

SOME CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF FREEDOM IN EDUCATION¹

IT is characteristic of our present incoherence that at a time when so much stress is being laid on the necessary submission of the individual to the needs of the social order (as those needs are interpreted in relationship to specifically material ends), an increasingly influential though not novel aspect of current educational theory should be based on an uncritical assertion of the individual will. What will be endangered by this, one suspects, is not so much the immediate economic need of society—the planners will see to that, and indeed, the necessity for social co-operation, variously interpreted, provides the binding force admitted—as standards both of intellectual and emotional life, necessary preconditions to maturity. In passing, it may be said that the inability to conceive any restriction on the individual beyond what a hope of purely material prosperity would demand is symptomatic of an age which accepts planning and rejects more transcendental values at the behest of a shallow pragmatism. The particular aspect of the perennial conflict between freedom and order I wish to examine in connection with current educational ideas, related as it obviously is to a change in the balance of political authority and the growing intellectual impoverishment of our political and social life, provides further evidence of our deterioration. I have tried to show that ‘order’ as Professor Mannheim conceives it is mechanically and inadequately related to the needs of human beings; I hope to show that some of the forces making for freedom and self-expression are similarly tendentious. For of both it is relevant to ask ‘within what limits?’ And in both cases the answer seems to me unsatisfactory and culturally dangerous.

At first sight the current agitation about education would appear reassuring; there would seem to be, as apologists would assert, a refreshing desire to experiment, to try new wine and to discard old bottles. But even the most strenuous enthusiast for the new way cannot, if he pauses to think, find the potter completely reassuring. Change is no end in itself; it normally betokens a lack of being—sound and fury have a habit of signifying nothing.

¹This essay is to be regarded as complementary to the article on *The Cultural Implications of Planning and Popularization* that appeared in *Scrutiny*, Spring 1947. Nevertheless it forms, of course, an entity in itself.

The emphasis on experiment, one comes to suspect, conceals a basic uncertainty (a view reinforced by current emphasis on method), an unconscious attempt to cover insufficiency by surface agitation.² Just as disconcerting are the implicit, sometimes explicit, claims made for education; it has come to be regarded as a panacea for our ills. It reflects further that process, before referred to, by which responsibility is being shifted. It is always the next generation that is to pull the chestnuts out of the fire ('we look to youth . . .', words in the mouth of every prating politician); all that is needed is the necessary educational opportunity. This emphasis on education is related to the stressing of youth and the general adoption of the standards of youth—other disquieting symptoms. Only a civilization in decline, wishing to surrender that which constitutes civilization, could wish to avoid its responsibilities by projecting its hopes on to a future generation—jam tomorrow, as it were. Such a projection provides a further insight into the nature of the secular Eden that exists, always just beyond the capacity to attain.

Indeed, this reverence for youth and the characteristics of youth, which are, of course, emotional rather than rational, deserves more careful analysis than it has received.³ Part of its attraction lies in the fact that it is easier to see, and therefore evade, the difficulties of rational behaviour than it is to realize even the need for standards of emotional behaviour. Feeling, to the immature mind, demands merely the exuberance of excess, as it did to the young Keats, for instance. Then other ideas are involved in the cult of youth. The decline in the belief in original sin and the corresponding affirmation of the natural goodness of man—all faults are the responsibility of 'the prison house'—both help to form it. A turning against the discipline inherent in full adult social living has, of course, been related to the rise to power of different social classes; and in the nineteenth century even some of the sophisticated reacted against society because of the admitted barbarities of the social scene. Many other causes could be discovered; but behind all immediate ones could be revealed a whole tradition, based partly on immemorial pastoral convention and partly on a sentimentalizing of the Christian concern for the sanctity of the weak and lowly, features of our emotional life which have implied a constant background of criticism to the hard-won values of 'civilized' existence. In Shakespeare's day, nurture triumphed over nature, court over country as, for example, *The Tempest*

²The whole uncertainty springs ultimately from an inability to assess what constitutes an educated man; and that is in itself related to the uncertainty about the nature of man due to the abandonment of the rationalistic solution to the problem, and the inability to construct a widely accepted and coherent anthropological substitute (cf. Ernst Cassirer: *An Essay on Man*).

³'Children, fools, blackguards make of their inferiority a title for governing the world' (Amiel).

makes clear. But in our Faustian civilization there has always existed a yearning, often disguised under various social forms, but sometimes more obviously exposed, for a simple life (variously revealed as the pastoral existence, the return to the womb, etc.). This is to permit a release from the complexity of civilization and of the guilt that the conflicts of complexity engender. This notion has not been allowed to develop fully during the sophisticated periods because of the protection provided by a sense of irony that does not ignore such manifestations but only accepts them in relation to other modes of conduct.⁴ But when that irony weakens because of the inability of the mind to stand aside from conflict, to detach itself—irony is a feature of maturity, never of youth, and those who accept the valuations of youth must sacrifice it—when, in fact, the situation is felt to be ‘serious’ and the onlooker willy-nilly involved, partly because of a realization of personal instability and partly because the values of social living have broken down and failed to provide the necessary balance, then indeed there is a surrender to the mere sequence of events; ‘being’ is forced to give place to ‘becoming’.⁵ What is obviously in process of becoming—youth—is sought after because its assurance of change represents paradoxically the only permanent value the mind can conceive. One aspect of nineteenth-century ‘thought’ unconsciously assumed such a surrender to the process of becoming. Today, in terms of numbers, which socially is all that seems to matter, it is the predominant assumption.⁶

Now it is characteristic of the educational theory I am setting out to examine that it should apply to the education of youth those very mental habits that youth most assuredly displays. One conceives of education as a stabilizing process, as an encouragement,

⁴The seventeenth-century poet could write: ‘Society is all but rude to this delicious solitude’, and remain aware at once of the truth and falsity of the remark; but Wordsworth’s feeling for Tintern Abbey is unequivocal. The eighteenth century represents a moment of equilibrium in the breakdown of this irony: yet even then the feeling for the unadorned and plain, the oft-repeated, the basic statement (‘What oft was said . . .’) contains the incipient suggestion of the simplifications of a later period. Baroque with its conscious superimpositions on the classic statement represents the last protest of an adornment that is not merely escapist. It may even be that the simplifications of geometrical order (e.g., the town plan, the formal garden) begin the process of levelling out which unconsciously degenerates into levelling down.

⁵‘High seriousness’, as nineteenth-century poetry and critical doctrine made clear, precludes in its single-mindedness an appreciation of its opposite, which finds an outlet only in that which is obviously not ‘serious’ (in the nineteenth-century sense of the word), i.e., nonsense. This, in Carroll and Lear, etc., relates itself to the child in a manner which it would be interesting to pursue (cf. W. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*).

not of what its object already superabundantly possesses, but of other aspects that it can only attain by a growing into.⁷ It should surely involve an appreciation of the other factor in the irony of existence so that there shall be the possibility of coalescence and fusion that will help create the pattern of life; it must provide an element of 'being' in what can else only be a meaningless becoming. Yet this is precisely what this aspect of educational theory ostensibly does not profess—or glosses over in the light of other interests. Practice may do something to correct the imbalance of precept; but the characteristic stresses in such educational writing betray an overall impression that must convey itself to the practitioner.

To begin with, the emphasis is placed on the children.⁸ 'The children themselves are the living end and aim of our teaching', says Dr. Susan Isaacs, a remark which in a sense is so obvious that it can only mean more than it says.⁹ 'Our attention is focussed, not on a system of education for children, but on the children themselves', states one of the latest practitioners.¹⁰ Implicitly there we have it. The child is so obviously an important factor that the emphasis would hardly be made—except as a reaction against

⁶The effect of this cult of youth on the instability of intellectual and cultural interests with its consequent introduction of the exigencies of fashion into the world of ideas is worth remarking upon. L. T. Hobhouse provides an interesting comment on the rapid change of dominant interests among the young with its encouragement of superficiality: 'These generations are extraordinarily short-lived. I can count up the intellectual fashions that have taken and held my students for a brief space. When I began in 1907 there was a wave of social idealism. Then very soon came suffrage, then syndicalism, then the war, then guild socialism, then Freud . . . Each of these waves absolutely submerges everything for the time being; be the subject what it will, the students will always get it back one way or another to the popular topic. It's lost labour to refute these things—they just die out in time'. (L. T. Hobhouse by Hobson and Ginsberg, quotation from a letter). Such fashions, however, reach beyond the student world.

⁷This phrase will, I hope, make it plain that what I look for in what follows is not the *rigid* imposition of a set standard. George Eliot in *The Mill on the Floss* has some hard and adequate things to say about square pegs in round holes where the education of Tom Tulliver is concerned. But I am interested in the educational weft that is to combine with the warp of the growing mind to form the finished pattern. My concern is related to that of Mr. T. S. Eliot in his diagnosis of the relation of the individual work of art and tradition: 'The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art towards the whole are readjusted; and this is the conformity between the old and the new'. (*Tradition and the Individual Talent*).

over-rigid educational standards of which today there is little fear—were it not that the ‘system of education’ obliquely referred to (by which one presumes is meant that which is to be taught, that in fact which, when learnt, gives significance to the child who, without it, becomes a mere living entity no more meaningful than the protoplasm) was about to be abandoned. I say ‘abandoned’, though of course that represents an extreme that even Mr. A. S. Neill would not perhaps contemplate.¹¹ In practice such an outlook lends itself to a decline of attainment and an overvaluation of certain qualities, important within certain limits of control but dangerous when allowed unrestricted play.

I need perhaps hardly state at this stage that the theories I am concerned with are offshoots of the Rousseau-Froebel-Pestalozzi line of educational thought—a line whose contribution can be summed up in the proposition ‘a child’s education ought to permit its freedom of development in accordance with the laws of its own nature’. The logical inconsistencies of this approach have, however, been so admirably exposed by Mr. Charles D. Hardie in his *Truth and Fallacy in Educational Theory* that I prefer to recommend his book to the reader and consider instead some of the over-emphases inherent in the ramifications of the theory, and its cultural implications, points not touched upon by Mr. Hardie.¹²

Now it should be obvious enough that the end of education is not indeed the child, but the child transformed in accordance with a careful consideration of the relative stress to be laid on immediate ends and ultimate good. It is the latter, one feels, that is coming to be increasingly neglected, partly because of the mental limitations of so many of the teachers, partly because of the theory

⁸It may be argued that what I am about to say is partly invalidated because I am not sufficiently specific about the age of the children involved. I am however concerned to combat a deliberate trend in educational policy that is spreading to the treatment of all ages. Naturally the extent of ‘determination’ on the part of the teacher may vary in accordance with age of pupil; psychological investigation would seem to show that the *degree* of control and of effort demanded where infants are concerned should differ from that expected of older children. But in all cases, as will emerge, I believe that education should be primarily deterministic, *i.e.*, that it should be much more in the hands of the teacher to determine the nature of what is learnt, and that there should be a much stricter interplay between the child’s interests and needs of the moment and the overall necessity of producing as mature an adult as innate mental capacity will permit, than present theory would encourage. This I believe to be necessary at all ages.

⁹Susan Isaacs, *The Children we Teach*, 1932.

¹⁰M. V. Daniel, *Activity in the Primary School*, 1947.

¹¹I do not wish to imply that Mr. Neill may not do good therapeutic work with a particular type of child.

by which they are hindered and which fails to provide them with any precise conception of those ends. The current emphasis on enjoyment and play methods is obviously relevant here. It is not that enjoyment is wrong or play wicked, though it is to be doubted whether the growing habit of confusing work and play, despite Plato's seeming and oftquoted approval, is to be encouraged.¹² However, with young people the limited aims implicit in such activities may sometimes be necessary. My objection arises from the feeling that even such ends are becoming increasingly neglected. This is so partly because of a lack of clarity of definition, partly because precept removes the civilizing influence (at least to be assumed) of the teacher to too great an extent, and partly because of a fundamental inability to relate the idea of what constitutes an educated person to the apparent need of the moment. The same may be said of the concern for interest: a child it is said should be allowed to develop its own interests in accordance with its needs. But interest is largely the creation of circumstance; it is not a thing a child is born with; and it is up to the teacher to create, not interest

¹²Mr. Hardie's book, which submits to logical analysis various educational theories (including those associated with Rousseau, Herbart and Dewey), is one of the few books on educational theory appearing in recent years that can be strongly recommended. An excellent criticism of Froebel (it appeared as long ago as 1901!) by Graham Wallas, reprinted in *Men and Ideas*, is relevant. D. H. Lawrence has some vigorous words to say in an interesting though neglected essay that appears in *Phoenix*: 'Education of the People'.

¹³J. H. Huizinga has some interesting comments to make on this confusion which are not inapplicable to the sphere of education; cf. *In the Shadow of Tomorrow*. Cf. too the remark of a small boy, quoted by Graham Wallas (*op. cit.*) 'When they play they don't really play, and when they work they don't really work'. Above, I have used the word 'seeming' because it is obvious that even in his approval of play, Plato's attitude was very different from that of some of our educationalists, a fact which they ignore when seeking his approval. 'It is the community standpoint, not the 'natural bent' of childhood, which is the dominating factor. Education takes the play-tendencies of childhood and directs and constrains them until the growing child takes on the mould of the rational, co-operative self-determining citizen . . . Their immature minds are to be directly conditioned, from the very first, to take on the dye of the community laws, so that this shall be indelible'. (R. C. Lodge: *Plato's Theory of Education*, 1947). A recent twist of the theory under examination would seem to involve increasingly the 'group' as the unit (*e.g.*, in *group* activities) which is to 'express itself'. This is especially true in America. It is therefore further relevant to remark that Plato is concerned with only a small section of the community, the self-determining citizens, subject to environmental influences very different to those open to the vast bulk of our children to-day.

undefined, but the right sort of interest to develop the ultimate good of the child—by performing a very definite and positive function in its life. The contradictions of course are inherent in the looseness of the vocabulary used and the ambiguity of the terms. Interest is no end in itself, as seems to be imagined; there exist standards of interest. Children are interested in their excretory functions but no teacher would encourage such; the objections are too obvious. It is when the nature of the interest is more disputable that problems of value must be faced—and such problems do not appear even to be raised, if practice indeed follows these precepts. Moreover, mature interests that the teacher can see the need of much more readily than the child—playing the piano, for instance—usually involve initial drudgery that may well have to be imposed on the young if their good is to be pursued. A restriction too may be necessary where harmful interests are involved—Plato's ideas on 'music' are relevant here. If the standard is to be freedom, that freedom itself implies the initial restraint and discipline inherent in the process of becoming free to exercise the required skill. I would not stress what indeed seems to me so evident were it not that I feel that the whole of our teaching practice, whether when 'free activity' methods or even more formal ones are adopted, suffers from a basic confusion. The advance in the knowledge of child psychology is important in-so-far as technique is concerned but it can have no effect on the aims and ends of education, which like the ends of life, I believe 'exist' as absolute objectives,¹⁴ and to be intimately related one to the other. To make the individual interests of the child the end is to abrogate all possibility of cultural coherence and in addition to deny the child what is essential, a sense of what is to be achieved. It is not too much to say that it is the function of the school to leave a child with a sense of and a respect for what he does not know, in addition to a confidence about such skills as he has succeeded in acquiring.¹⁵

But before pursuing this topic further, it may be useful to examine more specifically a recent pronouncement related to the theory under review. It will provide further information about the nature of the existence sanctioned by this theory; and it will afford an interesting insight, to those unacquainted with current writing on educational problems, into the quality of mind entrusted with their solution. It is taken from an educational journal; and those journals themselves would well repay scrutiny. Many reveal an almost total lack of intellectual interest which only those well acquainted with the cultural preoccupations of the average teacher would credit.

¹⁴For reasons, of course, which I cannot possibly discuss here.

¹⁵That it may be necessary consciously to accept limited ends for limited mentalities raises another though related problem. The fact is, however, that in the theory I am attacking such ends are not regarded as limited; the possibilities inherent in the child become the end in itself.

The extract is from a periodical symptomatically entitled *The New Era*, and it is part of an article on 'Group activity in School', by Professor H. R. Hamley, Professor of Education at the University of London Institute of Education:

'In an article published in 1918, W. H. Kilpatrick, the father of the Project Method, tells us that he "appropriated the word 'project' to designate the typical unit of the worthy life". This puts the emphasis in the right place. The project, whether isolated or functionally related to other projects . . . is an echo of life, of life that is rich and significant, of life that is really worth living. If that is so, the characteristics of the project are the characteristics of the life that is worth living. Among them are the following: *purpose, significance, interest, spontaneity and social co-operation*. A full discussion of these terms would lead us rather too far from our present purpose. The only term that may need a word of explanation is 'spontaneity'. Now it is one of the characteristics of life that it is not fixed or determined, strictly ordered or predictable; on the contrary, it is spontaneous and free, full of variety and enticing uncertainty. Life is a becoming, an unfolding, a continuous creation and no one knows with certainty what it will become or what the unfolding will finally yield. Where there is life, we say, there is hope. The glory of the project, whether it be an individual or a social project, is its *spontaneity*, its responsiveness to the evolving situation. No one knows, not even the teacher, exactly how it will turn out; no one knows the answer, for in many cases there is not one; at all events it cannot be found in any answer-book. The project has no pre-arranged standard either of appreciation or of attainment'.

Now it might be argued that this sort of stuff is hardly worth powder and shot; and indeed, it would not be were it not for the position held by its author, the influence of the London Institute, and the fact that it represents so well an attitude of mind that is being increasingly adopted by our schools and colleges. I am not here concerned with the project method adequately handled (though I think there are grave dangers inherent in any attempt to correlate knowledge in such a way at too early a stage).¹⁶ I am concerned with a deplorable looseness of terminology and a vapidness of expression that are all too typical. Professor Hamley's characteristics of what used to be known as the 'good life' (one imagines such a phrase, with its associations of Greek philosophy might well introduce a note of moral austerity hurtful to the spinsterish exuberance of Professor Hamley's careless raptures) are so incoherently jumbled as to imply anything or nothing. It is hard indeed to see what purpose is served by applying a similar set of substantives to an intellectual concept like a project and to the life of an

¹⁶Mr. Hardie summarizes some objections to the project method, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59.

individual; and Professor Hamley was perhaps wise to shelve a discussion of their meaning. But Professor Hamley's definition of 'spontaneity' is welcome, for the word, usually unexplained, crops up a great deal in this type of writing. As a human characteristic, 'spontaneity' seems to have attached to itself a peculiar charm of its own. It is perhaps pressing its meaning too far to ask precisely what significance in isolation such a term can have for human beings at all. For, as Wordsworth realized, even the most 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' is yet inextricably related to the prior necessity of long and deep thought that he quite rightly thought essential to the act of creation; such a period of gestation was inherent in the act. Correlations can be made in the mind which, leading to new fusions of thought, give an appearance of spontaneous creativity (*cf.* Coleridge's views on Imagination). But all this assumes a prior discipline, a 'subservience strictly to external things'. There must, in Coleridge's own phrase, be a 'correlation of subject and object'. Such ideas, as far as one can judge, do not appear to be part of Professor Hamley's intention (although, indeed, that intention is so vaguely expressed that it is difficult to pin Professor Hamley down in any precise way). What, however, he seems to be congratulating himself on is a lack of restraint, a venting of the impulse of the moment, the deliberately unpremeditated quality of what happens.

Such ideas are very common in contemporary teaching of art; they form, indeed, the main staple of the theory. Vast claims are made for the teaching of the visual arts which seem to me to be completely invalid (though no one will accuse me, I hope, of under-rating the importance of the arts). Mr. Read, for instance, goes so far as to assert that 'the secret of our collective ills is to be traced to the suppression of the spontaneous creative ability in the individual'. It all seems to me to be bound up with an over-emphasis on certain qualities, such as imagination, which need a much more thorough critical investigation than I can afford here, but to the need for which I can at least draw attention. Thus, in a recent article on 'Arts and Crafts',¹⁷ Mr. Green, for instance, asserts that 'the expressive and imaginative qualities of a drawing will always be more important than mere factual statement'. It seems to me a remark of doubtful validity, without a prior investigation into the *quality* of the imagination and expression involved.¹⁸ And Mr. Green's uneasiness betrays itself when he discovers that

¹⁷Printed in *The Quality of Education*, ed. D. Thompson and James Reeve.

¹⁸Imagination, loosely used, too often comes to mean 'fantasy-life'. The stimulation of this quality is all too much encouraged as it is, in our civilization of the cinema and the 'tuppenny blood'. When again, it is urged that the child is to be told to draw 'what he sees', the results all too frequently are the consequence of bad factual statement. The use of the word 'imagination' and especially that of 'creative' seem to me to merit the fullest investigation.

there is 'no artistic lapse in making a precise drawing of a plant, showing careful research into its structure . . . It was not beneath the dignity of masters of the stature of Dürer and many others to make such drawings'. It was not indeed. It is true that some children possess a certain innate gift of expression and are capable of evolving naïve and simple patterns to which the adjective 'pleasing' might be applied; but no achievement of any real worth is possible without a long and arduous submission to the need of acquiring a technique by means of which what in fact is observed of 'nature' can be adequately conveyed to the viewer. Moreover, the acquiring of technique surely has a repercussion on what in fact the artist 'sees'; for increased mastery of means leads to an increasingly subtle understanding of ends . . . if the student has the necessary artistic integrity and capacity. It is odd indeed that the practice of art teachers in this respect would seem to fly in the face of the experience of all the great masters; and it is instructive to examine the practice of the one great artist who has been quoted to exemplify the results of 'spontaneity', William Blake. Mr. Anthony Blunt has irrefutably shown how much Blake depended upon a careful study of the work of his predecessors. His own words testify to what he thought about careful copying:

' . . . no one can ever Design till he has learned the Language of Art by making many Finished Copies both of Nature and Art and of whatever comes in his way from Earliest Childhood. The difference between a bad Artist and a Good One Is: the Bad Artist Seems to copy a Great deal. The Good one Really does Copy a Great deal',

and a little later: 'Servile Copying is the Great Merit of Copying'.¹⁹

It is possible that some art teachers would argue that their aim is not to train artists, but that the worth of 'free expression' lies in a certain therapeutic value; it is regarded as a means of ridding the child of its inhibitions by giving it scope to exercise its creative faculties. Despite Mr. Herbert Read, however, it is difficult to see the final therapeutic value of the type of free expression

¹⁹Anthony Blunt: *Blake's Pictorial Imagination*, published in the Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute (1943). Admittedly in his quarrel with Reynold's views on art as an imitation of nature based on the necessity for following 'the other masters as a guide in making the selection necessary to arrive at a general idea of nature', Blake gave vent to such remarks as: 'Imagination is My World: this World of Dross is beneath my Notice', and 'Knowledge of Ideal Beauty is Not to be Acquired. It is Born with us'; but these statements seem to have had largely a polemical value, the product of an emotional reaction against Reynolds' ideas. Blake's practice shows how carefully he followed the masters, as Mr. Blunt has conclusively shown; and his remarks on copying show that in his imaginative efforts he was conscious of depending on a prior discipline.

permitted. For an essential part of any mental therapy lies surely in the re-ordering of experience in relationship to something other than itself, a coming to terms with that which lies outside the self, and the consequent emergence of the self on a new level of experience; this involves a submission at some stage to a discipline of a sort, a discipline for which the theory seems to make little allowance. It is a pity that in their reaction against a bad technique—that which produced the stilted, naturalistic drawing of the last century—art teachers should have thrown over all efforts to impart technique, in the manner suggested by Professor Cizek: 'Each child is a law unto himself and should be allowed to develop his own technique'.²⁰

I suggest, then, that it would not be impertinent at least to hint a doubt and to suggest that a more astringent investigation into the nature of the theory relating to 'spontaneous expression' is called for. What Professor Hamley has further to say, about life as a 'becoming', etc., is so banal as to be hardly worth the saying. It is true in the sense that no one knows precisely what the future holds. To make this obvious fact an excuse for the abeyance or the depreciation of attempts at rational forethought and control—qualities that distinguish what is specifically man—is to abandon the precarious values on which man has built up his civilization. The freedom Professor Hamley so ardently admires is the fruit of this forethought. To be at the mercy of the 'evolving situation' is to be bound by accident and temporary exigence—to become like Hamlet passion's slave and hence to lose the native hue of resolution. The restrictions of a narrowly rational approach will preclude a complete assessment of the imponderables in a changing situation (a fact that a profounder rationalism will allow for). Professor Ginsberg's realization that 'Reason may recognize the value of spontaneity' admits that the 'adjustment of the claims of

²⁰Even more astonishing are the claims made for child art, claims which seem to betoken a surrender to a naïve and singularly restricted range of experience, a restriction, incidentally, which appears to have affected much adult art of recent years. Mr. R. R. Tomlinson, in *Children as Artists*, states that 'No claim is made by the author that children's drawings have the same art content as the work of adult artists, but he does contend that they have a similar appeal to the emotions'. It is necessary to draw attention to the question-begging use of 'similar'? This admittedly short book, with its uncritical formulation of the current theory, lays itself open to attack on many occasions. There is, for instance, the remarkable statement that 'Primitives (of the school of Giotto and Cimabue) . . . resemble children in one essential respect; in their artistic urge to explore with zeal entirely new paths, untutored and unaided'. The paradox of D. H. Lawrence is worth noticing. 'Let our ideal be living spontaneous individuality in every man and woman. Which living spontaneous individuality, being the hardest thing of all to come at, *will need most careful rearing*' (*Op. cit.*, my italics).

this value to the needs of control is one of (reason's) most difficult tasks'; but the difficulty does not provide an excuse for failing to make the attempt. The happiness that lies beyond the reach of art is yet the product of that art. To assert that 'the project has no pre-arranged standard either of appreciation or attainment' is to ignore the aim which may be exceeded but alone gives meaning to the undertaking.

Now this type of approach is not only not the prerogative of an aberrational educational institute; it is also receiving increasing official sanction. The much quoted words of the ministry's report on *The Primary School* are relevant. There it is stated that 'the curriculum is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than of knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored'; and such a thesis is being maintained in the years beyond the primary school. As a result of the contempt which is being increasingly directed against the 'bookish few', 'activity' is being thought of more and more in purely physical terms. That physical movement is a necessary feature of the development of children is an indisputable fact; it is the relative emphasis that is becoming disquieting. Again, experience (by which is usually meant impressions received from the immediate physical environment) only acquires significance as it is related to knowledge—there is a correlation between the two and to emphasize the one at the expense of the other is to impoverish the meaning of experience itself. When Keats wrote that he did not think anything could be known for truth until it had been 'proved upon our pulses', he ignored the fact that the possibility of response to experience is not innate, and that prior knowledge, even of mere despised fact, may well enable the experience, when it is undergone, to take on meaning—or at least, a deeper meaning. Thus my experience of certain of the difficulties of emotional growth will be deepened by a prior reading of, say, *Hamlet*. The assumption of the report is that knowledge cannot become 'real' until it has been directly verified, a view which, one would have thought, has been sufficiently exploded.²¹

²¹It is interesting to note that the subject-matter of even grammar school education has become increasingly pragmatic over the last hundred years. (In a sense, of course, it is true that most education has always had a pragmatic bias, for there was a time when a knowledge of Latin had a severe practical value. But the pragmatic has undoubtedly received more considerable emphasis in recent years). Partly this may have been inevitable; but the fact that we may be faced, for instance, with an almost complete abandonment of classical education because such a training is not directly applicable to everyday experience and is not itself the fruit of the need of the moment is symptomatic. I am not, of course, concerned to argue the virtues or vices of a classical training. I am concerned with the objections which lie behind its unpopularity, which would be equally applicable to any other discipline (e.g., a deeper study of English) which was put in its place.

One of the more deplorable effects of this type of theory lies of course, in the increasing abdication of the function of the teacher. His or her job is becoming more and more that of merely providing an adequate environment so that the children shall be able 'to follow up lines of interest and exercise every muscle in their bodies and every faculty of their minds', as Miss M. V. Daniel exuberantly proclaims. It seems to me to afford merely another aspect of the general abandonment of intellectual and moral leadership in our society. The whole unwillingness to impose a view of life merely means that a worse view will be adopted, for a child cannot live in a vacuum. One would have thought that the need for demanding standards—or at least creating a framework, which, while permitting a certain flexibility would rigidly exclude deleterious interests and pursuits—was never more necessary to-day when the teacher is—or should be—one of the few civilizing influences in our vulgarized social order. The whole tendency towards making the child his own standard in the name of initiative and self-confidence is to be condemned as corrupting to the child. Self-confidence, as those who have taught know, so frequently comes to mean a self-satisfaction based on the type of egotism George Santayana so strongly and rightly condemns: 'Egotism is always a vice because founded on a mistake. It assumes, if it does not assert, that the source of one's being and power lies in oneself . . . and that nothing should control the mind or the conscience except the mind or the conscience itself'. There are indeed enough of the low on whom assurance sits leaving our schools and colleges without multiplying their numbers by intent. To feel that one has a claim on attention under certain circumstances is one thing; to feel that that claim has always to be met is pervasively corrupting to those very virtues the romantic educationalists profess to encourage.²² It involves too an abandonment of the basis of all ethical training, the creation of a sense of obligation, the contract inherent in an undertaking, the 'seriousness' of the act and the consequent care for *self-respect* which the admission of obligation involves and which is the offspring of renunciation as much as of self-indulgence; in a word, the loss of a sense of reverence,²³ and a loss of the 'tension' necessary for achievement.

I believe, of course, that this outlook is closely related to a

²²Eighty years ago, Amiel wrote: 'Our young people are detestable and are becoming more and more unmanageable and insolent . . . The baby wishes to have the privileges of the young man, and the young man means to keep those of the ill-behaved little boy . . . From the moment that difference in quality is officially equal to zero in politics, it is clear that the authority of age is bound to disappear'. (*Journal*: March 20, 1865). Cf., too, Keyserling's remark: 'The best practical solution which I have found in order to create an equation between my children and myself is to treat them as though they were distinguished strangers'. (*The Art of Life*).

vast change that is taking place in our social structure and the balance of political power. It is realized that, now that for the first time in human history a whole population is being educated, and thus clamours for attention, a vast majority can find no place in the traditional educational system, for their mental abilities are inadequate to the discipline exacted. It is argued that nevertheless the mediocre must have their chance; as the Harvard Committee report expresses it:

'The record of such people over history—the simple-hearted, those who have done the unobserved work of the world—is certainly at least as good as that of their more gifted—and more tempted—brethren. They are as worthy and as valuable democratic citizens as anyone else'.

The second sentence, of course, is just not true, as it should hardly be necessary to insist on here; it accords ill, in any case with the Committee's recognition that some ideas are more valuable than others, for in some sense of the word, ideas are obviously the 'products' of individual minds, and the progenitors of more valuable ideas are therefore of greater worth to the community. But in any case it should be sufficiently clear that no society can exist for long that allows itself to be governed by the values of the mediocre in the manner encouraged by our civilization. The problem of how to reconcile the standards of maturity with the requirements of the many—the central problem of mass civilization and minority culture—is not, however, to be met by a chaotic throwing-over of such standards as still survive at the behest of the individual, regardless of that individual's capacity and right to be considered. Even if with sections of our population limited educational aims are necessary—and of course they are—the fact that they are so limited must be clearly recognized and explicitly allowed for. The aim for any one group must recognize the ambiguity inherent in the idea of 'need', and must also realize its place in the hierarchy; then the 'needs' can be related to what is also desirable and it can be seen that their gratification is controlled by an appreciation not only of the individual's felt requirement but of the highest truths known to man. Finally the standard implicit in the aim, however limited, must be exacted. The desire to teach too much and too superficially is one of the curses of our educational system; a careful appreciation of the dignity inherent in even a limited undertaking—limitations consciously appreciated—would be preferable to a system that makes a superficial know-all

²³'To hear these young people talking really fills me with black fury: they talk endlessly, but endlessly—and never, never a good or a real thing said. They are cased each in a hard little shell of his own, and out of this they talk. There is never for one second any outgoing of feeling, and no reverence, not a crumb or grain of reverence . . . It is this horror of little swarming selves that I can't stand'. (D. H. Lawrence).

of even the commonest of men.²⁴ It is for reasons of this sort that attempts to secure a 'general education' that will provide a 'common core of knowledge' which the Harvard Committee is concerned to obtain in America by emphasizing the necessity of a common syllabus based on the Humanities, the Sciences and Social Studies need to be regarded with a certain degree of suspicion. How this syllabus is to be adapted to the needs of the less able is carefully glossed over; it is only stated that it is to involve '*new and authentic* treatments of these great subjects, not simply waterings-down of harder courses for the less able'.²⁵ All this is too reminiscent of Professor Mannheim's 'essentials' to need analysis here.

It should be clear that the educational theory I have been examining reaches far beyond the purview of the school and is at once a reflection of and a further means of implementing the profoundly anti-rational forces we have seen at work in our own day. By failing to distinguish adequately between the relative worth and stability of impulses and feelings, by making, in its extremest form, the individual's desires and attainments the final test, by encouraging the belief that the possibilities of attainment are not subject to rational analysis where what is essentially irrational and incapable, the child, is concerned, this theory proclaims its adherence to a body of ideas that is and has been destroying the wisdom of the European tradition on which our civilization has been built. I need hardly perhaps point its relevance to that outlook that regards taste, for instance, as something essentially relative, and the phrase 'I like it' as the first and last words in literary criticism.²⁶

I have said that this essay was to be regarded as complementary to my remarks on planning and popularization. I have tried to show that in neither the mechanical rigidities of Professor Mannheim, nor in the careless abandonment of our hard-won values

²⁴One of the current dangers lies in the contemporary condemnation of specialization. One appreciates the danger of over-specialization; but if some critics had their way, very soon instead of a few knowing a good deal about something nobody would know very much about anything. Cross fertilization is important, but there has to be something to fertilize.

²⁵*General Education in a Free Society*, report of the Harvard Committee (1946). My italics.

²⁶I would be sorry if it were thought that the alternative I suggest is a return to the 'beat-their-backsides' school of pedagogic thought. What has been done is not all loss; but I suggest that a much closer scrutiny of principles is necessary and a much more rigorous approach to the whole problem essential. Were it not thought too pretentious, I would like to define my position with Matthew Arnold's: 'I am a Liberal, yet I am a Liberal tempered by experience, reflection and renouncement, and I am, above all, a believer in culture'.

at the behest of a sentimental concern for the more immediate interests and needs of the individual, whether child or adult, lies our true way. Though I believe objective values to 'exist', our human imperfection does not enable us to grasp them completely, which means that an adequate outlook must always be prepared to admit the implications of new aspects of knowledge; these may necessitate a slight and careful reassessment of certain values in the light of new experience. But the necessity of such 'spontaneous' knowledge must not prevent our acting in accordance with the highest values mankind has discovered in the necessity imposed on us of determining the conditions by which we are to live. An abandonment to the immediate interests of the moment, in the name of an illusory freedom, would be as disastrous as a submission to the strait-jacket of the economic planner's will—indeed both are much more closely related than at first sight would seem obvious as joint manifestations of despair. An educational outlook affects and is affected by the quality of the age of which it is a manifestation. The inadequacy and superficiality of many of our educational ideas is a sad comment—if comment there need be—on our inability to assess adequately the requirements either of freedom or of order.

G. H. BANTOCK.

HENRY JAMES AND THE FUNCTION OF CRITICISM

TO form a just idea of Mr. Quentin Anderson's contribution to the understanding of Henry James one needs to have read his essay in *The Kenyon Review* for Autumn 1946. He had room there to develop his case at length, and the interested reader of the briefer presentment that, at the Editors' invitation, he wrote for *Scrutiny* (September and December, 1947), ought to know that the fuller treatment exists and may, by those who have no access to it, be taken as, in an important respect, finally convincing.

Mr. Anderson has established, I think, a very interesting fact. Not only are there decided manifestations in James's work of a strong and sympathetic interest on his part in his father's system; in certain of his books, generally considered as constituting his 'major phase', the system is present to such effect that, unadverted and uninformed, the reader is without the key to the essential intention—the intention that makes the given book what it is and explains what James saw it as being. The fact, then, has its bearings for criticism.

The statement of these is not a simple matter. Moreover, Mr. Anderson seems to me to have started with radical misconceptions as to what they could be. But I should like at the outset to make quite plain my sense of the positive value of his work. His argument regards mainly the late novels. These, of course, are very highly rated by the fashionable admirers of James, who, indeed, assume them to be the supreme expressions of his genius, but seem quite incapable of suggesting either any intelligible grounds for the assumption or any clear idea of the kind of thing we are supposed to be admiring. Novels are novels; James's distinction, we gather, is that he handles with great refinement the relations between 'civilized' individuals—representative members of a Victorian or Edwardian house-party: these late books (that appears to be the assumption) are especially alembicated specimens of the same variety of 'the novel'. Well, Mr. Anderson shows that *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl* are, in intention, allegories about Man, and by both intention and method much more closely related to *Everyman* than to 'the novel of manners'. If this fact can be brought to general notice its disconcerting effect may be salutary. It may even induce some receptivity in respect of the truth that even in his earlier work James is not a mere novelist of manners; so that ultimately it will become impossible for critics to tell us, as Mr. David Garnett does, that James's characters are