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# AUTHORITY AND THE INDIVIDUAL. By Bertrand Russell. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1949.

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price." There is very little the American people cannot have if they will make the effort and pay the price. We are again involved in the same old vicious circle, and it may well be that this is as close as we can now come to a practical solution for these problems; but at least we can indict Burns and his book for leaving Congress on trial for a considerable segment of the indefinite future.

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AUTHORITY AND THE INDIVIDUAL. By Bertrand Russell. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1949. Pp. 80. $2.00.

BERTRAND RUSSELL might be called a triple "traitor." A traitor to the glorious traditions of his country, having mercilessly criticized British imperialism before and during World War I; a traitor to his class, having always sponsored the cause of the underdog, although he is a member of England's highest aristocracy; and, last but not least, a traitor to his profession, having always written in a clear style which is considered bad form among professional philosophers.

He has remained faithful to his reputation as a lucid writer in his latest work entitled *Authority and the Individual,* which is a collection of six recent lectures.

As he puts it himself, his chief concern is the fundamental problem of "how we can combine that degree of individual initiative which is necessary for progress with the degree of social cohesion that is necessary for survival." He sees the one and the other founded upon and prompted by "an instinctive mechanism" that has been operating in man ever since he has developed into a species that was no longer deriving its nourishment from the trees of the tropical jungles. It was the "dual mechanism of friendship within the tribe and hostility to all others." The entire history of human progress and civilization, on the one hand, and the much longer record of man's inhumanity to man on the other, are condensed in these few words.

Social cohesion, or, as he puts it in his concluding lecture, security and justice "require centralized governmental control, which must extend to the creation of a world government if it is to be effective. Progress, on the contrary, requires the utmost scope for personal initiative that is compatible with social order."

Russell sees the dangers inherent in a world government which, while on the one hand preventing the recurrence of suicidal wars, might on the other hand prove to be deadly to all personal initiative and to all progress.

He would require that a world government leave anything not involved in the prevention of war to the national governments which in turn must not usurp the functions of local authorities. He notes the tendency towards the nationalization of public utilities and other key industries and insists upon a large measure of self-government for such large industries as the railways; he also emphasizes that there should be some difference between the relation of employees to a nationalized industry and the relations which would have existed had the industries remained in private control.

This combination of individual freedom with government authority, according to Russell, can be attained only when there is no governmental control of anything concerned with opinion, such as newspapers, books, and political propaganda, which must be left to genuine competition. It is in line with this reasoning that the author is unsparing in his criticism of the totalitarian control of science, art and literature, such as is exerted in present-day Russia. (Needless to say that he is also opposed to "every other form of monopoly" in matters of opinion.)

Touching upon the conflict between personal ethics and social and political institutions, Russell makes a distinction between the authority of custom and the authority of law. He believes that human progress is largely due to the more advanced or intelligent individual's criticism of, and revolt against generally accepted customs and beliefs. The matter is, however, more complicated when it comes to the conflict with the authority of the law. Says Bertrand Russell:

> Very much stronger grounds are needed to justify an action which is illegal than to justify one which only contravenes conventional morality. The reason is that respect for law is an indispensable condition for the existence of any tolerable social order. When a man considers a certain law to be bad, he has a right, and may have a duty, to try to get it changed, but it is only in rare cases that he does right to break it. I do not deny that there are situations in which law-breaking becomes a duty: it is a duty when a man profoundly believes that it would be a sin to obey. This covers the case of the conscientious objector. Even if you are quite convinced that he is mistaken, you cannot say that he ought not to act as his conscience dictates. When legislators are wise, they avoid as far as possible, framing laws in such a way as to compel conscientious men to choose between sin and what is legally a crime.

Russell is violently opposed to those philosophers and statesmen "who think that the state can have an excellency of its own, and not merely as a means to the welfare of the citizens." He rejects this view as potentially totalitarian in its implication. For "the state," in his opinion, "is an abstraction; it does not feel pleasure or pain, it has no hopes or fears, and what we think of as its purposes are really the purposes of individuals who direct it. When we think concretely, not abstractly, we find, in place of 'the state' certain people who have more power than falls to the share

of most men. And so glorification of 'the state' turns out to be, in fact, glorification of a governing minority. No democrat can tolerate such a fundamentally unjust theory."

Neither does he accept the view of those philosophers who contend that survival is in itself the supreme end. Survival, he says, "is a necessary condition for everything else, but it is only a *condition* of what has value, and may have no value on its own account. Survival, in the world that modern science and technique have produced, demands a great deal of government. But what is to give value to survival must come mainly from sources that lie outside government. The reconciling of these two opposite requisites has been our problem in these discussions."

The conflict between those who put more stress upon social cohesion and those who emphasize the factor of individual initiative, has been going on ever since men began to argue about the relation between the state and the individual. In Russell's opinion there can be no clear-cut solution to such a problem, but at best some sort of compromise.

Russell anticipates the attenuation of the evils caused by the two baleful aspects of individualism—the greed for possession and the love of power. The former, in his opinion, "will grow less when there is no fear of destitution." The power urge, on the other hand, "can be satisfied in many ways that involve no injury to others: by the power over nature that results from discovery and invention, by the production of admired books or works of art, and successful persuasion. Energy and the wish to be effective are beneficent if they can find the right outlet, and harmful if not—like steam which can either drive the train or burst the boiler."

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THE VITAL CENTER. By Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949. Pp. 274. $3.00.

KNOWLEDGE of the roots and the formative years of society, historians argue, is an absolute prerequisite to the analysis of modern problems. Having thus asserted the value of their field, they are too often satisfied to relax into a careful contemplation of a past era and leave the present to its own resources. Few are willing to grapple with the uncertainty, the elusiveness and the confusion of a modern dilemma. It is reassuring, therefore, to find such a competent and respected young historian as Harvard's junior Schlesinger venturing to assume the formidable task of defining modern liberalism.

So broad a creed as liberalism cannot be easily agreed upon. Limitation