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Clark objects to review

Editor:

In the Dec. 1953 issue of the *A.S.A. journal* there appeared a review of my book, *A Christian View of Men and Things*. Since it was distinctly unfavorable, you kindly have offered me an opportunity to reply. This gracious offer I am happy to accept because the review contains so many misunderstandings, distortions, and perhaps even what may be called mis-statements of fact that I do not want the readers of this journal to be in error as to my position. Although the distortions are numerous, I shall try to avoid imposing on your patience by selecting only a few examples.

The reviewer asserts (p. 7, col. 2) that the author "rather cynically remarks that 'Democracy made the naive assumption that the mass of the electorate could choose men capable of managing a nation's affairs.'" The sentence which the reviewer quotes occurs in a section of four pages summarizing the views of Oswald Spengler. Much of the wording is Spengler's own. But so carelessly has the reviewer read the book that he quotes this sentence as if it were mine.

It is true, I admit, that while rejecting Spengler's political theory and underlying philosophy, I agree that civilizations have come and gone, empires waxed and waned, and that the U.S.A. will probably not last forever; in fact I hold that our government has deteriorated considerably in the past twenty years; I hold too that the total depravity of man makes political deterioration inevitable and that the only permanent government will be the Kingdom of our Lord Christ. Perhaps this is cynical (i.e. snarling, contemptuous, misanthropic, pessimistic, and gloomy); modernists and humanists regularly say that it is; but I hold that it is unadulterated Christian truth.

To analyze the material on the "Inductive Theistic Arguments" would require too intricate a discussion. The reviewer mentions Abraham Kuyper as one who accepted them and who represents the usual Protestant position. But Kuyper did not accept them. In his *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology* (p. 112) Kuyper says, "Every effort to prove the existence of God by so-called evidences must fail and has failed." I happen to agree with Kuyper on this point. To say with Calvin that there is "nothing so

obscure or contemptible even in the smallest corners of the earth, in which some marks of the power and wisdom of God may not be seen" is not to assert the validity of Aquinas' or Aristotle's cosmological argument. If anyone thinks that the Thomistic, empirical proofs are valid, he should answer my specific criticisms of them found on pp. 308-312. Although a theorem of geometry may be true, it does not follow that a particular student's demonstration is valid.

For a reply in this journal it might be more appropriate to pass over most of the philosophy and theology and to consider the section on science; though even here the questions often turn on logic and epistemology. On page 11, col. 1, the reviewer accuses me of shifting my definitions. He quotes "science is incapable of arriving at any truth whatever." To this he joins my remark that Nietzsche "stated the exact truth." This, the reviewer claims is an inconsistency. A little reflection would show that this is not an inconsistency, for Nietzsche did not arrive at his truth by scientific experimentation; and there is no contradiction between saying that scientific methods cannot arrive at truth, but that truth may sometimes be had otherwise. I may be wrong in what I said, but anyone who says I am inconsistent has not read carefully.

At the bottom of the same column the reviewer states that Carlson's assertion-that the scientist tries to rid himself of all faiths-and my statement-that a syllogism is either valid or invalid and cannot be semi-valid -are exactly the same in sentiment. The reviewer's assertion can only be taken as a misstatement of fact. Unlike Carlson I allow room for faith, so much room that maybe there is no room for anything else; unlike the reviewer I hold that demonstrations, such as are found in any geometry book, cannot be semi-valid. Semi-validity is nonsense. And incidentally neither Carl Pearson nor A. J. Carlson were straw men, as the review claims.

The paragraphs on physical measurement and aesthetic formulation concern mainly the choice of the arithmetical mean. The reviewer's language is vague, but when he says, "The selection of an average measurement is based upon much experience," I would suppose that he meant that the choice is empirically determined. I still believe that my argument shows that this is not so. It would be most extraordinary if the mean were identical with an observed reading; but the lists of readings frequently contain modes, and half the time they contain medians. The choice of the mean therefore, instead of the mode or the median (a choice about which the reviewer says nothing, lacks empirical compulsion. An elementary example of something that can become very complicated, it is selected for reasons of a systematic simplicity that can well be called an aesthetic choice. (Cf. Cohen and Nagel, *Introduction to*

*Logic, p. 215).*

The paragraph, *Is Science Totally False* (p. 12) seems extremely confused. Obviously the reviewer is disagreeing with me, but he admits so much of my argument that the disagreement seems to be for the sake of disagreement. He admits that no abstract number will precisely correspond with the dimensions of this physical object under all circumstances and that careful scientific men do not state the mathematical formula as absolutely true. But this is precisely one of the points of my argument. And no confused comparison with Route U. S. 30 between Philadelphia and Chicago will make it absolutely truth. One important difference between the law of the pendulum and ordinary conversational speech, like the difference between a line without breath and thickness and U S 30, is that the former is mathematically precise. And it is the very precision of scientific law that makes it true. Loose general statements can be true in virtue of their very latitude.

To conclude: the omission of many points in this reply is not to be construed as an [acceptance of the?] interpretations imposed by the reviewer. The review is so inadequate that I would be greatly pleased to see a criticism of my chapter on science written by a competent physicist who would of course be familiar with the procedures I am discussing.

Gordon H. Clark Feb. 12, 1954 Indianapolis, IN