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Conversation Piece

The other night, in Seminar 2ab, Mr. Nabokov and Mr. Kaplan (Simon, not Donald) could have been seen, and were, covering an old blue envelope with an extended conversation in Russian. We present herewith this same dialogue (newly rendered into the English by Mr. Nabokov, Mr. Kaplan, Mr. Klein and others) not simply as an example of what bored tutors do in seminar, but because it contains some insights into the recurrent question of the differences among the Greeks, the Hebrews and the Christians. The conversation was set off, says Mr. Nabokov, by a question Mr. Klein addressed to the seminar:

Mr. Klein: "What has the fact that the sun at the equinoctial point is at the center of a cross to do with Dante?" (No answer, by the way, emerged.)

Mr. Kaplan to Mr. Nabokov: I think, as a Jew, that from the point of view of Dante the world before Christ is understood as a Greek world, that is, a world made from the same and the other, and not, as the Hebrew world, created out of nothing. Perhaps the whole difference between the Christian and the Jew is in the literalness with which the Jew understands the reality of a creation out of nothing.

Mr. Nabokov: Although dogmatically sameness and otherness are not the stuff from which God made the world, in Paul the resurrection of Christ is called the appearance of the reborn Son, but only symbolically. Here is the difference between the Christian West and the Christian East. The West takes the symbol as reality, while the East follows in the tradition of Judaism.

Mr. Kaplan: *Dogmatically* means precisely *not in reality*. It is this that the Jews do not need, for whom crea-

tion from nothing is real. If this is so, why didn't the Khazars convert the Russians to Judaism? (N. B. Khazars: an eighth century Touranian tribe, converted to Judaism.)

Mr. Nabokov: The Khazars were not entirely Judaic. Only the governing circles were Jewish converts, and indeed some Russian princes did for a time turn to Judaism. And in the seventeenth century all north Russia was in the grip of a strange Jewish heresy.

Mr. Kaplan: If the Orient became Judaized, it would accept the reality of creation.

Mr. Nabokov: Why does *dogmatically* mean *not in reality*? On the contrary, dogmatism is a Jewish invention which means simply "this is what I believe". The Latins have a slightly different notion of dogma; the reason understands and supports it. Dogma is for them irrational, but capable of rationalization, as interpreted perhaps by the Pope. This is a kind of heresy, and not dogma as such.

Mr. Kaplan: The first date in the Jewish month is the new moon, which from the Greek point of view is the meeting of moon and sun, and is connected for the Jews with repentance. Fifteen days after the first day of the new moon is the full moon, the beginning of Easter which is the redemption of the world through the Jews. Dogma is the dogma of faith. This is not a Jewish concept; for them it is fidelity—fidelity to the laws which have maintained since Abraham and will maintain until the coming of the Messiah.

Mr. Nabokov: I think there is no difference. There is a difference between the Latins and the Greek Orthodox Church, because for the latter dogma means fidelity to the commands of Christ, in which somehow is the symbol of faith.

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N. B.

Those unselected few who aren't called and will remain behind to sit under the Liberty Tree in the calm of colonial Annapolis will witness the second annual Spring Show—work of St. John's artists. This will carry on the old tradition of exhibitions of marbles, water-colours, pen and ink drawings, gouaches and mobile constructions done by the students who do such things in their spare time. A student group of art lovers started all this a year ago and the war hasn't deterred them at all. If you paint or in any other way dabble in the graphic arts won't you please get in touch with the said committee, before you go off to do battle, and present them with your work. The exhibition (so the clouded crystal ball shows) will open on April third (Saturday) and last for two weeks. The paintings, etc., will be hung in the Junior Common Room where bridge games will be suspended for that period.

This is a prefatory notice only. The committee has warned the COLLEGIAN that there will be more releases next term. We are asked now to urge anyone who will not be returning, and who would ordinarily be interested in exhibiting, to make arrangements by communicating with the *Spring Show* officials through the channel of this paper. Just drop us a line (Inter-Collegiate Mail) and say how many entries you have. No number is too great, and the judges decide what gets exhibited and what doesn't. Also, no prizes, but perhaps you'll sell an oil or two. If you will be back next term the vacation is an excellent time to finish anything contemplated. If you are in the service already, send any sketches you have done or may do—"Still Life with a Hand-Grenade" or "Block-Busters in the Sun." This takes care of everyone, whoever he may be.

War Meeting

On Sunday evening Paul Erlich and John Weber gave an airing to the time-honoured issues of communism versus capitalism. The dispute, said Mr. Buchanan, introducing the speakers, is an old one and occasions a smile in those of us who remember taboos under which those doctrines suffered that are now established in orthodoxy. Today the communist speaks in order among bright young men, and it is the capitalist who confounds his audience.

Mr. Erlich began the discussion. Can we do anything about capitalism, he demanded, and should we do it if we can? Defining the system as that under which a man can buy labor for profit, he subjected it to unrelenting attack. By this formulation, he maintained, it can be immediately apprehended as unjust, as both immoral and inefficient. The wastes of advertising and monopoly, the ludicrously expensive parties given by Mrs. Harrison Williams, are involved necessarily in the capitalist order. And we must recognize that capitalism has suppressed many human freedoms, though we agree that it defends the economic freedom of enterprise. Again, the system breeds that concern with material things which apologists assure us to follow from human nature.

In answer, Mr. Weber quoted a number of sound Anglo-Saxon proverbs. You can't get something for nothing, he said; you must put in what you get out, and nothing succeeds like success. He has been impressed by the success of capitalism in practice, as one is impressed by the practical justification of scientific theory; faced with this he is inclined to question the evident values of change. To those who identify capitalism with materialism, he suggests that the material end may indeed be best. Perhaps those things which we propose as the fitting goal of man, the intellectual and spiritual attainments, are not wholly to be desired; it has been said that wisdom is sorrow. In any case let us attack those who would impose their doctrines upon us; we must be free to choose.

But, said Mr. Erlich in rebuttal,

capitalism excludes other ends by the material. Further, he somehow continued, the system involves necessarily the abuse of police power against the unemployed; this was supported with a considerable quote. And capitalism gives rise to **fascism**.

Mr. Weber replied, in brief, that the material end is a vital one. Harkening back to Mrs. Williams' party, he assured us that she had a kind of right to it, that society returns wealth only for service.

The Dean then relieved the formality of the occasion by suggesting that the speakers should now cross-question each other. Mr. Weber defended his system as that insuring the maximum production and the freedom of the individual. Capitalists, he said, often act out of altruism and spiritual concern. But, objected Mr. Erlich, in the capitalist state whatever good is done is of necessity done by capitalists. And Communism offers an equal production according to safer means; the freedom of the individual to profit economically imposes the distortions of tyranny.

In the general discussion which followed points of greater interest were brought up and, under the guidance of the Dean, some philosophical premises on which the earlier discussion was based appeared in part. Mr. Weber, it became evident, believes that social systems should imitate the order of nature; they must include failure as well as success. A lengthy analogy to the situation among trees and bushes illuminated, under this hypothesis, the propriety of capitalism. It follows, too, that what is is, according to its nature, right; and no political system we conceive operates in practice. The unique fitness of capitalism, both moral and practical, is, we may infer from this, that in theory it allows so much to take the course of nature.

Note

The COLLEGIAN wishes to apologize again to Mr. Vissy Gurd, for whose essay, *Muscular Hypertrophy as an End and a Means* there has been no room in these issues. Mr. Gurd, there will never be any room. Your protests are in vain.

Letter To the Editor

Dear Sir:

I slept very peacefully during most of Mr. Comenetz's lecture, but I woke up around eight-thirty, and I became interested. Besides, that damn kid next to me was snoring so loudly that I couldn't sleep. Anyway, a few spare minutes this morning incited me to write up his lecture, but I fear I slept too long, and all I can do is humbly submit a few suggestions for a write-up. Here it is. Maybe you can add to it yourself, or find another donor.

Apparatus: Non-existence of God. Eyes, ears, nose, etc., but no intelligence. Pleasure balance.

Object: To demonstrate the way in which man can make the most of his life (boldly hinted at as the "good").

Method: If there is no God, or at least no cognizable (to some men) God, man should be concerned only with his life on earth. Thus he should make the most of his life on earth. And the best way for him to do this (proved by experience, no doubt) would be to enjoy life. Enjoyment of life for man consists of witnessing pleasure. He who enjoys life most witnesses the greatest net total of pleasures. Now there are degrees of pleasure (or else, why a pleasure machine?) and the only pleasures to be taken into consideration (because the others are inconceivable, for some) are those of which men actually witness the value: i.e., not those which Plato would offer Mr. Comenetz. Also, there is to date no standard by which we measure pleasures, because one hasn't been discovered. But one will be soon. Anyway, if this is all so true the man who enjoys life most is he who leads a life of cognizable pleasure.

Conclusion: Therefore, the way in which man can best make the most of his life is to enjoy as many cognizable pleasures as possible.

My Conclusion: If Comenetz has a mother, and she has any dough, she'd better hire a body-guard. If Comenetz has a girl or a wife; oh well, maybe she's got the same idea, and then she's safe.

Anonymous

Lecture Review

Divested of its rhetorical graces, Mr. Comenetz's science of ethics admits of the following summary. That single state of feeling which is variously named gratification, pleasure, delight, satisfaction, contentment or joy we shall call pleasure, and its contrary is pain. This "state of feeling", like the sensation of heaviness, is an approximate magnitude; the pleasures of an individual or of a group may be compared quantitatively, and frequently are. It is therefore possible to include pleasure as a term in a science. How fortunate this is becomes apparent when we see all reasonable men admitting without proof that the proper end of right action is—guess what?—Pleasure. The Pleasure Principle becomes by this universal acclaim the fundamental premise of our ethic.

Alternative principles or precepts divide into two classes. There are those which conflict with the Pleasure Principle and those which are consistent with it. Members of the second group, while subordinate to the Pleasure Principle, are unobjectionable and may even facilitate casuistry. Those of the first category, contradicting as they do what is admitted by all reasonable men, compel no refutation, and the Pleasure Principle itself is happily not in need of proof.

To turn the naive from the unpleasant doctrine that their pleasure is more important than ours, arguments are at hand which should persuade them that they are being visionary, if not precisely immoral. Selfishness in private action will indirectly result in less pleasure for them, as can easily be demonstrated in terms of fish and coconuts, and the expediency of an ordered state, once recognized, will insure public action of a responsible sort.

The tendency of economic, political and cultural masters to give to their slaves a fractional value in the pleasure calculus is to be combated with such trenchant maxims as "Here today, gone tomorrow". As for God, the probability that He does not exist is conveniently cancelled out of the science of ethics by the equal probability that he does not.

The fact of evolution, the lecturer noted in closing, suggests that pleasure may be a secretion or a current (designed to preserve the individual). This fascinating speculation raises the hope that in time, by means, perhaps, of sensitive reagents or delicate electrical devices, ethics will be lifted from the quagmire of approximate magnitudes to the slough of precise ones.

The lecture was punctuated by general laughter, and there was considerable applause at the end.

In the crowded question period, Mr. Comenetz agreed that men frequently act toward other ends than Pleasure, but found in this odd state of affairs no reason to doubt or demonstrate that such behavior is wrong. He did not care to explain the illusion of some that the Pleasure of eating and the Pleasure of knowing differ radically in kind and cannot, therefore, be compared simply in degree. It appeared to the lecturer inconceivable that any doubt the Pleasure Principle except out of a private and pitiable pathos. That the arguments which his science affords against selfishness were inadequate occasioned no alarm. The propriety of acting under the assumption that God does not exist because His existence is discursively uncertain did not seem questionable.

One puzzled inquisitor wondered why, if everyone agreed to the Pleasure Principle already, a science of ethics was called for. An attempt to read Happiness for Pleasure was rebuffed. A number of books were mentioned which Mr. Comenetz professed not to have read. On the whole, the evening did not represent any sensational contribution to ethical theory.

ROGERS ALBRITTON

College Meeting

The college meeting held yesterday at five thirty (instead of the usual time just before seminar) constituted a kind of substitute commencement for those who have been called by the draft and the various reserves. It was a ceremony conducted in the formal manner customary at St. John's on those occasions when we act as a college rather than as a group of students. The Dean, President and College Marshal

(Mr. Kieffer) entered in cap and gown, to announce those who are about to leave, as students "tried and true" who have applied themselves to "humane studies, philosophy and eloquence". Then the Ephebic Oath was read by President, reservists and draftees. The oath, once taken by Athenian youth on going off to war, is of great dignity and was most appropriate to the occasion: "I will not disgrace the arms of my country, and I will not desert my comrades in the ranks. By myself and with my fellows I will defend what is sacred, whether private or public. I will hand on my country not lessened but greater and nobler than it was handed down to me. I will hearken diligently to those duly charged with judging, and I will obey the established laws and whatever others the people with common consent establish. And if anyone attempts to overthrow the laws, or not obey them, I will not stand idly by, but by myself and with all my comrades I will defend the laws. And I will honor the religion of my fathers. The gods be witness of these things."

After the reading of the oath, each of those going into the services received a copy of Robert Bridges' *The Spirit of Man*, an anthology of great prose and poetry from the world's literature. Mr. Kieffer read the list of those who have already left and those who are leaving. The names are as follows already gone—Chester Briko, Douglas Buchanan, Phillip Camponeschi, John Childs, Theodore Childs, Lindsay Clendaniel, Robert Davis, David Dobreer, Wescott Gallup, Christian Hovde, Richard Huyck, David Kelso, Charles Levering, William Lundberg, Samuel Marvin, Thomas Owings, Walter Paine, Charles Patterson, James Raley, Allen Schofield, John Smedley, Richard Starke, Robert Thompson, Irwin Tucker, Thomas Usilton. Those going—Rogers Albritton, Joseph Blocher, Monte Bourjaily, Robert Campbell, Walter Cooley, Henry Freeman, Douglas Guy, Louis Hedeman, Richard Holle, Robert Hunter, Clarence Kramer, Casimir Krol, Claude Leffel, Lawrence Levin, Alexander Morse, William Ogden, Morris Parslow, John Somers, Edward Taylor, Martin Vogelhut, John Weber,

Milton Dauber, Alvin Epstein, Ernest Friess, Chaster Hewitt, Joseph Hollywood, Richard Hutchings, John Lobbell, Charles Nelson, Robert Scolnik, Andrew Witwer, Burton Armstrong, Glenn Fearnow, Alexander McDonald—fifty-nine in all.

After the books had been given out, Mr. Barr spoke briefly to those who are going. No solemn words, he said, were appropriate; quotations in Robert Bridges' book will say what should be said as well as can be, and they have the advantage of silence. Mr. Kieffer, in his introductory speech, used the phrase "students in arms"; this is meant seriously—the college expects that those entering the services will maintain their interest in what we study at St. John's. The college, too, expects them to come back, first because to enter the army does not by any means write an end to what one hopes for—many who went to World War I were surprised to find themselves restored to their old communities, and secondly because, barring accident, there are ways to be sure of coming back—when in the foreign climates of the war one forgets one's realer ambitions, it is necessary to recall having determined upon them on leaving civilian life. It is important, too, to keep an interest in the arts to avoid boredom, a greater danger than shell-fire in army life. Even the arts of war can be the appropriate study of free men.

To go to war, said Mr. Barr, is to throw into relief the human paradox—rational animality, in which one chooses, with the instruments of reason, a resort to violence. But saying this does not imply pacifism; violence is indeed sometimes necessary, and, as Alexander Hamilton once said, if men were angels, government would be unnecessary. It is because, to use a newspaper phrase the peculiar incisivness of which was pointed out by Mr. Adler, conversations must deteriorate that men must enforce law, sometimes with violence, upon each other.

The anthology, Mr. Barr explained, which the college has given to those going away was compiled for us in wartime.

B. B.

Arts

(At this time we are moved to say good-bye, and herewith do so. There is nothing in our heart but envy for those of us who will soon be in protestiv brown. You can get into all the best shows and concerts at half-price, or no price at all. You can visit all the Stage Door Canteens and have doughnuts with the great and near-great of the entertainment world leave your heart there and so forth. As a final gesture the Arts column is going to throw a huge party in the basement of the Library between the hours of nine and nine-fifteen Saturday morning. At that time we will present each of the departing with a copy of the Penguin Pocket Reader and a small Filipino house-boy).

In Annapolis there will be few gay times next week. One thing to look forward to however is *Shadow of a Doubt*, at the Circle on Sunday. Hitchcock directed it, and Teresa Wright and Patricia Collinge are starred along with Joseph Cotton. A lot of strange things happen and build to quite a climax. Moral: murder will out. On the same day, the Capitol will present *Immortal Sergeant* with Henry Fonda and Maureen O'Hara. Title explanatory.

One of the nice things to come home to (*home* being College) next term is the concert by the Coolidge String Quartet on March nineteenth. The place will be Humphrey's Hall, and the program will include Hyden, Beethoven, and Piston.

If your fancy moves you and you spend your vacation in Baltimore, we recommend the revival of *39 Steps* at the Little. Also the National Symphony at the Lyric on March 11th. *Priorities on Parade* continues to parade in Washington at the National.

In New York, we suggest you see Ethel Merman in *Something for the Boys*; Katherine Cornell in *Three Sisters*; the current Art Student's League exhibition; *Figaro* at the Metropolitan and the American films at the Museum of Modern Art.

Conversation Piece

(Continued from Page 1)

Mr. Kaplan: For Jews, fidelity identical with tradition—that tradition which sprang from Mt. Sinai whose foot six hundred thousand heard God speak to man.

Mr. Nabokov: The law of Christ rejuvenated the law of Moses. "I came to confirm the Law," said Christ. After Moses, God had to come down to earth in the person of Christ.

Mr. Kaplan: To that we Pharisees ask Christ, "Why do your followers violate the tradition?"

Mr. Nabokov or Mr. Kaplan both will doubtless be glad to explain after vacation any obscurities which translation may have imposed upon the preceding dialogue. It is barely possible that some of the speeches be in the wrong order.

WE

THEY