America's Socrates: Sidney Hook and American Higher Education

By

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ABSTRACT

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There was little that was uncontroversial about Sidney Hook (1902-1989), one of the foremost intellectuals, let alone philosophers, in America. He has long been regarded in contemporary intellectual circles and recent scholarship for his explication and philosophical analysis of German Idealism as a means toward understanding the roots of Communism, his superb expositions of John Dewey's pragmatism, his secular humanism, or for his almost militant anticommunism. This dissertation, however, examines a different dimension of his thought, namely the reception of his pragmatism as an educational philosophy. Ignored by most historians of American intellectual life, it was a comprehensive and systematic approach bent on clarifying and subsequently ameliorating the widespread cultural changes wrought by the Great Depression. From his post as chairperson at New York University's Washington Square College, he was among the first to eagerly and constructively press the range and import of Dewey's ideas to face the urgent educational problems facing higher education. When not engaged in matters related to the rise of European fascism or the famous Show Trials in the Soviet Union, Hook spent the bulk of his career introducing an entire generation of educators, administrators, and laymen to pragmatism's possibilities as a viable social philosophy. In so doing he initiated a lifelong debate with representatives of the St. John's Program over the nature, scope, content, and future of higher education. In so doing he recast the character of American Pragmatism.

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Introduction:

The Trouble With Sidney

> "In matters of education [Sidney Hook was] that inexhaustible geyser of books, lectures, and essays, a philosopher who scents the smell of battle from afar and is soon in the midst of it, giving as well as he gets, and usually somewhat better."—Brand Blanshard, *Education in the Age of Science,* (1959*)*

The American philosopher Morris Raphael Cohen once wrote that "[h]istory frequently shows philosophers who receive no adequate recognition except from later generations, but it is hazardous to anticipate the judgment of posterity."[1] This sentiment's grandiosity notwithstanding, it is one that most surely permeates this dissertation, which is an examination and, one hopes, a novel interpretation of the philosopher Sidney Hook (1902-1989). But this dissertation resists all conventional narrative and interpretive temptations, and strives, in earnest, to turn its back on convention by examining Hook's career as a public philosopher of education exclusively. In no small way, then, much of what follows attempts to assure for Hook his rightful attention by posterity. This is indeed a daunting task, for the consensus view is that Hook was one of the twentieth century's most controversial intellectuals.

Although he was an heir to the intellectual legacy of his teacher and mentor John Dewey, in many ways Hook was also his intellectual successor. Unlike Dewey, by his own admission Hook largely abstained from the life of a speculative philosopher, choosing instead the more public and critical role for the philosopher in society. This is not to say that he was philosophically inactive, either; rather he understood philosophy to be a never-ending quest for clarity in matters of public policy. And even though Hook's writings touched on all of the major social and political issues of the twentieth century, on no issue was his desire for clarity more

[1] Morris R. Cohen, *American Thought: A Critical Sketch* (New York: Collier Books, 1954), 414.

vital than higher educational policy. As far as we will understand him, education for Hook was equally his central philosophical purpose and his vocational calling. As one of the twentieth century's leading educational theoreticians and its foremost philosopher of democracy, Hook modified and applied Dewey's concepts (which were usually assigned to elementary educational reform) to higher education to fend off what he perceived as authoritarian forces inside the classroom and without. Consequently, Hook became a pivotal figure in almost all of the debates among and between academic intellectuals over the nature of educational theory and its implications for the larger concerns of American society. Together these themes represent his most distinctive contribution to American intellectual history, the real reason why he was fêted as a "giant among pygmies" and as America's answer to Jean Paul Sartre in France and Bertrand Russell in Britain.[2]

Scores of books and articles have testified to Hook's centrality in American thought and culture. Focusing on the somewhat "eclectic" elements of Hook's life and thought, scholars have been more concerned with *what* Hook believed rather than *how* he believed it. Sadly, with few exceptions—two *festchriften* presented to Hook on his sixty-fifth and eightieth birthdays and an unpublished dissertation addressing the relationship between his naturalism and educational theory—Hook's career as a teacher and public philosopher of education has gone largely unnoticed.[3] In fact, the mere mention of Hook's name has provoked a storm of conflicting opinions about his legacy-opinions that have rarely followed a common ideological pattern. At

[2] Thomas Sowell, "Sidney Hook Award", www.tomsowell.com/sphook.htm; Paul Kurtz, "Introduction", in Kurtz, ed., *Sidney Hook and the Contemporary World: Essays on the Pragmatic Intelligence* (New York: The John Day Co., 1968), 11. In his introduction Kurtz observed that "Hook [was] *engagé* at time when others [were] *non-engagés*."

[3] Paul Kurtz, ed., *Sidney Hook and the Contemporary World*: *Essays on the Pragmatic Intelligence* ; and Kurtz, ed., *Sidney Hook: Philosopher of Democracy and Humanism* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1980); Barbara Forrest, "Naturalism in Education: A Study of Sidney Hook," (PhD diss. Tulane University, 1988).

first glance Hook behaves not unlike scores of other twentieth century American intellectuals: a card-carrying member of the Old Left of the 1930s who underwent a near-complete transformation to New Right conservatism in the 1950s; and then, Neoconservatism in the 1970s and 80s. To one degree or another, this ideological trajectory is typically reflected in many histories of twentieth century American intellectual and cultural life.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the monographs, essays, and various personal reminiscences associated with the scholarly cottage industry of the notorious "New York Intellectuals."[4] Despite the sheer quantity of Hook's published work in educational theory, so far scholars of American intellectual life have given it short shrift or ignored it altogether. Moreover, in both the vast secondary literature on the New York Intellectuals, and in the abundant biographies and autobiographies by and about them, some authors have caricatured Hook's ideas to such a degree that only the individual political judgments he advanced or the "brilliant" polemical talents he displayed when defending them are featured. To some extent this is understandable, since many of these scholarly works have revolved around Hook's early Marxism and his later (militant) anticommunism. The result has been twofold: on the one hand he is often praised for his courage, integrity, and foresight in the context of geopolitical events; on the other he is either personally decried for his political naiveté, or condemned for his pragmatism's perceived misdeeds in the face of domestic and international crises.[5] Historians examining the plight of postwar liberalism in America, which, in their view, generally failed to

[4] For a succinct and extremely useful summary of these public intellectuals and the challenges associated with writing about them, see *The New York Intellectuals Reader,* ed. Neil Jumonville (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1-11.

[5] Terry Cooney, *Rise of the New York Intellectuals: Partisan Review and its Circle, 1934-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986); and Cooney, *Balancing Acts: American Thought and Culture in the 1930s* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995); Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); and Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and Their World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

stand up to Senator Joseph McCarthy—and McCarthyism—when it mattered the most, almost universally share this interpretation. Divided along ideological lines and written in almost teleological Left-to-Right terms, these monographs frequently single out Hook's life as "paradigmatic" of the New York Intellectuals themselves: they *all* "began as radicals, moved to liberalism, and sometimes ended up as conservatives."[6] Consequently, assessments of Hook's *entire* life have been content to broadly explain it in terms of a "Left-to-Right" continuum emblematic of American intellectual life in general.[7]

For one thing, Hook was forever chary of the appellation "New York Intellectual" (or "Neoconservative," for that matter), and all that it entailed.[8] He wondered to both his lifelong friend and colleague Daniel Bell, and to the conservative intellectual William F. Buckley, Jr. if, perhaps, historians of American intellectual and cultural life were wasting their time on the

[6] Bloom, *Prodigal Sons*, 6. For a more complimentary assessment of Hook's "sober and realistic" anticommunism, see Richard Gid Powers, *Not Without Honor: The History of American Anticommunism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

[7] In addition to Bloom and Schrecker's volumes, some noteworthy titles include: Richard Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973)*;* Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s (*New York: Harper and Row, 1985); John Patrick Diggins, *Up From Communism: Conservative Odysseys in American Intellectual History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975); Neil Jumonville, *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). The most irresponsible and vitriolic of these interpretations is Alan Wald's *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987). Wald's book has been uncritically accepted by, and serves as the basis for, the lone historical treatment of Hook's Marxism in the last few years, Christopher Phelps' *Young Sidney Hook: Marxist and Pragmatist* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997). Pells and Schrecker are particularly critical of Hook's membership in that class of "ideologues of the American way" who renounced their youthful Marxism for a liberalism that bordered on outright conservatism. See Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998). The phrase is from Pells, *The Liberal Mind*, ix.

[8] "I Never liked the phrase 'New York Intellectual. I've never considered myself [one because] the phrase was not current when I wrote most of my stuff." Sidney Hook to John Patrick Diggins, April 24th, 1986. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 6.

group.[9] Nevertheless, he never shied away from answering their questions or reading drafts of their manuscripts.[10] Tabling this question for now, why is it that for a public intellectual who spent his entire life in universities and who witnessed more than "half a dozen revolutions in American education," no one has explored his unquiet life as an educator and educational theorist to any great degree?[11] Interesting as they are, Hook's occasional exchanges with the New York Intellectuals are of less help in understanding his life and work, than are his enduring commitments to education, which always varied in light of cultural change but rarely wavered.[12]

Similarly, historians of America's Cold War experience have essentially reduced Hook's career to a single text, 1953's *Heresy, Yes, Conspiracy, No!* In the course of their respective inquiries they have, unfortunately, identified it as the *sine qua non* of his notoriously "obsessive" anticommunism, all but occluding his other deeply philosophical writings.[13] In so doing, scholars have focused less on Hook's analysis of the state of American education and its relationship to his overall educational theory, and more on the book's political fallout. Consequently, Hook is often associated with scores of state, local, and federal officials who sought to eradicate the communist threat to American education *in toto*. In the process, scholars such as Ellen Schrecker and Richard Pells often disregard the nuances of Hook's arguments. Moreover, in ignoring the text's implications for educational theory, Schrecker, Pells, and others have omitted

[9] Hook to Bell, February 3, 1986. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 6. Hook wrote to Buckley that his own "political impact was negligible. We were politically savvy and if we had the influence that British intellectuals had on foreign policy, the post World War period would have been profoundly different." Hook to William F. Buckley, Jr., January 20, 1989. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 23.
[10] Hook carried on prolonged correspondence with Alan Wald and Neil Jumonville. See Sidney Hook papers, Box 138.
[11] Hook, "Student Revolts Could Destroy Academic Freedom," *The New York University Alumni News*, May 1968, 3. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 67.
[12] Sidney Hook, *Out of Step: An Unquiet Life in the 20th Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), Chapter 32.
[13] Sidney Hook, *Heresy, Yes—Conspiracy, No!* (New York: John Day, 1953).

consideration of Hook's articles that defended Deweyan educational theory, his engagement with the advocates of the famous St. John's School, and his philosophical essays—all of which reflected his larger presence in the public debates over higher education in America in the 1950s.[14]

Focusing less on the Cold War activities of a select group of intellectuals and literary figures, other scholars have abandoned the mantle of objectivity and have dismissed Hook's postwar writings and activities altogether. Instead they emphasize the "young" Hook's Marxism and the various political activities that followed from it. Faced with the intellectual duopoly of Liberalism and Conservatism that dominated postwar American life, the historians Christopher Phelps and Alan Wald have turned instead to Hook's "revolutionary socialism" of the 1930s as the only period worth studying. The reason for this has less to do with historical fact and more to do with their shared antecedent ideological viewpoints. In their eyes Hook's career from 1938 until his death is little more than a series of backsliding episodes leading to outright "apostasy." The irony is that in the 1930s no issues occupied more of Hook's time than reforming New York University's curriculum and his public engagement with scores of educational theorists who opposed it.[15]

Fortunately some intellectual historians have not been so impatient. Having acknowledged Hook's role as the "forefather" of the New York Intellectuals, both the late John Patrick Diggins and Neil Jumonville have taken great care to present not only the positions Hook

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[14] Schrecker's *No Ivory Tower* and *Many Are the Crimes* typify this perspective. The historian Richard Fried uncritically accepts Schrecker's assessment of Hook's Cold War career; see Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), especially Chapter 4. Diane Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); and James Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) equally reduce Hook's Cold War activism to *Heresy, Yes—Conspiracy No!*

[15] Phelps, *Young Sidney Hook*, 1-15; Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*, 3-16.

took at any given time but have also striven to explore the manifold reasons Hook presented, *at the time*, for them. Eschewing the traditional *post hoc* approach to Hook's ideas, both of them have taken great pains to explain and explore the nuances of Hook's Marxism, pragmatism, and anticommunism alongside the career of American liberalism—especially how they related to developments in pre- and post-World War II American intellectual and cultural life. Their work has also delved more deeply than most into Hook's postwar "fight to establish a code of responsibility and integrity among the intellectual community."[16] But is there more to the story of New York City intellectual and cultural life—and especially Hook's life within this specific cultural milieu—than the New York Intellectuals? Is it possible to place Hook outside of the confines of those intellectuals who orbited around such renowned publications as the *New Republic*, *Partisan Review*, *Commentary*, the *Nation*, the *New York Review of Books*, and the *New York Times Book Review* (to name only a few)?[17] This dissertation argues that an exploration of Hook's educational theory might just complement their important work.

Purporting to treat American pragmatism as a whole, responsibility for why Hook has been so marginalized also lies with scholars of American philosophy. Assuming a linear trajectory among pragmatists, most histories confine their narratives to the "classical" pragmatism of Charles Peirce, William James, and John Dewey.[18] Scholars such as Andrew Feffer have moved beyond this trinity to include like-minded thinkers such as James H. Tufts,

[16] Jumonville, *Critical Crossings*, 13.
[17] Diggins, *Up From Communism*; Diggins, "Sidney Hook," *Grand Street* 7 (1987): 185-194; and Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
[18] Bruce Kuklick, *The Rise of American Philosophy: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1860-1930* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America: 1720-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Amélie Rorty, *Pragmatic Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1966).

and George Herbert Mead.[19] Still others maintain that there is a line that can be traced from Peirce all the way to such late twentieth century luminaries as Donald Davidson, W. V. O. Quine, Hilary Putnam, and the quintessential neo-pragmatist, Richard Rorty.[20] Collectively they have seemingly gone out of their way to avoid discussing Sidney Hook's place in the history of American pragmatism. Seeking to locate pragmatism's eclipse or outright demise, these authors largely skip the middle decades of the twentieth century as if Hook and other like-minded philosophers contributed nothing to the development of neo-pragmatism.[21] If and when Hook is mentioned it is almost universally in terms of his being Dewey's student, and little else.[22] Given these tendencies, what was it about Hook's pragmatism (or his personality?) that led so many of these authors to either lessen his importance or worse, ignore him altogether?

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[19] Andrew Feffer, *The Chicago Pragmatists and American Progressivism* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1993); Elizabeth Flower and Murray Murphey, *A History of Philosophy in America*, 2 vols. (New York: Putnam and Sons, 1977) especially the appendix; Israel Scheffler, *Four Pragmatists: A Critical Introduction to Peirce, James, Mead, and Dewey* (New York: Humanities Press, 1974). I have singled out Scheffler (although there are scores like him) because he maintains in his preface that "pragmatism is not only…a distinctively American philosophy. In its effort to clarify and extend the methods of science, and to strengthen the prospects of freedom and intelligence in the contemporary world, it represents also a philosophical orientation of urgent general interest." One could cite chapter and verse repeatedly where this is exactly Hook's attitude. Quote is from Scheffler, *Four Pragmatists,* ix.

[20] *A Pragmatist's Progress? Richard Rorty and American Intellectual History*, ed. John Pettigrew (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2000) is representative. Between his introductory remarks and the selections he includes, Pettigrew perpetuates the myth that nothing happened in American pragmatism between 1952, when Dewey died, and when Rorty wrote his magisterial *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* in 1979. It should be noted that Amélie Rorty's *Pragmatic Philosophy* does make allowances for analytic philosopher's "adaptation" to pragmatism, even though the variety of pragmatism she describes is within the boundaries of the Peirce/James/Dewey troika.

[21] John McCumber, *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001); Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2001). Both, it should be noted, accept Schrecker's argument and analyses wholesale. For a Cold War critique of Hook's philosophical positions, see John Capps, "Pragmatism and the McCarthy Era," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 32 (1996): 634-667; and Capps, "Sidney Hook and Anti-Communism," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 40 (2004): 803-816. For an answer to Capps' argument, see Robert Talisse, "Pragmatism and the Communist Party: a Reply to Capps," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 39 (2003): 657-661.

[22] Hook is almost universally referred to merely as "a student of Dewey's and later his indefatigable defender." Quote is from Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America*, 190.

Some scholars have recently attempted to reconfigure Hook's *philosophical* significance. Searching for the intellectual roots of his philosophy, philosophers such as Cornel West, Robert Talisse, and the late Michael Eldridge have suggested that Hook did not simply imitate Dewey's pragmatism—that he was not, contrary to most assessments, Dewey's "bulldog"—but that he instead sought to clarify and advance his mentor's ideas in order to meet the exigencies of a modern world. In their estimation Hook developed his own theory of meaning and truth, his own variant of philosophical naturalism, and his own unique political theory. Hook's aim was, they argue, to set these individual components against his hopes for an intelligent basis for culture in an age of scientific advancement.[23]

Important as these contributions are, they rarely go beyond linking Hook's philosophy to Dewey's. To be sure, Dewey, Peirce, and James collectively shaped Hook's pragmatism in meaningful ways. But so did several noteworthy scholars at both City College and Columbia, where Hook took his undergraduate and graduate degrees, respectively. While Hook and Dewey's relationship has been well documented, if not exhausted, we know less of the impact of such thinkers as Morris Cohen, the esteemed logician who instructed not only Hook but also dozens of like-minded (and pragmatically-minded) scholars.[24] And while the initial attempts to reconfigure Hook's place within the American philosophical tradition have been fruitful,[25] they

[23] Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Robert B. Talisse, "Politics Without Dogmas: Hook's Basic Ideals"; and Michael Eldridge, "Dewey's Bulldog and the Eclipse of Pragmatism," both of which appear in *Sidney Hook Reconsidered*, ed. Matthew J. Cotter (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 2004); see also Talisse, *A Pragmatist Philosophy of Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

[24] Jumonville and West are among the few who have attempted to connect Hook's pragmatism to Cohen's tutelage. Bloom's *Prodigal Sons* briefly discusses Cohen's impact on the New York Intellectuals, but with greater emphasis on how Cohen's Jewishness, and not his philosophy, assuaged some of their reservations for a career in academia.

[25] Talisse seems to be very much alone in doing for Hook what the latter did for Dewey. That is, Talisse engages Hook's pragmatism in the hopes of engaging, among other matters, contemporary debates over

have frequently overlooked Hook's own repeated claim that his philosophical positions themselves reflected a deeply sustained commitment to educational reconstruction as the means toward the realization of a democratic culture. As such they have missed an opportunity to explore how he brought Dewey's educational theory to bear upon the problems that beset the modern university. It should come as no surprise, then, that no consistent study of Hook's unique philosophical contributions to education exists, and his distinguished career as an educator and public philosopher has gone virtually without comment.

These concerns notwithstanding, none of these approaches do justice to Hook's career, one that cannot be understood independently of the institution that employed him. For more than forty years Hook taught in the philosophy department at New York University (NYU), spending most of his time at its Washington Square College (WSC) campus in Greenwich Village.[26] Situated squarely on the doorstep of American intellectual life, at NYU Hook devoted his energies not to the everyday activities of New York's literary circles but to the duties associated with his role of full-time teacher and the seemingly thankless task of department chairman, and all the while at an institution that, for the better part of the twentieth century, lived a rather precarious existence.[27] To keep NYU in step with the rapid social, political, and economic changes taking place in the city itself and the country as a whole, and in the hopes of transforming the institution into the intellectual "Mecca [of] the Atlantic seaboard," Hook wrote

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the nature of democratic theory. In addition to the above cited texts, see his *Democracy After Liberalism* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Talisse "The Legacy of Sidney Hook," in *The Essential Sidney Hook*, ed. Robert Talisse and Robert Tempio (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2002). An excellent Hookean extension of his overall project can be found in Talisse, *Democracy and Moral Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[26] Hook also taught at the New School for Social Research regularly from the 1930s-1960s.

[27] Unlike Columbia and other private colleges or universities, NYU did not become a prestigious institution until the late 1970s, well after Hook retired. See Thomas J. Frusciano and Marilyn H. Petit, *New York University and the City: An Illustrated History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), especially Chapters14 and 15.

furiously to colleagues within and without it in favor of deep-seated curricular and administrative reforms.[28] Why would a professional philosopher of his stature concern himself with such mundane matters as curriculum development, administrative reforms, and university politics? What was it about his educational theory, or these proposed reforms, that shaped or reflected public debates over the nature, scope, rationale, and future of American higher education? Is there something about his educational theory or teaching career that mandated such an intense and prolonged engagement?

As something of a revisionist account of Hook's career, this dissertation challenges conventional historical wisdom by arguing for a new and more complex interpretation of the roots, development, and transformations of his ideas, especially his educational ideas. It traces the intimate connections between his philosophical commitment to pragmatism and the debates over what he insisted was its paramount intellectual charge: educational theory and practice. Principally a work of intellectual history, this dissertation is not a history of philosophy—although it does intend to broaden the parameters associated with pragmatism's history considerably. Nor is it strictly an intellectual biography—though telling the story of his life and career as an educator entails an appeal to formative biographical experiences related to his intellectual development. And while it invests a considerable amount of time on educational matters, it is not necessarily a history of education, either. But Hook's career at NYU entails an examination of at least *some* of higher education's salient features. Finally, this dissertation will examine how Hook's ideas themselves were constantly being revised to meet the exigencies of and ever-changing educational world. In making a case for such an academic intellectual,

[28] Hook, "Comparative Evaluation of the Department of Philosophy." Sidney Hook Papers, Box 148.

changes taking place in New York City's colleges and universities ultimately serve as an ideal "context for intellectual work."[29]

In revising the traditional categories of intellectual, educational, and institutional history, this dissertation seeks to realign them within the larger patterns of American intellectual life. I maintain that an intellectual history of Sidney Hook, straining as he did under the leading educational pressures of his day, serves as a fertile seedbed for such an approach. Methodologically this is complicated, but it begins with consulting an array of Hook's more neglected or, in my view, misunderstood published works, many of which were related to contemporary educational questions, and not, solely a recapitulation of Dewey's views as many would contend. Moreover, when not *writing* about education, Hook was most certainly *talking* about it, for he delivered dozens of public lectures on the alleged crises that were associated with it. Thus the greater share of my primary research centers on Hook's manifold published writings on education. Shoring up these arguments will be an examination, for the first time, of Hook's related educational publications, which often reflected his profound desire to publicize his philosophical ideas about education for a larger audience. I would argue that much of the time these essays emphasized the indispensability of sound pedagogy and good teaching above all else. Finally, I will also introduce Hook's unpublished manuscripts and extensive

[29] Thomas Bender, "The Culture of Intellectual Life: The City and the Professions," in *New Directions in American Intellectual History*, ed. John Higham and Paul Conkin (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 188. Bender makes the best case for the study of cities, institutions, and intellectuals as instrumental analytical matrices in *New York Intellect: A History of Intellectual Life in New York City from 1750 to the Beginnings of Our Own Time* (New York: Knopf, 1985). For the application of this framework see David A. Hollinger, "Two NYUs and 'The Obligation of Universities to the Social Order' in the Great Depression," in *The University and the City: From Medieval Origins to the Present,* ed. Thomas Bender (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 249-289.

correspondence related to educational theory and its repercussions for higher education.[30] To account for his educational reputation, then, it is thus important to consult sources outside the traditional pale of intellectual history.

This dissertation also devotes, when necessary, part of its narrative to an examination of NYU's history as it related to Hook's career. In a matter similar to the economic history of New York, this institution, unlike neighboring Columbia University, suffered financially, and significantly so. This cycle of boom and bust frequently taxed its infrastructure, which, in turn required decisive educational action. Issues related to departmental structure, administrative powers, and the university's financial status collectively shaped Hook's sustained interest in frequently reforming NYU's undergraduate curriculum to meet the needs of its student population. As an active and combative crusader for administrative and curricular reform, Hook oversaw many of these changes firsthand. Hence the dual career of NYU and Sidney Hook elucidates the historian Thomas Bender's claim that New York City's intellectual, cultural, and institutional life can best be understood in terms of its academic culture. NYU was placed, he argued, in a "cosmopolitan intellectual culture" that was largely "underwritten by government patronage" until the late 1970s.[31]

As interesting as they are, the internecine battles at NYU over money, power, and the curriculum are not the entire story. Rather, this dissertation correspondingly argues that the manner in which they shaped the theoretical and curricular debates *outside* the university is

[30] The lone collection of Hook's correspondence is Edward Shapiro, *Letters of Sidney Hook: Democracy, Communism, and the Cold War* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995). Given its title, it is ironic that Shapiro includes no letters realted to education.

[31] Thomas Bender, *New York Intellect*, 341; and "Politics, Intellect, and the American University, 1945-1995" in *American Academic Culture in Transformation: Fifty Years, Four Disciplines*, ed. Thomas Bender and Carl Shorske (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 17-54; David L. Kirp, *Shakespeare, Einstein, and the Bottom Line: The Marketing of Higher Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), especially Chapter three.

equally, if not more, important. To this end we will introduce, when appropriate, such educational luminaries as Mortimer Adler, Robert M. Hutchins, Alexander Meikeljohn, Stringfellow Barr, and Scott Buchanan—all of whom engaged and debated Hook on education and its relationship to and its role in a free society. In addition to spearheading the famous Great Books programs at the University of Virginia, St. John's College in Annapolis and, later, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, these writers formed various educational organizations, all of which were united in their opposition to Hook's own (and his sympathizers') educational initiatives. It was not until well after Hook left NYU in 1973 that the once heated debates between them fell silent. While outside the pale of our current discussions, the reemergence of these debates can be traced to the fracas surrounding Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind.*[32]

Even though some effort is made to adhere to a chronological schema, the chapters in this dissertation admit to a more episodic rather than linear character. It begins with an examination of those relevant aspects of Hook's early childhood, adolescence, and years at the College of the City of New York (CCNY), and the degree to which they shaped his beliefs about education, especially the value of good teaching. The roles Morris Cohen and Charles Peirce played in his pedagogical development occupy center stage in the chapter, with John Dewey serving more as an understudy to the story than not. As such, it begs the readers indulgence, for most accounts of these years delve rather deeply into the evolution of Hook's intellectual associations with Marxism, and his attendant political activism. Marx, as we shall see, is conspicuosly absent from

[32] To date William N. Haarlow's *Great Books, Honors Programs, and Hidden Origins: The Virginia Plan and the University of Virginia in the Liberal Arts Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2003) is the only comprehensive text that explains the origins of the Great Books program. Haarlow pays little attention to the larger intellectual and cultural contexts that shaped the program. Moreover, in focusing on the origin and development of the St. John's school there is no mention of the debates between Hook, Adler, et al. For a more recent assessment of these debates, see James Atlas, *Battle of the Books: Curriculum Debate in America* (New York: W. W. Northon, 1993).

the argument we are trying to make, and largely because Hook himself maintained that there was little, if any, connection between his early dalliances with Marx and his life-long educational activism. It was possible, he argued, to be an *engagé* Marxist and at the same time fulfill those fairly disengaged obligations requisite the classroom and its search for truth.[33]

Also largely absent from this dissertation is the totality John Dewey's philosophy of education, and for reasons I hope to make clear throughout. How Hook became concerned with issues involving education and pedagogy is largely absent from even the most diligent accounts of his life, and that dimension of his thought, which he seemed to take the greates pride in, ought to be clarified for the reader.

The second chapter endeavors to examine the rise of Hook's career as a public philosopher of education in the 1930s, placing it within the context of his arrival at and, not long afterwards, influence within NYU's institutional landscape. The curricular and administrative reforms he initated there have never been explored, despite the weight Hook attributed to them throughout his life, serving as they did as one of the inspirations for his larger philosophy of education. So enamored was he of his educational activism that he dedicated several pages to his efforts in his 1987 autobiography, *Out of Step*. Hook's rising educational stardom thrust him into the public sphere, so to speak, where he first encountered his nemeses Mortimer Adler, Robert Hutchins, and their disciples.

Chapter three continues the battles into the 1940s, where the arguments begun by Hutchins and Adler (and, we might add, very much enjoyed by Hook) were broadened to include

[33] Barbara Forrest, telephone interview with Sidney Hook, September 14th, 1986. Typescript located in Forrest, "Naturalism and Education," 288. Forrest's work is an invaluable (albeit narrowly) philosophical companion to the historical career of Hook's philosophical work. In the same intervciew Hook stated that "all [of his] views on education derive from Dewey and not from Marx, who had no views on education." If there was any connection, however, Hook said it was a stretch; he half-heartedly suggested it might be found in Marx's view of "man as affected by technology," but little else.

the famous Bertrand Russell Case, where Hook's beloved alma mater, City College, sought to add Russell to its faculty with disastrous results for higher education. Hook's very public defense of Russell affected both his career at NYU and his impatience with the likes of Adler and Hutchins, and his educational activism increasingly intensified. So intense was Hook's vitriol for Adler and his followers after Adler's infamous "God and the Professors" speech at the storied Finkelstein Conference of 1940 that, one could argue, he made it his personal mission to publicly, repeatedly, and demonstrably, refute them at every turn.

Building on his very intense, and very public, disagreements with the Adlerians, Hook set out to present an alternative educational viewpoint, one that serves as the basis for chapter four. Here we will examine a long neglected component of Hook's career, his enduring passion for historical study and historical inquiry, and largely because history served as the curricular centerpiece to Hook's philosophy of education. Hook's historical interests culminated in one of his readily acknowledged but least studied texts, 1943's *The Hero in History: A Study in Limitation and Possibility.* Collectively, then, Hook strove to weave the themes typical of his historical interests into his larger educational concerns, and this chapter endeavors to gauge the degree to which he succeeded.

The last chapter confronts the "eclipse" declension narrative typical of American historiography, viz., that when John Dewey died in 1952 American pragmatism fell into philosophical disfavor, then declined and, then, was effectively occluded by the rising tides of analytic and continental philosophy. Then, in the 1980s, Richard Rorty rose to philosophical prominence, and rescued John Dewey from philosophical obscurity. This chapter argues that, if we examine Hook's *philosophical* career in the 1950s, we find that he was most surely not a victim of a philosphical subsumption; rather, by virtue of his promotion of and engagement with

these recent philosophical innovations, we might do away with the "eclipse" premise altogether, and reconfigure Hook into the larger history of American philosophizing. That Hook incorporated elements of the analytic and continental traditions into his own philosophical commitments only serves to demonstrate that, far from being eclipsed, pragmatism survived and thrived under Hook. Moreover, he openly acknowledged a rather considerable debt to analytic philosophy, elements of which he later—albeit conditionally—wove into his philosophy of education. Adjoining this argument was his sustained attempt to once more reinvent NYU to meet the demands of mid-century America. Perhaps most controversially, this chapter revisits and revises Hook's most notorious text, 1953's *Heresy, Yes—Conspiracy, No!*, examining its long-overlooked components, especially Hook's substantive educational proposals that appeared throughout, and the ubiquitous pedagogical implications therein. In another sense, then, this chapter represents a thorough (and, perhaps, long overdue) reworking of midcentury American intellectual life. The intellectual history of academic intellectuals like Hook is still in its infancy, and this dissertation, while certainly not the final word, hopes to add to the recent wave of studies about American academic intellectuals.[34] They need not all have to come from New York City, and they need not all have to be forever engaged in matters of public policy. Some of them were philosophers, and rightly so. Others were wedded to more sociological concerns, and rightly so. What united them was not a series of magazines or organizations confronting

[34] Neil Gross, *Richard Rorty: The Making of An American Philosopher* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 2008); Joel Issac, "Why Not Lewis?" *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 42 (2006): 54-60; Isaac, "Theorist at Work: Talcott Parsons and the Carnegie Project on Theory, 1949-1951," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 71 (2010): 287-311; and Isaac, "W. V. Quine and the Origins of Analytic Philosophy in the United States," *Modern Intellectual History* 2 (2005): 205-34. Isaac recently published an important monograph conjoining the construction of knowledge within the American social sciences, titled *Working Knowledge: Making the Human Sciences From Parsons to Kuhn* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012). As influential as their work has been on what follows, these authors fall more in line with the sociology of knowledge approach to history than the form of intellectual history undertaken in this dissertation.

contemporary political milieu; in addition to the books they wrote and talks they gave, they were wedded to the institutions that served as a platform for their activities. The philosophical career of Sidney Hook, especially as it accorded with his educational vision and institutional affiliation, is but one of many who belong in the next generation of intellectual histories.

A history of the debates over the character and content of American higher education allows us to identify points of originality in Hook's life and work. A study of his educational theory as it intersected with his career as a teacher and public philosopher represents an integral, but neglected, component of American intellectual, cultural, and educational history. In looking closely—and with a fresh perspective—at Hook's educational theory and the impact it had on American institutional and intellectual life, this dissertation will, hopefully, affect how future historians will approach the history of American pragmatism, the history of higher education, and the histories of intellectuals and the cities within which they lived and worked. This is necessary in light of all of the ideological and methodological impediments that have affected the existing historiography of intellectuals like Hook. That is, the greater the distance one has from the Cold War, or the student activism of the 1960s, for example, the better positioned subsequent scholars are and will be able to re-evaluate the work of one of the twentieth century's most misunderstood intellectuals.

Chapter One:

The Philosopher as Pedagogue: The Formation of Sidney's Temper

"I enjoyed teaching, and my students enjoyed being taught."[1]

It is no small claim to say that Sidney Hook was born to be a teacher. On the occasion of his retirement from New York University in the fall of 1972, Hook received hundreds of congratulatory letters in his philosophy department mailbox. Were one to peruse their contents, they would find that nearly every one of Hook's former pupils and colleagues went to great lengths to express their gratitude for Hook's having come into their educational lives. Collectively they detail an environment wherein Hook drew them into the world of ideas; a professor who was a catalyzing agent; who inculcated in them the skills requisite to making and defending an argument; and an enthralling pedagogue who keenly presented many sides of the same issue at once without disclosing his personal prejudices. That December, several of his former students, as well as a few of his colleagues, attended his final lecture. It was an historic occasion, and for two significant reasons: on the one hand, it marked the end of his nearly forty-five year career at NYU, the bulk of which was spent in the classroom teaching philosophy. And, according to many of those in attendance, it was the first time ever—ever—that Hook willingly volunteered his personal opinions about politics and society. Most of his students agreed, then, that, as a teacher, Hook both captivated and intellectually seduced generations of students using, for all intents and purposes, the Socratic method.[2]

[1] Hook, *Out of Step,* 71.
[2] "Retiring Prof. Hook Gives Class His Views," *New York Times,* December 21, 1972. The letters from students can be found in Sidney Hook Papers, Boxes 3-6.

Such lavish praise is ironic, however, if we were to examine Hook's own pedagogical odyssey. With very few exceptions, Hook's estimations of his time as a student are generally unfavorable, replete as it was with terrible teachers prone to politicizing their classrooms at will, or, even worse, who systematically poisoned the learning environment by stultifying the natural curiosities of the young. So terrible was his early education that Hook later referred to his teachers as "martinets" who inflicted corporal punishment with a "heavy ferule" when they weren't squelching classroom inquiries. While he earned a reputation for precocity and pugnacity at an early age, given the deplorable conditions under which he learned about the world and his place in it, he can harldy be faulted for it. Thus while it may well be true that behind every great philosopher is a great teacher, with regard to Hook's education the opposite was clearly the case.[3]

Until the late 1920s Hook's educational beliefs and commitments were relatively inchoate, and his interests in the philosophy of education more so. Our present discussion attempts to tell the story of how he came to *pedagogical* self-consciousness, and it does so without necessarily traveling down the long and complex road of how he came to *philosophical* self-consciousness. To accomplish the latter would entail delving deeply and thoroughly into the enormously multifarious and complicated philosophies of Morris Rapahel Cohen, Charles Sanders Peirce, and Bertrand Russell—to name but a few of his philosophical influences. But if we were to cast our narrative net a bit more widely to look closely at Hook's childhood and adolescence, especially with regard to how Hook himself understood its role in his pedagogical development, our examination immediately brings to light just how early in life Hook developed the beliefs and mannerisms associated with his interest in education, especially teaching. These

[3] Hook, *Out of Step*, 11-12.

traits made him equal parts inquisitive and quick-tempered, and animated nearly all of the debates in which he found himself the protagonist. Moreover, they all shaped (or re-shaped) his general attitude toward, and philosophy of, education. Thus the closer one looks at the years most historians neglect or ignore, Hook was either preternaturally wise or never grew up.

This is not to say that we will ignore the impact of those representative philosophers who influenced Hook's educational life. Rather, I suggest that it is possible to come to terms with his pedagogical passions and educational philosophy through an examination of his exposure to Cohen and Dewey's *pedagogy* as much as one could through a sustained examination of their respective *philosophies*. Since Cohen played the most important pedagogical role in Hook's development, and was, by Hook's admission, as important an influence on his intellectual development as was Dewey, we ought to outline those elements of Cohen's thought that helped frame Hook's own. To unpack the story of Hook's baptism by Deweyan fire would require more space than is available in this dissertation, and here is not the place to fully consider Hook's appropriation of Dewey's rather substantial philosophical project. Given Hook's long, inconsistent life, for which nearly three decades was spent in Dewey's personal and philosophical transom, their intellectual odyssey could very well require the kind of book-length treatment the historian Robert Westbrook recently afforded Dewey.[4] Fortunately, some philosophers have recently taken up the task of relating Hook's ideas to Dewey's, although many of them have, to date, said little about Hook's *educational* debt to him.[5] Generally speaking, they

[4] Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1991). Westbrook, however, only factors Hook into Dewey's life in the late 1940s, and even then only with regard to the question of communist teachers in American Schools. This topic will be addressed in Chapter five.

[5] Robert B. Talisse, *A Pragmatist Philosophy of Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 2007), especially Chapter six; Andrew Reck, *The New American Philosophers: An Exploration of Thought Since World War II* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1969), especially Chapter five. The lone exception I could find to

have concluded that Hook essentially accomodated and utilized much of Dewey's philosophical *vocabulary*, and that he did so without adopting Dewey's larger philosopical *project*, which involved an all-encompassing, multi-faceted system, entailing metaphysics, politics, education, and ethical theory. And we may readily acknowledge that Hook spent a great deal of time and energy writing *about* Dewey's philosophy of education. But the following tries to argue that there is a difference between Hook's numerous essays about the latter—most of which were written defensively or hyper-critically against those whom Hook perceived to have misapprehended Dewey's views—and the claim that Hook blatantly parroted Dewey's educational philosophy wholesale. Thus a prolonged discussion of the intersection of Dewey's and Hook's views is, in the end, not germane to our discussion.

If Hook indeed adopted Dewey's vocabulary without his antecedent philosophical system, how, then, might we explain the origin and development of Hook's philosophy of education and teaching? I would suggest that an examination of the central tenets of Charles Peirce's ideas would be of tremendous assistance, for it was Peirce, far more than Dewey, who played a formative role in Hook's pedagogical devleopment, viz., how he understood the centrality of method when designing curricula and the pedagogical role of inquiry in the classroom. Along with Cohen and Dewey, Peirce would mould Hook the philosopher into a pedagogue.[6]

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this trope is Steven M. Cahn, *The Eclipse of Excellence: A Critique of American Higher Education* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1973), especially Chapter two.

[6] Much of my argument regarding Peirce's influence on Hook is based on Robert Talisse, *A Pragmatist Philosophy of Democracy*; see also his "Politics Without Dogmas: Hook's Basic Political Ideals," in *Sidney Hook Reconsidered,* ed. Matthew J. Cotter (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2004); and "The Legacy of Sidney Hook," in *Sidney Hook on Pragmatism, Democracy, and Freedom,* ed. Robert Talisse and Robert Tempio (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2002), 11-21.

But through them Hook also developed a distinctive philosophic voice, and as we proceed throughout this dissertation, it is hoped that it will grow increasingly clear that Hook gradually saw philosophy playing a greater public role than ever before, especially in educational matters. Principally a *quest* for wisdom, Hook eventually grew to see philosophy almost exclusively in terms of a critical enterprise, one that was indispensable for clarifying the meaning of "general ideas" in the hopes of "testing their truth or falsity by their specific and relevant consequence."[7] As such, he ought to be considered one of the chief proponents of a distinctive variant of American pragmatism in the twentieth century—and much to the intellectual historian David Hollinger's argument notwithstanding.[8] But insofar as he did not systematically philosophize about what pragmatism was, and in choosing instead to apply its principles by practicing them, he deviated sharply from many of his philosophical contemporaries. To this end Hook recast his educational philosophy as an *epistemic* enterprise, one that would be deeply committed to questions related to the theory of knowledge on the grounds that responsible assertions about any number of issues required the effective use of creative intelligence. While these epistemic considerations were also related to his democratic theory, we are presently concerned with how they were bound up with Hook's pedagogy.[9]

Once we have discussed the milieu in which Hook's early disposition was formed, we will move on to those complimentary elements of Morris Cohen's philosophy and pedagogy that

[7] "Sidney Hook," in *The Creative Experience*, ed. Stanley Rosen and Lawrence Abt (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1970), 300.
[8] One of Hollinger's seminal essays essentially makes the case for Hook's marginalization in the history of American philosophizing on the grounds that Hook failed to "make a lasting mark on the course of philosophical argument" in the United States. See David A. Hollinger, "The Problem of Pragmatism in American History," in *The American Province: Studies in the History and Historiography of Ideas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 39. Subsequent chapters will address the tenability of this claim.
[9] Talisse, *A Pragmatist Philosophy of Democracy*, 119-121.

made an impression on the young Hook. Hook's exposure to Peirce's central tenets will yield to their effects on Hook's educational thinking. Even though as an undergraduate he read a few of Dewey's works, when he moved on to Columbia University for graduate studies, Hook saw, eventually, Dewey's in-class demeanor up close. It was a formative, and even shocking, experience, especially since Hook had been, up until the time he met Dewey, teaching in a variety of schools in myriad capacities. That is, Hook had formed at least some idea of what made an effective teacher before he met America's foremost philosopher of education. This experience, neglected by historians, clearly shaped his pedagogy once he became a college professor. Increasingly these experiences helped him to find his own voice above (or at least amidst) the din of his pedagogical heroes and mentors. They also inspired him, for the first time, to put to paper his own educational views in 1927. Taken together, it is hoped that an appreciation for these experiences will set the stage for and function as a template by which subsequent chapters can be better understood.

I. Learning How to "Draw and Shoot Faster"

> "By aspiration I would have liked to be like Dewey, by temperament I may be more like Cohen. It is not for me to say."[10]

Perhaps we may. It was in turn of the century Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and in the kitchen of his family's cold-water railroad apartment that Sidney Hook's education began. To Hook and his generation of American intellectuals, Brooklyn in general and Williamsburg in particular were "the ghetto life… [it was] ugly and cruel, but vital and interesting," despite "so much unnecessary suffering."[11] Seemingly cursed with a pathetically diminutive build and remarkably

[10] Hook to Barbara Forrest, November 2nd, 1987, in Forrest, "Naturalism and Education," 316.
[11] *The Creative Experience,* 298. Other attempts to place Hook's intellectual development within the context of his Brooklyn upbringing are West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy,* 114-115; Phelps,

poor eyesight, by the age of eight he was bespectacled, and it was not long before "four eyes" became a substitute for his name. Consequently, he frequently suffered beatings at the hands of any number of local gangs on the way to and home from school. Eager to avoid sustained thrashings, Hook and his classmates often met during and after school to devise circuitous routes around the usual entrepôts of such violence. As a result, it is not surprising that, at an early age, ideas about power, fanaticism, and, of course, combat, were instilled in the young Hook's consciousness.[12]

The commotion-plagued kitchen in Hook's childhood apartment served many educational purposes as well. In addition to functioning as the apartment's only source of heat, it also was the cultural center of the Hook household, bustling with arguments, songs, and the ebb and flow of guests coming and going. The young Hook was often huddled in a corner assigned to him, reading and devouring for a time the English Victorians. He was equally enamored of history and historical fiction, and through them developed "fantasies of commanding battleships, winning the presidency, and becoming a general."[13] By virtue of these literary choices, in time he had acquired a rather "obsolete vocabulary" for a young boy, which alienated him from most other children.[14] Insatiable when it came to reading, he would often sneak into the kitchen after his family went to sleep to read by the remaining dim gaslight, which no doubt exacerbated his already poor eyesight. And he was also very eager to avoid venturing outdoors, spending most days in the kitchen rehearsing his prose. Whenever he read—or wrote—he was often

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Young Sidney Hook, Chapter one; Jumonville, *Critical Crossings*, 16-18. Nearly all of these assessments are, understandably, geared towards setting up Hook's eventually being enamored with Marxism and communism, and, eventually, his anticommunism.

[12] Hook, *Out of Step*, 13-14.

[13] Hook quoted in Phelps, *Young Sidney Hook*, 18.

[14] *The Creative Experience*, 298. Whenever Hook reminisces about his youth his father's presence is often marginalized or omitted.

accompanied by his brother's singing or his sister's violin practice in adjacent corners. Other times he was learning to play chess, which he later credited with developing within him a passion for "storm[ing] the opposition."[15] Hook's mother, who was to him "all heart," oversaw her children's activities, alternately baking or burning whatever was being prepared, and all along either reading novels or, from time to time, participating in her children's activities. Hook recalled that these experiences instilled in him the "motor habits" he would never outgrow, especially a keen ability to concentrate in the midst of so much noise. So intense was his ability to focus on the task at hand that when Hook was very young a guest, increasingly annoyed by his reading and consequent indifference to his surroundings, poured an entire jar of mustard on his head.[16]

When once asked what it was that made him so creative, Hook drew upon his childhood to distinguish himself from the notoriously diligent and creative intellectuals of the twentieth century, such as John Dewey, Max Eastman, and Arthur Koestler, who were equally renowned for their predictable work habits. Each of them had a habit of rising early and reading and writing all day, carefully editing or revising their work as they went along. Dewey himself had acquired quite a reputation for literally and repeatedly re-writing from scratch entire chapters of books he was working on. Hook did no such thing; from a very early age he was a man of the first—and only—draft, writing nearly everything longhand, with hardly any revisions made outside of the editorial assistance his wife would provide as either she or Hook's secretary typed their way through his rather elaborate and ornate cursive. While he no doubt credited the busy nature of the kitchen with developing his ability to concentrate, he equally charged it with the development of

[15] *Ibid.*
[16] *The Creative Experience,* 300. Hook noted his mother's warm, kindly, and loving presence in his life: "If I were a literary man, I would try and do justice to her."

his frantically haphazard, impatient, and irregular work habits.[17] This can be explained for two reasons. As we develop a picture of Hook's role in the development of New York University, we may appreciate the topsy-turvy nature of his schedule and how it might have affected his writing habits. Secondly, given the breadth of his reading and the routines he established in high school it is possible to credit him with an obsession with precision when it came to all forms of communication.

As a teenager he also developed the habit of writing three hundred words a day as a means towards staving off writer's block. His strategy was to either become a better writer in the process or, at the very least, to have sufficiently extricated himself from his writer's block. One way he did this was to eschew the use of dictionaries or thesauri, which, he once noted, were "cheating" to him. Instead he tried to discover the meaning of a word or phrase by struggling with its context alone. Whether or not this led to good ideas was another matter; *those*, he maintained, were derivative of a source he could not account for. "Good ideas", those moments or flashes of insight into the nature of a question, he observed ironically, depended on "grace, from nature, from God, or what not."[18] To compose fluently was a matter of habit and was invariably a pedagogical enterprise. Hook also took to writing out elaborate epigrams about human nature, art, literature, and life in examination booklets—many of which survive in his archive. This would be a constant habit of his, as many of his public lectures and technical philosophical works were always drafted in what are now referred to as blue books.

With regard to his adolescence, Hook's account of his experience at Brooklyn's Boys' High is replete with fewer stories about a concrete jungle and, more accurately, descriptions of mean-

[17] *Ibid*., 293.The personal files at the Hoover Institution, which houses Hook's papers, are replete with personal artifacts from Hook's childhood, from examiation books, short papers, and notebooks of poetry and prose.
[18] *The Creative Experience*, 296.

spirited and ill-informed teachers who were almost always reluctant to think creatively and who almost always branded any pupil who did so as insolent. The manner in which he described his travails—namely that he regularly lived on the verge of expulsion—leads one to speculate how it is he ever graduated. The story of Hook's political activism within and without of Boys' High has been well told by Hook himself and others, and need not be fully recapitulated here. For present purposes it is important to note that Hook's dissatisfaction with the deplorable quality of his teachers led him to the local public library nearly every day after school. There he found and subsequently came to love Jack London's novels and essays, which introduced the young Hook to socialism. At the library he also rummaged through the newspaper collections, and found his way to the pages of the *Socialist Call*, a regular that overtly lent its editorial sympathies to the various causes drawn out of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' writings. As has been the case with many a curious reader's initial exposure to the ideas of capitalism's sworn enemies, Hook was instantaneously hooked; from them he learned about the relationship between economics, philosophy, and a subject that would eventually permeate his educational vision, history: "the nature of which I was hardly prepared to grasp [at the time] but whose very obscurity and intractability-on the basis of my youthful ignorance-spurred me into wider and wider reading."[19]

At the library he also explored philosophy more in depth, and mainly through the Victorian-era philosopher George Henry Lewes' *Biographical History of Philosophy*, a tome that mapped out the labyrinths of philosophical ideas in a densely composed, Comtean positivism, vernacular.[20] The impression Lewes left on Hook could be traced to Lewes' overt hostility to

[19] Hook, *Out of Step*, 34. An extensive treatment of London's influence can be found in Richard D. Horn, "The Perils of Pragmatism: Sidney Hook's Journey Through Philosophy and Politics, 1902-1956" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1997), Chapters 1 and 2. See also Phelps, *Young Sidney Hook*, Chapter one.
[20] George Henry Lewes, *A Biographical History of Philosophy*, 3 vols. (London: Charles Knight, Co., 1851).

idealism, obscurantism, and, most importantly, religious apologetics—ideas that Hook realized had coincided with his literary interests. Equally important was Lewes's conception of the scientific method, which emphasized the importance of evidence when presenting an argument and its repudiation of coherence theories of truth. Together these notions proved fertile ground for Hook's later philosophical inclinations.[21]

Hook's extended family also functioned as a library, so to speak. Since historians appreciate watershed events more than most, once an uncle, worried about Hook's spiritual development, gave him at the age of fourteen a copy of Heinrich Graetz's *History of the Jews*.[22] Exposure to the chronicle of pogroms and *autos da fé* left Hook "reeling with horror" and left him with a powerful distaste for all organized religions. It was a book, he recalled late in life, from which he "never recovered."[23] The inefficacy of his uncle's gesture, however, was most pronounced when Hook refused to participate in his bar mitzvah. Upon hearing of his decision, Hook's mother intervened, and related the story of the scalding death of her first-born child. "If she could live with her pain and still have faith," Hook later recalled, then at the very least, he could *try* to participate in the ritual. Persuaded more by a sense of what the lesser of the situation's two evils—capitulating to a harmless request instead of shaming the Hook family in the eyes of a disappointed community—than by a true belief in God, Hook all but declared the end of his faith.[24]

Hook's irascibility, manifest in his dialectical and pugilistic talents, was nurtured and developed in the classrooms at Boys' High. There rote learning was the norm, if not the credo, and nearly every teacher was either slow-witted (to Hook and his friends) or more concerned

[21] See Hook, "Convictions," in Sidney Hook, *Convictions* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1990), 18-19.
[22] Heinrich Graetz, *A History of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1891).
[23] Hook, "Convictions," 19.
[24] *Ibid*., 21.

with having their students pass standardized examinations than appreciating the significance of any material. Inquiry was hardly, if ever, encouraged; as a result, Hook spent most of his days plotting, with the help of his friends, ways in which to infuriate or outwit his teachers. If any learning took place, it was either by default or via auto didacticism.[25]

Hook's intellectual activism grew increasingly brazen, and his impassioned disputes with his teachers in class usually resulted in their summarily bellowing for his withdrawal from their classrooms, which was often followed by his dispatchment to any number of school administrators on the off chance he might explain himself to them. He could be ornery as well. In his exchanges with his teachers—he was known, pejoratively, as "Brainy"—his mouth would often get him into trouble with his more sensitive classmates, who sometimes took to cornering Hook outside the safety of the school classroom for supplemental instruction in excessive force. When not engaged in verbal debate, Hook took to writing letters to the school newspaper over such controversial topics as America's open borders; its participation in World War I (he opposed it in a manner similar to Randolph Bourne); and his defense of socialism by supporting the candidacy of Morris Hillquit in 1917. But even though he was an admitted socialist by the tender age of fourteen, he was also an early skeptic of the socialist *movement*, which he strongly believed was dogmatic. He thought that an inflexible commitment to the ideals of the socialist platform signaled the very abandonment of what he, all of fourteen, understood to be the socialist *cause*—the creation of the necessary social, economic, and political conditions to bring about a legitimately democratic society.[26]

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[25] *Ibid.*

[26] Hook, *Out of Step*, Chapter 2. Phelps's *Young Sidney Hook* and Horn's "Perils of Pragmatism" delve far more deeply into Hook's high school baptismal into the currents of American socialism than is required for the current discussion.

These ideas functioned as a viable antidote to Hook's boorish education and as a repository from which he could draw upon when devising his own educational philosophy. They further served him as a reminder of what not to do when he himself became a high school teacher while attending graduate school. The waking hours huddled in the kitchen corner; the daily quest for survival on the streets of Brooklyn; and the voracious intellectual curiosities of the young Hook left him, he later noted, with "the lasting impression that all peoples obsessed by fanatical dogmas [were] capable of lapsing into the unspeakable barbarities of the past" if they went unchecked.[27] Many of the episodes described above served as a dress rehearsal for Hook's conduct throughout his life, especially on the frontlines of American education. By the time he graduated from high school his truculence was nearly fully formed, and he felt armed with "a sword in one hand and a dirk in another." As he approached college, he believed that what was needed was for someone to "hone them to a keen edge."[28]

II. The "Mark of Cohen"

> "I never got much stimulus from my teachers in high school. Until I met Morris Cohen, I never met a teacher I respected intellectually."[29]

Few who have incorporated Hook's life into their work have failed to acknowledge the role Morris Raphael Cohen played in his development. Yet for all of Cohen's alleged influence, in most treatments Cohen's *philosophical* vision is marginalized, if not ignored. This is a pity, but at the same time understandable because so many of Cohen's students went on to careers outside of philosophy. Those who stayed in philosophy, however, all bore what they referred to as the "mark of Cohen." That is, they all shared a belief that the very nature of believing was a

[27] Hook, "Convictions," 18.
[28] *The Creative Experience,* 301.
[29] *Ibid.*, 306.

serious enterprise and one that demanded a serious degree of logical rigor. Logic, for Cohen, was not an adjunct to other fields of philosophical study; it *was* the centerpiece of any meaningful philosophic inquiry. As such, it was not to be studied formally; it was to be a living, breathing process. Logic, he wrote, did "not provide the food which sustains our intellectual life." It was instead "like the hydrochloric acid in our stomach that helps to digest our food. It is the antiseptic of our intellectual life which prevents our food from poisoning us."[30] Of all of Cohen's former students, Hook stands alone as the legitimate heir to these sentiments, and what he learned from Cohen philosophically is as important as what he learned from Cohen about pedagogy and *character*, traits that played a considerable role in the development of Hook's philosophy of education.[31]

Contrary to the legacy he has garnered in American historiography, Hook was not always a genius, for when he arrived at City College in 1919, his academic career was anything but promising. For starters, he was not a promising student, drawing the ire of frustrated administrators for his failure or near-failures in physics, hygiene and swimming. Malodorousness and nautical challenges aside, during his sophomore year he inadvertently discovered philosophy, especially through Dostoevsky, who reaffirmed his disdain for human suffering. He also read Bertrand Russell's 1916 anti-war manifesto *Justice in Wartime*, a text that effectively

[30] Quote is from Morris R. Cohen and Ernest Nagel, *Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method*, U.S. Armed Forces Education Manual 621 (Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1934), 182. Hook maintained that Nagel essentially wrote the text, with Cohen's approval. Given the sheer volume of editorial commentary and its accompanying correspondence, Hook can be similarly credited with writing substantial portions of Cohen's posthumously published *American Thought*.

[31] The most comprehensive treatment of Cohen ideas is David A. Hollinger, *Morris R. Cohen and the Scientific Ideal* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1975). I have also drawn upon Lewis S. Feuer, "The Philosophy of Morris R. Cohen: its Social Bearings," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 4 (1950): 471-485; and Gabriel Kolko, "Morris R. Cohen: The Scholar and/or Society," *Amercan Quarterly* 9 (1957): 325-336. There is, however, much more that can be done, as Hollinger skirts substantive discussions of Cohen's philosophical views in favor of a larger intellectual biography.

shored up Hook's socialist political convictions and convinced him of the necessity for clear arguments when "eliminating opposing views."[32] Hook soon began to see connections between philosophy, his wandering literary interests, and his high school political activities. The instructor who would weave them into a richer, more tenable tapestry was Morris Cohen, the man who "transformed" philosophy for Hook into the "dominant passion of [his] life."[33] A brief examination of Cohen's own intellectual biography accounts for how and why Hook and others came under his influence but also identifies the points of departure for Hook's own philosophical and pedagogical visions.[34]

Cohen, himself a City College alumnus, had attended Harvard and studied with the radical empiricist William James and the Kantian idealist Josiah Royce. While he admired and respected them both, he found greater intellectual comfort in the works of George Santayana, whose *Life of Reason* series influenced the young Cohen more than either James or Royce combined.[35] Nevertheless, James and Royce introduced their young protégé to the writings of Charles Sanders Peirce, whose work on logic with a mathematical cast and the philosophy of science became a source of profound inspiration to Cohen.[36] When not attending Harvard, Cohen

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[32] Hook, "Experimental Naturalism," in *American Philosophy Today and Tomorrow,* ed. Sidney Hook and Horace Kallen (New York: Lee Furman, 1935), 209-210. See also *Out of Step,* 39-41. The representative account of Russell's meandering political career is Alan Ryan, *Bertrand Russell: A Political Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[33] Hook, "The Philosophy of Morris Cohen," *The New Republic,* July 23, 1930, 17.

[34] The following biographical information is also based on Cohen's posthumous autobiography, *A Dreamer's Journey* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1949). The reigning philosophical dissent (although far too brief to be considered authoritative) from Hollinger's interpretations is Marcus G. Singer, "Two American Philosophers: Morris Cohen and Arthur Murphy," in *American Philosophy: Royal Institute of Philosophy Lecture Series 19,* ed. Beth Singer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 295-329.

[35] At City College Cohen used Santayana's text for all of his Philosophy of Civilization courses.

[36] In fact, Cohen's was the first to compile a bibliography or Peirce's writings and, later, the first to edit Peirce's writings for publication, titled *Chance, Love and Logic: Philosophical Essays by the Late Charles S. Peirce* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1923). Cohen's realism was different from Russell's to the degree that the latter denied that universals exist in a manner consistent with the natural

made the journey back to New York City to attend the lectures of Frederick J. E. Woodbridge at Columbia University, which had become perhaps the most reputable haven for philosophical naturalism at the time.[37] Given his education it is not surprising, then, that Cohen's own philosophy, by virtue of his having been pulled in so many intellectual directions in a very short period of time, was kaleidoscopic.

Having completed his PhD at Harvard, Cohen returned to City College, and within a few years became the face of the philosophy department. As the lone Jewish professor in a sea of young Jewish males (women were not yet permitted to enroll), he personally shared many of the traditions and values of his students. He was revered and respected, feared and reviled for his caustic wit and dialectical abilities, even if he lacked scrupulous fairness when dealing with an opponent's ideas. By the time Hook arrived at City, Cohen was considered "the strongest intellectual force" there, and its most highly regarded professor. His students were notoriously keen and persistent in logical analysis, traits which Hook later admitted, "often outran the limits of social discretion."[38] Nevertheless, for a generation of students Cohen was a source of inspiration, rising as he did from Brooklyn's vice and squalor to become one of the first Jewish professors in America—and a professor with a *Harvard* education at that! Given what we know about the famed New York Intellectuals' upbringing, it is not surprising that he also functioned as something of a surrogate to many of Hook's generation, both in terms of a role model and, at

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world. For Peirce's universals, see James Feibelman, *An Introduction to Peirce's Philosophy: Interpreted as a System* (New York: Harper and Row, 1946), Chapter two. Cohen's introduction to Peirce's works is instructive for how indebted Cohen is to *some* of his subject's principles. Ironically his skepticism with regard to pragmatism precluded Cohen's full appreciation of Peirce's views and how they shaped Dewey and Hook's pragmatism.

[37] Dewey had not yet arrived when Cohen was taking classes.

[38] Hook, "Professor Morris Cohen as Teacher," in *A Tribute to Professor Morris Raphael Cohen: Teacher and Philosopher* (New York: "By the Youth Who Sat at His Feet," 1928), 90.

other times, a father figure. Either way, the attention Cohen afforded some of his students succored many of their deepest emotional concerns.[39]

As far as his students were concerned, Cohen inspired them with his razor-sharp mind, which was often accompanied by his equally razor-sharp tongue. What impressed students the most was his ability to impersonally and objectively take two sides of any argument. A consummate logician, he notoriously felled even the mightiest of his philosophical opponents—who were most often the very students he was training—with "devastating results."[40] As a young, precocious, and impressionable student, Hook saw that Cohen's genius lay in his talent for the swift dissection and evisceration of any fallacious or unsound argument. All of these traits left an indelible impression on the young Hook: "[Cohen] was a great dialectician and had one of the most incisive and critical minds of the age [because] he could always find chinks in the armor of other philosophers' systems and analyses."[41]

Although he rarely declared his allegiance to any philosophical system, Cohen often referred to himself as a logical realist. Logical realism has a long and complicated history, but most scholars agree that its roots are derived from Platonism and that it argued that "universals" (or common properties of all things) existed independently of any of our direct experience of them. Instead of employing Plato's Theory of Forms, however, logical realists instead invoked the term "relations" to advance a framework for all existing and possible knowledge. And instead of utilizing Platonic allegory to convey these universals, logical realists relied upon

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[39] Alexander Bloom's *The New York Intellectuals and Their World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) makes the strongest case for the recurring theme of Jewish identity and affinity in New York's intellectual circles, with Cohen as a centerpiece of that story. Irving Howe's *World of Our Fathers*: *The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976) makes a similar case for Cohen but within the large Jewish culture of the city.
[40] Hook, "Professor Morris Cohen as Teacher," 92.
[41] *The Creative Experience*, 300-301.

mathematics as the means by which they constructed a comprehensive theory of logical relations. No philosopher was more responsible for this theory than Bertrand Russell. Cohen had fallen under Russell's influence in roughly 1903, when Russell first proposed his Platonic theory of meaning and the idea that logic and mathematics was essentially the same thing.[42] Even though Russell's ideas evolved over time, he was always wedded to the idea that every sentential utterance corresponded to some external "sense" or "meaning" of the individual terms human beings employed when talking about the way that the world is. These meanings reflect the particular things they talked about, and those things in turn reflected properties or relations of some eternal form. Russell further maintained that what unites the otherwise separate things individuals talked about—fire engines, apples, blood, and other red "referents"—was the ubiquitous quality, "redness" that they all shared.[43] Connected to the notion of referents was the notion of number, which was existentially prior to our experience of any numbered thing or things. Mathematical logic, then, was what human beings used to clarify the manner in which they spoke and were brought ever closer to an understanding of what was true or false.[44] The closest thing to a "philosophical god" for Cohen, Russell provided a "fruitful starting point for [doing] philosophy" proper. The two eventually became fast friends and admirers of each other's work, with Russell contributing the foreword to Cohen's anthology of Peirce's papers.

Cohen's version of Russell's ideas fell under the banner of what he termed "rationalistic naturalism," which can best be understood as a shorthand for a form of philosophical naturalism that was informed, quite paradoxically, by a strong metaphysical sensibility. Instead of arguing

[42] Hollinger, *Morris R. Cohen*, 107-108. Russell and Alfred North Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910) had not yet been published.
[43] For a brief account of Russell's philosophical development, see Ryan, *Bertrand Russell;* this summary has also benefited from Bruce Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America,* Chapter 8.
[44] L. J. Russell, "The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell," *Philosophy* 20 (1945): 172-182. See also Cohen, *A Dreamer's Journey,* 169-170.

that logic reflected physical or psychological events, for Cohen it "constituted a part of the real world as well as the world of thought" that allowed those who use it to see "that unity and plurality, similarity and difference, dependence and independence, form and matter, change and permanence, *are equally real*."[45] This is what he referred to throughout his philosophical work as the "principle of polarity." These concepts were united by virtue of their opposition to one another, and the task of logic was to restore some semblance of order, a way to come nearer to an understanding of the nature of things. Scientific method, Cohen argued, was a vernacular—a critical vocabulary—to this end.[46]

Briefly stated, the principle of polarity was for Cohen "a maxim of intellectual search" that he believed helped human beings clarify their respective positions, eliminate vagaries within ordinary modes of expression, and inculcate an appreciation for the interrelatedness of what would otherwise be deemed incompatible views. When discussing such existential categories as monism and pluralism (which asked: is the world "one" or is it "many"?), or change and constancy, it is the principle of polarity, Cohen argued, that guides our inquiries.[47] Upon sustained analysis apparently contradictory and incompatible positions—"polarized" viewpoints—could be reconciled, if not harmonized.[48] For Cohen, the vehicle for the resolution

[45] Morris R. Cohen, *Reason and Nature: The Meaning of Scientific Method* (New York: Free Press, 1931), 165-168.
[46] Cohen, *A Dreamer's Journey*, 170-171. For Cohen's disdain for psychology, see Hollinger, *Morris R. Cohen*, 87-90.
[47] *Ibid.*, p. 156-157. See also Daniel Bronstein, "The Principle of Polarity on Cohen's Philosophy," in *Freedom and Reason: Studies in Philosophy and Jewish Culture*, ed. Salo W. Baron, Ernest Nagel, and Koppel S. Pinson (New York: The Free Press, 1951), 44-58; and Feuer, "The Philosophy of Morris R. Cohen," 472.
[48] A famous thought experiment he implemented described two strangers who happened upon a suburban home. One of them declared that the house is thirty years old *and* the other said it was thirty-one years old. Now in this situation we would presume that one or the other, or both, of them suffer from any number of available logical fallacies, because on the surface these two statements are logically contradictory. Cohen suggests that were these strangers to draw upon the distinctions between the two—

of these terminological difficulties was logic, whose principles, he argued, were rarely, if ever, invariant. [49]

Coupled with the principle of polarity was Cohen's view of the nature of science and the scientific method, which for him were akin. "Scientific method," he argued, was "the persistent application of logic as the common feature of all reasoned knowledge. From this point of view scientific method is simply the way in which we test impressions, opinions, or surmises by examining the best available evidence for and against them. It is simply the pursuit of truth as determined by logical considerations."[50] And he believed that science was also the means by which all of the glorious truths of metaphysics could be revealed. It followed for Cohen that all logical principles were essentially reflections of the essences of things—searchlights for discovering the absolute and eternal truths about nature that existed prior to conducting any particular inquiry.[51] Once applied, logic aided in the discovery of the truth about the world *as such*, and not the nebulous world of ordinary experience. Metaphysics, then, became the basis for the defense of reason against all countervailing opinions. Universals were real for Cohen, and logic and mathematics reflected an ontological order. All sciences, in the end, deferred to this metaphysical system.[52]

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namely that one statement might be identifying when the builder commenced construction and the other when the house was ready for occupancy—the two statements are, in fact, true. The point is that once we wrest logical statements from their formal clutches and apply them to concrete instances, we are able to live, so to speak, with their logical differences, provided, he argued those differences in the end accorded with some prior metaphysical relationship. *Reason and Nature,* 156-157. See also Hollinger, *Morris Cohen and the Scientific Ideal,* Chapters 5 and 6; Arthur Francis Smullyan, "The Philosophical Method of Morris R. Cohen," in Baron, et al, *Freedom and Reason*, 65.

[49] Cohen and Nagel, *Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method*, 186.

[50] *Ibid*., 192.

[51] Cohen, *Dreamer's Journey*, 174-188; Hollinger, *Morris Cohen,* Chapter 5. Cohen would eventually extend his logical theory into the nature of historical knowledge.

[52] Bronstein, "The Principle of Polarity," 55; see also Milton Konvitz, "The Life and Mind of Morris R. Cohen," in Baron, et al, *Freedom and Reason,* 11-31.

Hook wrote that despite his disagreement with the more abstruse aspects of Cohen's thought, he credited him with an abiding interest in "logical method and [a] faith in its efficacy, as well as some of the foundation stones of my philosophic outlook and the store of materials without which philosophic construction is so much 'airy masonry.'" This enormously complex principle of polarity instilled in Hook a penchant for weighing conceptual or logical alternatives, but without the Hegelian baggage Cohen's views seemed to presume. But it was not Cohen alone who would shape Hook's own ideas, for more than any book he had read as an undergraduate, Cohen helped the young Hook "to find [himself]" philosophically.[53]And he found himself in Charles Peirce, whose writings Cohen presented to his young pupil. In Peirce Hook found an enthusiasm for the natural sciences and the rules of logic, as well as an avowed contempt for theology, metaphysics, and established religious practices. Central to Peirce's philosophy was the claim that, among the stock of available methods, the experimental method of the natural sciences proved the most fruitful of solutions to the complex and manifold problems of human experience. Hook was also struck by Peirce's views on human nature, namely that human beings by nature strove to "find out" about themselves and the world. Now this would appear to be a philosophical commonplace; from Plato onward there are numerous references to the natural inquisitiveness of mankind. What distinguished Peirce was his caveat that, even though Aristotle's dictum was true, the path that led to satisfactory knowledge of the world was tragically fraught with all kinds of difficulties. To this end he was one of the first to comprehensively identify the source of any particular difficulties associated with acquiring knowledge: intuitionism, dogmatism, and obscurantism, as well as the historical baggage of ontological claims about reality.

[53] *A Tribute to Morris Raphael Cohen,* 95.

Philosophically speaking, Peirce repudiated Cartesian epistemology, which presupposed that *any* scientific understanding of the world was comprised of certain propositions, and any understanding of the world must begin with doubting everything that one has hitherto yielded as reliable knowledge. Peirce dismissed this, for he maintained that individuals ought "not pretend to doubt in philosophy what we do not doubt in our hearts,"[54] because they cannot choose to doubt beliefs whenever they felt like it. Instead Peirce believed that doubt occurred externally, and was no easier to accomplish than it was to surprise oneself. Furthermore, doubt occurred when individuals did not know what to do, and they must thus search for *reasons* to doubt previously reliable beliefs. The resolution of such an uncomfortable feeling was what Peirce referred to as "belief," which was a "positive reason" for doubting anything in the first place.[55] Peirce named this process *inquiry*, a concept that immediately endeared him to Hook.[56] Inquiry became for Hook "the only method of eliminating pseudo-problems from philosophy. In terms of this method, questions of theology and epistemology with which philosophy has been saddled to the exclusion of so much else may turn out to be no problems at all."[57]

Hook also sympathized with Peirce's idea of "falliblism," which stipulated that mistakes were a necessary and inescapable part of the search for knowledge or truth. He was quick to remind his readers that even though scientific theories were advanced or regarded as "absolutely

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[54] Peirce, "Some Consequences of Four Inadequacies," in *The Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler, (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), 229; Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief," in *Ibid*., 15-16. Peirce is notorious for having never crafted a system under which all of his intellectual curiosities could be assembled. The representative interpretation of why this is the case is Joseph Brent, *Charles Sander Peirce: A Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993). I have also benefited from Murray G. Murphey's chapter on Peirce in Murphey and Elizabeth Flower, eds. *A History of Philosophy in America* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1977), 567-634. Given Peirce's biography—replete with addiction, loss, disappointment, depression—anyone who consults Brent's book will surely develop a sense for why Hook later in his career began to introduce the notion of tragedy as a central tenet in the pragmatist vision.
[55] Peirce, "Some Consequences," in Buchler, 229; "The Fixation of Belief," in *Ibid*., 10.
[56] Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief," in *Ibid*., 10.
[57] Hook, "Experimental Logic," *Mind,* 40 (1931), 438.

true" at the time of their issue, they were actually undergoing constant revision or modification to considerable degrees. Even falliblism itself had, after several fits and starts, evolved over the course of three decades. Peirce concluded that there was no end for inquiry, that there is no scientific theory that can ever produce certainty, and that all scientific knowledge was, in the end, imperfect. To assert the opposite was to "block the road to inquiry," which was an "unpardonable offense to reasoning."[58] Peirce thus extolled the scientific *method* as a social, cooperative enterprise, where knowledge could be established through processes of communal examination and consensus.[59] The result, Peirce hoped, would be a propensity to openly take measure of the veracity of ideas. Instead of absolute certainty, proper inquiry would result in more provisional knowledge.

From Cohen's and Peirce's ideas, Hook concluded that to accept anything as necessary or certain (or on faith) was to squelch inquiry. To hold something as certain and then attempt to justify it as such was absurd, for it was the least representative of any scientific of philosophical enterprise. Science, for these three, was thus a system by which individuals made sense of their experience, and not an absolute demonstration of the fixed problems handed down to human societies from time immemorial.

At this juncture, two things about Hook's experience with Cohen are worth noting. One is that Cohen wrote nothing about the educational implications for his logical theory; instead he dedicated most of his time examining its application to contemporary legal theory. Cohen himself forged meaningful and lifelong relationships with Justice Felix Frankfurter and the Yale

[58] Peirce, "The Scientific Attitude and Falliblism," in Buchler, 54.
[59] These notions have recently become attractive to a generation of philosophers yearning to establish the "epistemic roots" of deliberative democracy.The representative interpretation of this view is Cheryl Misak, "Making Disagreement Matter: Pragmatism and Deliberative Democracy," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 18 (2004): 9-22; see also Robert B. Talisse, "From Pragmatism to Perfectionism: Cheryl Misak's Epistemic Deliberativism," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 33 (2007): 387-406.

legal theorist Roscoe Pound. Additionally, it is important to note that, for all his influence on Hook, Peirce never explored falliblism's normative implications. This is understandable, especially since Peirce was largely interested in confining his pragmatism exclusively to the clarification of ideas, terms, or propositions, of their meaning in ordinary discourse. It would be up to Hook to finish the project of setting his own educational philosophy on a new track.[60] His classroom exposure to Cohen and, later Dewey, would hasten the process.

III. "Cleaving Through the Knotty Tissue"

> [Arguing with Cohen in class] was "a bleeding quite salutary for the soul."[61]

Equally important and instructive to the development of Hook's philosophical vision were the pedagogical conditions under which it took place. Stories about Cohen the teacher abound in the memoirs and reminiscences of his former pupils. In fact, the subject of Cohen's character often dominates them, with the word "pain" most frequently invoked as an apt descriptor of their experience. To watch "the bright blue rapier of his dialectic leaping, parrying, and thrusting in the animated give and take of class discussion," Hook observed at a dinner honoring Cohen's quarter century of teaching at City College, "[and] to cleave through a knotty tissue of irrelevances and see eye to eye with him into the heart of a problem, was an experience both inspiring and chastening."[62] Cohen would usually hold court behind his lectern, and with his spectacles halfway down the bridge of his nose, present his lectures while pacing back and forth,

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[60] Hook was most likely not terribly influenced by James early in his intellectual development. James's belief was that pragmatism, as he understood it from Peirce, was a "method of settling metaphysical disputes that might otherwise be interminable." Peirce, as we have indicated, thought pragmatism was a logical rule one ought to adopt when doing philosophy. The quote is from *The Writings of William James*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 377.
[61] Hook, "Professor Morris Cohen as Teacher," 91-92.
[62] *Ibid.,* 91.

erecting and demolishing arguments along the way with "ruthless logic."[63] His students—one might refer to them as audiences—were either rapt by these talents or paralyzed for fear of retribution. Many students who failed to sustain the course of argument often found themselves impaled on "the horns of a dilemma."[64] Irritated by what they perceived as an almost sadistic taskmaster, and most surely worn down as consequence of bearing the brunt of his sledgehammer tactics, many of those students outside of Hook's circle found him an educational hindrance.

Hook's classmates at the time reiterated these sentiments. The journalist and biographer Bertram Wolfe noted that he and his classmates "lived in dread of becoming the butt of his sallies" because Cohen was such "an intellectual bully." Others sadly noted Cohen's sadistic delight in delivering deep cuts to his students' psyches, which, they feared, discouraged them from pursuing a career in philosophy.[65] Teaching at the expense of a student's development, they all seemed to agree, was a miscarriage of pedagogy.

Hook rarely passed up the opportunity to reminisce about Cohen's role in his own intellectual development, and he later evaluated Cohen's pedagogy and judged it, in effect, *mis*educative. It created too many skeptics and enemies, and "when it came to solving problems on his own, [Cohen] couldn't do very much,"

> he would always make you aware of what was wrong with your solution, but he never offered you a solution of his own or helped you to reach a better one of your own. … The result was the best of the students trained by [him] were merciless in their criticism, more interested in argument than vision. … I'd go from Cohen's classes to those of other members of the [philosophy] department, and when differences arose, I would stalk to the blackboard to prove them wrong; and I'd do it too. I was written off, since Cohen never

[63] Ernest Nagel, "The Thirtieth Annual Meeting of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association," *Journal of Philosophy* 28 (1931): 88-89.
[64] *Ibid.*
[65] Hollinger, *Morris R. Cohen*, 73-75. Wolfe is quoted on 73.

> bothered with such mundane matters, as someone who had a radical chip on his shoulder.[66]

Hook also noted that when Cohen "was throwing his weight around awing his students by devastating repartee, he reminded me of that cartoon … in which a swordsman decapitates his fencing partner, and smilingly remarks, *Touché*."[67] Disapproving of the sadistic and merciless manner in which Cohen was the "the personification of the naysayer," Hook lamented that the coarseness with which he conducted his classes led to growing numbers of students clamming up.[68] He concluded that Cohen seemed more concerned with winning arguments than in presenting philosophy as a means toward honing a pupil's critical thinking skills. Pedagogically speaking, in due time and because he felt ashamed for his having enjoyed Cohen's approach, Hook "overcame" Cohen's propensity for saying

> 'no' to new positions without trying them out, [his] failure to suspend judgment. It took time for me to reason from Cohen's easy refutations of error, for failing to appreciate that a good cause may sometimes be poorly defended, that the issue is more vital than the arguments available or the persona of the arguers. If I had followed Cohen it would have destroyed my enthusiasm, I would never have taken risks, I would have played it safe as a critic of 'nonsense.'
>
> And yet there was a great wisdom in Cohen's large perspective, his wariness of enthusiasms, his insight that belief in great absurdities may lead to the acceptance of terrible moral atrocities.[69]

However Cohen's affect was not altogether negative, for Hook learned that there was a place for being "less kindly, less forgiving" in certain situations, especially those within which someone had suffered unjustly or, worse, behaved obstinately. Then, all bets were off. "Cruelty," Hook once lamented, more often than not made Dewey "sad." But there were times, he argued, when decorum begged more questions than not, and the traditional bounds of civility failed to pass

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[66] *The Creative Experience*, 301. Hook maintained that after he had finished his doctorate he couldn't get a job at CCNY because of his earlier behavior towards professors other than Cohen.
[67] *Ibid*.
[68] Hook, *Out of Step*, 56.
[69] Hook to Barbara Forrest, August 7, 1987. Reprinted in Forrest, "Naturalism in Education," 297.

muster. Such utter disregard for what he felt were the rules requisite an intellectual; sadness was not in his purview, for unjust, unwarranted cruelty made Hook "vicious." As we saw at the outset of this chapter, Hook's own classes were as rigorous as Cohen's, but tended to be more impersonal and objective. And however he felt about Cohen's character, the latter's penchant for "giving students a proper appreciation of the depths of their ignorance,"[70] which often left some well-deserved scars, made quite an impression on the then impressionable Hook.In a way Hook's own temperament can be cast as the mean between two extremes: Cohen's impatience and irascibility and, as we shall see, Dewey's patience and conviviality. Cohen's students recall with equal parts pain and reverence that his classes led them to read more and read widely, think and speak with precision, and above all, to criticize incessantly.[71]

Assessments of John Dewey's pedagogy range from the overtly laudatory to the underhandedly critical. Much of this is understandable, given that Dewey's principal responsibilities revolved around teaching and advising graduate students, and especially at a time when the latter were rarely, if ever, encouraged to socialize with their teachers or advisors. Some of his former students readily admit that they took his class to brag to others about having listened to *the* John Dewey; others were in awe. James Gutman, who later became a colleague of Dewey's at Columbia, observed that "there was no other teacher I ever had who gave such a sense that for fifty minutes you were watching a man think." Max Eastman concurred, and praised Dewey later in his life for not lecturing but for talking with his class more conversationally when not staring out the window

[70] Hook to Barbara Forrest, November 2, 1987, in *ibid.*, 315.
[71] Hook, "Professor Morris Cohen as Teacher," 93; Hollinger, *Morris R. Cohen*, 74.

"thinking." Apparently whenever he received students in his office, which was something of a rarity, he was, for all intents and purposes, gracious and polite.[72]

But Hook's classroom exposure to Dewey also helped him understand what, in the end, not to do. Despite the fact that several of his former students felt awed by what they witnessed as "man thinking", pedagogically Dewey was capable of arousing as much ire in his students as he did wonderment. His Vermont upbringing taught him, among other things, to always be polite and to greet everyone with respect and, if possible, a grin, and he repeatedly did so once his seminars commenced. Once seated, however, he was more prone to shuffling loose papers or folding creases in their corners, staring off into the relative distance afforded by the windows of Philosophy Hall, ruffling his hair or tugging on his moustache for extended periods of time. When he spoke, it was characteristically monotonic, with each word carefully chosen and usually with long pauses between them. The process was soporific. What compounded these issues was that Dewey often avoided addressing his classes directly. The result was, in the estimation of some of his less-than-famous students, that America's educational philosopher was an enigma, if not an outright hypocrite; his classes were not nearly as engaging or democratic as his educational writings suggested. In fact, many of Dewey's female students found it difficult to concentrate on whatever he was saying, as their attention grew increasingly focused on their paramount desire to either straighten his necktie or mat his hair down than on any number of philosophical questions under discussion. As one student observed, "questions from the floor were not exactly discouraged, but they were not invited."[73] As such, one student, Harold

[72] All quotes are from Jay Martin, *The Education of John Dewey* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 259-261.
[73] Reginald Archambault, ed. *John Dewey: Lectures in the Philosophy of Education: 1899* (New York: Random House, 1966), xxxiv-xxxv. Hook also wrote at length about Dewey's pedagogy in "Some

Larrabee, claimed that for all of his philosophical prestige, Dewey possessed "none" of the "pedagogic essentials" he so frequently espoused.[74] This was hardly the environment Hook had grown accustomed to at City College, and he salvaged the relative strengths of his two teachers and incorporated them into his own pedagogy, striving to be as engaging as possible without allowing his passion for philosophical truth devolve into partisan or ideological indoctrination.[75]

IV. "A Red-Letter Day": Mr. Hook Becomes a Teacher

"I followed progressive methods, not out of principle but because they worked."[76]

Given that April 9th, 1923 was one of the most memorable days in his life, it is a tragedy that no record of the career that day engendered exists. For it was that day that launched Hook's teaching career in the New York City public schools. While studying philosophy, in his junior and senior years he took a battery of education courses at City College. Apparently he found them not nearly as daunting as Cohen's intellectual maelstroms, and he sat for and successfully passed the requisite departmental examinations, earning his teaching certification. That summer he entered Public School 43, a middle school located a few miles away from Hook's Williamsburg apartment. While not a permanent teaching position, he was assigned to teach what were then referred to as "opportunity classes," which were either available for the more gifted student population or, in Hook's case, a measure to segregate unruly students who were tracking towards expulsion. As such, by keeping these students cooped up for most of the year, the schools staved off truancy and delinquency, a tactic that no doubt aroused suspicion in our

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Memories of John Dewey," *Commentary* 14 (September 1952): 245-253; reprinted in Hook, *Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life* (New York, Basic Books, 1974), Chapter 6.
[74] Larrabee quoted in Archambault, *John Dewey*, xxxiv.
[75] Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, 285.
[76] Hook, *Out of Step*, 71.

newly-minted teacher. Hook noticed that most of the raucous students in his class were well past twelve years of age (with many of them having recently immigrated to the United States), and he sensed that his class was merely a weigh station for them to get old enough to obtain their working papers. His suspicions were confirmed when his principal instructed Hook that, no matter what he did, his primary directive was to keep the peace and minimize bloodshed. If the students learned something, well, that was fine. But while he claimed never to have directly witnessed it, Hook was effectively assured that corporal punishment was, as a last resort, available to him should he be so inclined.[77]

It is difficult to appreciate the fondness with which Hook reminisced about his experience at PS 43. He recalled that his love of history translated well with his students, for he was able to render large bodies of facts into awe-inspiring, captivating tales of economic boom and bust, of battles won and lost, and the tantalizing biographies of great leaders throughout human history. As a middle school teacher, he was also responsible for teaching mathematics, and Hook discovered that his students exhibited a profound love for America's pastime, baseball. Capitalizing on their interest, he taught his students mathematics via showing them how to calculate percentages using their favorite player's batting average and their favorite team's standings relative the latter's opponents. And, true to form, he frequently divided the class into teams to debate contemporary issues, to compete in spelling bees, or to learn world geography. In light of his enthusiasm, it is clear that a sense of forlornness does not seem to apply to Hook when it comes to teaching.

He continued for the next few years to teach at high school annexes and summer programs, as well as in elementary school opportunity classes throughout the city. But the courses he came

[77] Hook, *Out of Step*, 69-70.

to most cherish were his evening school classes, where he taught packed classes of recent immigrants, many of whom had come to his class from a full work day and were, to his delight, eager to learn. Even though he was mostly responsible for teaching English, it was not long before he morphed the classes into lessons in "psychology, ethics, history, and economics," in the hopes that their assimilation would take place that much faster. Finally, the schedule he later described would make the modern graduate student either cringe or rethink their vocational pursuit: for roughly four years he taught from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.; then he would amble up to his late afternoon seminars at Columbia; then he would head downtown to teach again from 7 p.m. until 10., and all to pay for his graduate training at Columbia University. Thanks to a fellowship, it was only in his last year of graduate study that he was able to lighten his teaching load. Never the less, it was after he completed his PhD that he would encounter one of the most gratifying of his high school experiences: teaching at the East Side Evening School. It would launch Hook's public career as a philosopher of education.

V. Exploring the Vital Concerns of Living: "Teaching as a Calling"

> "My students sometimes say that I'm too sarcastic or too sharp, even when I take pains not to be."[78]

Shortly after graduating from Columbia Hook was hired as an instructor in philosophy at the Washington Square College (WSC) campus of New York University (NYU) and began teaching there in the fall of 1927. Given the meager salaries for freshly minted PhDs, he supplemented his income by teaching at East Side High School, which was located a few blocks from WSC's main campus and, intermittently, in the summer sessions at Columbia University whenever possible. Much of his time at WSC was spent teaching introductory courses in

[78] *The Creative Experience*, 302.

philosophy, as well as survey courses in ethics. That same fall East Side High's administration asked Hook to formally address those members of the student body interested in joining the teaching profession. His presentation, later reprinted in an obscure newsletter under the title "Teaching as a Calling," can be credited with catalyzing Hook's philosophy of education, and his interest in pedagogy.

Purporting to be a shot across the decisional bow, Hook suggested to his audience that "[t]eaching," as far as they knew it, was "as old as speech." He then briefly guided his audience through education's near-mythic history, from the "primitive man" who hoped to share his experiences around campfires to Plato's educational ideas, expressed most succinctly throughout the *Republic,* viz., that teaching was the noblest path to true "wisdom." Not surprisingly, he ended his survey by summarizing John Dewey's modern educational theory, which, he argued, had effectively replaced the campfire and Plato's philosopher-king with a philosophy of teaching as a means towards building a community of intelligent citizens. What each example demonstrated and shared, Hook suggested, was the belief that the survival of any particular culture was invariably connected to the transmission and maintenance of certain values among and between its members. And teaching, Hook affirmed, was the process by which these values were transmitted and enriched.[79]

After he warned his audience of teaching's remunerative pitfalls, his remarks took a somewhat autobiographical turn, and he turned his attention to distinguishing between teaching as a profession and teaching as a "calling." "If you have not a keen interest in the play of ideas for its own sake … [and if you] lack sympathetic patience … [or] could not keep [your] heart open and fresh to the tender, wide-eyed naiveté of the child," he cautioned his audience, they

[79] Hook, "Teaching as a Calling," *The Progress,* November, 1927, 16-17. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 39.

ought to find his or her life's work elsewhere.[80] Otherwise they would look upon their decision to teach as an encumbrance, and not, as he suggested a felt need, an "urge"—a calling—to make a difference in a student's life. The issue was paramount, he argued, because in education the very survival of a democratic community was at stake. Unlike years past, the schools in New York City and elsewhere were no longer divorced from the communities in which they were situated; they were in *and* of them. As such they had a special role to play, primarily "organizing the life intrinsic to itself into a miniature community expressing real problems, and solving them too." The school thus became "part of social life by linking its own activities with the industrial processes and cultural currents which engulf it on all sides." Students must be able to thus make intelligent decisions based on these (ever-changing) currents, and to this end the teacher must develop within his or her students "creative thinking," by which he meant "critical thinking, logical thinking."[81] As we proceed with our discussion, the significance of logic as a means towards the development of intelligent students will soon be apparent. For now, Hook was clearly stating that with these values in mind, before students decided on becoming teachers they ought to be aware of the nature of the school's specific aims and responsibilities, as well as the morality of their chosen profession.

Challenging his audience's professional mettle further, Hook then raised an issue that would become a constant feature of his subsequent social, political, and, most importantly, educational writings. Foreshadowing his infamous Cold War position on Communist teachers in the classroom, Hook drew upon Peirce's "argument from authority," and insisted that "no dogmatist—the person who believes that all questions have been irrevocably settled and that he

[80] *Ibid.*
[81] *Ibid.*

has the answer to them—has a *right* to be in the class room." More often than not, and no matter what the subject matter, Hook pointed out that intellectual or pedagogical prejudices invariably led to the imposition of the teacher's scale of values over and above their charge, which was to create an environment within which critical inquiry was to take place in the larger search for truth. In the context of a group of relatively immature and ignorant pupils, the fossilization of inquiry proved fatal on two grounds: it stultified the student's natural creative impulses and, by implication, threatened the survival of a democratic community.[82] Tolerance of new ideas was the paramount ethical role of the teacher, he averred; all other pedagogies lapsed into drab mediocrity.

The asceticism associated with teaching aside, Hook concluded his remarks with an appeal to his audience's consciences. Teaching, he admitted, was not for everybody; but should they decide *against* becoming teachers in favor of more lucrative endeavors, Hook urged them to find at least *something* that would sustain their intellectual curiosities. All of the relative material comforts associated with making a living—leisure, travel, and, of course, compensation—would come, he suggested, and be of greater value, as long as they found joy in their chosen professions. But *should* they decide to enter the teaching profession, he continued, the moral rewards outweighed the lack of a decent paycheck. The truly compensatory value of teaching, he stressed, was derived from

> The glow one feels when he catches the quick gleam of understanding in the eyes of his students. [Teaching pays] in the friendships one makes; … in what one learns from his students and the eager and shy affection they show; … and in those rare moments of exultation when one reflects that he is changing the world by changing the hearts and minds of those who live in the world, giving it its banner bearer—its statesmen, its scientists, and its poets.[83]

[82] *Ibid*., 17.
[83] *Ibid*., 33.

Given these remarks it is not surprising that Hook would be regularly voted NYU's "most stimulating professor" in the course of his forty-year career there.[84] Once we delve more deeply into the elements of Hook's educational philosophy, it will be equally unsurprising that pedagogy occupied a central role.

As replete as his brief presentation was with homiletic educational platitudes, and however geared they were towards primary and secondary instruction, the values Hook ascribed to education in general—critical thinking, tolerance, open and free discussion, the centrality and utility of logic, and a commitment to a democratic disposition—would play a pivotal role in the development of his own educational philosophy and his educational proposals for NYU as long as he was there. Moreover, that Hook was invited to discuss educational theory, practice, and pedagogy before the students of East Side High, when any number of local experts could have, suggests that, at the very least, his ideas regarding education were garnering attention in and around the community. It would take a few years, however, for him to move beyond speeches before potential teachers to an engagement with the challenges of his own educational situation at NYU. In the interim he endeavored to increase his visibility within in the American intellectual community.

Just as the path to public philosophizing began with the creative and inquisitive childhood of young Sidney Hook in Williamsburg and was nurtured, with considerable resistance and multiple inward lacerations, during his City College and Columbia days, Hook's path to becoming one of America's most renowned public philosophers of education began in 1927, in a high school. And little did he know that "Teaching as a Calling" would provide Hook (and his readers) with the generic features of his philosophy of education, upon which he

[84] Hook's papers have scores of congratulatory letters and commendations to this effect.

elaborated as the culture of higher learning in America changed over time. Within three years of his presentation before East Side High School, Hook was running NYU's philosophy department at the Washington Square campus. Almost immediately he seized upon the opportunity to drastically and comprehensively reconstruct its curriculum in terms of "Teaching as a Calling." The task was not without its difficulties, however, and the attempt to reconfigure American higher education within the parameters of a pragmatic, pedagogic temper—one that seemed inveterately hostile to authoritarian classrooms—thrust Hook on to American education's front lines. In joining the chorus of educational theorists in New York City and beyond, he was fast becoming a leading authority on educational philosophy and reform on the college and university level.

Chapter Two:

The "Ordinary Laborer in An Academic Vineyard"

> "The philosopher, it seems to me, is to be recognized by the reflective character of his action, whatever that action may be, and not by his fondness for revery."[1]

Hook's intellectual sea change occurred in tandem with New York University (NYU). Mired in the "disorganized economic conditions" and the "widespread personal distress and social confusion" brought about by the Great Depression, NYU took the fateful step of confronting the crisis directly. The Depression had caught many of NYU's faculty and administrators largely unprepared, overwhelmed, and in the midst of a profound crisis. Naturally the emergency was primarily financial, as assets dried up to such a degree that many feared for the survival of both the University and the city as a whole. Professor's salaries plummeted, and sometimes with such velocity that they feared that they too would have to join any number of the city's seemingly ubiquitous bread lines. Not surprisingly, classes were cancelled regularly, which severely limited NYU's revenue streams and, consequently, student opportunities to attend. For an institution that had always teetered on the precipice of bankruptcy, the future did not look so bright.[2]

To mark its 1932 centennial, and perhaps to draw attention to (or better yet, away from) its plight, NYU's administration organized a conference, to be held at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, with the theme "The Obligation of Universities to the Social Order." Presidents of some of America's most prestigious colleges and universities, respected dignitaries, journalists, academics, philanthropists, and financiers were in attendance. NYU Chancellor Elmer Ellsworth

[1] Sidney Hook, "Reason and Nature: the Metaphysics of Scientific Method," *Journal of Philosophy* 39 (1932): 9.
[2] Frusciano and Pettit, *New York University & the City*, 170-179.

Brown, who had longed to transform it into the Columbia University of lower Manhattan or the central Bronx, deliberately invited such a mixed group in the hopes of creating an open dialogue about the role NYU was to play in light of the vast cultural changes taking place in and around New York City. Moreover, he saw in the centennial an opportunity to mark the end of "ivory tower aloofness."[3] Or so that was the plan.

In addition to essentially ignoring cities in general and New York City in particular in their remarks, the conference participants gradually split into rival camps. On one side were the "technocrats," who were remnants of a Progressive Era attitude that saw in science and scientific method the keys to morally revivifying American university culture by rendering it more serviceable not only to its student body but also to the general public. These efforts ought to be supplemented, if not altogether overseen, by a more activist state. Although he was physically absent from the proceedings, John Dewey's views, which more than any other American intellectual at the time embodied these trends, hovered over them. On the other side were the technocrats' more conservative opponents, who decried any attempt to wrest the university from its exalted heights and insisted instead that universities ought to remain aloof and teach only the "eternal verities" and time-tested social, political and religious truths independent of their specific milieu.[4] These sentiments orbited around a critique of the dangers of scientific method and, by implication, Dewey's educational theory. Given such irremediable rifts it is not surprising that Chancellor Brown's hopes for an open dialogue quickly faded. The event ended after three days with a whimper and little accomplished.

[3] Hollinger, "Two NYUs," 249. The episode is also briefly mentioned in Theodore Francis Jones, *New York University: 1832-1932* (New York: New York University Press, 1933), 207-209.
[4] Hollinger, "Two NYU's," 253.

For present purposes, the conference is significant for two reasons. One is that it occurred while Hook underwent the transition from recently hired faculty member to chairperson of the philosophy department.[5] Secondly, the conference helps us appreciate NYU's institutional transformations. Considered an artistic and intellectual center of the city, in the early 1930s NYU emerged as one of the first institutions to initiate widespread educational reforms, with several intellectuals counted among its faculty and administration setting out to discover meaningful and practical ways to redress not only the college's economic difficulties, but also the curricular obstacles that stood in the way of such change. For all intents and purposes, NYU was essentially a bifurcated institution by the 1930s, situated as it was between its more prestigious, research-driven, and abundantly funded Stanford White-designed University Heights campus in the Bronx—which, by the way, overlooked the Harlem River and the sprawling landscape of both northern New Jersey and Upstate New York—and its relatively more dilapidated Washington Square College campus, located as it was in New York's Greenwich Village—which overlooked nothing. Furthermore, each campus had its own identity, and rarely did they act in concert with regard to curriculum and administration. Hook's post at Washington Square, where he spent his entire career, received most of the students coming to NYU; it was also an anxious campus, and largely due to the fact that it lived almost exclusively off of its gate receipts due to the mercurial nature of its curriculum and student populations.[6] While today the landscape and circumstances of both campuses has changed dramatically, it is important to note that Hook's assignment to the lesser campus helps us understand, to some degree, the motivation behind his many reforms. Moreover, whenever he did propose curricular or administrative changes, he was far less

[5] Hook's advisors Dewey and Frederick J. E. Woodbridge had lobbied quite sincerely and extensively for Columbia to appoint him, but for some reason their calls fell on deaf ears.
[6] For a fuller account of NYU's story in the 1930s, see Frusciano and Pettit, *New York University & the City*, Chapter 4.

provincial than many of his colleagues. Thus for the purposes of this and subsequent chapters, unless otherwise designated, Hook was always thinking of the university as a whole, and not simply how his ideas would impact Washington Square College.[7]

Just as New York consequently received a significant portion of government relief for public works programs, so it was that NYU became the beneficiary of millions of New Deal dollars to stave off the ill effects of unemployment and destitution. With the help of New Deal money and a generation of progressive-minded administrators and faculty, by World War II NYU had spearheaded "the phenomenal growth of higher education, educating men and women whose backgrounds were as diverse" as the college itself.[8] To outsiders it was as if the New Deal and NYU were working in tandem.

The scope and breadth of New Deal resources transformed NYU significantly. Until Hook arrived there in 1927 most courses related to the Liberal Arts—and all of the sciences—were taught at University Heights. When many observers referred to NYU, more often than not they were referring to the University Heights campus. Culture was, in effect, secluded from cosmopolitan life. His arrival coincided with the reconstruction of NYU's identity. For decades NYU's presidents and chancellors thought it had to compete for students and resources with uptown rival Columbia University; but by the 1930s NYU turned its attention inward, to the city itself.[9] NYU's facilities were developed exclusively "to meet the educational needs of exactly

[7] In many respects, the evidence suggests as much, seeing as though Hook almost always refers to NYU in his correspondence.
[8] Frusciano and Pettit, *New York University & the City*, 179. Much of the following has been shaped by Thomas Bender's "The Emergence of the New York Intellectuals: Modernism, Cosmopolitanism, and Nationalism," in *Intellect and Public Life: Essays on the Social History of Academic Intellectuals in the United States*, ed. Thomas Bender (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).
[9] Frusciano and Pettit, *New York University & the City*, 128-130. There was even an attempt in the late 1890s by Columbia's trustees to merge it with NYU, on the grounds that Columbia had always turned a

those New York City young people who would not or could attend college outside the city yet were prevented by cost or discrimination from attending Columbia" at Morningside Heights.[10] As the social and economic landscape changed, so too did the very nature of Washington Square.[11] And in the 1930s NYU did not, as Harvard and Chicago had, become institutionally concerned with the promotion of disinterested academic specialization among its faculty. Far from it, for the Depression, as one historian has noted, "kept philosophy in the world," because "it was simply impossible to avoid the experience of the world in such a turbulent era." The economic crisis had simply called for a "distinctively public and urban philosophy" to meet it.[12]

While it may be true that philosophy was kept *in* the world thanks to the Depression, to Hook philosophy, especially American pragmatism, was not yet sufficiently *of* the world. As we shall see, Hook was determined to redefine the philosopher's traditional vocational pursuits, because philosophers, he argued, should avoid the relative exclusivity of carping over internecine philosophical debates and the grand systems that have often spearheaded or followed from them. As important as philosophical debate was, equally important was the philosopher's concern with the larger problems of human affairs, and he strove to lead by example, adopting the mutually entailing temperament of the technical philosopher who functioned simultaneously as an autonomous public "moralist."[13] And on no issue was he more energized and publicly engaged than higher educational theory, practice, and reform. Consequently, from his post at Washington

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profit and NYU always seemed to be operating on a deficit. The story is also told by Jones, *New York University, A History*,154-158.

[10] Hollinger, "Two NYUs," 256.

[11] Frusciano and Pettit, *New York University & the City*, 146.

[12] Thomas Bender, *New York Intellect: A History of Intellectual Life in New York City from 1750 to the Beginnings of Our Own Time* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 312.

[13] *Philosophy and Public Policy* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), 5.

Square, Hook fast became one of the most influential participants in the culturally vibrant debates over the nature, content, and goals of higher education in the US.

Generally speaking, what follows explores how his stock as a public philosopher rose in the 1930s. As an aside, it is tempting to understand the total environment that shaped his thought, but our path is beset with all kinds of historiographical landmines. Needless to say, limitations of space and considerations of relevance rule out a comprehensive treatment of the people with whom he fought—alongside and against—and all of the issues over which he fought. That is, coming to terms with his significant personal and intellectual relationships with philosophers and educators in the 1930s is indispensable for the role they played in the development of his educational philosophy. But his editorial attachments and literary commitments to key magazines; his assessment of such historical events as the Moscow Trials in the Soviet Union and the rise of fascism in Europe; and his formal political associations with the Communist Party and the American Workers Party is not. Fortunately they have been sufficiently recognized and extensively examined by a myriad of accomplished historians.[14]

For present purposes and beyond we will seek to re-frame how we are to interpret Hook's ideas within the larger context of American higher education. While no doubt he concerned himself with international affairs, first and foremost he was a teacher and philosopher, and on no issue was he more dedicated than educational theory, pedagogy, and curricular reform. Hook's early attitudes towards education in the 1930s were always situated both inside NYU and

[14] In an attempt to discover their forebears, radical historians of literature have discussed the turf battles of those intellectuals who orbited around such renowned publications as the *New Republic, Partisan Review, Commentary, The Nation,* the *New York Review of Books*, and the *New York Times Book Review*. Some noteworthy titles include: Bloom, *Prodigal Sons;* Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams;* Pells, The *Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age;* Diggins, U*p From Communism;* and Jumonville, *Critical Crossings*. The most radical interpretation is Wald's *The New York Intellectuals* which has been uncritically accepted by Phelps' *Young Sidney Hook.*

beyond it. It was, as we shall see, a worldly philosophy. While he wrote no detailed educational treatise until the 1940s, his experiences throughout the 1930s—especially his repeated failures to secure any meaningful curricular reforms—served as the template for his later educational theory. By the time we finish we may have a better sense of how deeply intertwined his philosophical, educational, and political interests were. For by the mid-1930s Hook was well on his way to becoming a wide-ranging and cosmopolitan intellectual, a veritable "New York Intellect."[15]

Hook strove to develop his ideas regarding the intersection of scientific method and education consistently, and he hoped that in so doing he might transform the nature of college administration and aid in the reconstruction of the college curriculum, thereby rendering both more open, flexible, and democratic. This overview of the 1930s thus runs some unavoidable risks, for important as the political and social context of any thinker is, it must be doubly emphasized in the case of a pragmatist such as Hook, who took contexts seriously, who in the 1930s strove to become a public philosopher, especially one focused on educational reform, and whose other academic writings—namely those related to his Marxism—became ever more politicized. Collectively they contributed to his intellectual transformation from an "ordinary laborer in an academic vineyard" into a public intellectual.[16]

Despite the failure to agree on what the "The Obligation of Universities to the Social Order" was, exactly, the conference functions as a meaningful framework for this and subsequent chapters. The conference's manifold conservative impulses were, by the end of the decade, championed by Robert Maynard Hutchins and Mortimer J. Adler, each intellectuals *par*

[15] Bender, *New York Intellect*, 310.
[16] Hook to Harry Woodburn Chase, March 17th, 1934. Records of the Tisch School of the Arts, RG 35, Box 75, 10.

excellance, though of a very different caste. While Adler and Hutchins' activities will be examined in subsequent chapters (they did not attend the conference), for now we can note that historians have essentially treated Hook's career with Hutchins and Adler in terms of their respective pugilistic and polemical talents, obfuscating the larger question of why they took each other's positions so seriously. Also overlooked are the ways in which their careers overlapped: Hook and Hutchins both sought to revamp what they perceived as a disjointed general education curriculum—Hook at NYU and Hutchins and Adler at the University of Chicago. Both camps sought to render higher education more integrated and unified, and both saw a place for the establishment of a core set of texts to fulfill this mission. Both Hutchins and Hook failed somewhat, and their respective failures, and the philosophies that undergirded their ideas eventually—and hostilely—distinguished Hook's vision for higher education from Adler and Hutchins'. In a very meaningful way, Hook's intermittent failures to reconstruct NYU's curriculum in accordance with his educational philosophy prepared him for the educational battles of the 1940s and beyond.

I. The Shaping of the Academic as Public Intellectual

"Why don't American philosophers write more? … Because they teach."[17]

In the 1930s Hook endeavored to increase his visibility within the American educational community, and drew the attention of a newly formed coterie of educational activists, called the "social reconstructionists." This group, mainly composed of professors at Columbia University's Teacher's College and recognized colleagues or disciples of John Dewey, rallied around William Heard Kilpatrick and George Sylvester Counts, who were professors of the philosophy of

[17] Sidney Hook, "A Personal Impression of Contemporary German Philosophy," *Journal of Philosophy* 27 (1930): 151.

education at Teacher's College. Organizationally the social reconstructionists orbited around the Dewey-inspired Progressive Educational Association (PEA).[18] In the early thirties the PEA had split into two rival factions: on the one side were the relatively pacific members who advocated a more child-centered approach to pedagogy; and on the other were the firebrand social reconstructionsts. Counts, as one of the leaders of the latter, gained notoriety in 1932 when his *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* suggested that in a deepening economic crisis such as the Depression America's teachers could no longer remain aloof to the forces around them. Hook was eventually charged with preparing a report on the ways in which schools might institute "thoughtful and systematic study of the economic and industrial problems facing us today." On the strength of that report (no copy exists) in 1934 he joined many of the social reconstructionists on the board of Directors of a new monthly, the *Social Frontier*.[19]

Social Frontier was an ideal forum for all who might be interested in exploring the means by which education could assume some degree of social responsibility.[20] Although the journal's life span and subscription list were both limited, it was extraordinary for the scope and breadth of its ideas and contributors. Scores of essays on the state of schools and colleges or educational theory;[21] the morality of educational indoctrination; the situation of American youth; the relationship between leisure time and political responsibility; the value of civic and popular

[18] The standard history of the PEA is Patricia A. Graham, *Progressive Education: From Arcady to Academe*. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1967).
[19] C. A. Bowers, *The Progressive Educator and the Depression: The Radical Years* (New York: Random House, 1969), 35. Hook also spoke at a conference on education and social change, sponsored by the PEA and attended by Eleanor Roosevelt. See "Educators to Hear Mrs. Roosevelt," *New York Times*, November 19, 1933.
[20] Lawrence Cremin, *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience, 1876-1980* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 190. Although many of the members agreed about the educational implications of New Deal reforms, not all of them did on the question of how best the ameliorate the shortcomings of capitalist society and education's role in the process.
[21] "John Dewey's Page" had become almost singularly identified with the journal itself.

culture in promoting educational issues; and the relationship between social classes and democracy all appeared in its pages. In addition to in-house writers, *Social Frontier* solicited and published essays across the political spectrum, from the Communist Earl Browder to Dewey's sworn nemeses Hutchins and Adler. As we shall see, both Adler and Hutchins' contributions framed much of the debate between them and Hook.

United by a desire to combine educational with social reform, *Social Frontier*'s essays and reviews usually excoriated the New Deal's alleged trial-and-error approach to problems with calls for a more intelligent approach to economic planning. To begin with, many of them argued that the surefire way to address the problems was to emphasize the relationship between America's schools and the gradually deteriorating economic climate of its cities and countryside, rendering it more "intelligent." In the inaugural issue the editors of *Social Frontier* expressed their collective dismay at the concentration of corporate power in American society, with its economy of mass production and paradoxical philosophy of "rugged individualism" (the paradox being that while promoting individualism they were, in effect, *suppressing* individual development through insecurity and the homogenization of tasks within the workplace).[22] Collectively they wondered: what social or political system would replace laissez-faire capitalism now that its shortcomings had been exposed by the Depression? What was needed, they argued, was a renewed emphasis on the integral relation between social and economic life, which to them had been rent by privation.[23]

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[22] For brief discussions of this group and *Social Frontier*, see Lawrence Cremin, *American Education*, 189-191; for Dewey's participation, see Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 506-510. Bowers, *Progressive Educator and the Depression* remains the only detailed study of the social reconstructionists.

[23] Until roughly 1934 FDR had said little about and done less for educational institutions, focusing instead on the constellation of New Deal programs as a means towards fixing the economy. But in 1934 he funded the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) substantially, and broadened its powers to

Outside of his work at the *Social Frontier*, in the mid-1930s, Hook set out to publicly test his own philosophical and educational ideas. In a paper he delivered before the National Council on Religion in Higher Education, titled "The Challenge of the Social Order to the Curriculum of the Liberal Arts College," he preferred to "suggest some concrete principles to guide the revision of curricula and administrative organization [and] advisement" through a criticism of the America's liberal arts colleges.[24]

Too many graduates from America's liberal arts colleges, he began, were ill-prepared to grapple with the political ferment of contemporary society. The tangential nature of existing college courses, Hook argued, might provide a student with, say, a knowledge of Greek culture or astronomy, but the uncoordinated nature of the courses themselves left most students out of touch or, worse, ignorant of the society in which they lived. Citing the findings of numerous college presidents and the prestigious Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, as well as those of the as the National Society for the Study of Education, Hook expressed grief that the liberal arts curriculum was neither modern nor classical but was instead a "sweet-sour pickle mixture of credit courses leading to a degree but not to an education." While he was somewhat unclear about what he meant precisely by "education," he suggested that, at the very least, an educated graduate from a liberal arts college was someone who was prepared "to make an intelligent choice among the great and fateful alternatives being shaped for them by the movement of social forces."[25] Until significant reforms were enacted, graduates of America's liberal arts colleges would be "tragically unprepared to orient [themselves] to the stormy winds

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extend into America's colleges and universities. It was FERA, however, that tens of thousands of college students benefited the most from. in exchange for direct funding they became wards of the city itself.
[24] Hook, "The Challenge of the Social Order to the Curriculum of the Liberal Arts College," in *Report of the Eleventh Annual Meeting and Ninth Week of Work of the Fellows of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education*, 7. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 41.
[25] *Ibid*., 8.

of doctrine blowing from all points on the compass."[26] The distance between America's colleges and the cities in which they inhabit was considerable, he admitted, but not irrevocably so. It simply represented a challenge to the curriculum, its methods of instruction, and its administration.

In terms of curricula, Hook suggested that colleges reorganize themselves to render the humanities and the social sciences—properly integrated into survey courses—the bases of a genuinely liberal education. To breathe life into the curricula, these courses also ought to be designed and conducted with a keen eye towards what was happening outside of their classrooms. Perhaps the best subject to accomplish this, he thought, was history, for an appreciation of history—by which he referred to social, political, and cultural history—he maintained, would better orient students to the issues that dominated their culture. This, he offered, would realistically describe the student's culture and provide sufficient material for "critical examination of conflicting social philosophies, attitudes, and programs of action." The Carnegie Foundation's 1932 report, which had investigated nearly one hundred colleges the year before, noticed an especially troubling dearth of historical knowledge among America's college and university students.[27]

More important than what was to be taught, Hook continued, was *how* to teach it. Traditional rote learning ought to be abandoned in favor of teaching students how to think critically not only about the specific subject matters under consideration, but also an array of social, political, and cultural issues as well. Failure to inculcate a critical disposition regarding the burning issues of the day was for him unforgivable, irresponsible, and disastrous. "The

[26] *Ibid.*, 7.
[27] *Ibid.*

natural susceptibility of youth to enthusiasms, and [their] tendency to acquire its ideas as it does its enthusiasms, by contagion, make it the easy recruiting material for all sorts of demagogic movements which flatter its strength and impatience." The rise of Fascism in Italy and Germany were to Hook eloquent illustrations of how, in the absence of a strong critical sensibility "youthful strength can lead to insensate cruelty." To counteract these tendencies students should be taught to simply be aware of *whether* they were thinking, *what* they were thinking, "and the evidence one way or the other for conclusions heard or advanced."[28] Alluding to another conceptual centerpiece of his philosophy of education, Hook insisted that teaching the methods of reaching a conclusion was, in the long run, vastly superior to indoctrinating students into any particular conclusion reached. "Genuine teaching," he affirmed, "is critical teaching, and critical teaching consists in the discovery and reasoned investigation of all relevant alternatives to ideals and plans of action under consideration."[29]

Hook further urged teachers to organize for the abolition of trustee, presidential, or any other external administrative controls.[30] Power to enact changes in the curriculum and the means by which it was to be implemented must be in the hands of the faculty itself. With such power comes great responsibility, however, and Hook implored teachers to work closely with student representatives, professional organizations outside of the colleges and universities, and community centers on how best to reform the liberal arts. The point was, in the end, for them to *try something*; for the educator, serves society truly "by making a critical survey of social realities and social ideals and then honestly and courageously defending any conclusion he may

[28] *Ibid.*
[29] Hook, "The Role of the Educator," *The Student Outlook,* 2 (1934), 6. Records of the Tisch School of the Arts, RG 35, Box 75.
[30] Hook, "The Challenge of the Social Order," 9; see also Hook, "The Role of the Teacher," 7.

reach."[31] These ideas and ideals would serve as the foundation for his proposed reconstruction of Washington Square.

In one of his earliest attempts to bring his educational views closer in line with his democratic theory, in 1936 Hook gave the commencement address at Vassar College. In his remarks he decried the market economy for having created "the widest destitution in American history, the regimentation of millions on relief, the paralysis of many cultural activities, particularly retrenchment in education, and that acute hunger for foreign markets which cannot be sated without a large army, navy, and air-force."[32] Citing the boundless energy with which the federal government constructed a planned *economy*, Hook wondered why similar energies were not currently being geared toward a planned *society*, one that would utilize "the precise relations and mechanisms by which individual responsibilities may be established in the collective activity" could be experimented with. Education, he maintained, *was* such a mechanism by which any social changes could be engineered; planning was itself an experimental affair, one that required the observation of and experimentation with intellectual and material resources in light of some clearly, even if only tentatively, identified objective. An educational philosophy predicated on the methods of the natural sciences was consistent with the very best of the New Deal's intentions, one that would infuse "science with a social aim" and result in a democratically controlled society. While sympathetic to many of the arguments made among and within America's socialists, Hook stopped short of endorsing those of them who sought the violent overthrow of existing democratic institutions in the hopes of bringing about social change. Nevertheless, Hook did point out to his esteemed audience that, as it stood, the market

[31] Hook, "The Role of the Educator," 6.
[32] Hook, "The Philosophical Implications of Economic Planning," (1936), 667. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 42.

economy, with its preoccupation with the creation and retention of the rate of profit, would, unless immanently and democratically controlled, exacerbate the struggles among and between American citizens.

Hook closed his address by noting that education's true purpose was to aid the discovery of natural aptitudes within each citizen under controlled conditions, and to transmit those habits necessary for a diverse, and cooperative society. Because a planned economy such as the New Deal both presupposed a social philosophy and entailed a significant degree of communally supported activities, it depended upon the scientific organization of human and material resources towards a common goal. "Every large scale public work, from the pyramids to the TVA, every fleet built and outfitted, every successful military campaign and educational venture," he insisted, represented "conspicuous illustrations" of how common goals were achieved through common means. Extended into the public sphere it was thus possible to ameliorate unemployment while creating new homes and industries. And instead of cultivating a generation of dependents through public relief programs, he argued that a planned society would imbue each American with "a sense of the significance of his work in the collective whole." While to many observers this must have appeared as a paean for the New Deal, compared to the threat of permanent unemployment, poverty and destruction of the basic necessities of human life "to keep prices at the level of vendability," Hook argued that a planned society that applied experimental methods to social problems would yield results similar to those sought by the New Deal. It was high time, he continued, for education to assume an active role "in the social and economic reconstruction" that was so desperately needed.[33]

[33] *Ibid*., 671-672.

From Hook's public campaigning on behalf of educational reform we get a sense of how he saw himself: in a democratic society, it was preeminently the philosopher's job to identify and strip away abstractions, and to expose the social forces they hid. And, as we shall see, it was the educator's job to see that the public was well trained to recognize such abstractions when they were so identified. While he may have seen his campaigns as a national issue, we now turn to how he sought to implement these ideas at NYU.

II. Creating the "Philosophical Mecca of the Atlantic Seaboard"

> It seems clear to me that in the face of increasing competition from other colleges in the suburban area which is accentuated by the effects of the business cycle on enrollment, Washington Square College must take the lead in progressive educational policies.[34]

Despite being repeatedly voted "most stimulating professor" by his students, for a brief period Hook led a somewhat precarious existence among the faculty and administration. Among his various activities, as a founding member of NYU's Liberal Club and Social Problems Club, his desire to engage contemporary social and political issues of his day left many of his older colleagues puzzled. Students who disagreed with Hook also repeatedly hissed at him as he walked across the Washington Square on his way to teach. Sometimes faculty, when not hissing themselves, ignored him as he strolled across the quad or, worse, spat in his direction.[35] Apparently undeterred, Hook sought a more intellectually appropriate medium from which he could present his views.

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[34] Hook to Harry Woodburn Chase, January 26, 1938. Records of the Tisch School of the Arts, RG 35, Box 75.

[35] The local representatives of the Young Communist League (YCL) called him "a slimy revolutionary and reptile of the worst type," and an "advocate of fascism and enemies of the proletariat." Hook, *Out of Step*, 512. Hook was not, however, the only faculty member offering courses either on Marxism or containing Marx in its syllabi. An economist named Lois MacDonald in the Economics dept. taught classes—"labor and the state" and "socialism and capitalism" from 1933-36. For MacDonald and Hook's class offerings, see the *NYU Bulletin, 1935-1936* (New York: University Building, Washington Square, 1935), 66-67. Hook was, moreover, never one to count such hostilities among the store of available refutations of his positions.

With the help of Philip Wheelwright, the chairman of WSC's philosophy department,[36] Hook was invited to start and co-edit a quarterly journal of philosophical criticism, *Symposium*, in 1929. Anxious for the philosophy department to have a journal that would rival Columbia's preeminent *Journal of Philosophy*, Hook took to the task in earnest, landing contributions from Morris Cohen and Dewey for the first few issues. Intent on expanding the role of philosophers in American life, Hook also sought to expand the tenor of the journal itself to include sophisticated pieces on literature and, more importantly, current social issues. From its pages he hoped *Symposium* would join the extant debates over the causes of—and proposed solutions to—the depression. Although he worked hard, his efforts went unrewarded. James Burnham, Hook's colleague who had twice been promoted over him, was named the journal's sole editor. Still a fresh face in the American philosophical community, Hook did not fight Burnham's appointment, deciding instead to publish several essays and reviews in the pages of *Symposium.* Despite all of Wheelwright's efforts, NYU's Dean of Faculty eventually promoted Hook to assistant professor on the basis of his published work in 1932. At the end of a rather acrimonious internal dispute Hook was selected as the department chairman in 1933, prompting Wheelwright's resignation and, in effect, the demise of the *Symposium.*[37]

Hook's move to chairman could not have been timelier. In that same year NYU was able to pry Harry Woodburn Chase away from the presidency of the University of Illinois to serve as its chancellor. Unlike Hook, Chase's educational views could be considered more visceral than deeply theoretical, since they had more to do with the role of a university in American society

[36] There was a separate philosophy department at University Heights, but its records are all but lost.
[37] Hook, *Out of Step*, 529-536. It would be churlish to not acknowledge that, among the publications that garnered Hook's promotion was his landmark 1932 *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*. Since this dissertation attempts to reframe Hook's intellectual odyssey independently of his Marxist writings or political activities, and since Hook went out of his way to maintain that there was little connection between the latter and his educational views, I have set well-worn discussions of Hook's Marxism aside.

than any specific proposals commensurate with that role. In rather vague terms he maintained that universities "were first and foremost a real and vivid expression of the life of the state itself." As such, their task was to sufficiently educate its students not to live for but with an eye towards their futures. The long-term consequences, he hoped, would be a better community. Therefore, as vivid expressions of society the universities were thus obligated to directly serve it.[38] Despite the fact that he oversaw NYU's expansion at one of the lowest points in the Depression, next to nothing has been written about Chase's tenure.[39] His surviving papers reveal that he was a shrewd administrator, a skilled writer, and a gifted orator who fought tirelessly for systemic reforms within NYU while pointing out to the community that its survival during the Depression was inexorably connected to these reforms. He thus belongs to the larger academic intellectual culture of New York City.

By way of an examination of his representative addresses and Chancellor's reports, we may work towards developing a clearer picture of Chase's vision for NYU.[40] To be sure, in them he repeatedly extolled NYU's promise and prospects. "The university is *in* the world and *of* the world," he began, "it must draw upon the past for its illumination, but must do this as a means to the understanding of life today." To be sure, he vowed to maintain enrollment during the Depression through the creation of a Division of Continuing Education.[41] He also pledged to

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[38] Chase, "The Social Responsibility of the State University," *Journal of Social Forces* 5 (1923): 519.
[39] See "Chase to N.Y.U.," *Time*, Monday, February 6, 1933.The lone exception being Louis R. Wilson's short biography, *Harry Woodburn Chase* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960).

[40] NYU's institutional archive is maddeningly disorganized, which may explain so few scholarly monographs about it.
[41] He also oversaw the creation of the Division of General Education, which represented the cumulative effect of decades of adult education courses and extension services. But what set it apart from all other programs was its timing; its central purpose was, according to its director Ned H. Dearborn, to serve as "an agency, which by reason of its comparative informality of organization, may be immediately responsive to new social ideas and thereby increase the usefulness of the University." During its first

reassess the nature of the liberal arts themselves, because "adaptation to contemporary life … [was], indeed, the great problem of liberal arts education." For too long many of the country's colleges and universities had dictated to students what should be taught and how, which often resulted in a student being narrowly specialized and bereft of sufficient appreciation for "the educational problem as a whole." The Depression had changed all of that, however. In the midst of profound chaos students required "not merely specialized knowledge, but something like a coherent philosophy of life; a philosophy which involves a definite attempt to unify knowledge and organize its presentations in ways that will make the educational experience less a series of unrelated fact." This entailed "a definite attempt to set values on the subject of instruction" in the hopes that NYU would produce a generation of "cultured laymen" capable of dealing with the problems of contemporary life. One way to accomplish this would be to better integrate the university curriculum,[42] since he was convinced "that NYU best serves the Nation by serving first and most adequately its own community." While bordering on the platitudinous, his transparent faith in his institution helped frame the debates that would take place within NYU over the future of its liberal arts curriculum.[43]

Chase's evaluation of NYU was surely tempered by the forces of reality. To be sure, as the Depression deepened, joblessness among graduates of New York's secondary schools had swelled college enrollments to the point that NYU saw an annual increase of 20 percent, which

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calendar year the DGE offered more than 150 credit or non-credit courses, many of which coincided with an increasing amount of attention and assistance from the city's various public agencies. Through this collaborative relationship with the government (and with recurrent investments from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching), WSC had, to some degree, become an extension of the community itself. Dearborn quoted in Frusciano and Pettit, *New York University & the City*, 183.

[42] Chase, "Our Liberal Arts Colleges" (1933). Records of the Tisch School of the Arts, RG 35, Box 76, 10-12.

[43] Chase, *Report of the Chancellor, 1933-1934*, 10.

was at the time the highest in the United States.[44] The majority of these students came from all over lower Manhattan, Brooklyn, and, in some cases, New Jersey—a veritable cross-section of American urban life.[45] But even though enrollments increased, changes in the curriculum were non-existent, and the curriculum itself was largely disorganized. In late 1933 Chase, bewilderedly observed that at "the moment when the supreme task of a liberal education was clearly to give students some idea of the complex and unsettled world they live in," most of the NYU's classes—especially those at NYU—offered varied "only in detail" from those in vogue before World War I.[46] As a result, NYU was inundated with a series of curricular and administrative difficulties.

To begin with, from the student newspaper came complaints of irrelevant requirements, many of which were taught by execrable professors more interested in research than instruction. Classrooms were overcrowded; Hook's own classes "were large, [and the] corridors noisy and crowded, and the elevators as jampacked [*sic*] as the subways in the morning and evening rush hour."[47] How things have changed! When not the recipient of cavalier treatment, other students complained of being "forced through stereotyped instruction programs."[48] Nor was there any on-campus advisement for meandering freshmen. And the students were not alone in registering their displeasure with the state of NYU. One of the deans lamented that there were no "efforts toward the individualization of education," or a commitment "to [the students'] social or extra-

[44] In 1933 NYU had a total of 40,000 undergraduates and a total faculty of roughly 1800. See 1934 Chancellor's Report. By the 1937-38 academic year enrollments had increased by almost 600 percent. For a wide variety of reasons, Columbia and City College were notoriously unwilling to open its doors, and the more progressive undergraduate programs at Sarah Lawrence and Bennington were far too exclusive for many of the city's population

[45] Frusciano and Petit, *New York University and the City*, 191-193; Chase, *Report of the Chancellor, 1933-1934*, 13.

[46] Chase, "Our Liberal Arts Colleges," 6.

[47] Hook, *Out of Step*, 529.

[48] Washington Square College Bulletin, February, 1934. Hereafter *WSCB*

curricular interests." Nor were there facilities and resources for the "physical [and psychological] welfare of students." One reason why this never seemed to bother any administrators could be that, in light of the glut of applicants, many of them knew that for every student that withdrew from specific classes or the school entirely "there were others eager to take their place."[49] In seemingly maintaining the status quo, Chase conceded, NYU had outgrown itself. But "it is encouraging," he noted, that within its halls there was "a good deal of ferment" about the situation, though "much of it is still under the surface."[50]

Events in Europe pressed the point further. Faculty and administration alike expressed consternation over the fact that the Depression was being exploited by Fascists, sppealing to the naïveté and gullibility of the young to achieve political goals.[51] In light of the spate of student demonstrations that broke out throughout New York City's colleges over the lack of services for New York City's homeless, the Scottsboro Boys, and the dismissal of students who openly professed their socialism, to many at NYU it was imperative to avoid an over-population of drifting, disenfranchised, and disenchanted youth because of the potential retrenchment of the schools and colleges.[52]

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[49] Milton Loomis to Harry Woodburn Chase, December 30th, 1935. Records of the Tisch School of the Arts, Group RG 35, Box 50.
[50] Chase, "Our Liberal Arts Colleges," 9. More on Chase's role in Hook's program below.
[51] Richard M. Fried, *The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming! Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold-War America* (New York: Oxford University Press), Chapter 1.
[52] See Robert Cohen, *When the Old Left was Young: Student Radicals and America's First Mass Movement, 1929-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), introduction and Chapter 1. Chase himself reiterated these fears in several speeches throughout 1933. See "The Crisis in Education," Records of the Tisch School of the Arts, Group RG 35, Series 11, Box 76; and "Education as a National Resource," Records of the Tisch School of the Arts, Group RG 35, Box 76. I could find no evidence that Hook sympathized with the protesters or actively participated in demonstrations. However, he was censured by NYU for publicizing the struggles between coal miners and mine owners in Kentucky, which prompted "busloads" of students to go see it for themselves. See Frusciano and Petit, *New York University and the City,*185-187.

As we noted earlier, from Hook's perspective, NYU's younger generation of educators were particularly suspicious regarding the fragmentation of the college curriculum, the excessively large classes, and the disunity of each student's educational experience, one that seemed to be an extension of academic specialization.[53] Specialized scholarship, he argued, had not yet proven satisfactory for the organization of an undergraduate liberal arts education. Consequently, "[i]n large classes advanced students feel that they are not profiting sufficiently and those who are beginning their studies naturally feel out of swim"—or at least that was the case in his many philosophy courses.[54] Curricular compartmentalization and the subdivision of academic departments made it increasingly difficult for anyone to keep track of student development. Hook concluded that America's colleges, especially NYU, appeared by the mid-thirties so mired in producing successive generations of narrowly trained scholars (with a curriculum designed for potential specialists) that they subordinated all other concerns to that end. As chair Hook hoped to combine exceptional scholarship with an emphasis on great teaching.[55]

All of the above was compounded by NYU's outmoded administrative procedures. Like so many liberal arts colleges in New York, it was organized from the top down.[56] Before the Depression, most administrators thought that education was a privileged enterprise; many looked with scorn upon the extension of education to large numbers. In matters of policy all decisions

[53] I could find little to indicate that Hook was as vested in the University Heights Department of Philosophy as much as he was with the reforms under discussion—which he undertook with a considerable teaching load under his belt. The University Heights and WSC departments were combined in the 1950s, with Hook as its chair.
[54] Hook, "Evaluation of the Departmental Program in Philosophy," n.d., Records of the Tisch School of the Arts, Group RG 35, Box 75.
[55] Hook, "A History of the Department of Philosophy-A free-floating recollection," Sidney Hook Papers, Box 71.
[56] City College and Hunter College were administered similarly.

were frequently *ad hoc* and exclusively determined by the presidents and passed along, without debate, to the deans. Without soliciting recommendations from anyone, many deans in turn would assemble department chairpersons—at NYU they were called the "cabinet"—to compulsorily "attend meetings to apprise the faculty of what they intended to do." In turn the chairpersons from each department would provide the deans with ample justifications for their "prearranged courses of conduct," in effect serving as little more than "a rubber stamp." There were, in effect, no individual department meetings. The various curricula were mostly predetermined and almost always out of step with current events. It was also disorganized and disconnected from what the average student learned in high school. In short, the liberal arts colleges in New York, and NYU especially, had not yet recognized generally any duty to the masses, and dismissed courses of study that had the slightest utilitarian value. Faculty played little or no role in the academic affairs of the college. And however poorly the colleges were governed, and however limited the curriculum was, what was made clear was that its underlying purpose was to train scholars.[57]

These problems warranted significant attention, and not merely for the survival of the university. "The preservation of democracy depends on education," Chase announced, but

> [i]t is not enough to say that a democracy cannot exist without education. It is now a question, not merely of education, but of the type and quality of education that is needed if our tradition of democracy is to hold stable in the midst of a world so confused and perplexed. The preservation of American democracy is not to be assured by the development of a bureaucracy, no matter how intelligent. It is only possible on the basis of a diffusion of knowledge and an increased sense of responsibility among the

[57] Hook, *Out of Step*, 510, 537; Hook, "History of the Department of Philosophy," 6; Cohen, *When the Old Left was Young*, 23-25; for City College see Abraham Edel, *The Struggle for Academic Democracy: Lessons from the 1938 "Revolution" in New York City's Colleges* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), especially Chapter 3; and John E. Moser, *Right Turn: John T. Flynn and the Transformation of American Liberalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), Chapter 5.

> citizenship at large. The objective to be sought is …government set up, criticized, kept in power or put out of power by an informed and well-disposed citizenship.[58]

The means by which a well-disposed citizenry could be achieved was not, Chase continued, through "piecemeal tinkering with curricula, but a complete reorientation of liberal education which disregards where necessary departmental boundaries, which views realistically the environments in which graduates must live …" And it most surely was not going to be a lost cause:

> [d]uring the year a joint committee of twenty-four members of our faculty [from Washington Square College and University Heights] have been making a cooperative study of liberal-arts instruction in the American colleges. Out of the materials assembled and the monthly discussions …are arising considerations that will have an important bearing on our own undergraduate programs…[59]

Shortly after his address Chase sent a memorandum to NYU's Committee of Liberal Arts Colleges indicating his vision for NYU. "Our thinking about liberal arts colleges at this time needs one further step," he wrote, "namely, that we need not only to consider individual subjects but their correlation."[60] Fortunately for Chase plans for the reconstruction of the curriculum were well under way.

Chase's support notwithstanding, NYU also had institutional support in Milton Loomis, Dean of the School of Education. In the summer of 1934 he introduced a sequence of summer programs, sponsored through Washington Square College, with such titles as "Education for a New Day in America," "Education for Social Reconstruction," "Industrial Education in the Making," and "Youth Faces a New World." The result of three years of planning and organizing, Loomis's program sought "to emphasize fundamental social changes that [were] constantly taking place [and] to provide the type of educational service …most needed in light of new

[58] "NYU Report of the Chancellor for the Year 1933-1934," 8.
[59] *Ibid.*
[60] *Ibid.*, 9.

conditions and new problems." He arranged for faculty in the department of Education to spend the summer lecturing, but insisted that they integrate classroom activities with field trips to local industries, public utilities, and the headquarters of government agencies. He hoped that together students and faculty would learn, through the combined effect of observation and a classroom setting, "an enlightened discrimination between new values and old, and to preserve and maintain, with intelligence and authority, all values—old and new—that will promote the development of a better society." Not unlike Chase's speeches, what Loomis meant by "values" was unclear; the word appears repeatedly and inexplicably throughout his publications. On the other hand Hook, who took an early shine to Loomis, would soon incorporate the latter's concern for values into his own vision for the university.[61]

Hook's professional career would not have been possible were it not for Loomis's efforts. When he was promoted to Dean in early 1934, Loomis was considered "one of the most progressive college administrators in the country."[62] Eager to resuscitate its reputation in the city, among his many initiatives was to erect a system of individual advisement for undergraduates, the first of its kind at NYU. Beginning in the fall of 1935, he announced in the NYU newspaper, "every student will be treated as an individual and will receive individual attention to his needs

[61] "Courses at N.Y.U. Stress 'New Era,'" *New York Times,* July 1, 1934. In 1934 student evaluations of the Summer School actually pleaded greater connections not only between the classroom and the excursions, but also between the school and its surrounding community. See "Report of the Director of Summer Session Excursions, August 17th, 1934." Records of the Tisch School of the Arts, Group RG 35, Box 50. NYU was also selected by the Federal Office of Education to function as a training center for supervisors of adult education. They would offer a course on "Focal Problems in Modern Society," with lectures by such intellectual luminaries Franz Boaz, John Dewey, Horace M. Kallen, and Harry Overstreet.

[62] *WCSB*, February, 11,1934.

and educational possibilities throughout his college career."[63] It appeared to many that, institutionally speaking, the stars were aligned and significant changes were on the horizon.

Fortunately for Hook, Chase, and Loomis, throughout America "there was a good deal of experiment…as well as much soul searching about the aims of liberal education, about who should go to college and why, about what studies are of most worth, and how best to humanize and integrate knowledge for purposes of instruction."[64] Much of this came about because a network of educators and administrators had grown weary of traditional academic overspecialization and the imbalance between the pursuit of special academic interests and the attainment of the broader cultivation that, in their opinion, a liberal education was supposed to provide. NYU hoped that through its efforts it could serve as a template for national collegiate and university curricular reforms. As its principle architect, Hook's proposals for curricular reform would thrust him into one of the most heated public debates over the nature, scope, and justification for a liberal arts curriculum.

[63] *WSCB*, October 15, 1937.
[64] Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School*: *Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 308.

III. Biting Into the Problems of Here and Now: The Unified Studies Division

> "Once the vital connections between curriculum interests and the larger social interests are lost, the college is imperiling its own future."[65]

Motivated by Chase's enthusiasm and Loomis's administrative acumen, as well as NYU's "high mortality rate" as a result of diminishing student retention, Hook proposed to create an experimental junior college. Since NYU drew most of its students "almost entirely from those residents within the metropolitan area," they had "a duty of service to that area" because they were dependent upon it. In spirit and to the letter Hook designed the college as an alternative to NYU's existing curricular, administrative, and pedagogical impediments. As far as he was concerned the university was sufficiently equipped to meet the needs of those entering scholarly pursuits. The central problem was what to do with those students who could not afford four years of instruction; who were less interested in scholarship; who demanded shorter and broader courses of study; who were less fit for a conventional education; and who saw college life as pre-professional training. They, Hook argued, had no university to speak of. What he proposed, then, amounted to a radical reconstruction of university life, with the curriculum designed for guiding students "through the problems of living in the present complicated world" and for those that did not intend to become scholars.[66] The proposal had the enthusiastic support of Smith, who as provost encouraged Chase to "put such a plan through" by the fall 1935

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[65] Hook, "The Challenge of the Social Order to the Curriculum of the Liberal Arts College," in *Report of the Eleventh Annual Meeting and Ninth Week of Work of the Fellows of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education*, 7. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 41.

[66] Hook, "The College for General Training of New York University." Records of the Tisch School of the Arts, Group RG 35, Box 35.

semester. "With [everyone] in the saddle," he argued, "it might be possible to have this new experiment set up as a cooperative measure with the [entire] College."[67]

Hook's proposal was not merely a question of changing the curriculum to make it more accessible to the wider population. The situation was essentially *moral*, he argued, a necessary condition for grappling with the exigencies of the current situation facing the city. "If a democratic government is to succeed," Hook warned, NYU "must train both the excellently equipped and the average person how to *live democratically*, how to get along with their fellow citizens, and to enable them solve the problems of their society. The curriculum he envisioned would perforce fit each student's ability, instead of simply attempting to make every student fit the curriculum. This meant that, for example, a general curriculum comprised of required courses in English and Speech would lay the groundwork for more complex survey courses in biology, history (both American and European), the Fine Arts, Sociology, and Philosophy. Were his proposed junior college to have an overarching theme, it seemed most focused on complex existential questions involving how human beings came to be what they were. The Junior College was designed for students to take care of themselves as a member of a complex society, and supplementary classes in business and home economics would be available to students throughout their second year.[68]

At first glance there was nothing controversial about Hook's proposal; as we indicated earlier, scores of universities were experimenting with alternative curricula, the most famous of which was Alexander Meiklejohn's Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin in the

[67] Rufus Smith to Harry Woodburn Chase, May 3rd, 1934. Records of the Tisch School of the Arts, Group RG 35, Box 35.
[68] Hook, "The College for General Training of New York University," 3. There is some evidence that Hook's plan was inspired by developments at the University of Minnesota, which in 1932 adopted a junior college within its larger university-wide curriculum.

1930s (and for which Hook was considered for a position in 1932).[69] A closer look, however, reveals just how groundbreaking the college *could have been*: its curriculum was geared exclusively towards contemporary problems of human life and social destiny. The interrelationships between the achievements of science and the milestones in the progress of scientific knowledge and society would be stressed. But most importantly "the implications of scientific method for a liberal civilization" would be considered. Thus constructed each pupil would be "well-rounded" enough to either graduate with a terminal degree, to continue their studies at NYU towards a four-year specialized degree, or, if the student so desired, to transfer to another college without penalty.[70] It would also allow those students who were unable to afford a four-year education to benefit intellectually from a curriculum designed just for them. Because of the resources pouring in to NYU from the federal government, the proposed college was unique from the city's other institutions of higher learning, and hoped to be in a position to offer a general education that would retard dropout rates while coordinating studies. Moreover, Hook hoped that, by increasing its enrollments substantially, the university would cease living off its gate receipts exclusively.[71]

Not satisfied with simply identifying what America's educational problems were, Hook assumed that his task was to "reconstruct the educational system so as to make the theory and

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[69] See Adam R. Nelson, *Education and Democracy: The Meaning of Alexander Meiklejohn: 1872-1964* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 145. Meiklejohn's description of the college can be found in his *The Experimental College* (Washington, D.C.: Seven Locks Press, 1932).

[70] Hook, "The College for General Training of New York University," 8. From Chancellor Chase's perspective the junior college made sense both pedagogically and financially. With the creation of a new program open to more students, it would generate significant (and desperately needed) revenues, and would be far more helpful to the survival of the university. "In other words," Rufus Smith concluded, "if this new plan is sound educationally – and this is the first consideration, it will be a godsend financially." See Rufus Smith to Harry Woodburn Chase, May 2, 1934. Records of the Tisch School of the Arts, Group RG 35, Box 53.

[71] An interesting question is how Hook's junior college squared with existing Associate Degree programs the city offered.

exercise of *critical* method one of the primary objectives of the educational process and to leave curriculum making and administrative policy to the teaching staff working in cooperation with other agencies."[72] He was on his way to accomplishing both. But the college within a college would have to wait, apparently. Having given the matter careful and prolonged consideration, Chase vetoed Hooks' junior college proposal. In its place he decided to reconstruct NYU's entire curriculum along the lines of Hook's proposal.

Prior to determining what was to be done about the curriculum, however, as a member of NYU's "cabinet," Hook set his sights on what he thought were its outmoded administrative structure. Since it was largely organized to agree on policies *ex post facto*—especially the decisions of the President—Hook saw the cabinet in its current iteration as an obstacle to any of his proposed reforms. Encouraged by Chase and aided by some of his younger colleagues, Hook formed the Committee on Educational Policy in the hopes of reversing these trends. At its first meeting he argued that prior to the formal presentation of any curricular changes for the following academic year and beyond, all of the department chairmen ought to have a say in determining "the educational problems, policies, and programs of the College." It would be best, he added, if faculty and administrators work together so "that administrative officers should be considered service agencies to execute and effectuate [those] policies and programs." In what must have been a stunningly quiet room he then suggested the creation of an exploratory committee of three to five chairmen to consider ways in which "faculty participation in the government of the College" could best be facilitated.[73]

[72] Hook, "The College for General Training of New York University," 3.
[73] "Minutes of the Faculty Meeting," March 10th, 1936. Records of the Tisch School of the Arts, RG 35, Series 11, Box 50.

Although no detailed account of what transpired exists, from the faculty minutes of the Committee on Educational Policy we may try to develop a brief picture. Hook and Loomis assembled eighty-seven chairmen and faculty to debate the issues related to faculty control. The room appears to have been divided into pro- and anti-Hook factions. Those opposed to Hook summarily defended the extant curriculum and seemed to oppose any changes on the grounds that NYU was not obligated to society as much as Chase indicated. Scholarship and research, argued Homer Watt, a fairly conservative professor of education who published some deep-seated critiques of John Dewey, must perforce be protected at all costs, even at the cost of a pedestrian student body.

Arguing against what they thought were fossilized instructional philosophies and administrative procedures, Hook and his supporters defended not only Chase but their proposals to reconstruct the curriculum. After some time (and the record does not reveal exactly why) Hook submitted that the cabinet, as was presently constituted, be dissolved immediately. No doubt after considerable fanfare, the record shows that a chagrined Hook reluctantly withdrew his proposal.[74] In its place he lobbied for the creation of an advisory committee to act as proxy between the extant cabinet and the rest of the NYU faculty; this was warranted, Hook argued, but only on the condition that it was comprised of elected delegates chosen from the faculty. In turn these delegates had to act on their behalf and in the best interest of the entire faculty. Anyone who failed to do so would be censured. Hook's motion was, apparently, "discussed with spirit, and at great length."[75] While the exact voting tallies are lost, Hook's proposals survived the fracas, and faculty control became official policy at NYU, thus democratizing the administrative

[74] It should be noted at this point that no record of what was said exists. The account is based largely on the minutes from these meetings as well as secondhand accounts. To date no report of these meetings has been located, and there are scant archival materials for the other attendees.
[75] "Minutes of the Faculty Meeting," 10.

procedures of the entire university.[76] Thereafter every major curriculum policy was to be determined by a majority vote of the new-fangled cabinet, and only after such time as was allotted for each chair to deliberate with the junior and senior faculty. In time his candor at these meetings would win him several lifelong friendships while embittering those chairpersons sympathetic to previously established rules and procedures. It seems that Hook had scored a major political victory with little bloodshed.[77]

With his newfound administrative authority, and with the Depression saddling NYU with even more students than anticipated—enrollments had risen to more than 40,000 full- and part-time students university-wide by the end of 1935—Hook took to designing an experimental curriculum to, he hoped, meet their needs. Dean Loomis published an editorial in the *Washington Square College Bulletin* endorsing Hook's educational philosophy, assuring his readers that Hook's proposal would be get a public hearing in due time. Changes to the curriculum were imperative, Loomis continued, so the college could cease being an adjunct to merely obtaining a degree. Receiving an education at NYU was now going to entail the student populations' social obligations, becoming, he reasoned, "a process of preparation for living in a complex social world." Such an education was possible only through an emphasis on "science." "Through science," he averred, "we can safely apply [its] method to the solution of the problems of life in general."[78] After what we can only assume was considerable deliberation, Chancellor Chase signed off on the creation of the Unified Studies Division (USD).

For his part, Chase announced that the program constituted "a new approach to undergraduate training for contemporary life," one that would also be experimental and limited

[76] This story is well told by Hook himself in his autobiography, *Out of Step*, Chapter 32.
[77] *Ibid.*, 542-543.
[78] *WSCB*, February 27, 1936, 1-2.

to a small percentage of the student population-at least initially. The USD curriculum would cut across traditional department lines, offering comprehensive interdisciplinary information related to all fields of knowledge through survey courses. And unlike the earlier junior college proposal—and at Hook's insistence—the USD faculty were now required to consult with student representatives when designing the curriculum. In a separate article in the Washington Square College *Bulletin,* Hook went so far as to recommend that there be a student president for the USD to smooth the processes along. In conjunction with Hook's publicly held educational views, the main thrust of the USD seems to be designed for students who had no particular desire for professional life or had not yet decided which major they preferred. To facilitate more reflective thinking on these matters, students would thus be exposed to an array of interrelated subject matters and cultural backgrounds via a smattering of courses. Whatever said students decided to do with their lives at the close of their second year, Hook argued that the USD would have, if efficacious, sufficiently prepared them for any, if not all, future endeavors, viz., the continuation of their educations. This might have been a somewhat controversial stand, for the boundaries between what to many constituted a liberal education and what constituted a vocational education were now deemed increasingly porous.[79]

Labeled an "experiment of unusual significance," the USD was hailed by the Chase as a program "definitely attuned to the preparation of liberal arts students for life in their own community and epoch." Faced with the fact that higher education was becoming more and more a commonplace, NYU decided to "facilitate [the] cross fertilization of ideas and continuity with the work" of Hook's junior college. As Chase confided to an associate, in the end the program would "measure the growth of personality and power" of NYU's students rather than relying

[79] *WSCB,* October 15, 1937.

entirely on their grades.[80] A dinner was held for New York City's Board of Education president, and its superintendent of schools. The school newspaper, the *WSC Bulletin* and the *New York Times* attended as well. After Milton Loomis' enthusiastic endorsement of the program, John Dewey delivered the keynote address, in which he hoped that Hook's program would catch on elsewhere.[81] Within days the *Bulletin* announced that it would endorse Hook's program, although it appears to the reader that what students found most attractive about it was the Division's plan to do away with the existing grading metrics and the requirement of examinations as an assessment tool. Surviving newspapers reveal regularly posted events involving the USD, such as open lectures, discussions, and field trips. The program was also celebrated in the school newspaper for Hook's innovative pedagogical approach.

In the spirit of this dissertation, the USD ought to be understood as an extension of Hook's larger campaigns for educational reform, a fact that, unfortunately, is difficult to substantiate because of the program's limited archival materials, as only the chancellor's reports from the 1930s describing the USD are all that remains of its history. Nevertheless, from them it is clear that for two years a student's education was, for all intents and purposes, profoundly interdisciplinary, with the humanities and social sciences courses taught with overlapping, as much as was possible, courses in the natural sciences and the arts. In terms of student requirements, assignments were to reflect this interdisciplinary approach, and would be evaluated collectively by the USD faculty. And only a faculty with a keen pedagogical sensibility and an enthusiasm for its proposed curriculum would be considered for the program.[82]

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[80] Chase to Edward Oldham, April 12, 1935. Records of the Tisch School of the Arts, Group RG 35, Box 35.
[81] "New College Plan Adopted By N.Y.U." *New York Times*, February 26, 1935, 10. See also *WSCB*, February 26th, 1935.
[82] *Chancellor's Annual Report*, 1935-1936, 16-28.

One of the more interesting aspects of the USD was its commitment to dissolving the boundaries between the liberal arts and the vocations. By conjoining scientific and social studies the program tried to enlarge the spectrum of possible vocational choices. It was clear to Hook and his supporters that the increasing impact of science on industry and, in time, on social and political institutions, would generate stores of new opportunities for study. That is, by providing students with opportunities for personal growth in the classroom, they would hopefully have a more enriched personal life. And, if all went well, after two years of USD education students would be more capable of intelligent participation in a democratic society. Based on the Chancellor's Reports, it seems that the USD, as far as Chase was concerned, was the closest thing to a truly liberal—or general—education. Insofar as it could have been distinguished from any other kind of education, the USD might well undergird and accompany all extant vocational and professional education, no matter what course a student's life took. In the midst of the Depression, the point was all the more crucial.[83] But it was this goal of academic or curricular unification that drew the most criticism.

Despite Hook's efforts, and the initial praise the USD received, trouble soon arrived. Almost from its inception the USD was a storm center both in the faculty and student body. Since the program was only open to a limited population (roughly 200 students in its first inception), across the campus students grew increasingly distrustful of the goals it set out to accomplish. Since no one could be grandfathered in, many students saw the USD as disruptive, a belief compounded by the program's limited enrollment, which, they argued, created and reinforced a caste system that contributed little to the veracity of the proposed curricular reforms and almost nothing to the college's larger culture. Textbooks designed for USD courses

[83] *Ibid*, 23.

apparently grew increasingly scarce, as bookstores, maintaining that they were largely unfamiliar with the new program, mismanaged the ordering processes. Some *WSC Bulletin* editorials lamented that the mixture of advanced and beginner students in the same USD classrooms retarded their own development, and by the end of its first semester students were calling for its dissolution, decrying it as a "failed experiment."[84]

While the complaints raged on, Hook seems to have campaigned vigorously on behalf of the USD. But the available evidence suggests that within a year his dream that USD would one day serve as a template for national educational reforms was moribund. We can only speculate, but perhaps the program was doomed because Hook and his colleagues grew increasingly frustrated by the USD's administrative and student challenges. There certainly is evidence that some of the older faculty, still angry over what happened to the cabinet, sought to undo the USD wholesale. At one meeting of the Committee on Educational Policy, Hook suggested that before anyone suggested that the USD be eliminated, or before any of the student's criticisms were redressed, the faculty had to agree on what would take its place. If no consensus could be reached, then the USD ought to remain in place. He proposed that no changes be made in curriculum until NYU as a whole and the faculty affiliated with the USD were in agreement. His motion was resoundingly defeated.[85] After a period of recovery, Hook wrote to yet again to his staunch supporter Chase "to develop a distinctive curriculum justifiable from the point of view of educational philosophy as well as [one that would be] practically effective." The problem with the USD was not the proposed content or the structure of the program, he argued. Rather the dearth of "broad educational vision, flexibility in approaching concrete problems, and a happy

[84] *WSCB* December 6, 1936. I am not aware of any publications from the University Heights Campus.
[85] "Proposals Tabled, Defeated, Postponed, Withdrawn," November 24, 1936. Records of the Tisch School of the Arts, Group RG 35, Box 51.

gift for ironing out personal and departmental conflicts" among its participants preemptively sunk the program. After all, was not the USD an "experiment," and, as such, open to further public and self-corrective inquiry? The key to a successful policy, the *sine qua non* of the university, he insisted, was for NYU "to take the lead in progressive educational policies."[86]

Chase appears to have tabled his letter, for there is no response. And with that, Hook's first attempt to reconstruct American higher education went out with a whimper. The significance of Hook's forays into educational reform at NYU can be measured by the degree to which he never gave up on seeing some variation of its premises yield significant results. As we shall see, he worked for decades to revisit the USD's goals—namely interdisciplinary and collaborative learning—and frequently drew upon his brief experience as a source of, perhaps, what might or might not work next time around. Moreover, he heartily drew upon his experience when formulating a response to the rising tide of dissent against those education views he held most dear. While they said little of Hook's little program directly, because he was so closely identified with the educational philosophy of John Dewey, Mortimer Adler and Robert Hutchins began their campaign against them. In time Hook would count them among his chief philosophical and educational adversaries, for by the mid-1930s—as Hook struggled to make the USD viable—Hutchins had garnered considerable notoriety for his attempted reconstruction of Chicago's curriculum and administration, much of which bore strong resemblance to Hook's own ventures and failures at NYU. The point is crucial, and as we shall see, Hutchins' diagnostic and reform rhetoric about American higher education often appeared identical to Hook's own analyses of NYU and beyond. Behind many of Hutchins' ideas loomed Adler, a man who seems to have been born to be right about everything. Together they would arouse the ire of a

[86] Hook to Chase, January 26, 1938. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 148.

generation of American philosophers and philosophers of education, especially Hook. But to arrive at *that* point we ought to identify those points of agreement between them.

IV. Robert Hutchins, Mortimer Adler and Making Books Great

"Education is [the same] for all, and there can be no compromise with the proposition…"[87]

At roughly the same time Hook's plans for a more coherent and better-integrated curriculum at NYU had fizzled out, a veritable counter-attack against the philosophy that underscored his plan emerged from the Midwest. Its magnetic ambassador was Robert Hutchins, who at the tender age of thirty gave up the deanship of Yale Law School to accept the presidency of the University of Chicago in 1929. Born into Ohio aristocracy, he received the very best of educations: Oberlin, Yale undergraduate, and a Yale law degree in 1920. Strikingly handsome, tall, lithe, and urbane; when Hutchins arrived at Chicago he brought with him a reputation as a "natural-born stem-winding hell-raiser" blessed with a penchant for disarming critics with epigrammatic replies, such as "[Chicago] is not a very good university. It is simply the best there is."[88] Almost as quickly as he had arrived in Hyde Park he attacked not only the extant curriculum at Chicago, but the prevailing state of American higher education as a whole. Hutchins soon set out to establish *his* university as the educational equivalent of a "City on a Hill" by thoroughly reconstructing the institution inside and out to become a model for collegiate learning. One critic noted that his efforts at reforming Chicago "threw a nice little hand grenade into the quiet groves of Parnassus," a fitting tribute to a man credited with turning the educational world upside down.[89]

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[87] Robert M. Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936), 119.
[88] Hutchins quoted in Benjamin McArthur, "The War of the Great Books," *American Heritage*, February 1989, 60.
[89] Cecil H. Driver, "Robert Maynard Hutchins v. American Education," 1428.

One example illustrates how Hutchins operated. While in Europe on a Guggenheim Fellowship, Hook was notified of an available position in the philosophy department at the University of Chicago beginning in the fall of 1929. There he would join the leading figures of the "Chicago school" of American pragmatism, which had been established by Dewey himself in 1893: the philosophical sociologist George Herbert Mead, the moral and political philosopher James Hayden Tufts, and E.A. Burtt, a philosopher of science. All of them were social activists who sought to bring philosophy closer to the concerns of the immediate community; they worked, at various times and to varying degrees, with local activists such as Jane Addams. No doubt it was quite a shock that, despite Dewey's strong recommendation, and in light of Hook's relatively impressive publishing hitherto, for some reason Hook was not appointed. In hindsight this episode could not have been more fortuitous; the semester Hook was to have begun teaching Hutchins assumed the presidency of the University, and within a year he had all but forced the resignation of the resident faculty. As a junior faculty member, surely Hook would have been one of Hutchins' many victims in the bloodless purge of 1930.[90] Hutchins brought his friend Mortimer Adler to teach in the newly razed department (at a salary higher than most of the other faculty), no doubt an insult to pragmatism and, given his temperament, a stroke of luck for Adler.[91]

If Hutchins was the ambassador to the counter-attack, Mortimer Adler was its architect. His disposition was diametrically opposite of Hutchins, for where Hutchins charmed people with

[90] Mary Ann Dzuback, *Robert M. Hutchins, Portrait of an Educator* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 92-94. Once Hutchins assumed the presidency he strove to import, by presidential fiat, the philosophers Mortimer Adler, Scott Buchanan, and Richard McKeon, all of whom were his close friends and ideological congeners. All of them but Buchannan were given positions; Adler, who had finished his dissertation in 1930, was hired at a salary greater than all of the other faculty members but Tufts.
[91] Dzuback, 92-96. See also Adler's own account, *Philosopher at Large: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 127-185.

his wit and appearance, Adler was short and ungainly, erring on the side of Peter Lorre to Hutchins' Humphrey Bogart. Moreover, Adler "lacked …conventional grace and courtesy" when dealing with others; he was often aggressive and spoiling for a fight, a stalwart polarizer who disrupted any gathering in which he attended or presented with his didactic and condescending demonstrations of what he considered to be his steel-trap logic.[92] In many respects his life paralleled Hook's: Jewish-born in New York, he too scrapped it up with his high school teachers and classmates (Adler, however, dropped out because he thought he was simply smarter than everyone else. He took a job as a reporter at the *New York Sun* shortly thereafter.). Drawn to philosophy in high school after reading John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography*, he eventually enrolled at Columbia as an undergraduate in 1920.[93] He managed to get himself excused from ROTC duties because he was too clumsy and adamantly refused to take the mandatory swim test for undergraduates. Consequently he never received his degree.

As an undergraduate Adler initially studied with Dewey, and often tormented his instructor both in class and out, challenging (or interrupting) him during his lectures and then later slipping under his door detailed typed refutations of Dewey's lecture earlier in the day. After a series of polite responses, Dewey ceased all contact with Adler, which may account for Adler later describing Dewey's philosophy as "man-centered thinking" and "goddam…bunk."[94] Despite his falling out with Dewey, Adler found inspiration in Frederick J. E. Woodbridge, with whom Adler first read Aristotle (and with whom Hook also studied), and Richard McKeon, who introduced the young Adler to St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*.

[92] Dzuback, *Robert M. Hutchins*, 100.
[93] Adler, *Philosopher at Large, xx*; Dzuback, *Robert M. Hutchins*, 88-92.
[94] Dzuback, *Robert M. Hutchins*, 95.

Adler admired Aristotle's deductive metaphysics as both a means to acquiring philosophical truth and as an alternative to what he thought was the vapid allegiance Dewey and Hook had towards science and scientific method. Soon an Aristotleophile of the highest order, Adler's philosophical passions rested on the firm foundations of Aristotle and Aquinas. He admired Aristotle's keen ability to reveal "the *logic* of concrete human experience," which to Adler signified a pure philosophy that shed light on the deeper metaphysical realities of the nature of human existence and intelligence. Aristotlean logic was, moreover, the epitome of clear thinking, a science of the highest order applicable beyond the world or ordinary experience.[95] In Aquinas, Adler saw the continuation of Aristotle's project, with one important exception: Aquinas began with a coherent system of postulates and premises and built an entire cosmology out of them, fusing them with an overarching theology—namely five irrefutable proofs for God's existence. Adler later declared in a lecture before a captive audience at Marquette University that Aquinas was not simply an alternative philosophical voice but was "philosophy itself." Therefore we need not bother the study of any other philosophical systems per se, especially those that deviated from Aquinas' framework. All philosophies that followed Aquinas—to which Adler referred to as "aberrations," "fallacies," "inept," and "confusing"—could be dismissed for not building on the firm foundations Aquinas presented.[96] Philosophy for Adler was thus a supreme vocation, a vehicle for the establishment of truth in a world fraught with the uncertainties caused by pragmatism.

Aristotle and Aquinas notwithstanding, it was Alder's 1921 introduction to John Erskine's Great Books honors course that sealed his intellectual fate. Erskine's class at Columbia

[95] Mortimer J. Adler, *What Man Has Made of Man: A Study of the Consequences of Platonism and Positvism in Psychology* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1937), 36.
[96] Adler, *Saint Thomas and the Gentiles* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1938), 5.

not only animated Adler's quest for philosophical truth but also presaged his later initiatives with Hutchins at Chicago.[97] Impressed with Adler's enthusiasm and intellect, Erskine soon had Adler leading the Great Books discussion groups and, when Adler entered graduate studies, teaching the courses themselves. Embittered by Dewey's treatment, Adler thought—quite rightly—that he would be most unwelcome to pursue graduate work in philosophy at Columbia; and as a Jew his options were limited at many other colleges or universities. Thus he entered Columbia's graduate program in psychology—determined, however, to attend philosophy department gatherings in the hopes of debunking pragmatism on Aristotlean or Aquinean grounds. While no direct evidence exists, no doubt at a few of these meetings Hook, then still a graduate student, was in attendance.[98]

Adler quickly became Hutchins' colleague and unofficial mentor shortly after they met in 1927. As Hutchins' biographer points out, since Hutchins left no account of his first meeting Adler, it is difficult to determine what brought this odd couple together. Perhaps Socrates was right, viz., that in the deepest and most meaningful relationships individuals sought those qualities they personally lacked in the other. It is clear that Adler needed Hutchins, since he had essentially burned most of his Columbia bridges while he was still on them, and his standing in the philosophical community was largely non-existent. As such his professional opportunities were limited. For his part, Hutchins was drawn by Adler's Great Books ideas, but he also could have been more drawn to Adler's convictions and tactlessness. In any event, they were

[97] For a brief summary of Erskine's Class, see Anne H. Stevens, "The Philosophy of General Education and Its Contradictions: The Influence of Hutchins," *The Journal of General Education,* 50 (2001): 168. Adler also alienated himself from many of his classmates in philosophy through sheer force; he often passionately debated someone not to in order to persuade his interlocutor of the flaws in their argument but to show that he had been right all along.
[98] Dzuback, *Robert M. Hutchins*, 90.

intellectually smitten, and determined to reshape the University of Chicago wholesale on their terms.[99]

Hutchins' arrival at Chicago in 1929 was not unlike Hook's at Washington Square. Both encountered an outmoded curricular culture, which they thought had provided immature students with too much individual responsibility for curricular choices and disciplinary specialization. Armed with this freedom of choice many students would organize their educations into a number of courses haphazardly, and the quantity of work would be taken and completed in no particular order. At both NYU and the University of Chicago the questions arose: what were they to do with the able-minded student who arrived at college with some level of cultural sophistication and intelligence, and how were they to address the needs of those less-than-equipped to handle their post-secondary education? The former group would no doubt benefit from the free elective system, while the latter group would make, in the estimation of one Harvard educator, "a hash out of their elective opportunities" and either fail or drop out.[100] Both groups, however, shared a common trait: they lacked the sufficient background and judgment to make intelligent choices among the bewildering profusion of elective courses offered every semester in their college catalogues. And not surprisingly, many students thought of their college or university solely as a means of achieving success, a tendency that persists today. Thus Hook and Hutchins agreed that students were simply too immature to determine what their education should be, and the university's obligation to the students was to do more than establish an eccentric liberal arts curriculum to stave off these tendencies.

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[99] *Ibid.*, 88-89.
[100] George P. Schmidt, *The Liberal Arts College: A Chapter in American Cultural History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1957), 208.

And like the USD, Hutchins hoped to transform his university from a collection of disjointed and specialized classes into a more unified and better-integrated curriculum, and all with restructuring the administration as a prerequisite. Hutchins also faced similar crises and consequences of the Great Depression, and witnessed widespread retrenchment and consolidation (unlike NYU, however, the University of Chicago received no Federal support in the 1930s, as its money came from the Rockefellers). He believed that universities had grown stale from the emphasis on research as well, and that consequently the student's education was narrow and second-rate at best. But that is essentially where the appearance of agreement between he and Hook ended. Hutchins unveiled his curricular alternative in 1931, cleverly naming it the "New Plan." His plan was a separate two-year college within the University dedicated solely to general education. Attendance and requirements were abrogated, as was the accounting for course credits. In their place students would simply have to prepare for a battery of comprehensive examinations, which they could take whenever they felt they were best prepared. Hutchins even sought to combine the last two years of a qualified student's high school into the first two years of college, resulting in a baccalaureate degree by the time they were sophomores.[101]

While most historians credit Hutchins' controversial and incendiary 1936 "The Higher Learning in America" with elevating debates over higher education above the trivial, he initially justified the "New Plan" in a 1933 article of the same title. Replete with invidious distinctions and an invective that would give most thinkers pause, Hutchins chastised America's colleges and universities for obsessively focusing on "teaching" to the detriment of what he referred to as "higher learning." Teaching alone, he argued, bred the vile disposition in students to brazenly

[101] A detailed account of these developments can be found in Dzuback, *Robert M. Hutchins,* Chapter 5.

pursue remunerative opportunities; the "love of money" had taken over the undergraduate soul at the expense of the life of the mind. Thus too many bright students were wasting their precious time and energy learning how to master what he thought was the cat-and-mouse game of fooling their professors by learning how to mimetically pass their classes and examinations in the hopes of securing a diploma and, then, of course a job. Students were deceiving themselves, he argued; they may have a degree but they most surely did not have what amounted to an *education*.[102] In response Hutchins ordered that a new college be created and that the curriculum be organized on his terms. The University of Chicago, he boasted, has "smashed the current system" and

> completely reorganized the curriculum, and [has] developed four courses in the fields of the social sciences, the biological sciences, the physical sciences, and the humanities, with a view to presenting the principal ideas in the four major fields of learning as the basis for a general education….[C]redits are abolished; there are no course examinations.[103]

General examinations, and not course credits, would determine a student's overall progress, and unless they became "a public nuisance," any student could repeat the examination process *ad infinitum*.[104] With the possible exception of the latter procedures, Hook would most surely have supported the bulk of Hutchins' *claims* about education, but it is an open question whether or not he would support the substance of his *proposals*.

The curricular centerpiece of Hutchins and Adler's reforms was the development of a Great Books reading program as part of a general honors college at Chicago. Inspired by Adler's mentor at Columbia John Erskine, their Great Books course comprised the weekly seminar

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[102] Robert M. Hutchins, "The Higher Learning in America," *The Journal of Higher Education* 4 (1933): 5. Perhaps foreshadowing what would later become his elitism, Hutchins epigram was "How may the American University Make Provision for the Superior Student."
[103] *Ibid.*
[104] *Ibid*., 6. Hutchins also boasted about Chicago's integration of "talking motion pictures" into the curriculum. Ironically, he hoped that their implementations use would obviate the need for otherwise time-consuming and "ineffective" experiments in the sciences.

discussion of dozens of masterpieces in all scholarly fields—literature, philosophy, economics, history—with nary a reference to their social, political, or intellectual contexts or backgrounds. Students were to meet around an oval table and engage the logic of a particular text (students were discouraged from relating their discussions to the previous week's text) in order to determine what its words "meant." Hutchins—always erudite, inquisitive, mild-mannered, and jovial—often gently pushed his students to clarify their respective positions regarding a text; Adler—with a fist-pounding or a finger pointed—badgered the students see the logical errors in the books, and pushed them until he was satisfied that they believed they were sufficiently mistaken.[105] Such good-cop/bad-cop tactics might, on the surface, strike the reader as abhorrent, but by 1933 the actresses Lillian Gish, Ethel Barrymore, and even Orson Welles stopped by the Chicago roundtable to see firsthand what the local newspapers had been talking about.[106]

Initially Hutchins, Adler, and Hook's educational proposals maintained the appearance of agreement, and one could argue that Hook would have supported these structural changes with equanimity. Based on what we have discussed thus far of Hook's programs at NYU and those at Chicago, Hook, Hutchins, and Adler all appealed to the idea of a common Western civilization. But when Hutchins published an extended version of his "The Higher Learning in America" as a book in 1936, it seemed to many that the battle for higher education was on. Indicting all American universities for their love of money, their anarchic curriculum, and their unflagging

[105] Dzuback, *Robert M. Hutchins*, 102-103. The growing popularization of the Great Books program is discussed in Benjamin McArthur, "The War of the Great Books," 57-69.
[106] Timothy N. Lacy "'Making a Democratic Culture: The Great Books Idea, Mortimer J. Adler and Twentieth-Century America" (PhD diss., Loyola University at Chicago, 2006); Lacy, "The Lovejovian Roots of Adler's Philosophy of History: Authority, Democracy, Irony, and Paradox in Britannica's *Great Books of the Western World,*" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 71 (2010): 113-137; Burton David Weltman, "Debating Dewey: The Social Ideas of American Educators since World War II, an Examination of Arthur Bestor, Jerome Bruner, Paul Goodman, John Goodland, and Mortimer Adler" (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 1996).

support of mindless vocationalism, Hutchins concluded that they had been irretrievably corrupted from within. Philosophically speaking, responsibility for these trends lay squarely on Dewey's doorstep, with a little help from a positivism that had made it way to American shores and classrooms. No greater symbol for these intellectual carcinogens was the philosophy department at Chicago, which Hutchins has successful dismantled a few years before. It remained for him to persuade—some would say condescend—other institutions into following suit. The surefire way to bring this about was a philosophical revival, and no philosopher was better suited for it than Aristotle through the lens of St. Thomas Aquinas.[107] Hutchins' polemic transformed what was initially a struggle over curricular and administrative innovations into a national debate over education, science, philosophy, and values.[108]

Dewey and Hutchins sparred in a couple of essays in *Social Frontier,* with Dewey's review of *The Higher Learning in America* the only one Hutchins ever publicly responded to. Afterwards he and Dewey remained relatively silent towards one another.[109] Despite their respective allegiances, neither Hook nor Adler directly joined the fracas. We may speculate that one reason for this was Hook's near-agreement with Hutchins' diagnoses of the perilous state of higher education in the early thirties. But once Hutchins, with considerable help from Adler, presented the *means* by which they sought to reform higher education—a philosophical recapitulation of an Aristotlean worldview rendered palatable for the thirteenth century by Aquinas—whatever had passed for agreement quickly devolved into decades of polemical

[107] Robert M. Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America, passim.*
[108] For a general account of the debate Hutchins seemingly and single-handedly initiated, see Edward A. Purcell, *The Crisis of Democratic Theory: Scientific Naturalism and the Problem of Value* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1973), especially Chapter 8.
[109] Dewey's reviews appeared as "Rationality in Education" and "President Hutchins' Proposals to Remake Higher Education," both in *Social Frontier* 3 (1936-37). See also Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism,* 341-345; Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy,* 506-507.

exchanges, religious stereotyping, and petty squabbles over the nature of philosophy and the nature of the past. The shot heard 'round the world came in the form of a complimentary letter from Adler to Hook.

Shortly after the Dewey-Hutchins exchange in *Social Frontier,* in the spring of 1937 Hook was no doubt surprised to receive a letter from Adler in praise of his recent article "Dialectic and Nature."[110] Adler had by then grown increasingly visible throughout America for his having established an entire institution on the Great Books curriculum, the present-day St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland. St. John's grew out of Hutchins' inability to establish a four-year Great Books honors college within Chicago. In pushing for such a model, Hutchins had by 1936 alienated administrator and faculty alike, and, not unlike Hook's USD, eventually his plan too was moribund. Thanks to Adler's personality (or lack thereof) he, too, alienated the faculty. In St. John's Adler had a chance to show all of his detractors the pedagogical and philosophical errors of their ways. He promised future students and administrators (as well as his potential donors, no doubt; Hutchins gave Adler hundreds of dollars a year for the first ten years of its existence and served on its board of directors.) a college that would, in effect, live out Aristotlean metaphysics and train generations in the Aristotlean contemplative life through the mastery of some 150 masterpieces, from the pre-Socratics to Bertrand Russell, and to do so one book a week. Texts, and not contexts, only need apply, and there was no mention of electives or vocationalism. He recruited his faculty from the ranks of the anti-Dewey, anti-Hook community: Stringfellow Barr, Scott Buchannan, and Richard McKeon, although McKeon never officially

[110] Hook, "Dialectic and Nature," *Marxist Quarterly* 1 (1937): 253-284.

joined the faculty, preferring his post at Chicago.[111] Adler's proposed college won the enthusiastic support of the educator Alexander Meikeljohn, himself an opponent of Dewey and Hook's views, and the journalists Walter Lippmann and Lewis Mumford. Hook would take his turn with each of them, but for now he focused his attention on Adler.

In the letter Adler praised Hook for his essay, especially for its having successfully made a case for dialectic without resorting to Marxian platitudes. But why, Adler wondered, did Hook still cling to the Deweyan fantasy of scientific method as the only basis of philosophical inquiry? Why not at least think about the absolute certainties derived from metaphysics?

Hook could not abide being complemented by a perceived enemy; given his militant atheism, that it came from a prominent neo-Thomist must have stung, and Hook's combativeness was no doubt aroused. His response, while never sent, gives further clues into how seriously Hook took the public role he thought philosophy was to assume in the 1930s. "Indeed," he began,

> unless I have been sadly misinformed and in addition, have misread some articles of yours, I think your views are positively dangerous to the whole enterprise of scientific inquiry and freedom of thought. I am bewildered at the notion that you should be sympathetic to any variety of Marxism except Stalinism which is [your] Roman Catholicism in reverse, including auto-da-fe's and heresy trials.
>
> Since I differ from you in ethics, politics, psychology, and philosophy, and you are in possession of absolute truth, is it not fair an inference that if your group [St. John's College] had state power or influenced it, you would kill me for the good of my soul and the souls of other people? Hitler beheads people who propogate [*sic*] false views on 'the one right order of goods and values'; Stalin shoots them after making them confess; would you revive the stake? This is only one reason why I—and many other people—regard your view as dangerous.[112]

[111] An excellent study of the philosophy and curriculum of the Great Books program is William Haarlow, *Great Books, Honors Programs, and Hidden Origins: The Virginia Plan and the University of Virginia in the Liberal Arts Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

[112] Hook to Mortimer Adler, n.d., filed in "Dialectic and Nature," Sidney Hook Papers, Box 42. Quoted in Richard D. Horn, "The Perils of Pragmatism," 609. Horn's use of the letter has more to do with Hook's moving ever further away from his Marxism via Marx's removal from Hook's own dialectical philosophy.

Even though he decided against sending this white-hot letter—he did send a far more mild sentiment opposing "all varieties of authoritarianism, both in politics and philosophy"—Adler would soon give Hook a better, more public, opening with which to commence his fifty-year battle with Adler, Hutchins, and anyone who openly supported the Great Books curriculum. For now Hook saw in the burgeoning unified movement among the neo-Thomists, "a gathering storm" of Catholic thinkers set to undermine all that science and the scientific method set out to do. Leading Catholic thinkers such as Jacques Maritain, who would later ally himself with St. John's College, argued that if American democracy were to survive (and he was saying this as war in Europe had broken out), it must perforce rediscover its reputed roots in the traditions of natural law handed down from Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. Collectively Maritain, Adler, and Hutchins soon—and quite publicly—charged Hook and Dewey with heresy, labeling pragmatism "scientism" for its emphasis on science and scientific method, and tantamount to nihilism.[113] By 1940 Hook must have thought that a comprehensive anti-naturalist, pro-Catholic movement was afoot, and within a year he would have his deepest suspicions confirmed. In distinguishing his position from Dewey and Hook's into two competing worldviews—the "modernists" (Hook) versus the "traditionalists"—Adler certainly lent some credibility to Hook's suspicions.

By the end of the 1930s Hook decided to take on Adler and Hutchins, anointing them the leaders of the "counter-reformation" in American education and politics. Was Hook overstating the case? That is, was he reading more unity into his opposition than was the case? Perhaps, but Adler and Hutchins had repeatedly identified Dewey and Hook as the whipping boys for the

[113] Purcell, *Crisis of Democratic Theory*, Chapter 8.

Fall—positivism and pragmatism. And in the political arena writers like Lewis Mumford and Walter Lippmann argued that pragmatism bred immorality or, worse *a*morality through the worship of power, a worship that left America as a nation unprepared for the rising tides of Mussolini and Hitler. In the universities their allies Adler and Hutchins blamed Hook and Dewey for reducing the curriculum to the exposition of details, with nary an appeal to theology or philosophy's First Principles. Were Americans to follow Hook's model all education was merely technical training, mere *vocationalism*—Aristotle to the rescue! Again, if Hook was overstating his position at the end of the thirties, in the spring of 1940 Adler would provide him with a better opening with which to launch an attack.

From a discussion of Hook's educational activism in the 1930s we may take away that unique mixture of very common ingredients for all of his subsequent debates: his dedication to and publicity of philosophical precision and logical consistency; a sense of intellectual confidence; and a desire to combine these two in the educational arena. While tactically these may have produced very little, in intellectual circles outside of NYU Hook found himself on the defensive. This brief sketch of Hook's spirited encounters with Mortimer Adler and Robert Hutchins's ideas endeavored to set the stage for remainder of this dissertation, for just as "The Obligation of Universities to the Social Order," appeared to polarize the American intellectual community in New York—into the Adlerian categories of "traditionalists" verses "modernists"—Hook's exchanges with Adler and Hutchins affected American intellectual and educational life in general. Although it did not always take the form of a heated public exchange, Hook's debate with Adler and his allies serves as an entry point into the single most comprehensive expression of his philosophical outlook, *Education for Modern Man*. To get there

Hook would have to fight the Catholic powers-that-be in New York City, and, then, Adler himself.

Chapter Three

The Age of Exaggeration: The Fight Over Philosophy's Future

> "I engaged with [Adler and Hutchins] because most often no one else was willing to do so."[1]

In the years leading up to World War II Dewey and Hook's educational theory came under increasingly sharp attack. Excoriating him for "cutting education from its traditional moorings," theologians and conservative intellectuals alike declared open season on Dewey, ushering in an era when anyone, regardless of their political commitments or professional qualifications, could publish an exposition of what they understood those traditional moorings to be.[2] To this end, Catholics and Catholic intellectuals in New York City singled out Dewey, his followers, and American pragmatism in general as, ironically, "un-American."[3] Priests solicited the help of forces beyond America's altars, and it was not long before Stringfellow Barr, Jacques Maritain, Alexander Meiklejohn and a host of intellectuals lent their support to the anti-Dewey, anti-Hook, anti-science, and anti-technology crusade.[4]

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[1] Hook to Barbara Forrest, November 10th, 1987, in Barbara Forrest, "Naturalism and Education," 320.
[2] Cremin, *The Transformation of the School*, 237-245.
[3] "Naturalism Here is Seen Declining," *New York Times*, October 28, 1939*;* "Catholic Teachers Found Too Secular*," New York Times,* April 16, 1936; "John Dewey's Aims Held Un-American,"*New Yotk Times*, October 23, 1939. For a brief discussion of this attitude towards progressive education, see Jay Martin, *The Education of John Dewey: A Biography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 449-458. This was doubly ironic because Dewey spent a great deal of time and energy criticizing those Progressive educators who claimed to be carrying out his message and practices.
[4] James Gilbert, *Redeeming Culture: American Religion in an Age of Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); the anti-Dewey crusade gets a paragraph in John T. McGreevy, "Thinking on One's own: Catholicism in the American Intellectual Imagination, 1928-1960" *The Journal of American History*, 84 (1997): 111; and McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001). Even though Purcell's *The Crisis of Democratic Theory* is devoted to the complex intellectual matrix within which the developments in naturalism and traditionalism took place and often conflicted, as we shall see he ignores the Bertrand Russell Case altogether. In light of the degree to which scholars critical of Dewey personally or pragmatism in general rely on Purcell's insights this is striking.

With varying degrees of emphasis, historians generally agree that in the 1930s and 1940s American "intellectuals increasingly feared that Catholicism might create a disposition amenable to authoritarian rule."[5] These intellectuals were allegedly as obsessed with Catholic influence in America as were those who sincerely believed that Soviet Communism had taken a considerable foothold in American life. The crucial difference, they argued, was that Communists largely operated surreptitiously, a fact that only exacerbated the concerns of many American intellectuals like Hook. On the other hand, Catholics were fairly straightforward and always public in their desire to reform American culture in the hopes of redeeming American society and, then, perhaps the world. While tactically opposed to one another, these tendencies nevertheless fed off of one another.

To many thinkers evidence for such a theological cabal abounded, and reached its apex when the New York City Board of Education's decided to rescind Bertrand Russell's appointment at the College of the City of New York (CCNY). This episode represented an important but overlooked element of Hook's intellectual and political development, viz., the extent to which his running debates with the Adlerians on religion, metaphysics shaped (or re-shaped) his educational theory.

The development of Hook's educational writings of the 1940s was shaped by two causally unrelated but ominously coincidental events: Russell's hiring at CCNY and the famous series of conferences hosted by Rabbi Louis Finklestein under the title "Conference on Science Philosophy, and Religion, in their Relation to the Democratic Way of Life." Hook understood these episodes as proof positive that behind each was the authoritarian infection of America's

[5] McGreevy, "Thinking on One's Own,"112. See also Thomas E. Woods, *The Church Confronts Modernity: Catholic Intellectuals and the Progressive Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

institutions of higher learning. Examining these events also clarifies why and when he chose to write his educational treatise, *Education for Modern Man.* Before linking them to Hook's educational treatise, however, some knowledge of their shared history is required.

As is the case in most literature on Hook or Hook's experiences among the literary intellectuals of the twentieth century, most treatments of this period have emphasized the stridency with which they treated each other rather than the substance—the grounds—upon which they were defended. Our task will be to ameliorate these tendencies through a close reading of the published and unpublished materials of the time.

I. "Tendencies of A Fateful Sort": The Politics of Philosophy

> Adler [is] a man who [has] "imbibed the dogmatism of Catholic philosophy but not its wisdom."[6]

Hook sarcastically credited Mortimer Adler with advancing the Catholic Church's positions regarding Dewey "in a more finished and sophisticated form."[7] An Aristotleophile of the highest order and a Jacques Maritain protégé, Adler's philosophical passions lie with bringing the firm foundations of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas to bear on contemporary philosophical and educational problems. Adler admired Aristotle for his having revealed "the logic of concrete human experience," which to Adler was a pure philosophy that illuminated the deeper metaphysical realities behind the nature of human existence and intelligence. Additionally, logic was the epitome of clear thinking, a science of the highest order applicable beyond the world or ordinary experience.[8] Many of Adler's attacks against naturalism in general and Dewey and

[6] Hook, "The Baptism of Aristotle and Marx," *The Nation*, April 9, 1938, 415-416.
[7] *Ibid*., 417.
[8] Adler, *What Man Has Made of Man: A Study of the Consequences of Platonism and Positivism in Psychology* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1937), 36.

Hook in particular followed from this alleged worship of "ordinary experience." From Aquinas Adler saw the continuation of Aristotle's project, with one important exception: Aquinas began with a coherent system of postulates and premises, and then built an entire cosmology on them. And Aquinas' entire project, underwritten by theology, was seen as a meditation upon Aristotle's *De Anima* (or *On the Soul*). Adler was so thoroughly inspired by Aquinas, and convinced that he was *prima facie* true, that Adler declared before a captive audience at Marquette University that Aquinas was not simply an alternative philosophical voice within the Western tradition but was "philosophy itself." As such, Aquinas signaled the end of extant philosophy.[9] All philosophies that came after Aquinas—to which Adler often used the terms "aberrations," "fallacies," "inept," and "confusing" to describe them—were to be taken to task for not building on the firm foundations he presented. Philosophy for Adler was thus conceived as a supreme vocation, a vehicle for the establishment of Truth via Logic in a world fraught with uncertainties. And the most conspicuous source of philosophical uncertainty, he concluded, was "positivism" or "pragmatism." To ameliorate the situation Adler suggested to his followers that they take seriously the reform of America's institutions of higher learning. Soon the famed educators Alexander Meikeljohn, Robert M. Hutchins, and Scott Buchanan joined the educational crusade for America's salvation.[10]

Adler's interest in and promotion of Aquinas perplexed many. As a nonobservant Jew, his Thomistic enthusiasms caught many intellectuals off guard. Chief among their difficulties was the fact that there existed little in the area of a consensus over what, in effect, Aquinas'

[9] Adler, *Saint Thomas and the Gentiles* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1938), 5.
[10] *Ibid*., Chapter four; See also Timothy N. Lacy, "Making a Democratic Culture," especially Chapter two. Meiklejohn's engagement with both Adler and Hutchins and then with Hook is documented in Adam R. Nelson, *Education and Democracy: The Meaning of Alexander Meiklejohn, 1872-1964* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001).

philosophy represented. Aquinas tackled numerous questions that philosophers had been choking on for centuries: ethics, the existence of God, the soul, the nature of evil, and man's ultimate happiness (to name a few). At bottom, however, were his deeply theological interests and the assumption that God *did* exist, and that many of Aquinas' premises followed from this "first question." No wonder, then, that Aquinas had become the house philosopher for the Catholic Church. Thus many wondered: was Adler therefore a shill for the Catholic Church? Many of Adler's colleagues at the University of Chicago, where he had already amassed a sufficient list of philosophical enemies, thought his near-obsession with Aquinas "perverse."[11]James T Farrell, a native Chicagoan familiar with Adler, rather cruelly labeled him "the leading American fellow traveler of the Roman Catholic Church."[12]

For all of Mortimer Adler's philosophical shortcomings, it was his philosophical and institutional influence, especially at the University of Chicago, where he and Hutchins intended to reform its curriculum "in accordance with the spirit of Adler's thought," that Hook urged his colleagues to give Adler's books "more critical attention than until now [they have] received."[13] The combined effects of Adler's writings and the events at Chicago and, later, St. John's College were very much on Hook's mind in the late 1930s, and he broadcast his concerns at the inaugural meeting of the "Conference on Methods in Philosophy and the Sciences," a small gathering of naturalist philosophers and their sympathizers at the New School for Social Research. The conference was established specifically to consider "the common opinion that there exists at

[11] These issues are raised in Lacy, "Making a Democratic Culture," Chapter two; and Haarlow, *Great Books, Honors Programs, and Hidden Origins*, 34-37.
[12] James T. Farrell, "Mortimer J. Adler: A Provincial Torquemada," *Partisan Review* 8, November-December, 1940, 453. The reference is to Tomás Torquemada, a leader in the Spanish Inquisition. It is important to note that Adler himself did not formally join a Christian church until he was baptized as an Episcopalian in 1984. He did, however, embrace Catholicism in the last year of his life, 1999.
[13] Hook, "The Baptism of Aristotle and Marx," *The Nation*, April 9, 1938, 415.

present a strong and growing trend towards dogmatic authoritarianism, in philosophy and the sciences."[14] Hook's keynote speech, titled "Storm Signals in Philosophy," sounded the alarm.

Hook's address began, as did so many of his philosophical essays, by canvassing the state of philosophy in America as he found it. And what he found was that the first few decades of the twentieth century had celebrated science and scientific method as the best means of opening new fields of inquiry and in solving technical problems. In light of the veritable "fructification of philosophic activity" manifested in American pragmatism and the various stripes of European Positivism, philosophy moved further away from the construction of grand metaphysical schema from which all other fields of inquiry were derived to a general "scientific approach" to all academic disciplines.[15] The only dissenters had been "elderly gentlemen who were still curiously agonized about their souls and their probable habitat in the hereafter…" What kept these dissenters at bay was the relative stability of the American economy and, by implication, the American polity. Thus the issue was largely an academic one, pitting advocates of the scientific method against their detractors.[16] But the Great Depression changed all that, Hook argued, for it liberated social forces that threatened to carry the scientific method and its effects deep into American economic and political affairs. At the same time the last vestiges of America's "genteel tradition" mounted a counter-attack in their last philosophical stronghold, the field of ethics. These philosophical nostalgists were unwittingly aided by many of the cruder enthusiasts of "scientism," who maintained that the scientific method was free of ethical concerns, and the

[14] Unpublished and unfinished typescript by Gail Kennedy, "Proceedings of the Conference on Methods in Philosophy and the Sciences," filed in "Philosophy Notes." Sidney Hook Papaers, Box 196. The Conference is briefly mentioned in Gilbert, *Redeeming Culture*, 64.
[15] Hook, "Storm Signals in American Philosophy," *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, Winter 1938, 30.
[16] *Ibid*., 31-32.

logical positivists who dismissed ethical questions—expressed in value judgments—as meaningless and, therefore, philosophically uninteresting.[17]

Hook's greater concern was for those intellectuals *outside* of the academy, who continued to blame technological failures of every sort on scientific method wholesale, and those for whom values remained both necessary and meaningful. It was they who were easy prey to philosophical trends to ground traditional—and usually socially and economically conservative—values within a system of metaphysical truths guided by personal intuitions. The most conspicuous representatives of these systems were the European philosophers Søren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger; the worst of them were the neo-Thomists, who insisted that values were supra-temporal and "trans-empirical."[18] The point for Hook was that, in the presence of reactionary forces that may very well capitalize on this confusion, the once-moribund "genteel tradition" showed signs of developing "from…a set of ornamental attitudes into an obscurantist cloak for authoritarian techniques."[19]

The advanced guard of such a reaction, proclaimed Hook, were the neo-Thomists Adler and Hutchins. They came outfitted with a "program for the reorganization of the whole of our social life," as well as a philosophy of education. Both operated from the premise that philosophical truth was accessible, that it is one, absolute, and knowable; opinions that deviated from them were "absolute errors" that Hook was convinced "must lead to the corruption of minds and weakening of the foundations of public order." For Hook the neo-Thomists' cardinal sin was the absence of tolerance for differing opinions: "To the best of my knowledge—or rather

[17] *Ibid*., 32. For a broader historical swath of these developments, see Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America*, Chapter 12.
[18] While Hook's engagement with Heidegger (and others) occupies some space in Chapter five, he first encountered his work while studying in Germany in 1928. See Hook, "A Personal Impression of Contemporary German Philosophy," *Journal of Philosophy* 27 (1930): 141-160.
[19] Hook, "Storm Signals," 35-36.

opinion," he argued, "the only thing left uncertain in the view is whether heresy is to be combated by the stake of the headman's axe."[20]

Anticipating the objection that such tendencies were influentially impotent and, at best, were "evanescent in character," Hook pointed out that these ideas could capitalize on America's unstable social situation (circa 1937). That such forces had chosen for "their most effective incubating grounds"—America's colleges and universities—merely pressed the point further. "Authoritarianism looks to the schools in order to regiment thought; anti-authoritarianism in order to liberate it. But in either case both must look at the schools as a field of utmost strategic importance."[21] Dewey agreed, and suggested that authoritarianism tragically affected "the inherent way we educate people" by subordinating understanding the world in which we find it to the examination of what time-tested metaphysical truths lie behind that which we are investigating.[22]

Given America's dark times, one could not predict what turn events might take, and how many confused, disaffected, and diffident students might be won over to the camp of the actively intolerant. "Scientists cannot afford to be indifferent to the possibility that authoritarianism may become first a complacency tolerated, then an accepted, and finally a dominant mode of thought," Hook declared. While he presently recommended mainly a strengthening and clarifying of the ways that scientific methods were applied to social problems, Hook clearly expected that the battle against fascism would soon be fought in America's colleges and universities. Thus he was not only worried about what the neo-Thomists were saying but what, given the requisite conditions, they were capable of doing to undermining American democratic

[20] *Ibid*., 39.
[21] *Ibid*., 42.
[22] Dewey quoted in Gilbert, *Redeeming Culture*, 64.

institutions.[23] While on the surface these comments sound paranoidal, matters uptown—both at his alma mater, CCNY, and near Columbia University—as well as in Annapolis, Maryland, would soon lend credence to his convictions. Hook nonetheless sounded the call for a struggle between philosophical naturalists and absolutists, the outcome of which would shape debates over the philosophy of education for the foreseeable future.

The storm that Hook predicted broke forth in 1940. That spring there was news that a constellation of religious orders had sufficiently pressured the College of the City of New York (CCNY) internal administration as well as the city government to rescind the appointment of one of the world's most famous philosophers, Bertrand Russell. Then Hook's nemeses, Adler and Maritain were slated to appear on the program with him at a conference at the Jewish Theological Seminary later that fall. Together they came to signify a "failure of nerve" among intellectuals committed to an anti-scientific, anti-pragmatic ethos. More important, however, is how their positions would affect higher education.

Were it not so rife with pettiness, and were the consequences for higher education not so dire for Hook, "The Bertrand Russell Case," as it came to be known, had all the ingredients of a vaudevillian romp: death-defying philosophical acrobatics, comedic justifications in favor of usurping the institutional powers of a secular college, and a few trained animals who willfully functioned as covert operatives for the entire enterprise.

II. "Beware the British Serpent": America's Prurient Philosopher

> The teacher who urges doctrines subversive to existing authority does not, if he is a liberal, advocate the establishment of a new authority even more tyrannical than the old. He advocates certain limits to the exercise of authority, and he wishes these limits to be observed not only when the authority would support a

[23] Hook, "Storm Signals," 38.

> creed with which he disagrees but also when it would support one with which he is in complete agreement.[24]

Nearly seventy years later, the Bertrand Russell Case serves as a veritable "how to" guide for an intellectual lynching. Few historians have effectively examined fully the institutional milieu within which it took place, however, and the following attempts to move beyond the sensationalist, journalistic approach to the scandal, broadening events at CCNY to NYU.

In February 1940, New York City's Board of Higher Education unanimously approved the appointments of two new faculty members to (CCNY). One was rather innocuous: the reputable psychologist, Gardner Murphy was successfully lured away from his post at Columbia University.[25] The other was Bertrand Russell.

Russell was a British earl whose paternal grandfather had once been Prime Minister. Not that his pedigree influenced his appointment, however; he was, by the 1910s, "probably the world's most renowned living philosopher" for having co-authored, along with the venerated mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, the *Principia Mathematica*. The *Principia* is almost single-handedly responsible for the development, in the late 1920s and 1930s, of "philosophical analysis" in England and America. After its publication, in many ways philosophy was never the same.[26]

Given his international reputation, the Board of Education's chairman, Ordway Tead, was instructed to contact Russell personally. It was "with a deep sense of privilege" that Tead did so, and he assured the earl that his "acceptance [of the appointment] would add luster to the name and achievements of [CCNY,] and that it will deepen and extend its interest[s] to the philosophic

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[24] Bertrand Russell in "The Best Answer to Fanaticism–Liberalism," *The New York Times Magazine*, December, 16th, 1951.
[25] Thomas Weidlich, *Appointment Denied: The Inquisition of Bertrand Russell* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2000), 112.
[26] *Ibid*., 10.

bases of human living." And Tead was most surely not overstating the case. Russell's appointment was perhaps the most prestigious in higher education since Columbia University persuaded John Dewey to abandon his post at the University of Chicago in 1904.[27]

Institutionally Russell's appointment was a godsend. His health in decline, Morris Cohen, the intellectual masthead of the philosophy department, shocked his colleagues by announcing his retirement effective the fall of 1938. Harry Overstreet, the department's chairman, followed with his own retirement effective the fall of 1939. Their departures provided Nelson P. Mead, CCNY's president, with sufficient justification to simultaneously hire Russell and to fend off criticisms that the college was hiring an expensive celebrity in a time of widespread financial distress. Considering CCNY "singularly fortunate" to have landed a philosopher of Russell's stature, Mead rationalized that his appointment would provide a much-needed revenue stream via increased enrollments.[28]

The philosophy department could hardly contain their enthusiasm at the prospect of Russell's joining their ranks. With Mead they, too, believed his appointment made sense, but for reasons that deviated from the president's. As the philosophy faculty canvassed the philosophical scene in 1940 for potential replacements for Cohen and Overstreet—two of CCNY's distinguished philosophers and revered teachers who dedicated themselves to the thankless committee work as well—they were flabbergasted that Russell was, in effect, available. We say "in effect" because he was technically still under contract to UCLA through 1942. But Russell and his much younger wife had added yet another child to Russell's already large family, and Russell was prepared to offer his services to the highest bidder. Cohen criticized the

[27] Tead quoted in *Ibid*.
[28] "Russell to Teach at City College," *New York Times*, February 27, 1940.

appointment; CCNY's students would not be able to understand Russell's deeply technical philosophy. In the end Cohen offered only tepid support for the appointment. But Yervant Krikorian, who had succeeded Overstreet as department chairperson, ignored Cohen and helped lure Russell away from sunny California at the then-munificent sum of eight thousand dollars. He would be teaching introductory logic and several advanced courses in mathematical philosophy. As one of the few philosophers whose work left him "tongue-tied" Hook was no doubt euphoric over the prospect of being in such close proximity to Russell.[29]

Krikorian was equally ebullient, but for far more ulterior motives. He had hitherto spent his career outside of the "publish-or-perish" school, and he saw in Russell's appointment a vehicle for his own career ambitions. With Russell in tow he could continue editing his anthology on American philosophic naturalism, which by 1940 was still in its infancy. Moreover, Russell's age—he was 68 at the time of his appointment—bought Krikorian at least two years to finish the book, which would, he hoped, lead to a promotion. CCNY's bylaws mandated that all professors retire at the age of 70, which further suggests that Krikorian's support for Russell's appointment had more to do with internal politics than Russell's philosophical acumen. This may explain why, according to various accounts of the process, Krikorian insisted on inviting Russell over and above any younger candidates.[30]

Further evidence suggests that less than six months prior to Mead's announcing Russell's post, the president reached out to C.J. Ducasse, a philosopher at Brown University and friend of Hook's possessed a respectable body of publications and was nearly thirty years younger than Russell. Mead gauged Ducasse's interest in the vacant CCNY position. After some talk Ducasse

[29] Hook's reverence for Russell is well documented in Hook, *Out of Step*, Chapter 27. Quote is from 359.
[30] Weidlich, *Appointment Denied*, 26.

seemed convinced that his relocation was imminent. Inexplicably communication between him and Mead abruptly stopped, and Ducasse learned about the Russell appointment via Mead's statement in the *New York Times*.[31]

Outside CCNY a veritable storm center was forming. Convinced that he constituted a "danger and a menace to the health, morals, and welfare of the students who attend[ed]" CCNY, within a week of the announcement regarding Russell's appointment representatives of New York City's religious leaders moved to rescind it.[32] Protests appeared in a letter from William T. Manning, an Episcopalian Bishop who cited Russell's opposition to religion and traditional morality as sufficient grounds for rescindment. Following this example, several prominent Catholic spokesmen and journals joined Manning, and soon the battle lines were drawn, with local clergy, church-related lay organizations, and politicians demanding that the appointment be nullified on one side and scores of academic figures from all around the country supporting Russell on the other. As the increasingly absurd details of the case against Russell emerged, Hook threw himself squarely into the fray. Almost immediately the Russell Case became the "cause célèbre" in the battles over American education in the 1940s.[33]

Ignoring the fact that CCNY was an all-male institution, Jean Kay, a Jewish housewife from Brooklyn, raised the most far-fetched charges against Russell. She filed a taxpayer's suit against the Board of Higher Education, purportedly fearing for her daughter's safety should the latter be allowed to one day attend one of Russell's classes or, worse, should her daughter be courted by a young man who had. She added that Russell was an alien who promoted infidelity

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[31] C. J. Ducasse to Sidney Hook, May 24, 1940. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 11.
[32] Ray Monk, *Bertrand Russell: The Ghost of Madness, 1921-1971* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 235; Weidlich, *Appointment Denied*, *passim;* Thomas Kessner, *Fiorello LaGuardia and the Making of Modern New York* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989), 474-476.
[33] David A. Hollinger, "Science as a Weapon in *Kulturkampf* in the United States during and after World War II," *Isis* 86 (1995): 443.

(which was true; he advocated it so long as no children were produced, a reflection of his own behavior), was married three times, had seduced his own son's wife (also true), and, did not appear to have a principle that opposed homosexuality. All told, Russell was lewd and immoral, and her daughter ought not be subject to such an educational menace. Two days later Judge John McGeehan—an Irish Catholic who once sought to remove a picture of Martin Luther from the courthouse—ruled in favor of Kay, and voided the appointment on the grounds that Russell was "unfit to teach." In his verdict McGeehan cited the four of Russell's books he read over a two-day period, going into great—and libelous—detail. In effect, Russell's appointment threatened the purity of America's women.[34]

Under Hook's leadership the Committee for Cultural Freedom (CCF) made one of its last gestures, joining the chorus of university intellectuals in support of Russell. When Manning's letter first appeared, Hook fired off a letter on behalf of the CCF to the New York *Herald Tribune*, which had been publishing a sustained correspondence between Russell's more severe critics. The objections against Russell, Hook asserted, were hardly novel; indeed, they had been used against Socrates, Spinoza, and even Thomas Aquinas. "The history of science and art," he maintained, "is replete with cases of persecution of social, political, and religious dissenters by men of established power and institutional position, who have identified their personal prejudices with unalterable first principles. Our time, as the assault on Mr. Russell indicates, shows no improvement on that earlier condition." Any attempt to remove Russell would "open the way to

[34] Much of Weidlich's *Appointment Denied* is culled from *New York Times* articles. Kessner, *Fiorello LaGuardia*, 475. The books chosen had nothing to do with the classes Russell was hired to teach: *What I Believe* (1925), *Education and the Good Life* (1926), *Marriage and Morals* (1929), and *Education and the Modern World* (1932).

imposing in the United States the worst features of the totalitarian regimes in German and Russian universities." [35]

Hook tried to get what was left of the Committee for Cultural Freedom to sponsor an event for Russell to give a talk in the hopes of public vindication. Were all the newspapers to carry the text of Russell's speech, he believed, more and more voices of support would be roused. For added measure, he suggested that a public speech by Russell would no doubt line the latter's pockets; he might also consider a series of talks for the public. This suggests that Russell's plight was something of a personal crusade for Hook, and the sources of his level of involvement in the case and its consequences can be traced to his personal regard and deep feelings toward Russell, as well as his equally deep but contemptuous feelings for Adler, Catholics, and, well, most anybody opposed to Russell's appointment. Together he found the methods practiced by the Catholic Church and Adler abominable.[36]

Anxious to avoid any further publicity for Russell's supporters or, worse, his opponents, Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia cut the position from CCNY's appropriation in his annual budget. That he was up for re-election in 1941 and was afraid of losing the Catholic vote certainly shaped his decision. On LaGuardia's orders, the Corporation Counsel for the City of New York, the city's lawyers, refused to appeal the case, leaving the Board of Higher Education without representation. Even though he had maintained his silence throughout the proceedings, at the last minute Russell attempted to challenge the ruling. McGeehan denied his motions, and that was

[35] Hook, "An Attack on Freedom," *New York Herald Tribune*, March 9, 1940.
[36] Hook to Bertrand Russell, April 8, 1940. See also Russell to Hook, March 22, 1940; Hook to Russell, April 8, 1940; and Russell to Hook, April 14, 1940, Sidney Hook Papers, Box 156.

that. By judicial and mayoral fiat the offer of a position to one of the twentieth century's greatest philosophers was revoked.[37]

Undeterred by these fireworks, at NYU Hook immediately sprang into action. Once Russell's appointment had been nullified Hook offered Russell a position in his philosophy department.[38] However enthusiastic he was, Hook cautioned Russell that he needed the approval of Chancellor Harry Woodburn Chase first. Since Hook and Chase had a fairly well established rapport from the USD, and in light of the fact that Chase had fired off a vehement defense of Russell's right to teach in the *New York Times*, all signs pointed to Chase's approving the post.[39] In his piece, Chase argued that no church had any more right to meddle in the affairs of a publicly funded institution than Russell had any right to tell the church to change their rules in light of his liberal sexual attitudes.[40] In addition to Hook's commendations, Chase was besieged with letters from Russell supporters lauding his courage and convictions.

In an unusual turn of events, Hook found out from his friend and colleague Horace Kallen that, because of the public backlash to his appointment, Chase suggested Russell should stay in California. Kallen's involvement with Russell's plight at CCNY should not surprise us, since the nature of the fracas between the forces of religion and academic freedom repudiated his principle of cultural pluralism. From his post at the New School for Social Reasearch, Kallen devised a political philosophy within which each culture or ethnicity could retain its autonomy

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[37] Kessner, *Fiorello LaGuardia,* 480; Weidlich, *Appointment Denied*, Chapter 14. See also "The Bertrand Russell Case: The History of A Litigation," *Harvard Law Review* 53 (1940): 1192-1197; "The Bertrand Russell Litigation," *The University of Chicago Law Review* (1941): 316-325.

[38] The Russell crisis was not new to Hook. In 1928 he persuaded NYU Chancellor Chase to hire Hans Reichenbach, the brilliant philosopher of science, to a full professorship, only to be blocked by Reichenbach's host institution, the University of Istanbul, who would not release him from his contract. See Hook, *Out of Step*, 111.

[39] *New York Times,* April 18, 1940.

[40] Chase, "Academic Freedom Upheld," *New York Times*, April 17, 1940.

and traditions. In exchange they could not move to suppress the rights of other cultures or ethnicities to do the same. The necessary conditions for the mutual respect for all cultures, he argued, were best realized under American democratic institutions. With Hook, Kallen soon maintained that the Catholic Church exhibited all of the traits consistent with authoritarian tendencies on the rise in Europe.[41] In a letter to Kallen Chase took Hook and Kallen to task for trying to arrange for Russell to speak in New York City—Hook even wanted for NYU to host a fundraiser on Russell's behalf—and for creating a dangerous environment in the city's colleges.[42] Despite what may very well have been heated entreaties, Chase subsequently denied Hook's request on the grounds that Bishop Manning and his followers would produce another Mrs. Kay, and direct all of his and the Church's energies at Chase and NYU. Hook responded that *because* of Russell's situation there would be a groundswell of intellectual support, and more so because of the way in which the issue was ultimately settled. Chase, however, saw Hook's proposal as too politically volatile to justify to the trustees. As a privately-funded institution, Chase no doubt feared an even sharper decline in enrollments and endowments. One can only wonder what the NYU philosophy department would have looked like in 1942. Despite how he felt about the Russell affair at CCNY, Chase was squeamish when it came to open confrontation, no matter what the magnitude. The once-effective tandem of Hook and Chase would never be the same.

In the immediate aftermath of Judge McGeehan's ruling against Russell and CCNY, Hook took to the intellectual streets in support of the beleaguered philosopher. Together with

[41] David Hollinger, "Democracy and the Melting Pot Reconsidered," in Hollinger, *In the American Province: Studies in the History and Historiography of Ideas* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1985), 92-104.
[42] Chase to Horace Kallen, April 24th, 1940. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 156.

Dewey and Kallen, Hook tested the limits of decency by lambasting the priesthood in general and Catholicism in particular.

Hook's essay on what he maintained was "The General Pattern" in American intellectual life that the Russell case exposed, began with an economic analysis of contemporary America: since modern industrialized economies were becoming collectivized anyway, the crucial question was whether or not the "free market of ideas" could survive. As was the case in Germany, Russia, and Italy, powerful forces were arrayed against the survival of such a free market. In several recent cases, he suggested, Catholic priests and lay organizations had pressured public or other non-Catholic organizations to cancel appearances by speakers, or demanded the firing of public university professors. The moral was clear. "The spearpoint of the offensive against the separation of church and state in the United States is the Catholic Church," he began,

> For a number of reasons, plain speaking about the role of the Catholic Church in public and political affairs is discouraged. Not least among the reasons is the manner in which even the gentlest criticism is received by the Church, whose representatives have not been sparing of the most scathing pronouncements against others.[43]

In an early attempt to homogenize all dogmatists as authoritarians, Hook portended that

> Just as the Communist Party seeks to silence any critic of its philosophy and program with the cry "Red-baiting!" so many Catholic dignitaries wail "Bigotry!" as a reply to any criticism, no matter how sweetly reasonable, of their political ways.[44]

It seems here that Hook went out of his way to state that he meant not to attack the religious freedom of Catholics or any other group, but to speak frankly about the reactionary political

[43] Hook, "The General Pattern," in *The Bertrand Russell Case*, ed. John Dewey and Horace Kallen, (New York: Viking, 1941), 197.
[44] *Ibid*.

actions of a group determined to roll back religious freedom. Even were Americans to grant the claim that democratic institutions required some kind of religious grounding, Hook argued, we would then need to determine which religious traditions were best suited to the task. The issue for Hook was thus not entirely polemical or political but epistemic.

But the Catholic Church did not appear to Hook at all interested in allowing any such free determination. Once in power it would suppress the very religious pluralism that it now invoked to protect itself against criticism. There was some truth to this. In light of McGeehan's ruling the Brooklyn-based Catholic newspaper *The Tablet*, expressed the hope that his decision would signal a movement to abolish all of New York City's municipal colleges.[45] Additionally, the American Parents Committee on Education organized a rally in 1940 to publicly denounce, among others, Dewey, Russell and Eleanor Roosevelt for breeding irreligion, toleration for divergent viewpoints, and establishing a "fifth column" within America's schools and universities. Collectively their tolerance was a "sickly anemic thing" that fostered immorality, licentiousness, and a universe without values.[46]

Hook also cited passages from John Ryan and Francis Boland's influential *Catholic Principles or Politics*, published the same year as the Russell case unfolded, to further invert the Catholic-Communist analogy:

> Just as members of the Communist Party profess a belief in the Bill of Rights until such time as they come to power, when the Bill of Rights will be denied to non-Communists, so authoritative Catholics invoke an appeal for religious tolerance now, until such time as they come to power, when tolerance of religious heresy will cease.[47]

[45] The tale is communicated between John Dewey and William Hocking, May 16, 1940. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 175.
[46] "Academic Freedom Abused, Says Lawyer," *New York Times* May 24, 1940.
[47] Hook, "The General Pattern," 200.

Like Communism, Catholicism had its fair share of fellow-travelers in people like Mortimer Adler and Robert Hutchins, Hook continued. And they were also naïve, for although Hutchins did not often understand the totalitarian implications of his own doctrines, his more enthusiastic Catholic supporters did indeed. In light of the coalescence of authoritarian forces, "[t]he battle for a free American culture, at home as well as at our frontiers," he concluded, "is on."[48] Within a decade he would broaden these concerns into a manifesto dedicated to the cause of academic freedom, analogizing Catholicism and Communism more deeply than, perhaps, he ever intended. For now he was content to suggest that "Catholicism" was "the oldest and greatest totalitarian movement in history."[49]

Strong as Hook's words were, Kallen's contribution to *The Bertrand Russell Case* saw Hook's argument and raised him. Replete with allusions to Galileo, Jan Huss, and other unjustly persecuted heretics, Kallen's tone was far more aggressive than Hook's. The issue at stake in the Russell case was nothing less than "the issue of the Protestant Reformation against the religious imperialism of the Papacy."

> It is the issue, within Protestantism, of the liberty of the individual conscience against corporate coercion. It is the issue, within the enclaves of Christian culture, of religious and secular free thought against priestly domination of thought. In sum, it is the issue of free religion against the dogmatic theology of ecclesiastics; it is the issue of the open competitive method of scientific inquiry against the closed monopolistic indoctrinations of ecclesiasticism.[50]

Kallen concluded that it was the "churchmen, not the scientists" who initiated the "ecclesiastical assault" on Russell. Catholicism has always been the aggressor, and seemed to have fed off the outright warfare between it and the scientific community. In a way, Kallen was arguing that religion and science, while at war, were really profoundly misunderstanding one another, for

[48] *Ibid*., 210.
[49] Hook, *Reason , Social Myths, and Democracy,* (New York: The Humanities Press, 1940), 76.
[50] Kallen, "Behind the Bertrand Russell Case," in *The Bertrand Russell Case*, 30.

they were both trying to do the same job, which was "to enable men to be freer and safer and happier whether in this world or another." Religion was losing the war because it could not do the job as well as the scientific community could. One need only compare the standards of living, he argued, to those of France, England, Scandinavia, and America—all relatively secular and scientific countries—against those of Spain, Portugal, Poland, Russia, India, and, most importantly, Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy. Or one could use, as Kallen did, recent studies of criminal behavior within the United States to show that highly religious communities—*especially the Catholic ones*—did worse than more secular communities on most issues involving "public morals."[51] Indeed, the battle was on.

Even though Kallen and Hook (although there were several other essays in the volume) were preaching to the converted, their unabashed willingness to implement some rather archaic language suggests that the Russell case, for all of its absurdities, released within them deeply held suspicions about the course of American intellectual life and, more importantly, higher education. Their suspicions, and their enthusiasm with which they communicated them, were surely heightened by an event that took place between Judge McGeehan's ruling in and the publication of *The Bertrand Russell Case.* Those intellectuals who "organized the campaign against" Russell "purporting to attack 'immorality' and 'irreligion'" were actually "attacking freedom of thinking, freedom of teaching, freedom of scientific inquiry." Hook predicated that these same intellectuals would promote theology and authoritarianism under the cloak of democratic theory.[52]

III. "I Prefer My Poison Labeled": The Finkelstein Fallout and the Crisis in Education

[51] *Ibid*., 33-36; 43-50.
[52] Hook, *New York Times*, March 11, 1940. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 156.

> As I have already said, the failure of this conference to do the only work that justifies its existence, perfectly symbolizes the absence of cultural community in the modern world; worse than that, it justifies the most extreme pessimism about an impending catastrophe, for until the professors and their culture are liquidated, the resolution of modern problems—a resolution which history demands shall be made—will not even begin. The tower of Babel we are building invites another flood.[53]

Coterminous with events at CCNY, Jewish Theological Seminary Professor Rabbi Louis Finkelstein organized the "Conference on Science, Philosophy, and Religion, in their Relation to the Democratic Way of Life."[*] Troubled by the insidious rise of Nazism, Finkelstein mobilized academics from various disciplines to continually explore an array of problems crucial to the survival of democracy. This group all assumed that all fields of thought were threatened by totalitarianism, and the surest way to combat it was through an exploration of what common values Americans all shared. Never before had Protestants, Catholics, and Jews assembled alongside secular humanists in the spirit of collective inquiry; the conference was, in the estimation of one of its better historians, "a kind of ecumenical Talmud."[54] The prospect of a community of inquirers no doubt secured Hook's participation, but it was a decision he would soon regret.

At first blush, the CSPR was not charged with producing a single statement of philosophical agreement. But the press release that preceded it, one that was released after Hook agreeed to attend, asserted that there was a "broad basis for a united democratic way of life." This seemed innocuous and platitudinous enough; but the sentence that followed surely raised

[53] Adler, "God and the Professors," 131-132.

[*] Hereafter CSPR.

[54] Fred Beuttler, "For the World At Large: Intergroup Activities at the Jewish Theological Seminary," in Jack Werthheimer, ed., *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997), 670. For a larger discussion of the CSPR, see Beuttler, "Organizing an American Conscience : the Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion 1940-1968" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1995).

Hook's hackles. "This way of life," the release continued, "must be based ultimately on the religious principle of the Fatherhood of God and the worth and dignity of Man when regarded as a child of God."[55] For a conference dedicated to democracy, it must have become clear to Hook and other naturalists that the Conference's idea of democracy necessarily entailed a commitment to theological premises or presuppositions.

Finkelstein excited his audience further when he taxed philosophical naturalists like Dewey and Hook with *undermining* democracy and playing into the hands of fascists by denying "the true relation of democratic ideas and institutions to religious traditions, the historical indebtedness of science to monastic and rabbinical schools, and the vindication of traditional ethics in our growing economic and political confusion…"[56] Dewey had been invited to attend the inaugural meeting but surprisingly declined, claiming that it was "a mistake to attempt to find common theoretical ground among those whose convictions were so different."[57] Finkelstein's sandbagging gave further substance to Hook's suspicions that the Conference was a front for the attendant neo-Thomists. But it was Mortimer Adler's inflammatory paper "God and the Professors" that convinced Hook that a modern Inquisition was afoot.

To many participants, Adler had already caused enough trouble before he even set foot in the Conference. A self-described "impolite fellow," once invited, Adler fired back a condition-laden memorandum to the other participants demanding that the CSPR publicly and unanimously repudiate positivism on the grounds that, because it argued that knowledge about the world was

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[55] Louis Finklestein, "Introduction to the Conference on Science Philosophy, and Religion, in their Relation to the Democratic Way of Life, Inc."*Science, Philosophy, and Religion* (New York, 1941), 1-8. See also Beuttler, "For the World at Large," 679.

[56] Finklestein, "Introduction," 12. This theme—that naturalism begat totalitarianism because it questioned the necessity of transcendent and traditional values—has plagued the historiography of American pragmatism for decades. The most famous—though not the only—example of this is Purcell's *The Crisis of Democratic Theory*.

[57] John Dewey to Harry A. Overstreet, October 27, 1942. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 123.

possible through science and the scientific method, it subordinated philosophy and religion to "mere opinion." If the CSPR were truly committed to the goals Finkelstein set out for it, then rejecting positivism—what Adler insisted was its "basic function"—was a necessary condition towards that end. Without the conference taking such a stand, it could not honestly justify its existence. Therefore, it ought to "disband, for there is no point in considering the place of philosophy and religion in our culture if they are merely opinion."[58] The epistemological battle lines were being drawn. Although he had some reservations about the arrogant tone of his memorandum, Finkelstein heartily concurred with Adler's moxie.

Adler felt justified in his tone. By the summer of 1940 his *How to Read a Book* had transformed him from an obscure academic into a celebrity, one of the most persuasive thinkers in America. The book, essentially a "how-to" guide to reading, also explicitly suggested *what* was best to read, namely the great books of western culture. Consequently, his becoming a best-selling author occurred in tandem with his rising stature as a leading public intellectual for the Great Books curriculum he so desperately wanted to see implemented throughout America's colleges and universities.[59] Moreover, the book brusquely set aside empirically-based philosophies as unable to produce reliable knowledge about the world and man's place in it. Thus the text was less an exploration on how best to read a book and more of a defense of Adler's overall philosophy: through his dissatisfaction with modern, empirical, philosophy he came to realize that objective knowledge *was* indeed possible, but only through self-evident

[58] "Statement by Mortimer Adler on the Fundamental Position of the Conference on Science Philosophy, and Religion," n.d. Quoted in Beuttler, "For the World at Large," 679.
[59] Adler privately admitted to a friend that he conceived the text as a way to "explain to the public what Hutchins is driving at in his attack on American education and what St. John's scheme really means." Mortimer Adler to Clifton Fadiman, March 3, 1939.

truths and undeniable propositions.[60] As we indicated earlier, philosophy was, all told, metaphysics, and all other disciplines were subordinate to it. From the early thirties onward Adler defended these views before such organizations as the American Catholic Philosophical Association and was part of larger Catholic revival in America. *How to Read a Book* strove to connect this revival to a larger, more secular, culture.[61]

It is not surprising, then, that when Adler delivered his polemical "God and the Professors" talk at the CSPR Hook became incensed. Jacques Maritain, a French philosopher sympathetic to Thomism, preceded Adler's speech.[62] Maritain began by calling for the establishment of a hierarchy of values upon which democracy could stand. These values, he concluded, could not be derived from any empirical philosophy; only religion could accomplish that.[63]

Following Maritain, Adler noted that even though the conferees had assembled to find "a common understanding of our cultural failure and a common program for its reform," he defied them to accomplish their task. Professors, he sneered, only come to conferences to speak their minds, not to change them, not even to listen.[64] What was needed, he argued, was a conference about the professoriate and how they have consistently blocked all attempts to find common grounds—such as Hutchins' reforms at Chicago. Their failure to appreciate Hutchins' wisdom and prescience was sufficient proof for the bankruptcy of Dewey's philosophy, because he and his admirers had resoundingly dismissed Hutchins' *The Higher Learning in America*. And Adler

[60] There is no evidence that Hook reviewed the text, but the themes that dominated his post-CSPR writings suggest that he read *How to Read a Book.*
[61] McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*, 235.
[62] For a fuller portrait of Maritain, see John Dunway, *Jacques Maritain* (New York, Twayne Publishers, 1978).
[63] Gilbert, *Redeeming Cultreu*, 76-77.
[64] Adler, "God and the Professors," in *Science, Philosophy, and Religion*, 122.

singled out his former teacher Dewey for his cruelty towards the book. But the current conference would no doubt insist that it was concerned with democracy, not positivist professors. "Despite such blandishments," he continued, "I repeat my charge."

> The professors, by and large, are positivists. And furthermore, I say that the most serious threat to democracy is the positivism of the professors, which dominates every aspect of modern education and is the central corruption of modern culture. Democracy has much more to fear from the mentality of its teachers than from the nihilism of Hitler. It is the same nihilism in both cases, but Hitler's is more honest and consistent, less blurred by the subtleties and queasy qualifications, and hence less dangerous.[65]

And "science," he continued, "contributes nothing whatsoever to the understanding of Democracy"—an overt swipe at Dewey and Hook. Adler's talk then became a performance—Dewey later labeled it an "exhibition."[66] He produced sixteen theses on philosophy and religion, replete with self-evident premises and deductive truths. For example: "Religion is either the supreme human discipline, because it is God's discipline of man, and as such dominates our culture, or it has no place at all." With regard to philosophy, it was superior to science; the latter concerned means, not ends, and was incapable of producing "a single judgment about good and bad, right and wrong, in terms of the ends of human life." Consequently it was obsessed with "surface investigations" and not Truth. According to one historian's account, when asked for proof Adler contemptuously refused, and maintained that his audience accept all sixteen propositions *en bloc*.[67] When pressed further he even predicted that his audience would hide behind an intellectual sham suspension of judgment. Once more he chastised his audience; the failure of professors to institute Hutchins' curriculum, "the professional conduct of this very conference," demonstrated the hollow pose of objectivity that characterized the professoriate,

[65] *Ibid*., 128.
[66] Dewey to Overstreet, October 27, 1942. Copy in Sidney Hook Papers, Box 123.
[67] Beuttler, "For the World at Large," 684.

and its dolorous effects on the nation and the world. In words that Hook was well prepared to exploit, Adler foretold their futures, and they were bleak and foreboding.[68]

With all of his remaining energy Adler compounded these claims, going so far as to extol Hitler and Mussolini as "instruments of divine justice, chastening a people who had departed from the way of truth." The democracy the professoriate defended, steeped as it was in positivism, would defend anarchic individualism, which was a greater threat to America than fascism itself.[69] While the tenor of Adler's hyperbole was shockingly exceptional, he was not alone in finding positivism and pragmatism culpable in the development of—or at least coeval with fascism. In 1940 a chorus of American intellectuals issued "A Declaration on World Democracy," which argued that pragmatism and positivism provided a seedbed within which Hitler and Mussolini would yield fascist fruit. As bad as the latter were, Dewey and Hook were at least as bad as they.[70] Adler's remarks were so deeply troubling that it "almost caused" the philosopher Harry Overstreet "to commit murder."[71] Another attendant frankly argued that Adler's tactics were fascist, and not the other way around.[72]

Outside of the confines of the conference, Adler applied his rhetoric to American educational theory and practice. American education, he argued, was "frothy and vapid" because it perpetually molly-coddled its pupils to the point that they had no clue as to how to learn effectively. Students know nothing of pain, sacrifice, and hard work—essential variables that go into shaping one's character—and, as such, have yet to "grow up" in any meaningful sense of the phrase. The worst of all institutions were colleges and universities, which to Adler resembled

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[68] *Ibid*., 685.
[69] *Ibid*., 137-138
[70] Purcell, *Crisis of Democratic Theory*, especially Chapter 12. Some of the more noteworthy signatories were Lewis Mumford, Rienhold Niehbuhr, Hans Kohn, and Van Wyck Brooks.
[71] Harry A. Overstreet to John Dewey, November 17, 1942. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 123.
[72] Gilbert, *Redeeming Culture*, 76.

kindergarten more than anything else. Higher education was "something that is externally added on to a person, as his clothing and other accoutrements." Colleges merely "cajole" students through a loose network of academic electives "guided by [their] likes and dislikes, by his own notion of what enhances [their] appearance." Higher education was thus as reliable as "patent medicine advertising" and of little use to the survival of a democratic society.[73]

The surest antidote to this model was to invite students to the pain of attending college. By "pain" he meant the process by which the "interior" of a student—their mind and character—was transformed to the degree that they spend their time *thinking*. Borrowing surreptitiously from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Adler maintained that all "genuine learning," he continued, was exclusively intellectual; vocational training was best suited for the "median" students or, worse, "the lower half of a class" or "lowest common denominator."[74] What is painful about education is the effort required of the student to monitor his or her own activities independent of extant authorities. That is, a curriculum ought not be chosen according to one's inclinations but "according to what is good" for the student. How one goes about determining what the "good" is remained unclear, but Adler insisted that without thinking moral and spiritual elevation is impossible. Not surprisingly, the best curriculum to achieve such a contemplative life were the Great Books. For the lecture/seminar format of the Great Books curriculum is the only one of its kind that actually provided the necessary and sufficient conditions for Adler's "pain and work." All other curricula were thus "shams and illusions," which requires that "the

[73] Mortimer Adler, "Invitation to the Pain of Learning," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 14, (1941): 358-363.
[74] *Ibid*., 361-362.

heads of our school system, of our colleges, [and] of our adult education associations" be removed and replaced by Great Books men.[75]

Little wonder that Adler's views infuriated Hook, and he eagerly seized the opportunity to rebut. Attending the open session within which Adler delivered "God and the Professors," he rose to give an extemporaneous reply that he had been writing in his head for years. In effect, he sought to repudiate Adler's speech in its entirety, and to do so on epistemic grounds. Having overcome his demand for Adler's censure on the grounds that his remarks were offense and inflammatory—he even suggested they not be published—Hook reconsidered, and once more brandished his dirk and shield.

Adler's conflation of the professoriate with Hitlerism was patently absurd, Hook began. If anything, it seemed to Hook that their only fault was manifestly to disagree with Hutchins and Adler. Above all, members of the American intellectual community in general and the trustees, faculty, and administrators at the University of Chicago in particular, had all carefully and honestly considered and then rejected Hutchins' curricular proposals for their inherent deficiencies (they would, however, take a foothold in 1943). Moreover, there was no concrete evidence connecting positivism to totalitarianism; and Adler's refusal to field inquiries into his sixteen theses was disconcertingly reminiscent of fascist tactics. As for Adler's demand for complete assent or complete denial of his sixteen theses, Hook was happy to deny everyone of them—demonstrably!—noting that they exhibited the characteristic faults of all such attempts to employ deductive metaphysics instead of the scientific method.

> There is irony in the fact that more universal **agreement** exists about scientific ideas, which make no pretense of being self-evidently true, than about any axioms or self-evident truths which have ever been advanced at any time by any metaphysical school.

[75] *Ibid*., 363.

> The moral is that we ought to extend scientific method to the questions and problems in social life about which there is **disagreement**.[76]

Hook concluded that, in sum, what Adler really wanted was to roll back the Renaissance, the Reformation, the French Revolution, and "the subsequent trend toward democratic secularism which makes the state neutral in religion." If Adler had his way, the members of the conference would stop fighting Hitler and start fighting each other, on behalf of their different religious and philosophical beliefs.[77] The point was that it was easy to reject Adler's hyperbole; many attendees did so on the grounds that Adler was merely playing *provocateur*. The more important issue for Hook was that Adler's speech had won near-universal assent for its central tenets—namely that positivism and pragmatism were sufficiently dangerous to America to warrant their elimination, or, worse, their being ignored. "If words and doctrines mean anything," Hook later wrote to his former professor Overstreet, "[Adler and his supporters] told us that if they had the power they would liquidate not only positivists, humanists, and pragmatists, but all other theologians who did not possess the 'true' theology." Hook pleaded with Overstreet to stop attending the Finkelstein conferences—which by 1942 Hook was convinced were dominated by "clerical fascists"—because the "dominant note" they sound "is responsible for totalitarianism."[78] "Adler," Hook wrote to Edward Shils, then a young professor at Hutchins' University of Chicago, "has hanged himself with [that speech]—it's up to you fellows to pull the

[76] Hook's remarks were later published in *The New Republic* under the title "The New Medievalism." See *The New Republic* 103, October 28, 1940, 602-606. The quote is taken from 605. See also Purcell, *Crisis of Democratic Theory*, 219.
[77] Hook, "The New Medievalism," 606.
[78] Hook to Harry Overstreet, October 26, 1942. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 123.

rope. Hutchins has his neck in the same noose."[79] It is unclear if Shils heeded Hook's advice. It is clear, however, that Hook had moved to the offensive.

Over the next four years Hook was both heartened and distressed by the conference's proceedings. Buoyed by Adler's absence, he thought that the sound of ecclesiastical "tom-toms and metaphysical bagpipes" would diminish over time; to some extent it did, for Hook received word that by 1945 the Conference had "abandoned" the mandated quest to conjoin the religious and the secular. Nevertheless, and much to Finkelstein's chagrin, Hook declined to participate in subsequent conferences because he felt that an antecedent commitment to theological premises was "not germane to the unifying purposes of democrats"—ironic given the enthusiasm with which he went at Adler.[80] However, with Maritain moving increasingly to the forefront of subsequent programs, Hook was concerned that the abandonment of religious presuppositions would be short lived. "Maritain does not differ from Adler on any point," Hook observed, "except in his manners and tone of voice—which are something of course. But I myself prefer my poison labeled." Maritain's essays again extolled the virtues of a fixed hierarchy of values, which to Hook reeked of authoritarianism, further convincing him that his decision not to attend any other conferences was a wise one. But he would never forgive the neo-Thomists for sabotaging the CSPR and thus precluding an excellent opportunity to work out "a mode of living together, of approaching concrete problems of democratic life."[81] In fact, In a letter to Harlow Shapley, who was himself sincerely interested in exploring the possibility of religious defenses

[79] Hook to Edward Shils, November 9, 1940. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 44.
[80] Hook to Rabbi Louis Finkelstein, October 26, 1945; Finkelstein to Hook, October 22, 1945. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 123.
[81] Hook to Overstreet, October 26, 1942. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 123.

for scientific inquiry, Hook expressed his hope that, since he could not attend the second CSPR that Shapley "took care of Mortimer Adler and his friends."[82]

Between 1940 and 1944 Hook exposed Adler's philosophical fallacies in a series of articles and symposia, many of which have been explored and explained by historians.[83] Less discussed is a short-lived counter-conference Hook organized from 1943-1945, the Conference on the Scientific Spirit and Democratic Faith (CSSDF). From its proceedings emerged what Hook and his congeners believed were both a viable intellectual challenge to the Finkelstein conference and a rebuttal to the philosophical and educational views of the neo-Thomists. While Hook's contributions were limited (he was, after all, engaged in far more public arenas), he always maintained that the conference aided the cause of democratic humanism and philosophical naturalism.

IV. Ballyhoo and Fooferaw: A Referendum on Aquinas

> The Defects of the elective system in current education have long been recognized. But the steps that have been taken to remedy them have not.[84]

Undaunted by the Adlerians' attacks on progressive educational theory, Hook would eventually compile his criticisms into *Education for Modern Man*, the subject of our next chapter. For now we must delineate Hook's philosophical lynchpin: that what appeared to be an internal debate among educators over the fine points of pedagogy and curricula masked a

[82] Hook to Harlow Shapley, October 18, 1941. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 124.
[83] Hook's various replies to Adler and his circle have been sufficiently mined so as to not warrant detailed discussion here. What is important, however, is that many, if not all, of them emphasize the polemical elements of the exchanges at the expense of the *grounds* upon which Hook levied his numerous responses. That is, historians have looked to the Finkelstein conference as another in a series of examples in which Hook fought for fighting's sake without paying attention to Hook's emphases on educational theory and curricula. The most recently narrow view of the episode is Edward Shapiro, "Sidney Hook, Higher Education, and the New Failure of Nerve," in *Sidney Hook Reconsidered,* ed. Matthew J. Cotter (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2004), 183-202.
[84] Hook, "Ballyhoo at St. John's College—Education in Retreat," *The New Leader* 27 (1944): 8.

reactionary trend that threatened the whole of society. A group of self-appointed reformers claimed only to want to teach students how to think (or how to read a book); but really they wanted to teach them *what* to think by telling them what they *must* read. Whether or not the "Great Books" were relevant to contemporary society, the aims of their enthusiasts were indeed relevant, problematic, and regressive. Shortly before the book appeared Hook framed his concerns. "The past is used as a weapon in a present struggle over a present issue which should frankly be brought into the light," he began.

> The real point of the attack on progressive education is an attack on secular education. And this attack is part of a much larger attack campaign against the ideals of a secular culture free of controls by dogmatic theology or political religions.[85]

The schools were the current foci of the reactionary campaign precisely because schools were themselves bastions of resistance to authoritarian tendencies. Hook essentially rejected the St. John's curriculum on three broad grounds: content, logic, and pedagogy. The contents of the Great Books hardly added up to a single Western tradition, he contended, unless it was a tradition of dissent and disagreement. Logically, the Adlerians were guilty of more than one absurdity. Although they claimed that social science was unintelligible and amoral, many of their Great Books were examples of some of the earliest social scientists. And although they claimed that they were uncovering eternal and ubiquitous truths, they dodged the obvious objection that one should be able to find such truths in any time and any place.

Pedagogically, St. John's stood on an old, exploded theory of mental discipline coterminous with an Athenian gentleman, namely that skills learned in one field can be carried into another field without loss of efficiency or veracity. For example, Adler and Hutchins argued that one could best learn to write effective English by mastering Latin prose. Against this, Hook

[85] Hook, "Progressive Liberal Education," *The Nation*, March 11, 1944, 314.

posed the common-sense theory that the best way to learn a particular topic or skill was to study it directly. Generalizing from there, Hook argued that if the aim of education was to empower students to face the problems of the world as they found it, then education ought to start with some attention paid to contemporary society. The best way to come to terms with the manifold forces that shaped the Second World War was to study the complexities of post-World War I American and European culture, not through a seminar-based reading of Thucydides. None of this precluded an exploration of the great themes that permeated the Great Books—either of the past or of present. "Few contemporary problems can be adequately grasped," he argued,

> without exploring the causal and ideational lines that radiate from them to the events and ideas of the past. Nothing is more contemporary than present-day totalitarianism. Can its nature be understood without a social and economic analysis of capitalist society? Can we come to grips with its rationalizations and achieve clarity in our own minds without some study of the men like Nietzsche, Hegel, Rousseau, Locke, Hobbes, Aquinas, Aristotle, and Plato, as well as the principles contained in the papal encyclicals? What subject can bring home more forcibly the importance of sound ideas on biology, and the logic of evidence? But it is not only to the past we must go. The study of present-day materials is mandatory to make the historical excursions fruitful.[86]

It was a "monstrous pedagogic error," on the part of St. John's College Hook continued,

> To regard the study of present-day materials as irrelevant to proper liberal education. To understand totalitarianism our students should read not only great books of the past but some of the **bad** books of the present, perhaps large parts of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. They might with profit study Germany's cultural and economic life since 1933, read Stalin's new constitution and examine differential wage rates in the Soviet Union, examine the Lateran Treaty between Mussolini and the Church, see selected moving pictures and plays, even pore over old newspapers—all as a directed part of their study, and all taboo on St. John's plan.[87]

Some of the Adlerians turned Hook's cries of willful misunderstanding back at him. Scott Buchanan, a philosopher long opposed to Hook and Dewey's pragmatism and an equally long supporter of the Great Books, got involved in a candid and ever more angry personal correspondence with Hook. The letters suggest that Buchanan had repeatedly invited Hook to

[86] Hook, "Ballyhoo at St. John's College," 9.
[87] *Ibid.*

actually visit St. John's College before the latter continued to berate it; Hook appears to have never set foot there. Again, for all of this posturing, and in light of his lifelong love for a good fight, it is frustratingly ironic that he refused to enter what he so vehemently believed was such hostile territory to debate higher educational theory with those he thought were so convincingly ill-equipped to do so.[88]

Buchanan patiently, if patronizingly, denied some of Hook's cherished misconceptions. St. John's was not the darling of the Catholic world, nor was it indoctrinating anyone. Hook was more interested, Buchanan wrote, in analyzing the college based on hearsay and innuendo from such magazines as *Life* than what was actually going on in Annapolis. But even if Adler's call for liquidation was overblown, what beef did Hook have with Adler's identification of the systemic problems of American universities? What about the "irresponsible academic scholar who…identifies academic freedom with his specialist's license not to think about his responsibilities?" Hook, Buchanan argued, was missing the point: St. John's was not a front for Aquinas; it was about skills and styles that went beyond the limits of Hook and Dewey's allegiance to scientific method. "I don't know how," he began

> one reads poetry by the scientific method, or how one can understand the rather extraordinary rhetoric and poetry of [Columbia University literature professor] Mark Van Doren's book if he thinks it contains argument or should contain [an] argument.[89]

Hook, of course, was equal to the task of enraging Buchanan. He replied that he had taken on St. John's because of the great claims being made for its yet unproven curriculum, claims made by none other than its president, Stringfellow Barr. "Man alive," Hook wondered,

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[88] For more detail in Buchannan's life and work, see Charles A. Nelson, *Radical Visions: Stringfellow Barr, Scott Buchanan, and Their Efforts on behalf of Education and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Westport: Bergin & Garvey 2001); and Haarlow, *Great Books, Honors Programs, and Hidden Origins*. As a graduate of St. John's himself, and a friend of Buchannan's for some time, Nelson's book, however, is essentially a series of laudatory biographical valentines to these radicals.

[89] Scott Buchanan to Sidney Hook, May 28, 1944. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 156.

> Don't you read Barr? If you do, why don't you fire him for fooling the public, since what he wrote is logically incompatible with what you say is going on at St. John's. Presumably you have told him what's going on.[90]

Whether or not Buchanan knew it—and, presumably, whether or not he liked it—Hook continued that St. John's was being used "by reactionary currents to break down democratic secularism in America." And as for Buchanan's implicit argument that Hook might not understand the language of St. John's, since it was language of the great books, Hook returned the slight:

> First, you have not been reading all of the great books—not by a long shot. Second, what do you know about us to make you as bold as to charge us with being ignorant of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Aquinas, etc? Do our writings really show such ignorance? We do not use their language because we do not think it is good language. It confuses physics and ethics, mathematics and poetry.Why do you think I am opposed to finding a common human language, or that I want students to read poetry by the "scientific method" (whatever that is), or that I, who believe that philosophy and logic should be prescribed subjects for all college students, am opposed to teaching philosophy (which includes of course exposure to, if not exposure of, the key ideas of natural theology)?[91]

"This may sound strange to you," Hook rather rudely closed one letter to Buchanan, "but when I read your letters I sometimes wish you would write like Adler. His stuff has a head, a body, and a conclusion. The trouble with it is that it is devoid of insight and wisdom." One wonders why Hook would at this point of severity move from the *argumentum ad baculum* to the *argumentum ad hominem*. Perhaps he concluded that, in the end, Buchanan was overmatched or, worse naïve. "You have insight and suggestiveness," Hook conceded, "but they appear only when I read your letters as poems. But a poem is not the best medium by which to carry on an argument."[92] Perhaps this was Hook's way of slamming the argumentative door in Buchanan's face.

It worked. Not surprisingly, Buchanan concluded that the discussion was "getting nowhere," and he let fly. Hook could not have read all of the books on the St. John's list, and

[90] Hook to Buchanan, June 30, 1944. *Ibid.*
[91] Hook, "Ballyhoo at St. John's College," 2.
[92] Hook to Buchanan, June 30, 1944. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 156.

certainly not in the right order, for he "... would not use terms in such uncircumspect [*sic*] ways, or refer to doctrines as discredited, or to running away from contemporary problems into the past." Perhaps Hook had read *some* of the books, but only in a narrowly professional way. "You are a social philosopher," Buchanan observed, "and it comes out very clearly in your writing." He then accused Hook of using logic like a schoolboy debater. "The consequence of your hypocritical interest in formal logic is that you apply it to people who are not practicing the art at all." Hook was incapable of comprehending Barr's vision, and was misled by a "witch-hunting suspicion of persons." But worst of all, Hook had completely misunderstood Adler and Hutchins. And as for the reactionary forces allegedly behind St. John's College, they were examples of Hook's "inverted theology, a theory of possession by demons." "A Fascist-Catholic political coup would use anything it found," Buchanan maintained,

> to use including your pragmatism, which has been eminently useful in both Italy and Germany. We are no more owned to fellow travelers than you are…[y]ou are simply making up stories of the kind that the money-from-Moscow people have done since the last war. I read your piece in the Bertrand Russell Case volume. Your and Kallen's stuff reminded me vividly and painfully of that old sheet, The Menace, that used to tell us about rifles stacked in the crypts of Catholic Churches all over the country. Why do you fall for that psychopathology?[93]

Buchanan was only the most deliberate and hypercritical of those who thought that Hook had gone overboard in exaggerating the menace of the Adlerians. Even the favorable reviewers of Hook's educational treatise *Education for Modern Man*—which will occupy some of our attention in the next chapter—admitted that Hook perhaps enjoyed a good fight a little too much.

The creeping authoritarianism Hook identified—and, perhaps, exaggerated—through the Bertrand Russell Case, the Finkelstein Conference, and his ongoing feud with the Adlerians overlapped with his manifold concerns about the future of America's colleges and universities.

[93] Buchanan to Hook, July 10, 1944. *Ibid*., 1-2.

But they also bled into his concerns over New York University, especially with regard to what should be taught and how in its courses. The surest way to stave off the above curricular and pedagogic tendencies would be to take them head on. Ever to brandish his dirk and a dagger, for Hook the fight was to take place in intellectual terms, which now meant that he had to make as strong a case as possible for the necessity of historical study within the parameters of his philosophy of education. The surest way to fend off the forces of educational dogmatism was historical intelligence.

Chapter Four:

The Philosophy of History As A Philosophy of Education

> The intelligent man…employs his knowledge of the world to increase man's power over things, to decrease man's power over man, and to enlarge the fellowship of free and equal persons striving to achieve a more just and happier society.[1]

"To the extent that one can speak of a philosophy of history in the United States," Hook once observed, "it [can be] found in the writings of American historians in their reflections on their craft." So Hook wrote in the preface to *Philosophy and History*, the fifth volume in the New York University Institute of Philosophy's series.[2] The book, published in 1963 but reflective of Hook's long-standing historical interests, was a landmark achievement, for it represented the first time ever when professional American historians and professional philosophers met to consider "questions of mutual interest" in the philosophy of history. Morton White, Carl Hempel, Ernest Nagel and Albert Hofstadter represented the more prominent philosophers on the roster, and were joined by such eminent American historians as Lee Benson, Bernard Bailyn, and the Europeanist Leonard Krieger. Among other topics, essays on the logic of historical narration, the problems facing contemporary historiography, and patterns within historical inquiry abounded.

To be sure, this was not the first interaction of professional American historians with philosophy. Progressive Historians such as Carl Becker, James Harvey Robinson, and Charles Beard had fallen under Dewey's influence, and did so even while Dewey had himself written little about history or the philosophy of history.[3] Dewey quite famously was more interested in history's role in philosophic inquiry or, more importantly, the role such inquiry played in a

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[1] Sidney Hook, "The Philosophical Presuppositions of Democracy," *Ethics* 52 (1942): 296.
[2] Hook, ed. *Philosophy and History: A Symposium* (New York: New York University Press, 1963).
[3] These historians frequently acknowledged their debt to Dewey's pragmatism. For a full discussion of the extent of Dewey's influence, see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

child's moral and intellectual development. And beyond his activism in the formation of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), Dewey had rather limited *academic* contact with those historians who claimed that their own work was inspired by his. But while it is true that most of America's professional philosophers *not* named John Dewey were unconcerned with the problems of historical theory, historiography, or historical understanding and explanation, Hook can be singled out for both his historical interests and his direct engagement with America's professional historians. With this in mind, then, we seek to examine Hook's "efflorescence of interest" in "problems of history" and their relationship to his philosophy of education. But this interest was not rooted simply a "quest for historical self-consciousness." It was, rather,

> a consequence primarily of interest in the nature of scientific explanation and the challenge posed by the existence of historical knowledge, with its imprecisions and particularity, to the conclusions reached about the nature of scientific method and objectivity won by an analysis of the logic of the natural sciences.[4]

Gathering these historians and philosophers together for a two-day conference was for Hook a culmination of nearly thirty years of engagement with the philosophy of history, and we ought to unpack why that was the case, and more so to conjoin his philosophical interests in history to his lone educational treatise, 1946's *Education for Modern Man*.[5] Last chapter we examined both the personal and intellectual roots of Hook's desire to publish the latter; currently we shall uncover the sources of Hook's profound enthusiasm for historical inquiry, an enthusiasm that pervaded his philosophy of education. Moreover, we have thus far suggested that Hook repeatedly made historical arguments to press the range and import of philosophical ones, and *vice versa* and that a crucial curricular centerpiece to his entire educational theory was

[4] Hook, *Philosophy and History*, x.
[5] Hook, *Education for Modern Man* (New York: John Day, 1946).

historical—not philosophical—study. Bearing all of this in mind, what follows endeavors to meaningfully connect the two, and we begin with one of his more trenchant analyses of historical inquiry.

I. "The Vision Which Blossoms From Understanding": Hook's Logic of Historical Explanation

> "The present is the basis from which we determine the kind of interpretation we must apply to the past. It is the source of all our guesses and hypotheses; and it is present uses, purposes, and habits which determine our recognition of the past fact as such."[6]

It was sometime in 1928 that, for the first time, Hook engaged history philosophically, when he assembled a number of contemporary philosophers for a *festschrift* in honor of John Dewey's seventieth birthday. While the volume, entitled *Essays in Honor of John Dewey*, was replete with scores of laudatory essays from former students, Hook's own contribution lacked the tenor of his later Deweyan commitments. Rather, he was more interested in exploring pragmatism's general connection to the larger epistemological issues in historiography and the philosophy of history under the title "A Pragmatic Critique of the Historico-Genetic Method." Given the enthusiasms for historical study and historical fiction we noted earlier, the article was his first comprehensive attempt to philosophically engage the utility and logic of historical inquiry within the parameters of contemporary American philosophizing, exploring the underlying assumptions at play when inquiring into the origin or nature of a particular object or event. And he felt it important to critique this method in light of pragmatism's potential for enriching historical inquiry.[7] First he sought to challenge the assumptions associated with the

[6] Sidney Hook, "A Pragmatic Critique of the Historic-Genetic Method," in *Essays in Honor of John Dewey On the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Sidney Hook (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), 162.
[7] *Ibid*., 157.

historico-genetic method, viz., that historical meaning was perforce phenomologically derivative. That is, in terms of explaining change over time, proponents of the historico-genetic method understood history exclusively in terms of a unilinear unfolding of successive stages, with the future understood as the gradual unfolding of predetermined outcomes realized in the present. And all of this, by the way, was considered inevitable, and social theorists would capitalize on its implications. Later in this chapter we will examine how Hook extended his philosophical critique into more popular, and more political, audiences.

But before we investigate the nuances of Hook's argument, it is important to note what is conspicuously missing from it. Quite curiously, there is no sustained engagement with the works of Arthur O. Lovejoy and his epigoni in the History of Ideas, even though Lovejoy had rather famously critiqued pragmatism for its prospective theory of knowledge, which, he maintained, had thoroughly discounted any legitimate understanding of the past. As such, pragmatism's epistemology was suspect, for it conducted historical inquiry with contemporaneous blinders and only looked over its shoulder to the past when it suited its epistemic purposes. What could be more sinister to the life of the mind, Lovejoy argued, than to twist past events willy-nilly in order to satisfy some or other present impulse? Dewey's epistemology was thus dangerous, for it exhibited the potential to whitewash or rewrite history, and not, as Dewey famously maintained, reconstruct it.[8]

[8] Lovejoy's criticisms of Pragmatism (or the Thirteen Pragmatisms) are well known. For secondary accounts, the best place to start is Daniel J. Wilson, "Science and the Crisis of Confidence in American Philosophy, 1870-1930," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 23 (1987): 250-256. The main thrust of the argument under discussion is from Lovejoy's "Time, Meaning, and Transcendence," *The Journal of Philosophy,* 19 (1922): 505-515. The essay was reprinted in *Dewey and His Critics: Essays from the Journal of Philosophy,* ed. Sidney Morgenbesser (Lancaster: Lancaster Press, 1977), 142-152. For Lovejoy's sustained critique of Pragmatism—especially James and Dewey's version of it—see his posthumously edited *The Thirteen Pragmatisms* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1963). There are no significant letters in the Hook archive related to the current discussion.

Moreover, long before analytic philosophers such as Arthur Danto took an interest in the subject in the 1950s, it is important to note that Hook was fascinated with the logic of historical understanding and the epistemological foundations of historical knowledge.[9] We might also argue, and will do so presently, that Hook was one of the few active professional American philosophers who wrote regularly on the subject and its relationship to educational theory. In so doing he wedded his philosophy of history—or more accurately, his critical appraisals of working historians—to his philosophy of education. And he was also deeply interested in what it meant when someone claimed to understand history, for the opportunity was ripe for ascertaining what it was they understood, exactly. Was history a distinct body of knowledge (or "facts") or was it a mode of inquiry consistent with the larger concerns of the natural sciences? Underscoring these concerns was whether or not knowledge of the past was the key to understanding the present or *vice versa*. In raising the former, Hook outlined the core theses largely associated with German thinkers; with the latter he drew extensively on his former professors Morris Cohen and Frederick Woodbridge for guidance, mixing Max Weber's critiques of teleology in the process.[10]

While Hook avoided a precise definition of the Historico-Genetic method—he seemed most focused on the methodological aspects early twentieth century German historicist Ernst

[9] The representative statement within analytic philosophy is Arthur Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965). Danto was among the first to suggest within the analytic community that history was not a special branch of knowledge but was part of a larger class of philosophical problems burdened by conceptual assumptions and clumsy language. See his complex "On Historical Questioning," *The Journal of Philosophy*, No. 3 (1954): 89-99.

[10] Two things about this essay are worth noting. On the one hand Hook framed much of his critique on a close reading of Max Weber's *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschafteslehre* well before Talcott Parsons' landmark translation of the text. Secondly, John Herman Randall, Jr., another of Dewey's students (despite never having taken a course with him), wrote one of the only pragmatic philosophies of history in the twentieth century, *Nature and Historical Experience*, in the 1950s. The philosophical cornerstone of his argument was Hook's brief essay from the Dewey volume. See Randall, *Nature and Historical Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), especially Chapter 1.

Bernheim and the philosopher Heinrich Maier in the article—instead Hook narrowed the historiographical question down to a concern with how these thinkers and their followers had hitherto accounted for change over time, "and [how] this development [could] be rendered significant, or understood, by tracing the spatio-temporal continuity of its structure…as far back as possible…the series of phases in the history of any object constitute a whole, and that any one of these phases derives whatever meaning it has only in reference to this whole."[11] Tracing how the present grew out of the past, these historians were principally concerned with framing all questions of historical meaning in terms of the study of origins, outlining the existential continuity of a particular object, practice, institution, or event over or through a vast expanse of time. Wherever we have successfully traced its development, viz., identified from whence it originated, and why it persisted and developed in the direction it did, we have, in effect, explained its history—and, in the end, established its meaning in relation to other things' natures. These universally valid histories, moreover, were considered stable and ordered, immune to the vicissitudes of time. Methodologically this entailed no appeal whatsoever to explanatory variables outside "of the mechanical causal connection of antecedent and consequent;" and their methods mirrored the inductive methods of the natural sciences[12] In so doing these historians believed that the history they were explaining was tantamount to the manner in which the phenomena associated with the natural sciences was explained. As much as scientists strove to remove all things illusory about natural phenomena, so too would the genetic historians strive to

[11] Hook, "A Pragmatic Critique of the Historic-Genetic Method," 158. Hook seems to be lumping Bernheim and Maier together, despite the fact that Bernheim was a medievalist and Maier a philosopher. Never the less, the works Hook engaged in the article were Bernheim's *Lehrbuch der Historischen Methode und der Geschichtsphilosophie* (Leipzig : Duncker & Humblot, 1908); and Maier's, *Das Geschichtliche Erkennen* (W. F. Kaestler, 1914).
[12] *Ibid*., 167.

reveal *the* Truth about The Past, one episode at a time.[13] In many ways this method resembles America's current genealogical vogue, wherein one person has an antecedently determined outcome (the individual in question) whose lineage can be traced back as far as possible without *necessarily* appealing to extraneous social, political, cultural, or economic variables for support.

In focusing on the mechanical development of a *particular* thing at the expense of all other considerations, Hook suspected that these thinkers, for all of their attempts at meaning, were in effect cloaking their histories in metaphysical ideas or theodicy. "Since antecedent continuities [actually] extend in all directions," and not linearly, he argued, to practicioners of the genetic method "intelligent *selection* can only be made when it is guided by a cosmic plan or a super-empirical purpose progressively realized in the serial order of the things selected."[14] Moreover,

> Just as common practice of tracing one's ancestry does not consist in an investigation along all possible lines, but is directed towards some member along *one* of those lines distinguished for some reason or other, so in tracing the history of any institution or object…[t]he direction we follow…is determined by a goal known already in advance.[15]

This goal in advance could be the preordained unfolding of a spirit, idea, or culture, and the genetic history of object X was such that it participated in its realization. In order to accomplish this, Hook argued that these historians must perforce deprive an individual or object or institution of its "active initiating power," or their purposes when shaping the conditions under which historical change or continuity took place. Human beings were regarded as passive agents

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[13] This brief summary has benefited from Clayton Roberts, *The Logic of Historical Explanation* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1996), Chapter 12; John Higham, Leonard Krieger, and Felix Gilbert, *History* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Publishers, 1965), 92-103; and George Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), especially Chapter 3.
[14] Hook, "A Pragmatic Critique of the Historic-Genetic Method," 160.
[15] *Ibid.*

subsumed under the will of some or other preordained goal, for they were "unconscious" of the real purposes that lie behind the development under consideration. At long last, along these lines, "Man's temporal destiny," Hook warned, was "to serve as an illustration of the play of eternal essences."[16] That is, the totality of the explanatory framework mattered more to the historian than the larger provisional and empirical considerations that could easily serve as the impetus for conducting historical inquiry in the first place. On purely historical evidence, these metaphysical pretensions have usually been *ex post facto* rationalizations of historical changes rather than the causative factors in such changes. Having identified this fallacy, Hook would later invoke it within his more positive, pragmatic, proposals for conducting meaningful historical inquiry.

Tracing the succession of events, objects, or individuals over or through time, Hook concluded, did not produce a history, for he believed that understanding the *development* of a thing or event was not the same as understanding its *significance*. Here was what he thought was the genetic-historico method's most pernicious aspect: for all of their talk of explaining the nature of an object or event, these writers, at best, produced only a chronicle of events, not reliable historical knowledge, and they did so because they removed from consideration the activity of human beings in pursuit of particular ends. That is, as long as we simply traced event X back to its alleged origins we removed all *normative* considerations from our inquiries, which only shed more heat than light on the questions it allegedly endeavored to solve. And normative considerations were not always the preserve of scientific historians, who abjured issues associated with contemporary life and their attendant interests and purposes in the present. If that were indeed the historiographical case, why, Hook wondered, were so many new histories written independent of novel facts about the past?

[16] *Ibid*., 161.

A consideration for whether or not this was a charitable assessment of Maier and Bernheim's work is outside the boundaries of the current discussion. But the fallacies associated with the genetic method led Hook to propose an alternative mode of historical inquiry, one that concluded that "knowledge of the present," and not a knowledge of the origins of a thing and its development over time, was "the key to the understanding of the past." His was a philosophy of history that was "not interested in teaching anything, but in *understanding* what has happened, no matter what the consequences of that understanding may be." Methodologically this experimental attitude need not

> stress the motive of the individual historian—although he always has one—but makes the purposes and needs of the historical subject, be it the individual or community, its central explanatory category. Nor does it see in the cultural values towards which man's purposes are directed a reflection of an ontological scale of ethical norms…[17]

Rather, the historian begins with a particularly complex and contemporary problem and conducts an inquiry into how it came to be so problematic—especially if it were determined to be a recurring one. Instead of a genetic approach the historian begins with what he or she finds in the present, viz., "the force of tradition, physical factors, and other conditions under which they activity of the historical individual takes place," all of which represented for Hook a "consideration of their bearing upon human interests that the *strength* of these factors can be determined." Acknowledgement of these factors sets the parameters for our reflective inquiry.[18] The result is less a genetic lineage but an imaginative reconstruction of the past to better gauge

[17] *Ibid*., 168.
[18] *Ibid*., 170.

an understanding of the present. In rendering the present more intelligible human beings could control their existential conditions more wisely.[19]

This is a far cry from the Beardian relativism that dominated American historical writing in the 1930s.[20] While he does not mention him by name, Hook's argument that the experimental method in history was "objectively relative" by virtue of an historian's choosing to study a specific contemporary problem in order to better "guide him in the labyrinth of the past," was methodologically similar to Carl Becker's approach to history.[21] Neither teleological nor genetic methods, which aimed at developing a complete historical picture, were of any use (or had limited use) when grappling with the present, Hook argued, and as long as the historian "[did] not pretend that [their findings] are man's sole interest and that his account is the whole story," the greater the propensity for the problem under investigation to be dissolved.[22] But this is not to say that there is no subjectivity at play under experimental historical inquiry. For as long as there is a human subject conducting it, the materials under discussion will perforce represent the historians' motivations. But these motivations will be limited, Hook maintained, by the nature of the conditioning factors in the situation studied—the human purposes expressed in contemporary cultural values. Taken together, the history that will be written was itself an historical event, for it had existential consequences by virtue of its standing as a reconstruction of the past in light of the present, and not the other way around. Historical understanding was thus the combined effect

[19] Hook developed this last theme at length in "The Philosophy of Democracy As A Philosophy of History," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 9 (1949): 576-585.
[20] For a succinct exposition of relativism in American historiography, see Higham, Krieger, and Gilbert, *History*, Chapter 3.
[21] With the exception of Novick's *That Noble Dream*, Hook's essays and books are largely excluded from the history of historical writing in America. For Becker, see Robert Skotheim, *American Intellectual Histories and Historians* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966). Another angle that cannot be explored here is Hook's relationship to the development of American intellectual history as a field within the profession.
[22] Hook, "A Pragmatic Critique of the Historic-Genetic Method," 169-170.

of that which had taken place in the past and, to borrow from Dewey, an intellectual reconstruction of that past subsequently.[23] While he certainly did not explore them in the context of an article on the logic of historical explanation, there were no doubt serious moral and ethical implications for the study of history. What is clear is that Hook's epistemological interests found an extension in his practical philosophizing about history.

The difference between Hook's critique and his positive proposals was the difference between claims of historical certitude in terms of scientific history and historical relevance and plausibility in light of proximate investigations into contemporary issues. In other words, one method sought to discover the nature of the material of historical study; the other sought to make intelligible the very same materials so as to render human activity more purposeful and intelligible. But what also troubled Hook was the inherent determinism that seemed, as far as he was concerned, to undergird the historico-genetic method. In the 1930s Hook wrote next to nothing about history proper, focused as he was on examining the relationship between pragmatism and Marxism—an effort which, as we indicated earlier, has been exhaustively examined elsewhere. That said, while he was most surely preoccupied with matters closer to home, viz., the structural and curricular reforms taking place within NYU, in the early days of World War Two Hook took the opportunity to wed his larger philosophical interests in history to his larger normative concerns regarding education. In the interim he produced one of the most confounding texts of his professional career.

II. "A Slight Performance" Somewhat Slighted: *The Hero in History*

[23] As an aside, it is worth noting that the correspondence between Dewey and Hook suggests that he functioned very much like a Salieri to Dewey's Amadeus when Dewey was writing his 1938 *Magnum Opus, Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*. Hook read every draft of every chapter and meticulously critiqued it to Dewey's approval. Dewey's observations on history in *Logic*, moreover, bore strong resemblance to Hook's views in the article under discussion.

> The world seen by the historian …is not one in which credulous myths flourish about the natural goodness of man. And although he does not subscribe when he is intellectually sophisticated to any metaphysical or theological view of natural evil, he does know that, whatever its causes, evil exists.[24]

In the fall of 1942 Hook received a friendly reminder from John Day publishers to satisfy his obligations. In exchange for at least two shorter, more popular texts (or, if he preferred, textbooks), John Days editor Richard Walsh had agreed in 1940 to publish Hook's *Reason, Social Myths, and Democracy*, a rather heady paean to epistemology, Marxism, and the dangers associated with intellectual obscurantism and authoritarianism regarding the democratic way of life. Upon receiving the manuscript Walsh carped that the book, while no doubt interesting to the philosophical community, was far too complex and complicated for John Day to effectively market to an audience, which would, he believed, imperil its remunerative prospects. Threatening to bring all of his forthcoming books to another publisher, Hook insisted that in exchange for the book's publication he might rework some of his lecture notes from two of his more popular courses at NYU, "Ways of Life" and "Philosophies of History," for another volume. A few months later he surprised Walsh with a completed manuscript for *The Hero in History: A Study in Limitation and Possibility*. But Hook cautioned Walsh not to get his hopes up; the book, he lamented, was more of a "reflective rather than a popular study." Given the recent tensions between author and publisher, we can only assume the depths of Walsh's chagrin, for Hook had clearly promised John Day earrings but had only pierced its publishing ears. Not to worry, Hook charily assured Walsh, "it may catch on because of the timeliness of the topic." For

[24] Hook, "The Humanities and the Taming of Power," in *Education and the Taming of Power,* (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1973), 195.

an intellectual wedded to either speaking or writing demonstrably, Hook's rather guarded tone must have furrowed his editor's brow.[25]

Privately, Hook elaborated on his reservations about the book to Morris Cohen, who was no slouch when it came to writing about history's intimate relationship to philosophy. "It is my first attempt at a popular book," Hook confessed. "The position is a kind of cross between William James and Karl Marx. I am afraid, however, that as it stands it is a slight performance—not popular enough to be really popular, and not fundamental enough to be a philosophical contribution of high order. If I had your erudition and amazing historical [knowledge] at my fingertips, I am sure I would have written a better book."[26]

Hook's self-assessment (or false modesty?) appears doubly misleading, for most reviewers of *The Hero in History*—which included both professional historians as well as philosophers—were largely impressed with the breadth of Hook's historical (and historiographical) knowledge as well as his overall erudition.[27] The most thoughtful reviews came from Hans Kohn and John Herman Randall, who both praised the book for reminding its readers that all of life involves choices of considerable magnitude and that their decisions affect the happiness of others.[28]

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[25] Hook to Richard Walsh, July 23, 1940, Sidney Hook Papers, Box 44; Hook to Walsh, September 25, 1942, Sidney Hook Papers, Box 45.

[26] Hook to Morris Cohen, March 5, 1943, Sidney Hook Papers, Box 45.

[27] The philosopher Charles Gray Shaw gushed that with *The Hero in History* Hook "…has navigated the metaphysical Gulf of Messina without being wrecked in the determinist whirlpool of Charybdis or the individualistic rock of Scylla." And the sociologist Gwynne Nettler sent Hook a postcard exclaiming "Hot Damn! What juicy writing…you thrill me brother…" Sidney Hook Papers, Box 44.

[28] Hans Kohn, review of *The Hero in History*, *The American Historical Review*, 49 (1944): 268-269; John Herman Randall, Jr., review in *The Journal of Philosophy* 40 (1943): 575-580. For all of their larger philosophical disagreements—which would grow more intense in the 1950s—Randall overt praise, namely that the book was "sound" and "brilliantly illustrated," must have pleased Hook some.

In addition to a plethora of favorable reviews in the traditional academic journals, Bertram Wolfe, himself a former student of Morris Cohen, praised Hook for exemplifying Reason in what he construed as an unreasonable time.[29] And Arnold Toynbee congratulated Hook for the "puzzle" he framed as it related to a distinguished leader and public action, though he reserved final judgment until he had more time to spend with the book.[30] And Charles Beard wrote Hook as well, praising him for weaving elements of the social sciences into his larger historical framework. The book, he wrote, "cannot be grasped by merely 'dipping' into it here and there. It has no waste chapters, paragraphs and lines which can be skipped without loss…it marches from start to finish. I can say readily and truly that your pages, one after the other, evoked furious thinking on my part, mingling much approval with some uncertainties, and always respect for [the] way in which you state propositions and look all around them." As a result, he suggested that they might work together on some or other project in the future.[31] The latter review is important, for Hook had recently and quite favorably reviewed Beard's *The Republic: Conversations on Fundamentals* for *The Nation,* and maintained that the book was "destined" to become "a classic in the field."[32] While no record of the meetings that preceded it exist, and there are no archival materials related to its publication, Hook's relationship with Beard—and, one can assume, the historical community's fairly positive assessment of *The Hero in History*—led to an invitation to contribute to the Social Science Research Council's 1946 *Report on Historiography*.[33]

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[29] Bertram Wolfe, "The Great Man's Role From The Past To Our Time," *The Progressive*, May 24th, 1943.
[30] Arnold Toynbee to Sidney Hook, February 27, 1947. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 45.
[31] Charles A. Beard to Sidney Hook, February 16, 1945. In Sidney Hook Papers, Box 45.
[32] Sidney Hook, "The Political Testament of Charles Beard," *The Nation*, October 23, 1953.
[33] Social Science Research Council, *Theory and Practice In Historical Study: A Report of the Committee on Historiography* (New York: Social Science research Council, 1946).

Academic accolades notwithstanding, *The Hero in History*'s cultural reception was also noteworthy. Within a decade of its publication several colleges and universities endeavored to weave elements of the book into their courses.[34] Even the American government took note, such as when the department of State reached out to Hook in the hopes of coordinating several translations that would eventually be distributed throughout postwar Europe, a request that culminated in *The Hero in History*'s appearance in nearly ten languages by the mid-1960s.[35]And the United States Information Service initially sought Hook's permission to add a chapter from *The Hero In History* to an anthology of American essays that would be distributed throughout Asia. At the height of the Korean War, the same agency sought permission to produce 5,000 copies for a Korean translation of the book in its entirety.[36] For the intellectual historian it is hard to fathom a rival intellectual who attracted so much attention from his government.[37]

All of this is to say that Hook's insecurities about the book were, in the end, perhaps both warranted and unwarranted. In straddling the popular/academic publishing divide he clearly compromised some of the more pressing points about the philosophy of history and the concerns of contemporary American historians. After all, he made it clear that the book was not "a special philosophy of history" but an attempt to get to the bottom of the question of why so much written

[34] Harvard, San Fernando Valley State, and Dartmouth all requested Hook's permission to use chapters of the book. See Richard M. Ohmann to John Day Company, August 16, 1956; Marin Pundeff to Sidney Hook, July 6, 1959; Jonathan Stewart to Sidney Hook, November 7, 1953. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 44.
[35] The book was translated into Japanese, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and a few Indo-Aryan dialects. Apparently the publication of American authors via German presses was seen as but one way to reconstruct the Germany's infrastructure. We may infer that, given the nature of the book, Hook's assessment of Hitler as more of an "eventful man" instead of event-making man" had rather influential properties, and most likely played a role in government's desire to maintain that "…business relations between German and American publishers…be returned as quickly as possible." See Barbara Elias to Sidney Hook, October 12, 1950. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 45.
[36] See Kathryn E. Skisson to Sidney Hook, September 9, 1955; Howard O. Hill to Sidney Hook, July 28, 1959. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 45.
[37] Unlike the *Hero in History*, Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1946) was written at the behest of the US Office of War Information.

history entailed the study or inclusion of a causative Hero to move it along.[38] But in addition to the professional notoriety he garnered, *The Hero in History* earned Hook a professional commendation when he was awarded Columbia University's prestigious Butler Silver Medal in 1945.[39] Respect of his peers notwithstanding, the book was apparently a bit of an economic disappointment to his publisher, for in the very same letter Walsh sent to Hook congratulating him for the Butler Medal, he acknowledged that it was not the best seller that he had hoped.[40] But what was it about the book that garnered so much attention from so many different intellectuals, and for so many different reasons?

This is a hard question to answer because *The Hero in History* brings to mind Italo Calvino's observation somewhere that exasperated readers are usually inclined to throw their books against a wall in the hopes that the impact would rearrange the words in the order they were meant to be, thus rendering it intelligible. This is largely the case because Hook is clearly engaging the methodological changes at play in American historiography as a result of its embrace of the social sciences without feeling obligated to explain the particulars of those changes, or the authors to whom they were assigned. Then, ironically, he dedicates entire chapters to historical works that are decades old, such as F. A. Wood's 1913 *The Influence of Monarchs*, and *w*ith the exception of a few throwaway lines in Thomas Jefferson's direction,

[38] *The Hero in History*, p. xiii.
[39] The Philosopher George Santayana received the Gold Medal for his *Realm of Being*. "Author at 82 Will Get The Butler Gold Medal," *New York Times*, April 6, 1945. See also Philip M. Hayden to Sidney Hook, March 22, 1945. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 45.
[40] Richard Walsh to Sidney Hook, April 7, 1945. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 45. By the mid-1950s some of Hook's colleagues (one of whom, Nathan Glazer, an editor at Doubleday and Company) declared some of the books' core ideas about "the hero" and historical determinism outdated to the times. Glazer politely declined to re-publish it. Nathan Glazer to Sidney Hook, August 26, 1954. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 45. It is worth noting that the book's initial publication coincided with the arrival of several noteworthy texts credited with establishing the field of American intellectual history, especially Merle Curti's *Growth of American Thought.*

there are no American historical figures marshaled in support of his ideas. Moreover, most of the volume is dedicated not to the question of whether or not human beings make history or whether history is shorthand for the circumstances that make heroes but on clarifying the problem of "the hero" in history itself. Thus the book is most surely not a philosophy of history but a philosopher mediating the methodological lines drawn between contemporary historiography on the one hand and the philosophy of history on the other, all the while seeming to pay particular attention to the question of historical epistemology:

> It is difficult to give a satisfactory account of what happened, how it happened, and why, without striking a plausible balance between the part men played and the conditioning scene which provided the materials, sometimes the rules, but never the plots of the dramas of human history. Philosophers have treated this question in the large; historians in the small. The first have offered wholesale solutions usually in the interest of programs of action or hopes of salvation. The second have eschewed large-scale generalizations and cautiously gone from case to case.[41]

Hook hoped that by clarifying their respective positions in general his readers might understand the utility of or futility in studying the great men or heroes of history. To this end he outlined what he understood to be "the main line of historical action."[42] "The fundamental logic of the situation," he wrote, "is this":

> either the main line of historical action and social development is literally inescapable or it is not. If it is, any existing leadership is a completely subsidiary element in determining the main historical pattern of today and tomorrow. If it is not inescapable, the question almost asks itself: to what extent is the character of a given leadership causally and, since men are involved, morally responsible for our historical position and future?[43]

[41] *The Hero in History*, xiii.
[42] *Ibid*., 7.
[43] *Ibid*.

This observation impressed nearly every reviewer, for Hook seemed to contend that his readers consider the role of "great" or "heroic" men (and, to a considerably lesser extent, great women)[44] in history against "protagonists of historical determinism" such as Carlyle, Hegel, Engels and Spencer (to name a few).[45] Despite differences of opinion among them, what united all of these determinists was a monistic conception of history wedded to a deep metaphysical or quasi-scientific system that accounted for it, *pace* Hook's 1929 article. Hence Hook's lifelong aversion to grandiose metaphysical or supra-scientific explanations for empirical phenomena had a new set of targets. Before we attempt to unpack Hook's ideas, we should briefly lay out those of his targets.

In general, Carlyle and Hegel (and Wood), by virtue of their allegiance to grand narratives and The Hero's influence, laid down historical laws explaining change over time and then anointed a uniquely gifted and uniquely situated Great Man/Hero who embodied, or was at least a symbol for these laws. Moreover, these laws were, by and large, universal, irreversible, and inexorable. This Hero, whose biography was essentially unimportant, controlled the conjuncture of circumstances associated with historical change and was qualitatively marked off from other men; and, by implication, all history was the extension of their deeds and thoughts. History was, in the main, inevitable; there were no *ad hoc* aspects to history and contingencies were anathema. Thus the cornerstone for Hegel and Carlyle's narratives was deducible from their

[44] Hook dedicated roughly 12 pages to the role of women in history—which might very well be considered a feat for its times.
[45] In a curious turn he does not mention Marx in his list of determinists, only "orthodox Marxists" such as Engels.

metaphysical theories of history. Historical forces were causative, and all other variables were subsumed under them.[46]

Conversely, Spencer argued that the decisions of Heroes did not shape historical change over time but were instead shaped by social forces. To attribute an epochal event to any one individual at any time was to misunderstand the laws of history, he argued, laws that were not metaphysically grandiose but were instead "scientifically" so. Thus to understand the Hero one needed to understand Spencer's theory of social evolution, and then deduce from this theory a history. Engels argued that the great man was one who prepared "the minds of men for the revolutionary social changes that, unknown to them, are already on their way."[47] In this sense, and in line with orthodox Marxism, the great man was a dialectical necessity, an outcome of the forces of social and economic change. The complexities of the social conditions of the day mattered little, for there was no alternative outcome but revolutionary activity.

All of these authors, however, were united in their transcendent refulgences and monistic conceptions of historical change: Carlyle and Hegel's mystical metaphysical determinism; Spencer's social determinism; and Engels' economic determinism. All of them shared their convictions and refuted any and all claims regarding contingency regarding the great man, and, were history to turn out different from that which *they* predicted, Hook predicted they would perform some hoary methodological acrobatics or casuistry to save face. "Even theological determinists like the Popes," he bellowed, "who believe we can trace the finger of God in all historical events, speak of western culture since the Reformation as if it had been created by Luther and Calvin behind God's back. The fact remains that, for all their talk of the inevitable,

[46] This account benefitted from Joseph McCarney, *Hegel on History* (London: Routledge, 2000), especially Chapter 6.
[47] Hook, *The Hero in History,* 12**.**

the determinists never resign themselves to the inevitable when it is not to their liking."[48] Thus for all of Spencer's critique of Hegel and Carlyle for their metaphysical allegiances, Hook lumped them all together on the grounds that behind them all were a series of presuppositions that they believed were inscrutable. Spencer, according to Hook, simply substituted one grand metaphysical doctrine for an allegedly scientific one. And "Great men," he argued, "were interpreted as colorful nodes and points of the curve of social evolution to which no tangents could be drawn."[49]

Thus far we have tried to show that one element of *The Hero in History* was philosophical, and epistemologically so. This is difficult in light of Hook's very careful attempts to stick to writing a popular book on a philosophical theme without doing too much in the vein of technical philosophy. But hopefully it is clear that the methodological schools discussed above were, for Hook, epistemically untenable because of their inherent conceptual imprecisions that were passed off as theories of historical change. The determinists were also guilty of trying to explain empirical events via metaphysical platitudes—always dangerous to empiricists and pluralists. Meaningful historical inquiry for the latter took place when individuals availed themselves of their own predilections and tried to explain what alternative paths of action were available to the Hero/Great man, and how and why he decided which was best and what were the consequences on human purposes. Hence the subtitle of the book was *A Study in Limitation and Possibility.* Individuals—great or not—were always limited by the circumstances within which they operated. By virtue of their conduct there was always the possibility for war, pestilence, revolution, crusades or any number of disasters. In this sense we might argue that all of this was

[48] Ibid.,13.
[49] *Ibid.*, 15.

Hook's implicit invocation of Peirce's argument from authority or tenacity, each of which facilitated dogmatism and obscurantism, which in turn were offered as causative factors in historical change. Without quoting him directly, Hook was surely devoted to Peirce's maxim: "The demonstrations of metaphysicians are all moonshine."[50]

Few reviewers paid much attention to *The Hero in History*'s philosophical underpinnings discussed above.[51] Instead many of them focused the bulk of their attention on Hook's rather provocative distinction between the "eventful" and the "event-making man":

> The *eventful* man in history is any man whose actions influenced subsequent developments along a quite different course than would have been followed if these actions had not been taken. The *event-making* man is an eventful man whose actions are the consequences of outstanding capacities of intelligence, will, and character rather than of accidents of position. This distinction tries to do justice to the general belief that a hero is great not merely in virtue of what he does but in virtue of what he is.[52]

This event-making man in turn exhibited a "preponderant influence in determining an issue or event whose consequences would have been profoundly different had he not acted as he did." Given this distinction Hook argued that much of what was behind scholars and laymen studying great men had to do with the rise of authoritarian governments in history—from antiquity to the present. What united all of them was an effort to inculcate "mass enthusiasm and worship" of a great man or leader over and above any other force of historical change. This great man or leader in turn needed to secure the belief in their greatness among the people by synthesizing Peircean methods of authority, tenacity, and *a priority*; that is, to be historically efficacious the great man

[50] Peirce's quote is from "The Fixation of Belief," in Buchler, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, 15.
[51] The only exception was Randall, who dedicated nearly eight pages to the book's philosophical import.
[52] Hook, *Hero in History*, 154. The appearance of the distinction eight chapters into the book is surely odd, especially given the weight it is supposed to carry.

must get himself believed in.[53] Great Men could thus be either a romantic protagonist or an apotheosis and, in a Peircean sense, one who was infallible.

The eventful man for Hook was the lesser catalyst for historical change, for he could only alter the course of human history by meeting some social and group interests—whether they be economic, national, psychological, or whatever—first. Thus a Jefferson or a Lincoln, by virtue of their responding to the social and political crises of their day, were great but not Great because their speeches or writings (or their having lived) cannot be credited with exclusively bringing about the changes for which they are so lauded. Thus Jefferson was an apologist for a complex set of social circumstances already at play—religious freedom, for example—and the Declaration of Independence carried less etiological weight than has been assumed. And although he undertook no sustained discussion of Lincoln, we may just as well assume that slavery would have died a natural death if he had never lived.[54] And given what we know about the history of science, it is safe to assume, as Hook did, that the Theory of Relativity would have been developed by any number of scientists not named Albert Einstein. And were we to chain one thousand primates to one thousand word processors *War and Peace* would most surely be written. The idea that "almost anybody could have done it" or "context matters" itself appeared fallacious, and the book exists as something of a straw man, for Hook was, in effect, more interested in establishing the validity of the event-making man in history. But reviewers and members of America's armed forces bought it, and here is the point where they all agreed that

[53] *Ibid*., 10. On this point Hook's only reference to American historians is made. He also criticized James Harvey Robinson and the New History for "imagining that they were dispensing with heroes and great men to follow the sober course of economic and social 'forces,' they were deceiving themselves. They removed the kings, statesmen, and general from their niches and then set up in their places the great captains of industry and finance, and the great thinkers in philosophy and science." *Ibid*., 23.
[54] *Ibid*., Hook did make a conditional allowance for Jefferson's greatness due to his role in the Louisiana Purchase.

Hook's book was important: were one to canvass the record of human history, there was only one Great Man who independently and effectively re-determined the course of history and, in so doing, radically altered the lives of men, women and children everywhere: Vladimir Lenin. Without Lenin, the entire course of the Russian Revolution would have been "lost" and the social, economic, and political history of the world would have been drastically different. While the situation in Russia was, for Hook, revolutionary since 1905, without Lenin the Revolution of 1917 was "unthinkable" (and, even though Hitler was demonstrably a terrible person it was conceivable that without Lenin the Second World War might very well not have happened).[55] Since Lenin's stranglehold on the Bolsheviks was total in terms of slogans, strategy, and objectives, Hook concluded, over the course of a long and deeply descriptive chapter, that free societies can do without a Great Man.

As provocative as these ideas were, this latter point, namely that free societies have no need for a Hero, brings to light what, I would argue, is the most important (and universally ignored) aspect of the *Hero in History*: the normative consideration associated with historical inquiry. Again, since he was trying to write a popular book, Hook did not dedicate long passages to value theory; but he did point out that the heroes of history were always faced with choosing among alternative courses of action before they performed that which made them Great to their audiences, scholars, or lay people. This emphasis upon action and its consequences can be teased out of the text and segues to our larger consideration of Hook's educational theory.

The *Hero in History*'s normative aspects could be found in two interrelated and interdependent categories. On the one hand were epistemic considerations that utilized elements of the logic of historical inquiry when grappling with clarifying and achieving human purposes.

[55] *Ibid*., 184; 203.

On the other hand were more educational and political considerations. Given the nature and design of the text, Hook briefly presented the latter instead of demonstrating them via sustained argument.

The logic of historical inquiry provided for Hook an explanatory "framework for [assessing] heroic action." Armed with this he hoped to explain that the study of the Hero or Great Man's actions entailed a consideration of their respective epistemologies, especially when those actions largely constituted the source of their being considered heroic in the first place. And these actions presupposed a method by which their requisite beliefs were, to once more borrow from Peirce, "fixed." So the larger issue for Hook was the extent to which these heroes weighed alternative courses of action when confronted with any number of social, political, or economic crises. "The existence of possible alternatives of development in a historic situation," he maintained, "is the presupposition of significant heroic action."[56] In weighing alternatives these heroes considered any number of desirable—and potential—consequences of their action—or inaction—for human purposes. When we study these heroes that is precisely the basis upon which we judge them; not merely *that* Lincoln's issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation *when he did* forever altered both the course of the Civil War and the discourse about slavery but *how* he arrived at his belief that slavery was "wrong" and the policy alternatives he weighed before its issuance. This entailed an appreciation of many historical variables and not merely Lincoln's personality. "Where a genuine alternative exists," Hook argued, "the active presence of a great man may be decisive—*may be* because *other* elements come into play to decide the issue between the alternatives, and they may weigh more heavily than the element of

[56] *Ibid.,* 114.

personality."[57] To study heroes this way allowed readers to appreciate better humanity's limitations and possibilities—including the limitations on the possibility of heroic action. In this sense Hook hoped that historical inquiry into the past would be considered replete with methodological suggestions for our inquiries into present difficulties. But it also seems that Hook would conclude that in this sense Lenin represented the worst in humanity—the subordination of all genuine alternative courses of action within an historically important situation. The likes of Hegel, et al., certainly placed, in Hook's estimation, for they denied that alternatives were possible at all.

This larger normative aspect of the *Hero in History* was both educational and political. Foreshadowing his later excursion into the problem of tragedy in philosophical inquiry (which was no doubt apt given the topic of The Hero), Hook maintained that the moral component of historical inquiry consisted in

> Being aware of the relevant *ifs* and *might-be's* in the present, and choosing between alternatives in the light of predictable consequences. We may lose even after we have chosen intelligently and fought bravely. In that case regret is always vain, and resignation, without capitulation…is the better part of wisdom, until a new opportunity supervenes. But intelligence and sustained courage will win more often than drift and fitful bursts of effort. If there is any ethical imperative valid for all historical periods it is awareness and action.[58]

Such potentially tragic inquiries arose whenever we discovered "the fateful consequences of the lost chances of yesterday," such as (for Hook) the myriad political opportunities squandered that would have prevented Hitler from coming to power. Such occurrences had a particular bearing on how we grapple with problematic historical situations in the present as well, for "the consequences of a lost chance," however, "rarely close the doors to future choice. But they

[57] *Ibid.,* 116
[58] *Ibid*., 148.

narrow them to alternatives that are all relatively unfavorable in comparison with earlier possibilities."[59] To study history was thus to study the exigencies of heroic decisions, and their consequences for the weal and woe of a particular nation or, as we have seen in Lenin's case, the world. While not quite a nod to Santayana's adage that historical amnesia was tantamount to a tragic guarantee that all past misdeeds will be repeated, it sounded pretty close. This is as close to an acknowledgment to history's value in education as we can find in *The Hero in History*.

Because most heroes in history exhibited authoritarian tendencies in ways of belief, or oversaw the violent manifestations of those beliefs, Hook closed the book with the simple—or, better yet, over-simplified—observation that democracies such as England and the United States have no use for a Hero or Great Man on epistemic grounds. Since the cornerstone of a democratic society was the principle of majority rule, wherein the active participation of the governed in determining their own welfare, such a society entailed a *leader*, not a Hero. They would not only weigh alternative courses of action, they would perforce do so before proposing any particular policy that might adversely affect the minority in a pluralistic society. In this respect the leader adheres not to a transcendental conception of democracy but professes an allegiance to the democratic *process*, which is another way of describing that messy epistemic give-and-take whose consequences hopefully—hopefully—result in the majority and minority agreeing to disagree until the minority, adopting the democratic process itself, becomes the majority. Such a leader does not think or act independently of any constituency, either. These leaders could also come from all aspects of social, political, or intellectual life. Democracies, for all of their internal frustrations and endless epistemic foibles remained, even in 1943, when it

[59] *Ibid*., 149-150.

was not clear to what extent a free society might survive and thrive, the last best hope on Earth. That was why, he argued, we only glorified our leaders when they died.[60]

On a related note, Hook spared no platitudinous expense when he maintained that "a successful democracy…may honor its statesmen; but it must honor its teachers more." Why? Because it was teachers, and not Heroes (or, for that matter, leaders) "who have given people vision, method, and knowledge."[61] They were the ones who transmitted those indispensable regulative ideals and values that democracies have required for their survival for as long as democracy has been historically viable. Their task was not to present history mnemonically but to eschew all appeals to the event-making individual, who represented all that threatened a culture of free inquiry. "The heroes in a democracy," he wrote,

> should be the great figures in the Pantheon of thought, the men of ideas, of social vision, of scientific achievement and artistic power. For it is these men who mould the intellectual ideals and social attitudes of the citizens, who without knowledge, quickened perception, and educated taste cannot realize the promise of democracy.[62]

When studied, the Pantheon revealed a litany of alternatives that were either weighed, rejected, repudiated, or adopted, and so on, and their consequences for the cultures within which these weighed alternatives took place. A student who understood this developed, with a good teacher's help, an ability to discern what was significant and what was trivial in both the past and the present. Central to an understanding of and appreciation for these values was history—both as an independent subject matter and as a method of inquiry that set limits and raised possibilities for the abnegation of Heroes or Great Men altogether. With this he tied together his critiques of the

[60] Hook, *Hero in History*, 236. At the risk of editorializing, it must have been odd that Hook, America's leading philosopher of democracy, would dedicate a scant twenty pages to it, and nearly fifty to his discussion of Lenin and the Russian Revolution. Nothing in the archive clarifies why he did so.
[61] *Ibid.*
[62] *Ibid*., 237.

heroic school of historiography, the dangers associated with metaphysical systems promising the sun, moon, and stars, and the prospects for meaningful historical inquiry via education. It remained for Hook to wed his philosophy of history to his philosophy of education. This would turn out to be harder than he thought, trying as he did to promote their nuptials while simultaneously failing to resist launching an attack against his educational adversaries.

IV. The Strident Pedagogue: Educating Modern Man

> To discover why a man comes to value what he does, does not necessarily lead us to justify his value, but it enables us to be more intelligent about its character.[63]

Shortly after John Dewey died on June 1st, 1952, publishers clamored for someone to write his biography. Among them was John Day, which had published Hook's well-received (especially by Dewey) 1939 intellectual biography, *John Dewey: An Intellectual Portrait.* Oddly enough, Hook declined the offer, citing the level of research such a book required, book ideas he was working on, and a heavy teaching load at NYU. But he was also somewhat taken aback by John Day's invitation, for he felt that they had all but severed their relationship with Hook in light of the less-than-stellar sales of Hook's *The Hero in History*. "The ironical thing," Hook wrote, "is that my anti-Hutchins book, 'Education for Modern Man,' which you thought would have too small a sale to justify publication, has sold almost 14,000 copies."[64]

As indicated in the last chapter, *Education for Modern Man* was conceived as the culmination of a nearly ten-year campaign against various manifestations of the Adler/Hutchins line, defending progressive education (as he understood it) and criticizing the St. John's curricular centerpiece, the Great Books. It was also a response to that consortium of self-styled Adlerians who went by the name "Education for Freedom." In addition to attacking Dewey in

[63] Hook, *Education for Modern Man*, 133.
[64] Hook to Richard Walsh, June 27, 1952. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 44.

particular and progressive education in general, this group—which in addition to Adler and Hutchins, included such educational luminaries as Mark Van Doren, Stringfellow Barr, and Alexander Meiklejohn—started a foundation in 1943 that sponsored a series of radio broadcasts blasting Dewey, vocationalism, secularism, and the general "materialism" at work in American education. What they preferred instead was a traditional educational system grounded in metaphysical truths, even if they felt no obligation to account for what those truths were. So popular were these radio broadcasts that the same year Hutchins published a titular manifesto synthesizing all of them.[65] If one idea united the dozen or so broadcasts, it was that John Dewey's educational philosophy had "done more than anything to promote the disintegration of American education." And in its place a curriculum ought to be dedicated to the study of values "independent of time or particular environment, though realizable under changing forms in both."[66] We might imagine Hook in his Brooklyn sitting room listening attentively to such statements in horror. In any event, he fired off a letter to the president of the Mutual Broadcasting Company, furious at the conspicuous absence of any views critical of Education for Freedom, and calling Hutchins and his group "a closed theoretical corporation" bent on slander and misinformation about Dewey and his followers. If Mutual Broadcasting was to continue hosting such opinions, he continued, why not have Dewey (and, of course, Hook) appear to respond to their charges? If they would not, Mutual Broadcasting might as well be considered guilty of promoting Education for Freedom and, by implication, the St. John's philosophy of education.[67] Unfortunately, there is no evidence of an invitation ever having been extended to Hook; nor is there evidence repudiating Hook's larger accusations. In the meantime, and perhaps

[65] Robert Hutchins, *Education for Freedom* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1943).
[66] Hutchins, "What is Liberal Education," Education for Freedom radio broadcast, December 20, 1943. Transcripts of nearly a dozen broadcasts can be found in Sidney Hook Papers, Box 148.
[67] Hook to Miller McClintock, December 31, 1943. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 130.

as a direct response to the perceived slight by Mutual Broadcasting, he once more assembled some of his previously published scholarly and miscellaneous pieces, and published *Education for Modern Man* in 1946.[68] Among its many accomplishments, the book is credited with introducing to the American intellectual community Hook's appellation as "Dewey's Bulldog"[69]

For a book conceived as a sustained critique of Robert Hutchins, *Education for Modern Man*'s title was actually inspired by Jacques Maritain's 1944 volume, *Education at the Crossroads*.[70] Maritain's conception of "man" was a "free individual in personal relation with God," and whose job it was to obey his laws all the time. Moreover, this conception of "man" was ubiquitous and invariant. The "crossroads" at which education stood were between a curriculum and institution dedicated to the furtherance of these concepts and goals and the dilemma of a more secular path associated with modernity. Hook's title indicated that recent advances in science and technology have so greatly impinged society that such a concept of Man falls incredibly short of solving temporal problems. Thus "modern man" meant just that: humanity as was found in its current state of duress.

The book is a study in contrasts. It was a remarkable book for its time, written as it was in rather lucid prose, and bereft of any systematic or comprehensive educational considerations typical of, say, Dewey's educational *tour de force*, *Democracy and Education*, which had appeared thirty years earlier. To many of its readers Hook's position was not unfamiliar to his contemporaries, steeped as it was in a Deweyan vernacular. But unlike Dewey, the crucial

[68] All his life Hook never argued that his proposals represented an outright repudiation of the St. John's group. Rather he emphasized that their texts—their subject matter—would be equally welcome into his proposed educational philosophy. The problem was with their unalloyed allegiance to metaphysics as the sole repository from which all of their specific educational proposals followed

[69] The phrase first appeared in Eric Bentley's review of *Education for Modern Man*, titled "Dewey's Bulldog," *Saturday Review of Literature* 29 (1946): 22. Copy in Sidney Hook Papers, Box 45.

[70] Even though there is no evidence that it influenced his later work, the same year Hook's tome came out Maritain published *St. Thomas Aquinas: Angel of the Schools* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1946).

difference was that Hook did not fold his educational polemics into a larger theory of democracy. Drawing heavily on his experience as the architect of the Unified Studies Division at NYU, the book also laid out the generic features of a four-year undergraduate curriculum applicable to any American college or university. Central to his proposals were questions related to values and history—questions at the heart of Education for Freedom (and, again, St. John's) as well. But the book was also deeply polemical, which turned off many readers and reviewers, who wished that he had either written a more detailed educational philosophy or an outright polemic—not both.

Were we to shirk the temptation to tell yet another story about Sidney Hook eviscerating metaphysicians, we might discover a rather rich educational program that proposed six required areas of studies in the first two years of college: the physical and biological sciences; society and contemporary civilization; values; methodological considerations; composition, literature, and languages; art and music. Methodologically speaking, Hook hoped that these would all be taught interdisciplinarily, without too much respect for established boundaries. This was especially true for the sciences and social studies, for "only when one science is taught it tends to be treated professionally, while the division of the social studies into history, political science, and economics was "an intellectual scandal."[71]

The two required disciplines of values and the analytical methods were closest to what Hook seemed to do in his own undergraduate courses. Value conflicts that lie at the base of political and intellectual differences were to be teased out of the text/s under discussion and examined and compared. Drawing upon his own pedagogy, he argued that methods of analysis always involved something more and less than the mere training in formal logic. "There is an approach to the study of logic that on an elementary level is much more successful in achieving"

[71] Hook, *Education for Modern Man*, 87-88.

a critical disposition in students than pure syllogistic mastery of *Modus Tollens*. "This plunges the student into an analysis of language material around him," he argued,

> but especially the fields of politics and social study, insight is developed into the logical principles of definition, the structure of analogies, dilemmas, types of fallacies and the reasons why they are fallacies, the criteria of good hypotheses, and related topics. Such training may legitimately be required of all students. Although philosophers are usually the best bale to give it, any teacher who combines logical capacity with pedagogic skill can make this study a stimulating experience.[72]

Even though Hook argued that these methods could be extended into all areas of inquiry, for our purposes we will limit our discussion to those that seemed to him crucial for a viable educational philosophy: the study of human values and their implications for meaningful historical inquiry. For it is here that Hook hoped that a "good teacher working with good books"—especially history—could "make the value commitments of others appear as vital options, actively competing with the students' own, instead of abstract negations." To study history was thus invariably to study values, which would in turn help students to either reaffirm or reject certain values they were previously committed to.[73]

The concerns associated with values, Hook argued, were ultimately related to society's concerns, for value judgments were derived from the concerns of and conflicts that occurred within society. And as long as values originated in human experience, and could not be traced to some place beyond living, breathing human desires or needs (such as some transcendental realm or theological doctrine), then, Hook argued, values judgments were properly subject to the same critical scrutiny as factual ones.[74] In this sense, Hook regarded questions of value to be of the same order as other matters of practical concern, and he pointed to history for support of his

[72] *Ibid*., 97-98.
[73] *Ibid.,* 131.
[74] *Ibid*., 132-136.

arguments. For example, how might society understand the nature and history of intolerance (America was, after all, in the midst of war)? Hook maintained that to ascertain how to reduce intolerance among individuals or societies, the educator must make some historical figure come alive to demonstrate how, if it were at all possible, a more secure individual or social relationship could be, or could have been, established. And this entailed a consideration of the specific and contingent; that is, among other things, what *kind of* intolerance—personal, institutional, or social—one was considering. Questions of this nature were for Hook of the same order because "a moral problem [was] created not merely by asking a question but by discovering an objective difficulty in a concrete situation…"[75] Conflicts among values were thus shaped by present problems, and means were an integral parts of ends.[76] Moral questions revolved around choices between one good and another good, and not merely, as was then assumed, between good and bad or right and wrong. Reminiscent of his days at East Side High School, it was the educator's task to flesh out the complexities of choice in history as evidence that some contemporary dilemmas may very well transcend historical time. The educational implications for this view were no doubt striking or appealing to his readers, for the network of values in any society served as the environment within which the educational process took place. This view was a far cry from primitive man's conversations around a campfire.

At the risk of a philosophical diversion, by "values" Hook meant both "goods" in the sense of goals, needs, and desires which were determined in the context of inquiry to be desirable for someone to pursue—such as intelligence—and "right" in the sense of the conduct in which it was correct to engage. Matters grew epistemically messier when sometimes the question of right

[75] *Ibid.*, 186.
[76] *Ibid*., 130. For a more philosophically rigorous treatment of this discussion, see Forrest, "Naturalism in Education," Chapter three.

in matters of personal behavior "dramatically" eclipsed questions of good in terms of larger goals and desires. To the extent that this happened, larger concerns with values in the educational process might also be eclipsed. This was just the very nature of values if we removed them from their ontological or metaphysical trappings and placed them in the exigencies of ordinary experience. "Values come in clusters and constellations," Hook argued, "[t]hey supplement and complement each other like colors [and] they contribute to enlarging our understanding and sharpening our perceptions in particular cases. When we are familiar with the ways in which values call to values, we know what to look for, what to reinforce or guard against, what to affirm or reject."[77] And familiarity came with study, especially the study of history.

Perhaps the single greatest difficulty that confronted Hook was the problem of applying the scientific method to values within the context of his philosophy of education. And Hook realized this: "The great challenge to the centrality of scientific method in the process of education arises from the presence of values. How, on this view, are they to be approached? Can they be understood, can they be evaluated, without breaking free from the general pattern of inquiry?"[78] While it was necessary for Hook to acknowledge this problem, he understood also that an acknowledgement alone was insufficient. Thus he also spoke at length about the complexity of the problem itself, and recognized that there was a common method needed to reach some form of consensus on value conflicts. Method, for all of its centrality in his philosophy of education, was also the pedagogical cornerstone:

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[77] *Ibid*., 134. Hook further explored the nature of human values in his *Quest for Being.* For a sustained engagement with Hook's theory of valuation, see Barbara Forrest, "Naturalism and Education," especially Chapter 3; Raziel Abelson, "Hook's Ethical Theory, Pure and Impure," in Paul Kurtz (ed.), *Sidney Hook and the Contemporary World: Essays on the Pragmatic Intelligence* (New York: The John Day Company, 1968), 203-217.

[78] Hook, *Education for Modern Man*, 177.

> Values or goods are plural in morals, just as ends in education are plural. They conflict not only with the values, goods, and ends that are rejected to some extent among themselves. Two parties to a dispute may both profess allegiance to the ideals of justice *and* happiness or to the goods of security *and* advance. But they may evaluate them differently, and assign them different weights when faced by the necessity of choice. Similarly, although different schools of education subscribe to critical intelligence *and* loyalty, natural piety for one's tradition *and* independent exploration of new modes of thought, they may be worlds apart in the practical judgments because they accent differently the values they hold in common. They can reach a consensus only insofar as they both submit to a *common method* of resolving conflicts of value in specific situations. But it [is at] the point of method, i.e., the process by which ideals are themselves derived and evaluated that they fundamentally divide.[79]

This statement could very well serve as the autobiography of his nearly thirty-year quarrel with the Adlerians. But for all of his assertions that the institution of scientific method was itself the institution of value, Hook was surprisingly silent throughout *Education for Modern Man* on what its *actual application* involved.

Important as this dilemma was, our exposition and analysis requires that we postpone such a discussion, and with the caveat that Hook seemed to take some of the shortcomings of the book to heart. He later expounded on the theme of the mutuality of values and history in a Presidential Address before the American Philosophical Association—a move that plays an important role in our next chapter. For now we might assess how Hook defended his claim that historical study played a crucial role in how we navigated value conflicts.If the task of education was to inculcate a sensitivity to a consideration of values, an understanding of past historical situations was essential; despite each contemporary situation a student found themselves in was in some ways unique we can appeal to historical precedents for guidance.

From a strictly theoretical perspective, Hook's proposals regarding curriculum and content (with the exception, of course, for his overt exclusion of religion) were, as far as some of his reviewers were concerned, relatively uncontroversial, for they occupied every position which

[79] *Ibid*., 56.

was important to a knowledge of what the goals of education should be. Given the book's sustained critiques of Hutchins and Adler, Hook surely must have been confident that anyone could find his proposals agreeable regardless of whether or not they sympathized with St. John's. Yet his proposals regarding historical study warrant further attention, for as much as he saw it and his concerns for method as mutually entailing, he was also extremely vague when proposing just *how* this was all possible in the classroom. This fact only underscored the general impatience that permeates *Education for Modern Man*, one that failed to effectively, objectively, and simultaneously present a positive educational philosophy *and* a critical appraisal of the St. John's program.[80] Above we examined how Hook understood the logic of historical inquiry; we also examined the general moral import of historical knowledge in *The Hero in History*. But how did he understand historical study within the context of his educational philosophy?

Hook constantly appealed to historical study in defense of his educational views. The point he made more often than any other about the utility of the scientific method in historical study was that it secured the latter from lapsing into what he called "pure fiction." The primary use of scientific method in history was, ultimately, a logic of criticism. "[P]recisely those features in a historical account," he wrote

> which distinguish it from fiction, which make it more or less warranted than another account, which testify to its critical rather than uncritical nature, are features that will be found to be a part of the general pattern of scientific inquiry. The same is true for anything put forth as a valid interpretation of a work of art or a correct explication of a text, without in any way denying that different qualities of experience are present, and that the critical or scientific approach has additional functions quite different in deciphering the meanings of a poem from, say, reconstructing the skeleton of a prehistoric animal from a few fragments of bone.[81]

[80] Mason Gross lamented Hook's dwelling so much on the Adlerians; it resulted in too many platitudes when analysis was warranted. See *The Journal of Philosophy*, 43 (1946): 629-636.
[81] Hook, *Education for Modern Man*, 176-177. Without mentioning him by name, Daniel Bell appears to have drawn rather heavily upon Hook's ideas in his *The Reform of General Education: The Columbia*

Hook believed that when the scientific method was applied to historical study it militated against the brazen insertion of the historian's personal views into the subject matter. As a result, the historian's analysis would provide whoever reads their book a unique opportunity for the offering of insights into the human condition. History, for Hook, must be viewed as a source of "perennial and fascinating interest because, among other things, [it] gives us insights into the nature and condition of men as we experience them in their customary political and social habitat." At roughly the same time he argued elsewhere that historians

> Enable[d] us to see into the hearts of men, make us aware of the corruption of the best of men and the possibility of grace and regeneration in the worst. It is in this sense that they give us not a truer psychology of the human mind but a completer [*sic*] one than the textbooks of academic psychology no matter what the standpoint from which the latter are written.[82]

This is not to suggest that Hook thought that historians were saints or, more importantly, objective in an absolute sense. The point was that there was a need for factual accuracy and logical consistency when writing history. Even though Hook was equally aware of the limitations of using scientific method in the humanities. "The recognition that the logic of scientific inquiry in history is identical with the logic of scientific inquiry in nature," he acknowledged, "is not gainsaid by the obvious fact we know far less about history than we do about nature." But more to the point he declared that

> Historical terms are ill-defined and the general laws on the basis of which we make predications are vague and unrelated to each other. And yet so many of them are relevant to historical situations that the task of the historian becomes far more complex than that of the natural scientist. But once a definite historical problem is formulated, a beginning

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College Experience in its National Setting (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966). In the book Bell takes note of changes at Harvard and Chicago, but not NYU, and despite his close friendship with Hook.

[82] Hook, "On Historical Understanding," in Hook, *Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life*. Quote is from 164-165.

> can be made. Despite our methodological doubts, we recognize that some historical explanation and some predictions about human affairs are better warranted than others. When we seek to make explicit why one historical account or prediction is more adequate or truer than another, it is always in terms of a common pattern of inquiry employed in any field where the distinction between truth and fiction has a meaning.[83]

He also carried his frequent denial of intuitionism, so crucial to Hutchins' overall educational approach, into his analysis of history:

> A more legitimate conception of historical method calls attention to the fact that the explanatory categories of historical understanding are purposive and social—that history cannot be "reduced" to a chapter of physics and biology. But the purposes and traditions of men to which we relate our historical explanations must be identified in the same way as we identify other traits in nature and life, not through a unique act of intuition but through publicly observable acts of what can legitimately be inferred from such acts…[84]

Despite its limitations, for Hook the scientific pattern of inquiry was the only one that guaranteed that all knowledge was commonly accessible. This pattern, moreover, remained the same regardless of *where* it was applied. "[I]t is clear that the existence of geology as a field of inquiry does not presuppose that there is a geological method of inquiry except in the innocent sense of methods of geology."[85] Therefore it is once more not surprising that, in light of his views, Merle Curti and Charles Beard recruited Hook to provide a detailed glossary of historical terms to the Committee on Historiography in 1946.[86]

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[83] Hook, *Education for Modern Man,* 176.
[84] *Ibid*., 169.
[85] *Ibid*., 165-166.
[86] For Hook's glossary, see *Theory and Practice in Historical Study: A Report of the Committee on Historiography* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1946), Chapter 4. While we cannot speak with too much authority about the reasons why Hook was chosen to participate in the SSRC's endeavor, we can reasonably guess that his historically-oriented publications played a considerable role. Compounding this difficulty is the fact that Charles Beard destroyed many of his personal papers. See Clyde W. Barrow, *More Than a Historian: The Political and Economic Thought of Charles A. Beard* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000), xxi.

Hook also believed that history afforded students opportunities for criticism and for clarifying, and, hopefully, endorsing human values. This position in turn reinforced the importance of history in the curriculum he proposed. For it offered opportunities for the vicarious experience of values which were themselves connected with those values that actually impinged upon the affective environment of a classroom as well as society. The epistemological status of values and the manner in which they were treated could for Hook serve as a larger preface to the specific treatment of values as they constitute the affective environment of the school. "From first to last, in season and out," he argued,

> our educational institutions, especially on the college level, must emphasize *methods* of analysis. …The objection to this stress on method come from the most diverse quarters and are based on the crassest misunderstanding of the nature of methodological analysis and the reasons for making it central, not exclusive, in every educational enterprise.[87]

The reason for Hook's continual emphasis on method was conjoined to his frequent and insistant rejection of any kind of intuitive or revelatory claim in any enterprise—especially education.

In purely pedagogical terms, Hook maintained that the centrality of scientific method obviated the need for the method of authority as a viable pedagogical device, and he dedicated an entire chapter to the criteria for a good teacher. The chapter, essentially an elaboration of his 1927 talk before curious teachers we mentioned in chapter one, solidified Hook's pedagogical position. Good teachers were essentially good inquirers, for they must present alternative viewpoints whilst avoiding biases or preferences for one or the other. They ought to be expert in a field but need not be a scholar per se, and whatever their dedication, the good teacher was preeminently dedicated to the processes associated with free inquiry, both in the classroom and

[87] *Education for Modern Man,* 145.

without. This meant that they must be authoritative without being authoritarian; and if there is to be any authority in the classroom, Hook concluded, it must be method.[88]

It is worth reminding the reader that, for all of its difficulties, *Education for Modern Man* was a resounding success for an academic publication. In addition to its selling as many copies as it did over time, the book was translated into Japanese in 1949.[89] We might further (albeit briefly) measure its success in terms of the impact it had on Hook's invitation to join a panel on the much-vaunted Harvard Report, *General Education in a Free Society*, a book that, in many ways, dwarfed the arguments made in *Education for Modern Man.*

Unwittingly or not, the Harvard Report was designed to mediate the differences between Dewey and Hook on the one hand and the Education for Freedom/St. John's group on the other. And it did so by arguing that there existed no inherent conflict between "heritage," or what they understood to be Classical or Christian traditions, and the sciences. Each, furthermore, had made significant contributions to modern education. Its principal exponent, the Harvard philosopher Raphael Demos, believed that most lines of inquiry—such as the humanities, the social sciences, and even the natural sciences—all had unique ways of determining Truth. Revealing himself to be less than objective, Demos further argued that, if he had had his way, the Report would have included a metaphysical defense of democracy.[90]

Hook countered by insisting that the "method of organized intelligence" was more than just an instrument in the establishment of Truth. Rather, it was synonymous with the

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[88] Hook wrote: "In the educational system of a democracy, the authority of method must replace the authority of persons and institutions in the determination of truth." *Ibid*., 170.
[89] Takahashi Tomiya to Hook, October 25, 1949. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 44.
[90] This summary is from Boyd Bode, "The Harvard Report: A Philosophy of American Education," *Journal of Higher Education,* (1946): 1-8; Raphael Demos, "Mr. Bode and the Harvard Report on Education: A Reply," in *ibid*., 57-62, 114; Demos, "Philosophical Aspects of the Recent Harvard Report on Education," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 7 (1946): 187-213; Bode, "Reply," *ibid*., 264-292.

experimental method or "scientific attitude" applicable to all spheres of human experience—even great books—related to "heritage." It remained to apply it to current events to test their consequences for the betterment of society. Demos' approach was little more than dogmatism, again. If there was another form of knowledge attainable beyond the scientific method, Hook would love to hear about it; and if they did, he insisted that they show how it paid off educationally. Demos should have known better to argue from First Principles with another philosopher whose life commitments were dedicated to the renunciation of them.[91] The Harvard Report incited Hook and Horace Kallen to organize yet another meeting of the New York University Institute of Philosophy to discuss—yet again—the challenges American naturalists faced in light of metaphysicians.

Hook's very public forays into historical study and educational theory garnered him both the popular audience he sought (though not as large as John Day would have preferred) and the respect (albeit critical) of the American philosophical community at large. His fusion of historical inquiry with his vision for a more intelligently organized liberal arts curriculum took him into new educational—and political—territory. The fallout from his efforts would occupy the bulk of his time in the 1950s, and would inspire him to revise *Education for Modern Man* once the Soviet Union launched a satellite into space. Never again would he avail himself of the necessity of historical study as a means towards grappling with an uncertain, and, at times, unkind world. And given the scope and breadth of his historical knowledge, especially that of the Russian Revolution and its Hero, Lenin, for the time being he wondered: what were the prospects for such dogmatists in America's classrooms?

[91] Hook, "Synthesis or Eclecticism?" in *ibid*., 214-225.

And once more, the creeping authoritarianism that Hook identified in those Great Man histories shaped what American intellectuals ought to do in light of what many perceived as Communism's insidious takeover of higher education. Drawing upon his lifetime of experience within the classroom and beyond, Hook advanced what has come to be known as his most controversial position yet, one that frames the next chapter. All along he was convinced that his argument was thoroughly consistent with the talk he delivered before promising educators in 1927, namely that no dogmatist should to be allowed in America's classrooms. When he later put his views to paper, he assumed that he had written a rather innocent article. Instead he opened the polemical and educational penstocks. In the process Hook recycled some of his former adversaries, as both Adler and Hutchins turned out to be stalking horses for the forces of reaction in the 1940s but "cultural vigilantes" in the 1950s.

Chapter Five:

"The Will to Misunderstand"

> For although I recognize that there are occasions when one should listen and not talk back, I have often suffered when compelled to sit patiently as waves of rhetoric or streams of outrageous misstatement or misinterpretation washed over me.[1]

In 1958 the Committee on Elections unanimously selected Sidney Hook president of the prestigious Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association (APA). As far as professional philosophical organizations go, to be elected President of the Eastern APA, the most revered among them, was no small feat, as it represented a resounding testament to both one's scholarship and professional standing. Among the myriad and oftentimes tedious administrative responsibilities befitting the prestigious organization's masthead, delivering the APA's presidential address was its capstone. Being chosen by his peers could not have been more fortuitous for Hook, for his presidential address was to be delivered in conjunction with his beloved mentor John Dewey's centenary, a fact that no doubt must have pleased Dewey's most ardent and dedicated warden. And philosophically, Hook's nomination could not have been more curious to many within the APA, for the career of professional philosophy had moved further away from traditional pragmatism.

In order to better gauge his audience, Hook took the advice of a colleague, who in a private conversation pleaded, "For Heaven's sake and our own, [Sidney], don't merely give us another paper. Say something of general significance—."[2] There was just cause for remonstrance, for American philosophy—especially that variant known as pragmatism—had drawn the fire and endured the ire of professional and lay opponents for decades, and Hook's

[1] Sidney Hook, "Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association,* 33 (1959 - 1960): 5.
[2] Anonymous quote to Hook, in *ibid.*

platform would surely serve as a significant line of defense against them. Furthermore, since there were times when Hook's pugilistic enthusiasms replaced his otherwise level-headed philosophical temperament, perhaps his colleague was suggesting that he could delve deeper than ever before for his Presidential Address. But what topic would meet the criteria for "general significance"?

To be sure, Hook could easily have drawn upon his six-month stint in Japan, where, as part of his 1958 Ford Fellowship, he spoke before the Japanese Society for the Study of American Philosophy and the Association for the Philosophy of Existence on the similarities and dissimilarities between American pragmatism and European existentialism. Or he could have drawn on his manifold writings defending Dewey's pragmatism against his critics, scattered as they were throughout the decade. Or he could have drawn upon his various writings on the theory and practice of General Education, for he had, after all, delivered three lectures the previous summer on the topic at Western Washington College of Education. Throughout the 1950s he also spoke at Michigan State University, Mount Holyoke, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Miami (to name a few) on education and educational reform. All of these potential sources inform the larger scope of what follows, for while all of these ideas shaped the tenor of his presidential address to one degree or another, what he most certainly *did not* draw upon when putting it together was his long and notorious engagement with the question of global Communism.

In order to "compensate for the distortions to which pragmatism has been subject," Hook's Presidential Address, which he eventually titled "Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life," endeavored to accomplish two very important philosophical goals. On the one hand, it strove to counter what he believed were decades of rather tendentious readings by both

professional philosophers and "men of affairs" of the classical pragmatisms of Peirce, James, and Dewey—readings that gave the lie to the view that pragmatism *in toto* begat either nihilism, scientism, or, perhaps worse, an unalloyed optimism regarding the state of human affairs. More importantly, Hook also took the opportunity to critically appraise recent and oftentimes controversial trends in contemporary professional philosophy, most notably the analytic and ontological revolutions of the 1930s and 40s.

Moreover, the address sought to bring to the philosophical forefront a theme that many of pragmatism's critics maintained it was immune to: a sense of the tragic in human experience. Understood within the context of philosophy's history in America, it is understandable why Hook would devote one of the more important philosophical platforms in America to discuss "the tragic." For one thing, he had witnessed directly a profound change in the American philosophical landscape, and he certainly must have wanted to call attention to these latest trends and their impact on earlier forms of philosophizing. This is largely true, because the APA program of 1959 was dramatically different from any that had appeared before the war. By the mid-1950s representatives of the ontological revolution (sometimes referred to as Existentialists or Ontologists proper) had, in general, extolled the centrality of tragedy in the day-to-day nausea that was human existence. Led by Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, Paul Tillich, Karl Jaspers, Albert Camus and their legion of followers, tragedy's value to them was indisputable on the grounds that all life was simply absurd and could hardly, if ever, be otherwise.[3] Analytic revolutionaries, on the other hand, still coming to terms with or trying to move beyond the works of the Vienna Circle's Logical Positivism and its most famous exponent, A.J. Ayer, frequently

[3] For an overview of American intellectuals' embrace of and response to Existentialism, see William Barrett, *The Truants: Adventures Among the Intellectuals* (New York: Anchor Press, 1982), 123-130. See also George Cotkin, *Existential America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

maintained that moral or ethical dilemmas were, at root, linguistic problems that begged for clarification, and were largely inexplicable (or, to some, philosophically uninteresting) beyond the crudities of moral subjectivism or the dead-ends associated with emotivism.[4] In light of their practice of unrelenting conceptual clarification, "tragedy" was thus only a term, and not an experience.

There are, of course, many exceptions to and within these philosophical camps, about which I have offered but a broad outline but will return to later. For the time being "Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life" signified that Hook was a seriously engaged philosopher, and not, as many scholars have maintained, preoccupied with Cold War enthusiasms and baiting political traps to catch suspected communists. He also can be credited with offering a critical view of the nature of contemporary philosophy as he found it at the end of the 1950s, and in the process *advanced* American pragmatism by *reframing* its history in light of recent philosophical achievements. As we shall see, Hook's engagement with alternative philosophical proposals was not new. Nor was it always overtly critical to the point of dismissivism, either, and on this point in 1956 he presented to the philosophical community an anthology of his colleagues and contemporaries, *American Philosophers at Work*.[5] This text, long overlooked by intellectual historians, was an important book *of* philosophy, not one strictly *about* it. Widely read and widely reviewed, its arrival solidified Hook's philosophical bona fides, and surely played a role in his election to the APA Presidency. Even though it was not the only volume presenting

[4] Bruce Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America*, 229-242. Interestingly, Kuklick makes no mention of Hook's philosophizing, only that he was John Dewey's "indefatigable defender."
[5] Sidney Hook, ed. *American Philosophers at Work: The Philosophic Scene in the United States* (New York: Criterion Books, 1956).

contemporary philosophical discourse, for our purposes *American Philosophers at Work* can be singled out for its intent as much as its content.[6]

But the story does not end there. Coterminous with his philosophical activism, Hook continued his educational activism throughout the 1950s, and played an important role in re-inventing New York University's curriculum while increasing his administrative presence and prowess within it. Akin to his Presidential Address, the timing of Hook's educational activism could not have been more apt, as the very nature, scope, and value of higher education was undergoing profound change.[7] Thus what follows examines the degree to which his philosophical writings of the 1950s and his educational activism overlapped.

And yet, why would someone who allegedly embodied a near-evangelical zeal for witch hunting communists dedicate so much time to professional philosophizing? And to philosophizing about philosophy and higher education at that? These questions hover above our discussion, which ultimately endeavors to re-frame rather than re-tell Hook's Cold War experience. As was the case with so many other decades in Hook's career, I suggest that the 1950s was less about politics proper and more continuous with the role Hook cast for himself as

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[6] For but one example, see Yervant Krikorian and Abraham Edel, eds. *Contemporary Philosophic Problems: Selected Readings* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1959). The volume is just that, an anthology, with nary a thematic overview by its editors. This model was followed by Henry D. Aiken and William Barrett, whose four-volume *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Random House, 1962) both expanded the list of contributors to include more Analytic and Continental authors, and all as a means towards its readers appreciating the "activity" of philosophy rather than any one of its doctrines. For the Catholic, i.e. Thomistic response to these volumes, see D.J.B. Hawkins, *Crucial Problems of Modern Philosophy* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1962). Its preface sates the following: "Readers…will see… the underlying conviction that the best achievement of human thought may be considered as the extension of the Incarnation, as the product of a grace which is gradually composing the climate necessary for its flowering." Quote is from Hawkins, *Crucial Problems of Modern Philosophy*, 9. Statements like these might even have made Mortimer Adler blush, tempted as he might be to agree.

[7] On the general transformations taking place within American colleges and universities, see Thomas Bender, "Politics, Intellect, and the American University," in *American Academic Culture in Transformation*, 17-57.

an *engagé* intellectual in world of perpetual flux. After all, he argued, "the social function of the American intellectual"

> is to think, and to act in such a way that the results of his thinking are brought to bear upon the great issues of our time. The cardinal attribute of the life of thought—its proper virtue—is the capacity to discriminate, to make relevant distinctions…The task of the intellectual is still to lead an intellectual life, to criticize what needs to be criticized in America. They have nuisance value.[8]

Few would disagree with Hook's appellation, and we ought to place his nuisance value within the larger scope of American intellectual life at midcentury, as he criticized what he felt warranted criticism. In postwar America the cause of the intellectual had considerable moral import; given the stakes at home or abroad (or both), the consequences of being an *engagé* or non-engag*é* intellectual were, as far as Hook understood them, dire. As we shall see, the Cold War could be fought on the educational front, and philosophers, steeped as they were in life of critical inquiry, could certainly marshal the energy requisite the task. We begin with Hook's infamous running argument with the American intellectual community over philosophy's role in determining who should be allowed in the nation's classrooms.

I. "What Is So Hard To Understand About this?" The Teacher As Legislator of the Free World

> The chief evil from which the schools suffer is not communism but community neglect, and the failure to make the common and special needs of the individual personality their supreme concern. Whatever the responsibilities of the schools to a democratic society, the responsibilities of a democratic society to its schools are more basic and more numerous. These responsibilities have not yet been adequately discharged.[9]

In the spring of 1949 Hook wrote to his friend and colleague C.J. Ducasse that "Never, never in [his] entire life" had he "ever written anything" with "such repercussions" as his most

[8] Hook, "The Intellectual in America," in *Political Power and Personal Freedom* (New York: Criterion Books, 1959), 451-452.
[9] Hook, *Heresy, Yes—Conspiracy, No!* (New York: John Day, 1953), 278.

recent article in the *New York Times.*[10] Asked to respond to the recent fracas at the University of Washington, where three professors were removed from their posts on the grounds that they were members of the Communist Party (CP), Hook admitted to Ducasse that he knew little about what happened in Seattle and how, and that it would have been foolish at the time to comment on the matter. Still, since he felt so strongly about and had been railing against authoritarian attitudes in education since 1927, the question of CP members in the classrooms—no matter what educational level—was one of momentous import to Hook. So instead of prescribing a specific course of action for the University of Washington he chose a "reconsideration of [higher education's] first principles."The article, originally submitted to the *Times* as "Communism and Academic Freedom," was later changed, and ran as the slightly more inflammatory "Should Communists Be Permitted to Teach?"[11] This question, and Hook's rather nuanced answer, would forever influence the manner in which historians and philosophers wrote about Hook.

While Hook's argument was devastatingly simple, it was anything but formalistic. It held that *any* individual who voluntarily joined an organization dedicated to undermining the spirit of free inquiry, or who had decided in advance what was true or false in a particular subject matter, had, in effect, mortgaged their ability to hold a position of trust in a classroom. Since free inquiry was the cornerstone of a democratic education geared toward eliciting the maximum growth of individuals so they might play a role in a free society; and since they obligatorily deferred to an authority external to the pursuit of truth for its own sake, members of the CP were thus *prima facie* unfit to teach. CP members sacrificed their intellectual autonomy to obsequiously toe a party line, and there was little room in a democratic classroom in a democratic society for such

[10] Hook to C.J. Ducasse, March 9, 1949. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 54.
[11] Hook, "Should Communists Be Permitted to Teach?" *New York Times*, Feb. 27, 1949.

authoritarian or dogmatic tendencies. Hook cited official CP documents, testimony from such CP officials at home and abroad, and the canonical texts from which their ideas followed as sufficient evidence that members of the CP were under strict orders to unequivocally obey its Soviet leadership. From these he determined that the latter mandated that members surreptitiously infiltrate and indoctrinate on as many educational levels as possible. In so doing, Hook firmly believed that members of the CP blocked the road of inquiry—a cardinal sin for the pragmatist—and that they did so willfully and dishonestly. Therefore, they surrendered all intellectual integrity and could not, under any circumstances, be employed at any educational level:

> Any man who has been certified as competent by his peers and who has professional integrity—no matter what his beliefs: Communist, Fascist, Platonist, Seventh Day Adventist, etc., etc.—should be permitted to teach. But if an individual is a member of any group, legal or not, which acts on official instructions to 'take advantage of his position in the classroom' to indoctrinate for a party line, to capture control of departments, rewrite texts according to instructions received from an outside source, etc., he is professionally unfit to be a member of the academic community. His present and active membership in such a group, no matter what group, is an action which clearly declares his intention to violate the elementary duties of the scholar and teacher.[12]

Hook insisted that the purpose of his argument was to critically evaluate what he thought was at stake in the classrooms, and was not designed to be the final word on the subject or "to punish or hurt anybody" in particular. In a letter he expanded on this, writing that he was less interested in the personalities associated with the melee in Seattle than in "bring[ing] to the teaching profession an awareness of the standards to which it commits itself, as part of the academic community."[13] This point was, alas, somewhat lost on many of his readers, and, given the brevity with which someone is bound to present his views for the *New York Times*, the fallout from

[12] Hook to Ernest Kantorowitz, December 11, 1950, in Shapiro, *Letters of Sidney Hook: Democracy, Communism, and the Cold War*, 158.
[13] *Ibid*., 26

Hook's article was immediate, considerable, and widespread. Friends, colleagues, and adversaries alike inundated Hook's office at NYU with letters of either support, criticism, or outright condemnation. And he answered nearly every one of them at length. Ducasse, whose own students were among those fired by the University of Washington, wrote rather supportively that Hook's argument "hit the nail on the head," and Irwin Edman, Hook's colleague at Columbia University, heartily concurred, for he himself had recently written an article for the *Times* himself addressing the relative illegality of CP members in the classroom.[14]

But Hook clearly relished responding to his adversaries, mixing his trademark wit with a healthy dose of vitriol. One of the more impertinent of these letters was addressed to Herbert Aptheker, the radical American historian and doyen of the American CP for, among other things, his long-standing apologies for Stalin's Show Trials of the 1930s. Aptheker had recently written Hook, and pointed out that, while he was indeed an avowed and unapologetic Communist, he never explicitly sought to indoctrinate any of his students and was, for all intents and purposes, an honest and ethically conscientious teacher. To help Hook appreciate the depths of his own ignorance, Aptheker implored him to arrange a public debate between the two, whereupon he would demonstrate that Hook's grievances with the CP—and, for good measure, his pragmatism—were inveterately and embarrassingly off base. This caricature of the CP, moreover, was also more of threat to academic integrity than any CP member was. Unfazed, Hook responded that he "would no more help build an audience for [Aptheker], than [he] would for a member of the Nazi Party who offered to debate [him] to prove that Hitler was not really an anti-Semite." He cited chapter and verse from Willam Z. Foster, the erstwhile leader of the Communist Party in America, Lenin's *Works*, and the CP official periodical *The Communist*, and

[14] Irwin Edman to Hook, March 2, 1949. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 54.

lamented that Aptheker was either lying to him about his educational qualifications and reputation or, worse, was egregiously naïve when it came to the CP's official decrees. If Aptheker had indeed pledged to advance the party line in all affairs, Hook averred, especially in the classrooms of America's schools, colleges, and universities, how could Aptheker legitimately believe he was being intellectually honest or, at the very least, an authentic Communist? "I had always thought," Hook scolded, "that the mark of an intellectually honest and objective" individual was not to pledge to follow an antecedently agreed upon and impervious political platform; rather it was to "pledge to follow the line of *truth* no matter where it leads." There would be no debate, and Hook's *coup de grace* only pressed the issue between them further: were Aptheker deliberately disobeying orders, which is what it sounded like, then not only would a public debate be a waste of Hook's time but also physically perilous for his proposed interlocutor.[15]

However much he enjoyed such support and criticism, the scope and breadth of such correspondence must have caught Hook off guard, for it became clear to him that his *Times* article was perhaps more suggestive than declarative. Perhaps it was even naïve, for he had suggested that CP professors should be subject to the "enlightened good sense of the academic community" and investigated, sanctioned, or dismissed in light of academic due process. He also argued that administrators, trustees, and politicians should be excluded from this process, for they are seldom intellectually prepared to understand the role of free inquiry in democratic classrooms. A suspected professor's peers, however, were, and he wrote in a letter to one critic:

> I am unalterably opposed to any kind of legislation barring individuals from teaching or public employment on grounds of membership in any legally recognized political party. The standards of integrity in teaching, as in all other professions, must be upheld by the

[15] Hook to Herbert Aptheker, December 12, 1952, in *Letters of Sidney Hook*, 211-212.

> members of those professions themselves. The interference of the state in these matters is always productive of more harm than good.[16]

Over the next four years Hook continued to receive letters on the issue, and each one, no matter the tone they took, shaped and reshaped his thinking about CP members in America's classrooms. He published several articles on the issue in popular magazines and philosophical journals between 1949 and 1952.[17] Rather than re-stating his initial premises, however, Hook's position evolved from a brief and speculative claim about CP members based on party documents into a more general consideration of the epistemic and administrative dangers of authoritarian attitudes in education in general. Perhaps frustrated by all the fuss he created, as time wore on he assured his correspondents that a book-length treatment of the topics was in the offing. In a letter to Roger Straus of Straus Farrar, Straus, and Young Publishers, Hook proposed a book titled *Freedom Under Fire*, which he anticipated would be a "realistic, viable philosophy to guide public opinion in these troubled times." Straus accepted, and by the middle of 1953 Hook again stitched together and revised several essays from this period, integrating them into a single volume with a different title: *Heresy, Yes—Conspiracy, No*.[18]

The book actually addressed several separate but overlapping themes. Of course there was the matter of CP members in American schools; but several other issues in American intellectual life were raised as well. There was, for example, a critique of the "mule-headed foolishness" of contemporary political discourse in light of McCarthyism; a chapter critical of the conservatism found in William F. Buckley's *God and Man at Yale*; a challenge to what he

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[16] Hook to Albert Shanker, March 28, 1949, in *Ibid*., 132. Hook elaborated on this point in the text especially 130-131.

[17] While outside the boundaries of the current discussion, one could argue he continued to revise and refine his position until his death, beginning with a rather larger volume titled *Political Power and Personal Freedom*, in 1959.

[18] Hook to Roger Straus, May 16, 1952. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 54.

felt was the intellectual density of such "ritualistic liberals" as Arthur Schleisinger, Jr.; and the epistemic closure of Robert M. Hutchins's own position regarding CP members in the classrooms. While here is not the place to unpack any of these analytic tributaries (which could very well require a separate volume), scholars everywhere have overlooked the larger philosophical river than ran through *Heresy, Yes—Conspiracy, No*.[19]

The philosophical centerpiece to the entire text was the justificatory invocation of the logical principle known as *prima facie* when dealing with the prospect of CP members in American classrooms. Unlike its opposite, *ultima facie*, which logically represented a last word within the context of an argument, Hook's usage of *prima facie* denoted that there was sufficient empirical evidence available to justify a belief in a CP member's unfitness to teach. Until further evidence was presented against his argument, and until further debate took place in light of it, Hook maintained that his belief was justified. Staking this claim was crucial, for invoking *prima facie* signaled that Hook outright anticipated and welcomed a response to, if not a rebuttal for, his argument. In more technical language, constitutive of the logical rule itself was the necessity for further investigation into and deliberation over the truth or falsity of the claim under discussion. If, as a result of inquiry the facts bore fruit, then the initial proposition denoted something that was true.[20] If not, then it would be high time for belief revision. While it can certainly be argued that many of his contemporaries failed to grasp what Hook felt was a simple logical rule—he was often chagrined that so few of his correspondents apprehended his position—Hook's premise entailed a commitment to the burden of proof, to a continuation of the conversation.

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[19] Hook, *Heresy, Yes—Conspiracy, No!* (New York: John Day, 1953).
[20] For an extended explanation of this distinction, see Thomas Senor, "The Prima Facie/Ultima Facie Distinction in Epistemology," *Philosophy and Phenomenological research*, 56 (1996): 551-566.

In addition to this logical *rule*, the above critiques can be better understood in terms of the book's larger philosophical *temperament*, which had its roots in Peirce's commitment to the spirit of experimental inquiry as the more reliable means of acquiring knowledge than any other. As we mentioned earlier, Peirce rejected all other ways of "fixing belief" but those associated with the methods of the natural sciences. One of the more dangerous ways of belief fixing was what he referred to as the "Method of Authority," which had historically aimed "to keep correct doctrines before the attention of the people, to reiterate them perpetually, and to teach them to the young; having at the same time the power to prevent contrary doctrines from being taught, advocated, or expressed."[21] In this sense one might assume that *Heresy, Yes—Conspiracy, No!* is one sustained argument against authority.

Hook pressed the range and import of Peirce's premise into *Heresy, Yes—Conspiracy, No*'s overall argument, and believed that an "authoritarian attitude" pervaded much of contemporary educational theory and practice. This attitude could be found both within the school, college or university, and without. Internally it manifested itself in those teachers who precluded alternative viewpoints from being heard or, worse, refused to honestly defend a position staked and the evidence upon which it rested. As a result, he or she exhibited "an impatience with doubt, opposition, and the half-articulate bewilderments, which as often betray genuine difficulties in the subject matter being taught, as they do the personal difficulties of the learner."[22] This individual may very well be a CP member, but they could also obstinately hold any number of political, racial, or religious ideas, and decide in advance what conclusions they wanted to reach. Because the inculcation of a critical disposition was essential for a free society

[21] Charles S. Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief," in Justus Buchler (ed.), *The Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), 16.
[22] *Heresy, Yes—Conspiracy, No*, 133.

to flourish, and because these teachers were sufficiently hostile to it, they were, again, *prima facie* unfit to teach.

Schools, colleges, or universities were also threatened by authoritarian forces external to them. At the school level it could be found in parents who strove to influence educational policy via pressures of any kind. This violated the autonomy of the educational process, Hook warned, for many of them lacked the requisite abilities equal a professional educator or administrator. That they were parents who dotingly wanted what was best for their child was not coeval with an ability to determine what should be taught and how. It was best to leave such decisions in the hands of professional educators and their colleagues:

> the mere fact that the individual is a parent no more qualifies [them] to determine what the best educational regimen is for [their] child than what the best medical regimen is. As a parent, [they are] free, of course, to select the type of education [they] desire for [their] child—secular or parochial. As a citizen [they are], of course, vitally concerned in the physical and psychological conditions under which [their] child is receiving instruction. [Their] cooperation in helping to solve problems in these areas is most welcome. But all this is still a far cry from the assumption of educational authority or expertness.[23]

Parents alone, he continued, were not the only ones who felt that, by virtue of their professional standing, they were not only best qualified to dictate what should be taught or how, but felt that they were best qualified "to save the nation and the world by reforming or revising the curriculum."[24] Hook identified the Chamber of Commerce, the Catholic Church, or any political party as equally guilty of meddling in affairs they knew little about.[25] Thus *a fortiori*, there was no difference between parental and any other form of authoritarianism, for they collectively blocked the road of effective inquiry not by *proposing* changes—which he felt parents especially

[23] *Ibid.*, 126.
[24] *Ibid.*, 127.
[25] Hook's grievance with the perceived authoritarianism of the Catholic Church was long and heated, beginning in the 1930s with several chapters in *Reason, Social Myths, and Democracy*. For his comparison between the Church and the CP, see *Heresy Yes—Conspiracy, No,* 218-221.

had a right to do—but by *demanding* changes, and sometimes resorting to a denunciation of existing educational theory or practice. Based on these perceived (and real) threats, Hook dedicated several chapters in *Heresy, Yes—Conspiracy, No* to a defense of teachers and their role in the preservation of free inquiry and a free society. For "next to the [student's] parents [their] teachers play[ed] the greatest role" in their lives; they were, he maintained, "the physician of the soul."[26]

Even though Hook argued frequently that all teachers must be free to do their job, this was not the same as being free to do it in whatever way they pleased. As a rule, the teacher must inculcate the capacity for "reasonable assessment of evidence" when inquiring into any and all subject matters, to get the students "to think in and *about* the major fields of human interest."[27] But thinking was not the same for all subject matters; one could not be expected to think historically and mathematically in equal measure. Hook believed that logic was consistent to all fields, and therein lie the teacher's rub. "The laws of inference are the same for all fields," he cautioned, "but the truth of an assertion depends upon more than logic although any assertion which violates the laws of logic must be false if not meaningless." It followed that, no matter what the level of instruction,

> the teacher who wishe[d] to develop emotional an intellectual maturity in [their] students will nurture them in a respect for—but not worship of—fact. To be intellectually responsible means an insistence that ideas about the world be tested by the facts already known, even if unpleasant, and by other facts to be sought for, and that in the absence of sufficient evidence, judgment be suspended. To suspend judgment is never easy particularly about matters which are urgent and require action. But it is well to remember that we do not need to be certain in order to act; and the our doubts may be settled through the intelligent quest for the evidence by which we seek to appease them.[28]

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[26] *Heresy Yes—Conspiracy, No,* 140. A separate but related argument about academic freedom followed from Hook's defense of teachers, and he advanced it within the context of dismissing Buckley's *God and Man at Yale*. For this discussion, see *Heresy Yes—Conspiracy, No*, Chapters 8 and 9.
[27] *Heresy Yes—Conspiracy, No,* 143-144.
[28] *Ibid*., 144.

Once more, spoken like a true Peircean. The teacher, while an authority on whatever subject he or she taught (hopefully), must never be authoritarian in its transmission. That is, by virtue of their calling, they have pledged fidelity to the truth and the objective methods available in finding it, instilling in their students the capacity to weigh alternatives in each and every problematic situation they found themselves in. As he said in 1927, there was no room for a dogmatist in this process, viz., presenting merely what they believe and adopting a casuistic approach to the truth when doing so. The good teacher played an important role in alleviating some of the anxieties associated with the way that the world was and the seemingly daunting, endless search for meaning and personal fulfillment in it. These educational values would, by the end of the decade, get a larger philosophical hearing in his APA presidential address. But more importantly, such a position was hardly the mark of a near-evangelical, raving raging anticommunist conservative. Education for Hook thus played a more important role than ever before in inculcating the values, habits, and attitudes requisite democracy's survival. Rather than call for a Deweyan reconstruction of American education *in toto*, he channeled his efforts into more effective arenas. He began with his beloved New York University.

II. An Invaluable Cultural Leavening: NYU's Postwar Mission

> Students often don't distinguish between analysis and repudiation of what they're saying and disparagement of them for saying it…they fail to realize that the progress of discussion, like the discovery of truth, consists in eliminating false starts, hypotheses, and alternatives.[29]

The intellectual and tactical questions surrounding what to do about or with CP members who were currently teachers in American colleges and universities existed on an equal plane with another of Hook's vocational pursuits, the institutional and curricular reconstruction of New

[29] *The Creative Experience*, 299.

York University (NYU). This is to say that the 1950s were not all about Communist Party members in the classroom, for as fervently committed as he was to the further clarification of his position regarding the requisite behavior of the professoriate, Hook was equally, if not at times more, committed to the postwar reconstruction of Washington Square College and University Heights. Many among its leadership felt that this was necessary, for World War II had recently provided ample opportunities for both campuses to assist in the Federal government's defense activities. With enrollments having plummeted (understandably) due to the war, NYU welcomed millions of federal dollars to offset its economic losses. This infusion established new or bolstered existing schools of Engineering, Medicine, Dentistry, Meteorology, and Nursing—the latter having doubled women's presence on campus by war's end. In effect, NYU's two campuses became a "full scale collaboration," and with an educational appendage to the Arsenal of Democracy.[30]

In terms of administration and curriculum, NYU was comprehensively revamped to meet wartime demands. Under the auspices of the Army Specialized Training Program (or ASTP), American military authorities, emboldened financially, limited much, if not all, faculty research and publication, and preferred instead for them to devote more time and energy into various "professional associations" and to the performance of "community service." Faculty course loads were increased; the academic calendar was extended from nine to twelve months, and liberal arts courses deemed superfluous by military authorities were eliminated outright without any input from the professoriate. If a professor wanted to keep his or her job they were presented with two choices: they could either accept an assignment in a comparable field or war-issues course, or

[30] Frusciano and Pettit, *New York University and the City,* 191. For an extended treatment of NYU's transformation during the war—one administrator referred to the institution as having itself been "drafted," see Harry O. Voorhis to Paul A. McGhee, January 14, 1944, Records of the Tisch school of the Arts, RG 35, Box 1.

they could teach a course in another discipline altogether. One such professor was Marie Swabey, Hook's colleague in philosophy, who was reassigned to the School of Mathematics on account of her background in the subject. The entire university had been turned upside down, from a once-vibrant intellectual community into a veritable hub for some 29,000 students trained in various technical and military programs. Even though there is little evidence to suggest that the military had any plans for what to do one the war was over, at war's end NYU found itself with the largest contingent of returning veterans of any university in the country—nearly 10,000 of them.[31]

This sudden and exponential spike in enrollments taxed NYU's extant infrastructure. Historians have noted how rapidly they responded to the crisis; they added housing, expanded administrative facilities, laid the groundwork for future administrative buildings, and established the Law School. Furthermore, NYU converted its wartime facilities into schools of Engineering, Business School, professional studies. The most controversial of all of these initiatives was NYU's extensive acquisition of vast tracts of Greenwich Village real estate to accommodate many of these changes. Less studied, however, are the more academic changes that took place.[32] Given the sheer numbers of students, many administrators wondered: should NYU reinvent itself by either offering a strictly vocational or professional track for undergraduates, or a curriculum that focused more on the liberal arts? Additionally, if NYU were to offer a more professionally-oriented degree track, should they try again, as they had in the 1930s, to establish a terminal two-

[31] Frusciano & Petit, *New York University and the City*, 192-198. See also *The New York University Self Study: Final Report* (New York: NYU Press, 1956), 22-25.
[32] Frusciano & Petit, *New York University and the City*, especially Chapters 12 and 13. It is important to note that Frusciano and Petit's volume, which is the lone history of NYU that treats the years 1932 onward, does not mention anything related to Hook's almost 40 years there. Nor does it engage in curricular discussions to any meaningful degree, omitting the tenures of many deans along the way who advanced such innovations along with Hook.

year program within the context of a four-year college? Shortly after the war a series of committees were assembled to discuss NYU's recent past and whither it was tending, with the Special Committee of the Educational Program of Washington Square College, among the more prominent.

For much of the war Hook was involved with various committees on the issue of curricular reform and postwar reconstruction, writing reports and memoranda to administrators on the need for new undergraduate courses at NYU once hostilities ended.[33] While the exact author is unknown, one of the surviving committee reports from 1949, titled "Statement of the Function of a Liberal Education," bore strong what we might call the "mark of Hook."

Students, it argued, should "be familiar with the continuing traditions and dominant problems of their culture, and with the moral values and ideals in whose light men have sought the good life in the good society." These aims, moreover, could not be "properly achieved without the development both of imaginative power and a strong sense of critical method."[34] These curricular objectives, it concluded, entailed a reconstruction of NYU's administrative culture as well, especially with regard to the input of department chairpersons as to what courses should be taught and why.

By 1953 these various committees gave way to a university-wide inquiry into the nature, scope, character, and content of NYU's overall mission and its curriculum. Inspired by Harvard's

[33] See Hook, "The Function of Higher Education in Postwar Reconstruction," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 16 (1942): 43-51. In 1941 Hook sat on the New York University Institute for Educational Reconstruction. See also "'Voted Policy of the Faculty," October 24th, 1950,'" Records of the Tisch School of the Arts, Sidney Hook Biographical File.
[34] "Voted policy of the Faculty"; see also Hook's "The Function of Education in Postwar Reconstruction," 44.

General Education in a Free Society,[35] Henry Townley Heald, NYU's Chancellor, thought that in light of the increasing numbers of postwar applicants eager to utilize the benefits associated with the GI Bill, NYU ought to both outline its prospects for a postwar world while establishing short- and long-term goals for its undergraduates. The issue was vital; new majors such as Engineering, Nursing, Law, and Business, as well as the existing makeup of the School of Education, raised all kinds of interesting questions related to curriculum, viz., whether or not each school would turn out specialists or not. To grapple with these and many other issues, chairpersons from nearly twenty departments, in conjunction with several Deans and administrative officers from both Washington Square and University Heights campuses met intermittently to discuss these and other mundane matters as high school recruitment and admissions policies. Armed with a $250,000 grant from the Carnegie Corporation, NYU analyzed its role in New York City, and hoped that its work would be a benchmark for all of America's major metropolitan colleges and universities. The result was the nearly 500-page *New York University Self Study: Final Report*[36].

From the detailed minutes contained in the volume, it is clear that there was little consensus as to what NYU ought to offer its students. Discussions were generally lively, and frequently intensified whenever the interlocutors raised the question of whether or not all undergraduates should be required to undergo a "common academic experience," even if they desired a career in business or engineering, etc. Unlike the discussions over admissions, those related to curriculum—such as what should be taught, how it should be taught, and in what

[35] Harvard University, *Committee on the Objectives of a General Education in a Free Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1945).
[36] *The New York University Self-Study: Final Report* (New York: New York University Press, 1956).

sequence, if any—appear to have gone on for hours if not days. And Hook was at the center of them all.[37]

It also appears that Hook was more assured of what he did *not* want for NYU than what he wanted, and he set the early tone of the meetings, arguing that any question related to undergraduate instruction must perforce make reference to the university as a whole. In a manner consistent with the Unified Studies Division, Hook wanted to elevate NYU's stature, from what he perceived as a "last option" for students who failed to gain entry to Columbia, Princeton, Brooklyn or City Colleges, to one in which a high caliber and high quality undergraduate education could be obtained. Were they to accomplish this, he continued, perhaps more of their students would continue on to advanced degrees—ensuring not only a greater reputation among the metropolitan area schools but also a steady stream of revenue. Undergirding these goals would be a first-rate, coordinated and comprehensive liberal arts curriculum rooted in what he referred to as its "minimum indispensables."[38]

Rather characteristically, Hook began with "anybody who goes to college should be turned out a cultured or developed person … or to put it another way, we should ask ourselves, 'What do we want our own children to know in order to face the world and to live with themselves?'" Students should be exposed to a requisite amount of courses that would both serve as a foundation for a preferred course of study and to guide the intellectual pursuits of the more professionally-oriented students. For too long, he continued, NYU's undergraduate curriculum was ornamental or haphazard; the war, however, imposed one kind of coordination to remedy it. In a postwar world devoid of excessive military oversight, NYU could redress the relative dis-

[37] All that remains from these discussions is the published volume. NYU's archive is somewhat disorganized, leaving more lacunae in each participants' personal files (if any of them have a personal file) than not.
[38] *New York University Self-Study*, Appendix B, 25.

integration of its curricula, coordinating them to the degree that new degree tracks in the social or physical sciences would coincide with those that otherwise occupy the liberal arts.[39]

In response to these otherwise benign observations, some committee members expressed an interest in grafting Harvard or Yale's existing curriculum onto NYU; others wanted to copy Columbia's long-standing Core Civilization model as a solution—which amounted to implementing a great books curriculum. However interesting or successful these programs might have been elsewhere, Hook countered that without further inquiry into the needs of NYU's students, and how a reconstructed curriculum might best meet them, the question of what texts to have them read was moot. At the very least, what *was* needed was less agreement on specific courses offered (important as that was) than on what subject-matters and values—what principles—would inform and enrich them. To agree on principles, he averred, would signal that all parties involved in the discussion would concede differences on finer points of courses in favor of the larger tasks at hand. "In international affairs you can always adopt a principle," he noted, "but until you implement it you do not know whether all mean the same thing. In this sense," he continued,

> our discussion would be incomplete, and we might be deceived semantically by the phrases we use, unless we go on to a consideration of subject matter and skills and values. What skills do we want our students to acquire? What knowledge of subject matter would they have in order to be prepared to live with themselves and to live in the world about?[40]

We may speculate that this all sounded platitudinous to his colleagues. But the point he made was more philosophical than strictly procedural, and especially so because so many students were entering NYU interested in becoming a lawyer, engineer, accountant, nurse, etc., the difficulty was how to persuade students that courses outside of their narrow vocational

[39] *Ibid.*
[40] *Ibid*., 26.

interests—say, in philosophy—had an intrinsic educational value to them. Even though classes in Philosophy, History, and English would still be required, many of the committee members (including Hook) feared that students who majored in a specific subject would only bring their interests to bear on their writing assignments. Something had to be done, then, with regard to how NYU understood itself, which would aid in communicating to undergraduates the value of a well-rounded education—one that would enrich their particular vocational aspirations. In short, the issue was surely a familiar one to Hook: should higher education be vocational or non-vocational?

Many of Hook's colleagues seemed more interested in defining specific courses NYU should offer, or what the undergraduate curriculum should look like, exactly. When engaged with the question of whether or not NYU would be restructured on vocational or professional lines or not, many, such as Deans John Prime and Alonzo Myers, seemed to come down on the vocational side of the argument, and maintained that if all a student wanted was to be an accountant, why should an institution make him or her care about issues irrelevant to their interests? Myers was not alone, and he appeared to have garnered a consensus on vocationalism.[41]

At this juncture Hook took a position all too familiar to his readers. One can almost imagine the setting: Hook must have paused dramatically, cleared his throat, and adjusted his spectacles, a squinted as he soliloquized: "I regard the liberal arts college as a professional school…you cannot make a distinction between vocational and nonvocational education. Since vocations or professions like medicine, teaching, and law came out of the liberal arts colleges, I regard a liberal arts college as performing a vocational function." Vocations entailed a study of

[41] *Ibid*., 27-30.

the liberal arts, he continued, and instead of promising students a job—which he feared NYU would be doing if it chose professional tracks over liberal arts tracks—NYU should inform all of its current and future students thus:

> On the basis of a consensus and in terms of educational tradition, we are giving you what we think you ought to have. We are willing to show you that if you want to be a well-integrated individual these are the areas in which you have to acquire some knowledge; these are the skills in which you have to acquire competence. As a result you will be a better engineer, lawyer, or educator.[42]

To bolster his case Hook waxed autobiographical, weaving a tale of his decision in high school to be a philosopher. When he arrived at City College he persuaded its Registrar to wave all of his science (especially physics) and mathematics requirements in favor of taking more philosophy courses. After a few semesters he regretted his decision, for in time he learned that to be a good philosopher one had to have a mastery of mathematics and physics, for so much of the history of philosophy has been shaped by scientists and mathematicians. "In one sense to be a professional philosopher is just as vocational as to be a professional C.P.A.," he concluded. For the C.P.A. must be as aware of their place in the world, of course; they must be aware of what is authentic in the major areas of human experience. This character trait was as important as any particular professional requirement. The key question was: how was NYU going to effectively weave these themes together—namely, what approaches should they take—in order to inculcate within the students a sense that knowledge of the general implications of History, English, and Philosophy was not an obstacle to a profession but was actually, truly liberating. That these students were attending school in New York City already suggested the worldliness of their environment; it remained for NYU to make an equally great contribution to their lives. Narrowly focusing on

[42] *Ibid*., 28-29.

vocationalism would be disastrous to that end. The alternative was to coordinate the undergraduate curriculum in order to stave off these tendencies.[43]

As the discussions wore on they became more repetitive. Then Dean Thomas Pollock, one of Hook's most fervent supporters on campus, reminisced with his colleagues about the failed Unified Studies Division and wondered if, again, whatever the new curriculum looked like, it could be better coordinated and interdisciplinary.[44] Bolstered by this, Hook added that all-University departments could effectively oversee new curricular initiatives at the undergraduate and graduate levels. This way it would be easier to design and implement a core curriculum in the liberal arts and sciences for a whole division.[45] Weaving together the Washington Square and University Heights campuses would pose a considerable advantage to NYU's standing in the city's higher educational network.

When not engaged in sustained dialogue (and, one may assume, when not being a husband and a father), Hook responded to a Dean Miguel DePries' request that he evaluate his own department in light of the concerns he raised in session. Provisionally speaking, this was indeed a momentous occasion, for Hook had spent considerable time and energy building NYU's philosophy department into one of the most intellectually diverse in the country.[46]

Philosophy held a unique place in the curricular life of NYU, he began, because "[f]amiliarity with the great philosophical systems and training in critical analysis liberates the student's imagination and widens his intellectual horizons so that he can discern possibilities in

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[43] *Ibid*. 32-36.
[44] *Ibid*., 112.
[45] *Ibid*., 110-112.
[46] This claim is largely anecdotal. The Philosophy Department at NYU has no sustained archive, and little record of Hook's almost 40 years there. There are, however, several folders dedicated to Hook's career at NYU at the Hoover Institution, and I will consult them in the future to bolster this claim

life to which he might otherwise be blind. Thus philosophy operates as an invaluable cultural leavening in the curriculum where so many courses exist whose chief emphasis falls upon assimilation of merely factual material." He pointed out that his view was supported by recent surveys by the Rockefeller Foundation, all of which concluded that studying philosophy was vital to the successful completion of all other areas of study. This was not to elevate his chosen professional department above all others at NYU. Rather, it was to demonstrate that philosophy's principal aim—its quest for wisdom—inoculated the mind from dogmatism in all its forms.[47]

It is important to note, and somewhat astounding to report, that when not active in NYU's self-assessment, chairing his department, and writing, Hook had been invited to and accepted invitation from several colleges, universities, and educational organizations throughout the 1950s, and was a Visiting Scholar at the University of Delaware for all of 1954.[48] In between he conducted seminars on general education at Brandeis University, titled "General Education for Contemporary Living" and at the Humanities Seminar for the Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults in 1953.[49] Such educational prestige and administrative accomplishments and his career as a midcentury cold warrior, helps explain why Teachers College, Columbia University, offered Hook a Professorship in the departments of Philosophy and Education in 1953. There he would have had less administrative responsibilities, and could very well have looked forward to a long career of research and writing—never mind teaching fewer classes and

[47] Sidney Hook to Miguel A. de Capriles, January 13, 1954, Records of the Tisch School of the Arts, Sidney Hook Biographical File.
[48] The invitations archive at the Hoover Institution is massive. While he certainly declined many offers, Hook accepted invitations from (to name a few) the University of Minnesota, Michigan State, Lincoln University, the University of Miami, Ohio University, the University of Oregon, Penn State, and Mount Holyoke. He almost always spoke on educational reform or academic freedom. Some schools, not listed here, wanted Hook to debate this or that professor on CP members in the classroom.
[49] Hook, "General Education for Contemporary Living," Sidney Hook Papers, Box 8.

receiving more money than he had seen thus far. However, he felt that his work at NYU was not yet done; though flattered, he ultimately declined the extraordinarily tempting offer.[50]

Additionally, in the context of NYU's self-study, it cannot be gainsaid that Hook's arguments, which, again, seemed far more moral than procedural than not, carried the day. Once deliberations ended and the publication of the *Self-Study* occurred, Dean Pollock, Hook's ally, sent a memorandum to Chancellor Heald in June, 1956. Throughout much of the self-study Heald had occupied the office of local pariah, for he had been fighting Greenwich Villagers for years over NYU's rights to vast tracts of Washington Square real estate. After years of court battles, Heald and NYU essentially received permission to remake much of the expanded area in NYU's image. To justify his moves, Heald insisted that, even though NYU was a privately-funded institution, by virtue of its location and ethos, it was "public in every other respect" because of the intimate relationship it had with its students and the city.[51] Armed with such severe myopia, he received word from Pollock that, beginning in the fall semester of 1957, a new General Program would be launched, officially called the Program of Coordinated Liberal Studies. It may have taken a couple of decades, but Hook's call for a more integrated liberal arts curriculum rooted in developing well-rounded individuals capable of continuing their own educations had come to pass.[52] More importantly, nowhere in the course of their discussions did the issue of communists in classrooms come up.

But there was little time to celebrate NYU's transformation, however, and largely because Hook's educational activism that produced such profound changes coincided with his seemingly tireless philosophical activism. In response to the myriad changes taking place within

[50] Hook to Dean Hollis Caswell, April 17, 1953. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 148.
[51] Frusciano and Petit, *New York University and the City*, 208-210.
[52] Thomas C. Pollock to Chancellor Heald, June 1, 1956, Records of the Tisch School of the Arts, Sidney Hook Biographical File.

the discipline, Hook continued the process he began in 1951, actively soliciting contributions from contemporary American philosophers for a veritable "state of the field" volume. It was completed and published the same year as NYU's *Final Report.*

III. Dogging the Life of Man: An American Philosopher at Work

> Viewed in light of the history of philosophy, the great danger of all philosophical thought which goes beyond logical analysis of categories is not an excess of speculation—which has at least an imaginative appeal—but an excess of salvationary zeal.[53]

Hook's tireless educational activism spilled into the American philosophical scene as well. And the timing could not have been more apt, for the 1950s were a time of deep reflection within the American philosophical community. In light of the analytic and ontological revolutions that began in the mid-1930s, many within it began to wonder if there existed anything that could otherwise pass for "American" philosophy anymore, maintaining as they did that so much of what passed for postwar philosophizing had developed more of a European accent than ever before. At the risk of generalization, as the war ended many philosophers retreated *en masse* from what would otherwise pass for normative questions in ethics, politics, legal philosophy, and social policies. The ironies of this trend were not lost on Hook; in spite of them he continually believed that he and his American counterparts still steeped in the pragmatic tradition were still far more *engagè* than their European equivalents, and more so in light of the fact that so few Europeans had hitherto engaged American pragmatism at all.[54]

Some of this attitude was justified, for many European thinkers were still philosophically committed to expanding existing or erecting newer grand narratives about the nature of Reality,

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[53] Hook, "Nature and the Human Spirit," in *Freedom and Reason,* 142.
[54] See Paul Kurtz, "Introduction," in *Sidney Hook and the Contemporary World: Essays on the Pragmatic Intelligence* (New York: John Day, 1968), 11-14; Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America*, especially Chapters 12 and 13. The reception of analytic philosophy in America—a story different from its mere appearance—has yet to be written.

the nature of Language, Meaning, and the like. Similarly, American philosophers dedicated to Existentialism, Ontology, and, more broadly analytic philosophy, rarely sought to make connections between their newly-acquired European enthusiasms and changes taking place across the American philosophical landscape. To the chagrin of some of his domestic colleagues, pragmatists like Hook were less inclined to follow these schools along the road to orthodoxy. As far as Hook was concerned, I would argue he was remarkably sympathetic to the spirit of the analytic revolution—though, as we shall see, he was not altogether convinced of its letter. He took less kindly, however, to the ontological revolution and its attendant metaphysical speculation. In fact, he would often invoke the techniques of the analytic revolution to expose the fallacies of its ontological counterpart. Taken together, by the middle 1950s an intellectual lacuna of sorts emerged in American philosophical circles, and Hook sought to bridge the gap using a sustained series of books and articles about how Pragmatism might best provide a philosophical environment within which these otherwise disparate schools might break bread together. Over time this effort would have a profound and long-term impact on his educational philosophy.

In the meantime, Hook's best friend Ernest Nagel, who was an important philosopher in his own right (he was elected President of the Eastern APA in 1957), tried to steer Hook in the direction of analytic philosophy's core concerns and techniques. By virtue of his having spent some time in Vienna with Rudolph Carnap and his congeners, and then with Ludwig Wittgenstein and G.E. Moore in Cambridge, Nagel can easily be credited with introducing the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle, and what at the time passed for Cambridge Ordinary Language Philosophy, to the American philosophical scene, relaying their ideas in a series of articles in the prestigious *Journal of Philosophy* in the 1930s. Considered seminal works then

and now, they were later expanded into an important book, *Logic Without Metaphysics*, in 1956.[55] Disciplinarily, Nagel was simply more deeply committed to the technical intricacies surrounding philosophy of science than Hook, and few, if any, of his major philosophical papers addressed ethical, social, economic, or political matters.[56] In light of his role in the career of analytic philosophy, recent histories of the period have looked rather favorably upon Nagel's efforts and legacy.[57] All of this is to say that despite their deep friendship, Nagel never seemed to be able to persuade his best friend of the marriage that could be brokered between analytic philosophy and American philosophizing—despite Hook's lukewarm sympathies.

For all intents and purposes, neither could Hook's NYU colleague William Barrett persuade him. Barrett's Magnum Opus, *Irrational Man*, published in 1958, introduced *Existenzphilosophie* to the English-speaking world with its in-depth discussions of Sartre, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Nietzsche.[58] Hook, however, was unpersuaded. What he did do was acknowledge the challenges both schools of thought posed for meaningful philosophizing in America.

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[55] It is worth noting that Nagel wove many elements of his European experience into his broader concerns with logic and the philosophy of science he inherited from Morris Cohen and F.J. Woodbridge—who, if we recall, were Hook's undergraduate instructors at City College and, later, Columbia as well.

[56] Nagel's two 1936 articles appeared as "Impressions and Appraisals of Analytic Philosophy in Europe: I." *Journal of Philosophy* 33 (1936): 5-24; and "Impressions and Appraisals of Analytic Philosophy in Europe: II." *Journal of Philosophy* 33 (1936): 29-53. For a brief yet helpful survey of Nagel's overall philosophical outlook, see Andrew J. Reck, *The New American Philosophers: An Exploration of Thought Since World War II* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968), 120-137.

[57] Scott Soames, "Analytic Philosophy in America," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 449-481; Soames, "Philosophical Analysis," in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 2006).

[58] For recent, and extraordinarily useful, studies of Heidegger and Nietzsche's reception in American intellectual life see Martin Woessner, *Heidegger in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, *American Nietzsche: A History of An Icon and His Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

Since so many philosophers were growing increasingly enamored with the analytic or ontological revolutions, Hook's critical appraisal of these new movements soon evolved into a defense of the very nature of philosophy itself, one manifested in a landmark volume, *American Philosophers at Work* in 1956. He also took his critical message abroad, traveling to Japan, a country philosophically transformed in the early 1940s by the Heidegger-influenced Kyoto School. There he delivered lectures on American Pragmatism and its relationship to and difficulties with Existentialism.[59]

At the decade's end he had been elected to the APA Presidency, and many, if not all, of his philosophical concerns came together in his Presidential Address. Uniting all of these pieces were questions of what philosophy should or should not be in light recent developments. That is, Hook sought to explain to his audience why some philosophy in America moved further away methodologically from the German-inspired *Gesamtgeschichte*—comprehensive, system-building philosophical inquiry—to more meta-philosophical questions of whether it was possible—or even desirable—to build these systems in the first place.[60] "The great systems have made promises that they cannot possibly fulfill," he wrote elsewhere,

> for they have ignored the fact that the concrete issues which divide men and inspire conflict have their primary locus in economic, political and national life. No philosophical vision or synthesis can provide valuable answers to them on their own terms. It is well to admit openly that there is no royal philosophical road to social salvation, however it may be with the quest for personal salvation.[61]

While American philosophers imbibed European trends, sometimes to drunken excess, Hook soberly tried to explain to the world what American philosophers elsewhere were "working" on.

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[59] For an overview of this phenomenon, see Lin Ma and Jaap van Brackel, "Heidegger's Comportment Towards East-West Dialogue," *Philosophy East and West*, 56, (2006): 519-566.
[60] For insider's perspective of these developments, see John E. Smith, "The Course of American Philosophy," *The Review of Metaphysics*, 11 (1957): 279-303.
[61] Hook, "Nature and the Human Spirit," 142.

Before we begin, however, it is probably best to broadly outline the *contours* of the analytic and ontological revolutions without resorting to their respective *histories*. Since both trends represent a diverse tradition in the history of thought, we will unfortunately be doing somewhat of a disservice to both.

As long as it has been a self-conscious branch of philosophizing, different authors have used the general attitude reflected in analytic philosophy differently at different times throughout the twentieth century. Never the less, the attitude can best be summed up by one of its most famous representatives, Ludwig Wittgenstein: "People who have no need for transparency in their argumentation," he wrote, "are lost to philosophy."[62] No matter what their specific lines of philosophical inquiry—and they were legion—the first order of business for a philosopher in the analytic revolution was to establish the bounds of sensible language in order to establish meaning. Once these were determined, it was possible to explore what passed for genuine knowledge. Put somewhat more technically, the elimination of linguistic confusion via philosophical analysis entailed a deep commitment to issues in logic and epistemology, and these issues were the only ones that passed for legitimate philosophizing. Problems related to ethics, politics, law, or economics were, in effect, pseudo-problems, for the job of the philosopher was not to construct elaborate theories to solve anything. On the contrary: the philosopher's calling was to expose those linguistic confusions, conventions, and ineptitudes that duped human beings into thinking these were legitimate problems in the first place. Perplexity in life stemmed from a

[62] Wittgenstein, quoted in *Philosophy of Meaning, Knowledge, and Value in the Twentieth Century,* ed. John V Canfield (New York: Routledge, 1997), 1. For excellent overviews of the analytic revolution from the philosopher's perspective, see Scott Soames, "Analytic Philosophy in America," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 449-481; Soames, "Philosophical Analysis," in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 2006). For its impact on the American scene, see Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America*, Chapter 12.

misuse of words, not experience, and so much of this movement required the open disavowal of value conflicts and the history of philosophy because the large, complex, questions related to human experience were simply jettisoned in favor of assemblage of observations based on our linguistic clarifications. If this sounded like science to the uninitiated, it was. "Analytic philosophy," Morton White, one of America's most renowned analytic revolutionaries, predicted in 1950, "will no longer be sharply separated from science, and an unbridgeable chasm will no longer divide those who see meanings or essences and those who collect facts."[63] With regard to its disdain for linguistic obfuscations, hopefully we can see the extent to which Hook derived some appreciation for the analytic revolution. But their claims that philosophy was *continuous* with science, and not scientific *inquiry,* combined with the dismissal of values and their consequences, clearly aroused Hook's antipathies.

If the analytic revolution denoted a quest for meaning, and if its proponents were in search of the very basis of language, existential ontologists sought to explain the very reality that lurked behind all language, all ideas—all thought in general—about the way the world was and the place of human beings within it. If analysts desired the most precise way to talk about being human, existential ontologists wanted to talk about—or, better yet *describe*—something more, or that which was behind all the talking: "Being," or *Dasein,* "a man's Being." This concept ran through the works of Kierkegaard, Sartre, Heidegger, Camus, and their cavalcade of supporters, and can be considered they very basic mood characteristic of *Existenzphilosophie,* and even in if they disagreed with one another's usage.[64] Essentially a comprehensive metaphysical system, in

[63] Morton White, "The Analytic and the Synthetic: An Untenable Dualism," in his *Essays and Reviews in Philosophy and Intellectual History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 121-37.
[64] Roland Stromberg, *European Intellectual History since 1789* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1994), 246-248; 256-260.

general they argued that all of one's concrete existence was explicable in terms of one's Being, and the critical point of departure for these thinkers was that philosophy had historically been concerned with taking hold of things—of individual beings—and rendering them intelligible with little concern for the innermost pole of all existence, Being.[65] What was needed was a radical alteration of our conceptual existential framework, as we are forever in the grips of Being. "Existence" further denoted that constellation of feelings associated with having been cast into the world, a world whose character was enigmatic, insecure, unfamiliar, and, because human beings eventually perish, fleeting and dreadful. Woven into these feelings was a sense of angst—that we are and that we have to "be"—and that we must perforce recognize this and persevere, for to fall prey to these feelings rendered us inauthentic human beings. For Sartre, Heidegger, and others, life is the process by which we acknowledge this and attempt to overcome this dread and become authentic. How? Well, we are to essentially take a leap, and not necessarily one of faith; on the contrary, our leap must be one that confronts the nature of our existence. More importantly, it must be one that does not entail sustained ethical inquiry or the weighing of consequences on others. To quibble with the immediacy of experience and the problems it generated, and not to ponder the very nature of why we were doing it in the first place, merely perpetuated the cycle of inauthenticity.[66]

Keeping these ideas in mind, at first blush the list of contributors to *American Philosophers at Work* was as timely as it was impressive. In addition to many second-tier contemporary followers of pragmatism, the volume's contributors range from the titans of logic and epistemology (Rudolph Carnap, F.S.C. Northrop, Nelson Goodman, W.V.O. Quine, and C.I.

[65] Sartre wrote somewhere that human beings only "take hold of things." They did not "grab them."
[66] *Ibid*; this discussion also benefitted from Wolfgang Stegmüller, *Main Currents in Contemporary German, British, and American Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), Chapter four.

Lewis), Absolute Idealism (Charles Hartshorne and Bland Branshard), Philosophy of Science (Nagel and Charles Morris), Aesthetics (William Ray Dennes), and Moral and Political Philosophy (Paul Weiss, Abraham Kaplan, Wilfrid Sellars, Arthur E. Murray, Horace Kallen, and Hook). Conceived as a snapshot of the character of contemporary American philosophizing Hook captured what he thought were the "intellectual passions of an age," those significant aspects of academic philosophy's trajectory in the years following World War II. Ironically, for someone so suspicious of existentialism, ontology, or any other variant of metaphysical speculation, Hook omitted their representatives altogether.[67] More importantly, no representatives from the Neo-Thomists were included (perhaps not even invited).

The history of American philosophizing, Hook proudly proclaimed, was commensurate with the history of America itself. While he was most surely not adopting the linear narratives associated with the "from Jonathan Edwards to John Dewey" school typical of so much American historiography,[68] Hook argued that the rise of American civilization was only intelligible in terms of its debt to European ways of thinking, feeling, and acting—its culture—and the degree to which those forces were shaped and reshaped by the unique historical experience of Americans themselves. With professional philosophy becoming increasingly international via transoceanic conferences and meetings, and armed with his friend Nagel's correspondence from the 1930s, Hook sensed that more and more European philosophers were becoming more and more curious about what their American counterparts were up to. In one way, then, the text was designed to stave off European philosophers' more or less "impressionistic" beliefs about American philosophizing, and, more importantly, American

[67] The only obvious exceptions might be Nelson Goodman and Paul Weiss, who a) wrote more systematically, and b) had more than a slight respect for metaphysics.
[68] This school is typified by the work of Kuklick's *A History of Philosophy in America*.

culture. The point here is crucial, and runs counter to many "eclipse" narratives about pragmatism's career: given Hook's efforts, American philosophy might be seen as having *always* embraced its analytic and continental brethren—even if it did so at arm's length.[69]

The other aspects of American philosophizing Hook conveyed to his readers were its methodological and thematic transformations. "[W]ith some notable exceptions," he wrote, professional philosophers "no longer practice…in the grand *tradition*, essaying wholesale views about the nature of man, existence and eternity." Striking a seemingly autobiographical tone, Hook argued that most contemporary American philosophers, having been inspired by recent advances in science and technology, "do not even practice philosophy in the grand Manner but concentrate on the patient analysis of specific problems aiming at results while although piecemeal are more likely to withstand criticism."[70] This assessment, however, was not altogether positive, for some American philosophers had gone too far. Taking aim at the analytic revolutionaries and their American devotees, Hook argued that too many of these patient analyses, concerned as they were with the problems of logic, mathematics, and general questions of meaning, potentially estranged American philosophizing from the concerns of laymen—the cornerstone of how Hook understood philosophy itself. Laymen, however, have historically felt the need to solve their various difficulties, and may neither have, alas, the appropriate time nor the capacity to effectively clarify the terms they invoke towards their solution before setting out the tasks at hand—G. E. Moore's insistence notwithstanding. It was one thing to acknowledge the impingement of novel experience as a result of scientific discoveries, and the philosopher's place in clarifying the issues at stake; it was another to maintain that the philosopher serves no

[69] Hook, *American Philosophers at Work*, 10-11.
[70] *Ibid*., 12.

such role at all because all philosophy was continuous with the ordinary problems of everyday science. In another way, then, the text served as a warning to its readers to specialize at their own peril. With his pragmatic temperament in tow, no doubt Hook was implying that pragmatism would be, in the end, an appropriate vaccination for the ills of hyper-specialization and philosophical insulation in America.

Finally, he hoped that *American Philosophers at Work* would, at the very least, foster a dialogue between all of the philosophical schools in question. This overture clearly made sense in light of Hook's polyglot philosophy department at NYU, which by the late 1950s had commenced the Institute for Philosophy, whose touchstone was interdisciplinary inquiry into the burning intellectual issues of the day.[71] To foster such a dialogue, he insisted, would be an extension of the democratic ethos of American culture, and for the very important reason that America was different from Europe because it embraced pluralism, eschewed intellectual authoritarianism, and strove to weave the achievements of the natural and social sciences into the fabric of political life. "There is no state philosophy in America," he concluded in his introduction, "and no authority is recognized except good argument and cogent evidence." Unlike other regions of the world,

> The continuous disagreements among American philosophers may show that philosophy is still far from being a science or even scientific, but it also proves that American philosophers are free. Ultimately, it is more important that they be free than that they agree.[72]

[71] About the term "interdisciplinary." While outside the boundaries if the current discussion, the NYU Institute, started by Hook, engaged philosophers in conversation with some of the country's most recognizable historians, psychologists and psychoanalysts, and aestheticians over the course of nearly twenty years.
[72] Hook, *American Philosophers at Work*, 13.

Hook briefly explored many of these ideas in his original contribution to *American Philosophers at Work*, titled "Naturalism and First Principles."[73]

Largely ignored by historians, "Naturalism and First Principles" is one of his more densely philosophical pieces of the 1950s, and one that assumes among his readers a considerable degree of philosophical, psychological, and even anthropological sophistication. The title must have thrown a few readers as well; in the history of philosophizing, naturalism—the general belief that legitimate and meaningful knowledge can be achieved via empirical observation and evidence in the course of inquiry—was anathema to "First Principles"—the belief that legitimate and meaningful knowledge could be derived from propositions that were themselves not derived from any other propositions (otherwise referred to as *a priori* knowledge).[74] As was the case with the ontological revolution, Hook was impatient with any branch of philosophy that proceeded to explain the way that the world was in foundationalist terms independent of scientific or empirical inquiry. Since these trends dominated contemporary philosophical discourse, he felt compelled to act—or at least explain further how naturalism epistemically trumped them. In a curious turn, however, the essay opted not to make a comprehensive argument establishing naturalism's inherent efficacy. Rather, he chose a meta-philosophical path via a series of interrelated critical "points" *about* naturalism in light of critiques against it from several points on the philosophical compass, especially those emanating from contemporary analytical philosophers and, in some cases, religionists.

"Naturalism and First Principles" accused analysts and ontologists of the same epistemic crime: they antecedently discovered and then either logically or metaphysically justified and

[73] Hook, "Naturalism and First Principles," in *American Philosophers at Work*, 236-258.
[74] For a helpful overview of naturalism's history, see *American Philosophic Naturalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. John Ryder (Buffalo: Prometheus Press, 1994), especially the Introduction.

applied first principles to human affairs, and did so independently of measuring the consequences. "[T]here is no such thing as strictly logical justification of first principles in science or common sense," he began

> since proof by definition involves the reduction of all statements to indefinable terms and undemonstrable propositions or to propositions themselves so reducible. And secondly…in the sense in which justification of first principles is an intelligible question—as when someone asks me why I regard naturalism as a truer and more adequate doctrine than its rivals—the answer will take the same *general* form of the answers given by those who do the world's work—the cobblers, the carpenters, and gardeners—when they are asked to justify one set of procedures rather than alternative ones.[75]

Hiding behind an edifice of language or so-called "rationality," analysts and ontologists claimed to have discovered some or other pathway to The Truth, dismissing larger concrete questions of ethics, politics, and policy as bunkum. Fair enough, Hook demurred. Naturalism took many of these claims at face value, and argued that it was pointless—if not impossible—to try to come to some sort of agreement on First Principles before examining their implications for human conduct. Instead, he and his fellow naturalists sought to uncover what methodologies lay behind their claims; or what epistemic framework engendered any one of these ideas in the first place. Under close scrutiny, Hook argued, even the most enthusiastic opponent of naturalism would have to readily admit to having weighed alternatives, measured evidence, and re-thought or re-formulated the problem they found engaging and first attempted to solve. If philosophy were committed to rendering human behavior more reasonable and more rational—and Hook thought that was what its history symbolized—then even the most ardent opponent would realize that their respective inquiries into The Truth or whatnot were, in effect, geared toward making "effective use of everyday knowledge." In other words, even philosophers who maintain that all knowledge of human affairs is *a priori* must have as clear an argument why it must be the case

[75] Hook, "Naturalism and First Principles," 239.

and no other. Ratiocination could never serve as a bellwether for what he felt was philosophy's purpose: the quest for wisdom.

Equally important was the extent to which Hook gauged the controversies that followed the publication of W.V.O. Quine's famous essay, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," published in 1951. While its exhaustingly complicated ideas lie outside the current discussion, Quine essentially laid the groundwork for rendering the philosophy of language—a stalwart branch of the analytic tradition—all the more complex by calling for the reassessment of all terms philosophers have taken for granted when analyzing the truth or falsity of sentences.[76]

In addition to analyzing sentences themselves, one implication for Quine's theory was that we ought to explore the terms (or even the sentences) we use to analyze sentences themselves. Underscoring these points was Quine's belief that logic was exclusively the preserve of the sciences, and that there was literally—and he meant *literally*—no difference between the concerns of the scientist and the concerns of the philosopher. More importantly, philosophy has no methods other than those of science, no foundations more secure than science, and no subject matter distinct from science. The world of science became a world of fact, not value.[77] Logic, moreover, had nothing to do with empirical claims to truth, and by "empirical" it was meant any statements related to human conduct found in ethics, politics, or economics, which were not necessarily the preserve of the scientist. Only statements about empirical matters can be either

[76] For an early but nonetheless useful effort to place Quine's contributions to historical philosophizing, see Hilary Putnam, "A Half Century of Philosophy, Viewed From Within," in *American Academic Culture in Transformation*, 193-226.

[77] My discussion of Quine's general views is based on Alan W. Richardson, "Engineering Philosophy of Science: American Pragmatism and Logical Empiricism in the 1930s," *Philosophy of Science* Volume 69 (2002): 36-47; Thomas Mormann, "Carnap's Logical Empiricism, Values, and American Pragmatism," *Journal for General Philosophy of Science* 38 (2007): 127-146; Robert Almeder, "Carnap and Quine on Empiricism," *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Volume 14 (1997): 349-364; Scott Soames, "Analytic Philosophy in America," 18-21; Soames, "Philosophical Analysis," 17-22; Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 182-191.

true or false, not what happens when, or if we decide to act upon their being true or false. The distinction was crucial: Quine and his early followers ascribed to logic a role consistent with the natural sciences (such as physics), which sought, at least in general, to uncover the nature of the universe in its entirety.[78] Hook, however, rejected this idea, and invoked the term "logic" more propositionally and naturalistically, less as an instrument of truth unearthing and instead in terms of

> instruments of discourse which enable[d human beings] to avoid the shocks and surprises, the disasters and disappointments in attempting to understand the nature of the world and our own intentions and purposes. …its use enables us to make the knowledge we have today more coherent, and especially because it more easily facilitates adding *new* knowledge to it.

Before we draw out the educational implications of such a statement, it is important to note that most of Quine's contemporaries agreed that logical work was synonymous with a call for a more refined theory of meaning. While not nearly as technical in its vocabulary, the point to be made is that "Naturalism and First Principles" did as well, for it maintained that analytic philosophy (and, by implication, Quine) was actually more consistent with the form of naturalism that Hook espoused than previously assumed. That is, "unless [philosophers] are prepared to hold that all knowledge is analytic and the differences between nature and history, with all their contingency, and mathematics and logic disappear...," they ought to entertain naturalism's prospects for clarifying their terms. After all, Hook continued, the naturalist believed that the search for clarity was commendable; it was not, however, the be-all and end-all of philosophic inquiry. Clear language was indispensable, yes, provided it rendered conduct more intelligible and practicable.

[78] I have benefitted immensely from Joel Isaac's essay, "W. V. Quine and the Origins of Analytic Philosophy in the United States," *Modern Intellectual History* 2 (2005): 205-234. It is worth noting that Isaac and others rightly observe that the "Two Dogmas" essay both represents a break of sorts from the logical empiricism of his mentor Carnap and an inauguration of sorts of what would become "Ordinary Language" philosophy. For Quine's move toward pragmatic naturalism later in his career, see Almeder, "Carnap and Quine on Empiricism."

Even then, he wanted to know by which method such clarity was attained. “Naturalism...has nothing to do with [many] linguistic matters, important as they may be in other respects,” he concluded. It was “concerned only with those assertions about existence from which something empirically observable in the world follows that would not be the case if existence were denied.”[79]

Once more Hook devoted considerable space to defending science as a method and means of inquiry rather than, as Quine and his followers maintained, a settled body of conclusions purporting to accurately express the truth about the world. One aspect of the significance of this methodological conception of philosophy had been its extension to the treatment of many of philosophy's most cherished philosophical problems. Perhaps this is why Hook chose to deal with naturalism and not pragmatism (or at least Dewey explicitly) in his contribution to *American Philosophers at Work*. He did not present an argument about the nature of nature; rather he offered us "nature" without Dewey’s metaphysical baggage, and he chose an oblique characterization of it to denote all that is subject to meaningful (read "normative"), philosophical (read "scientific") inquiry. Naturalism was thus less part of a larger metaphysical, ontological, existential matrix and more of "a systematic reflection upon, and elaboration of, the procedures [a human being] employs in the successful resolution of the problems and difficulties of human experience."[80] And unlike his ontological interlocutors, method, and not metaphysics, marked not only what philosophers should do but also what philosophers have always been doing. Hook's suspicion was that, at bottom, as soon as one philosopher elevated one form of

[79] Hook, “Naturalism and First Principles,” 241.
[80] *Ibid*., 257.

knowledge over and above another he or she had to have inevitably invoked and/or utilized the methods associated with the natural sciences.

In engaging the analytic philosophers so deeply, Hook was thus *not* repudiating them outright. Nor was pragmatism "eclipsed" by the analytic revolution. Rather, it is clear that he sincerely appreciated the profound significance of the analytic revolution. Many of its central tenets and techniques were consistent with his conception of philosophy—that philosophers must develop and deploy sharp conceptual tools to clarify problems. Nevertheless, there were shortcomings to this approach, as questions surrounding ordinary language should never be considered independent of scientific inquiry. Since many within the analytic camp eschewed the practical problems that followed their quests for clarity, and since they disavowed philosophy's history, Hook felt very strongly that they avoided direct confrontation with moral, ethical, and political questions. In light of the history of philosophizing, how could it all of a sudden be fashionable to analyze language at the expense of their consequences? While Hook would not go so far as his colleague John Herman Randall Jr. to dismiss the analytic revolution as a "revolution over teacups," Hook clearly looked upon their works with a healthy dose of skepticism.[81]

[81] Randall shared this comment while offering a "pastoral admonition" of the analytic revolution's "narrow sectarianism" in his APA Presidential address of 1956, titled "Talking and Looking." It was later published under the same title in the *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 30 (1956-1957): 5-24. His best line: "There is a lot in Heidegger, if you only knock the Kierkegaard out of him." Randall was actually (and perhaps accidentally) invited to contribute to *American Philosophers at Work*. Not only did he refuse, he went to considerable lengths to "declare total war against" analysts, for it was they who "would if [they] could kill the philosophical enterprise completely, as it already has done in England." Hook chided his friend, saying "…if it is war, whether hot or [C]old, we shall be fighting on opposite sides in the conflict." Randall to Hook, October 24, 1951; Hook to Randall, October 27, 1951. Sidney Hook Papers, Box 24.

Whatever esteem Hook had for his analytic colleagues across the philosophical aisle, with regard to other important philosophical innovations of the 1950s, like existential ontology, he was far more critical, and to such a degree one wonders if his arguments were more impatient than not, rooted in a misunderstanding of its core ideas. For it was they, he argued, who lacked "the courage of their imperial claims," and not, as many might have thought, those sympathetic to pragmatism.[82] His critique of these schools was rooted in their overt dismissal of the world as it was currently understood via the methods of scientific inquiry. Instead of seeking a more mediate view of knowledge, viz., specific existential difficulties can be made better piecemeal, and only if we apply the experimental methods to them, ontologists amplified such specific existential difficulties into problems of existential universality. That is, they sought to translate *a* particular problem engendered in a specific context into *the* problem of all existence. Nonsense, said Hook:

> Problems exist within the world, problems are found within experience. But you cannot make an intelligible problem of totality or of everything. The existentialist maintains that the world is absurd because he cannot find and answer to the so-called problem of the existence of the world. The pragmatist says it is absurd to say that the world is absurd. Only human beings can be absurd. The truly absurd thing about the existentialist is that he does not understand the necessity of being clear about the criterion of what constitutes a problem. Without such a criterion, one can make a problem about anything and everything.[83]

Having the idea of absurdity function as the bulwark between a meaningful life or a life devoid of meaning, it seemed to Hook that that the only choices the existential ontologists offered human beings were dread and resignation. And these, he continued, were little more than existentially unacceptable choices in a world where some human beings might actually prefer to strive for the minimization of discomfitures of varying degrees instead. In offering a wholesale

[82] Hook, "The Quest for 'Being,'" 723.
[83] Hook, "Pragmatism and Existentialism," 160.

approach to the contingencies of human existence, these philosophies stir[red] the viscera," Hook chided, "without challenging the understanding."[84] There was simply too little to be gotten from complying with Heidegger and his followers' impassioned pleas for us to ask why there is something rather than not, for no one is capable of solving *all* of the problems of human existence. Well, human beings *might* be able to, but philosophers would be remiss not to admit that their inquiries will resort to little more than platitudes, vagaries, or emotivism instead of reasoned, calculated, honest, and intelligible inquiry. Hence their dependence not upon the empirical and contingent methods associated with the natural sciences but with the presuppositions about the universe derived from metaphysics. Even still, were human beings to *want* to try and solve *all* of their problems, history was on Hook's side that it is inevitable that one or other problem must be solved temporally in order to proceed to the next. In their manifold quests for "Being" the ontological revolutionaries mystified knowledge to such a degree that their claims about the world were radically and epistemically incompatible with the knowledge humans strove to acquire empirically.[85]

The conceptual foil for these epistemic quandaries was "Being." In light of its popularity among existential ontologists, Hook wondered what specifically the term denoted, and what conduct was expected to follow from it? To get to the bottom of "Being" he drew upon the analysts:"[i]f one reflects upon language, one finds that a principle of significant assertion is that no word has a meaning unless it also has an intelligible opposite." But what was the opposite of Being? Not- or Non-Being? What were they? Surely not being something is a form of Being; when human beings move from life to death they surely stop "being" alive but they also adopt

[84] *Ibid*., 164.
[85] For a larger examination of this question, see Hook's, "The Quest For 'Being,'" *The Journal of Philosophy*, 50 (1953): 709-731.

the status of "being" dead. And surely Being cannot be equated with things that are either only possible and imaginable, for we can imagine all kinds of things that are impossible, such a Unicorns. But Hook's greatest frustrations lay with "Being" as something that existed "independent of consciousness or experience," and thus the "really real" existent in the world was little more than Being's—for lack of a better word—Being-ing. But Hook argued that as long as we get headaches and lose loved ones we are being affected by the world, and not Being. Such a) problematic presuppositions, and b) metaphysical bunkum were simply too much to bear for a pragmatist who sought to find value in a philosophical school committed to helping us understand ourselves on a grand scale. Since it generated more epistemic heat than light, the concept of "Being" ought to thus be discarded as philosophically fruitless and, ironically, existentially meaningless.[86] As one philosopher aptly put it, in adopting a "mystique" about the way the world was and the turgid prose he employed in describing it, "…Heidegger has shown that a German philosopher can do things with Greek that would curl the hair of an Oxford don."[87]

Taken together, Hook's critical appraisal of and cautious admiration for the analytic revolution, coupled with his repudiation of all things ontological, shaped the character and content of his American Philosophical Association Presidential Address, "Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life." In it he molded his critiques into a meta-philosophical meditation on the history of philosophy and pragmatism's place in it. While he drew heavily upon his mentor Dewey, nowhere in Hook's address was Dewey's optimistic tone. And Dewey's penchant for grand narrative was altogether absent. Cornel West has identified the crucial difference between

[86] Hook, "Pragmatism and Existentialism,"164-165.
[87] Randall, "Talking and Looking," 17.

the two philosophers as one of *temperament*, with Hook's philosophical outlook rife with frustrations, a sense of betrayal, and disappointment. To his credit, West is one of the first to point to "Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life" as Hook's "most mature and memorable statement of his post-Deweyan" philosophical career.[88] West, however, is motivated by a desire to place Hook in a larger intellectual tradition, one that begins with and emulates Ralph Waldo Emerson's theodicy, and not, as we have argued, his sustained engagement with his contemporaries.

To an audience of philosophers, Hook's opening volley was more pessimistic than usual. The philosophical dangers associated with the analytic and ontological revolutions gave the professional philosophers pause, he argued, and it was high time, after nearly two decades of engagement with them, to place them on trial for their philosophical transgressions. The significance cannot be lost on the reader, for this was a presidential address before hundreds of philosophers, many of whom might take offense to his levying such severe charges. Hook understood well that his address would be philosophically controversial; he admitted as much, and offered these revolutionary tendencies a fair trial, encouraging his audience to fight back once he had his say.

The totality of Hook's address need not concern us at present. More germane to the discussion is Hook's opening salvo against the analytic and ontological revolutions. "For some time now," he began,

> philosophers have been disputing with each other about what philosophy should or should not be. They would be better occupied, it seems to me, doing what [they think is] philosophically worth while instead of objecting either to linguistic analysis or metaphysical speculation, as the case may be. The issue is not one of proper definition or

[88] Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 118-119. Alas, despite his admiration for Hook's Marxism—and not his pragmatism per se—West too subscribes to the "eclipse" narrative. See *ibid*., Chapter 5.

> even whether philosophy is a science or a body of knowledge of comparable objectivity, but rather whether it is worth doing, whether there is sufficient illumination and fun in pursuing certain themes, ignored by others, to justify continuing doing so.[89]

The time for quibbling was over, and from these revolutions philosophy must recover. For whatever their individual worth, each of these trends spells doom for what philosophizing was prior to their arrival: the quest for wisdom in an insecure world. Since the analysts and ontologists abdicated their responsibilities in ethical, social, and political matters, Hook sought to re-state the nature of philosophical inquiry as precisely that. In setting aside the internecine conflicts within the American philosophical community, or the outright dismissals from the likes of his colleagues (such as Randall), Hook outlined the tasks for the philosopher in spite of them. Philosophy, he argued, must reclaim the mantle of normative inquiry, its quest for wisdom, the indispensability of philosophy's history, and, most importantly, an appreciation for life's tragic tendencies. For all of their claims to the contrary, the ontologists and analysts had no meaningful answer to the latter; society, and not just philosophy, suffered bitterly as a result. "What saving message," he wondered, "do philosophers bring their fellow men?" Analysts and ontologists, Hook argued, had none.[90]

Briefly stated, "the tragic" in Hook's address had nothing to do with afflictions such as sickness, aging, or death; it was, at bottom, moral. The "element" of the tragic, he observed, entered into our experience when a morally problematic situation engendered the need for a reflective choice between two competing but equally desirable goods or outcomes. Were there a moral cookbook replete with recipes for every moral occasion, there would be no need for reflective inquiry into all of the relevant factors that brought the situation into existence in the first place. Until one appeared, we were left to draw upon our intelligence to ameliorate the

[89] Hook, "Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life," 6.
[90] *Ibid*., 7.

situation to the best of our abilities, weighing alternative modes of conduct informed by our reflection. How do we know what the correct course of reflection or conduct is, and how long is long enough to reflect? What are the desired consequences of our actions? What are the larger social and political goals of doing so? Rarely are these answers clear to us, Hook maintained, and he lamented that the element of the tragic lay "in the defeat of [our] plans or hopes, in the realization that in much grief there is not much wisdom, and that we cannot count merely upon the passage of time alone to diminish our stupidities and cruelties."[91] In other words, as long as human beings lived they will be met with sufficient difficulties that warranted resolution or dissolution for them to carry on, and they may *think* they are making the appropriate decision to do X in light of some desired end. In the process some or other good—or right—has been sacrificed for their purposes; they may never get what they wanted, but we are closer and, hopefully, better prepared to confront the problem when it arose in the future. And they most surely will appear in the future. In this sense Hook assured his audience that a philosophy that pinned its hopes on a "least worst" approach to problems was preferable than one that dismissed moral questions as either inexplicable "emotive sentences" or part of the order of things. The record of human history showed that, on more than one occasion, human beings were indeed fallible, and it was altogether clear that, while not inevitable, it was possible that his audience and readers might join their ranks too. On the question of what to do about it, analysts and ontologists lie silent. While the former were somewhat helpful in clarifying the language requisite our reflection, they fell way short given the magnitude of the moral situation.[92]

[91] *Ibid.*, 11.
[92] Hook, "Pragmatism and Existentialism," 163-164; "The Quest for 'Being,'" 712-713.

This thumbnail sketch of Hook's platform is framed in such a way as to raise a not altogether obvious question: what were the intellectual prerequisites for being able to ameliorate such morally problematic situations? Since he offered a sustained defense of the history of philosophy as normative social inquiry; and that pragmatism as he understood it (and not as Dewey did) was the best method by which such situations can be ameliorated, less explicit are the more narrow instruments by which such a disposition can be cultivated. But there were elements of his address, long ignored by philosophers, which suggested what could be done. The historian, however, must probe a bit more deeply to unearth these instruments, and the results bear strong resemblance to his larger educational commitments.

If the tragic lies at the root of moral experience, and the surest way to stave off the direst of consequences within it entailed the effective use of intelligence, how was the latter to be attained? Hook implied that it was via education, and he placed the analytic and ontological revolutions on alert: it was at this crucial juncture that their philosophical clarion calls rang hollow. "To be wise about education," he stressed,

> it is not merely enough to repabtize [*sic*] the ends of the good life as ends of a good education, too, as if without operational application to concrete historical situations, they had any but a peripheral bearing on the great, current problems of education. One must study social history, the psychology of learning, the methods and techniques of pedagogy to achieve educational wisdom. To enumerate the ends of the good life is not enough. Nor is a primer on logical analysis which can serve as an introduction to the study of *any* subject, a primer to the philosophy of education.[93]

Once more he argued that historical study played a crucial role in the resolution of moral difficulties. "[H]istory is the arena of the profoundest moral conflicts in which some legitimate right has always been sacrificed, sometimes on the altars of the God of War," he reminded his audience.[94] Any education that had history as its centerpiece must perforce include the

[93] Hook, "Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life," 8.
[94] *Ibid*., 18.

philosophies of history found in Hegel, Schiller, Heidegger, or Tillich, and would point students in meaningful directions as to their strengths and weaknesses. Hook confidently announced that the more these thinkers were studied the more their readers would find them inefficacious when confronted with immediate moral difficulties; in lieu of practice they offered ambiguities, theology, or, worse, unintelligibility. Nevertheless, they must be understood, Hook argued, for students who study only ideas that accord with their predilections know little about them.[95] In conjunction with the study of social, political, and economic history, it was impossible for any "humane person" to not be "moved more by man's failures to use the knowledge he has had to remove the evils and sufferings which were remedial than by his attempt to achieve too great a control or power over nature." To study history, then, was to place individuals in a better position to act as effective moral adjutants. And on cue, Hook argued that it was pragmatism, and none of the ideas associated with the analytic or ontological revolutions, that placed them in the appropriate methodological frame of mind—and along the way to enjoy the "blessings of a little luck."[96]

At roughly the same time as his Presidential Address, Hook was invited, at the behest of his friend and colleague Bland Branshard, to flesh out these educational ideas in the journal *Daedalus*. The impetus was the recent launch of the Russian satellite Sputnik, which immediately induced widespread panic across the American political spectrum. Equal to the degree to which it intensified extant Cold War tensions, the launch focused the federal government's attention and resources like never before on improving the quality of science and language education. Nowhere was this enthusiasm felt more than in America's institutions of

[95] *Ibid*., 18-19
[96] *Ibid*., 22-26; see also Hook, "The Ends and Content of Education," *Daedalus*, 88 (1959): 7-10.

higher learning, which were soon charged with getting more students into college, and into those fields once there. Accompanying these overt demands was a staggering influx of federal funds into scientific research and development. By 1958 the National Defense Education Act had been passed by Congress; because the act contained a clause mandating that any recipient of federal funding must sign what was, in effect, a loyalty oath, philosophers like Blandshard and Hook wondered how this newfound federal support would affect higher education. Hook contributed "The Ends and Content of Education" to the forum, a piece that had a familiar ring to it.[97] Its significance lies in Hook's combining all of the elements of this chapter hitherto, and presenting them to an audience that was not explicitly philosophical or even narrowly academic.

Of all the ink he spilled in the 1950s, Hook's article outlined in greater detail than in *Education for Modern Man* what he believed were the main objectives of modern higher education: the study of history as a means of making intelligent decisions in social and political affairs; an ability to write and speak and think clearly and effectively; and, as a tacit acknowledgement of the crisis generated by Sputnik, a "study of the great maps of life." Since we have sufficiently grasped Hook's understanding of and passion for historical study, we might close this chapter with a brief discussion of the other two.

Since individuals must all communicate with each other independently of their chosen vocation—especially when those vocations were becoming increasingly specialized in the postwar workplace—modern education must effectively reduce any and all obstacles to effective communication. The issue was not merely linguistic or even cultural; once more it was moral, for once again Hook advanced the premise that "man is born to problems and troubles as the sparks fly upward." Moreover, clarity of thought, speech, and writing has a deep aesthetic quality.

[97] Hook, "The Ends and Content of Education," 7-24.

"Whether practical or theoretical, whether it involves a move that may spell life or death or only a move in a chess game," he continued,

> The ability to think increases the power to solve problems. It also increases our satisfaction in doing so. By increasing both power and satisfaction, it multiplies alternatives of choice and makes us freer men. The development of our capacities of aesthetic appreciation and imaginative identification multiplies the occasions for joy and delight in a tragic world. It refreshes the spirit without imposing suffering on other human beings.[98]

These skills shaped how students might study and communicate the value judgments and commitments of the major philosophies and religions "that have swayed multitudes, as well as the visions of solitary figures of deeper thought but lesser influence," and brought them to "bear directly upon some of the ideological conflicts of our age." This is what Hook meant by "the great maps of life," and it bore directly on the relationship between them and the culture of crisis that surrounded how to best manage the federal government's newfound enthusiasm for scientific education. From an understanding of the many maps of life, students ought to become

> more acutely aware of the revolutionary impact of science and technology on human culture. If he rises above the level of the earthworm and wonders about human origins and destinies, this knowledge will help him to develop a reflective view of the place of man in the universe, of God's existence, of the meanings and evidences, if any, of immortality and human freedom.[99]

The same applied to questions of social policy, where knowledge of the great maps and clear communication "involves a clear choice among key moral values. Sometimes this is true in what appear to be merely questions of limited means." As an example, Hook drew upon Sputnik and its aftermath: "hard decisions about nuclear defense in the grim days ahead of us involve commitment to ideals on which we may literally have to stake our lives." "Surely," Hook pleaded, "this is justification enough to make a critical and searching study of the grounds,

[98] Hook, "The Ends and Content of Education," 8.
[99] *Ibid*., 9

alternatives and consequences of the great ideals for which men have lived and died."[100] Thus what would appear to be little more than a series of vague program proposals actually turn out to be mutually entailing, mutually edifying goals that every institution ought to aspire."The nature of education," he repeated, "is such that even when learning is a process of discovery the greatest weight must fall upon the knowledge and wisdom of the past. It could not be otherwise."[101]

Since no representatives from the analytic or ontological revolutions concerned themselves with educational matters, the chief obstacle to Hook's educational vision as the decade closed was not their respective *Weltanschauungen* but once more the metaphysically-oriented educational philosophy of Mortimer Adler. Adler had spent the better part of the 1950s accomplishing two important goals: assembling, marketing, and profiting handsomely from the *Great Books of the Western World*, and launching a sustained critique of higher (or liberal) education, one that castigated Dewey and Hook's philosophy along the way. The most recent iteration of this tendency was Adler's self-published *Liberal Education in an Industrial Democracy*, a volume based on a series of lectures Adler delivered before insurance executives.[102] While we have already delved into Hook's condemnation of Adler and his colleague Robert Hutchins' curricular proposals, in his article he focused rather narrowly on Adler's ontological commitments, and he did so because from them Adler had derived a theory of human nature and, by implication, a theory of education.

Every human being, Adler argued, had all the distinguishing properties common to all members of the species as a whole. Therefore, education should be the same for all students everywhere. "Human differences in capacity for education," Adler averred, "can be thought of in

[100] *Ibid*., 11.
[101] *Ibid*., 12.
[102] Mortimer Adler, *Liberal Education in an Industrial Democracy* (San Francisco: Industrial Indemnity, 1957).

terms of containers of different sizes. Obviously a half-pint jar cannot hold as much liquid as a quart or gallon jar. Now the poorly endowed child is like a half-pint jar, and the gifted child like the quart or gallon container." What remained was to fill each of these jars equally with the same "cream of liberal education." The effective teacher, he concluded, was one who poured without spillage.[103]

The source of dispute between them revolved around the idea of equality. For Adler, equality denoted sameness in human nature and, of course, education; for Hook it entailed the equality of opportunity for students to receive one. Once they did, a respect for intellectual, emotional, and even biological differences was the cornerstone of a liberal education independent of any antecedently determined theory of all human nature—all claims, he further maintained, that have been supported by the various sciences. "A dull child will never be able to read as well or as intelligently as a bright child," he argued, "and an ordinary child will never be able to play as well as a musically gifted child. But both children can be so educated that each enjoys reading and music." This is the inverse of Adler's metaphor, and Hook hoped that educational theorists would avoid the trappings of Adler's proposals and concentrate on discovering ways in which students could be taught to the extent that "they could achieve the full measure of their growth and health." No doubt it was possible to achieve this independent of any particular metaphysics.[104]

More disturbing than these presuppositions about human nature and education were their religious underpinnings, or what Hook perceived as the increasing "clericalism" of Adler and his educational disciples. In short, "clericalism" stood for a steadfast belief in the supernatural, one

[103] Adler, *Liberal Education in an Industrial Democracy*, 35-36. Quoted in Hook, "The Ends and Content of Education," 19.
[104] Hook, "The Ends and Content of Education," 19.

that was required "to reach *truths* about man, nature, and society, in order to discover morally valid *ideals*, and in order to acquire certain intellectual *skills*."[105] By asserting self-evident truths independent of their fruits in experience, and in light of its presuppositions about the nature or structure of the world or of language, and in deducing any and all forms of behavior from these presuppositions, clericalism revealed itself to be on par with the analytic and ontological revolutions. Hence Hook's inveterate suspicions of them all in the educational arena. An effective liberal education would genuinely liberate students from the crippling ambiguities or frustrations associated with them all.

Given these seemingly unrelated themes in his mid-century career, what connections, or what lessons, can the intellectual historian draw from them? While Hook's engagement with the question of how best to explain the preclusion of members of the Communist Party from America's classrooms; with what administrative and curricular prerequisites best inculcate the dispositions requisite free inquiry; and with the question of what questions philosophy concerned itself with and wither it is tending in light of recent trends appear unrelated, given his devotion to the development of, and application of, critical intelligence to problematic situations, we might recommend some deeper thinking on the matter.

To be sure, Hook's alleged obsessions with CP members in the classroom had, upon closer inspection, more to do with its pedagogical and administrative implications than with the larger questions surrounding the degree to which he bore responsibility for the arrival and effects of McCarthyism. We have suggested that an extension of these concerns can be traced to his unflagging commitment to the improvement of the character and content of NYU's undergraduate curriculum, and the administrative changes required in its execution.

[105] *Ibid*., 22.

On the philosophical front, we have also suggested that, contrary to the current "eclipse" narrative in American historiography, pragmatism did not vanish from the American philosophical landscape with Dewey's death. What it did do, as we have suggested, was grow more sophisticated as a result of the Trans-Atlantic dialogue between analytic and continental philosophers, a dialogue that was, in no small way, advanced by Hook and his colleagues. An entire volume could be produced to illustrate the ways in which this discourse radically altered the character and content of philosophy departments and their curricula across America—including the hundreds of graduate programs that imbibed these new trends. More importantly, Hook continued to write either about Dewey in particular or about pragmatism in general throughout the 1960s and 1970s—long before the alleged pragmatic Renaissance begun by Richard Rorty.

Finally, Hook clearly saw that, if the goal of undergraduate education was to create the conditions under which each student could maximize their potential as persons, and that no classroom dogmatism or obscurantism ought to preclude that, the prevailing philosophical winds, if they became the dominant methodological approach to the comprehension and solution of life's difficulties, posed a not inconsiderable threat to the amelioration of the world's most pressing problems. In short, each of these aspects—authoritarian classrooms, stale and anachronistic curricula, and epistemic and moral gobbledygook—impinged upon the student in America's colleges and universities enough that free inquiry, and, perhaps, a free society, might be (or at least become) imperiled. All of these tendencies stirred in Hook a deep desire to revisit, revise, and eventually reissue *Education for Modern Man* in 1963.

Epilogue:

Marching to the Beat of a Different Panjandrummer

> Where general education has been tried and failed, its failures have resulted, not from an overdose of skepticism generated by its curricular practices, but from a lack of belief in its validity on the part of those who have been responsible for its operation and especially by abysmal failures to teach it properly—a task of greater magnitude than the teaching of specialties.[1]

Sidney Hook's educational and philosophical activism continued, quite literally, until his death in the fall of 1989. For decades he continued to assail what he thought were authoritarian tendencies within higher education, and the inveterate dogmatisms associated with educational discourse without. But many of the arguments within which he found himself, and indeed many of his public squabbles with his opponents were, more often than not, variations or recapitulations of the battles we have discussed in the preceding chapters. While it is tempting to examine them as they related to the student rebellions of the 1960s, many of them fall outside the thematic boundaries of this dissertation. Moreover, were we to address Hook's fights as they related to the politicization of American colleges and universities—and that rather tumultuous decade within which they took place—we may very well require a separate volume, one that would reconfigure Hook within the larger context of the manifold students protests, women's rights, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Vietnam War.[2] However, it is possible to suggest how we might revise Hook's later educational experiences independent of them, and to do so we ought to examine the educational and philosophical significance of Hook's decision to revise

[1] Hook, "General Education: The Minimum Indispensables," in *The Philosophy of the Curriculum: The Need for General Education,* ed. Sidney Hook, Paul Kurtz, and Miro Todorovich, 36.

[2] One such text is Hook's *Academic Freedom and Academic Anarchy* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1969), which is largely a series of articles about the increasing politicization of America's colleges and universities strung together, with little of the philosophical richness of his earlier educational and philosophical works. It remains for intellectual historians concerned with academic intellectuals to contextualize their writings from the 1960s, for not all them were activists on the educational front.

Education for Modern Man shortly before the educational battle lines became so pronounced. Even though the bulk of the text and scope of its argument remained largely intact, Hook prepared a nearly fifty-page introduction for the new edition, one designed to assess the manifold changes that had taken place in American higher education since its initial publication. Hook also revisited *The Hero in History* in the 1970s, updating its core argument in a rather timely, fifteen-page tract, and one that he hoped would lessen the frustrations of a profoundly discontented populace.[3]

"The Hero in History: Myth, Power, or Moral Ideal?" appeared in the wake of the Watergate scandals. In it Hook decided to bring its argument to bear on what he perceived to be the abject cynicism within American politics as a consequence of President Richard Nixon's malfeasance. Since we have maintained throughout that Hook's philosophy of education was essentially anti-authoritarian, Nixon, it could be argued, stood accused not of presidential misconduct *per se* but of the larger matter of violating Hook's Peircean commandment that no one shall block the road of inquiry. That is, Hook believed that Nixon's failure was less political and essentially *normative*, for he frequently treated many of his political opponents as political enemies within the democratic process.[4] By virtue of such an epistemic violation, Hook was not surprised, then, that the country was in such an antiheroic mood. What were needed were more *eventful* individuals to restore the public's faith not only in its chosen leaders, but also with respect to greater participation in the democratic process. These individuals should be "knowledgeable and compassionate at the helm of affairs," he wrote, and "they must be firm in

[3] Hook also reissued *Heresy, Yes—Conspiracy, No!* in 1973, and with a new introduction. Considerations of time, coupled with the complete absence of a copy of this revised edition, precluded its appearance in the section.

[4] Sidney Hook, "The Hero in History: Myth, Power, or Moral Ideal?" in Hook, *Philosophy and Public Policy* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press), 153-164.

the loyalty to democratic first principles yet aware that they must live on the same planet with those who live by other principles." Since all ideas were for Hook plans of impending conduct, these individuals must also be sufficiently intelligent, and all the more so in order to avoid "the twin faults of sentimentality and arrogance" that often interfered with developing democratic ideas.[5]

All of this was to say that, while no free society entailed a hero, given Hook's perceived malaise affecting American society (represented by what he acknowledged was a sustained decline in voter participation), it was time for an eventful person to appear in American culture. That person need not necessarily represent a political party, for the public's frustrations with, if not outright contempt for, American politics and politicians in light of Watergate precluded the legitimate amelioration of extant social or political problems. Clearly, then, the solution to the country's political problems was no to be found in better politics. For the same reasons the eventful individual could not come from the ranks within the existing political bureaucracy. And even though political parties had in years past developed in response to the failures of local communities to solve their problems, Hook was also not advocating the development of a third party, either. The solution to contemporary social and political problems, he maintained, was right in front of the average citizen's nose, for what was needed, he argued, were better teachers and better classrooms. The consequences for effective political intelligence, and, by extension, political discourse and participation, required that the country

> reeducate our youth to wean them away from the strange notion that what is public, what belongs to all, is what belongs to no one—one of the sources of the shameless vandalism that disgraces so many cities. They must learn that whatever is public belongs to us, that public money is our money, public parks our gardens, public transportation our means of

[5]*Ibid*., 164.

> conveyance, and public policy something for which … they are as responsible as the rest of us.[6]

"This," he maintained, "is our best hope that the choice of national leadership, of the eventful men and women of tomorrow, will be wisely informed."[7] The role of the teacher in this process was to help students navigate and, with effective pedagogy and, once more, a little luck, find their way out of the wilderness of a complex and contingent world. The teacher as inquirer, and not as politician, was thus a normative agent for intellectual and, Hook hoped, social and political change. Watergate effectively illustrated for Hook the dangers commensurate with when an individual, who may very well have been *eventful*—like Nixon, for example—first fooled themselves and then tried to fool an entire country into believing that they were actually *event-making.*

These larger normative concerns, normatively couched as they were, help us appreciate Hook's earlier decision to reissue *Education for Modern Man.* His new introduction assessed the climate of educational and philosophical opinion in the decade since John Dewey's death in 1952. No sooner had Dewey died than scores of journalists, politicians, and, at times, educators, launched a sustained attack on him and his followers, concluding in general that they collectively and categorically failed to deliver on the goals they set out to achieve. In addition to some space dedicated to, once more, the Adlerians, Hook identified Admiral Hyman G. Rickover as the doyen of this group. The move against Rickover must have struck Hook's readers as odd, if not superfluous, since the former was mostly concerned with issues related to America's primary and secondary schools. But since Dewey was the face of all that was wrong with American schools,

[6] *Ibid*., 163-164.
[7] *Ibid*., 164.

which was a sentiment promulgated by then-President Dwight Eisenhower,[8] he combined his polemic against Rickover with a defense of Dewey's ideas.[9]

Rickover's evolution from a decorated commander of atomic submarines to respected educational commentator culminated in 1959's *Education and Freedom.*[10] While details of its argument—if there really was one—lie outside the current discussion, it is important to note that the book is unique for its universal absence of any evidence for his claims that Dewey and his followers, especially that cabal of disciples at Teacher's College, have sabotaged America's schools.[11] It was clear to Hook that Rickover had not read much Dewey, and perhaps did so willfully, for if the Admiral had consulted any number of Dewey's educational texts he would not have so foolishly misrepresented them. This, Hook must have sighed, is what he meant all along by the "will to misunderstand": the stubborn refusal to responsibly comprehend and engage an author's ideas combined with an absolute confidence that one's critique was valid. Such intellectual laziness bred stupidity, and once again Hook must have relished the opportunity to expose Rickover's fallaciousness.

In terms of Rickover's methodology, at first blush it was clear that wherever analysis was lacking, sensationalism and innuendo would suffice. For example, at one point in the text, as he was laying into Dewey's pedagogical theory and its alleged disintegration of American

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[8] Eisenhower published a letter in *Life* magazine in 1959 blaming Dewey personally for all of the "defects" in Dewey's system, one that had duped parents and educators alike for decades. The irony was not lost on Hook and many others, as Eisenhower was president of Columbia University just before his election in 1953.

[9] Hook also briefly took Dewey's disciples in progressive education to task—whom he referred to as a "periphery of faddists"—within American education.

[10] Hyman G. Rickover, *Education and Freedom* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1959). Both the journalist Edward R. Murrow and Great Books advocate Mark van Doren praised the book in their foreword and prefaces, respectively.

[11] Even though the body of the text is replete with quotes attributed to Dewey and his acolytes, there is not a single citation in the text.

education, Rickover relayed an anecdote about a time when Dewey visited a classroom, only to discover his own young son "being beaten energetically" by a substantially larger classmate. When Dewey inquired into what was going on, Rickover quotes an anonymous teacher replying to Dewey: "That is part of our progressive education." And Rickover communicated this with nary a reference as to the date, location, or the names of the individuals in the story. But Rickover's point had been made: not only was Dewey a second-rate educator, he was also a bad or, worse, sadistic parent.[12] Progressive education was inveterately and single-handedly ruining society.

Compounding the crisis atmosphere in America's schools was the 1957 Russian moon shot of Sputnik.[13] Along with Dewey's educational theory, Rickover identified Sputnik as the *sine qua non* of America's backsliding schools, for the launch of that satellite was, in fact, *the* triumph of the Russian educational system, and could well serve as the educational corollary to what Pearl Harbor had done for the American military. To that end, Rickover argued that America ought to look outside its borders for educational inspiration, preferably Switzerland (or, perhaps, the Soviet Union); then they ought to apply what those countries were doing to America's classrooms.[14] The purpose was to eliminate what Rickover referred to as the "fun morality" associated with Dewey, and to replace it with a "hard education" rooted in the sciences and mathematics. He was, in effect, calling to phase out—or at least marginalize—courses in the humanities in favor of the militarization of our children's educational experience.[15] If America

[12] Rickover, *Education and Freedom*, 135-136.
[13] For a discussion on the political and, to a lesser extent, educational fallout as a result of Sputnik, see Eilene Galloway, "Organizing for Outer Space," in *Reconsidering Sputnik: Forty Years Since the Soviet Satellite*, ed. Roger D. Launius, John Logsdon, and Roger W. Smith (Amsterdam: Harwood, 2000), 309-325.
[14] Rickover, *Education and Freedom,* 158-160.
[15] *Ibid*., 39-52.

did not shore up its science and mathematics curricula, he concluded, its citizens should not be surprised if their country's postwar military and cultural prominence eroded with time. Because Dewey's educational philosophy allegedly dominated America's classroom, and because America lacked a hard, scientific, education, Rickover suggested that Dewey had almost personally cost America the upper hand in the space race.

Hook was sufficiently chastened by many of Rickover's claims to dismiss them as the meandering complaints of an educational philistine. He was perhaps more incensed by Rickover's popular influence, especially among American politicians, whose post-Sputnik anxieties resulted in a frenzy of federal resources to create crash programs in various mathematics and science departments across the educational spectrum. Under the guise of "reform," the federal government began investing heavily in these fields, and NYU was among the greatest beneficiaries. On the surface of it, Hook must have taken these initiatives as a challenge to, or repudiation of, his life's work at NYU, for resources poured into the schools of medicine, and engineering, with virtually none of them set aside for programs in the humanities and social sciences. In fact, many of these departments were being forced to prune their curricula.[16] So it seems that Hook extended his critique of Rickover into his indictment of the rapid and, perhaps as far as he was concerned, vapid reactionary federal educational policy. Having better trained, better equipped engineers and scientists was important, he argued, but to obviate the need for the alleged "dry rot" of "cultural courses" was both unnecessary and, in the long run, educationally perilous.[17]

[16] Frusciano and Pettit, *New York University and the City*, 197-205.
[17] Hook, *Education for Modern Man*, 9.

Moreover, Hook responded sympathetically to the infusion of much-needed resources for scientific research, with the caveat that it was once more time to investigate ways in which it could be integrated into American general education. This is not to say that he opposed that variant of scientific education associated with specialization in a post-Sputnik world. Rather, equally important to Hook were the methodological considerations that served as an extension of the scientific community, viz., the larger epistemic implications of scientific study, and not simply the mastery of a scientific or mathematical curriculum. In this sense he hoped that the next generation of craftsmen, engineers, historians, and teachers could, with hard work, be intellectually and methodologically aligned. The problem with the crash programs Rickover advocated and the federal government subsidized was that they were, by design, divorced from the broader concerns of a liberal education, and Hook found this both troubling and ironic—troubling to the degree that he must have sensed that the time was nigh regarding all of his accomplishments at NYU, and ironic because he felt that courses in Russian history and philosophy were all the more apt given the American political climate. As far as Hook was concerned, Rickover appeared to want America to parrot Russian scientific achievements in education without knowing anything about the larger culture that produced them.[18] Implicit in Hook's critique, then, was an attempt to identify the Admiral and his supporters' naiveté.

Another, equally significant component of *Education for Modern Man*'s new introduction was Hook's examination of the ways in which analytic philosophy impacted the contemporary educational scene. His inclusion no doubt built on the relative success of *American Philosophers at Work*, coupled with the increasing visibility of analytic philosophy in college

[18] Hook, *Education for Modern Man*, 10-14. Equally ironic was Hook's tacit admission that, for all of Rickover's bluster, Dewey had comparatively no impact on America's primary and secondary schools. Dewey's real influence was in education departments in American colleges and universities.

and university departments across the country. And with the likes of Admiral Rickover shaping post-Sputnik educational discourse, Hook argued quite forcefully that the ambiguities within it ought to be redressed if any meaningful educational changes were to take place. Analytic philosophy, he argued, played a pivotal role to that end, for it paved the way for

> [a] greater attention to context and usage, an effort to state things with definiteness if not with precision, could banish from educational writing much of the nebulosity and soapiness which afflict it.[19]

All of the relevant terms employed by educational philosophers and theorists—such as "learning," "knowing," "education," and, perhaps most importantly, "teaching"—would, Hook claimed, benefit considerably from a greater understanding of "their specific contexts" and the sense in which they have been used both over time and the manner in which they had shaped contemporary discourse.[20] "At its best," he argued, analytic philosophy guided the manner in which students could express themselves, which would lead to "greater self-understanding," however recondite and technical their language might become. Furthermore, a greater self-awareness among students would lead to better, more fruitful inquiry—both in the classroom and without, aiding them when weighing alternative modes of action. Such linguistic clarity, he continued, minimized the communicative difficulties associated with assumption-laden reasoning.[21] To be able to think and communicate more clearly in educational matters was, for Hook, essential for the elimination of the types of obscure and, at the time, highfalutin usage typical of Rickover and his followers. Analytic philosophy's techniques, then, would essentially call for the disbarment of Rickover from the court of public opinion on educational matters.

[19]*Ibid*., 46.
[20]*Ibid*., 47.
[21]*Ibid*., 50.

As important as it was for the clarification of educational *terminology*, Hook's support for analytic philosophy in matters of educational *practice* fell short of wholesale endorsement. Since analytic philosophy was more concerned with normative *language* rather than with normative *problems,* it was all but philosophically impossible for it to elucidate questions of what to do within the larger matrices of educational policy, especially pedagogy. A good teacher, we noted earlier, must be able to think and communicate clearly; but linguistic analyses of their students fell considerably short when exploring the consequences of their ideas should they decide to act upon them. "[W]hen we ask for the bearing of the analysis [of language] on educational theory and practice," he maintained, "we are not referred to any specific educational problem which serves as the controlling point of departure, but to certain ways of speaking of writing by educators which illustrate distinctions made by the analysis." What to teach and how best to teach, and to whom good teaching is directed, was the marrow of Hook's educational philosophy; an analysis of language, while necessary, was for him insufficient for its larger normative aspirations. Apprehending the meaning of honesty told a student little about in what behaving honestly consists.[22] Building on the Peircean convictions exhibited throughout this dissertation, "[a] philosophy of education," Hook wrote,

> [m]ust grow out of the live issues in situations marked by doubt, disagreement, or conflict and should not be tested by reference to values and goals imposed upon education from without…without some synoptic visions of the paths open to men in their quest for a desirable society, without a vital concern for the human condition in the place and in this time, a purely linguistic approach to educational problems is barren. It does not even reach the plane of a philosophy of education.[23]

[22]*Ibid*., 48-49.
[23]*Ibid*., 53.

This perhaps explains why so few twentieth century analytic philosophers ever engaged questions germane to the philosophy of education.[24]

Sidney Hook's engagement with the educational challenges of contemporary society in the 1960s and 1970s via the reissuance of these materials reinforces our central contention, namely that he was a perennially engagé philosopher of education. To wit, no adequate philosophy of education could ignore the accomplishments of the experimental sciences and the desire for linguistic clarity when appreciating and, then, examining them. But it must perforce be prepared to evaluate them in light of the manifold value commitments both teachers and students shared and, more importantly, frequently disagreed with one another about. For this he must not only be recognized, but also rescued from the marginalia of academic intellectual discourse.

The reconciliation of an experimental temper with a visceral concern for human values was what Sidney Hook believed to be the purpose of any philosophy of education worth its salt. History, replete as it was with innumerable moral lessons about the nature of alternative choices of conduct when, at times, it mattered most, catalyzed these concerns, especially when grasping for ways in which to live in an increasingly complex and dangerous world. Hook regularly reminded his readers that such a world, and all of its problems—and, of course, its joys—was itself the outcome of transformations in science and technology. The intellectual and moral survival of the student, and, by extension, the survival of a free society, therefore, thus depended on the quality of the teachers that stood before them.

[24] For the relative dearth of engaged analytic philosophers, see John Wilson, "Analytic Philosophy Revisited," *Oxford Review of Education* 22 (1996): 117-123.

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