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Three Defenses of Freedom

The Measure of Man by *Joseph Wood Krutch*. (Indianapolis, Indiana: The Bobbs Merrill Company, 1953, 261 pp.)

The Counter-Revolution of Science, by *F. A. Hayek*. (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1952. 255 pp.)

Free and Unequal, by *Roger J Williams*. (Austin Texas: The University of Texas Press, 1953. 177 pp.)

Reviewed by Richard M. Weaver

In 1929, Joseph Wood Krutch attracted wide notice with *The Modern Temper*, an analysis of the impact of modernism upon traditional values. Now after the lapse of a quarter of a century, with the world in more critical plight, he turns again to the status of man.

Though admitting that every age feels itself to some extent an "Age of Anxiety," Mr. Krutch thinks that in modern civilization "things can't go on this way much longer." Modern thought as well as modern science seems to be an education for suicide. Man is inclining more and more to think himself as a god while forgetting that a god possesses not only the knowledge but also the wisdom to use power. In a world of tremendous technological competence, a little folly or ill will can go a great deal further than ever before. Yet the present tendency in sociological thinking is to exculpate man entirely and to cut him off from all responsibility for evil.

Interestingly enough the hope of salvation, as Mr. Krutch sees it, lies in some of the more recent revelations of science. The most advanced physicists are beginning to admit that "the *unpredictable* and *indeterminate* are part of ultimate reality." This brings us to the "denouement of the whole comic drama of determinism." The random element irresistibly reasserts itself. The reductionist equations of science, which regard everything as "nothing but" something simpler

which its techniques can handle, may prove only a turning away from the more significant realities.

The emergence of these new mysteries makes the materialist and mechanist “Science of Man” look as old-fashioned as Newtonian physics. The world of modern physics is extremely different from the world we see and feel; and modern psychology has made its greatest contributions through concepts which can be rendered only in metaphors. We now apprehend our world through symbolic constructs hardly less than did medieval man.

The attempt to reduce the world to a single predictable prime element has failed. This means we shall again be engaged in the “method of discourse,” by which man is discussed as man, moral questions are dealt with in moral terms, and consciousness, far from being regarded as an epiphenomenon, is seen as having an efficacy of its own.

There is a saying that the river of knowledge sometimes turns back on itself. If Mr. Krutch’s fascinating analysis is correct, it is just now making a great turn. Those who have been last—the stubborn believers in the actuality of individual human freedom—will be first.

That certain concepts of science seem to support anti-democratic theories of politics has long been uncomfortably acknowledged. In *The Counter-Revolution of Science* F. A. Hayek shows how the application of these concepts to the subject matter of social science is a perversion, brought about in some cases by “demagogues of science.”

The first major fallacy was ignoring the essentially subjective nature of the social sciences. These sciences are concerned now with how things and actions appear outwardly, but with how men think and feel about such things and actions. With this kind of data, physicalism and behaviorism can do nothing. A second error, the root of modern collectivism, has been the treatment of certain bodies of phenomena as independent and objective wholes, whereas in fact they are provisional constructs of theories, definable “only in terms of relations which are intelligible human attitudes.” Thus when the modern social scientist talks about “the nation” or “the economy” or “capitalism,” he is hypostatizing an ontological basis which does not exist. But such assumption makes things very convenient for collectivist planners. Yet a third error, “The historicisms of the scientific approach,” treats history as a theoretical science. Starting with a belief in the independent existence of these wholes, the social scientist tries to find the “laws” of their development. The result is a “mongrel view” which “is indeed neither history nor theory.”

Following this groundwork of exposition, Professor Hayek gives an interesting account of “the source of the scientific hubris.” This was the *Ecole Polytechnique* in Paris during the Napoleonic period. Here that worldly adventurer and intellectual juggler Count Henri de Saint-Simon formed his circle. Here he attracted as collaboration the youthful Auguste Comte, who was to carry forward the doctrine of social control to previously unimagined lengths.

Some readers of *The Counter-Revolution of Science* will no doubt be surprised by the pedigree of certain ideas now widely accepted in modern political thinking.

With the world tending more and more to standardization and automation, Dr. Roger J. Williams, Director of the Biochemical Institute of the University of Texas, makes out the scientific finding an argument against what he terms “the uniformity theory” of human beings. According to Dr. Williams, no two human beings are ever born alike, nor do they ever become alike; and unless this actual diversity, which is due in important ways to heredity, is understood, no provision for real freedom can be made. He believes that “we must deal with humanity *as it is*, and this includes its tremendous variability.” To the extent that a “science of human understanding” is possible, it means an appreciation of natural, in-born diversities and inequalities. Biology is made to testify to the truth that “one law for the ox and the lion is oppression.”

In one experiment Dr. Williams describes, 6,377 persons were given a certain substance to taste. Some said that it was bitter; some said that it was sweet; some said that it was sour; some said that it was salty; some compared its taste to that of specific fruits and vegetables; a considerable percentage said it had no taste at all. Similar differences are shown to exist in other areas of response and capacity. The evidence piles up until the reader is willing to agree that man is a creature fearfully, wonderfully, and variously made.

Dr. Williams’ main object is to show that political systems based on the idea that men are alike or can be conditioned to be alike fly in the face of overwhelming biological, psychological, and medical evidence.

These three works, coming from different fields of specialization, agree in this conclusion: all theories which have sought to abolish the basis of individual human freedom, ambitious and overweening as some of them have recently been, collapse when one begins to look at the facts which constitute the nature of things—whether in physics, biology, political science, or belles lettres.

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