

with the “decision-making” or “moral reasoning” approach. This construct resulted in a “non-directive” method reminiscent of the Rogerian psychoanalytic school and was aimed at “empowering” the pupil to “discover” for himself what is “right” in any given moral situation. This represented, as Professor Kilpatrick notes, the transmutation of education from a didactic exercise into psychology. Teaching became counseling, and learning, self-analysis.

The objective in the avant-garde approach was not to inculcate in the student those traditional and objective ideals of honesty, thrift, self-discipline, moral courage, and the like, and to encourage him to practice them until they became second nature, but to help the adolescent erect *ex nihilo* his own moral system, one that was “right” for him. Moral education, according to this approach, became an odyssey of self-discovery in which there were no fixed moral absolutes, only a universe of equally valid “choices.” “Values clarification” stands as a prime example of the anti-intellectualism rampant today: the elevation of *feeling* over *thinking* in our heavily psychologized society, the supremacy of the subjective over the objective. To advocate the superiority of one moral value over another is seen to be judgmental—one of liberalism’s deadly sins—and a violation of the student’s personal liberties, if not his civil rights.

The flaw here is self-evident to all but the willfully deluded educational ideologues: that a child with an undeveloped moral sense is capable of developing his own moral system, or exercising autonomous moral judgment, without first acquiring a framework, an edifice of values, within which to exercise such judgment. It is plain lunacy to present ado-

lescents with bizarre and profound moral dilemmas—as does so much of the “values clarification” curriculum—and expect them to extrapolate a useful response on the basis of . . . what? A vacuum? Whether something “feels right”? It is sheer madness to present students with the kind of hypothetical moral conundrums that have stumped philosophers since Aristotle—would you have strangled baby Adolf in his crib if you knew what he would become?—which are thoroughly unrelated to the real moral choices they will face in their own lives, and expect such exercises to produce coherent “value systems” able to deal with real world choices. In truth, such curricula are aimed not at helping children cope with the real problems they will encounter, but at conditioning them to the idea that *Alles ist relativ*, that no objective standards of truth and morality exist.

This novel notion that children should be left to their own devices to engage in life’s moral struggles, to “discover” their own standards of conduct without adult guidance or fixed standards of right and wrong, is probably unprecedented in human history. The ubiquity of such a theory in the government schools goes a considerable way toward explaining the condition of barbarism toward which American society is with increasing velocity careening. Ours is likely the first society in history that refuses to view education as the means of cultural conservation and transmission. The government schools—“public” school is a misnomer, as the schools belong not to the public, but to the government—have become one vast acultural shrink’s couch. We are rearing generations of young people who “feel good about themselves” as they merrily do drugs, get pregnant, abort the products of conception, join gangs, punch teachers, and steal from their employers when they grow up and get jobs (when they’re not on the public dole, of course).

Professor Kilpatrick urges parents to reclaim some lost territory for their children from the education professionals. I am not optimistic that they can do it. Four decades after the “look-say” reading method (as though English were a pictographic language like Japanese) was thoroughly discredited, it continues to be inflicted on students by teachers who themselves learned to read by that dubious approach, who are themselves bare-

ly literate, and who wouldn’t know Molière from Madonna. The social-engineering elites never will, never can, admit that they have been wrong. To do so would be a defeat from which such social experimentation would never recover. The reason “look-say,” sex and drug education, and values clarification never seem to produce the promised utopian results, the controlling elites insist, is because such programs have never been “fully funded.” A little more money, a bigger government grab of the nation’s wealth, and the failing programs, failing curricula, and failing schools at long last would succeed.

As Professor Kilpatrick points out, the popular culture does not suffer from the “non-directive,” relativistic educationists’ qualms about advocating a particular set of “values” as superior to all others. Since the schools leave children free to discover their own morality, they do—in rock music, MTV, movies, and all the rest of the sludge the “entertainment” industry spews forth. For children denied them in the schools, values are wherever else they find them, and increasingly that means in the popular culture. And so, while educators fret over how they can help students think for themselves and invent their own standards of morality while blithely ignoring the mounting evidence and social costs of their failure, the TV, music, and movie industries are happily doing the job of “values education.”

Perhaps nothing is so suggestive of what is wrong with the government schools, notes the Hoover Institution’s Thomas Sowell, as the results of a recent international study of 13-year-olds that found Koreans at the top and Americans at the bottom on the scale of mathematical accomplishment. When asked if they thought they were “good at mathematics,” only 23 percent of Korean 13-year-olds answered affirmatively, compared with 68 percent of their American counterparts. Apparently “education-as-therapy” has been a success, at least on its own terms. American 13-year-olds “feel good” about themselves, while being unable to tell algebra from artichokes. Little Johnny not only is incapable of telling right from wrong, he also is incapable of *thinking*. We are, Professor Sowell notes, raising up generations of “confident incompetents.”

Nevertheless, there is little that is new in Tom Sowell’s screed directed at America’s bankrupt educational system. His

Sin’s Lair

by Paul Ramsey

Sin frets the heart.
The loss increases pain
In clumsy fits and starts.
The loss remains,
Until a change of heart.

work surveys the bleak landscape, observing the prominent landmarks since *A Nation At Risk* (1983), and before: an entrenched, monopolistic establishment feeding on a captive audience; incompetent teachers protected by the nation's most powerful union; university schools of education that are held in contempt by serious scholars and genuine intellectuals; politicized curricula; ideological brainwashing of students; an institutional fear of competition; the intrusion of nonacademic political propaganda; divisive multiculturalism; a pedagogical penchant for narcissistic psychobabble; etc., *ad nauseam*. Dr. Sowell hits his stride in the two-thirds of the book he devotes to the nation's colleges and universities, though here, too, he covers much of the ground previously plowed by others. Though Sowell offers a new

and unusually trenchant economic analysis of the spiraling "costs" (i.e., spending) of American universities, for those familiar with previous critiques by Allan Bloom, William Bennett, Chester Finn, and Diane Ravitch of the appalling state of education in America, Professor Sowell's book stands as a complement to theirs, rather than a freestanding and original work.

One cannot come away from *Inside American Education* without the distinct impression that Professor Sowell believes the cause is lost. After 300 thoroughly demoralizing pages describing the truly dreadful condition of the nation's "public" schools and universities, he offers a halfhearted, half-page conclusion calling for "vast changes" of the sort that a dozen years of George and the Gipper failed to implement. The difficulty here

is that such people as the esteemed Professor Sowell—people who recognize the scale of the mounting catastrophe—do not nowadays control the institutions threatened by it; when they did, they recoiled from revolution. And revolution is what is required, not incremental change at the margins. Yet tectonic change appears at this late date to be almost impossible, the decline in the American educational system being a symptom of the larger eclipse of American civilization. History does not provide a single example—not one—of a nation or empire that, having recognized the impending smashup, first slowed, then halted, and finally reversed its gadarene descent into historical oblivion. History is catching up to America.

BRIEF MENTIONS

ART, FRAUD, AND MYSTERY

The Raphael Affair

by Iain Pears

New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; 191 pp., \$18.95

Jonathan Argyll, a 28-year-old doctoral student of art history from England, is arrested for vagrancy when found sleeping in the Church of Santa Barbara near the Campo dei Fiori in Rome. He tells his interrogators that masked beneath the paint of the church's altarpiece, a mediocre composition by 18th-century painter Carol Mantini, is a long-lost work by Raphael. The painting vanishes and reappears in London with Britain's foremost art dealer, Sir Edward Byrnes. The Raphael is unmasked with great pomp and fanfare and sold in the main sale room at Christie's—as the world's most expensive painting—to the Italian government. During a gala event at the National Gallery in Rome, the painting is burned by a vandal who knows that the much-touted "masterpiece" is actually a fake. Mysterious murders follow and set the stage for a thrilling denouement.

Iain Pears holds a doctorate in art history from Oxford, has been a consultant to the Getty Foundation, and is the author of *The Discovery of Painting* (Yale University Press). This book is the first in a series of forthcoming detective novels by Pears, and a better debut could hardly have been made: *The Raphael Affair* was short-listed for the British Crime Writers' Association Award.

The set-up is typical of the crime novel genre. The chief inspector is smug like Peter Wimsey, though without the wit and urbanity; he is cerebral, corpulent, and sedentary like Nero Wolfe; and he has a fond but acerbic relationship with his beautiful assistant Flavia di Stefano. What is refreshing in this case is that the inspector is neither the run-of-the-mill flatfoot nor the typical gumshoe; he's Generale Taddeo Bottando of the Italian National Art Theft Squad. Pears informs the reader in a preface that "there is an Italian art squad in a building in central Rome. However, I have arbitrarily shifted its affiliation from the carabinieri to the polizia, to underline that my account bears no relation to the original."

The pace of the plot and nature of the narrative are substantial enough to stand on their own, but overlapping these are entertaining if not always accurate generalizations: bold, slashing strokes of cultural criticism—of European culture in general and of Italian life in particular, which the author clearly loves—that have all the subtlety of Van Gogh at Auvers. The Swiss are "insufferable," with their "cleanliness, order and efficiency." In contrast to neighborhoods in Rome, London's are "unutterably dull," with "an atmosphere of respectability that made you think they were all tucked up in bed by nine-thirty with a glass of hot milk." The graduate student is "good-looking enough, in an English sort of way [though] not very well-dressed by Italian standards." A Frenchman swallows his pride and orders "a bottle of Montepulciano, which he considered one of the few Italian wines that might deservedly have been produced in his home country." And concerning Italian cuisine, "Like most Roman eating establishments, [the restaurant] served wonderful pasta, magnificent antipasti and dreadful main courses. Unlike Turin, which really knew what meat was, Romans seemed satisfied with any sort of boot leather."

Amid the plot, dialogue, and cultural polemics is also a trove of information about art forgeries and their detection—about craquelure, the hairline cracks that appear in old oil paintings; about how forgers emulate them, successfully and unsuccessfully; about spectrometers, electron microscopes, and alcohol solutions used in determining the authenticity of artworks. "An oil painting takes years to dry completely, sometimes half a century," a character explains. "There's no bigger giveaway than a Renaissance picture which is sticky. That, incidentally, is how Wacker, the Van Gogh forger, got caught in the 1930's."

The *Guardian* describes *The Raphael Affair* as "good clean art-scam fun. . . . Plot as layered as a forger's paint; Italophiles and gallery gazers will love it." It is all this, and more.

—Theodore Pappas