DARING, DUBIOUS AND DIVERSIFIED DOGMATICS OF A DON

While I naturally wanted to write on some phase of international relations, a very wise program committee adopted the policy that for this year each Don would give the other Dons a rest from his accustomed theme. Being one of the members of this unusual committee, I felt constrained to practice what I had preached, and hence the subject announced.

The title chosen requires definition. Daring seems appropriate because experience has taught me that any Don who presents his personal views in this company is engaged in a dangerous enterprise. I intend to present my personal views, and hence I appropriately characterize my action as daring. Again, any effort to air one's own beliefs or credos is dubious for the reason that one's personal views are not fixed, but change from day to day as new information and new knowledge are gained. No one who makes an honest effort to keep abreast of modern thought in any field can be absolutely sure that his conclusions drawn today will be valid tomorrow. Hence my undertaking is dubious. The use of the term diversified in my title will become self-explanatory if my audience follows me in my effort to express my own opinion on subjects as widely separated as party politics and philosophy, art and international relations, football and the Machine Age, Herbert Hoover and Huey Long, science and democracy, H. L. Mencken and the depression. The key word in the entire title is dogmatics, since for lack of both time and inclination I shall present the various tenets of my creed without any serious effort to offer adequate proof of their rational validity. I therefore cheerfully warn all Dons of the scholastic variety not to seek after a well-rounded system of any kind in what follows; with equal pleasure, I serve notice on all legal lights present to flee from
precedents, says, and whereas, if they wish to follow my dogmatics; and to the Presbyterian theologians present I advise that the most inti-
timate knowledge of Calvin and Knox combined with a decent quota of Holy Writ, will in all probability be of no avail in their efforts to appraise this paper.

It is customary, I believe, for philosophers to begin or to try to begin at the beginning. Religious teachers have also followed this plan, hence all of the poetic and theological myths as to Creation and the origin of the world and of man. Carried over into philosophy, these myths assume long and learned treatises on the origin of matter, life and mind, but the fact is that all of them still remain myths, and from the point of view of the writer afford no adequate scientific explanation of the origin of anything. The explanation of origins is therefore outside the field of my philosophical dogmatics. They belong to the domain of natural science, which in its present state of development cannot answer any fundamental question pertaining to them. So it seems to me that all answers yet given by science or philosophy are purely speculations, or at least weak hypotheses which are no nearer to knowledge than the creation myths of the historic religions. If this position be correct, and I believe it is, what Don, be he coldly scholastic, legally shysterian, or pedantically Presbyterian, would have the intellectual nerve to expect me to give answer to questions of origin? If there be such a one, my reply to him is, that I am not ready tonight to answer.

But now I must buckle down to my task and explain to you the meaning of Truth, for all philosophers proceed in this manner. Here we encounter much profound thinking, and in one of the first stages it is discovered that we must accept the axioms of mathematics and the
postulates of descriptive science, none of which can be proved, or else we must get on in the world without mathematics or science. So, in order that the knowing process may go on, we cheerfully or reluctantly accept the axioms and postulates. For example, if one wishes to doubt the existence of the external world, one must accept the consequences, which undoubtedly will be fatal to any further scientific investigation. Again, we learn that no description of reality is true unless it is free from internal contradiction. If we deny this, it then becomes impossible to discriminate between the true and the false. In all of these controversies about knowledge and truth it seems advisable to recognize the finite nature of the human mind. We do have some knowledge, and hence may arrive at partial Truth. We must, therefore, accept that type of experience with reference to truth which the human mind can attain. We cannot do more than this, but those who for any reason do less are disloyal to truth, or rather to that part of truth which man can aspire to know. If I rely passively on the authority of some one else in science, philosophy or religion, then I am surrendering my intellectual birthright. Obviously I am indebted to authorities in books, in persons and in institutions, but after full acknowledgement of my indebtedness, then it becomes my personal responsibility to formulate my own view. Now some Don wants to inquire at this point, but what is Truth? What is the nature of Truth? I am not ready to answer. I do not know what is Truth, and I do not know the nature of Truth if Truth has a nature. I say this reverently after having read what the philosophers have said on the subject. An empiricist holds all knowledge to be a posteriori, a rationalist believes some knowledge at least is a priori. The former
holds that all knowledge is derived from experience, the latter that some of it is in the mind of the knower before experience. Realism and subjectivism lead us into long controversies over the source of knowledge, the relation of knowledge to reality and the problem of the test of truth. There are many shades of realists and many kinds of subjectivists. On the side of reality we find monists, dualists and pluralists, Theists, Deists and Personalists of varying shades and degrees. As pertains to Truth we find Authoritarians, intuitionists, rationalists, pragmatists and all the rest. I make no attempt to summarize the various philosophical systems from Plato to Dewey. I simply make this statement, that I have not found Truth or Reality by much reading of them.

I have a deep personal conviction that the search through philosophy for Truth and Reality is vain, because as defined by the philosopher, both Truth and Reality become idols of the Market Place. There may be a difference between True and False propositions, and between reality and appearance, but the distinctions made by philosophers, together with all the historic opposition between realism and idealism, and between dualism and monism, reduce themselves, as I view it, to illusions of language.

But Don Hewett presses me for an answer to the question, "What is the relation between soul and body, or between mental and physical events?" My reply is that to the best of my knowledge there is "no one uniform relation involved, and that the search for such a relation yields only self-deception and disappointment."

Illustrative of the troubles of Dualism, I take this story from an article by Professor Warren Fite of Princeton. It is the story of a
drunken man who was advised by a waggish friend to take the first of two cabs standing at the door of his club, because the second cab "wasn't there."

Space and time are no less difficult to deal with philosophically by curving one of them or by increasing their dimensions, and I may add that for me no more difficult.

I respect energy but deny that its known properties offer any solution to the difficult questions pertaining to the nature of reality, and hence no discussion of protons and electrons is necessary.

It becomes necessary then for me to suspend judgment on these matters until science moves forward into larger fields of the now unknown, since my philosophy, at any rate, waits generally on science. There is, however, one phase of reality, the personal, which I know from experience, and on this phase I do not wait on science. Whatever else reality may be or not be, there is personality in it, otherwise there can be no reality. The critic may well say that I postulate personality, and I reply by asking, what other axiom or postulate has greater justification?

I note with interest the restlessness of Don Hickey and his eagerness for me to proceed with religion. I shall therefore proceed. If one picks out the elements of religion which one thinks are important, one can define religion in terms of the chosen elements. In other words, all definitions of religion are arbitrary. If one demands mystical experience, the mystic has the definition at hand. But mysticism is often not conducive to thought and action in the realm of human development, and too often blinds men to the realization of their power and obligation to improve existing conditions.
To many, religion is largely a matter of certain beliefs. I have examined in considerable detail many of these beliefs, both the historical and the supernatural, and am thoroughly skeptical of the historical, and both skeptical and dissatisfied with the supernatural. Those which have been made dogmas by religious bodies I hold are either untrue or else have no need for the dogmas. It is my privilege and duty to investigate all beliefs, to weigh the evidence, and to revise my own views from time to time as new knowledge may determine. Religious experience which accords with psychological science will always be evidence worthy of consideration. But lest some Presbyterian Don regard my religion as one composed altogether of doubt and unbelief, let me add that I regard one element in religion as absolutely necessary, and that element is found in my definition of religion. Upon my acceptance of reality as personal I am enabled to have a definite belief in a God who becomes for me the universal person or self which is in me and in each one of us expressing at all times the essential qualities of personality—viz. intelligence, good-will, justice and love. Such a God requires no acceptance of superstition beliefs, no church dogmas, no historical inaccuracies, and no mystical experiences. I have made no claim to final knowledge of Truth or Reality, but I have evidence which to me is valid that I am possessed of the qualities of intelligence and love, and that these qualities, therefore, inhere in Reality, since I am at least a part of Reality.

It is futile to argue that these qualities originated with me at my birth, hence I attribute them to a Spiritual or Personal Power, since I do not find them outside of persons, and to that Power I assign the term God. All this I steadfastly believe. I believe further that it is
through these qualities of personality that mankind is bound together by the universal personality which constitutes the spiritual Power and the Supreme Reality of life— the Power, if you choose, which is in this world making for righteousness. Our supreme need is that type of religious awakening that will help us identify ourselves with other personalities, through an intelligence and love that will lift us above selfishness, extreme individualism, narrow nationalism and all forms of bigotry and intolerance. Our search for truth, reality and better ways of living among men is through empirical study rather than theology. What we think about our relations to men will take care largely of what we think about God. Now perhaps I have outlined a very poor epistemology, a dumb and impossible metaphysics, and an altogether unsatisfactory religion, but at any rate these are at present my personal views. Some of you now have at least a clearer understanding of why I called them dubious. In what follows I promise you diversification and dogmatism de luxe.

In the field of economics I refuse to accept the conception of value held generally by Western civilization. To my mind, life, including love, poetry, art and thought, is far superior in value to money and all forms of wealth. The dominant pecuniary pursuit of western peoples is low and degrading beyond words, especially when such large numbers of mankind are deprived of bare economic necessities. I should like to see economic communism established up to the point of insuring food, shelter and clothing to all, and beyond that point let the capitalistic regime hold sway. I do not believe that all our ills are due to capitalism or to any other economic scheme, and even if I did, I have no hope of suddenly uprooting all the ills of mankind. My suggestion of limited communism
may be thoroughly impractical, but it seems to be about what our own government is being forced to undertake. I believe that Hoover and the Hoover view of economics and government, whether in office or out of office, will not hasten the solution of our present problems, while Huey Long's share the wealth scheme will get us into worse difficulties than we now dream of.

It is my conviction that democracy is endangered throughout the world today, not because of the low mentality and ethics of the average voter, but because military power is passing from the common citizen with his gun and bayonet into the hands of trained experts in airplanes, tanks and chemical laboratories, and that such military power will prolong the reigns of dictators who can use it to force the majority into submission. The ignorance of the masses is no greater than it has been in the past, when because of their importance in military life they forced what measure of democracy we have had on kings, feudal lords and aristocracies.

I am a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, and the acceptance of Darwin's evolutionary hypothesis bothers me not a whit more than the reflection that the earth moves round the sun in accordance with the Copernican theory which was evolved several hundred years before John Wesley was born or Methodism was heard of. This I offer as proof that scientific theories have not and in all probability will not undermine the foundations of religion. It goes without saying that I am thoroughly uninterested in the Methodist creed, but like all creeds it remains an external manifestation of an inner spirit.

My father was a Democrat in politics and was elected to office several times on that ticket. (May a kind providence spare his son from a like experience). I have voted for Republicans and Democrats, for
more Democrats than Republicans, and have yet to witness my country's salvation at the hands of either. Tonight it is impossible for me fully to justify my having voted for either party. The game of politics, to quote George Jean Nathan, "Impresses me as a peep-show, the particular low humor of which is derived from the circumstance that the performers have their eyes glued to the other end of the same keyhole that is being used by the onlooking customers." Incidentally, I have only slight admiration for George Jean Nathan, and have a hearty personal dislike for H. L. Mencken. I like

I like sports and believe good sportsmanship has many important lessons to teach mankind. Fishing is my favorite participating sport, while football ranks highest among non-participating games. I like bridge, but have no aspirations to be a Culbertson.

Since Education is my life's work, I will state that I believe in it passionately. While I grant that our American system is far from perfect, I think no other existing system would serve our country as well. It has probably gone too far along vocational lines, but here it only patterned too closely after industry, which supported it. I believe our public schools have been, are, and will continue to be, the greatest institution in America.

I believe in peace among nations and abhor war. When patriotism leads to violence, it seems senseless and despicable to me. War may have been justified before the machine made our conquest of nature at least partially successful so that now without such fierce competition we may supply the needs of all. With proper international government, business organization and sane population control everyone can live comfortably in this world, with no possible need of war. Until mankind is rid of war,
the constructive arts of civilization will not come into their own. Every scientific advance today creates new instruments of war. It is my personal conviction that an international government will be necessary before we have world peace. The League of Nations and the World Court represent the greatest step in advance taken in international relations since the advent of the national state. From them as a beginning we can in time build an effective international organization. The doctrine of national isolation in the present world of international trade and improved communication is as inane as Brisbane. No nation of any consequence can afford to accept a doctrine so archaic. The evidences that the United States of America is an integral unit in a world community are too numerous and too convincing to require further argument. The general trend toward the great increase of power in the hands of our President and the Governors of States will, I trust, prove to be only a temporary phenomenon. I think it is most dangerous, since it is patterned too closely after the rule of the dictators.

I discover that my views on marriage and divorce, prohibition, Abyssinia, movies, farming, the Coronado Exposition, and a few other topics have not yet been given, but having exhausted my time and extended, to say the least, the patience of my fellow Dons, I shall hope perhaps to cover these topics at a later time in Volume II of my Dubious Dogmatics.

May 1, 1935
Ten Don Meeting