

AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION: A BRITISH CRITIQUE

The gravest current threat to American higher education is the breakdown of consensus on academic goals, in the view of Sir Eric Ashby, master of Clare College, Cambridge University. In an essay for the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, Sir Eric warns that the repression of freedom of thought is a likely result of continued campus controversy over functions.

"To say there is no consensus on the goals of higher education in the United States is understatement," he writes in ANY PERSON, ANY STUDY (McGraw-Hill Book Company, \$4.95). "There is dangerous discord."

Faculty and students who support the supremacy of reason are caught between the New Left's repudiation of the moral code of liberalism and bigoted fundamentalist interpretation of the code by the Right, he asserts.

American universities are peculiarly vulnerable when there is no agreement as to their goals, rights, and responsibilities, having involved themselves more intimately in serving society than their counterparts elsewhere. Sir Eric believes that they have assumed more functions than they have the strength to discharge. The task that has suffered most, he says, is their prime one: the teaching of undergraduates.

He also finds them too big for cohesiveness and hence difficult to govern effectively.

If they keep going the way they are headed, he warns, the year 2000 may find U. S. higher learning afflicted with "brontosaurian cumbrousness and a surfeit of mediocrity."

Planners may be helpless to change the course on which higher education is set in America, "though it may, indeed probably will, be changed by the forces of society." Should it remain on its present course, however, he foresees these consequences:

1) Universal access by the year 2000, with an estimated enrollment of about 16 million students in some form of higher education.

2) One in six of these students (if colleges in the year 2000 are no more attractive to youth than they are today) attending unwillingly; and at least half of them dropping out.

3) This "semi-drafted army" of students will be taught by about 900,000 members of a profession whose prime duty is to teach "but whose teaching load is apt to be inversely proportional to their distinction, and whose distinction is measured by the possession of a Ph.D. and the continued publication of what are deemed original contributions to knowledge."

4) Unless some unforeseen factor eliminates it, "a streak of frustrated aspiration will run through the whole system." Two-year colleges will strive to do para-academic work, four-year colleges will itch to set up graduate programs. And, at the pinnacle, a few world famous institutions will be committed to the costly obligation of preserving their supremacy.

But Sir Eric says that higher education may not remain on its present course. He sees three other possibilities:

1) A moratorium on expansion, by replacing the socio-economic barriers with barriers of merit and motivation. If this happened, massive funds might be put into raising the level of secondary education (continued either at school or in community colleges). High schools might be the terminus of full-time education, "except for those who need, or want, to go to college for some clear purpose."

2) Another outcome, favored by the New Left, might be a successful disruption of the system "and its replacement by something quite different (what nobody knows)."

3) A final outcome might be "to identify the dangerous features in this sombre prognosis and to eliminate these systematically by slow evolutionary change. (The radicals forget that this is the way they evolved from the apes.)"

A partial moratorium on expansion along current lines may come from the students themselves, suggests Sir Eric. "A growing number of students resent the postponement of 'adult responsibility, rights, and prerogatives.' They do not wish to be initiated into a society whose values they do not respect. They do not wish to be given a professional training which equips them (as some put it) to be 'exploited' by industry or government."

One way to change the pattern, he adds, would be to spread out higher education through the working life of citizens.

In ANY PERSON, ANY STUDY, Sir Eric comments briefly on the entire gamut of higher education in the U. S.

MOMENTS OF TRUTH

David L. Silverman invented his first game at the age of seven in order to arouse his grandfather's waning interest following a prolonged losing streak at casino. Since that time Silverman's passion for games and puzzles has been consuming. It culminates today with the publication of a fascinating book: YOUR MOVE — A TREASURY OF 100 DECISION PROBLEMS DESIGNED TO CHALLENGE YOUR INSIGHT. (McGraw-Hill, \$5.95).

"The objective of this book is to entertain," the author indicates. "Any instruction you derive from it is unintended." The book succeeds admirably, at least in failing to provide a shred of instruction.

The first part of the volume, illustrated by Don C. Oka, consists of 80 game problems with the solutions printed on the reverse side -- the author hates to thumb through a puzzle book in quest of a solution, with the risk of inadvertently reading the solution to a problem not yet attempted. For example:

"Driving in unfamiliar territory, you stop to get directions at a large house with a fenced-in lawn. Absent-mindedly you neglect a sign at the gate which says BEWARE OF DOG. You are half way to the house when you suddenly see a vicious-looking Doberman Pinscher streaking toward you with teeth bared. You have neither weapon nor protective clothing such as a jacket with which to defend yourself. And you haven't a chance of getting back to the gate in time. Your move!"

(Appropriately, this situation occurs in a section titled, "Life Games.")

The second part of the book contains 20 unsolved games -- a mine of intriguing research problems that serious gamers may find even more entertaining than the solved problems.

The problems, in both sections, involve challenging "moments of truth," decisions in games of chance, games of skill, games conventional, unconventional, serious or bizarre.

(Continued on page 11)

Honors - Awards given

Fayetteville State University held its annual Honor and Awards Day, Friday April 30th in Seabrook Auditorium.

Students always look forward to the presentation of these awards to outstanding students.

One outstanding feature of this year's program was the presentation of sorority and fraternity awards by members of these respective organizations. Customarily, the Academic Dean always presented these awards.

This year a special citation was presented to Dean Richard Fields to an outstanding athlete who also excelled scholastically.

Members of the Awards Committee were:

(Continued on page 10)

... Nabokov ...

(Continued from page 4)

hardly exceeded the number of poems I wrote in English," Nabokov writes in his introduction.

His earliest poetic style -- "one of passionate and commonplace love verse" -- is not represented in these pages, and was followed by a period of rebellion against the political regime which had overwhelmed his native land. As an emigre, he sought to recapture and crystallize the sights and sounds, moods and feelings of the Russia which was no more.

Then came "a period lasting another decade or so during which I set myself to illustrate the principle of making a short poem contain a plot and tell a story...; and finally, in the late thirties, and especially in the following decades, a sudden liberation from self-imposed shackles, resulting both in a sparser output and in a belatedly discovered robust style. Selecting poems for this volume proved less difficult than translating them."

A proponent of rigid fidelity in the transposition of Russian verse into a different language, Nabokov confronted a dilemma when it came to his own works:

"Treating a text in that way is an honest and delightful procedure, when the text is a recognized masterpiece, whose every detail must be faithfully rendered in English. But what about englishing one's own verse, written half a century or a quarter of a century ago? One has to fight a vague embarrassment; one cannot help squirming and wincing; one feels rather like a potentate swearing allegiance to his own self or a conscientious priest blessing his own bathwater. On the other hand, if one contemplates, for one wild moment, the possibility of paraphrasing and improving one's old verse, a horrid sense of falsification makes one scamper back and cling like a baby ape to rugged fidelity."

Nabokov's solution: wherever rhyme, "or its shadow," offered itself it was welcomed gratefully; but "I have never twisted the tail of a line for the sake of consonance; and the original measure has not been kept if readjustments of sense had to be made for its sake."

The poems written in America, and previously published in THE NEW YORKER, are of a lighter vein, "owing, no doubt, to their lacking that inner verbal association with old perplexities and constant worry of thought which marks poems written in one's mother tongue, with exile keeping up its parallel murmur and a never-resolved childhood plucking at one's rustiest chords."

The inclusion of chess problems, for which Nabokov "refuses to apologize," brings forth a poetic explanation on his part: "Chess problems demand from the composer the same virtues that characterize all worthwhile art: originality, invention, conciseness, harmony, complexity, and splendid insincerity. The composing of those ivory-and-ebony riddles is a comparatively rare gift and an extravagantly sterile occupation; but then all art is inutile, and difinely so, if compared to a number of more popular human endeavors...The present collection of a few problems composed recently forms an adequate corollary to my later verse."

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The Smokies

The Great Smokey Mountains of Tennessee and North Carolina take their name from the blue haze that clings to their slopes. The mountains contain 26 species of orchids and more species of trees than are found in Europe.

