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THE PASSING OF AGNOSTICISM

THE term "agnosticism" was coined about a hundred years ago by Thomas Huxley, the great champion of Darwinism and Evolution. It defined his own intellectual or philosophical position and, more broadly, characterized what would eventually be the prevailing point of view concerning what human beings know, or are able to know. This was essentially the positivist outlook, holding that knowledge is limited to what can be made evident to the senses, and rests, in the final analysis, on "objective" demonstrations. It is essentially a term of rejection, a negation of the idea represented by *gnosis*, which is the Greek word for knowledge, primarily mystical knowledge, or what is spoken of as "spiritual truth."

The positive aspect of agnosticism was of course the implied faith in the promise of the natural sciences. Its gradual adoption by all educated and progressive men amounted to a realization of the hopes of the pioneers of free-thinking materialism and the scientific ideology of the eighteenth century—men like Lamettrie, who, when Diderot claimed that the Atheist could be slain with the wonder of a butterfly's wing or the eye of a gnat, replied that these natural splendors were no proof of God since Nature might produce everything out of herself. "Nature" was an independent reality that depended upon neither chance nor the Deity.

The antagonism of men like Lamettrie and Holbach to religion is sufficiently explained by the arguments they used. "If atheism were universally disseminated," Lamettrie declared, "all the branches of religion would be torn up by the roots," and there would be "no more theological wars," no more "soldiers of religion, that terrible kind of soldier." Huxley shared in the Enlightenment enthusiasm for science, and he had ample reason to distrust the men of religion, since he had been contesting with them vigorously over the evolutionary doctrines for years and was a target for much theological vituperation. In his experience, organized religion was a barrier to scientific progress and education. He could remember the persecution of Priestley by bigoted religionists, and the suppression of Hutton's contributions to geology, toward whom theological rancor was extreme because he took a gradualist view of the formation of the earth's structure. (The Creationists insisted that all this happened in six days—or, at least, quite suddenly.)

But during the nineteenth century, the balance of informed opinion swung in favor of Evolution and toward the idea of science as the foundation of human progress, and it was natural that agnosticism became the settled outlook of the men who took part in furthering this great change. The effects of the transition were briefly but effectively described by Bertrand Russell in an article he contributed to the *Nation* for Jan. 9, 1937. Writing of the shapers of culture, he said:

> In former days men wished to serve God. When Milton wanted to exercise "that one talent which is death to hide," he felt that his soul "was bent to serve therewith my maker." Every religiously minded artist was convinced that God's aesthetic judgments coincided with his own; he therefore had a reason, independent of popular applause, for doing what he considered his best, even if his style went out of fashion. The man of science in pursuing truth, even if he came into conflict with current superstition, was still setting forth the wonders of Creation and bringing men's imperfect beliefs more nearly into harmony with God's perfect knowledge. Every serious worker, whether artist, philosopher or astronomer, believed that in following his own convictions he was seeing God's purposes. When with the progress of enlightenment this belief began to grow dim, there still remained the True, the Good, and the Beautiful. Non-human standards were still

> laid up in heaven, even if heaven had no topographical existence.

Now comes the part with which we are most concerned, since it applies more or less to Thomas Huxley's time:

> Throughout the nineteenth century, the True, the Good, and the Beautiful preserved their precarious existence in the minds of earnest atheists. But their very earnestness was their undoing, since it made it impossible for them to stop at a halfway house. Pragmatists explained that Truth is what it pays to believe. Historians of morals reduced the Good to a matter of tribal custom. Beauty was abolished by the artists in a revolt against the insipidities of a philistine epoch and in a mood of fury in which satisfaction is to be derived only from what hurts. And so the world was swept clear not only of God as a person but of God's essence as an ideal to which man owed an ideal allegiance; while the individual, as a result of a crude and uncritical interpretation of sound doctrines, was left without any inner defense against social pressure.

It is worth a little effort to sample what Russell means by going to the work of distinguished nineteenth-century writers—men like W. E. H. Lecky, Henry T. Buckle, and Herbert Spencer in England, and William James and Andrew D. White in the United States. Skeptical of orthodoxy, they carried with them the moral disciplines that were once identified with religious inspiration. But as the years went by, and the sources of moral ideas became increasingly speculative and abstract, there was no longer a ready medium for the transmission of moral conviction from one generation to another. By the end of the nineteenth century it was possible for a man like Freud to be more than merely neutral in respect to religious teachings. He was clearly anti-doctrine in relation to religion and metaphysics. As Philip Rieff has remarked, Freud "refused to ask the religious question, or announce a characterological ideal." He saw in psychoanalysis a substitute for the religious vocation. As Rieff puts it:

> To be religious was to be sick, by definition: it is the effort to find a cure where none can possibly exist. For Freud, religion could only be a symptom of what it seeks to cure. . . . In a sense we can now better understand, there is something to the gross charge that psychoanalysis is the perfect profession for neurotics—but only for extremely intelligent neurotics, those who can learn to inhibit successfully their religious impulse.

The treatment for undisciplined belief, in Freud's view, was disciplined unbelief, and he would allow no compromises with the virus of final explanation.

Meanwhile, the old idea that the sciences would prove a more reliable approach to understanding of higher laws—of the divine plan in some vague, Unitarian sense—gave way to the tough-minded opinions of physicists who held that atoms and the void were all that need be considered in constructing an account of natural reality. Conceptions like Natural Law and Natural Right were drained of meaning, and the traditional idea of legitimacy in government, as John H. Schaar has pointed out, lost its validity, giving way to pragmatic measures of the services a government might render. The agnostic's rules for certainty shut out the entirety of subjective sources of orientation and values. Everything must be measured, counted, demonstrated. Moral principles were for holiday speeches, while the practical side of affairs was turned over to the scientific technologists and trained bureaucrats.

We are here concerned with the application and practice in a going society of the agnostic point of view, and John Schaar's analysis of how this works is particularly illuminating:

> In the bureaucratic epistemology, the only legitimate instrument of knowledge is objective, technically trained intellect, and the only acceptable mode of discourse is the cognitive mode. The quest for knowledge must follow specified rules and procedures. Thus, many other paths to knowledge are blocked. Specifically, everything thought of as "subjective" and tainted by "feeling" must be suppressed. Any bureaucrat who based his decisions upon conscience, trained prudence dreams, empathy, or even common sense and personal experience would be *ipso facto* guilty of malfeasance. The bureaucrat must define whatever is to be done as a problem, which implies that there is a solution and that finding

> the right solution is a matter of finding the right technique. In order to solve a problem, it must be broken into parts, things that are in appearance dissimilar must be made similar. This is done by extracting one or a few aspects which all the objects dealt with have in common, and then treating those aspects as though they were the whole. This penchant for abstraction and comparison in turn requires measuring tools that will yield comparable units: among the favored ones are units of money, time and power. All such measurements and comparisons subordinate qualitative dimensions, contextual meanings, and unique and variable properties to the common, external, and quantifiable. Consider, for example, Clark Kerr's incisive definition of the multiversity as "a mechanism held together by administrative rules and powered by money." He is talking about what used to be called the community of scholars.

Well, enough of this. The point we are after is locked away in the quotation from Bertrand Russell, where he speaks of the decline of culture "as a result of a crude and uncritical interpretation of sound doctrines." He undoubtedly means that the rejection of the dogmas of anthropomorphic religion was sound, and by "crude and uncritical interpretation" he implies the loss of impersonal ideals to which men might give their allegiance. He is saying, in short, that we do not know how to be morally earnest atheists; individuals may succeed in this, but whole societies seem to fall into moral drift.

Agnostics, as a class, are educated people. Like Tolstoy, they have outgrown the childlike beliefs of their ancestors; but many of them, unlike Tolstoy, have found no humanistic substitute with sufficient moral inspiration to be communicated to the rest of the world. As a result, they remain isolated in their disciplined convictions from the great majority of the people. The fact is that "disciplined unbelief" is psychologically very difficult. Another fact is that the great majority of people who *support* the institutions by which agnostics are employed—the universities, research bodies, and other professions—are as a rule still "believers" of one sort or another. They think that truth is real and that at least some of it can be found and followed. They believe in a moral order and law, however vaguely or ineffectually. They usually confess to some sort of "religion." The world would seem to them an anarchic and frightening place if they did not have these beliefs. No doubt such beliefs can be torn to shreds by the intellectual skills in which many agnostics excel. But it is equally true that it is the people who have some kind of belief or moral conviction whose faith holds society together. The question, then, is: What would happen if the negation and denials of the agnostic spread to all the rest?

Philip Rieff's point comes in here. He said that "only . extremely intelligent neurotics . . . can learn to inhibit successfully their religious impulse."

One can, of course, construct a generous definition of the agnostic position which would render this entire argument meaningless; it could be claimed that an agnostic is one who refuses to believe *easily* in anything—a man who wants substance on which to form his convictions, and who insists on distinguishing between higher human longings and what he feels he actually knows. With such a definition, however, "agnostic" is turned into almost its opposite, indicating what might be called a cautious and very serious gnosticism, which demands experiential verification for whatever is deemed an addition to knowledge. But this is not the familiar meaning of the term; as we have used it, it means a practical denial of transcendental reality, or of the possibility of any knowledge of it, which is almost the same thing.

In any event, Schaar has an answer to our question, since he believes that a general loss of faith is already characteristic in our time, with consequences that can be broadly characterized. He says:

> The main point remains: modern man has determined to live without collective ideals and disciplines and thus without obedience to and reliance upon the authorities that embody defend, and replenish those ideals. The work of dissolution is

> almost complete, and men now appear ready to attempt a life built upon no other ideal than happiness, comfort and self-expression. All ideals are suspect, all other straints and disciplines seen as snares and stupidities, all collective commitments nothing but self-imprisonments. Modern prophets rise to pronounce sublimation and self-mutilation the same. We, especially the young among us, presume that the individual can live fully and freely, with no counsel or authority other than his desires, engaged completely in the development of all his capacities save the capacity for memory and the capacity for faith.

Prof. Schaar adds this melancholy paragraph:

> But if this is nihilism, it is nihilism with a change of accent that makes all the difference. Gone is the terror, and gone too the dedication to self-overcoming of the greatest Nihilist. No one can say where this will lead, for the attempt is without illuminating precedent. But it is clear that for our time, as Philip Rieff has written, "the question is no longer as Dostoevski put it: 'Can civilized men believe?' Rather: Can unbelieving men be civilized?" Perhaps new prophets will appear; perhaps tribalism will reappear; perhaps the old faiths will be reborn; perhaps Weber's "specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart" will stalk the land, or perhaps we shall really see the new technological Garden tilled by children—kind, sincere innocents, barbarians with good hearts. But however it comes out, we must be clear that already the development of the post-moral mentality places the question of authority and legitimacy on a wholly new footing.

Prof. Schaar wrote this for the *New American Review* (No. 8), which appeared in January, 1970, and since then Jacob Needleman's *The New Religions* (Pocket Book, 1972) has become widely available. Mr. Needleman shows how the vacuum in belief is rapidly being filled, often by American adaptations of old Oriental faiths such as Zen and Tibetan Buddhism and Hinduism. Another approach to this rather sudden change in the psychological constitution of the American mind is provided in William Irwin Thompson's *At the Edge of History* (Harper & Row, 1971), which speaks of the current "cargo cult" myths he encountered in talking to hitch-hikers on Pacific Coast Highway and elsewhere. All history is in flux on the West Coast of the United States, moving very rapidly, and there seem to be anticipations of very nearly every future possibility:

> . . . what we are is not what we are about to become: the aborigines of another fall or the adepts of a new civilization beyond matter. At the edge of history the future is blowing wildly in our faces, sometimes brightening the air and sometimes blinding us.

Meanwhile, there are various accounts to settle. Prof. Schaar speaks of the corrosive effect on the Liberal doctrine of the social contract that the breakdown of traditional legitimacy and authority is having; conformity often seems the result of mere habit alone, and as Schaar remarks, "all such habits are weakening in the modern states." The old transcendental roots are gone; they have been cut, are disbelieved in, and found contemptible from repeated exploitation and betrayal, and no one knows, really, what is going to take their place.

The famous American "affluence," while having a cushioning effect, also brings release from old feelings of obligation. Many of the young don't seem to believe they will ever have to settle down and actually go to work for a living. They are the world's greatest improvisers, and go on dreaming their dreams. The prophets and planners who survive from the previous generation are, many of them, filled with nostalgia for a lost pastoral simplicity. Marshall McLuhan, for example, doesn't seem able to recognize the difference between a TV set and a town cryer. As Thompson remarked in an article in *Time* for Aug. 21, 1972:

> Many contemporary technological critics are medieval thinkers. Soleri is a medieval thinker, Ivan Illich is a medieval thinker, Marshall McLuhan is a medieval thinker, Jacques Ellul—they're all medieval thinkers. Basically they're seeing the end of the modern era and the return to the Middle Ages which they prefer.
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> They think in terms of culture, hierarchy, cathedral cities, the concentric universe and the integration of science, religion and art. Their vision

is the Middle Ages reachieved on a higher level of order, with a new content and a similar structure.

Many of the intellectuals are now so hungry for order that they would be willing to see the end of democracy and some new kind of Napoleonic order coming in. Arnold Toynbee, in his recent book *Surviving the Future*, says that as far as he can see we have a choice between a world federal state with an Alexander at the helm or nothing—annihilation.

I think the intellectuals will be the first people to make accommodation to the new power structure. As long as they can still have their elitist sense as professors and computer scientists, they will be quite happy in an aristocratic pro-management system. They don't stand to lose that much. Thus the ones who cry the loudest for freedom might not be all that much in favor of it.

These political implications are nowhere being discussed. Even the mystics don't really discuss the meaning of their intensely hierarchical system. All these mystical religions have gurus at the top and disciples at the bottom, and they're very much men. They are graded according to their state of consciousness and evolution, and there are some who are more highly evolved than others. . . .

We are again moving into a very hierarchical, mystical, Pythagorean, antidemocratic system. Half of me is in favor of that. The other half does not want to go through the Middle Ages all over again. Will it be good or bad? Take the Industrial Revolution. It may be that the Industrial Revolution was an ambiguous event that was equally good and equally evil. And this new revolution, which is not just technological but a cultural transformation—probably the biggest one we've ever seen since we were hominized—is equally going to share those ambiguities.

Obviously, the day of the agnostic is over. Other conceptions of reliable truth are moving human beings to action, and we need other safeguards to maintain our balance and to avoid "going through the Middle Ages all over again." Agnosticism was a kind of discipline, but it shut out too much. Destroy religion, Lamettrie said, and you won't have those terrible problems any more. Deny the spirit, and no priest can tie you up in both this life and the next, because you just *don't believe* any more. Well, it was too easy, and it didn't work. The transcendental realities are there, and they keep bubbling up in the strangest places; they are a natural, not a supernatural phenomenon. The universe includes more than the *philosophes* dreamed of. There isn't any "sound doctrine" which denies the spiritual realities in human beings, but going beyond bare affirmation is difficult and even risky. What is sound doctrine for accepting the spiritual reality in human beings? We may need to borrow some of the agnostic's caution in looking for an answer to this question.

REVIEW
CONSCIOUSNESS AND DESIGN

THE sweep of intellectual change manifests the world over, these days, and has especially clear articulation in a book published last year in India—*The Physics and Chemistry of Freedom*, by Krishna Chaitanya (Somaiya Publications, Bombay, 35 Rs.). The title may be puzzling until it is realized that the author means that since the elimination of subjectivity began in the physical sciences—with Galileo's primary qualities—and eventually led to denial of meaningful choice or freedom in man, it is desirable to go back to these parent sciences to establish a changed outlook. At the outset, Mr. Chaitanya uses the rejection by Socrates (in the *Phaedo*) of mechanistic causation (proposed by Anaxagoras) as the model of his own contentions. Socrates maintained that it was not the bones and sinews of his legs that determined whether or not he took flight to Megara, to avoid the penalty of drinking hemlock, but that he, Socrates, thought it *right* to stay where he was, and that this was the cause of his being there. He said that to speak of his muscles as "causes" was "too absurd."

The question of why men look for the source of causation outside themselves is answered by Chaitanya in an interesting way:

> We have to retrace the road of thought to reach again the fork where we obviously seem to have taken the wrong turning to wind up in our present dead-end. Upanishadic thought can give a helpful indication for locating this parting of the ways. This tradition does not see the world as an illusion, but sees it as an emanation of God who continues to be immanent in it. Desire awakes in the One to be the many, in the infinite existence to be a finite series of embodied existence. *"Brahman* desired: 'Let me be many, let me multiply.' He reflected and after reflection He projected all this—whatever there is. Having projected it, He penetrated into that very thing, and became the gross and the subtle." But amnesia about the immanence of consciousness in creation began early and had to be corrected. *"Brahman* pierced the openings of the senses so that they turned outwards. Therefore man looks outward, not inward into himself. Some wise man, however, with his eyes closed, and wishing for immortality, saw the self behind."

While Mr. Chaitanya does not often use the sources of Indian philosophy in this study, the few occasions when he draws on this Eastern heritage seem of great help, as in the case of this metaphor of *Brahman.* The desire for wider experience is a longing everyone can understand, and a logical enough cause for the world to come into being, if sentience be regarded as essential reality. Then, the mistaking of externals for causes can be understood, too, since this is common in our experience. Chaitanya applies the metaphor to European thought, which is his chief concern: "In Europe too man looked outward, and soon forgot that to describe experience completely one had to mention the consciousness looking outward as well as the universe which was seen when it looked outward."

This book ranges across the entire terrain of modern physical thought, gathering a vast assemblage of evidence from modern authorities to show the changing direction of scientific inquiry, ever tending, today, toward the restoration of subjective reality. The temper of the work is found in a passage occurring in the Epilogue:

> Since there are great differences between inanimate matter and living matter and between living matter and sentient, self-aware matter, creativity cannot be denied in evolution. And unless we choose to deny evolution, this creativity has to be reconciled with continuity. Offering solutions that ignore either reality is facile and the solution that chooses to deny creativity in particular must be regarded as imbecile. For while there can be insentience, there cannot be a formulation by the insentient of a theory of its insentience. And it is in this predicament that we shall find ourselves if we accept the inert particle of Galileo, with no centre of inner initiative in it, as the ultimate reality in the universe.

The present volume by Krishna Chaitanya is to be followed by another with the same theme, *The Biology of Freedom.*

The study of the course of human thinking on the great questions of reality and meaning, as pursued by a single individual, can have some tidiness and symmetry, but these qualities are seldom present at the level of controversy in public affairs. The issue of whether or not the world is the fulfillment of some vast scheme of meaning is the problem that is now before the California Board of Education, although by no means in this philosophical form. Nicholas Wade, writing in *Science* for Nov. 17, 1972, under the title, "Creationists and Evolutionists: Confrontation in California," summarizes the highlights of a struggle which began about ten years ago when two Orange County housewives began a campaign to persuade the State Board of Education to change the textbooks used in the public schools to eliminate the conflict between what is said in the Bible concerning human origins and the teaching of biology in the schools. There are, it seems, two groups which have organized for objectives of this sort, one definitely opposed to any conception of evolution, the members of which declare belief that all living things, including man, "were made by direct creative acts of God during the Creation Week described in Genesis." The *Science* writer says that the other group, the American Scientific Affiliation, is "devoted to exploring the relation between science and religion" and has "evangelical leanings." This group is said to "tolerate" evolution. A member of the latter group, Vernon L. Grose, who is professionally active in education, believes that on the question of "origins" science should be "absolutely silent." He says that science has been "oversold in Western culture as the sole repository of objective truth." Mr. Grose is author of two paragraphs which last year were adopted by the California School Board for inclusion in *Science Framework for California Public Schools:*

> All scientific evidence to date concerning the origin of life implies at least a dualism or the necessity to use several theories to fully explain the relationships between established data points. This dualism is not unique to this field of study, but is also appropriate in other scientific disciplines such as the physics of light.
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> While the Bible and other philosophic treatises also mention creation, science has independently postulated the various theories of creation. Therefore, creation in scientific terms is not a religious or philosophic belief. Also note that creation and evolutionary theories are not necessarily mutual exclusives. Some of the scientific data (e.g., the regular absence of transitional forms) may be best explained by a creation theory, while other data (e.g., transmutation of species) substantiate a process of evolution.

Publishers of science textbooks have been told that any books adopted will have to conform to these guidelines. Meanwhile, the biology teachers are organizing to protest such specifications.

Letters in response to this article, appearing in *Science* for March 9, show a fairly wide gamut of opinion. One correspondent welcomed the possibility that the teaching of science would be freed of undue "naturalistic influence," while another declared that "Of course, every school textbook should explain *both* the theory of creation *and* the theory of evolution," pointing out that this meant adding the Darwinian version of the origin of man in parallel columns with the King James version of Genesis, in all bibles in the schools or public offices! Still another wrote the following:

> I believe that the point at issue is viewed in a false perspective, in that the Christian religion and the biblical story are presented as unique carriers of a belief in creation. In the United States, a textbook should at least give an account of the ideas on creation expressed in the religious beliefs of the American Indians, who relate creation to the Great Spirit. Moreover, it would be appropriate to mention that other religions, for instance, Shintoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam, have their own views on the problem of how the universe originated. Some attention might also be given to the ideas professed by the ancient Greeks. If this is done, children could be brought to understand that many people have thought about the problem, and that the Judeo-Christian tradition is only one amid several others. This would allow a perspective in which to

better present the scientific attempts which are made to explore this matter.

The closing comments of Nicholas Wade in his Nov. 17 article seem equally pertinent. He remarks that the concern of the creationists to preserve the beliefs of their children is legitimate, as is the resolve of the biologists to teach their science without intrusions. He adds, however:

> The antagonists on each side probably present a more serious threat to the other than they realize. Biology teachers are probably more persuasive than they would like to admit. And the lobbying activities of creationists open the door for any other sectarian interest, religious or political, to get science textbooks altered to their liking. Having espoused the creationist cause from the start, the California state board will be hard put to find a solution that satisfies both sides.

By coincidence, in the same (March 9) issue of *Science* with the letters from readers on the California science textbook controversy, Michael T. Ghiselin discusses at length Charles Darwin's book, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals,* first-published in 1879. Ghiselin uses the book to show that the underlying theme of Darwin's career was to work for the elimination of teleology or a sense of underlying purpose in nature and life. Pointing out that Darwin used the term "metaphysics" in the meaning which "psychology" has for us, he gives evidence of Darwin's effort to convert psychology into a natural science. In one of his notebooks, Darwin wrote: "Origin of man now proved.—Metaphysics must flourish.—He who understands baboon would do more toward metaphysics than Locke." Again: "Plato . . . says in *Phaedo* that our *'necessary ideas'* arise from the preexistence of the soul, are not derived from experience.—read monkeys for preexistence."

Again and again, Darwin sought to refute any implication of a teleological cause. He remarked that the theory of evolution "would make man a predestinarian of a new kind because he would tend to be an atheist." His studies did indeed have this effect on him. A believing Christian in his youth, he later said that "disbelief crept over me at a very slow rate, but was at last complete." The change took place so slowly, he explained, that it caused him no distress.

It seems not unreasonable to think, then, that the general influence of evolutionary doctrines is in this direction, and that the ardent creationists feel this tendency and resist it, although they, as partisans of a single counter-doctrine, may be unhistorical in their methods and often unable to put their recommendations in terms acceptable even to scientists who are themselves in grave doubt about the validity of the mechano-morph assumptions of traditional science. The ideal solution might be somewhere in the direction of the proposal of the correspondent who suggested a plurality of mythic alternatives to the "chance" theory science has inherited from the atomists. But even suggesting this implies a broad, non-sectarian approach to religious belief, which is not likely to develop in a society prone to polemics in behalf of religious orthodoxy. The most promising sign, so far as an enlightened conception of religion is concerned, is the gradual change in attitude on the part of some scientists and the scientific-minded people who, being human, are beginning to give expression to the same inner longings which religionists feel, although in less confining terms.

COMMENTARY
BOX CANYONS OF EDUCATION

EVEN though set down twenty-three years ago, the criticism of art education by Schaefer-Simmern (see "Children") seems pertinent enough for repetition. In the first chapter of *The Unfolding of Artistic Activity*, he says:

> Most adults are unaware of their creative potentialities. If they have done something in the visual arts, their work has consisted mainly in imitation of nature. Usually they are taught to follow the "style" of their instructors. Here are to be found many of the well-known procedures which characterize present-day art teaching. Some types of instruction sail openly under old academic banners, some are camouflaged by modernistic slogans, either way, external achievement is primarily taken into account, while the student's personal conception is often neglected. All the various art trends, as for instance the academic, impressionistic, expressionistic, abstract, and lately the surrealistic, are reflected in corresponding principles of art education. These principles determine the methods of teaching in special as well as in general schools. They even penetrate into leisure-time art instruction. They set the measure of value by which the works of the rising generation are "judged and altered." Unfortunately, they imply that artistic activity is not a natural attribute of human nature; rather, that it must be acquired by industrious efforts at adapting the preconceived ideas of others. But genuine artistic ability cannot thus develop; instead, man's inborn creative potentialities are strangled within.
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> Since external accomplishments are stressed, the further course of such teaching often reduces the artistic process to mere surface decoration, there is no organic unfolding of the student's own artistic ability; he becomes, in any field of pictorial production, a victim of unrelated specialization. Usually, the formal structures of his drawings have no connection with those of his paintings, and they in turn are alien to his designs. He does not experience the inner relationship of the so-called fine arts, of crafts and industrial arts. Since they do not emerge out of their own creative being, they do not have personal meaning to him. His participation in imitative art classes may be "fun," and he may take pleasure in acquiring facility in the various modes of expression, but he does not gain in the strength and stature, the belief of his own powers, and the self-respect which would make artistic activity constructive in the growth of his personality. On the contrary, specialization within the pictorial process forces him into further complication. He becomes divided within himself.

The same sort of comment could be made to apply to other fields of education. Wherever models of "professionalism" dominate, or where the patterns of "discipline" are held to be more important than individual growth, the spontaneous interests of the student are frustrated. Production of either rebels or conformists is the natural result.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
ART IN EDUCATION

THE practice of art as the means for developing individual discipline was, as has been noted here, the reason for John Rice's choice of art as the foundation subject in the curriculum at Black Mountain. We now have a book which seems a splendid illustration of how this works—*The Unfolding of Artistic Activity* by Henry Schaefer-Simmern, published by the University of California Press in 1950. There is a sense in which this book also illustrates the learning theory of Piaget. But quite apart from these services, the book is a delightful visual experience. The author speaks of his work as an "experiment," and four of his six chapters—the first two are introductory—present the work of four different groups of people. There were mental defectives in one institution, delinquent young in another, a group of refugees, and some persons in business and the professions. Actually, these "social" differences didn't seem to count for much in relation to the unfolding of their creative capacities. With each group, the work in the later stages is rather wonderful.

The author begins with some criticism of art education, then turns to his own intentions:

> The theory presented in this book stresses the primary importance of the unadulterated creative process. Not the separate teaching of artistic elements of form according to atomistic methods, not a special technique employed in a special medium, neither drawing, painting, sculpture, nor fine or applied art, is the final aim of the kind of art education here proposed. The goal is rather the natural cultivation of growing mental powers as they operate simultaneously and interfunctionally within the process of artistic configuration. All different media and techniques are subordinated to this purpose; and hence it may be necessary, in the artistic development of any given person, to encourage him to utilize many different materials, each of which will help him in realizing his particular stage of visual conceiving. It is in this way that an integral connection between man and his artistic achievement is established.

The illustration of Piaget's ideas is in the following:

> With the growing ability of visual conceiving, the work to be achieved grows also, within its structure, organically, stage by stage, from simple to more complex organizations of form. As each phase of development matures, it prepares thoroughly the ground for the manifestation of the next phase; that is, the principle of natural growth underlies the entire pedagogical procedure. As the main trend of this art education is inwardly determined by the law of man's growth of visual conception, and as the artistic fruit of that growth, education (the natural cultivation of growing mental powers) and artistic activity (the pictorial realization of visual conception) become functionally united. . . . Thus it becomes comprehensible that in the evolution of innate artistic abilities man functions mentally and physically as a psychobiological whole. The unfolding of his artistic creativeness is intimately related to his whole being. Education, artistic activity, and the physical organism of man constitute a dynamic synthesis.

This is enough theory. The point, here, is that no one can work in a creative activity without gaining in discipline. He has to have his own inspiration and do his own criticism and set his own limits, and he has to find his own new directions for growth. In this sense, art is a tool of human development; it objectivizes the necessity for self-direction in all forms of growth.

Perhaps the most dramatic achievement described in this book is the progressive unfolding of Selma, a woman of thirty who had a mental age of between six and seven years. In the beginning she was unresponsive, sloppy, and replied to all questions by groaning or shaking her head. She was also shy, restless, and unhappy. The author was able to interest her in attempting to draw by showing her the drawing of a seven-year-old child. Her first drawing in crayon, while something like the child's work, gave evidence of some independence of visual conception. This part of the book shows each drawing Selma did, one after the other, each one indicating some small growth in visual conception. The third drawing exhibited a design element. She worked for weeks on the same subject, trees, flowers, hills, gradually learning to use colors. After three months she worked out new shapes for

blossoms and leaves. Progress was slow but consistent. A change in the size of the paper confused her. She was, however, helped by cautious suggestion. Asked if she had ever seen a pond, she said, "Do you mean a pond with fish?" And subsequently, being encouraged, she made her first large drawing, showing a square pool in a formal design with fish, and trees growing out of each of the sides. Later she did another fishpond with birds flying about. Now she was being praised with enthusiasm by the other girls, and they worked cooperatively together on large designs—a rare accomplishment in such a community (mental institution). Toward the end of the period Selma designed a table cloth and executed her design in embroidery herself. After seven months she was able to work independently. She began to do hooked rugs with interesting designs. She had her own ideas now, and sang while she worked. She began to show the characteristics of a normal, healthy human being.

You could call what happened to Selma "therapy," but if you inspect her later work you may not want to. It's so pleasant to look at that the term seems irrelevant. The therapy was a side-effect. The resident psychologist said:

> The growth of highly organized form evident in her pictorial work corresponds with Selma's development toward a more unified personality. She did not hide her head or runaway when engaged in conversation. She would seek out a person and talk to him—something which she had never been observed to do. . . . It is the educational and therapeutic significance of the genuine artistic process that it embodies in an indivisible manner so many different aspects of human functioning.

About forty-five pages are devoted to a report on the group—four people—drawn from business and the professions. This "experiment" lasted four years and was highly dramatic in its results. The developmental side is covered by illustrations of the work from the beginning by a social worker in a New York hospital, who had had little or no training in art, and little interest in it, and who joined the course in the hope that she might be able to use what she learned in her work. Her first drawings were like those of a child. She was extremely intelligent, however, and her progress was rapid. She soon began to draw scenes she remembered from childhood, mostly on her grandfather's farm in Norway. It was a dairy farm and she took great pleasure in drawing cows, which she had loved as a child. These early visual experiences now came back to her vividly, and her early work was often turned into embroidery or done as wall hangings on cloth. As the months go by the work grows in complexity and interest. She also cut cows out of a plate of plaster of Paris and carved them in low relief. After some months her paintings began to resemble those of Henri Rousseau. Then she turned to portraits of people. She visited Morningside Park and learned how to do rocks. With her knowledge she did mountain scenes in Norway, from memory, and composed a striking study of a mountain goat. A pencil drawing of a fjord has great appeal. She was fully conscious of her own gradual development and wrote comment on the excitement she felt as her capacities enlarged. Many pages of this material are in the book. Especially interesting are the reports of her visits to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, telling what the experience of looking carefully at great paintings meant to her. There are wonderful passages on the painters of the Italian Renaissance, and on her sense of discovery in looking at Cézanne's work with the eyes of a new-born painter. Schaefer-Simmern says:

> The uniqueness of this understanding of essential aspects of works of art lies in the fact that it is principally concerned with objective, artistic data. Miss E.'s critical observation is not characterized by explicative comments on line, color, composition, and so forth, based on ready-made "aesthetic hypotheses," which rarely touch the artistic problem that constitutes a work of art. The specific value of her approach is marked by precise visual judgment which arises from her own creative experience, that which in turn leads to the discovery of precise pictorial functions, to principles of artistic configuration.

We should add that the other three people in this group also did work that one enjoys looking at—at the end of four years they were not "students" at all!

The most important thing about this book is that it is likely to make almost anyone who reads it want to draw or paint.

FRONTIERS

Samplings of the Malaise

THE mood of dissatisfaction that has spread across the country is suggested by a question asked in boldface on the cover of the April *Saturday Review of Society:* "Can Business Save Us?" The question is an informal title for a debate between Peter F. Drucker, management consultant and authority on business, and Edward K. Hamilton, deputy mayor of New York City. Mr. Drucker, arguing for the affirmative, speaks of the popular rebellion against higher taxes and proposes several ways in which private enterprise might take over public functions. Additional taxes, he says, must come from middle-class earners who make between $7,000 and $15,000 a year, and these people are unwilling to give up even more of their income to the cost of government. As alternatives to increases in taxes, he points to the possibility that private services may be more effective than government functions, citing the United Parcel Service, which is often preferred to the mails for reliable delivery. Another suggestion is more contracting out of public services to private firms. He also has some other ideas for mobilizing the resources of business to help relieve the "unbearably heavy load for the taxpayer."

Mr. Hamilton contends that the complex problems of the present require an even greater investment of public funds. In one place he says: "The plain truth is that the welfare cycle is composed of a whole series of problems of exquisite complexity which, experience has demonstrated, will never be addressed in the normal course of profit-seeking."

Arguments of this sort neglect facts which neither government nor business seems able to deal with. For example, the government does "contract out" the construction involved in public housing, but, as housing experts have shown, what is built often has little relation to actual human need. Moreover, as Charles Abrams says in *The City Is the Frontier* (1965):

> Our biggest boast—that housing in cities has improved physically—also highlights our biggest default, e.g., that the environment in cities has simultaneously deteriorated. While census figures indicate that housing conditions have improved since 1940, crime, according to the FBI, has doubled in the same period (after 1958, the crime rate was said to have increased five times as fast as the population). No matter what the census figures show, housing conditions cannot be rendered decent unless the environment is made decent also (the Harlems of New York and elsewhere have many fine houses and are among the worst of environments). Nor, as the cities sag under the weight of their new social and financial burdens, can the environments of the cities be improved and their social problems dealt with unless they are made financially able to deal with them.

Cities, in short, and not just housing, must be sound and healthful. A large part of Mr. Abrams' book is devoted to showing that public housing programs usually lose their "general welfare" purposes as they are applied in local areas and made to serve the interests of developers and construction contractors. After a discussion revealing how extensively builders are protected against losses, he concludes: "Unless these mechanisms are reshaped to benefit low-income groups or fulfill similar social purposes, the emerging trend of the system would seem to be toward a 'socialism for the rich and private enterprise for the poor'."

Obviously, there are grave questions to be answered concerning even the possibility of effective social welfare services, on the scale required, in a society dominated by the code of competition and self-interest and spurred by acquisitive goals. Converting welfare purposes to these goals in order to support "private enterprise" seems a somewhat contradictory practice. Meanwhile, the time-scale of interest felt by politicians who must continually seek re-election seems to work against the success of any long-term measures.

Problems of this general character emerge again and again in our society. Examining the implications of the rapid trend to large-scale farming during the past twenty years (*Environment*, December, 1972), Michael Perelman and Kevin P. Shea point to the side-effects which go with the resulting increased production: "environmental disruption from the increased use of fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides; the mass migration of millions of agricultural workers to cities ill-prepared to receive them; and the loss of the social benefits of the small farm-based communities." There are other objections to the trend:

> Agriculture, even on the largest scale, does appear profitable to the farmers themselves. However, this profitability owes a great deal to tax accountants and attorneys, through whose expertise non-farm businesses and wealthy individuals can "farm." They can raise cattle or develop an orchard but their operations will not turn a profit until the cattle or the trees reach maturity. As long as there is no profit, the owner can write off these expenses from his non-farm income when paying taxes. Then when his cattle or trees have matured, the owner can sell out the operation at a profit and declare a capital gain so that he is taxed at a lower rate.

The comparison between small and large farm operations, detailed in this article, involves many factors and deserves reading in full.

Still another approach to the question of human attitudes in our society is provided by an extract from a book published last year by Columbia University Press—*The Big Foundations* by Waldemar A. Nielsen. In this passage (quoted in *World* for Feb. 13), the author is critical of wealthy men who are shrewd in business but "remarkably naïve in their charities." Typically, the creator of a foundation does not seek "professional staff" and consults only his attorney, accountant, or wife. He chooses trustees who will agree with him, and—

> As a result, although donors have often been remarkably farseeing in their business, they generally have been shortsighted and inept in launching their foundations. . . . This is a commentary with profound meaning for a society that has traditionally granted major responsibility for its development to its business and financial leaders.

The judgment made by this writer is of interest for two reasons. First, it is accurate enough in describing the weaknesses of most foundation charity, which is singularly unimaginative; but what seems more important, the criticism neglects the fact that a man who has some wealth *ought* to use it himself in the way he thinks best. The self-reliance and initiative of the American businessman are his principal virtues, and to expect him to drop them in his maturity seems both unrealistic and wrong. Criticism ought rather to stress the lack of understanding of human need in the typical businessman—this is what needs correction. Hiring somebody else to think "socially" for him is no substitute. No social ills can be effectively remedied by professional "do-gooders" so long as the source of those ills lies in the lifelong and habitual ignorance which makes hiring the professionals seem like a good idea.