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Confusion, Not Conspiracy

HENRY HAZLITT

In September 1960, a thick pamphlet of 114 pages appeared with the title *Keynes at Harvard*. It was published by the Veritas Foundation of New York, which described its purpose as: "To educate the officials, teaching staffs, governing bodies, undergraduates and graduates of American colleges and universities, upon the subject of Communism, the international Communist conspiracy and its methods of infiltration into the United States." Presented as a "staff study," no author was listed as such; but the name of Zygmund Dobbs appeared on the title page as "research director."

The thesis of the pamphlet was that "Keynesian economics" was not economics but a "weapon of political conspiracy"; that "Keynes himself was a Fabian socialist," and so were most of his followers; that the Keynesians "infiltrated" the Economics Department at Harvard and "planted" other Keynesians in other colleges; that the difference between the Fabians at one end and the Communists at the other "is merely a difference in methods. The Fabians believe in 'easing' into absolute power by deceit. The Communists and Fascists believe in attaining power by violence. The ends are the same since absolute power can only be maintained by violent repression."

Keynesians and Fabian socialists, and Fabian socialists and Communists, were all united, the study held, by a common hatred of free-enterprise capitalism. Therefore the Keynesians and Fabians, and all who criticized laissez-faire capitalism, were either dupes of the Communists or knowingly associated with them as part of a vast conspiracy.

The study did not spend much time on economic or political analysis, or on the exact nature of the errors in Keynesian or socialist reasoning. Instead it attacked the *people* who held Keynesian or socialist views, and questioned their integrity and motives: "Fabian socialism uses Keynesism as a political weapon. The Kremlin followers use the Fabian organization as a cover for their operations. Keynesism is used to snare the unwary and bring them by degrees into a socialistic turn of mind. The Communists then work hard to propel such socialistic converts further along the road to Soviet socialism." And later the study declared, referring to

Keynes: "We will deal instead with his motives and intentions rather than the vapory justification of his creed."

IN THE ATTEMPT to justify this approach, the study still further quoted Joseph A. Schumpeter as writing, in his *History of Economic Analysis*: "Remember: occasionally, it may be an interesting question to ask why a man says what he says." It may, indeed. But when we look up the whole passage in Schumpeter from which this sentence is torn we find that Schumpeter's true argument was the exact opposite:

"The scientific character of a given piece of analysis is independent of the motive for the sake of which it is undertaken. . . . This implies that any arguments of a scientific character produced by 'special pleaders'—whether they are paid or not for producing them—are for us just as good



or bad as those of 'detached philosophers,' if the latter species does indeed exist. Remember: occasionally,

it may be an interesting question to ask *why* a man says what he says; but whatever the answer, it does not tell us anything about whether what he says is true or false. We take no stock in the cheap device of political warfare—unfortunately too common also among economists—of arguing about a proposition by attacking or extolling the motives of the man who sponsors it or the interest for or against which the proposition seems to tell."

If the author of *Keynes at Harvard* had kept this principle steadily in mind, the pamphlet as it stands would never have been written.

The pamphlet adopted the principle of guilt by association. Thus we were told on page 96: "In later years Schumpeter taught at the London School of Economics, which was founded by Fabian socialists and generally reflected the Fabian view. He had a relationship of many years with Alfred Marshall (Fabian socialist economist), having first met Marshall in England in 1906. Schumpeter wrote consistently as a neo-Marxist socialist for 45 years. We believe this sketch suffices to prove Schumpeter's socialism."

Now aside from the fact that it is absurd to call either Schumpeter or Marshall a socialist (unless the term is to be stretched out of all useful meaning), such passages as the above (and there were many) are clear examples of guilt by association. By the same logic one could go on to prove that Lionel Robbins and F. A. Hayek are also socialists because both also taught at the London School of Economics.

Now, four years later, appears another "staff study" published by the Veritas Foundation, *The Great Deceit: Social Pseudo-Sciences*. This time it is a full-length book, in both hard-cover and paperback (\$5 and \$3.75), running to 354 pages. There is an introduction and epilogue by Archibald B. Roosevelt. The "research director" is again Zygmund Dobbs.

In *The Great Deceit* we encounter

From the Academy

RUSSELL KIRK

Poverty of Condition and Poverty of Mind

Why are so many of the American poor unemployable in a time of great economic expansion, when there exists an urgent need for more hands and minds in many occupations? Vague talk about "automation" does not go to the heart of the matter. Although of course the old-fashioned manual laborer often has been displaced by machines, still the service industries, many new forms of production, and all sorts of occupations and trades—from skilled furniture craftsmanship to the federal civil service hospitals—seek in vain for additional competent employees. Nevertheless, several million able-bodied people remain without regular work.



Kirk

A principal cause of this paradox is the fact that we still have millions of citizens who are virtually illiterate. For modern occupations literacy is essential. Perhaps the most effective tactic in the "war on poverty" would be simply to teach people—and especially the rising generation—to read and write adequately. Abandon the "look-see" folly that has afflicted American pedagogy for a generation, return to the tested method of phonics, and great numbers of "functional illiterates" would become, in short order, employable and much more adequate citizens.

"Progressive" educationists, for decades, clearly have failed to impart the skills of reading and writing to the young folk that most need help. This hard truth is illustrated by recent findings in Detroit, summarized in the April *Bulletin* of the Council for Basic Education (725 Fifteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.). An anti-poverty undertaking, the Mayor's Special Youth Employment Project, endeavoring to render employable

some 2,200 drop-outs and the like, discovered that though 84 per cent of these young people were high-school graduates, many could not read second-grade materials or solve seventh-grade arithmetical problems.

Hierarchs of the educationist empire usually respond to this challenge by demanding yet more "massive financial aid" to public schools. But our genuine necessity is a qualitative reform, inexpensively attainable by the adoption of better basic manuals and the restoration of "phonics" as the sound method of achieving literacy. A forthright, readable, succinct new book on this general subject has just been published: *Reading without Dick and Jane* (Henry Regnery, \$4.50). Its author is Dr. Arther Trace, who wrote *What Ivan Knows that Johnny Doesn't*.

More Illiterates Coming Up

As Professor Trace points out, during the boom of 1964, national unemployment stood at 5.3 per cent, and 16 per cent of teen-agers were without work. Yet the demand for tolerably educated people steadily and urgently increases. "Yet it is certain," he tells us, "that at the present rate we are going to have more illiterates and more ignorant, more unskilled, and untrained people entering the labor market in the next decade than ever before, and with fewer opportunities for these people than ever before."

The biggest cause of "technological" unemployment, Dr. Trace shows, is simply the ignorance of many people otherwise capable of working. Inability to read and write is correctible, at least where the young are concerned. We must really restore "phonics" in our schools, not simply make gestures in that direction; and we must replace the horribly boring and ineffectual "Dick and Jane" sort of basal reader by primers and primary-school textbooks that stimulate the imagination and contain a fund of

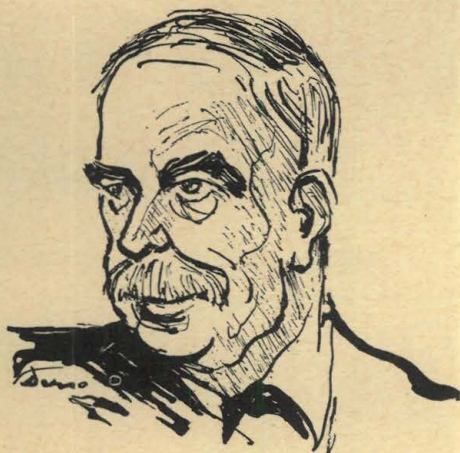
information. (Probably 95 per cent of our nation's children still are cursed by "Dick and Jane" inanity; better readers, including the Open Court series edited by Dr. Trace, are only beginning to win adoption.)

"There are no Dick-and-Jane type parents," Mr. Trace concludes, "even though there may be many Dick-and-Jane type reading experts, some school administrators, and, alas, even some teachers. . . . And certainly we do not have Dick-and-Jane type students. A normal healthy second-grader delights in making fun of the stories in these readers. No student is so incompetent but that he deserves the opportunity to learn to read from readers that are vastly better than the ones he has now. The vocabulary control and the look-and-guess method in them are not the fault of the parents or of the students. . . . They are correctible. The four million elementary school students which the National Council of Teachers of English estimates to be poor readers are poor readers not primarily because they are mentally or physically or emotionally defective or because they are Negroes or because their parents are ignorant and indigent; they are poor readers primarily because the textbooks and the methods of teaching reading are poor."

In the "grey area" schools and the colored schools, commonly instruction in reading and writing is least vigorous, partially because the tenured mediocrities who often direct such schools assume (without quite putting the matter bluntly) that most Negro children and other young folk from poor families are congenital illiterates. Yet it is precisely in such neighborhoods that the rate of unemployment rises most dismayingly; it is the graduates of such Detroit schools who cannot read even a Dick-and-Jane primer, though they are endowed with diplomas.

The American poor, generally speaking, do not need more generous handouts, nor even occupational retraining. They need to learn to read and write, quite as much as they need to send down roots in their broken urban neighborhoods. How much longer will the dull doctrinaires of the National Education Association and its affiliates endeavor to block such efficacious and simple reform?

the same conspiracy theory as in *Keynes at Harvard*. But now it is applied over an immensely wider field. *The Great Deceit* is encyclopedic in its range. It covers the Fabians in detail, the "social scientists," the book clubs, the newspapers, the publishers, the historians, Marx and Marxists, anti-Semitism, racism, the anthropologists, the sociologists, Hull House, progressive education, the Supreme Court, jurisprudence. Nearly a thousand names are cited. Practically everyone on the Left is treated with disrespect, his motives questioned, his doctrines caricatured. Nearly every Left-Liberal is identified, sometimes, with each mention of his name, as a "socialist" or "Communist," and most are accused of being devious and designing.



JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES

I have space to cite only a handful of examples. Emerson and Hawthorne are cited as having "pioneered socialism in America." John Dewey is identified chiefly as "a socialist for over 60 years." He "belonged to numerous Communistic groups starting in 1935 and continuing throughout the rest of his life." He "was touted as an educational philosopher" and "developed the collectivistic system of education which was dubbed 'progressive education.'" He was "a key manipulator in the educational field." He "could pull the wool over the eyes of a sharp observer like Holmes." He was "a past master in the art of dissimulation." His "plan was to operate under the intellectual smoke-screen of a vaporous philosophy called 'pragmatism.'" This was the old Marxist materialistic theory rehashed in sugar-coated terms."

The late Roscoe Pound is identified as "a perfect front man" for socializ-

ing the law. Morris Cohen is identified as one who "with the help of the department head, Harry A. Overstreet, managed to become a professor of philosophy, specializing in 'legal-philosophy.'" When Freud gets a mention, it is to inform us that his "major avocation was to undermine all basic religious faiths." When Einstein gets a mention, it is solely as "an expeditor of socialist-Communist ideas among scientific circles."

When the most influential thinkers and writers of the twentieth century get this kind of treatment, I hardly need to tell the reader how lesser figures fare. And it is all just too bad. For this book represents a truly prodigious amount of research and reading. A great deal of it is genuinely informative and enlightening. Some

of it is excellent. It is full of revealing quotations from Left-Liberals, some of them devastating in what they expose. But everything is seen as an enormous socialistic plot, and every "socialist" as a conscious conspirator. The picture as a whole is simply incredible. And therefore the tendency of most sober-minded and balanced conservatives and libertarians will be to reject it as a whole, the good with the bad. They will be afraid to use anything in it until they have made an independent check, to make sure that an accusation is accurate or a quotation is correct and not torn out of context.

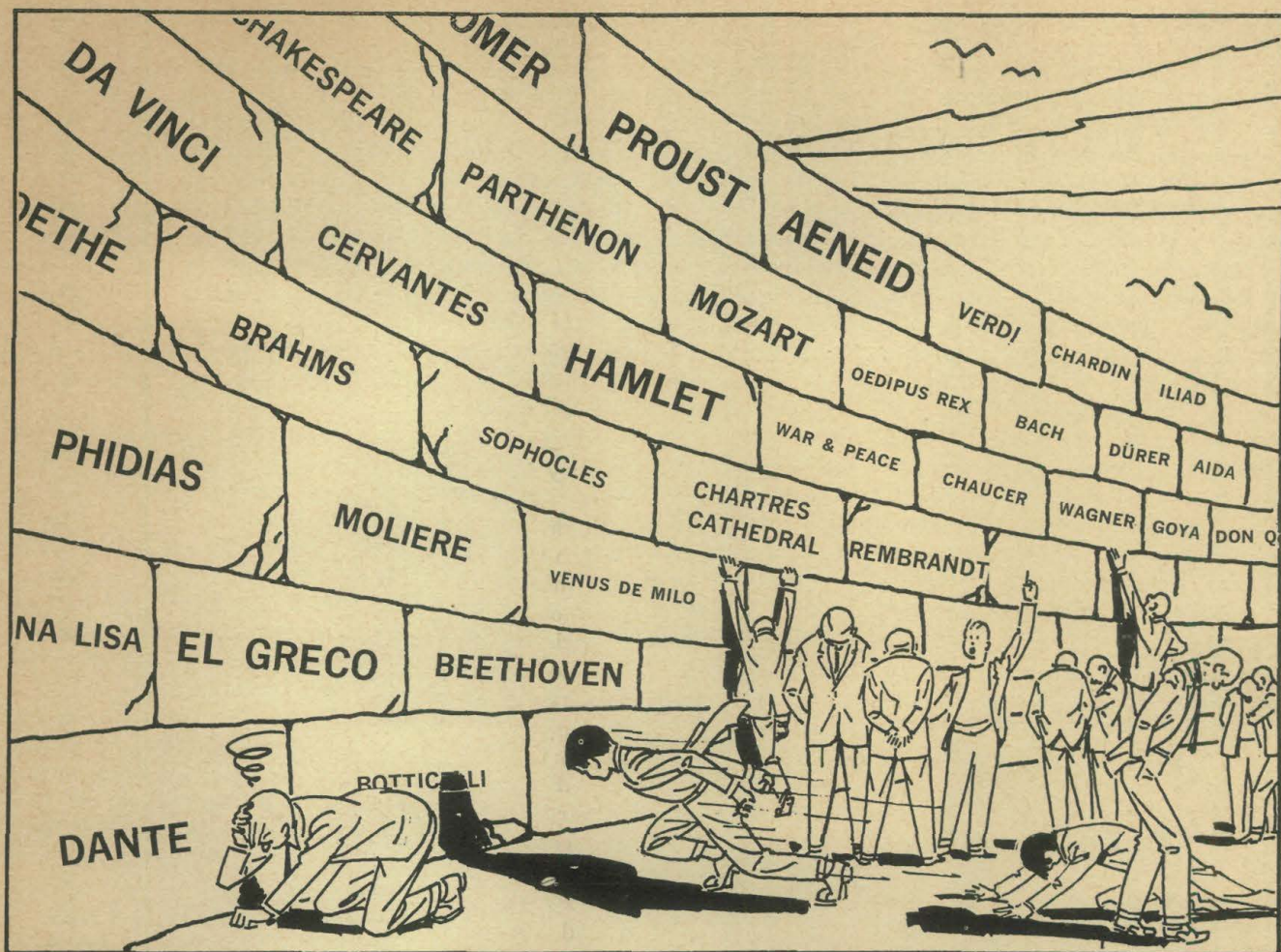
The penalty for even a single inaccurate statement in a book is that it may throw doubt on every other statement in it. And habitual exaggeration, caricature or distortion must of course do immensely more harm in the long run to the cause of those who indulge in them. By as-

sociation with accusations that are overdrawn or untrue, accusations that are true will be ignored or rejected. When *everybody* is vaguely accused of being a conspirator or a subversive, how is the reader to know when he is dealing with a real conspirator or subversive? A book like this defeats the very purpose of its authors and sponsors. It hurts the whole conservative side. It provides an easy target that Left-Liberals will treat as typical.

THE implied logic that runs through *The Great Deceit* and *Keynes at Harvard* goes something like this. Communists have advocated such-and-such a policy; Smith advocates this policy; therefore Smith is a Communist, or a Communist "dupe," and does even more harm than the Communists precisely because he passes as a non-Communist. By such logic one does not need to study any question on its merits. One merely finds out first what the Communists think and asserts the exact reverse. This is to be subservient by contradiction.

The truth is that people most often become socialists, even in many cases Communists, not because they are wicked but because they are misinformed, superficial, or sincerely confused. One should subject their arguments to patient analysis. One must examine the merits of the arguments, and not merely the alleged motives of those who advance the arguments. One has a chance of converting socialists if one takes their good faith for granted; one has no such chance if one begins by accusing them of dishonesty, conspiracy, or deceit.

It is with great personal reluctance that I have written this. In *Keynes at Harvard* the authors made several generous references to my own book, *The Failure of the New Economics*. It is an ungrateful task to criticize them in return. But it is unfortunately a necessary one. By overzealous exaggerations and accusations they are hurting the very cause of individual liberty and competitive capitalism that they as well as I and others are trying to preserve and promote. Today conservatives are in a minority in the intellectual world. If they are to be convincing to the "intellectuals" who, for good or ill, create public opinion, their arguments must be on a far higher ethical and intellectual level than those of their opponents.



This is the Wall that Quack Built

"There's nothing beyond it," he declares coldly. "Educate yourself to a full appreciation of these 'immortal' artists and their works, and that's where you end. You'll be in an earthly paradise of perfections." Don't let Quack deceive you. Man moves ahead by satiating himself of art at higher and higher levels.

"Art Is Too Important To Kid Yourself About"

There's no surer (nor more painful) way to destroy man than to block him with a wall and make him believe he can never go beyond it. It's death by stagnation and despair. Crash through for your lives.

Art isn't immortal, as you've long been aware (at least subconsciously) no matter how insistently old-fashioned critics (see samples below) go on telling you it is.

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It brings art up-to-date — much as Evolution brought Biology up-to-date — namely, by abandoning the rigid certitude, allowing for changing conditions and making the best conjectures it can, under the circumstances. It's tough-minded and forward-looking, instead of sentimental and tied-down. Costs nothing to investigate.

FIGHT OFF THIS NAIVE RANT



"and the spontaneous delight that everyone feels before the Parthenon sculptures will last as long as the human race rejoices in the name of man."

"Language greatly used has all the sanction of a sacrament: the race is as incapable of forgetting a great poem as it is of losing its last wish under the stars."

"No words that man can any more set side by side can ever affect the mind again like some of the great passages of Homer."

AUTHORITATIVE OPINIONS

"HYPOCRISY ABOUT ART lets a lot of fresh air into the subject of art criticism — does a good job of deflating some of the pompous nonsense." George B. Keester, Chairman Fine Arts Dept., West Virginia Wesleyan College.

"Shaw has taken off the lid and exposed the aesthetic and critical overalls in the stew of beauty. Painter, art gallery director, and aesthetician for many years, Shaw has shown many opinions and their underlying presuppositions to lie in a Limpopo greasiness. His chapter entitled 'The Metropolitan Museum Lays an Egg' is far too delicious to miss. This was a long overdue cleaning of the fat, self-congratulatory, aesthetic stables." Prof. Dale Riepe, C. W. Post College, in Philosophy & Phenomen. Research.

"PRECIOUS RUBBISH which I received and promptly read, seems worth passing around. Please send me 30 copies." — John Wilcox, Prof. and Grad. Adviser, Wayne University.

"What wonderful fun. I've been carrying it around with me everywhere, and making people read its wonderful cento of quotes, and to pretty general applause... It's a lulu." — Conrad Aiken.

"Expresses to a T my every thought. I think it's great."

Nicola Ziroli, Artist in Res., Univ. of Ill.

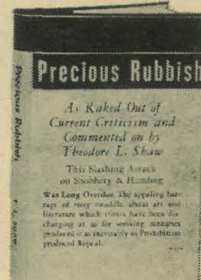
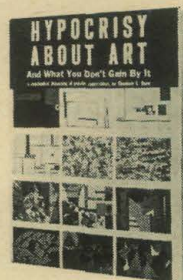
What Picasso said — "When I was young, I got into trouble by mocking my elders and breaking down everything they had done. That's the way I managed to create new roads. That's what the youngsters of today ought to be doing — not imitating, but mocking me and tearing me down. It's the only way to find success." As quoted by Leonard Lyons.

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