University of New Mexico, Commencement Address, 1933.

J. F. Zimmerman

DANGER ZONES IN THINKING

We often speak today of certain danger zones in international relations such as the Far East or The Balkans, meaning that trouble is likely to occur there and also likely to spread to larger areas of international life. The theme selected for this occasion is Danger Zones in Thinking, and by it is meant certain subjects which are giving us trouble in our own thinking, and which also may lead to other difficulties in other and larger areas of our thought life. I shall speak briefly of four such danger zones:

I. The first appears in our thought concerning the relation of man to the mechanical development of the so-called machine age. If by analogy we think of man as a mechanism which can be improved somewhat as we improve the annual models of automobiles, we may conclude that some form of social Utopia is rapidly approaching, or as we say today of prosperity, is just around the corner. On the other hand, if mechanical progress, is viewed as only one of the great achievements of man along with philosophy, drama, poetry, art, and religion it will not then become the sole criterion of progress for humanity in its larger moral and spiritual outlook. Too great faith in mechanism in relation to human development has produced Babbits in the past, and will continue to produce them even though the one holding such faith holds also a college degree, or even a Doctor's degree. Man's ethical and spiritual nature evolves slowly, and we shall err if we expect rapidly approaching Utopian perfection here. On this subject there would seem to be
much wisdom in Ludwig Lewisohn's statement that the only Utopia mankind by its nature will ever attain is the road to Utopia. With this thought we may conclude the discussion of the danger zone of machine age optimism.

II. The contradictory idea that human nature can't be changed at all is the second danger zone. This idea has won prestige by an analogy concerning human nature drawn from a static and materialistic physics now long discredited. From this danger zone has spread the notion that humanity must, through long costly and cruel processes work its way through depressions, revolutions and wars, and that the human race despite all of its efforts, can never hope to outgrow such catastrophies. It is frequently referred to as the doctrine of, "Let nature take its course", and for the past several years has been exceedingly potent in American life and thought.

More recently this idea has been challenged vigorously by those in governmental authority in this country upon the advice of a group of college professors dubbed "the brain trust." Those challenging the philosophy epitomized by the phrase "Let nature take its course" in human relations are saying boldly, in the language of one of their leaders "We now demand that we become masters not victims of destiny." They are seeking sufficient control by man over economic and social phenomena to insure the beginnings of a planned social order wherein passion and self-interest will be subdued by benevolent intelligence. They agree that men and nations are not yet ready for an ordered life on this planet,
and in particular they agree that our own nation is not ready for it, nevertheless they insist that we must at least embrace such a high purpose before we can make any progress toward the goal of an ordered society.

This group of leaders and thinkers, here in our own nation, in the year 1933, have given birth to a new and a great undertaking of the human spirit. But we should not expect revolutionary results immediately, for such an adventure will meet intense opposition from numerous false notions which have spread from the danger zone "Let nature take its course" in human relations. Furthermore, such a new adventure in human affairs must be supported by citizens who respect superior knowledge, who are well-disciplined for cooperative action, and who will follow the leadership of only the best men and women. We in America do not yet have such a citizenship and in all probability will not have it for years to come.

Nevertheless, President Roosevelt and his Associates including those of the so-called "Brain Trust" are to be congratulated on their decision to experiment in the scientific spirit with the difficult social and economic problems growing out of the depression. It is the hope of all thoughtful citizens that through their efforts banking, agriculture, industry and transportation will be greatly improved, the evils of unemployment alleviated, foreign relations sanely adjusted, and business in general revived.

But if all of these things are temporarily accomplished the permanent results for the future will still remain negligible unless we can develop a citizenship with superior knowledge, with cooperative intelligence and with devotion to the leadership of
the best men and women. We may then with propriety ask what are
the plans today for training for that type of citizenship? The
answer is that to date no plans have been announced. The doors of
many professions are already closed or are being closed to trained
youth; labor unions are reducing the number of candidates for ap-
prenticeships in the trades; many cities are closing parks and play-
grounds to save expense; and thousands of boys and girls are already
wandering aimlessly over the country. Any plan that will restore
prosperity is most welcome, but we may be permitted to express the
hope that it will not be accomplished by blocking the way of youth
to future attainment and to larger life. It would be a national
tragedy indeed to offer beer to youth, but to deny to them the
supreme opportunity of preparation for good citizenship. Obviously,
at this early date, it would be unfair to the present leadership to
assume that behind all emergency measures there does not exist a
basic plan for a new deal for youth, which will prevent the young
people of today from becoming the forgotten men and women of the
future. But I repeat that some such basic plan for the training
of youth is immanently necessary.

III. This leads us to the third danger zone in our thinking,
which relates to the purpose and functions of government. It is
not difficult to understand how with high taxes and decreasing
values there should be today deep concern for the public credit.
It is unfortunate, however, that many seem to have overlooked the
important fact that public credit must always be viewed in its
relation to public service, because public service is after all
the only reason for the existence of government. Public credit must be preserved because it is necessary to the public service and to private enterprise as well. On the other hand public service—which includes schools, roads, health, welfare, departments, bureaus, and commissions of various kinds—is equally basic to public credit and necessary to any economic recovery and to all future social advancement. The notion that there exists a tax-paying public on the one hand, set over against a tax-spending public on the other is only another phase of mental confusion growing out of the doctrine of the separation of public credit from public service. By this line of reasoning we finally reach the amazing conclusion that state finances or national finances and state development or national development are antagonistic whereas in every text on government it is cogently set forth that they are cooperative elements of the same great process of building the commonwealth or the nation. We cannot in times like these approve the continuance of unnecessary or wasteful governmental service of any kind. Neither can we afford to reduce public service to such a low level that the privileges of the few will multiply, while the life of the masses falls to lower planes, and peasantry and servitude emerge as the fixed scheme of things in this country. It behooves good citizens of state and nation to be on their guard against this loose and extremely dangerous type of thinking—dangerous not only to public service but also in the long run to public credit itself.

Just now we are hearing and reading of the superiority of monarchies and dictatorships and the inferiority of all forms of democratic
government. In the same article you will find the Fascism of Italy linked in praise with the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in Russia. The writer of the article, however, never explains to the reader why it is that in these two countries alone among all the great nations it is found necessary today to prevent emigration. Life is so good there, presumably, that their citizens are forbidden even to try it elsewhere. I suggest that in the long run it may possibly turn out as well to be able to concentrate power in an emergency, as we have done in this country, and then relax such power when the crisis ends.

The heritage of democratic government is not old, and though the people have not ruled very well, the proletariat, as such it must be admitted, are also not dictating very successfully. The delusions of popular government are surely no greater than those of Monarchy, Fascism or Communism. If it is finally demonstrated that the only form of government possible is one in which the individual must be utterly submerged for the good of the state, then we will be forced to adapt some such form, but until that fact has been more fully demonstrated, I hope the individual in America, at least, will refuse to surrender his thought to any state even though that state claims to be Utopia. I believe that in this refusal of the individual to become the mental vassal of any state under any form of government lies the hope of the future. To this end the evolving life of our democracy hangs still on the thread of freedom of speech and of the press, which is to be interpreted as including also the freedom of research into all fields of knowledge.
The mistakes of education in democratic governments have been many, and we must, therefore, hear with patience the numerous criticisms, just and unjust, which are current. Other social and business agencies are likewise receiving their share both of just and unjust criticisms for our common mistakes. At one time or another all social agencies have borne the chief share of blame for all the evils of the depression. Perhaps the greatest mistake of education is that it has been concentrating on the preparation of youth for a life of labor, to the exclusion of much needed preparation for a life of freedom. It is admitted that the creative faculties have been too much neglected, but there are many who have believed all along, and who still believe that the development of character and of the creative faculties is the supreme task of education. They have held this view because they believe that this has been and still is the supreme purpose of life. If the prizes in business and industry become less attractive in the future, and I think they will, the fields of education and government will have a chance to get the services of more of the best men and women with the best minds. This will be a great gain for education and government. Sound thinking will surely help us in government, for we must hold with Voltaire that "Men will continue to commit atrocities as long as they continue to believe absurdities."

The recognition of sound character and personal integrity will probably help us most of all in governmental affairs. Faith in the unethical man or woman, and following their leadership ought to end in this country, and it must end, if we are to get on in
the future. Therefore it seems to me that education does not need so much a change of the curriculum as it needs men and women who can teach a better way of living. That better way of living must include greater knowledge of human relations, more creative work, an appreciation of our higher spiritual resources, and a devotion to the average man based on the recognition of the infinite value of the individual. This is the challenge to education and to government in the future.

IV. We now enter the fourth danger zone of thinking, which, as you already may have surmized, lies in the field of our thinking about religion. Religion was read out of life somewhere around the close of the 19th century, by scientists who could find no place for it in a world ruled by the scientific laws which they had formulated. For example, let us consider the second law of thermodynamics, according to which energy tends to run down and after a few more million or billion years all energy will be used up and the universe itself will run down. Bertrand Russell in 1902 wrote his Gospel of Despair based on 19th Century science as follows:

"That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the
noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built."

This view was prevalent in 1908 when I entered college, and upon finishing college I was deeply impressed with its scientific validity. Not being fully convinced, however, that science had presented a true and also a total view of things, I entered seriously upon the study of philosophy, taking my Master's Degree in that field. I learned from the outset, by a year's study of Plato, that in his opinion the three great realities of the universe were the True, the Beautiful and the Good. That while human life might be ignorant, ugly and unjust, the Universe was not necessarily at fault. And I have lived to see science discard entirely its atomistic and materialistic physics, described in the words of Millikan as "The childish mechanical conceptions of the nineteenth century now grotesquely inadequate." Furthermore, I have lived to see the whole philosophy of materialism characterized by a scientist as "nothing better than a superstition on the same level as the belief in witches and devils." Morality and religion have lived through the intervening era, on a plane so low and materialistic as to constitute in the minds of many a sufficient explanation of all the failures of
modern civilized society. The things I learned in physics about solid matter have vanished at the approach of electrons, protons and quanta, and it is at least a great mental and spiritual relief now to enjoy, with the approval of science, the privilege of thinking again of life, mind and personality in terms of reality, and what is more if I choose even in terms of religion. We can now be scientific and quote Rupert Brooke paraphrasing Plato:

"There the eternals are and there
The Good, the Lovely and the True,
And Types, whose earthly copies were
The foolish broken things we knew."

For my part I believe the graduates of 1933 are more fortunate with all the evils of the depression, than were the graduates of twenty years ago, who went forth believing that science was more important than life, and who were sure that a living universe was doomed to be a dead one.

One wonders today how the erroneous notion that science had revealed all reality ever originated, and yet such a notion was prevalent just two or three decades ago. Along with it went also the notion that because men held naive ideas about God, spiritual reality in any form could not be trusted. It is true today that one cannot accept all that man has believed about God, or all that many still believe, but there is no particular reason why one should do so. Neither do we accept all that science has taught about the physical universe. One can today it seems to me, hold this view of the Universe—that living forms are superior to the inorganic, that mental endowment is superior to primitive living forms, and that mortal nature may yet be found to be endowed with a form of conscious-
ness far superior to our present mental and spiritual endowment.

"This secret spoke Life herself unto me: 'Behold, I am that which
must ever surpass itself.'"

The most uniquely human quality as we study the lives of
the greatest human beings who have lived, seems to be the constant
quest for ever higher levels of experience. The quest of the True,
the Beautiful and the Good may not bring us to any final conclusions
about God and religion. Indeed such finality may be, and I think
probably is, contrary to the nature of man and of the Universe. But
these quests will, as demonstrated in the lives of so many of the
great spirits of earth, lead into a way of life called Love, which
will be seen to be the only true way of life for all of those who would
reach the higher levels of human experience. And Love if you choose
to call it such is the foundation principle of the world, or if you
prefer a different phraseology it is the Kingdom of God.

May we not say then that the most vital need of the world
today, over and above all temporary and emergency plans or programs,
is men and women who will live fully up to the limit of their truth-
seeking power and who continually will be saying with Leonora Speyer,

"Horizon, reach out
Catch at my hands, strecht me taut,
Rim of the World!
Widen my eyes by a thought."

Men and women who will never abandon the search for Beauty in the
spirit of those charming lines of Keats,

"A thing of beauty is a joy forever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness."

Men and women who will ever seek the good life and who will surely
find it in some combination of truth and beauty in the higher realms of their own personal experience.

On this subject of morality and religion I offer you no fixed Ethic or Gospel, but I have suggested the possibility of a higher way of life, which I believe is fundamentally both morality and religion according to the teachings of their leading exponents. In all ages

In conclusion it may be of help in remembering the four danger zones in thinking mentioned to summarize them briefly.

(1) Machine-Age optimism
(2) Cultural Pessimism
(3) Non-purposeful government and
(4) Materialistic morality and religion

And now since neither you nor I nor the audience would be satisfied without the final annual commencement rite of exhortation (Question mark after you and audience), I give it as follows:

In almost all situations in life you will find that clear, logical thinking helps. It is therefore my earnest wish for every one of you that in graduating from this University you will not swell the already multitudinous host of those who cannot think clearly.