Book Reviews

Excellence. Can we be equal and excellent too? John W. Gardner. Harper, New York, 1961. xiv + 171 pp. $3.95.

No other writer has pleaded the case for excellence in performance in every field of endeavor with John Gardner's effectiveness and clarity. *The Pursuit of Excellence,* a report of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, was developed under his chairmanship. Last November he was one of three members of a committee that prepared a report for the governor and the board of regents of the state of New York on meeting the demands for quality as well as quantity in that state's higher education. More recently he wrote a chapter "On education" in the report, *Goals for Americans,* prepared by the Commission on National Goals appointed by President Eisenhower. In reports from the Carnegie Corporation (of which he is president) and in many other places, he has frequently emphasized this theme. Now we are indebted to him for this small volume which summarizes his position and which should assist in clearing up fuzzy thinking about equality in a democracy.

Gardner reviews the decline of hereditary privileges and the development in America of the democratic dilemma of equality and competitive performance. He notes that these principles are present and operating to some extent in our society and that, in general, there is much confused thinking about them, particularly about equality and competitive performance. If, in the name of equality, we treat all persons as if they were equal in ability, if we permit the less capable to stifle the superior (in business, industry, civil service, trades, schools, or elsewhere), then "all who pray for the continued vitality of democracy must protest."

Gardner asks: "Is excellence possible in a democracy? Can an equalitarian society tolerate winners? Does our devotion to equality condemn us to a pervasive mediocrity? How can one possibly explain or justify the slovenliness that is openly accepted as normal in our schools, in trade unions, in industry, in government—in short, everywhere in our society? Do we honor excellences which are most fruitful for our continued vitality?" He holds that, if we can consider the answers to such questions without uneasiness, we have not thought long or hard about excellence in the United States.

In seeking solutions to the problems and conflicts inherent in these questions, Gardner appeals for a toning up of our whole society. Greatness requires high standards at all levels and for every kind of ability. It takes more than an educated elite to run a complex technological society. We "can not have islands of excellence in a sea of slovenly indifference." We must learn to honor excellence and to demand it in every socially acceptable human activity. The breadth of his approach is indicated in his statement: "We must have respect for both our plumbers and our philosophers or neither our pipes or our theories will hold water."

But the idea of excellence in itself is not universally a powerful moving force. Moving and meaningful ideas must incorporate the importance of the individual and his fulfillment. We must also have a sense of shared purposes. In spite of the diversity of our opinions and values, we do have shared aims and convictions: peace, justice, freedom, the worth of the individual, and equality before the law. All these are usually taken for granted; yet without a new sense of commitment to them, the critics of democracy may prove to be right in saying that democracy's preferences are inveterately for the inferior. Gardner does not believe this is our destiny, but the danger is real.

The role of leadership in our efforts falls heavily on the talented, many of whom refuse to accept civic responsibility, or, when they do accept it, are not always aware of the requirements of the role beyond their field of specialization. Granting that some creative persons must be allowed to be completely absorbed in their work, Gardner holds that, on the whole, gifted persons enjoy power and influence today and that our society expects power and responsible leadership to go hand in hand. "The key to a position of leadership in our society is a commitment to the highest values of the society."

Role of Institutions

Schools and colleges should be the heart of the national endeavor to contribute to the fulfillment of the individual, but Gardner urges that we change the idea that learning is only for the young and that it occurs only in school. Every institution in our society should contribute to the fulfillment of the individual. He regrets the excessive prestige attached to a college education. All young people should look forward to an active period of growth and learning throughout their lives, regardless of whether they go to college. The great variety of opportunities for learning are indicated, and the plea is made that young people not going to college be better informed about these opportunities and be given as much help and counsel as college-bound students. A person's value to society depends on continued learning, and he should be persuaded that failures and frustrations in school will not necessarily characterize his efforts in other learning situations. This position has often been stated, but never more briefly or effectively than in these few pages.

Since a democratic society grants little hereditary privilege, it places a high premium on ability. Sorting individuals on this basis is very nearly the most delicate and difficult process our society has to face. We do it in athletics, but a person's place in adult society is rarely determined by such a judgment. Our desire to protect young people from invidious comparison with respect to the more critical and important kinds of ability has produced serious confusion in educational objectives and dangerous erosion of our standards. However, as we go about the business of giving special attention to the talented, Gardner does not advocate the European system of early separation according to ability. He believes that the American principle of multiple choices, which allow successive oppor-

tunities for the individual to discover himself, must be preserved, but that it must be combined with insistence on high standards at every step. "We can not worship frivolity and expect our young people to scorn it. We can not scorn the life of the mind and expect our young people to honor it." However, he does not advance any simple answer to the perplexing problems of motivation but merely asks us to use more effectively whatever we already know about the effect of morale, environment, challenge, and stimulus.

Sheer intelligence is not proposed as the single criterion for social advancement. For one thing, bright and highly motivated persons are needed in all walks of life and at all levels. Furthermore, extreme emphasis on the intellectually gifted child might bring a reaction, as it did in the 20's, demanding equal treatment for all students. The result was to be expected in a democratic society which grants the less gifted majority the greatest ultimate control over the opportunities provided for the smaller number who can perform at the highest levels. If measures for the gifted arouse hostility, a backlash can be expected. We can best manage this particular problem by stating it in more constructive terms. "How can we provide opportunities and rewards for individuals of every degree of ability so that individuals at every level will realize their full potentialities, perform at their best, and harbor no resentment toward any other level?" In this connection, Gardner endorses the comprehensive high school in which students are grouped according to performance in each specific subject, and students of every degree of ability are placed in the home room and in extracurricular activities.

In considering individual fulfillment, Gardner maintains that the particular responsibility of our schools is to give attention to the intellectual aspects of the individual's growth. The emphasis must not be merely on teaching facts, theories, and concepts or on training in the skills but rather on instilling the proper attitudes toward growth, learning, and creativity. Learning for learning's sake is not enough, however. In addition to intellectual growth, the individual must grow emotionally and develop his character and personality. "Freedom without moral commitment is aimless and promptly self-destructive."

Gardner reminds us that a free society is still the exceptional society and that the survival of the idea for which our nation stands is not inevitable. Our fate depends on whether we, as a people, can, "despite the narcotic of easy living and the endless distractions of a well-heeled society, respond with vigor and courage and dedication to the demands that history has placed on us."

Gardner holds that our people would rather work for something they believe in than to enjoy a pampered idleness. Happiness and effectiveness are to be found in striving toward meaningful goals, including devotion to standards and respect for the human mind and spirit.

"The idea for which this nation stands will not survive if the highest goal free men can set themselves is an amiable mediocrity."

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Manual of Physical Anthropology. Juan Comas. Thomas, Springfield, Ill., 1960. xxi + 775 pp. Illus. $17.50.

An Introduction to Physical Anthropology. M. F. Ashley Montagu. Thomas, Springfield, Ill., ed. 3, 1960. xvi + 771 pp. Illus. $14.50.

A Handbook of Anthropometry. M. F. Ashley Montagu. Thomas, Springfield, Ill., 1960. xi + 186 pp. Illus. $5.

These competing textbooks from a single publishing house may be likened to the offerings of some American automobile companies. Thought of in this way, Thomas can be said to have imported a successful 1957 Mexican model, the Comas *Manual*, and to have matched it with his own refurbished 1951 model, the Montagu *Introduction*. Also, Thomas has taken the unusual step of disconnecting the rear appendages of the *Introduction* and offering them unchanged as the Montagu *Handbook*, a "trailer" type of vehicle. Not surprisingly, therefore, the *Manual* looks a bit exotic in its new setting—it was designed for a different clientele, the *Introduction* shows its old lines under the added fins and chrome, and the *Handbook* is as ungainly a collection of spare parts as can be imagined. Also, judging from dimensions and price tags, Thomas has not yet changed over to the "compacts."

I will not extend this simile beyond remarking that books, like cars, are planned and produced with an eye to sales. It is up to the buyers, in this case teachers and students, to choose with care. To this end let us consider the relative merits of the *Manual* and the *Introduction*.

Having been trained in Europe and having gained experience in Mexico through years of editing and of teaching physical anthropology, Juan Comas recognized the need for a textbook in Spanish which would take into account the particular preparation of Latin American students. In 1957 he produced such a book under the title *Manual de Antropología Física* (Fondo de Cultura Economica). Its success led, after only 3 years, to the present English edition. This has not involved much change: The wise elimination of a section on statistics; amplification of chapters 2, 5, 8, and 9; and the addition of some recent references. In the above simile, in characterizing the English language edition as slightly exotic, I was not thinking of the translation, which is good, but of some of the subjects discussed, which will be unfamiliar to many North Americans: For instance, the "biotypologies" of Viola, Pende, and Barbara. Yet this does not mean that the book is in any way below the standard for introductory teaching levels in North America.

The *Manual* appeals to me because it gives historical background, strikes a good balance between the different sections, connects statements with sources by means of footnotes on the same page, does not overwhelm the beginning student with technical details beyond his need, and reports facts with a minimum of personal bias. The experienced teacher, W. M. Krogman, who contributes a preface, likewise has a high opinion of the book.

On the other hand, Ashley Montagu, who was trained in England and America and who taught anatomy in Philadelphia for a number of years, brought out the first edition of his *Introduction* in 1945 (326 pages, $4). Unfortunately, it was marred by many errors and was able to survive its bad reviews mainly because of limited competition. An improved second edition appeared in 1951 (555 pages, $8.75). The present edition is basically the second edition with the addition of quite a bit of new material. For some reason not all of the new material has been inserted in chronological order. Also, some material that