bag where you put in your thumb and pull out a plum. Fact becomes only a fulcrum of choice; truth a bridge to what you want when you want it. The great philosophers know that reality is not like that: "Before Abraham was, I am."

Schiller's humanism was the old anti-Platonic doctrine of the sophists: man is the measure of all things. His *bête noire* was Plato: "wherever words lure and delude, stupefy and paralyze, there Truth is sacrificed to Plato." Man "makes" truth. "Truth is that manipulation of [objects] which turns out upon trial to be useful, primarily for any human need, but ultimately for that perfect harmony of our whole life which forms our final aspiration." Thus truth is "primarily an issue of action."

Values, also, are primarily an issue of action. This degradation of reality into a grab-bag where you pull out a peanut and call it a plum if it meets your need is as pernicious as it is false. It destroys a hard necessary realism; it dissolves the world into an as-you-like-it of all things to all men. The pragmatists were too vital to share the *rigor mortis* of collectivists; yet their acid destruction of absolutes, values, firm reality, destroys the power of the mind against the closed systems of the *collectivist* Right (fascism) or the *collectivist* Left (communism). After pragmatism, the mind is flabby against collectivism's cynical belief that truth is only the most convenient lie.

Mr. Abel is critical, but too gently critical, of all this. But where Schiller's incidental insights were wisest, Mr. Abel is more critical, unfortunately. Schiller's interest in psychical research, his "belief in immortality as a psychological postulate," his distrust of the politics of the masses, his belief that eugenics is more important than economics, were refreshing (and quite distinct from his pragmatism). As a literary artist of incidental wise insights, he was far superior to the Schiller who tried hard to be a philosopher but failed because pragmatism was always breaking in.

The critical mind, seeing pragmatism steadily and whole, must conclude that its appeal and popular success were possible only because the modern mind is a babe in the woods of philosophy. That, one must add, is the most tragic thing about the modern mind: unphilosophic, it swallows pragmatism or existentialism as college boys used to swallow goldfish.

E. MERRILL ROOT

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Gem of the Ocean

Christopher Columbus, Mariner, by Samuel Eliot Morison. 224 pp. Boston: Little, Brown and Company. $3.75

Prejudiced, vain, capable of cruelty, Christopher Columbus suffered under a delusion his entire life. Paradoxically, had it not been for the dreams which grew out of his delusion; had he not possessed the determination whose excess was marked in unfeeling exploitation of the natives; and had he not had the sublime self-confidence of an egoist, America might have remained undiscovered for years to come.

Samuel Eliot Morison has reworked his famous seaman's history of the world's greatest explorer. He shows that while Columbus made a hash out of celestial navigation and applied irrelevant passages of Holy Writ to geography, he was yet a seaman unexcelled. "As a master mariner and navigator, Columbus was supreme in his generation. Never was a title more justly bestowed than the one which he most jealously guarded — *Almirante del Mar Oceano,* Admiral of the Ocean Sea."

His mistakes, like his achievements, were cinemascopic. The world, being a sphere, is divided into 360 degrees. Each degree is 60 nautical miles. It was typical of Columbus that he should dismiss, correctly and intuitively, Ptolemy of Alexandria's estimate of 50 nautical miles to a degree. Instead, he chose to believe one Alfregan, a Moslem geographer whose guess was 66 nautical miles. But in equally typical fashion, Columbus managed to misread Alfregan, believing him to have put the length of a degree at 45 nautical miles. By so doing, Columbus underestimated the world's circumference 25 per cent.

Salting this blunder with a combination of other errors (some of them inherited from Marco Polo, who may have been the world's most mendacious charlatan), Columbus figured the distance from the Canaries to the coast of Japan as 2,400 nautical miles. Actual airline distance is 10,600 miles.

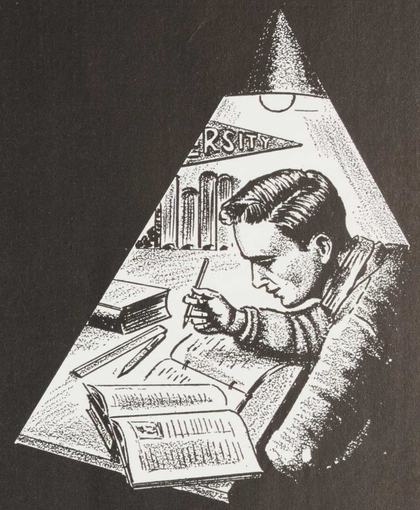
Of course, his great boo-boo was his stubborn belief that he was knocking on the walls of old Cathay. No evidence could shake this notion; all signs, supernatural and natural, served to confirm him in his fancy. He was not only a master seaman of the past but a past master at tacking from partial truths to erroneous conclusions. Admiral Morison is not direct on this point, but we can't help think that save for luck and God's grace, Columbus might never have found anything on his first voyage but blue water. He was an intensely religious man; and God seems to have rewarded his faith, throwing an island in the way of his ships a few hours before they were scheduled to turn back.

The irony of his life is not that Columbus was hailed for a discovery he did not make or ignored for his real achievements; it lies in the fact that contemporary estimation of Columbus and his visionary schemes was close to the mark. History proves that his critics were correctly commonsensical in disparaging his plans on grounds both nautical and geographical. The New World was to raise Spain from poverty to incalculable wealth, but neither Columbus nor his masters would settle for anything less than the imagined cornucopia of Asia. Columbus and his critics were shortsighted: both ignored the possibilities of the new continent. But at least the critics realized that tepees did not look like pagodas.

The four voyages were monumental. Extraordinary difficulties were met and surmounted, colossal feats in dead reckoning were achieved. His faults withal, Columbus possessed that uncompromising spirit found only in men of magnitude.

F. R. BUCKLEY

is this student alone?



NO—Like most young people, he is an idealist. As such, he can never be alone. Countless forces contend for his mind, to convince him that they can answer his many questions. The answers that sway him today are the decisions which will guide America tomorrow. For years the forces of the Left have understood this —and acted accordingly. As a result, yesterday's rebels are now entrenched. If they are ever to be routed—if collectivism is ever to be defeated—the voice of freedom must make itself heard on the campus.

YES—For in another sense this student *is* alone—terribly alone. He is a Conservative. There is no sparkling young professor to buttress his beliefs, no host of undergraduate sympathizers surrounding him. This student is the rebel of today. Will *you* help give him access to the philosophy of freedom? Will you show him that he is not alone?

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