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COMMUNITY VERSUS DOCTRINE

NOT only much of the confusion in thought, but also many of the fears of men, sometimes for even their lives, come from insistence on some criterion of doctrinal "correctness." The merciless questions of inquisitors, often reinforced by techniques of torture, were intended to force their victims to admit to heretical views, so that punishment could be administered with a show of " justice." When John Calvin carried on what was ostensibly a friendly correspondence with Servetus concerning theological issues, Servetus thought two minds were freely pursuing religious truth together, but Calvin hoped that Servetus would let slip some erroneous opinion; Servetus did exactly that, and then died over a slow-burning fire for his careless intellectual honesty.

In our own time, we know how the expressions of "liberals" have been carefully inspected for betraying tendencies, and an all-time high in fantasies of political suspicion was reached when a leader of the John Birch Society declared that President Eisenhower was a dupe of the communists. Co-ops on Indian reservations have been held up as examples of the infiltration of "alien ideology" and the entire Progressive Education movement was once regarded as a deep-seated subversive infection. Textbooks which dare to deal with history without patriotic clichés may be banned from use in the schools, and simple tests such as the outlook of anyone who talks against "colonialism" are said to reveal communist inclinations. A kind of Gresham's law operates in such demands for political purity. Eventually, crackpot élitism develops and only those who militantly oppose the income tax or urge that the functions of the post office be turned over to free enterprise are regarded as above suspicion. Such waves of ferociously exacting orthodoxy rise periodically, reaching a stage of maximum fury, as in the time of Senator Joseph McCarthy, and then recede, sometimes exhausting themselves in a *reductio ad absurdum* of extremism, but the basic potential of angry demand for "correctness" always remains, ready to energize the next cycle of anxiety and witch-hunting hysteria.

This devotion to correctness is not of course the monopoly of any political persuasion. It is found wherever the over-simplifications of ideology gain power over men's lives. The endless fractionations of the revolutionary movement during the past hundred years illustrate the same tendency. The denunciations of one another by radical thinkers often exceed in scorn and contempt their more conventional attacks on Capitalism; Heywood Broun pointed this out, years ago, when as an undoctrinaire socialist he was bitterly lashed by the Communists of his time.

Actually, so long as men believe it possible for there to be precise formulation of social truth, it is difficult to see how vindictive controversies of this sort can be avoided. So long as men think that there can be one true path to salvation, and that it can have unambiguous description in words, so long will there be religious wars and ruthless purges of dissenters, and it does not matter much, in relation to the disintegrating effects and general disaster of these antagonisms, whether salvation is expected to come about in this world or the next.

The "good intentions" of men are regarded as of no importance—or as unforgivable naïveté—when their erroneous opinions can be shown to deviate from the "objective truth" of correct doctrine and procedure. Nothing irritated Karl Marx more than the good intentions of men who differed with him in matters of revolutionary theory. And no thoughts of a man who is not "correct" in his political views are worth

examining. Wrong in these, he must be wrong in all. You could even say that men with incorrect opinions no longer qualify as members of the human race. Their eradication, should it become necessary, is a necessary surgery for the good of all.

The illustrations of this sort of doctrinal righteousness and intolerance are practically endless. There are many ways of identifying the damned, and if you can't catch a man by something he has said, wicked inconsistencies may be discerned in the way he lives or in the fact that he has more money and lives more comfortably than he should. Class position may render a man's opinions worthless. One of the critics of George Benello's "Wasteland Culture" (see last week's Frontiers) objected with fervor to his citation of academic authorities—not, apparently, because the views of these men are demonstrably wrong, but because they are "academic," and a good activist will accept no such support for his contentions. Another critic said that Benello's article was "just another rationalization, on the part of a desperate, frustrated, good-hearted man for an escape to a kind of utopian community." Still another found it ominous that Benello used the Japanese Soka Gakkai and the Birch Society for examples of certain "principles of organic, nuclear organization," taking this as evidence that Benello's thesis could not "address itself to questions of social ethics."

The notice here of these criticisms is not meant to suggest that Benello's paper is flawless, but to show how preconceptions of "correctness" render dialogue virtually meaningless. In one place the entire literature exposing the totalitarian tendency of modern revolutionary movements is disposed of with a flick of the wrist:

> Benello still hasn't rid himself of the tendency, so common among intellectuals, to justify non-revolutionary action in a situation which their intellectual integrity insists demands commitment and action of a revolutionary nature by all this "god that failed" nonsense. I have an automatic suspicion of individuals who commend to me their conviction that basic social change is necessary and that revolutionary action is ethically demanded of a human being of any stature, but who wail and bemoan about past mistakes and abuses on the part of successful revolutions.

What did Mr. Benello do, in writing "Wasteland Culture"? One thing he did—quite obviously—was to take on in debate a wide variety of men with strong doctrinal certainties. To be without such certainties is apparently regarded by them as sure evidence of wishy-washy character, and this judgment is fortified by powerful moral emotion: people without positive political certainty cannot be human beings "of any stature." By such arguments, sooner or later, the truly righteous get to belong to a pretty small club. And if it should happen that some professor or psychologist has gathered evidence to show that this pattern of intellectual intolerance is repeated, over and over again, and by people of opposite ideological persuasion, the psychologist and his evidence can be safely ignored because he is, after all, an academic, and is only supplying reasons for not "doing anything." (Einstein's physics was Jewish—we don't have to pay attention to it.)

But how is it that, in an area so problematic as the remaking of history, apparently intelligent men can offer their opinions with such firm confidence? The confidence, it is fairly clear, comes from the assumption that there already is, or can be—the man with strong opinions being further along in developing it than the rest of us—a genuine science of human society. Mistakes or uncertainties may exist in that science, but if you have enough moral indignation, you can ignore mere technical limitations. The nihilist, when he throws the bomb, is profoundly convinced that his act, although "symbolic," will really contribute to the liberation of all mankind.

The attractions of a Science of Man are obvious. What is the difference between science as we know it, and ordinary, uninstructed opinion, or mere superstition? Science eliminates ambiguity in relation to the facts and forces of

nature. It gives you a single unequivocal account that you can rely upon. No argument. There is a wonderful, sure-thing quality in physics and chemistry, and wouldn't it be great to have a science of man which would have the same indisputable certainty? Then we could really prove our claims and it would be perfectly legitimate to suppress the wrong-headed irrational people who dissent. They won't even admit that two and two make four.

Science abstracts from nature to identify natural laws. It isolates the important generalities, and even if we don't know what Nature really means, philosophically speaking, we know how to manipulate natural forces so as to get what we want out of it, and that's good enough. Satisfying human needs is the real business of life, and making the socio-economic arrangements satisfy all human needs equitably is the purpose of revolutionary politics. How could anyone doubt that?

So, to get a science of man in society—a political science—you abstract until you get enough laws, until you know enough to predict mass human behavior, and then you are ready to make a revolution and establish the good society. That's how the science of man is supposed to work, so let's get on with it. All good men will *want* to get on with it. The certainty comes from scientific expectation and the passion for justice. And when scientific knowledge seems weak, the eagerness for justice will make up the difference. There is a splendor about the passion for justice. It hides ignorance and dissipates uncertainty, and makes unsure men who practice restraint seem puny and contemptible.

Useful to an understanding of this situation is recognition that the men responsible for the recent break-throughs in psychology—mainly the humanistic psychologists—are not, with the mild exception of Erich Fromm, attracted to political activity at all. Psychodynamics, as they have come to experience them, simply do not fit in with social dynamics as most radical political thinkers explain them. The "science of society," as political thinkers formulate its terms, seems alien to the psychological realities of man. The great discovery of the humanistic psychologists is the wholly unique, idiosyncratic mode of growth for each man: the truth about the individual man is his individuality, not his generality, not what he has in common with other men when his individuality is ignored. The psychologists who have become persuaded of this—who believe that soul-making (self-actualization) has to be understood first in its own terms, and not first in the terms of environment-making or conditioning—are simply unable to see how what they have found out about human beings can be mechanistically extrapolated to a mass level for the purposes of righteous and wrathful political manipulation.

George Benello, you could say, attempted in his paper to show the necessity of applying the insights of humanistic psychology to any serious attempt at social reconstruction. As a result, most of his critics accused him of watering down the revolutionary resolve. As one of them put it:

> Benello leads us into a Freudian Brook Farm, or its equivalent. . . . the formation of colonies of the self-possessed makes their living easier but does not bring the troops home or make the cities livable or take the chemicals away from the cops. . . .

Left unnoticed by this comment is the central problem—the means by which very many people can be led to become the kind of human beings who will *care* enough about bringing the troops home or making the cities livable. Involved is the question of how people may be expected to outgrow their indifference to authentic social ideals, or whether you can whip them into correct attitudes. You can tell a man he ought to be an angry revolutionary, and he might agree for a while, even out of embarrassment, but the fact may be that he just wants a job, and after getting it will decide that the system isn't really so bad, after all.

Political activists typically fight shy of psychology because it questions their certainties

and weakens their polemics. To the political thinker, a man suffering injustice or deprivation is either a revolutionary or ought to be, and to turn him into one is the only significant problem.

Another phase of this question of psychology and politics appeared, recently, in Lewis Feuer's account of Soviet difficulties in explaining the crimes of Stalin. The Russians all remember the terrible things that were done in Stalin's time but their political certainties make actual explanation impossible. Discussing the boycott of Freud in the Soviet Union, Feuer pointed out that if Soviet social psychologists attribute the things Stalin did to his "personal traits, his fears, his persecution complex, their explanation will make the unconscious forces of the individual paramount, and this will move them to be 'Freudian' in spite of themselves." So, Freudian ideas are banned. No psychogenesis allowed. A psychological explanation would lead to further embarrassments:

> And why, moreover, were the Soviet Communist Party and the Soviet people themselves in such an irrational frame of mind as to allow themselves to be guided by the all-dominant neurotic personality of their time? Soviet thinkers, prohibited from dealing with the great contradiction of Soviet Society, are also vaguely aware that if they did so, the whole Leninist theoretical structure might be shaken.

There is obviously a deep abyss between the therapeutic approach and the revolutionary approach. And therapy, incidentally, has come a long way since Freud, being no longer dominated by the mechanistic concepts of nineteenth-century science. The modern humanistic psychologist is unable to accept the available political reasons for abandoning the idea that individual freedom of mind is the *sine qua non* of human life; he knows that to herd men into roles they have not yet grown into, by themselves, is a violence to their individual being that cannot be repaired by utopian political promises. There is of course truth in the charge that the therapist tries to make people comfortable with the *status quo*—but this argument, like all sweeping indictments, must vary widely in application from man to man. Universalism in therapy probably tends to convert it into some kind of humanitarian religion, but for all the dilution this represents to the tough-minded political person, it may be a better beginning to social change than angry, seize-power prescriptions.

It is legitimate to wonder whether social thought, as such, can ever wear out the partisan passion for correct doctrine, and whether some other point of view having solid substance could take the place of strong ideological persuasion. In the present, history is mainly a resource for polemics in justification for the correct theory of history. For example, in a recent *Saturday Review* article, Harvey Wheeler of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions spoke of America as an imperialist culture, a charge which in a later issue of *SR* brought a retort from Samuel Eliot Morison:

> This [the charge of imperialism] is almost completely untrue. The territorial Ordinances of 1780-87 and the Federal Constitution outlawed imperialism for the United States by providing that all territory bought or conquered by this country, instead of being kept in a colonial status, should eventually become states of the Union with all the rights and privileges of the older states. This principle has been extended to Hawaii and Alaska, and will be extended to Puerto Rico whenever her people indicate that they prefer statehood to their present commonwealth status.
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> The only aberration from this principle, the annexation of the Philippines, was atoned for by giving the Philippines independence before we were forced to do it, as the British, French, and other empires were forced to do to their colonies in Asia and Africa. To call the status of the blacks or the Mexican-Americans in this country "colonial" is a perversion of that much-abused word; we might as well call Sicily a colony of Italy, or Southall a colony of England. Even the Red Indians, who lie heavily on the American conscience, have been given full rights of citizenship—which, apparently, few of them wanted—and complete self-government of their reservations.

Well, we do sound a little too good to be true, in Mr. Morison's version. Harvey Wheeler rejoins with the following:

> The traditional relationship of America to the Southern Hemisphere has been imperialist since the Monroe Doctrine through the era of Dollar Diplomacy, through the era of the "roving" Monroe Doctrine of the early Cold War, and issuing in the contemporary form represented by Vietnam. The Secretary of State recently warned of more Vietnams to come.
>
> The internal face of this imperialism is revealed by the selective despotic effects of cultural deprivation. There is near unanimity among educators that the track system of primary and secondary school education tends to magnify the cultural condition with which children begin school.

So, mincemeat has been made of Mr. Morison. . . . But, but. . . . There was a time, when you went to school, when you thought you had reason to be proud of America; you weren't ready to cope with this all-white or all-black way of reading our history, then; and, in fact, you're not ready now; but you also know that a statistical, neutral gray which lets you forget about the argument is no good, either. It's shilly-shallying to say that there's truth on both sides, even though there is truth on both sides. The ideological *push-push* in historical studies has just about ruined our capacity for historical understanding.

Behind all the science-of-society abstractions and moral judgments of past history are the subtle variations of what people hope for, what they'll settle for, what they'll do from anger, what they'll do from pain, what they'll do from self-consciousness or shame, and what conformities they'll submit to with a peace-in-our-time resignation; again, still further behind the abstractions are still more subtle variations in private visions, personal ideals, dislike of and disbelief in violence, longing for fraternity and community. When history and social aspiration are discussed in terms of ideological theory, these endlessly different individual attitudes are coarsely regimented into marching order, and somehow the people are bulldozed into thinking that they believe in the abstractions, when they don't, really, at all; and meanwhile the moral emotions flush away honest uncertainty, generating a fervor which validates intellectual sloppiness and supports the conventional mix of sincerity and half-hypocrisy and half-self-deception which shapes party-liners all over the world. But sometimes, nevertheless, people's real feelings get to the surface, and they wonder, desperately, what *else* they can do. And when people begin to think, individually, about concrete historical situations there may come some intensely honest, existential reflection of the sort that was reported, several years ago, by Dorothy Samuel about movement volunteers in the South:

> "I know I'm not really changing the world out there'" one said to me in emotionless tones, "but at least I'm doing *something;* I am working with living human beings whose needs are clear and obvious. But whatever I accomplish, it won't change the greed and cruelty and lying and exploitation that run through our whole bomb-happy civilization." And another pointed out, "It's easy to bleed for the Negroes now. But I have the horrible certainty that, once they get a square deal in our society, most of them are going to play the game just as the whites have been playing it for years."

But isn't this, expressed with a very different feeling-tone, what a lot of black people mean by Black Power? A square deal in playing the game? Some of them say they'll play it a lot better than the whites do; that it'll be cleaner, and have more human dignity in it. And maybe it will.

Most revolutionary action is supposed in theory to be born from deprivation, powered by grievance, and to lead to dignity and justice. Programmatically, this is the class struggle. But to overcome deprivation and oppression *with* dignity and justice—this is a very unfamiliar proposition, and it doesn't formulate in terms of statistical techniques. It relies on the idiosyncratic progress that has the best chance of occurring in human community. It is a proposition that elicits the immediate retort: You'll *never* get a real community under these terrible circumstances, controlled by this distorting system, with all those bad people running things!

Of course not. No one can make an existing society compete with ethical abstractions in the minds of perfectionist political utopians. The thing is impossible. But meanwhile these angry utopians insist upon remaining ignorant of the actual processes of human growth. Yet they do have the good intentions they mock so bitterly in others. If we could learn to work with each other's good intentions, as the only humanist capital that exists, the general ignorance about human growth or progress might begin to fall away.

REVIEW
A LIMITED COMPARISON

SYNANON, by Guy Endore (Doubleday, 1968, $5.95), is a remarkable achievement at an extremely difficult task. While it is hardly possible to convey through words the significance of this rapidly growing movement of human reconstruction, Mr. Endore has done many of the right things and none of the wrong ones to help his readers understand Synanon. He started out in a spirit of ignorance and wonder, and much of the ignorance but none of the wonder is dispelled in the development of this long story. He saw the difference between what he knew he could not explain and what he could at least report. That is what his book turns out to be—a fascinating, meticulously honest, and astonishingly complete report.

Synanon, as most MANAS readers know, began about ten years ago, in Ocean Park, California, as a collection of a dozen or two drug addicts and alcoholics who were trying to find a way to live without chemicals. The fundamental inspiration of this effort was Charles E. Dederich, a former alcoholic who was himself looking for a way of life. It is clear from Guy Endore's book that Mr. Dederich found it, and that its name is Synanon.

Today there are some six or seven Synanon Houses around the country, in large metropolitan cities where drug addiction is a serious problem. There would be many more houses, if Synanon had the money to start them. Those houses are places where frightened and desperate human beings—people in the grip of a degrading, often lethal, illegal, and obsessively tenacious habit—can find and live with other people who have put heroin out of their lives. All they have to do to join Synanon is to accept the obligations of getting well. This may sound simple, but it involves something like a life-or-death-struggle for each of the addicts who come to Synanon. The genius of Synanon is that it provides a rough and ready course of exposure to the kind of stimuli which, taken together, give the addict a fighting chance in his struggle to change. Synanon is an environment shaped by two major forces: the irreducible facts of life, which no one can eliminate from his existence; and the resolve of the Synanon people to shape those facts, whatever they are, into tools for personal reconstruction.

Basic to Synanon is the open-door policy. A member is free to go or stay. In his encounter with law and order, the addict has known only punishment, coercion, and contempt. Society treats him only as an object—a sinful, dangerous, and very nearly hopeless object. At Synanon, if Synanon takes him, he is treated as a human subject—much reduced by his own action, but human—and everything that happens to him is bent somehow to helping the human subject to emerge from and outgrow the tangled effects of the self-manipulation and social manipulation which have made him what he is. Synanon does not manipulate, but it sets conditions, often very tough conditions, and these are defined by the necessities of Synanon's own survival and by the merely embryonic humanness of the newcomer to the club. Synanon, you could say, hates and is absolutely hostile to the weakness that leads to bondage to chemicals, and loves the man who fights for freedom from chemical control. So there is both ruthlessness and deep affection in the Synanon process.

These are generalizations which come naturally from a reading of Mr. Endore's book. Again and again, the author asks himself why he is so fascinated by what is happening at Synanon. Instead of answering, he dives into another chapter of the Synanon story. It would be ridiculous to try to summarize that story, or any portion of it, here. In the first place, there can be no "objective" account of Synanon. Synanon doesn't really exist except in terms of deep subjective involvement. All the rest is precarious

shell. You have to see and feel Synanon in these terms or investigation of it is a waste of time.

You could say that Guy Endore's book is a long (360-page) catalog of exciting and diverse forms of subjective involvement in behalf of human growth. A peculiar virtue of the book is its rejection of the "showcase" technique. While, obviously, the author is devoted to Synanon, an admirer of Chuck Dederich, and a man who, in spite of certain sensibilities, is practically a captive of his hunger to understand Synanon, you can't really call him a partisan of Synanon. The point is, no one can write about Synanon to any intelligible effect without identifying with the place. And to say that this author has been glamorized by Synanon would be nonsense. The roots of Synanon are in the heartstrings of human beings: how silly it would be to write about such a place without listening to it with your own heart.

You can't write about music without hearing it; you cannot speak of love without having loved; you can't know despair without suffering it, in one way or another—and none of these things can be done with a cool, scientific objectivity. What, then, must such a writer have, to prove to the reader that he is not on some kind of hero-worshiping binge? He must have honesty. He must have skill. He has to be able to report in the right symmetry and without fear. He should not care about persuading anyone of anything. He must reveal his subject, not aim it in any direction.

Somebody like Guy Endore had to write this book. An ex-drug addict is not likely to be able to write such a book. Few addicts are really that bright. They don't as a rule have orderly minds, although they sometimes have a vivid, sharpshooting intelligence and a biting humor (which this book illustrates again and again). As an experienced writer, Guy Endore moves at will to a distance from his subject which enables him to work in both the angriest and the would-be "objective" criticisms or attacks on Synanon. It is all there, from mindless imprecations to depth-psychology expertise, from expressions of hurt feelings to professional pontifications. There is nothing by Mr. Endore to refute these charges. They fall of their own weight.

Is Synanon then perfect? We don't really have any familiar canons for either conventional approval or criticism of Synanon. Synanon—and this book about it—serves up a slice of life. The thing that seems inescapable, regardless of whether you like some aspects of Synanon, and frown at others, is that a lot of people are living active, fruitful lives because of Synanon, people who would otherwise be dead or dying. That is the basic, existential qualifier of all comment. Just around the corner from the happy, constructive side of the Synanon story are the grim and often obscene realities these people have just barely escaped. An ugly past has left its scars. While most of the residents have been able to separate their emotions from their memory of this past, when someone refuses to understand what it means to have escaped from all that, they get excited and yell—they try to make him see what Synanon has done for them all. It is not a destructive excitement.

Synanon is a going concern in the business of saving lives, producing clean man-hours. Here are people who were once experts in self-destruction, and are now enterprising morale-factories for the common good. It is this *esprit de corps* which bubbles out of the new lives of former street-walkers, shop-lifters, pimps, burglars, and thieves, and creates an atmosphere that you can *feel* if you wait around at Synanon until its waves hit you. The non-addict who visits begins to wonder if his own respectability is worth anything at all, when people who have never had anything like it, but seem now to have something better, and more intense, because they had to fight to get it, can be so alive.

Synanon is filled with puzzles like this for the reader. Description of the encounters of these people with the corrective institutions of our society occupies a main portion of the book. The fact is that, by limited comparison with Synanon,

the conventional society is an almost total failure; the fact is that Synanon is doing what the conventional society has proved itself unable to do. In respect to drug addiction and crime, our corrective institutions do not work. Our rehabilitation programs do not work. The corrective institutions offer courses in the higher learning of recidivists. But Synanon works. It is a shelter, which limits the comparison, but it is also a place of bravery and recovery, which opens the comparison up. It is a bulwark of protection, but actual human muscle develops behind its walls. Its methods are in many ways the very opposite of what the corrective institutions of society practice and recommend.

Well, on paper these are only claims. And a person could go to Synanon, stay a while, then leave, and say that it did him no good and is bad for other people. Some have. But the facts that are recited in Guy Endore's *Synanon* are not the sort of facts that can be falsified by a clever writer. Mr. Endore is not especially clever. He is an observer of human nature—a novelist must be that—and he tells what he has observed.

Critics of Synanon have gone there, made snap judgments, and then blamed on Synanon the ancestral ills of the human race, failing to see that Synanon is, more than anything else, a living laboratory of people trying to reconstruct themselves, and about the most ingenious environment for doing this that has ever been devised—a piece of absolutely magnificent opportunism in design, which is continually changing. They fail to see this because they look at objects, not subjects. They take still pictures, not movies. They don't see the real action, or if they see a little of it, they don't stay long enough to see it in the round.

What Synanon makes you realize is that you are not really qualified to sit in quick judgment of a community that is really a going concern in our time. Hardly anybody is. We have no idea, in our society, of how to make peace. We don't know how to educate our young. We don't know how to establish the forms of racial justice. We don't know how to discourage dishonesty. We can't stop people from killing one another. A community is a place where these ills disappear almost entirely, not because you put them down, one after the other, with brilliant problem-solving techniques, but because you develop a social organism which leaves no room or nourishment for such activities. And when that condition exists, what you have going cannot possibly resemble the various bankruptcy proceedings the larger society is always involved in, to salvage the fragments left by its failures. And, worst of all, which makes the possibility of resemblance even more remote, we have professionalized our bankruptcy proceedings, because they seem to go on all the time; since we obviously can't stop them, we give them an authoritative style and bureaucratic finish, and pay the officials enough to look well and sound highly trained as they go about their scavenger duties.

What this Synanon book may do for its readers is to cause them to reflect on the human necessities of a going concern which has found a way—a way now involving over a thousand reconstructed human beings—to develop regenerative functions which at the same time relate to the existing society in productive and helpful ways. This is not isolated "treatment" of flawed personalities (an approach which often only deepens the characterological fissures), but is simply *surrounding* people with the functions and attitudes of health. In an upside-down culture like ours, actual health may not be easy to recognize. We don't see much of it, anywhere, and some people have forgotten what it's like. Yet it can be studied at Synanon, sometimes in wild exuberance and overflowing supply.

COMMENTARY
THE UNDERLYING SIMPLICITY

BOOKS like *How Children Learn* (see "Children") have a special appeal because of their simplicity—the problems of helping the young are not nearly so complicated as we make them out to be. It does, however, take driving intensity of purpose to extricate yourself from peripheral preoccupations in order to *reach* the simplicities of true education.

Actually, good examples of work with children may be far more plentiful than encouraging signs in higher education. Perhaps this is because child education is a less complicated and less controversial affair. Perhaps it is because specialists in child education are less "intellectual" in their approach to teaching—more manifestly people spontaneously attracted to little children and to involvement with their welfare and growth. At any rate, it often seems that child psychologists are able to tell explicitly what they find out about the humanness of the youngsters they study, with less need for argument and case-making. They make you wonder why the principles of helping children are not at once seen to be also the principles for helping adults. It seems evident, for example, that if adults would apply the principles of child education to international relationships, they would soon put an end to war.

Guy Endore's book on Synanon also gets down to basic simplicities. It shows how, at Synanon, a kind of bulldozer action sweeps away argument which distracts from the essentials of community life. The stress at Synanon on "gut-level" response is, after all, only a practical impatience with intellectual irrelevance and pretense. While there are doubtless higher forms of existential immediacy, the main business at Synanon is clearing away the debris of self-delusion, and the addict, characteristically, has been viciously exploiting his own body and its potentialities. For him, basic honesty may have to begin here.

Another kind of honesty emerges in the letters of the two young men quoted in "Children." The reader is not moved to argue or offer an "on the other hand" comment. These students did not sit down to compose a "critique" of the university, but tore a page out of their lives. What they are experiencing "is basically a diversion of energy and talent which might be better used in other areas." Obviously, the resulting "insufferable confusion" will require a bulldozer treatment corresponding to the one that works so well for Synanon.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
WRITING HOME

THIS Department gets its share of warm-hearted material about the work of teachers, but it also gets a sizeable amount of accurate and depressing descriptions of the disasters suffered by the young. It is difficult to mix the two sorts of reports. (Of course, this may not be desirable.) For example, before publishing his most recent book, *How Children Learn,* John Holt wrote the earlier *How Children Fail,* which has been widely recognized as a valuable and perceptive account of the mistakes made in child education. Obviously, we need both sorts of books and discussions. We need the critical material, if only to realize how badly we need the other kind, and to recognize the necessity for making examples of constructive and liberating teaching a lot easier to find and to point to.

It is also necessary to speak of the learning processes in which young adults are involved, in their own terms. Here, because the content is essentially intellectual, we find the discussion largely couched in abstractions. And as for what ought to be, instead of what is, in higher education—such questions are usually so complicated that ordinary people are either over-awed by the erudition or disgusted by the tenuous abstraction of discussion. In this case notice of the radical reform implicit in something Paul Goodman said recently helps to get back our confidence:

> By and large, it is not in the adolescent years but in later years that, in all walks of life, there is need for academic withdrawal, periods of study and reflection, synoptic review of the texts. The Greeks understood this and regarded most of our present college curricula as appropriate only for those over the age of thirty and thirty-five.

It may be that a "direct" approach to the higher learning is not the way to improve it at all; that the need is to find out how to live better lives, and then let learning mold itself according to new patterns of being.

Meanwhile, we have some interesting extracts from letters to a mother from her two sons—both away in college. One is a graduate student, the other in his third year, and their letters by coincidence reached her at almost the same time. The graduate student (in philosophy) wrote:

> My classes leave much to be desired. However, I am reconciled to a system in which the stultifying elements predominate. My academic effort is completed in a perfunctory manner, somewhat in the nature of an action which is superfluous since it is basically a diversion of energy and talent which might be used better in other areas. Evidently the most notable fruit of a "higher" education, as indeed with the whole of the present school curriculum, is the intellectual inertia which it perpetuates. The University is no longer the seat of scholarship and "disinterested pursuit of knowledge"; there is, of course, a place for technological and industrial research, both in the university and in special research labs of the corporate system. But scholarship, where it occurs, is limited and, more often than not, the mere perpetuation or enhancement of esoteric bodies of knowledge, explication of which has the salutary effect of furthering the individual's position in the hierarchy of the profession. I almost fear a professorship as I do death; the former signifies the achievement of intellectual puerility—just as one becomes childish in a physiological sense, so the process occurs also in the context of academia.

The other son writes from a college abroad:

> All in all I would say that this has been a good year. I never feel that I have learned as much as I would like to, or even should have, but I have found ideas enough to stimulate my constantly flagging inspiration. I begin to wish often that I had lived in the Renaissance. Learning today is too compartmentalized and of course it has to be because our educational system is a preparation rather than an end in itself. And unfortunately, if you talk about learning as an end in itself, people accuse you of being too intellectual or "ivory towerish" or whatever, whereas in fact all one means is that learning should be an integral part of living. . . . universities suffer from the insufferable confusion which substitutes a moulding process for an educating process . . . in the end every solution is the same, *viz.,* totalitarian.

The mother, naturally, found these letters sad—or rather, they made her sad. She wonders whether her sons and the sons of other mothers must now reject "a society which in a sense seems to be the logical end of democracy." She adds:

> We have failed our children, on the one hand; but perhaps, on the other, we have in some strange way made them aware of the pitfalls of the excessive materialism our age has imposed, and they are wary. I don't know.

It is conceivable, at least, that these young men will be able to find institutions where they will be subject to less smothering and confinement, and be able to teach; maybe they will do good teaching, wherever they go.

But this is thinking about the future in terms of the status quo—in terms of obstacles, barriers, delusions, and frustrations—and how ingenious people may sometimes manage to cope and live a constructive life in spite of all that is wrong. Undoubtedly, this is the future for a great many young men and women of the present, who, one way or another, will learn to work fairly well in existing institutions by refusing to take them seriously—by using the facilities and denying intellectual sovereignty to the great rock piles which keep out the weather. But is there no alternative to this merely guerrilla sort of freedom that may be devised by resourceful academics, to save their own souls?

There is certainly no immediate or conventional alternative. In the present, alternatives exist mainly in the imagination. In order to create a social scene where genuine education can take place, without all these booby traps and strategic defeats, it will probably be necessary for daring and self-reliant people in education to make a clear and final separation in their own minds between learning and teaching, and *making a living.* Such people will do some kind of work to support themselves, and devote their free time—we really have a great deal of it, thanks to the labor movement and technology—to uncompromised thinking and teaching. Men who decide to do something like this will purify their lives and develop an independent commitment which nobody can interfere with because they will never offer it for sale—they will only *give* it away. This is about all you can do with the little bit of truth a man discovers in his life, anyway. Truth has never been a popular item in the market places of our civilization.

This is probably the only reform in higher education that has even the slightest hope of doing well.

FRONTIERS

The Misuse of Symbols

GERALD SYKES is a skillful diagnostician of our time who achieved some fame with his book, *The Hidden Remnant* (Harper, 1962). His work seems a collection of critical insights framed by concrete situations which show what is wrong simply by exposing pretense and self-deception. He knows, that is, how to submit samples of common ills in a way that makes the ills self-evident. He also knows something about how good men behave, or ought to behave, and he is able to identify the influences which prevent many of us from behaving in this way.

So you read Mr. Sykes much as you might take a walk in new and interesting country—expecting to come upon sights (insights) you haven't encountered before. It doesn't seem to matter much what Mr. Sykes writes about—whatever it is, it serves his purposes. His latest book, *The Cool Millennium* (Prentice-Hall, 1967, $5.95), is ostensibly about technology and what it is doing to us. Actually, no book of criticism that neglects this subject can attract much attention; if a writer wants to be heard, he has at least to seem to write about the problems created by technology. So Mr. Sykes writes about technology, or seems to; but what he really does is discuss the psychology of belief, and how men react when a system of supposed salvation begins to show signs of breaking down. *The Cool Millennium*, then, is an analysis of the psychology of belief which gets its dramatic effect through a long succession of little case anecdotes.

What does "cool" mean for Mr. Sykes? The word describes the defensive attitude people adopt to hide their growing fears that the familiar methods of getting along and of life-adjustment will not work any more. Coolness is sophisticated withdrawal. It is sometimes the posture of one who hopes that he will be recognized as an inside dopster who is going to make it, no matter what; but it also has better meanings.

Mr. Sykes starts out:

> Man rushes first to be saved *by* technology, and then to be saved *from* it. We Americans are front-runners in both races. The United States led the world away from small wheatfields and toward big ones, away from outhouses and toward toilets, away from the virgin forest and toward the pulp mill, away from scarcity and toward abundance, away from few loaves of bread that were nutritious and toward many loaves of bread that are not, away from the peasant and toward the factory worker, away from the child of nature and toward the quiz kid. Now a few Americans want to go, not in the other direction, but toward an intelligent use of their new advantages that permits them to find abundance in their personal lives, lives that have not been processed out of genuineness or fulfillment. It seems like a reasonable wish. Actually, it is a presumptuous wish, which may never be granted, even to the most intelligent. The snags on the zipper of progress are not so easily unsnarled.

It is soon apparent that Mr. Sykes is not really taking on the evils of technology except as props and scenery. He is writing about the problem of what Plato called "double ignorance," or the delusion that one knows when he does not. Double ignorance is hard to abolish because doing so requires an independent critical view of what "everybody" thinks. Maintaining this view is neither comfortable nor profitable. It is also extremely difficult. Mr. Sykes' book is the calm pursuit of independent criticism. He is not ardent. He calls no one to any colors. He doesn't espouse a great cause, but by quotation he holds a mirror up to the ideas of some men who do. He edges these men on stage without preface or announcement, apparently hoping that the reader will take the hint.

That the book is concerned with the psychology of belief becomes evident when the author shows that the wonderful machines of technology have taken the bind out of production problems and put it in marketing. This means the clever manipulation of symbols to move goods, condition attitudes, and to establish "faith." As Mr. Sykes says:

> Merchandising is of far greater value to the economy than manufacture, which can be turned over to robots or semi-robots. Craftsmanship has become vestigial.
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> The gifted American, then, must learn how to merchandise his talents. His talents must be bought, or else he will "starve"—that is, get enough to eat perhaps but share none of the prestige or excitement of the new society. Today we do not live Platonically off slave labor, or Benedictinely on a feudal farm or Jeffersonianly next door to wilderness; we live "Madisonianly" by the sale of our wits. And our wits must be packaged attractively even in universities—or they go unnoticed. Our wits express themselves in symbols, but the symbols must seem real if anyone is to pay real dollars for them. If this means that symbols must be aimed at customers, at the worst and weakest in customers so that a steady stream of real dollars may be obtained (and it does mean just this, with mathematical precision), we begin to understand an inherent ethical catch in the new technical order, its obligation to rely on the *misuse of symbols*.
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> This catch is most obvious in politics and commerce, but it also exists in art and science. In academic life it usually takes discreet forms: excessive specialization, excessive avoidance of value-judgments, and similar devices of shrewd hedging and unnoticed secession from the concerns of other men. These evasions of responsibility become inevitable as soon as morality becomes social, not personal. In a highly technicized society, morality becomes more and more social and less and less personal. It is easier to fool society than one's inner voice, so long as that anachronism remains audible.

The plain fact is that the technological theory and system of salvation is now a vast rationalization for ignoring the inner voice, for excusing whatever we think it is necessary to do to keep the system going. *The Cool Millennium* is a thorough questioning and expose of that rationalization, at points where it is obviously distorting the psyches and eroding the responsibilities of individual human beings. Well, Mr. Sykes doesn't propose solutions, but he has some wonderful quotations from Sartre and Lewis Mumford—on which he solicits the comments of a computer. The computer's replies are so mechanistically plausible that the reader sees how radically free our minds must become if we are even to *imagine* what the fundamental formations of a better way of life would be like. *The Cool Millennium*, will probably compel its readers to unload a few more of the illusions which protect them from desperation. Another kind of "cool"—the Socratic variety—might help them to survive this.