

T H E HUMANIST

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LEO SZILARD

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

LEO SZILARD: HUMANIST OF THE YEAR

RETRACING THE LIBERAL TRADITION

Edwin T. Buehrer

THE REDISCOVERY OF MIND

Joseph H. Rush

AN OBJECTIVE BASIS FOR ETHICS

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EXISTENTIALISM AND THE HUMANIST'S CHOICE

John King-Farlow

ALSO:

Harry Elmer Barnes

Corliss Lamont

Dorothy Ellin Flax

Samuel Paul Etu

John M. Morris

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Leo Szilard

Humanist of the Year

Dr. Leo Szilard, Professor of Biophysics at the University of Chicago, was named Humanist of the Year 1960 at the annual meeting of the American Humanist Association in Chicago on February 27th. This annual award to men of distinguished achievement in the cause of humanism has been given to:

Anton J. Carlson	1953	Margaret Sanger	1957
Arthur F. Bentley	1954	Oscar Riddle	1958
James Peter Warbasse	1955	Brock Chisholm	1959
C. Judson Herrick	1956	Leo Szilard	1960

In presenting the silver plaque for the award, Dr. Theodore Puck of the University of Colorado read the following citation:

Leo Szilard, scientist, teacher, and indefatigable worker for peace. His life has been dedicated to the principle that Man's mind can find solutions to problems in any field—the transformation of matter, the nature of life, the organization of human society. His brilliant achievements in many sciences, pure and applied, have opened up new universes of discovery. He has alerted mankind to the necessity to seek new and fresh approaches to the problems of attainment of peace on earth. His dedication to truth and human welfare, his adventurous and masterful methods of problem solving, and his courage and persistence in the face of difficulties have inspired gifted young men throughout the world to make their lives more meaningful for science and for humanity.

The award was accepted for Dr. Szilard by the former president of the American Humanist Association, Dr. Hermann J. Muller, with the following response:

I am profoundly moved at accepting this award in behalf of my dear friend Leo Szilard, whose grave illness prevents his being with us. It

would be most presumptuous of me to make any statement for him, but I would say for us that we all feel deeply honored. We are honored at his accepting this recognition by us of his incomparable contributions to the advancement of human understanding beyond horizons previously unimagined, of human control over nature, and over the affairs of men themselves. All this, we agree, represents the highest type of humanism in action. For my part, let me add that in thus receiving into our group Leo Szilard who, with his wife, Gertrud Weiss Szilard, is herewith given our honorary membership, we have taken among us one of the truly great men not only of our own time, but of the whole elapsed course of human history.

Leo Szilard was born in 1898, in Budapest, Hungary, and obtained the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Physics at the University of Berlin in 1922. There he demonstrated the connection between the Second Law of Thermodynamics on the one hand and the relation of entropy and probability on the other. In 1925, he established the relationship between entropy and "information," subsequently rediscovered by Shannon.

Working at St. Bartholomew Hospital in London for a two-month period during his vacation in 1934, he discovered, jointly with a staff member of the hospital, Dr. Chalmers, that when beryllium is exposed to gamma rays of radium, slow neutrons are emitted, which later played an important role in the history of the chain reaction. They also discovered what is now called "Szilard-Chalmers Reaction," which permits the separation of a radioisotope from the stable isotope from which it is produced through neutron capture.

While in England, Szilard became associated with the Clarendon Laboratory at Oxford, but he was in the United States at the time of the Munich crisis in 1938 and promptly resigned his position at Oxford to remain in the United States.

While still in England, he had recognized that a self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction might be maintained if an unstable element could be found that would emit two neutrons for each neutron captured, and he had derived the general laws governing such a chain-reacting system. He learned in January 1939 of Otto Hahn's discovery that uranium breaks into two heavy, charged fragments when it captures a neutron. Szilard immediately thought of the possibility that neutrons might be emitted in this process and that a self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction might be set up in some system containing uranium. At once, he borrowed \$2,000 from personal friends, rented

a gram of radium and made a radium-beryllium neutron source out of it. On March 3, 1939, he and Walter Zinn at Columbia University demonstrated that about two neutrons are emitted in the fission of uranium for each neutron captured in this process. The same discovery was made independently and at about the same time by Anderson and Fermi at Columbia University, as well as by Halban and Joliot in Paris.

In July 1939, Szilard recognized that a uranium-graphite system was favorable for a controlled chain reaction. He was aware of the military possibilities inherent in this development and realized also that a world war was impending. Szilard communicated his results and his apprehensions to Albert Einstein, and this resulted in a letter written by Einstein to President Roosevelt, dated August 2, 1939, which was the origin of the later atomic bomb project.

Szilard became a member of the Columbia University National Defense Research Staff in 1940, and in January 1942, Fermi and Szilard moved to Chicago to continue their work under contract with the Government in the so-called Metallurgical Laboratory of the University of Chicago. They achieved the first self-sustained chain reaction at Chicago on December 2, 1942. The patent issued for it names Fermi and Szilard as joint inventors.

At the end of the war, Szilard accepted a position as Professor of Biophysics at the University of Chicago. There Szilard developed jointly with Aaron Novick a method for studying mutations, induced enzyme formations and other phenomena in growing bacterial cultures, which is known as the method of the "chemostat." His work and interests centered on mutations and induced enzyme formation in bacteria, antibody formation in mammals, and the general problem of protein synthesis.

On March 25, 1960, the trustees of the Lewis and Rosa Strauss Memorial Fund announced the award to Dr. Szilard of the Albert Einstein Gold Medal and \$5,000 for his pioneering work in nuclear research and his more recent work in the field of biology, specifically investigating the growth, mutation, and genetics of bacteria and bacterial viruses.

On April 5, 1960, the trustees of the Atoms for Peace Awards, Inc. announced that Dr. Szilard will receive one of the two awards for 1959, including a gold medal and \$37,500. The other recipient is Prof. Eugene Paul Wigner of Princeton, also Hungarian-born. This award was established by the Ford Motor Company as a memorial to Henry Ford and his son Edsel in answer to President Eisenhower's appeal for international efforts to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

Retracing the Liberal Tradition

EDWIN T. BUEHRER

For a generation, now, neo-orthodox theologians and their fellow-travelers have achieved the almost universal and uncritical acceptance of the Judaeo-Christian tradition as not merely one of several streams of Western culture and faith but as, in fact, the one all-inclusive tradition and, as such, the proper frame of reference with which our historical and theological thinking is primarily concerned. The most astonishing fact about this development is the failure of religious liberals to delineate their own tradition and re-state their own faith against the claims of those who have become its relentless critics and enemies.

Liberals had too lightly assumed that the trend of religious thinking was moving in their direction, and they could not get themselves to believe that the philosophy, mood, and temper, which they found so persuasive and satisfying, could or would be so suddenly and vigorously renounced. Once renounced, however, they were haunted by the thought that what their former leaders and colleagues were saying must be largely true. Thus began that ignominious retreat to a position less vulnerable to attack by the sponsors of the new orthodoxy, and more in keeping with the evolving theological climate. In due course many religious liberals forgot the historic sources of their inspiration; they substituted neo-orthodox theology for philosophy; they abandoned their former reliance on the social sciences and their former faith in humanity; therefore they lost their sense of direction, their courage and, in not a few instances, also their faith. In short, they abdicated their responsibility as religious liberals.

THE JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN TRADITION

It is the assumption of this article, that not only does the Judaeo-Christian formula fail to account adequately for the emergence of the democratic

• *Edwin T. Buehrer is Minister of the Third Unitarian Church of Chicago and has been a president of the Western Unitarian Conference and vice-president of the American Humanist Association.*

tradition in our modern life, but that it pre-supposes a too narrow and restricted concept of tradition to provide a sufficient framework for the many other influences that have entered into the mainstream of our Western history and civilization during these past twenty centuries. The sum total of the tradition which we now have can be called Judaeo-Christian only if we think in terms of the original Judaic and Christian elements which can still be identified as such, despite its historic hospitality to other cultural accretions. By that same token, however, one could speak of the inclusiveness of *The Graeco-Roman Tradition*, for it, too, with sufficient rationalization, could be conceived to be an equally massive repository of our entire Western stream of civilization, including Judaeo-Christianity; and it would seem to be an open question as to which, the Graeco-Roman world or the Judaic-Christian world, influenced our present Western culture more decisively.

Another undeniable element in our culture is the influence of paganism on Christian faith and practice, as evidenced, for example in the celebrations of Christmas and Easter which the ancient church appropriated in part—for reasons both good and bad—in its fierce and long drawn-out rivalry with other religious beliefs and practices. If we now add the non-Christian origins of the communion service with its symbolism of flesh and blood, and the pre-Christian beginnings of monasticism, with its philosophy of flight from the world as over against the concept of service to and transformation of human life, we will be hard-pressed to justify the inclusiveness that has been attributed to the Judaic and Christian tradition.

Again, the sponsors of the great tradition are guilty of a too flagrant disregard of the influence of the Renaissance upon our culture, with the subtle and almost undiscerned strains of humanism which have invaded our religious thinking and practice. For in their "return" to Greek philosophy, literature and art for sources of insight and inspiration, the men of the Renaissance emphasized the earthly and human aspects of the Greek tradition in order to counterbalance the dualistic and idealistic aspects which were the special concern of the ancient faith and practice. And following the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Age of Enlightenment, there emerged the age of science and technology with its own powerful influences, wholly non-Christian in origin. All these, independently and in their total effect upon our culture, made for the democratic ideal in human affairs, with an ever-increasing variety of ingredients and influences, pouring into the already over-burdened tradition of Christianity.

Response by H. J. Muller in accepting the Humanist of the Year award for
Leo Szilard, at the annual meeting of the American Humanist
Association, held in Chicago, Feb. 27, 1960

I am profoundly moved at accepting this award in behalf of my dear friend Leo Szilard whose grave illness prevents his being with us. It would be most presumptuous of me to make any statement for him but I would say for us that we all feel deeply honored. We are honored at his accepting this recognition by us of his incomparable contributions to the advancement of human understanding beyond horizons previously unimagined, of human control over nature, and ~~human control~~ over the affairs of men themselves. All this, we agree, represents the highest type of humanism in action. For my part let me add that in thus receiving into our group Leo Szilard who, with his wife, is herewith given our honorary membership, we have in my opinion taken among us one of the truly great men not only of our own time but of the whole so far elapsed course of human history.

INDIANA UNIVERSITY

College of Arts and Sciences

BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA

March 2, 1960

DEPARTMENT OF ZOOLOGY

Dr. Gertrude Szilard
Care of Dr. Maurice Fox
The Rockefeller Institute
66th St. and York Ave.
New York 21, N.Y.

repl - 3-13

Dear Mrs. Szilard:

As Ted Puck has perhaps informed you, the granting of the Humanist of the Year Award to Leo, that took place at the annual meeting of the American Humanist Association held at the Hamilton Hotel, Chicago on February 27, was a very moving occasion for all the persons present. The citation, composed and delivered by Ted, is to be printed in a forthcoming issue of The Humanist. It may be that they will also publish my reply, ^{given} when I received the award for Leo. I am enclosing a copy of this. If you prefer to have the word "grave" or the whole clause "whose grave illness prevents his being with us" removed from the published version, Dr. Wendt, the editor of The Humanist, would of course agree to this. I have written to tell him that Leo might prefer it this way and that you are to be consulted on the matter.

Later in the evening Ted gave us a most heart-warming talk on the role of science in the modern world, using many instances from Leo's life. I think that this orientational effort was very valuable for the members, especially since these include few scientists. They were most of them representatives of small Humanist groups scattered throughout the country and they will bring this point of view back to their own groups. Ted's talk was very much appreciated.

I have not ventured to write to Leo directly because I have wanted to spare him all unnecessary bother, to allow him to devote as much time and effort as possible to his work and to whatever he himself chooses to do or to think about. I would like to tell at least you, however, that I much appreciated receiving copies of three manuscripts from him, one of the paper that has just appeared in the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists and the other two on antibody formation, enzyme inhibition, and related matters. They were eye openers to me but I did not feel competent to make any suggestions about them. I am not familiar enough with those fields to do so, but got the feeling that they are highly significant contributions.

With warmest personal regards to you both,

Yours sincerely,

Joe (Hermann J. Muller)

H. J. Muller

HJM:slh
enc.

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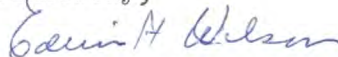
March 16, 1960

Dr. Gertrude Weiss Szilard
The Rockefeller Institute
New York 21
New York

Dear Dr. Szilard:

At the Annual Meetings of The American Humanist Association, in addition to a public citation, our Board of Directors voted to make your husband, Dr. Leo Szilard, and yourself the first joint honorary members of our Association. Other honorary members are Sir Julian Huxley, Dr. Max Otto, and Bertrand Russell. This makes any financial contribution to our Association quite optional, but you will be continued as a member of the Association in a continuing way. We all felt very deeply, those of us who knew, that your own part in this present difficult period is a very admirable one, and we want to give you this little token of assurance that we appreciate your courage and all that you are going through at this time, personally.

Sincerely,



Edwin H. Wilson
Executive Director

EHW/ccj