Economics and Ethics

"THE GREAT place of Henry George in the history of ideas," said Dr. George R. Geiger, Philosophy Professor of Antioch College, at the banquet meeting in the Commodore Hotel, "is his refusal to separate facts from values, economics from ethics. He was both a moral thinker and an economic scientist, but his moral thinking was also grounded in economic realities, and his economic formulae were never cut off from moral orientation."

Dr. Geiger, son of Oscar Geiger who founded the Henry George School of Social Science in New York, pointed out that too often in the past, economics has been regarded as a purely objective science, having no concern with facts, particularly economic facts. This dualism between economics and ethics, which has had the blessing of both economists and philosophers is tragic and fatal. A no-man's-land is established in which human hopes have perished.

"But values without facts are empty," said Professor Geiger, "And facts without values are blind. The gap between them, the gap between morals and technology, is perhaps the most disastrous man has to face—to bridge that gap requires all the efforts of human intelligence. This no-man's-land can be crossed from either the side of economics or ethics—economics must realize that facts are not simply neutral and philosophers must realize that their Utopian ideals cannot be implemented without the facts of economics and the social sciences."

Referring again to Henry George, the speaker said, "poverty plays a tremendous part in his philosophy. No one has to tell you that George's interest was a moral interest. He was interested in economics because of what it could do in the lives of men. John Dewey has said that the use that George makes of the concept nature, natural rights, natural law, is symbolic of this interest on the part of Henry George of a fusion bewten the facts of economics and the values to which they must be addressed."

Dr. Geiger next dwelt briefly on what he meant by science, mentioning the tentative point of view and the operational point of view. "Some of you may say if you have a tentative point of view that means you are a liberal," said the philosopher. "If you can't see two sides of the question how can you vote? Do you have to be 100 per cent sure, even in the single tax? Totalitarians say 'liquidate the opposition.' I still say I can vote even if I am not 100 per cent sure. Maybe you think there are absolute truths. If so, I envy you. The scientific spirit says nothing is too precious to be examined."

Regarding the operational or experimental point of view the speaker had this to say: "You don't simply talk. You perform some kind of experiment, simply with litmus paper, or a new form of education, or a new type of taxation. Some predictable consequences must follow or your ideas are simply theoretical. If we cannot approach economics and ethics in some such way, how do we approach them? I am not saying that George would sympathize with all these points but he would sympathize with the operational point of view. He did it. His followers have tried in some way to perform experiments in the field of economics and social science, and in that way alone I feel can the gap between economics and ethics be bridged.

"I am saying once more," emphasized the speaker, "that the philosophy of Henry George underlined this — there must be a complementary relationship between the two. Whether you start as economists working in the field of values, or as philosophers interested in ethics, I think most of you must realize that the two have to be joined in some way. This is not to end in an academic question—it is not only the question of the Henry George School of Social Science at the Hotel Commodore. I certainly feel this problem of morals and ethics, between the what and how, ends and means, is the 64 billion dollar question confronting all of us."

Maurice William, whose book *The Social Interpretation of History* had a great influence on Sun Yat Sen, spoke next and urged Americans to take more responsibility for the affairs of government. "I can assure you that what is going on in China today is no civil war," he said. "It is merely Stalin's battle for China in his war against the U. S. He is determined to rob us of our friends in China. . . . It is up to us to see to it that the bridge made by our government is retained, not only in our interest, but in the interest of a world which is praying for peace."

Dean Carman on Education

The final speaker on this program was Harry Carman, dean of Columbia College, New York who spoke on "Education for What?" in a world where "two ways of life, each diametrically opposed to the other, struggle for domination."

With a strong emphasis on individual integrity and character the dean approached the ideal of education in this manner: "If freedom is the cornerstone of the American way of life, what does it imply? What are the implications for those who enjoy freedom and those who seek it at a time when freedom and free institutions are challenged by communism and other forms of regimented statism? It is almost certain that man will continue to gain control over the physical world . . . but man has not yet learned how to control himself. He has lost sight of the real problems of life and of those values which give meaning to life.

"Science and technology," Dr. Carman pointed out, "are not ends in themselves but means to an end. Alone they cannot remake the world or save men from degradation. No amount of mechanization can confer spiritual values or teach us how to behave ourselves in terms of human values. On the other hand, science is amoral. It furnishes us with no ethical or moral codes; it merely affects the material conditions of our existence.

"The democratic way of life with its emphasis on freedom," he said, "will not function—much less survive—if we do not discover and correct its shortcomings. Youth of tomorrow as well as of today need to wrestle with the social, economic and political problems. They should not avoid controversial issues merely because they are controversial, and the teacher who advises such avoidance is not worth his or her salt. A democracy flourishes on differences of interest and opinion over many things for many reasons. It is important in a democratic state, as my colleague, Frank Tannenbaum, has so frequently emphasized, to differ without emotional violence.

"The dangers to the American way of life," we were reminded, "are not all without; rather the most dangerous are within. They are suspicion, prejudice, intolerance, bigotry, hate and the worship of Mammon. Teachers should think of education as a liberating process—liberating in the sense that it frees men from ignorance, superstition, fear, prejudice and unnecessary mental and physical handicaps. We want a world, as Dr. Henderson of the New York State Education Department has put it, where more people are more free in the sense that they are masters of themselves. People are free in the degree to which they possess the tools of learning and techniques of action, the ability to verbalize, to analyze and synthesize, to create, to organize, to administer.

Speaking further of the responsibilities of citizenship, the dean said, "Those of us who believe that the primary concern of our institutions of higher learning should give thought in framing educational programs to one of the most insistent problems of our time, namely, personal relationships in modern society. Each of us should be aware of the fact that the ailments of the world in the twentieth century are not different from what they were a thousand or two thousand years ago. Then as now, selfishness, corruption, crass materialism, discrimination, the exercise of power for power's sake, beset mankind. Every community in America, to say nothing of the rest of the world, is plagued by the presence of those who are ignorant, indifferent, selfish, parasitical and who, on the basis of their conduct, show little evidence that they possess those inner traits which make for real human greatness: integrity, self-reliance, a deep sense of responsibility for one's thoughts, words and actions, unselfishness, fair play, faith in a social order which cherishes freedom and opportunity for human betterment, right against wrong in terms of human welfare, and a premium on excellence of performance. Not only must we be aware of these ailments and shortcomings but we must strive for their elimination.

"The really educated man," concluded the speaker, "is one who like Henry George himself, makes these items a part of his philosophy of life:

"He seeks truth, for without truth there can be no understanding, and without understanding the problems that separate us are insoluble.

"He is able to communicate ideas in a manner that assures understanding.

"He has faith in man. He respects differences because he knows how they have come to be. He fears uniformity because it confines both mind and spirit. He is aware of his own limitations and his neighbor's possibilities.

"He possesses vision, for he knows that vision precedes all great attainments.

"He cultivates inner resources and spiritual strength, for they enrich his daily living and sustain him in times of crises.

"He has ethical standards by which he lives.

"He is aware of the human struggle for progress and comprehends the forces that have assured or jeopardized this progress. He knows that man's progress requires intellectual vigor, moral courage, and physical stamina.

"He is conscious of his responsibility as a citizen, and participates constructively in the social, and political life of the community."

The toastmaster at this banquet was Rev. W. Wylie Young, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Batavia, New York.