Book Reviews

Democracy as an Automatic Mechanism

The Temporary Society. WARREN G. BENNIS and PHILIP E. SLATER. Harper and Row, New York, 1968. xii + 148 pp. $4.95.

This book, the result of a collaboration between a distinguished theorist and applicator of administration and a distinguished sociologist and social psychologist, has the virtues of brevity and boldness in an address to a most important problem: the nature of the future society.

Its fundamental argument is that "Democracy is inevitable" (the title of chapter 1) because it "is the only system that can successfully cope with the changing demands of contemporary civilization." Like Marx, the authors maintain that men may give history "a little push here and there" but what they will be assisting is, even so, the inevitable. The "changing demands of contemporary civilization" tend to reduce to the fact of mere accelerating change itself, so that the essential argument is: inevitable rapid change makes inevitable "democracy": democratic families, democratic corporations, and other democratic institutions. In the wake of Czechoslovakia and Chicago and in the year of the appearance in America of the massively military and growingly fascist-like state, this is news indeed and cheering news at that. The argument goes all the way: the authors maintain that "even if all those benign sentiments"—the libidinized beliefs of those who cherish democracy as something to be eternally striven for—"were eradicated today, we would awaken tomorrow to find democracy still firmly entrenched, buttressed by a set of economic, social, and political forces as practical as they are uncontrollable." A hidden hand of even wider reach and grander grasp than Adam Smith ever dreamed ensures that the "competitive environment" in which institutions exist will drive them willy-nilly to democracy, as Smith's entrepreneurs were to be driven by the same mechanism out of private greed for profits to public service for nothing. This is not, of course, a statement about a passing phase in America, but a law universal for all at least of modern society—the rapidly changing modern world: in the authors' own italics, *"democracy becomes a functional necessity whenever a social system is competing for survival under conditions of chronic change."*

What makes impossible the emergence or persistence of anything alternative to democracy is that, under such change as exists, "little in [our society] is permanent save for a few values so ambiguous as to have no effect on behavior"—and the changeless changingness itself, and above all the "democratic family." The "democratic family" is what the American middle class already has, and the rest of the Western world (the argument requires the modern changing world, East or West!) is about to get. What we have—and have had in America except for brief times and odd pockets—is "a family system in which the social distance between parent and child is relatively small, the exercise of parental authority is relatively mild, and the child tends not to be seen as a mere parental possession without independent legal status. . . . The democratic family is a result as well as a cause of change acceleration, for any increase in the rate of social change tends also to increase the parents' doubt about their own values and customs. . . ."

In this family "democratic response patterns are learned," and "the democratic family [thus defined] is the most potent expression of democracy, and a necessary condition for its survival." (I believe the authors also imply or take for granted that it is a sufficient condition.) Again, in these years of mounting thousands of dropouts and runaways from just such families, who say they are trying by their flight to escape what they sense as soul-destroying prisons and who would rather die of malnutrition or methedrine than return to these "democracies," this is surprising and reassuring news! More particularly so since just these children, whether "hippie" quietists or protester activists, are consciously out to "destroy the system—the whole liberal-democratic bag," while most of the rest, who passively continue in what they feel are their "processing" families and prison-schools, are even more likely to destroy it by their apathy.

The authors certainly make out a good case that, even before the modern era, one change after another in America prevented the emergence of or rapidly broke up an "authoritarian family system." Their tracing of this phenomenon is itself interesting and a worthwhile correction of folk-belief and official history. But the question arises whether and in what sense a family that is merely nonauthoritarian is "democratic"—even if the alternative that emerged has, as they claim, small social distances, mild discipline, and so on, or is "equalitarian, permissive and child-oriented" as they put it in another place, or where, as among the pre-World-War-II Manus ("a democratic family system where we would least expect it") the children "did as they pleased, bullying and tyrannizing over their parents." One might question whether this is a democratic family in any sense, and, further, whether it is calculated to produce children who are lovers of democracy or would be competent to practice it if they were.

All turns, of course, on what is meant by the word democracy, and whether its uses in the authors' various contexts (family, business, state) are compatible and also consonant with what is intended by the fundamental argument "democracy is inevitable." One might have supposed that, whatever else democracy means, it implies a system of self-rule, perhaps—is it corny?—government of the people, by the people, for the people. There is, of course, a great deal more to it than that. But the intended upshot is the appearance and reality of rule responsive to the properly informed judgment of those affected by the rule. Its principal virtue is that it *necessitates* the continuous education (in the highest sense) of all parties to it. What relation this bears, in reference to a family, to parent-child proximity, "mild" authority, and nonpossessiveness or child-centeredness is problematic indeed—unless these are *outcomes* of a democratic structure or process. But if they are outcomes only, what would be

a democratic family—in either sense: democratic in itself or calculated to produce lovers of and competent practitioners of democracy? Clearly it cannot be "authoritarian"—meaning practically all the bad things we mean in the political sphere by "totalitarian" or "fascist." But is the only alternative a family with no one in charge, a family that virtually assumes the parents have no "superiority of . . . knowledge, perceptions, attitudes and skills," that entails (without reservation) that "the products of earlier education become debris that chokes off later growth," so that there cannot be at any time in any matter a valid and legitimate authority? Should not this be called the anomic family? And is it not precisely the children of such families who jam our clinics, anxiety-ridden to the point of panic, at the lack of valid, protective authority with which to identify, in which to partake, and in measured increase to which to succeed? And do we not have working models of quite other genuinely democratic families the hallmark of which is rational, legitimate authority, first given, then granted, then redistributed, families whose life is in dialogue so that "rulers" and "ruled" are continuously mutually educated, families where there is full and firm rule so far as possible by and on behalf of all, a genuine expression of a common good of a family that thus genuinely exists *as* a family? And is it not such families, as expectable in theory and confirmed in experience, that generate in the children precisely the inner "democratic character" that continues the knowledge and love of democracy into other, more public spheres of life?

I believe that the failure of the authors explicitly to relate their definition of democracy ("a system of values . . . [that] include: 1. Full and free *communication* . . . . 2. A reliance on *consensus* . . . . 3. The idea that *influence* is based on technical competence and knowledge," etc.) to the demands of democracy in the classic sense vexes and bedevils the argument at every point through an otherwise most stimulating and interesting book. But equally serious, I think, is their taking of present mindless, technology-led, rapid social change as a datum, a permanent datum, accepted or espoused. I think it exceedingly doubtful that any trace of democracy can long survive it, and I believe we now see such democracy as we have tottering punch-drunk in the face of it. Indeed, I should have thought, as do many of my colleagues, that the "constitutionalization," the bringing under democratic control, of the twin pythons—the science that brought us Hiroshima and the technology now polluting biosphere and noösphere beyond recall—would be the first order of business for a democratic society that has sufficient strength to see to its own survival.

The questions raised by the book are of the first importance. It deserves careful reading. If the authors are right we are on a paradisiacal path where this reviewer sees only and wrongly a well-paved road to hell. The issue deserves the weightiest discussion.

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Directional Guides

Animal Orientation and Navigation. Proceedings of the 27th Annual Biology Colloquium, Corvallis, Ore., May 1966. ROBERT M. STORM, Ed. Oregon State University Press, Corvallis, 1967. x + 134 pp., illus. $5.

These six papers on animal navigation result from a colloquium held at Oregon State University. No claim is made to comprehensive coverage of the subject. For instance, the extensive migrations of insects are not mentioned. But the book does provide a useful and authoritative review of six major areas in which important investigations are in progress.

Arthur D. Hasler reviews his own extensive work and that of others on the migration and homing of salmon, and the olfactory orientation and sun-compass orientation of freshwater fish. Most of this material is also available in Hasler's own book *Underwater Guideposts: Homing of Salmon* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1966). The four pages of detailed discussion of Hasler's paper provide a helpful indication of the unanswered questions in this field.

Although Denzel E. Ferguson's review of "Sun-compass orientation in anurans" has broad coverage, including, for example, the impressive work of Twitty and his associates on the homing abilities of newts, the emphasis is understandably on the work of the author and his colleagues. This work has convincingly demonstrated that anurans learn the direction of the shoreline along which they live. When captured and released in a circular enclosure filled with water, these frogs tend to swim consistently in a direction which would bring them back to their home shoreline were they swimming near it. The directional tendency persists when they are transported in light-tight containers and released at any hour of the day or night, but only if the sun, moon, or stars are visible.

The migrations of turtles are discussed in characteristically stimulating fashion by Archie Carr. First Carr describes the basic reproductive cycle of sea turtles (*Chelonia*), along with the results of an extensive tagging program that has documented their lengthy migrations. Then he turns to the navigational problems posed by their open-sea migrations, with specific reference to the population of green turtles that nest on Ascension Island in the mid-Atlantic but feed along the coast of northeastern Brazil. The chapter concludes with Carr's views on the possible evolution of island-finding by sea turtles. He is inclined to be open minded toward all possible hypotheses concerning the sensory basis, or bases, of these remarkable feats of long-distance navigation. He considers that inertial navigation and sensitivity to terrestrial magnetism are worthy of renewed attention despite negative evidence that has discouraged most zoologists.

William J. Hamilton III discusses what may prove to be a significant new facet of bird orientation behavior. This is the possible role of social stimuli and interactions between birds in groups or flocks. Although necessarily preliminary and speculative, Hamilton's idea is an intriguing one—that members of a flock share orientation information and thereby improve upon the capabilities of any one individual. This might help explain the increase in flight calls of nocturnal migrants that has been reported to occur late at night and under conditions of poor visibility. Hamilton presents data indicating that the sun is used by starlings to help orient their daily foraging flights from concentrated roosts to distant feeding areas. He also finds that large flocks are better oriented than small ones, and he goes on to consider the possibility that the characteristic V formation of geese may be related to this postulated pooling of directional information. While no conclusive proof is advanced for any of these suggestions, their presentation is a significant con-