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THE PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES INVOLVED IN THE WAR

From PROFESSOR BYKHOVSKY, Moscow

To THE EDITOR OF *Philosophy*

DEAR SIR,

In Volume XVI, 63, of your journal you published an article by Professor Stace, "The Philosophical Issues Involved in the War," Unfortunately, articles on pressing problems involved in the world war appear all too rarely in English philosophical periodicals. The great war of the democratic powers against the Hitler hordes has keenly raised several vitally important questions. A fight is being waged for the very existence of European civilization, for the self-preservation of culture, for the destinies of whole nations, for the future of humanity. Philosophy cannot and has no right to remain unparticipative in this mighty struggle. Self-alooftness from the fight in these days when the fate of European culture hangs in the balance would be betrayal of philosophy, betrayal of its most sanctified ideals. Being the self-cognizance of culture, the intellectual consciousness of mankind, philosophy must take its due and worthy place in the fight against Hitler barbarity and benightedness.

Professor Stace's article is one of the utterances of English philosophers spoken against the common enemy of all progressive mankind. That is why we read it with such satisfaction and brought it to the notice of Russian readers through our philosophical periodical *Pod Znamenem Marrisma* (No. 7, 1942). We would like to share with English readers some considerations on problems touched upon in Professor Stace's article.

At the beginning of his article Professor Stace raises the question as to whether the war between England and Hitler Germany really is a war between two world-views, two different philosophies, and not merely a struggle between two nations exclusively for their material concerns. And in speaking of this fight for material interests, Professor Stace identifies it with *imperialistic* war. We cannot concur with this terminology. Indeed, at the basis of *all* wars lies the collision of social-economic and material interests, but it does not follow hence that *all* wars are imperialistic. In a deeper examination of the motivating forces of social processes it will be found that behind the more abstract ideological motives of war—be they religious, ethic, or what you will—there is always concealed their real, social-economic basis, the struggle for the material interests of societies and classes. But it by no means ensues that all these wars are imperialistic.

The struggle for material interests, lying at the basis of war, determines the nature of war depending on *what* material interests are being fought for. And here one should bear in mind the fundamental distinction between *just* and *unjust* wars. *Just* wars are non-aggressive wars, they are liberative wars, pursuing the object either of defending the people against foreign invasion and attempts to enslave them or liberating people from slavery and oppression of imperialists. *Unjust* wars are wars of aggression, aiming at the seizure and enslavement of other countries, of other nations. Hitler Germany is waging a war of aggression. And the nations fighting against Hitler Germany are waging a just war, a war of liberation. As is known, in the Atlantic Charter, the nations united in the anti-Hitler coalition have proclaimed renunciation of territorial expansion as being one of their guiding principles.

All this should be borne in mind in order to distinguish between just and unjust, imperialistic and liberative wars.

True, Professor Stace writes that though war is waged for material interests, it is *also* waged for a definite world-view. Unfortunately, Professor Stace is confined with this "also," and makes no attempt to establish the *nature of correlation* between material interests and the ideologic promptings of war.

The author of the article under discussion further writes that both belligerent parties fight *not only* for their territorial interests but also for *their* world-view. But the connection between the struggle for their territorial interests and the struggle for their world-outlook by no means boils down to the fact that the one and the other are both *their own*; this connection is far deeper: world-outlook is determined

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by the *character* of material interests and in turn serves as a weapon in fighting for material interests of a *defined type*. The imperialistic, plundering war being waged by Hitler Germany, and the Hitlerite "ideology" of barbarity and obscurantism are indissolubly bound up with each other not only by their apportionment to one subject ("their own"), but also in their very *essence*. The world-outlook of Hitler Germany is just that very apology of aggression, the panegyric of international pillage, hostile, in its very roots, to universal human progress.

In the opinion of Professor Stace, the Hitlerite philosophy is formed of two elements: the Hegelian teaching of the state and Nietzschean ethics. These elements are mutually contradictory—the Hegelian teaching of the state is rationalistic through and through; the ethics ensuing from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are irrationalistic, being expressive of voluntarism.

In this enumeration of basic elements of Hitlerite ideology the eye is struck by the absence of *racism*, the zoological "philosophy of history."

In so far as the article discussed mentions Hegel as the source of the Hitlerite doctrine of the state, it should be pointed out that Hegel's philosophy as a whole by no means constitutes the source for Hitlerite ideology, not only in virtue of the former's rationalism but also because the greatest theoretic conquest of Hegel's—his dialectic method—is alien and hostile to the German obscurants: that Hegel's conservative system (of which his doctrine of the state is a component element) is in contradiction with his own method, and is a tribute to the backwardness of the Germany of his days: this system is that "dead" in his philosophy which "grips the living." The Hitlerites have availed themselves of the Hegelian cult of the state, but by this they in no way become historical inheritors of the great idealist, inasmuch as they sever themselves from the ideological traditions of classic philosophy with its deep convictions in the might of reason and enlightenment, its faith in progress, and its hatred of obscurantism.

Another component part of the Hitlerite "philosophy" is that of the doctrine of the primacy of will over reason, rooting in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. In Professor Stace's opinion, Nietzsche is distinguished from Schopenhauer firstly by the fact that with the former will is identified with the "will for power," and secondly by the fact that the fight for power is recognized by him as being the motive force of progressive development. The latter aspect is not correct: Nietzsche's paens in honour of the "will for power" are, with him, hand in hand with decisive *negation of the idea of progress*, being replaced by him with the mysticism of "perpetual returning."

The main shortcoming of Professor Stace's characterization of Hitlerite irrationalism is, we think, in the fact that the counterposing of will to reason and the subordination of reason to instinct is limited by Professor Stace to the boundaries of *ethics*. But the irrationalism of Hitlerite ideology spreads over all spheres of philosophy. The Hitlerites deny reason not only as an ethic, but also as a *gnoseologic* principle: against the doctrines of truth they counterpose *mythology*. What is more, their irrationalism grows into a negation of all European science, culture, and civilization in general, leading this negation to the herculean pillars of reaction—to the pitch of appealing for a return to the prehistoric habits of German barbarians.

In face of the whole world the Hitlerite ideologists cynically discard the integuments of civilization which hampers them. Moeller van den Bruck, for instance, one of the actual authors of that ideology which goes by the name of "Hitlerism," writes:

"The contradictions attending our history still make themselves evident. Even the oldest of them, which we had considered as having absolutely outlived themselves, are to-day again reviving. There is sense, and, what is more, political sense, in the fact that at the present time there are Germans who turn their consciousness to the former rung on the basis of which there once arose the First Reich; that there are Germans who, in the medieval ages, in the hierarchic system, and even in mystics and still earlier primitive and mythical forms, search for the new principles on which we could again base ourselves; that there are Germans who, basing themselves on the experience of our acquaintance with Western culture, civilization and progress show a preference for prehistoric and primitive cults; that there are worshippers of Donar and champions of primitive, original Christianity, and that no

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formation is so sincerely loved and so understandable as the almost still barbaric formation of Romance days." (Moeller van den Bruck, *Das dritte Reich*, S. 253.)

The Hitlerites' fight against "Intellectualism" is a fight against European culture, against the very foundations of modern science and civilized life. Voluntaristic ethics are merely *one* of the elements of restoration of barbarity.

That part of Professor Stace's article in which he casts light on the connection between Hitlerite theory and practice rings well and convincing. The practical equivalent of the "theory of the total state," as correctly indicated by Mr. Stace, is a suppression of the human personality and of freedom of thought, speech, press, and public meeting. The practical equivalent of Nietzschean ethics is the striving or domination by any means, both on a national and on an international scale.

Against criminality raised to the status of "philosophy" Professor Stace contrasts the philosophy of England and other countries of democratic civilization. The two main sources of philosophy defended by the democratic countries are considered by Professor Stace to be Christian ethics and ancient Greek, in particular, Platonist life-cognizance.

Professor Stace makes the proviso that under Christianity he does not have in view here the following of Christian dogmas in the direct sense, but an ethic ideal, historically rooting in the Christian teachings of love for man, i.e. that element of European culture which is usually called *humanism*.

In speaking of Platonism Professor Stace also does not allude to the specific features of the Platonic theory of cognizance, the doctrine of the state, etc., but he avails himself of this expression conditionally—for denoting any ethic based on the primacy of reason. It is well known that English philosophic traditions are by no means Platonic. It is not Platonism but empiricism and sensualism, rooting in the teachings of the great English nominalist William of Occam and threading via F. Bacon and Locke to the philosophic teachings of Mill and Spencer, which express the national traditions of English theoretic thought. But the utilisation of the term "Platonism" accepted by Professor Stace is proper in its conditional, so to say, symbolic, sense. Professor Stace employs the conception of "Platonism" to denote the philosophic antipodes of irrationalism, and in this respect he is right.

Humanism and the primacy of reason over instinct actually are included in the guiding principles of the anti-Hitlerite world-outlook, bringing into affinity *all* freedom-loving peoples fighting against Hitlerite man-hatred and obscurantism.

Professor Stace brings out the connections existing between the principles of the world-outlook of democratic peoples and the foundations of the political pillars of democracy: respect of personal dignity, recognition of democratic liberties (thought, speech, the Press, etc.), respect for labour, condemnation of slavery.

It will not be amiss here to mention that Nietzsche, whose works the Hitlerite ideologist proclaim to be a "New Testament," openly declared that "slavery pertains to the essence of culture," and appealed for restoration of the institute of slavers. ". . . If it be true," wrote Nietzsche, "that the Greeks perished as a consequence of slavery, then it is still more true that we shall perish because of the absence of slavery." For him "labour is ignominious," and he declares that the dignity of man and the dignity of labour are "pitiable spectres" engendered in "pitiable times." And the fiercest enemies of the glorious democratic principles of European civilization rightly declare Nietzsche to be their "ideological" forerunner.

Publication of Professor Stace's interesting article in *Philosophy* is indeed a gratifying event. Professor Stace is right in pointing out that "philosophers are apt to sit in their ivory towers, weaving curious distinctions and debating strange intellectual puzzles without any consideration of their implications for humanity. For even the most abstract questions invariably have, in the end, important practical bearings." (Page 242.)

In this hour, when the destiny of European civilization, when everything which is the result of two thousand years of creative effort of progressive mankind is being decided, the dignity of philosophers compels them to active participation in this great fight for liberation.

On this ivory tower we must needs mount an anti-aircraft battery.

Yours truly,

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