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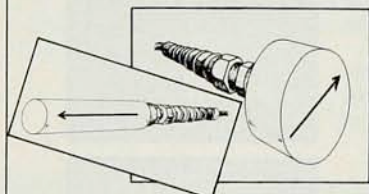


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speech—"Most of what meant most to me never appeared in those hearings"—is a rare exception.) The one explicitly autobiographical and personal essay, a 1965 speech at a National Junior Science and Humanities Symposium sponsored by the US Army, contains a richness of illuminating detail that makes one regret all the more the remote and disembodied quality of most of his public utterances.

While the early postwar essays will interest historians for the light they shed on Oppenheimer's thought and the intellectual milieu of those years, the most engaging from a contemporary perspective will probably be the later ones offering broader reflections on what it means to be a scientist, the nature of the scientific enterprise, and the relation of science and society. Here he challenges those who equate the cultural impact of the Einsteinian revolution with those of the earlier Copernican, Newtonian and Darwinian revolutions. While those earlier transformations in scientific thought were generally comprehensible by nonscientists and challenged the world view of the masses, setting off "great waves of change in human culture," he argues, the arcane and largely inaccessible discoveries of modern physics trans-

formed the intellectual foundations of a specific discipline without a corresponding impact on the larger culture. (The cultural impact of nuclear weapons, the major technological byproduct of these discoveries, is, of course, another matter.)

Toward the end of his life, Oppenheimer called repeatedly for greater scientific literacy, on one occasion offering a utopian vision of a world in which scientific inquiry, like music, art and sports, would be engaged in by amateurs for the sheer intellectual joy of it. In 1965, already a dying man, he spoke movingly of the rewards of the life of the mind: "Whatever trouble life holds for you, that part of your lives which you spend finding out about things, things that you can tell others about, and that you can learn from them, that part will be essentially a gay, a sunny, a happy life."

Uncommon Sense contains some rewarding passages (as well as some less so), but it does not resolve—indeed, in some ways it deepens—the enigma of J. Robert Oppenheimer. We must continue to seek the central springs of his elusive personality and his allusive intellectual style.

PAUL BOYER

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