or keep up his present academic exercises in religious history. It will be up to Mr. More to decide which course is the better way of affirming his independent faith.

which a book emerges; these conditions alone realize the author's ideas; they alone contribute morality, not an abstract, but a specific morality in terms of experience, to the work of literature. More cannot tell us why Milton is superior to Blackmore because his sole idea of the mind is that of a mechanism of moral ideas. The intentions of the two poems being equally good, he cannot understand why their equal morality does not moralize the pieces into an equal excellence; because moral ideas are *things* they ought to be as efficient one place as another. Mr. More conceives literature, first, as a mechanism of ideas; then, as a mechanism of books themselves; literature is a timeless, self-perpetuating machine set in motion in an infinite past which is no past at all. To be another Dante you have only to believe that his ideas, his "results," are good, and to identify them in some undefined sense with your own moral habits.

Mr. More's doctrine is morality for morality's sake, and if art for art's sake has always been an outrage upon reason, his position is no less so. There is little rationally to choose between them.

His view of style as rhetorical devices is, then, perfectly consistent: they have no necessary connection with what is being said; like morality, they simply exist. Morality being automatically moral, moral values are moral before they are communicated; the style merely dresses them up. But how can there be abstract results apart from the means — apart from the medium which, under *temporal* conditions, fixes the values in experience? Style — the way values are apprehended — is the technique for validating them. Mr. More's theory logically ends in never uttering another word.

Because he cannot take the philosophical view he sees naturalism as the worship of instinct, license, self — all the

THE HOUND & HORN

things, in fact, that a respectable citizen of the United States, for reasons of social habit, would not permit himself to do. No one in his senses would deny that François Villon was a person of instinct, that he was pitifully engrossed in his own self, that he was a licentious fellow; no one in his senses would call François Villon a naturalist. The point at issue lies where Humanism cannot take hold of it. For Naturalism is not a thing, nor several things; it is an intellectual focus, getting intenser since the seventeenth century, prior to certain habits of thinking and of conduct. The anti-naturalist is still a naturalist if he cannot get off his naturalistic plane; More is one because he presents a mechanical view of experience. A doctrine is not a method, and until it can be made one, the Humanists are "flattering themselves they are philosophizing, and that they will so be good men."

III

What is a technique for the realization and preservation of values? How shall we know when we have values? — a more difficult problem than the mere conviction that we need them. There is no such thing as pure value, nor are their values separate from the means of creating and preserving them. There are certain definite ways in which men have had access to value in the past (the Humanists tell us that Dante had values, but not how he got them); but our problem is, Have we any of those ways now? If we have, how may they be used? Is there a condition or are there several conditions that must be met before we may use them?

We have seen the assumptions of the Humanists. The assumptions of this essay are that Humanism is not enough, and that if the values for which the Humanist pleads are to be

FALLACY OF HUMANISM

made rational, even intelligible, the prior condition of an objective religion is necessary. There is only one necessary religion, as Mr. Eliot has said, for men in the West; this was clear to the anti-authoritarian mind of William James as well. It must be understood that this essay urges the claim of no particular Western church, and it is in no sense a confession of faith; but the connection between the Reformation and Naturalism, and what I conceive authority to be, define the position that the Humanists must occupy if they wish to escape intellectual suicide. Religion is the sole technique for the validating of values.

Why is it? The virtue of religion is its successful representation of the problem of evil. We have seen how Mr. Foerster, wishing at once to cultivate natural human nature and to reject it, could not decide how far he cared to go in either direction; this was because his dualism was verbal; there were no really opposed principles; there was simply an infinite number of points on the same scale. And thus his opposition between Quality and Quantity was verbal also; it was Quantity versus Quantity, presided over by rootless Restraint, the referee who checked nothing but coherent thought.

There is a preliminary question to be asked, which it does not seem to occur to the Humanists to ask. They tell us that somehow we have to do with Quality, but since, for them, nature is the quantified nature of scientism and the mind is a quantified machine of moral ideas, it is difficult to see where Quality comes from.⁷ The preliminary question, then, is: What is the source of qualitative experience? Both horns of his dualism being reduced to Quantity, the Humanist cannot tell us; and that is why much of his criticism gives you the

⁷ The Humanists use the term "quality" at the same philosophical level as a fashionable tailor would use it.

feeling that he expects you to pluck values out of the air. Since the Humanist has not been philosophically hardy enough to work out of the naturalistic version of nature (which he naively accepts), since, in fact, he cannot root the concept of nature as Quantity out of his mind, his idea of Quality is irresponsible, foot-loose, highly transcendental in a kind of Concord sense.

The source of Quality is nature itself because it is the source of experience. It is only by holding to an idea that leaves nature an open realm of Quality that experience is possible at all; and, conversely, experience alone is the road to Quality. If an American zoölogist seeks a certain Philippine cobra he doubtless says, "*Naja samaransis*"; the snake is merely an instance of the quantification of nature. The head-hunter, however, has a vividder feeling for the unique possibilities of the particular cobra; it may bite him; it may give him the evil eye—both richly qualitative experiences. For the Humanist, *opposing* Quality to nature, has got it on the wrong side of his duality. Pure Quality would be pure evil, and it is only through the means of our recovery from a lasting immersion in it, it is only by maintaining the precarious balance upon the point of collapse into Quality, that any man survives his present hour; pure quality is pure disintegration. The scientist says, "*Naja samaransis*"; Mr. More, a cadence of the same theme — "Immoral"; Quality is quantified before we ever see it as Quality; and nature becomes a closed system of abstraction in which man is deprived of all experience whatever and, by being so deprived, reduced to an abstraction himself.

The religious attitude is the very sense, the religious dogma the definition, of the precarious balance of man upon the brink of pure Quality. But if you never have Quality, never

have the challenge of evil, you have no religion — which is to say, you have no experience either. It is experience, immediate and traditional fused — Quality and Quantity — which is the means of validating values; experience gives the focus to style. Rhetorical device is our abstract term for properties of style after style is achieved; they have never of themselves made one poem better than another.

Religion's respect for the power of nature lies in her contempt for knowledge of it; to quantify nature is ultimately to quantify ourselves. Religion is satisfied with the dogma that nature is evil, and that our recovery from it is mysterious ("grace"). For the abstraction of nature ends, as we have seen, with the destruction of the reality of time, and immediate experience being impossible, so do all ideas of tradition and inherited order become timeless and incoherent. It is the indispensable office of religion that it checks the abstracting tendency of the intellect in the presence of nature; nature abstract becomes man abstract, and he is at last condemned to a permanent immersion in pure and evil Quality; he is forever condemned to it because he can no longer see it for what it is. The protection of religion is the abstraction, not of nature, which so conceived would be the abstraction of abstraction, but of experience. It proposes a system of Quantity *against* nature; it is a quantitative version of the encounter between the head-hunter and the cobra; but it says nothing about the cobra-in-itself. The organized meaning of the encounters of man and nature, which are temporal and concrete, is religious tradition, and its defence is dogma. The dogma acts for the recoil of the native from the snake: it is his technique for finding out the value of the encounter. Every such encounter is rich and unique in Quality: it is the temporal, never recurring focus, the new triumph, the re-affirmation of

THE HOUND & HORN

the preserved experience of man. The modern Humanist, because of habitual reactions, recoils, but he has no reason for doing so, and his recoil is without value. He and the snake are one: Quantity versus Quantity; nature against nature; snake against snake; or, for that matter, man against man.

It is the failure of the Humanist to get out of this dilemma which makes his literary criticism feeble and incomplete. Mr. Foerster says: "It is best to face the issue in all candour"—the issue being Shakespeare. This poet merely "presents" life; he does not "interpret" it. If I had never read Shakespeare and had not read the rest of Mr. Foerster's book, his distinction would sound plausible; but having read his book, I know what he means which is something very different from what he thinks he means. He means that the mind of Shakespeare was not a mechanism of moral ideas. The Humanists quarrel with literature because it cannot give them a philosophy and a church; but they keep turning to literature because they cannot find these things elsewhere. You cannot have the sense of literature without the prior and specific sense of something else. Without this you expect too much of literature; you expect of it a religion and a philosophy; and by expecting of it the wrong thing, you violate it, and in the end you get from it less than it is meant to yield; you get neither literature nor religion, nor anything that is intelligible. You destroy literature without constructing a religion.

The infinite Quality in nature mysteriously assailing the available experience of man is the theme of tragedy; the struggle for preservation against disintegrating Quality is the meaning of religion. The dependent ideas, religion and tragedy, are equally incomprehensible to the Humanists and to their enemies, Zola, Rimbaud, and Mr. Sinclair Lewis. Shakespeare, says Mr. Foerster, must go—"despite the im-

FALLACY OF HUMANISM

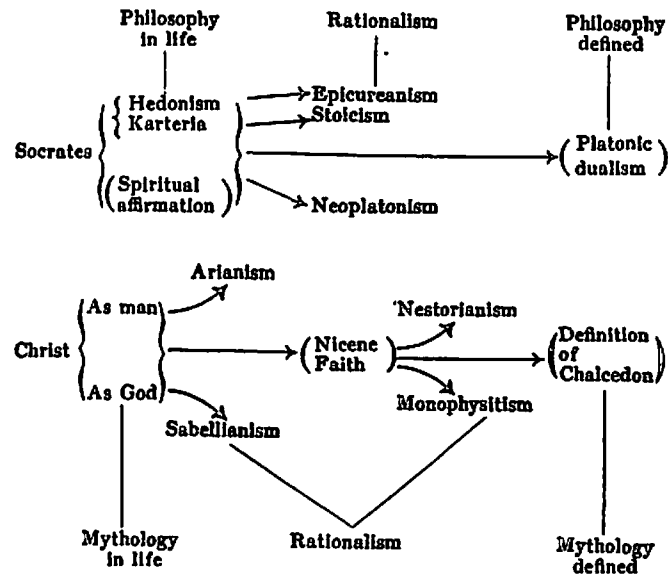
pressive development of his mind and art." What is development of mind and art? I do not know. Neither does Mr. Foerster.

ALLEN TATE

We think it only fair to Mr. Tate and to Mr. More to quote the following pages from *Christ the Word* which are most pertinent to Mr. Tate's discussion.

THE EDITORS

"It should seem therefore that our only choice lies between a reasonable philosophy based on an irrational paradox and an unreasonable metaphysic based on a rational presumption. And I cannot see how the like alternative can be avoided in the attitude we take towards the contending claims of an orthodox philosophy and an heretical metaphysic in the dogmas of religion. The parallel may be presented to the eye schematically as follows, with the proviso, however, that it aims only at a rough approximation to the facts:"



THE HOUND & HORN

"But individually, and on its negative side, each of these major heresies was a blow levelled at the very spirit of faith and worship which it sought to elucidate, in the one case by slurring over the functions of the Saviour as representative of the human race, in the other case by clouding his mission as revealer of God. More than that — and the point I would now make would be clearer if the innumerable subsidiary heresies had been brought into our survey — in the period under consideration every possible means of reconciling the Incarnation, that 'thing truly paradoxical' as Athanasius admitted, with the monistic demands of reason had been tried, and all had ended in logical confusion and moral disaster. The time had come to call a halt. The constructive work of the Greek intelligence had been accomplished, once for all; the centrifugal force of the Greek character threatened to dissipate religion into endless factions. There was needed just such a statement of orthodoxy as that provided by Chalcedon — a formula which, in hard, precise, immitigable terms, should set a check upon the claims of reason to extend the faith in one direction to the exclusion of the other. It had come to this pass: either the central fact of Christianity had to be abandoned, or such claims of reason had to be transcended. You may rationally reverence Christ as an inspired man (at least you may if you do not inquire too curiously into the meaning of inspiration), or you may rationally (if it so pleases your fancy) dissolve an event of history into a fiction of the mythopoeic imagination, and to one or the other of these extremes or the heresies were inevitably sloping; you cannot rationally worship the incarnate Saviour, as both the orthodox and all but the most intransigent heretics understand worship.

"Such an admission may be painful, even humiliating. But, after all, the dogma of the Incarnation is no whit more irrational than the dualism which meets us at every turn of our inquiry into the nature of things, — e.g. than the incomprehensible junction of body and mind with which every act of our life makes us familiar, and against which the endeavours of a rationalizing psychology break down invariably in wanton disregard of facts or in gross abuse of logic.⁸ The analogy, I may add, was clearly perceived by the theologians of the faith fifteen hundred years ago, and was even embodied in the creed improperly attributed to Athanasius: '*As the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ.*' However our pride of intellect may rebel, there can be no intelligent attitude towards the greater problems of existence until we have learned that: reason, though it may be the pragmatic guide of conduct, is not the source of knowledge or even the final test of truth. The question put to the soul of each man is not whether the primary tenet of Christianity has the kind of consistency demanded by logic, but whether it corresponds with the lessons and surest intuitions of spiritual experience."

⁸ This argument I have developed in the first chapter of *The Christ of the New Testament*.