

Unsafe at Any Metabolic Rate

From Cambridge in the East to Berkeley in the West, and not excluding all the cow colleges in between, there are multitudinous colonies of apprehensive little men and women earnestly consuming the daily news, scowling, and wringing their hands over the worsening condition of the planet Earth. Though it makes some of them cringe and others become physically ill, they are all in a fever to know every fresh infamy committed by their fellow *Homo sapiens*—especially their fellow Amerikan *Homo sapiens*.

So they look to their local gazettes for headlines of calamity and decline. They rush to their television sets for the latest soap opera performances of the "evening news" and for fresh confirmation that Darwin was in error—it is not the fittest who have survived but the most inferior, and the most inferior are now hastening us along on a path to catastrophe. If ever they begin to lose this premonitory faith in mankind's imminent self-inflicted finale, they seek renewal in the anxious pages of the *Progressive*, the *Nation*, and the *New Republic*. They turn to National Public Radio, which they consider an educational experience, and some—those wishing to plumb the heart of our darkness—brave the *New York Review of Books*.

These are America's intellectualoids, at least they are mostly intellectualoids, and if their neurotic fears are merely transmogrifications of those uncertainties that every intelligent man has lived with and reflected upon since mankind's first stirrings in the Mesopotamian silt, that is little consolation to them. These fears are as closely related to their cerebral condition as flies are to a summer picnic; for it is the idiotic condition of the intellectualoid to remain forever gripped by that vast sense of limitless wonder that always emboldens the semi-educated, making him such an enormous pain to his betters, who put puerile awe behind them sometime during early adolescence. This infantile sense of wonder is what induces intellectualoids to ponder matters that are hopelessly beyond their meager intelligence and that leave them unhorsed and trembling from the experience. If a modern Galileo were to take pity on them and to explain to them that most of their fears are moonshine just as most of their wonder is ridiculous, he would be put down as an agent of Nixonian conspiracy or worse. The congenital oaf needs his fears; and, in every era, America has abounded with charlatans glad to minister to these needs.

Now in days of yore the charlatans had to conjure up delusions remote, exotic, and ominous to set an oaf to quavering. For instance, Bryan sold his snake oil with tales of Eastern Bankers and spirits from the nether regions. But today's

charlatans have an easy time of it, for the intellectualoid is even more gullible than a Tennessee dirt farmer, and he is more numerous. Even now many of these intellectualoids are shuddering in deadly dread of things so commonplace as *Wonder Bread*, *bacon*, *sugar*, *prime grade beef*, *Coca Cola*, *table grapes*, *Gerber baby food desserts*, and three mystery substances, denominated by them as *Frute Brute*, *Breakfast Squares*, and *Pringles*.

Appalling? Amusing? Agreed, but typical of the genre; for over a decade now intellectualoids have been bombastically testing every American value and every American institution. No social, political, or philosophical matter has been too abstruse for their pretentious skepticism. And today, after this great pothor of reassessment, the result of it is that intellectualoids all over the country are quaking in their sandals over the metaphysical possibilities of Coca Cola. They are terrorized by breakfast. Table grapes are to be treated circumspectly.

Today's intellectualoids have cultivated more fears than a medieval peasant. In fact they harbor so many fears that a pervasive and incorrigible craziness has overcome them, and they are now pressing their nostrils on all fronts. That is why we cannot dismiss their nutritional fears with guffaws and knee slaps. If recent history has taught us nothing else, it has taught us that what the oaf fears he outlaws, and with the oafs fearing everything from scientific experimentation to white bread, civilized man's liberties are in a tender condition.

If you doubt the intellectualoids' fury, consider the fervent testimony of an MIT microbiologist, the eminent Dr. Michael Jacobson, an organizer of the Center for Science in the Public Interest and a scientist in whom a yelp is struggling to be heard. *Wonder Bread* shall never touch his lips, nor shall *Frute Brute* besmirch him, for he is an intellectualoid with a mission. If he and his associates have their way America will be as free of *Wonder Bread* as Teaneck, New Jersey, was free of hooch from January 16, 1920, to December 5, 1933.

The aforementioned dangerous substances compose a list designated by Dr. Jacobson "The Terrible Ten," ten loathsome foods that fill every fastidious intellectualoid with fear. After reading Dr. Jacobson's learned treatise on them, even I was a bit wobbly, for it seems the gustatory arts, as practiced nowadays, are laced with exploitation, voodoo, and homicide. This at least is what consumer-conscious intellectualoids like Dr. Jacobson would have us believe, and it is instructive to consider their case.

Certainly the above list embraces a wide variety of foods, and Dr. Jacobson's

literature notifies us that a wide assortment of evils issues from them. For instance some are poisonous, e.g. bacon and sugar. Others are American indulgences the continued use of which threatens international disequilibrium and personal spiritual damnation, e.g. prime grade beef. Pringles represents "the ultimate insult to the potato," a food known to the cognoscenti as "a terrific vegetable." Still others are exorbitantly priced and possibly serve as covers for the Central Intelligence Agency, e.g. *Wonder Bread* and *Coca Cola*. All in all one would have to admit that the Terrible Ten encompasses a veritable profusion of evil.

To address each complaint would be heavy labor and ridiculous labor at that. For there is, as mentioned earlier, a pervasive craziness about this business, and one sheds one's dignity when one rises to the dais to debate a loon. So let us consider that one evil characterizing every item on the list; in doing so one discovers not only the depth of our intellectualoids' fears but also the craziness that has overcome them and placed them beyond the pale.

What is it that commends *Frute Brute* to the Terrible Ten and not say *Acapulco gold*, *tiger milk*, or *Vitamin C*? After intense study of the works of Dr. Jacobson and other consumerist intellectualoids who share this obsession with foods, I think I have finally apprehended the complaint fundamental to all the foods listed amongst the ten. As they see it the problem with the Terrible Ten is that those who eat from it die! Oh one can ingest *Wonder Bread* with impunity for a few decades or so, but then the wraith cometh, and the only ones who have profited from the exchange are the tax collectors and the tycoons of Colonial Bakers, Inc.

As the consumerist intellectualoid sees it, death, just like child abuse, relative deprivation, and sexual inadequacy, does not have to happen. At least not until one has lived a life full of happiness, fulfillment, significance, and Scandinavian furniture, a life that is...well, a life that is the standards statistical life as extrapolated by intellectualoids in public interest think tanks. Now just as the standard statistical life is free from "pointless" work, material discomforts, psychological longings, and unsatisfactory sex, so too is it free from bowel cancer, heart disease, and inconvenient strokes. If the American citizenry abstains from the Terrible Ten it will move a giant step toward realizing the intellectualoids' dream of the standard statistical life. Of course other benefits will accrue. Migrant workers will be educated. Under-

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Special Book Review/A. Lawrence Chickering

Authority: Garbling the Issues

Advancements in knowledge about the social and psychological nature of man are tragically few and far between. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, the fashion has been to expect those advancements to come from the social sciences—from sociology, psychology, political science, and anthropology, among other disciplines. There was a time, before they thought they discovered scientific objectivity, when all of these disciplines in a university were in the philosophy department. Indeed, until not too long ago, a doctoral candidate in psychology at Harvard would have to defend his thesis before the entire philosophy department, which at various times included such figures as Alfred North Whitehead, William James, Josiah Royce, and George Santayana.

It was only in the mid-thirties that sociology, psychology, and the rest were certified by the philosophy of science to be separate departments, and philosophy was left with what many of the scientifically-minded regarded as the fever-swamps of either linguistic philosophy or metaphysics. Until only recently, these new social positivists have regarded philosophy as a quaint anachronism—curious as many think archaeology is curious, but of no practical value in an age of objectivity and “facts” to man’s search for himself.

People may disagree about how much man’s understanding of himself has advanced in this age of social science. Yet one can’t help noticing the ironic coincidence—which may not be mere coincidence—that social and psychological disorder seem to be increasing, just as the potential for a “scientific understanding” of man seems greatest. Under the circumstances, we have excellent cause for wondering how much social science, cut off from philosophy, can ever tell us about man, and whether our reliance on an impossible objectivity is not itself caused by the philosophical and social currents that are undermining

our political and social order.

Because the occasions are rare when social science *claims* for itself an important breakthrough in understanding, few opportunities are available to scrutinize both its theory and its practice—especially to appreciate its severe limitations. One recent occasion was presented in the publication of what has been billed as a seminal study of the problem of au-

Obedience to Authority

by Stanley Milgram
Harper-Row \$10.00

thority, by a psychologist with all the resources of a scientific laboratory at his disposal. The book, *Obedience to Authority*, by City University of New York Professor Stanley Milgram, has been celebrated almost universally (and in my view legitimately) by social scientists as social science at its best.

Unfortunately, while *Obedience to Authority* gives us social science at its best, it also gives us a vivid illustration of the weaknesses of a social science cut off from philosophy, and of the critical limitations in our intellectual discourse on the problem of authority. It is thus an enormously important book, both for its content, and especially for the response it provoked. It is perhaps most important as a symbol of our society’s vulnerability to authoritarianism—not so much for what it says, as for what it does not say.

Obedience to Authority grew out of a series of experiments Milgram undertook at Yale in the early sixties, to study, as he put it, “when and how people...[will] defy authority in the face of a clear moral imperative.”

To study the comparative effects of pain-infliction versus an authoritative command, Milgram recruited volunteers, ostensibly for a study of “memory and

learning,” from the adult, male, working population around New Haven. But the experiment was not really for a study of memory and learning. Indeed, the experimental situation itself is one of the most interesting and controversial aspects of the book, and several reviewers have accused Milgram of being a Hitler and a Strangelove for having contrived it.

By apparent luck of the draw, the volunteer (“subject”) finds himself seated in front of an impressive electronic board, featuring a long row of buttons, designated with electrical currents going in 15-volt increments from 15 to 450 volts. To help him understand the point of it all, eight categories of shock intensity designate groups of buttons, going from “Slight Shock” at one end, to “Danger: Severe Shock” and “XXX” at the other.

A second “volunteer” (“learner”), apparently luckless in the draw but in fact part of the experimental team, sits in a chair, with an electrode attached to his wrist. Electrode paste is applied “to avoid blisters and burns.”

In the “memory and learning” study, the “subject” asks questions of the “learner,” and for every wrong answer he “punishes” the “learner” by giving him an electric shock, beginning at the minimum 15 volts and increasing the voltage 15 volts for each wrong answer, right up to 450. The authority is a laboratory technician, of impassive manner and stern appearance, clad in a grey technician’s coat, who commands the “subject” to continue (“The experiment requires that you continue”), and when necessary assures him that “There is no permanent tissue damage.”

The experiment begins, and with each wrong answer, the “subject” moves up the row of buttons. Here is Milgram’s description of the “learner’s” response: “At 75 volts, the ‘learner’ grunts. At 120 volts he complains verbally; at 150 he demands to be released from the experiment. His protests continue as the shocks escalate, growing increasingly