

café, a year ago, sat a lady exactly like Mme. Mercier: eminently bourgeois, yet with something vaguely histrionic about her; superabounding, yet seductive; wearing as she does an enormous black hat very much aslant on coils of blue-black hair dressed with yellow combs; and always carefully balanced on the edge of her chair. In Madame Mercier's case, it is not a glass she looks down at over a blouse all purple zig-zags and orange buttons, but a volume of Molière. She has a pupil in the French drama.

Classes, indeed, have sprung up as naturally from the family talents as salad from the flower-beds—here is another proof that bourgeois France is still alive. Securities are insecure; les Boches, however mythical, are real. So M. Mercier, with his distinguished gift and his sensitive ear, teaches harmony to the tuneless, and takes an active and paternal share in Mademoiselle's classes as well. Mlle. Jeannette, a handsome, red-cheeked, capable girl, has brought back from Paris the latest thing in musical gymnastics. I doubt, though, if she gets as much satisfaction as her father does from watching a group of ladies in their bathing suits spasmodically struggling for "rhythms." M. Mercier makes a gallant effort to keep his shoulders steady, sucks in his moustache, but has to bend his expressive face far over the piano to hide the wicked twinkle in his eyes.

"H'attention, hop!" cries Mademoiselle. "Now, papa, they may do the chorus," and the piano strikes up—

Au clair de la lune  
Mon ami Pierrot—

To hear M. Mercier's happy voice rolling out the old nursery song while Warsaw is falling, is the most heartening thing in the world. It seems as if little girls with bare knees and fluffy skirts must still be skipping rope in the Luxembourg Gardens, and gamins in black aprons buying hot, sugared *gauffres* for one sou. Mme. Mercier's brother is in the trenches, near Rheims. Several cousins have been killed, her *bonne* has lost a son. Unspeakable things happened to the women and children half a dozen villages from theirs. But one hears nothing of atrocities. Nor does one see a sock or a bandage in these ladies' hands. Indeed, I fancy I detect a shade of veiled amusement when mornings of "relief work" are mentioned by the pupils. The Merciers have got beyond that. While we Americans invent palliatives, try even to delude ourselves into believing that the horrors of war cannot be, because they do not fit our vision of an ideal world, they are looking war full in the face. France is invaded—no fact could be more blasting. Yet why, runs the bourgeois adage, revolt against what hap-

pens in spite of you? Better accept it to-day, lest you have to do so to-morrow on less convenient terms.

The Merciers know, and so do I, when the family phalanx looms quaintly above my stone wall, that even if France were annihilated they would never become American. Topsbridge is only a make-shift; the State House dome is only the symbol of a livelihood. We look decidedly queerer to them than they do to us. In spite of their humanity and their sociability—and how they have brought Topsbridge together!—a barrier of perfect manners is definitely interposed between us and their vital emotions. That is really the reason they cheer me so. There is an expectancy about their philosophy, their practical competence, their good-humored physical well-being, their secret detachment, which persuades me that the cafés on the Boulevards will before long be full of the old life; that red-roofed country villages will once more be steeped in immemorial peace; that the bourgeois-bohemian will again look lovingly out from his quiet garden on the complex, civilized pattern of rural France.

## COMMUNICATIONS

### Political Philosophy in Germany

SIR: In his book on "German Philosophy and Politics," Professor Dewey has proposed an original view of what is wrong with the philosophy of the government responsible for the present war. It has been commonly felt that on Germany's part this war has a philosophy behind it, and a bad one. Many of us have been supposing that this philosophy stood in strong contrast with the idealism with which Germany began the nineteenth century. During the time when the present policies of the German government were shaping themselves, the prevalent state of mind was openly hostile to these idealistic teachings, and Germany was listening to leaders who learned far more directly from scientific experience and from the bitter examples of successful statecraft that were at hand, especially in English practise. We thought that Germany had learned these lessons only too well, and with native thoroughness had carried them to extremes at which we, who had in some measure been practising them, were forced to abhor them. As opposed to that early idealism, this philosophy was one which justified expediency as against principle; which had cured the German spirit of the weakness of sympathy and humanity; which had freed itself from the idea of absolute obligation toward treaties or elsewhere, and had become efficiently Darwinian and pragmatic.

In Professor Dewey's eyes we have been making a mistake, and a serious one. The trouble with Germany, he finds, is not in the rejection of its idealists, but in the vestige of their doctrines that it still retains. It is Kant in particular who has misled Germany, by giving a philosophic sanction to a certain native hypocrisy in the national

blood which disposes it to revel in the inner flattery of idealistic sentiment while doing what it pleases in the outer world of hard facts. This was not quite foreseen or intended by Kant; but he had set up an absolute principle of duty, so formal and spectral that it could not be said to command anything in particular, and yet one which spurned instruction from experience. Such an absolute law, like the swept and empty house of Scripture, was open to occupancy by any usurping devil; and so Scharnhorst, Hegel, Bernhardt and others trooped in, setting up in the vacant sanctuary "the good of the State" as a concrete object of supreme devotion. Thus the nation has come to use the name and inner unction of the idealist's absolute duty to support the principles of Machiavelli, Frederick and Bismarck. This result is persuasive to the German mind chiefly because the German mind is disposed to have its absolute; abandon this "traffic in absolute," and the supreme good of the German state fails to impose on belief as an ultimate end; it becomes an end to be tested, like all others, in the crucible of experience. It must break down at last before the higher good, "furtherance of the depth and width of human intercourse." This, as I read it, is Professor Dewey's diagnosis of the German distemper.

He therefore recommends to American policy a more radical experimentalism; let us have done with absolute or fixed principles, such as "nationality" or "sacred rights;" let us regard everything as subject to test, discussion, measurement, compromise, adjustment, revision. Of course, while we are trying a theory out, we try it as if it were, for the time, worthy of complete confidence, and to become "established," for that is what giving a trial means. And we are forced to inquire whether the German government is not at the present moment faithfully following the experimental prescription: it is trying its own theories to see how they work. It believes firmly that its methods are the methods that succeed; and it believes so not because of anything that Kant taught, but because of the way in which it has recently been interpreting history, led by its series of economic historians from Marx (who precisely inverted Hegel's view of history) to Lamprecht and Schmoller. Perhaps official Germany still expects to find these principles confirmed by a successful issue of the war, and if such should be the case, would Professor Dewey have any argument from the armory of the experimental philosophy against them, as principles suitable for Germans? He might urge that what in such an event would work very well for the victors would work very badly for the victims; and unless a principle works all around, it cannot fairly be said to work. But this is exactly the test that Kant uses; it is, in fact, his "absolute law:" any maxim, said he, that can be made universal is a good one, any other is a bad one. This law does not indeed prescribe any specific line of conduct; but, as the present instance shows, it would be highly inaccurate to infer that it is of no effect in guiding concrete action, or in distinguishing between a good course and a bad one. Germany's course might be defined as experimentalism without the Kantian corrective.

Upon close scrutiny of Professor Dewey's argument, however, the substance of his criticism seems to be, not that Germany has an absolute, but that it has the wrong absolute. Has he himself done more than to transfer the puta-

tive crown of the absolute moral end from "the good of the German state" to "the furtherance of human intercourse"? If it were true that Germany to-day believes in an absolute duty, the trouble would be, on Professor Dewey's showing, only that it gives this absolute too narrow a definition. But this is an error which can certainly find no sanction in the Kantian philosophy. For Kant did in fact try to fill his formally empty house with a maxim identical in effect with that which Dewey proposes: "Treat humanity as an end in itself, and never as a means only." Can anyone with the slightest historical justice credit the German government of to-day with following *this* Kantian principle? If this were taken by the government as an absolute of inflexible rule, would there have been any war? And would Professor Dewey have had anything to criticize?

The fact of the matter seems to be that the ruling party in Germany does not at heart believe in any absolute duty. It is radically experimental or pragmatic, which is what *Realpolitik* essentially means. It does indeed go about its work as desperate action always does, with relentless dogmatism and a liberal invocation of the name of God. It flourishes an absolute: but this absolute is not even verbally of Kantian origin—it has its roots in the ancient piety of Germany, transferred to the historically un-German doctrine of the divinity of the monarch and of the state. But assuming for the moment that this appeal to absolute right had a sidelong reference to Kant or Hegel, is anyone outside of Germany convinced by it that the German government believes in its own language, or is actuated by any idealistic faith? What most of us seem to feel here is rather a discrepancy between the profession and the actual belief exemplified in behavior, a mental dishonesty which can neither be traced to Kant's philosophy nor attributed to the normal character of the German people. And surely we cannot fairly judge the character of any philosophy by those who cloak themselves in its phrases without a shadow of faith in its substance.

The issue raised by Professor Dewey is not a slight one. It involves not only the good name of German idealism—which with all its strut and abstraction is worth defense, for we must allow Germany what spiritual asset she still has—it involves also our own American political thinking. The American people is becoming conscious of its need for a political philosophy which expresses its character. Largely through this war the conviction has become strong within us that we have a distinct character, and something to stand for. When Mr. H. G. Wells made the tour of America whose results were published in "The Future of America," he failed to find any such conviction: he said we were "state-blind." This condition of things has come to an end. We have a political character, and are conscious of it. Is it expressed in the philosophy of experimentalism? Our national protests against submarine outrages have been based throughout on the ground of rights that are assumed stable. Experimentalism at this point would rob our national attitude of what punch it has. We need not, and do not, assume in these documents that we know in detail what is absolutely right and good; but we are bound to believe that there is such a thing as principle and right, and that there are certain rules which come so close to

embodying it, in the existing cases, that we shall put an inflexible will behind them. They have been experimented with during all previous history, and they have been experimented with enough. We do not propose to experiment further with slavery, nor yet with our main positions upon the "rights of man," though we have much work to do in defining those rights. There can be no doubt that our own experiment in government has suffered from an overdose of absolute *a priori* theorems borrowed from England and France (surely not from Germany) in the framing of our constitution. It will take time, as Professor Dewey declares, to weed out this mass and determine what things they are to which we shall hold fast. Here an experimental temper will help us on. It is always easy to be absolute about too much, and the critic of the absolutist is always needful. But that is a far cry from the rejection of all absolutes—that is, of all fixed principle. I should prefer to accept the other side of Professor Dewey's faith, and adopt "the furtherance of human intercourse" as a good beginning toward defining an absolute end.

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### In Reply

SIR: The correctness of my account of the historic development of the German temper of mind is of limited interest compared with the other question which Professor Hocking raises—a question which, as he truly says, concerns our own American political thinking. Shall our political philosophy be experimental, or shall it be *a priori* and absolutistic? My book on German Philosophy and Politics was certainly addressed to American, not German readers; it was animated by the hope that it might do something, however slight, to make Americans conscious of the discrepancy which exists between the tenor of our activity and our current theory and phraseology about that activity. To make a specific application, I do not feel easy when I find that, say, the divergence between President Wilson and Mr. Bryan as to the method of dealing with the present international situation rests upon a common assumption of "immutable principles," waiting ready-made to be fastened upon the situation; the divergence being that Mr. Wilson, as a lawyer, finds them already embodied in a legal code, and Mr. Bryan, as a sentimental moralist, finds them embodied in the great heart-throbs of an altruistic humanity. I can but think that we should be better off if we had recognized from the beginning that the question was to find out what we really wanted, and what the moving forces of the situation permitted, and how to go intelligently about getting the ends decided, after due deliberation, to be desirable.

But Professor Hocking disagrees. He finds that the matter with us is that we have been too pragmatic, too empirical and experimental, and that the conduct of Germany is an object lesson to us of what that sort of a philosophy leads to; a warning, presumably, to return to some absolute and eternal code—just whose, however, he fails to tell us. And so it appears that the accuracy of my statement of Germany's mental diathesis is relevant to the issue between us. For Professor Hocking has not grasped my position. I have not said that the behavior of the

rulers of Germany was dictated by an idealistic philosophy. I meant (and said) that it was a *Realpolitik*—highly pragmatic if you please. Of course it is; all action as action is pragmatic. But the prevalence of an idealistic philosophy full of talk of Duty, Will, and Ultimate Ideas and Ideals, and of the indwelling of the Absolute in German history for the redeeming of humanity, has disguised from the mass of the German people, upon whose support the policy of the leaders ultimately depends for success, the real nature of the enterprise in which they are engaged. Does Professor Hocking believe that the German people are supporting the war because *they* think it is a measure of "practical expediency"? If so, what and where is his evidence? For myself, while I should hesitate to accept the utterances of representative Germans in the present excitement as satisfactory evidence regarding objective facts, I think they are wholly acceptable evidence regarding their own state of mind. And that state of mind is one which naturally expresses itself by appeal to Kant, the categorical imperative, and the traditional idealism of Germany. Does Professor Hocking deny this? If not, what does he make of it?

What I make of it, I repeat, is not that the Germans are conscious hypocrites, but that in a world where men act pragmatically, it is dangerous to entertain a philosophy which is at odds with the facts of action, since such a philosophy will mask from men the real nature of their activities and encourage them to engage in one kind of action feeling that they have the sanction of ideas of a radically different kind. Yet I recognize that in a society organized as is Germany, class stratifications, and an efficiently organized hierarchy of subordinations, give appeal to *a priori* concepts a certain solid backing. "Immutable principles" are but sublimations of the emotions attending the actual organization of society. There is no such intellectual uncertainty and confusion in a German appeal to an absolute philosophy as there is, inevitably, in its American analogue—which to my ear always has a deplorable thinness and unreality.

Let it not be thought that to admit—or rather assert—that German action is pragmatic and experimental is to give away the case. What is at issue is the difference between an activity which is aware of its own character, which knows what it is about, which faces the consequences of its activities and accepts responsibility for them, and an activity which disguises its nature to the collective consciousness by appeal to eternal principles and the eulogistic predicates of pure idealism. Let me close by rewriting a sentence of Professor Hocking's: "Infected by a romantic idealism, the current popular philosophy of Germany justifies measures undertaken because of narrow expediency in the name of eternal principles; it justifies acts devoid of sympathy and humanity on the ground that they are in the interest of an ultimate evolution of humanity possible only through the leadership of a people which appreciates the truth of pure idealism and the meaning of pure duty; it justifies breaking of legal and therefore external and temporary obligations in behalf of an unconditional obligation to fulfill an historic mission as organ of the Absolute."

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