

SATURDAY REVIEW: OUTLOOKS

Editorial: Cop-out Realism

ON ALL SIDES, one sees evidence today of cop-out realism — ostensible efforts to be sensible in dealing with things as they are but that turn out to be a shucking of responsibility.

Example: Until fairly recently, off-track betting was illegal in New York State. Gambling on horses was regarded as a disguised form of stealing, run by professional gamblers who preyed upon people who could least afford to lose. Also outlawed was the numbers game, in which people could bet small amounts of money on numbers drawn from the outcome of the day's horse races.

Attempts by government to drive out the gambling syndicates had only indifferent results. Finally, state officials decided that, since people were going to throw their money away despite anything the law might do to protect them, the state ought to take over off-track betting and the numbers racket.

It is now possible to assess the effect of that legalization. The first thing that is obvious is that New York State itself has become a predator in a way that the Mafia could never hope to match. What was intended as a plan to control gambling has become a high-powered device to promote it. The people who can least afford to take chances with their money are not only not dissuaded from gambling but are actually being cajoled into it by the state. Millions of dollars are being spent by New York State on lavish advertising on television, on radio, in buses, and on billboards. At least the Mafia was never able publicly to glorify and extol gambling with taxpayer money. And the number of poor people who were hurt by gambling under the Mafia is minuscule compared to the number who now lose money on horses with the urgent blessings of New York State.

A second example of cop-out realism is the way some communities are dealing with cigarette-smoking by teenagers and pre-teenagers. Special rooms are now being set aside for students who want to smoke. No age restrictions are set; freshmen have the same lighting-up privileges as seniors.

The thinking behind the new school policy is similar to the "realism" behind New York's decision to legalize off-track betting and the numbers game. It is felt that since the youngsters are

going to smoke anyway, the school might just as well make it possible for them to do it in the open rather than feel compelled to do it furtively in back corridors and washrooms.

Parents and teachers may pride themselves on their "realism" in such approaches. What they are actually doing is finding a convenient rationalization for failing to uphold their responsibility. The effect of their supposedly "realistic" policy is to convert a ban into a benediction. By sanctioning that which they deplore, they become part of the problem they had the obligation to meet. What they regard as common sense turns out to be capitulation.

Pursuing the same reasoning, why not set aside a corner for a bar where students can buy alcoholic beverages? After all, teenage drinking is a national problem, and it is far better to have the youngsters drink out in the open than to have them feel guilty about stealing drinks from the cupboard at home or contriving to snatch their liquor outside the home. Moreover, surveillance can be exercised. Just as most public bars will not serve liquor to people who are hopelessly drunk, so the school bartender could withhold alcohol from students who can hardly stand on their feet.

It is not far-fetched to extend the same "reasoning" to marijuana. If the youngsters are going to be able to put their hands on the stuff anyway, why shouldn't they be able to buy it legally and smoke it openly, perhaps in the same schoolroom that has been converted into a smoking den?

We are not reducing the argument to an absurdity; we are asking that parents and teachers face up to the implications of what they are doing.

The school has no right to jettison standards just because of difficulties in enforcing them. The school's proper response is not to abdicate but to extend its efforts in other directions. It ought to require regular lung examinations for its youngsters. It ought to schedule regular sessions with parents and youngsters at which reports on these examinations can be considered. It ought to bring in cancer researchers who can run films for students showing the difference between the brackish, pulpy lungs caused by cigarette smoking and the smooth pink

tissue of healthy lungs. The schools should schedule visits to hospital wards for lung cancer patients. In short, educators should take the U.S. Surgeon-General's report on cigarettes seriously.

In all the discussion and debate over cigarette smoking by children, one important fact is generally overlooked. That fact is that a great many children *do not* smoke. The school cannot ignore its obligation to these youngsters just because it cannot persuade the others not to smoke. It must not give the non-smokers the impression that their needs are secondary or that the school has placed a seal of approval on a practice that is condemning millions of human beings to a fatal disease.

Still another example of cop-out realism is the policy of many colleges and universities of providing common dormitories and common washrooms for both sexes. The general idea seems to be that it is unrealistic to expect young people not to sleep together. Besides, it is probably reasoned, if people are old enough to vote they are old enough to superintend their own sex habits. So, the thinking goes, the school might just as well allow them to share the same sleeping and toilet facilities.

The trouble with such policies is that they put the school in the position of lending itself to the breakdown of that which is most important in healthy relations between the sexes—a respect for privacy and dignity. No one ever need feel ashamed of the human body. But that doesn't mean that the human body is to be displayed or handled like a slab of raw meat. Sex is one of the higher manifestations of human sensitivity and response, not an impersonal sport devoid of genuine feeling. The divorce courts are filled to overflowing with cases in which casual, mechanistic attitudes toward sex have figured in marital collapses. For the school to foster that casualness is for it to become an agent of de-sensitization in a monstrous default.

The function of standards is not to serve as the basis for mindless repressive measures but to give emphasis to the realities of human experience. Such experience helps to identify the causes of unnecessary pain and disintegration. Any society that ignores the lessons of that experience may be in a bad way.

—N.C.

LIGHT REFRACTIONS

In Conclusion

by Thomas H. Middleton

THIS IS my third and, I hope, last column in defense of what are referred to these days as "gay rights."

In recent weeks, several cities have repealed statutes that gave homosexuals equal rights under the law; Anita Bryant and her husband have announced that they plan to spend much of the summer trying to convert homosexuals to heterosexuality; and in my last column, I quoted a man who had written to me, saying, among other things, that "making homosexuality respectable will only cause this contagious disorder to spread and infect otherwise well-adjusted and innocent people."

It seems to me that all of this anti-homosexual activity is rooted in misunderstanding.

No one knows what causes homosexuality. It may be genetic or it may be rooted in some undiscoverable childhood influence. It should be obvious, however, that heterosexuality is the norm and that homosexuality is the normal drive for only a small minority. It's equally clear that this small minority has never had a particularly easy time of it. I should think it reasonable to say that only the tiniest fraction of the world's homosexual minority actually made a conscious decision to be homosexual.

In *Crimes Without Victims* (1965), Edwin M. Schur says, "There is definitely no sure and simple cure for homosexuality, and the dominant view is that in most cases therapy can at best only make the patient a better adjusted homosexual."

Recently, I had a telephone conversation with Peter Judge, a local spokesman for the rights of homosexuals. One of the things he said was, "No one ever filled out an application to be homosexual." That, it seems to me, is an important point. He also described something I'd never given much thought to—what it's like for a youngster as he comes to know that his sexual orientation is different from that of most of his contemporaries. The boys ask the girls to dance; they date; they pair off naturally, experiencing varying degrees of affection and tentative sexuality. It is at this time that the homosexual boy (let's call him Bill) begins to feel there is something wrong with himself. Bill's attraction is not toward

girls but toward boys. He finds this disturbing, but there is nothing he can do about it. He is ashamed to tell anyone—surely not his parents. He looks among his group of friends, hoping to find someone who will not only understand but perhaps share his feelings. If he finds someone to whom he thinks he can explain these troubling emotions and he lets himself be known, he runs the very high risk that he might have misread his friend. If he has, it is virtually certain that his friend will spread the word that Bill is a queer. From that time on, Bill's adolescent life will be hell, and if there are other homosexual boys in his class—as there almost certainly would be—they would probably be too frightened even to speak to Bill lest they be unmasked.

All things considered, I can't understand why so many of us seem to think that heterosexual, "well-adjusted and innocent people" would find life as a homosexual in any way seductively attractive. The greatest fear among those

who favor antihomosexual laws seems to be that homosexual teachers will influence their students, persuading them to join the ranks of homosexuals. But, as Judge said, "No one ever filled out an application to be homosexual." There is no question that there have always been teachers, some superb, some dreadful, who've been homosexual. There surely must have been some few who have tried unconscionable intimacies with their charges, but that is at least equally true of heterosexual teachers. In any case, I think the teacher who advocates a sex life—be it hetero- or homosexual—to a group of schoolchildren should be fired outright. But I hope the day will soon come when homosexuals are accepted as neither wrong nor criminal, are no longer fired, harassed, beaten, or imprisoned simply for being homosexual—in short, when we are mature enough to rate one another on our social and professional performances and not on our sexual preferences. ●

