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TO
THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF ROERICH

By Garabed H. Paelian

[In the spheres of art and letters, and of philosophy and religion, Prof. Roerich's is an honoured name. He is one of the greatest creative forces in the modern world. The Twentieth Century is privileged to publish the following neat and lucid exposition of his work as a philosopher, from the thesis for which the writer, Dr. Paelian has received the Ph. D. degree with honours, from the University of New York.]

It is the verdict of many cultural leaders that the world is now passing through a period of transition, with the inevitable consequences of chaos and confusion. The foundation of the coming age is being laid now, therefore the role of leadership becomes many times more important, at this time, than at any other time in the history of mankind. The world needs men who have big hearts and clear minds and characters which can stand the test of chaotic conditions: men, who have the pioneering spirit and who are willing to lead men through the present chaos to the new age by educating them, enlightening them and showing the path which leads to real progress.

Prof. Nicholas Roerich has been such a leader for many years. He has established a number of institutions and his aim is to bring humanity together through education and culture.

In the comparison of Roerich's work with that of others, an attempt is made to compare his philosophy with that of one of the leading philosophers of the day—John Dewey, whose philosophy has attracted much attention in America.
In comparing the pragmatic and instrumentalistic philosophy of John Dewey with the neo-idealistic philosophy of Nicholas Roerich, a transition is seen from West to East, from materialism to a new idealism. The older philosophies considered knowledge to be primary and experience to be secondary. They made practice revolve around theory, and facts revolve around ideas. John Dewey reversed the process, giving a primary place to experience and considering ideas to be mere instruments of response and adaptation. According to Nicholas Roerich, neither theory nor practice, knowledge nor experience, ideas nor facts have any meaning by themselves. Like the space-time continuum of Relativity, they form an inseparable continuity. Dewey does not believe in an inner world; for him the external world is the only reality and science is the key which opens this world to humanity. Roerich believes in an inner, spiritual world as well as an external, physical world. He believes that, by turning within, it is possible to make contact with the creative forces of the universe just as, through scientific methods, it is possible to contract physical energies and utilize them for our benefit.

Dewey cannot see any plan or purpose in the universe: Roerich believes that there is a plan and a purpose. The plan is evolution and the purpose is the growth of ourselves into the self of Divinity.

Dewey's ideas on educational methods are not very different from those of Roerich. There are, however, certain differences in their theories on education. To Dewey, education is growth; it is that reconstruction of experience which adds to the meaning of experience. To Roerich it is the unfolding of latent soul characteristics: the expansion of one's consciousness so that, through experience, underlying fundamental principles are understood and the oneness of
ourselves with the larger self is realized.

In their religious views, Dewey and Roerich differ considerably. Dewey is humanistic; Roerich’s views are universal. Dewey’s ideas are pragmatic. He believes in religion, because humanity is helped by it. Roerich is idealistic. He considers religion to be a contact between the outer physical and the inner spiritual, life of man and, as such, to be indispensable to any cultured man.

To Dewey, Reality constitutes the concrete, objective world; to Roerich, Reality is the noumenal world of principles, whose projection, on cross-section, constitutes the phenomenal, concrete world.

To Dewey, life has no purpose or goal; to Roerich the purpose of life is to acquire experience and knowledge through which one can strive towards the source of all knowledge, the final aim and destiny being Divinity.

To Dewey the conception of God as an antecedent being or original Reality is not admitted even as an hypothesis; Roerich believes in an immanent God, in everything; a God in us and in nature; nature and ourselves being in Him.

Dewey does not believe in a soul, or in immortality: Roerich believes in a soul which is a spark of the Great Fire of Divinity, and which is immortal like its source.

Dewey connects all knowledge with the physical; Roerich is a believer in a spiritual world which is in the heart of man, a Kingdom of God within man.

To Dewey, right is the expedient in the present situation. “Not perfecting as a final goal, but the ever enduring process

1 H. H. Horne, John Dewey’s Philosophy, especially The Quest for Certainty, p. 18.
3 John Dewey, The Quest for Certainty, p. 5.
4 H. H. Horne, John Dewey’s Philosophy, especially The Quest for Certainty, p. 17.
of perfecting, maturing, refining, is the aim of living\(^4\). To him, morality is conduct and conduct is action with a purpose, and the universe of morals exists only in the sentimentalties that generate them\(^5\). Roerich is a believer on a morality which denotes character, soul growth: morality being the symptom or the fruit of character. To him, morality is the result of an inner condition which is present when the mind and the heart function in harmony and man's inner and outer lives are not in conflict; when the outer life becomes the perfect expression of the inner, spiritual man.

Both Dewey and Roerich reject the organized, commercialized church, based on authority. To Dewey, however, the new religion is one of social sharing. To Roerich it is an act of turning within and living in the Kingdom of God, living a life of communion and love with his fellow men, a life of real brotherhood in which heart and mind are one.

In conclusion, Dewey's denial of an inner life places a limitation on thought. Roerich accepts no such limitation. To him both the outer and the inner are manifestations of the one life, and they are of equal importance.

With the growth of science in our generation, and the consequent increase in the complexity of our economic and social problems, our educational and religious institutions have undergone a number of changes. Education has taken on an experimental aspect and organized religion has ceased to be a vital force. It is, therefore, necessary that a new system be introduced into our schools to save our educational system from the clutches of routine standardization, and bring about a spiritual regeneration. We shall, in this way, usher a new culture into the world. It is our belief that the philosophy of Roerich, which is an adaptation, to Western

conditions, of the Eastern philosophies, will accomplish this purpose, for the following reasons:

It is timely, as it follows the principles of the theory of relativity. Its philosophy is all-inclusive. It is neither materialistic nor idealistic but includes both materialistic and idealistic. It assumes separate and independent existence for neither ideas nor matter: only postulating the existence of a continuity of idea-matter similar to the space-time continuum of Relativity.

It follows the principle of synthesis and its concepts are universal. It combines the best methods of the East with Western methods which have stood the test of time. It deals with fundamental principles which are common to the two hemispheres and it gives the student a universal viewpoint, making him feel at home with his universe.

It combines a subjective approach with an objective approach to knowledge. For it, like the space-time continuum of Relativity, subjective and objective are the two phases of knowledge and, therefore, are inseparable. It uses all the objective tools that science can provide. It also employs all the subjective means available, such as introspection, to arrive at knowledge. Classical philosophy speculated on the nature of knowledge and of the universe, without the aid of empirical and scientific methods. Modern materialistic philosophy, reacting from the classical method, does not believe in the speculative method. Roerich, however, proposes the co-ordination of human knowledge, by a combination of the scientific and philosophical methods.

Its psychology follows the same method, accepting both the objective and the subjective approaches. It accepts all the experimental facts of the behavioristic psychology, but it considers it to be incomplete. It also accepts the experimental findings of the introspection psychology, and of the
Existential School, which was introduced by G. E. Müller, in 1890. Later it was adopted by a group of German psychologists, who centred about Külpe, a pupil of Wundt, and about Ach and Watt. Titchener introduced the method into his laboratory at Cornell, for the study of processes of comparison, about the year 1900. Alfred Binet, the originator of psychological tests, hit upon the same method in attempting to study the process of thinking. Georges Dumas, French psychologist, Professor in the University of Paris, and leader of the group which collaborated in the *Nouveau Traité de Psychologie*, believes that introspection is really indispensable in psychology. The entire school of psycho-analysis of Freud, Adler and Jung is based on the method of introspection, as is the school of psychiatry, within which is a movement which has been described as "a springing into new life of the 'psychic' tendency... psychiatry starting in earnest to be psychic."

This method gives a true picture of the inner nature of the child, and guides the teacher in stimulating the inner creative impulse towards release and self-expression. This leads to an extension of consciousness and, in due time, adds to the wisdom of the student, a wisdom which, according to Hermann Keyserling, is "a perfect inner adjustment of the individual, not the self-conscious individual, but the individual conscious of the Self."

It is neither individualistic nor socialistic. It does not seek to educate the individual without regard to the needs of society, nor does it consider the needs of society without regard to those of the individual. Roerich’s philosophy be-

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7 R. S. Woodworth, *Contemporary Schools of Psychology*, p. 212.
lies in the freeing of the creative impulse of an individual, according to his capacity, and in the transformation of society to meet the needs of the individual. It believes in the greater responsibility of the individual and of his leaders.

It considers culture to be the synthesis of art, religion and science; it considers the cultural development of the student, on a physical, emotional mental and spiritual basis, to be a necessity.

It considers education to be a process of awakening, a process of providing the stimuli for releasing the potential soul forces of the student, and for the unfoldment of his soul characteristics from inside outward, as a seed unfolds into a tree.

It seeks the liberation of the mind from its fetters, from prejudices, superstitions, conventional ideas and other limitations, so that it can think freely and express itself without restrictions or suppressions.

It places a great responsibility upon the teacher, to guide and inspire his students and to show them the purpose of life, so that they can take their share of responsibility in the evolution of the plan of life.

Roerich's philosophy gives to humanity a cosmic religion, based upon a universal and selfless love which contemplates the unity of all men in one great and real brotherhood.
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