

The Person And Education

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This book is, from one vantage point, a position paper on a philosophic outlook called "Empirical Personalism." From another, it is a call for a democratic school engaged in dialogue, staffed by teachers who are both empiricists and "witnesses"—and dedicated, above all things, to the "emergence of persons."

But Professor Soderquist has also given us his credo here, his fundamental commitment as teacher and educational philosopher. His book, therefore, becomes a kind of log of an intellectual—or, perhaps, a sentimental—journey, concluding with the discovery that one can go home again.

Home, for Harold Soderquist, is the belief called personalism, with its roots in nineteenth-century romantic idealism, its associations with Protestant theologies, its focus on metaphysics, values, and "the human person." Kant and Schiller are evoked as the personalists' inspiration; tendencies to personalism are marked in Josiah Royce, William James, and William E. Hocking. The author pays tribute to all of these; but William James is first among them—James with his optimistic faith, his stubborn "will to believe."

Soderquist, however, was cast into another world, the twentieth-century world of urbanization, technology, disorder, ambiguity. As a teacher, as a modern man, he had to expose himself to new currents of thought, most particularly to the currents of Deweyan Experimentalism as they inundated the classrooms of his world. The experimentalist stress on intelligent controls, on the proper adaptation of ends to means, on communication and democratic values,—all seem to have moved Soderquist to qualify his traditional personalism and assimilate some aspects of the empirical objectivity characteristic of experimentalism.

He could not, of course, accept the tendency of some of Dewey's followers to emphasize process and flux to the exclusion of order

and stable ideals. Nor could he accept the notion that values could be scientifically defined. And as a committed personalist, he could not give up his belief in his metaphysic, not as a "logically predictive" premise, but "as a reasoned source of inspiration for pursuing values," an overarching and unifying principle which could sanction the centrality of man.

It is apparently for this reason that he turned to the writings of certain existentialist philosophers, particularly Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Heidegger, and Marcel. One suspects, in fact, that his need for modernity made him welcome the growing popularity of existentialism (or what he took to be existentialism) in the past few decades. Living professionally among progressives and empiricists, he could not have found it easy to think of himself as "dated," as archaic in some way.

This is not to say that Professor Soderquist turned to existentialism because it was fashionable or because it seemed to him a "good thing." A considerable part of his book is devoted to the "philosophic anthropology" of the existentialists, to exploration of self-alienation, dread, anxiety, authenticity, and other core concepts of those who have expressed the view. He has made every effort to treat these ideas honestly and comprehensively, and he has avoided all the clichés of critics who call them "meaningless" or destructive or (in the trivial sense) "absurd."

The existentialist notions of "subjectivity" and choice have appealed to him most of all; and considering his deeply felt commitment to the person and the person's relation to what is "outside" (or what transcends), it would not be surprising if he was moved to appropriate what struck him as a related, even a synchronous set of aperçus.

Nor would it be surprising, even in existentialist terms, if he chose to discover in existentialism only those views which could

be integrated with personalism—or, more precisely, "Empirical Personalism." Using experimentalist criteria, he seems to fend off certain of the irrationalist aspects of existential thought. He reacts vigorously and more than once against the recommendation of a "tragic" stance, so familiar among existentialists. He tends to see existential freedom as asocial, even anarchic, in spite of the persistence of the Other, of "engagement," of what Jaspers calls the "situation," in existential writing, especially in recent years. It is as if he is compelled to resist the paradox implicit in a concern with "inwardness," the paradox associated with the "Look" of which Sartre writes, the paradox foundational to the existential "leap."

Most significantly of all, he may be compelled to resist the very image of a world of open possibilities in which men are free to

choose themselves in action, in which the only values there are those men create as they commit themselves and take responsibility for what they choose. How can this be reconciled with the existence and persistence of "the ideal" (even when the ideal is "but an orientation, a yearning, working through a never finished series of ends-in-view")? How can it be reconciled with "moral intuitions" or the moulding of selfhood "in creative relationship to the true and the good..."?

Still, Professor Soderquist has made a noble effort. He has attempted to do what is seldom done today: to act as a hedgehog, to concern himself with a "big thing," to work out an integrated view. Perhaps, when all is done, he should be read as the keeper of a log. Logbooks are often more interesting than designs for empiricist-personalist-existentialist-democratic schools.