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The Aims of Education

By BRYAN W. MONAHAN.

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V. EDUCATION

We have seen that evolution in the man-line has been towards lack of adaptation of the individual to his environment towards the replacement of organisation of the non-vegetative functions by a condition of lability. This event is subserved by the genetic mechanism, which as a mechanism, is irrelevant to the present enquiry. Organisation of the non-vegetative functions, highly developed in some animals, is virtually absent in the human infant. The infant possesses little more than a potential for development. This potential is manifested in several vague directions—types of behaviour which we recognise as the instincts; but within and beyond the frame-work of these the development of the individual is free to proceed to extraordinary differentiation.

At birth the infant meets problems posed by its environment. Its capacity to deal with these is, practically speaking, nil; it is completely dependent on outside assistance. Knowledge of the answers to the problems is not inborn, as it is to varying degrees in other animals. In so far as standard solutions are pragmatically satisfactory, and correspondingly invariable, they are passed from parent to off-spring not through the genetic mechanism, but by virtue of lability. Thus so far from inheriting certain acquired abilities, we have lost some possessed by other animals. This change of mechanism clearly allows "variation" to become effective infinitely more rapidly than genetic variation, whether the latter is (as is by no means proved) or is not "spontaneous" and haphazard.

Once the full significance of lability is grasped, it can be seen how immensely significant the cultural environment must be. Certain answers to problems are so standardised as to be equivalent to inborn or genetic, answers; nevertheless they are passed from one generation to the next entirely through the cultural inheritance, and unquestioned and unrecognised for what they are. What has to be realised is that the individual is a product of these answers (which might almost be described as "cultural genes." I shall, however, refer to all these "factors" as cultural elements), in practically the same sense as he is a product of his genes. He is, in fact, the resultant of both.

It is quite impossible to know how the individual would develop if he were fully isolated at birth from the cultural tradition, for the simple reason that he would not survive. Any individual, therefore, available for observation must embody some cultural elements. His environment as he first sees and hears it, is a product and portion of the cultural tradition. Any element of this tradition is highly complex,

as shown by Tudor Jones (*Fig Tree*, September, 1936). Now although, and especially in a given Society, the initial cultural elements may be very standardised, the infant is at birth extremely labile, so that almost imperceptible differences will be much more significant to the infant than they would appear to be to the adult observer. This is as if cultural elements were showing "mutations." These elements enter into the structure of the developing personality, and consequently play their part in governing the interaction of the personality with its environment. This interaction itself becomes part of the environment, so that the initial effect is magnified. For example, if an infant is made angry, and reacts violently against its environment, it suffers the reaction of the environment, and undergoes some particular experience. The effect of this experience, however, may vary with its relation to previous development. If this line of thought be pursued, it becomes evident that environment is extraordinarily subtle and variable, even when to the observer it appears to be fully standardised. The "same home" provides an infinity of different environments for its children. This concept can be analysed and developed at great length.

It is evident that through this mechanism the child acquires many and varied differences; these in turn affect all subsequent acquisitions of cultural differences, though clearly to varying degrees. They affect the *direction* of subsequent development, and this direction may appear as an aptitude. An "aptitude" of this derivation is clearly not genetically transmissible.

This part of the discussion may be summarised and symbolised in the statement that mental development consists of the development of mental "organisation," and that such development is predominantly and increasingly cultural, and not genetic; its physical basis is lability, which has emerged from the genetic mechanism. This conception enables us to define the essential objective of education. We may say that the problem of education is the problem of ensuring the provision of the cultural material to enable the purpose embodied in the individual to build mental structure by serial decisions of acceptance and rejection.

The subjective aspect of a cultural element is, in the broad sense, a belief. This belief may, of course, be true or false. Beliefs differentiate men as effectively on the mental plane as genetic differences on the physical differentiate animals into species. Certain beliefs divide men into immiscible groups. There is, I believe, a true speciation of human beings which has developed away from the genetic mechanism. Its aim is differentiation; there is no significance in the emergence of its mechanism (lability) if differentiation does not occur.

It is obvious that anything in the nature of standardised

(Continued on page 4.)

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From Week to Week

Transition to Totalitarianism

Ten years have passed since the following appeared in The Australian Social Crediter, on July 6, 1946.

Except partially in the economic sphere, we have never had a system which could properly be called democracy. Democracy literally means government by the people; but the people is a collectivity, and there is no real sense in which a collectivity can exercise self-discrimination as can the individual. The actions of the whole of society may be determined on behalf of society by individuals specially authorised, in matters affecting society as a whole; thus a universal decision to go to war as a special case, or a universal agreement against murder as a general case, represent collective actions for which individual exponents are required. But the matters about which all individuals are agreed are extremely few; collective action is practically never the outcome of universal self-determination, and when it is not, individuals must clearly be determined against their will.

Any permanent, or semi-permanent, government therefore involves the determination of the many by the few, and what we incorrectly call democracy actually consists of some mechanism by which the many can limit the determination exercised by the few. The British Parliamentary and judicial systems at their best probably represented the greatest development of this power of limitation. The whole idea was to limit the power of the Executive. It was not government by the people; it was restraint of government. The idea that Parliament itself is a governing institution is a corruption of the real idea, and has led to the corruption of Parliament. And the idea of "government by the people" is leading to the destruction of liberty, through the elevation of the idea of government, at the expense of the idea of restraint.

In 1929 Lord Hewart drew public attention to the fact that a self-conscious group was working to remove the restraint of Parliament on the Executive. Its great method was to induce Parliament to pass Acts which empowered "the Minister" to make Regulations having the force of the Act itself—"as if enacted in this Act" is a form of words in use—and, further, to place decisions made by "the Minister" beyond the jurisdiction of the Courts.

Lord Hewart's book (*The New Despotism*) succeeded in bringing this process under scrutiny. There ensued a period of crisis for the sponsors. But they successfully argued that

under modern complex conditions, this delegated legislation was absolutely vital, and they got away with nothing worse than the creation of a Select Committee of the House of Commons whose duty it is to examine all Regulations, and call the attention of the House to any which it considers should be further considered; and the House has the power to disallow such Regulations, provided it does so within forty days, as a rule.

This compromise seemed to meet the danger; in fact it made it graver. For a process that had been going on quietly and almost in secret, had now received a sort of Parliamentary approval, and consequently a great impetus. And all that was required to defeat the safeguard was such a volume of Regulations, which rapidly ensued, as would make any task of proper examination impossibly onerous. Dr. C. K. Allen, in an article in *The Sunday Times* of June 2, 1946, relates that "Not long ago the Committee confessed that it was utterly overwhelmed by its task. One Member complained that the agenda for a single meeting weighed 11b 7oz. At another session sixty-seven Orders, many of them technical and complicated, had to be swallowed at a draught. It is not humanly possible for the Legislature, which is supposed to be responsible to the electorate for this kind of government, to keep abreast of what is being done in its name. Every new Act places a bewildering medley of powers in the hands of Ministers."

But the powers are really placed in the hands of bureaucrats. The bureaucracy itself forms a highly, and increasingly, centralised government, concealed behind the increasingly empty Parliamentary forms. Some time ago we must have reached the point where the bureaucracy could completely dispense with Parliament—as, no doubt, it soon would, if a further attempt were made by the green-grocer and engine-driver M.P.s to interfere with the plans of the "experts"—the bureaucrats trained at Sir Ernest Cassel's expense "to run the future Socialist State."

Thus at the present time we are governed on totalitarian lines by a bureaucratic dictatorship. The sole advantage we have over frankly totalitarian countries is in the possession of an instrument—Parliament—which *could* be used to assert the sovereignty of the people over the Executive. That is the issue, for nothing else is possible until it is done. We shall certainly go in one of two directions: either the bureaucracy will abolish the potential threat of Parliament, replacing it with something like the Soviet "Parliament"; or public opinion will force the dictatorship to disgorge the powers it has arrogated, which is an essential preliminary to any sort of reconstruction.

Any new Government—whether Liberal, or Country Party or Social Credit—which imagines it is going to "do better" than the present party in power is likely to be a menace; for it would have the same false impression of its function, as well as the inexperience which would make it the more malleable in the hands of the experienced bureaucracy.

The position has deteriorated much further in Great Britain than in Australia. As Dr. Allen observes, "the war has virtually killed the immemorial doctrine of *ultra vires* and the peace merely embalms the corpse." But here the doctrine of *ultra vires* is bound up with the integrity of our written Constitution. It is the great barrier to what Emeritus Professor Roscoe Pound calls "administrative absolutism."

Dr. Allen refers to Professor Pound as the foremost jurist of America, a "lifelong exponent of sociological jurisprudence and of 'social control' through 'social engineering,'" who yet now utters the most solemn warning against the havoc which is being wrought in American law and life by just this process.

There is a world front on totalitarianism; in the Australian sector lies as a major objective the Constitution. The coming Referendum presents an opportunity to bring its importance to public recognition, and expose the forces working for its overthrow.

Responsibility—"The Light Horse"

The two letters which follow are from a series of letters written by Mr. Corboy. The first written in 1955 was published. The second written a year later was not. the Municipal Hotel project was abandoned.

3 Warburton Street,
MATRAVILLE,
16th March, 1955.

The Editor,
"The Messenger,"
MAROUBRA JUNCTION.

Dear Sir,

The Messenger of 10/3/1955 records that at a recent meeting of the Randwick Council it was decided to engage an independent firm of accountants to report on the financial soundness of the proposed Community Hotel. We are given to understand that, should this firm report favourably on the proposal, at least one alderman will withdraw his opposition.

The dependency on the advice of an outside body seems to overlook entirely the principle which is at stake in this issue.

As I see it the position is this: some (a majority) of councillors, and some (probably a minority) of ratepayers favour the idea of a community hotel, while other councillors and other ratepayers, for a variety of reasons, strongly object to its establishment. What is required therefore is a mechanism which will ensure that the aldermen and ratepayers wanting a community hotel take full financial responsibility for the success or failure of the venture.

Freedom and responsibility are complementary. Those who wish to set up a community hotel should by all means be free to go ahead with their experiment provided they are willing to back their judgment. At the same time those opposing the scheme should have the freedom to contract out.

When individuals take responsibility for their actions we may have a stable society and local government seems an appropriate sphere in which to make a beginning.

Yours,
ALAN CORBOY.

3 Warburton Street.

MATRAVILLE,

31st March, 1956.

The Editor,

"The Messenger,"

MAROUBRA JUNCTION.

Dear Sir,

The report in *The Messenger*, 22nd March, of the meeting of the Randwick Council at which it was decided to abandon the Municipal Hotel project was very interesting. Especially interesting was the plaint of one councillor that his electors were wrathful with him because he preferred to support his own policy rather than theirs. One can, of course, pass over the irrational and emotional statements to the effect that unless we drink council beer we cannot function as a separate municipality and must therefore be absorbed by the City of Sydney. A more plausible excuse must be advanced for taking from us control of our own affairs.

Two councillors, however, said they fought for a principle.

I too am concerned with principles, and the ones germane to this matter are the principles of freedom and responsibility.

To be free a man should be able to decide, without penalty, whether he will or will not support any particular project. Having made his decision, he then accepts responsibility for the result, good or ill, which flows from his action.

No layman is wise enough to speak with authority, but it seems likely that man will best be in harmony with nature in a free and responsible community.

To this end, while expressing no opinion as to the merits or otherwise of the hotel scheme, I ask, should the matter again come before the council, that the councillors bear in mind the principles I have outlined. They may then be able to devise a method which will allow those in favour of a hotel to accept responsibility thereof. At the same time, and by the same means, ensure that those objecting are not involved in a project which may be distasteful to them.

Yours,
ALAN CORBOY.

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THE AIMS OF EDUCATION—(Continued from page 1). education is in flat contradiction to the direction of evolution. The infant possesses at birth a potential for development which is gradually exhausted, and a potential for differentiation which is gradually modified as the result of the differentiation already progressively achieved. Certain biases to the direction of differentiation are given willy-nilly from the moment of birth by the immediate comprehensive environment, and the cultural material of the environment is always a factor throughout life. But purpose emerges in the child, and accepts or rejects the cultural elements available so far as it can discriminate them.

The only overriding policy of education which is consistent with the observable trend of evolution is first to aim at the conscious emancipation of purpose, and second to aim at the emergence of conscious understanding. The technique of this policy is to aim at the reduction of any aim through consciousness to automaticity, so that each aim becomes a mechanism to be transcended in its turn by purpose. Thus the alphabet is learnt for the sake of words; words for the symbolisation of concept; concept for understanding.

The converse policy is that of canalising the individual's development potential in accordance with a pre-arranged pattern—in accordance with some other individual's purpose—or even with some disembodied purpose, a collective purpose such as has already been achieved to a high degree of perfection particularly in the insect world, and there by the genetic mechanism. I repeat, lability has no significance except as a mechanism to permit a high degree of differentiation. The world of living things consists almost entirely of examples of purpose confined by the mechanisms it has devised. Man is the exception. The collectivist idea really is a barrier to progress in just the same sense as the ventral development of a nervous cord proved to be at the epoch when the decision was made. Human progress does not lie in the physical sphere, although no doubt development may there be looked for. Our progress lies in the third dimension of mind in the continuous supercession of achieved mechanisms; possibly, conceivably, in other dimensions still. The fundamental law of the physical world is the law of entropy; the first achievement of purpose was to reverse it. That was the earliest organic problem. The mechanism devised was subordinated, and made to subserve function. But then function was subordinated to integration, and integration in turn to investigation, investigation to knowledge, and knowledge to understanding. Any one of these stages could be pursued as an end in itself, could undergo enormous elaboration; but elaboration or expansion is not progress. Extrapolation suggests that the next step for us is automatic understanding, the step to which is the recognition of the significance of our own evolution, and the conscious discrimination of its present end-point. Thus education must be applied to the emancipation of purpose. This will probably be achieved by such a cultivation of understanding as will lead to the child's acquiring early the ability to educate itself.

It will probably be realised that this is a problem of dimensions; cultural elements may be one, two, or three dimensional; probably, ultimately, more. But I do not wish to pursue this aspect here.

The starting point of education is the child's curiosity, which is the expression of its potential for development and

differentiation on the mental plane. The teacher's part is not to canalise, but to assist, by the provision of cultural material as requested, with developing insight, by the child. It is a striking characteristic of a child, from infancy onwards, who is not interfered with, that it has a pronounced continuity of development, combined with a tremendous capacity for concentration. These characteristics are greatly modified in most adults. We find them disintegrated in most of their aspects. This is the result of interference and distraction, from infancy onwards; it can be verified by simple observation in almost any home.

The basis of educational policy can only lie, I believe, in understanding in that ultimate sense previously discussed, for here we are at the growing point of our true progress, which is affected as never before by our understanding of its direction. A new and genuine emancipation lies ahead, awaiting our recognition of its possibility.

(Concluded)

Extracts from Francis Bacon's "Novum Organum"

Man, being the servant and interpreter of Nature, can do and understand so much and so much only as he has observed in fact or in thought of the course of nature: beyond this he neither knows anything nor can do anything.

Neither the naked hand nor the understanding left to itself can effect much. It is by instruments and helps that the work is done, which are as much wanted for the understanding as for the hand. And as the instruments of the hand either give motion or guide it, so the instruments of the mind supply either suggestion for the understanding or cautions.

Human knowledge and human power meet in one; for where the cause is not known, the effect cannot be produced. Nature to be commanded must be obeyed.

The Idols and false notions which are now in possession of the human understanding, and have taken deep root therein, not only so beset men's minds that truth can hardly find entrance, but even after entrance obtained, they will again in the very instauration[*] of the sciences meet and trouble us, unless men, being forewarned of the danger, fortify themselves as far as may be against their assaults.

There are four classes of Idols which beset men's minds. To these, for distinction's sake I have assigned names—calling the first class *Idols of the Tribe*; the second *Idols of the Cave*; the third *Idols of the Market Place*; the fourth *Idols of the Theatre*.

There are idols which have immigrated into men's minds from the various dogmas of philosophies, and also, from wrong laws of demonstration. These I call, Idols of the Theatre; because in my judgment all the received systems are but so many stage-plays, representing worlds of their own creation after an unreal and scenic fashion.

*Instauration: restoration, renewal.