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BOOK REVIEW

Underpinnings for a "University Education"

By Charles O. Houston


In contrast to their earlier work, The Subversive Science (Houghton Mifflin, 1969), the editors have presented us with a volume of readings which is eminently teachable, as well as valuable in presenting a wide range of scholarship which speaks directly to the title of the book. While their previous collection was valuable and important to our educational efforts, the diffuseness and, sometimes, the level of abstraction of the contents made it less than attractive to the contemporary student, who complained of its "difficulty." Students should have little trouble with the present work since all the selections are excellently chosen, clearly written, and accompanied by suggestions for additional reading.

Each of the editors supplies a brief preface, and each selection is preceded by introductory paragraphs which establish the selection in the context of the part in which it is placed. There are four such parts: "Genesis and Perception"—which includes articles by Odum, Napier, Meggers, Sauer, Ong, Searles, Shepard; "Society and Its Creations"—with contributions from Leyhausen, Calhoun, Davis, Audy, Moholy-Nagy, Karp, Milgram; "Positions"—Darling, Scott Paradise, Chas. A. Lindbergh; and, "The Crunch"—John Ryther, Ehrlich and Holdren, Schaefer.
Eugene Odom's discussion of "The Strategy of Ecosystem Development" introduces us to the next selection, "Early Man and His Environment" by John Napier, an example of which is then supplied by Betty J. Meggers' "Environment and Culture in the Amazon Basin." The emphasis changes a bit in the last four selections of this first part, with a statement by Carl O. Sauer (one of the earliest of American geographers to turn his attention to environmental/ecological questions) on the "Theme of Plant and Animal Destruction in Economic History," the weight of whose argument is neatly matched with the following piece by Fr. Walter J. Ong, S.J., "World as View and World as Event." These two selections are clearly placed in the "mental" focus of the title by Harold F. Searles, who discusses "The Role of the Nonhuman Environment," and by the concluding paper in this first part, by Paul Shepard, which confronts the student with the implications implicit in "The Cross Valley Syndrome."

The first part having set the stage, so to speak, the reader is rather dramatically introduced to "Society and Its Creations"—people acting and interacting in groups large and small—with three sharply written selections: "The Sane Community—A Density Problem?" (by Leyhausen), "Psycho-Ecological Aspects of Population" (by Wayne H. Davis), and "Overpopulated America" (by Wayne H. Davis). The combination of these three provocative pieces—which, if they do not cause some serious re-thinking by teacher and student alike as to the "relevance" of their educational experience, will bring trouble, trouble, trouble to River City—enables the editors to direct the readers' thinking toward the immediate, through "Measurement and Diagnosis of Health" (by J. R. Audy), "The Four Environments of Man" (by Sibyl Moholy-Nagy), and, still more immediate, "The Ecological City" (by Mort and Eleanor Karp) and "The Experience of Living in Cities" (by Stanley Milgram).

The pattern of these first two parts is repeated—at different levels of abstraction—in the last two, the first of which examines "The Unity of Ecology" (by F. Fraser Darling), "The Vandal Ideology" (by Scott Paradise), and "The Wisdom of Wilderness" (by Charles A. Lindbergh) as "Positions" from which we finally encounter "The Crunch": "Photosynthesis and Fish Production in the Sea" (by John H. Ryther), "Population and Panaceas: A Technological Perspective" (by Paul R. Ehrlich and John P. Holdren), and "The Inadvertent Modification of the Atmosphere by Air Pollution" (by Vincent J. Schafer).

The book is rounded out with "Biographical Notes" and more than twenty pages of additional readings listed according to each of the four parts.

If one searches for unifying themes, they are to be found in the title of the book which is underlined repeatedly with the basic philosophy of the editors: no easy answers, no easy solutions; only tough-
minded grappling with alternative modes of thinking, perceiving and acting.

Taken as it stands, this book can—and should—be utilized as a core text for several series of "courses" or "programs" in general studies, supplying the essential underpinnings to what (perhaps wistfully) we call "a university education." Please read it; please buy it; please use it.

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