

Editorial: Variations on a Theme

Foyle's bookshop in London in the 1940s and 1950s had a room labelled 'Second hand philosophy', and another, comparable in size, marked 'Second hand Joad'. Lord Quinton has recently recalled 'the slightly risible figure of C. E. M. Joad' who 'settled down in later life to the production at regular intervals of books with such titles as *Return to Philosophy* or *Philosophy in our Time*, in which the absolute values of truth, goodness and beauty were defended in a diluted Platonic manner'.

These words of Quinton's are quoted from *Education, Values and Culture*, the Victor Cook Memorial Lectures, delivered in the University of St Andrews, and at King's College, University of London, in 1992. Quinton's contribution is a pair of lectures entitled 'Culture, Education and Values'. The other half of the work is two lectures by Professor Anthony O'Hear, 'Values, Education and Culture'. The lectures are mutually supportive rather than hostile or even dialectical. They join together to preserve educational values which in their view are threatened with erosion or perhaps with virtual destruction. Lord Quinton has qualms in his iconoclasm:

In holding that truth is not relative, but that only belief is, I have not assumed that truth or knowledge is an absolute value or, again, that the literary merit of the canon is. I think these values are rooted in human nature, not part of the eternal architecture of the world. But I still think them really valuable, not least as stepping-stones on the way to more comprehensive knowledge and a more inclusive canon, understood as a possession of the human species in general and not just of some biased and self-interested group of exploitative power-seekers.

The canon mentioned by both speakers is the ark of our cultural covenant, the storehouse of what has best been thought and said and fashioned. In its defence, as in the treasuring of the content of the canon, Professor O'Hear is almost wholly uncompromising:

Reflectiveness, then, which might at an earlier stage in our argument have seemed to be on the point of destroying morality, by interpreting our morality naturalistically, may now come to the aid of morality, when we begin to think about the actual fabric of our moral life. For if someone were to say that the only things worth being interested in for themselves—the only constitutive goods for us—were selfish pleasure and riches, we could remind

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him of the saying in the Gospels about the profit of gaining the whole world when one suffers the loss of one's own soul, or of the Socratic adage that the good man cannot be harmed. That on some level we all understand these and similar sayings, as well as everyday talk about such virtues as compassion, courage, kindness and justice, and that we feel ourselves bound unconditionally by some of what is implied in such talk shows that untempered hedonism is not in practice the only value in our lives (and similar objections could also be made to the monistic re-evaluations of Nietzsche, Wilson and Foucault).

Lord Quinton fears that he may be styled an old buffer. Professor O'Hear is content to be recognized as a young fogey.