

DEALING WITH THE GIFTED CHILD

By Nathaniel Branden

In addressing the issue of "dealing with the gifted child," Nathaniel Branden presents cornerstone questions adults must confront if they seriously want to be sensitive to the needs of children.

Branden is especially successful in communicating the urgency of the problem: the tragic waste of human potential which follows as a result of abuse, indifference, and repression. For this reason alone, I would recommend the tape, particularly for teachers and parents who are unfamiliar with Branden's work.

What are these essential concepts which Branden explores in his discussion? First of all, young children, *all* of whom have very special gifts and potentialities, need an environment which provides love and encouragement, and to grow without the threat of rejection, repression, and guilt. Secondly, adults should reacquaint themselves with the lost, gifted child within, so that strong, empathetic understanding and support can freely emerge.

Demonstrably, the adult who is chained to his own repression, fears individuality, is motivated by the desire to dominate, and is unable to face the child within himself, is clearly going to have difficulty in dealing effectively with children. The connecting bridge between the adult and child is the mutual acceptance, understanding, and support of positive life values which are *actualized* within the context of the relationship.

What the adult often fails to realize is that his values and those required for the healthy growth of the child are frequently incompatible. The adult then attempts to "solve" the resulting conflicts by the use of force and denial, methods against which the child is clearly powerless to cope successfully on a rational basis. Instead, both learn to engage in manipulative relationships, which drain energy and creativity and which lead to the failure of each to maintain those values theoretically endorsed. As Branden points out, many children struggle only briefly to attain self-esteem and integrity in a world become increasingly hypocritical and inconsistent, if not harshly inimical to their well-being. Others simply grow bitter.

It is the adult's responsibility to provide an environment within which the child can prosper at his own rate, according to his own internal needs and capabilities. The adult has the "upper hand" in the relationship; thus he must attain the self-discipline and responsibility for abhorring coercive methods in relating to the child. Unfortunately, many parents and teachers intimately involved in the growth of the child are apparently incapable of achieving this essential discipline and responsiveness. Such people have no business being parents and teachers.

In spite of the fact that Branden deals directly with some core issues in his discussion, I question the inferences made when he concludes, even after admitting that the child needs emotional and intellectual freedom, that: "It's your house. Certain basic principles of safety, law and order and respect have to be maintained, obviously." He fails to consider (a) what these "certain basic principles" are, (b) how they are formulated and observed, and (c) in what respect the child participates. The fact is, most home environments (and many, many schools) are created by adults, *for* adults. The child must somehow conform, regardless of whether such a context is alien to his very special needs.

In this tape and elsewhere, Branden has made it clear that the child's purpose in life is not to become (or to be viewed as) a family or national resource, that his reason for living is not to please every expectation of his family, teachers, or society. Yet predominantly, this is how the child is handled and taught, and wherever he turns his environment reflects everyone's choices but his own.

To provide for the child's needs, however, the adult must understand what these needs are. Whereas much remains to be discovered and understood with regard to this issue, a great deal is known about how the young child grows and develops his human capacity. Unfortunately, Branden's discussion is far too general to be of much practical use. His recommendation of Haim Ginott's work (again), while commendable, is of limited value. I especially recommend the work of Jean Piaget, Maria Montessori, Jerome Bruner, Joseph Mc V. Hunt and, for at-home Montessori applications, Elizabeth Hainstock. Those interested in technical and/or scientific research material should contact university departments and/or professional research groups for assistance. Parents and teachers would also profit from exploring various professional and therapeutic programs which deal directly with adult-child relationships.

These recommended authors, in their own special way, have examined the world of childhood with a view toward optimizing the natural, unobstructed development of the child's burgeoning intelligence and sensitivity. While they do not deal so much with interpersonal aspects of the question, they do provide very helpful knowledge regarding the child's characteristics and needs. Thus, the adult need not enter years of therapy exploring his own childhood before he can take the initiative and responsibility for providing the best possible environment for the child. He simply has to care enough to explore the alternatives. Reviewed by Peggy Farrell / Education (Cassette Tape 555, 48 min.) / LR Price \$9.95

CULTS OF UNREASON

By Christopher Evans

If you want an entertaining read, this book is for you. If you want some disturbing, insightful ideas which may cause you to modify cherished beliefs of your own, then this book is absolutely for you. The subject is important as hell—the hell which credulity has again and again made on earth. Not that the author's generally good-humored account of eccentric modern faiths comes right out to make any such portentous point. But Evans goes at least partially into the reasons for their existence and the explosive growth of several. And those reasons bear plenty of thinking about.

One would expect this of Christopher Evans. A British research psychologist, he includes in an adventurous background not only study at orthodox institutions, among them a physics laboratory, but at Duke University with Joseph Rhine, the advocate of psionics. Evans remained unconvinced—but went on to do work himself which appears to be leading toward breakthroughs in our understanding of the human nervous system and mind. Frequent public appearances at home and in North America, in the cause of scientific popularization, have helped keep his own mind healthily uncloistered.

About half the present book he devotes to Scientology, "the science fiction religion" as he calls it, from its origins in L. Ron Hubbard's dianetics—a crude mishmash of the most simplistic concepts proposed by early speculative thinkers—to its current status as a church of world-wide membership and developing respectability. Thence he goes on to "the saviours from the stars" whom flying saucer enthusiasts insist are among us, to various "black boxes" for which superscientific properties are claimed, and finally to a glance at certain of the Oriental and fake-Oriental religions which in the past few generations have gained considerable ground in the West.

It is easy to show up revelations of that kind for the nonsense they are—unsupported assertions, outright misstatements, logical non sequiturs, meaningless noises—and debunking writers like Martin Gardner have done this over and over. Unfortunately, they hardly ever convince a believer. When the latter does become disillusioned, as happens fairly often, he seldom turns into a rationalist; he embraces another creed, usually just as crank. Even occasional

scientists and philosophers, a few of them brilliant, have been trapped into nuttiness: for instance, Sir Oliver Lodge or Bertrand Russell.

Why? Evans thinks the decline of established religion, as well as general social upheaval, is responsible for the rise of new dogmas. He points out how much more readily a rootless, half-educated modern person is impressed by pseudoscientific jargon—especially if it relates to powers higher than human—than by appeal to a Bible which the churches themselves have been busily stripping of its mystery. In wry fashion, he declares that many of these cults do fill a need, and some may have the potential of becoming valued parts of society as a whole. (Thus, whatever its faults, Scientology has been in the forefront of the battle against involuntary psychosurgery.)

To this I would add with more pessimism that the same will to believe has given power to such blatantly unscientific systems as communism, nazism, or, in lesser degree, twentieth-century liberalism. There is a very common personality type which L. Sprague de Camp has dubbed the credophile. Can this be the breed that, when deprived of a satisfactory traditional faith, turns into Eric Hoffer's True Believer?

Libertarians had better not feel too smug. They are at least prone to wishful thinking. Thus, in order to oppose a domestic military establishment, they are apt to maintain—in the teeth of history and easily available contemporary data—that the Soviets and slave Chinese are no threat at all. Additionally, they credit our species with more objectivity and independence of spirit than the bulk of it seems to have. This question has not yet been properly answered: "How can we win and secure freedom when many people, probably a large majority, don't want it?"

Evans asks this only by implication, but should jog readers into thinking about it. His book has flaws, including slipshod grammar and proofreading, and a minor error concerning Tolkein's hobbits. But don't let that stop you. If nothing else, as said, you'll get fun out of it, which is a rare treat these days. Reviewed by Poul Anderson / Social Psychology / LR Price \$7.95

COCAINE

By Richard Ashley

THE DOORS OF PERCEPTION and HEAVEN & HELL

By Aldous Huxley

LICIT & ILLICIT DRUGS

By Edward M. Brecher

Open any daily newspaper or weekly newsmagazine, tune in any radio or television news broadcast, and you will encounter "the drug problem." The quotation marks are there for a reason; there is a drug problem in this culture, but the news accounts are not informative about it; they are symptomatic of it. For the problem is not one of "addicts" and "pushers" who use and sell "dangerous drugs"; it is one of thugs and their public-relations men who prohibit socially innocuous activities, interfere in the free market to the detriment of everyone involved, and spread vicious, deliberate lies about the substances they seek to control.

The thugs are politicians and medical doctors; their public-relations men are members of the news media who report their grossly exaggerated and sometimes even fabricated stories as fact. Consider the case of cocaine. Conventional wisdom has it that this "hard drug" is psychologically and physiologically addictive (whatever that means); that its regular use leads to paranoid delusions, violence, and, upon withdrawal, intolerable depression; that the "cocaine fiend" is a threat to himself and to society. The facts are that the Indians of the Andes have been using cocaine daily for more than 2000 years—using it in quantities comparable to those ingested by today's illegal users—without harmful consequences (though there seem to have been a few beneficial consequences); that, when cocaine was freely available in America (around the turn of this century it was the basic ingredient in dozens of wines, tonics, patent medicines and soft drinks, including the original Coca Cola), thousands of people took it daily in even larger quantities than the Indians, with almost no documented cases of disaster; that, as in the case of every war against drugs ever conducted in this country, the push to prohibit cocaine originated in a campaign against a despised minority, in this instance, black Americans; that, if drug laws were actually based on the dangers posed by the use of drugs, alcohol would be an illegal substance, available only on the black market, and cocaine would be sold over the counter in drug stores.

All this and more is to be found in Richard Ashley's recent book *Cocaine*, a book I honestly believe (the adverb seems necessary, if only to distinguish this recommendation from a publisher's blurb) every serious libertarian should read. Admittedly, cocaine is not a subject of interest to everyone; there is no reason it should be. But Ashley's book is much more than a book about coke. It is a careful, systematic, painstaking, thoroughly and openly documented study of what happens when government enters the marketplace by forbidding the manufacture, sale, or possession of a commodity—any commodity. Yet in a sense, the real importance of Ashley's book is not in its content, for all that

it offers the most damning case against such government tampering I have seen outside Thomas Szasz's *Ceremonial Chemistry*, but in its method. *Cocaine* is quite simply the best popular book I have ever seen on any subject. It offers not only the care, system, and research I mentioned a few sentences ago, but also a full account of the author's assumptions and the kinds of evidence he considered in reaching his conclusions. It is intelligently written and highly readable. It is the best touchstone I know for anyone who wants either to evaluate popular books on serious subjects or to write such books himself.

Another volume which offers a combination of sound, reliable information and methodological excellence is that containing Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell*. Huxley wrote about nearly everything in the course of his career, proving himself an insightful dilettante of many fields and an undeniable master of one: writing—the use of linguistic symbols in the formulation of ideas. Add intellectual honesty and insatiable intellectual curiosity to this profile, and it becomes not merely plausible but virtually a foregone conclusion that Huxley's would remain twenty years after its publication, the most accurate description of an acid trip in the literature. That there should be an accurate description at all is wonder enough, since LSD seems to play biochemical havoc with precisely that portion of the brain which enables us to form and manipulate concepts and thus symbols. But to the extent that it can presently be done, Huxley has succeeded in speaking intelligibly about that nearly (in the Korzybskian sense) un-speakable experience.

Ashley and Huxley restrict their investigations to specific drugs and implicitly establish social and methodological points of view which are relevant to the study of other drugs and of problems in other areas altogether. Edward Brecher's *Licit and Illicit Drugs*, researched and written under the auspices of the Consumers Union, takes a different, if predictable, tack, that of a research report. Where Ashley and Huxley are concerned to set the record straight on drugs about which misinformation or no information at all has been the rule, Brecher is concerned simply to gather, organize, and critically evaluate all the information there is on all the drugs there are. His book is a wealth of factual material and a model of precision. It has become the standard general reference work on illegal drugs because there is no better one. Reviewed by Jeff Rigenbach / *Cocaine* / LR Price \$7.95 / *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell* (one volume) / LR Price \$1.95 / *Licit and Illicit Drugs* / LR Price \$4.95

THE BOHEMIAN GROVE AND OTHER RETREATS

By G. William Domhoff

This new book by Domhoff is a somewhat unusual admixture of high-society anecdotes spiced with local color, serious sociological theorizing, and listings of the interconnections of those he is studying. But the content of the book speaks directly to important problems in social theory.

American society is, I would argue, becoming somewhat feudalized. It is organized more and more around status rather than contract and is characterized by economic decisions having more and more of a political rather than a market-oriented nature.

In this situation, the background, attitudes, and degree of unity of those in charge become valuable data for those interested in politics. Domhoff is interested in *who was responsible* for the development of contemporary American State-monopoly capitalism. This has been the subject of three books Domhoff has written and one he co-edited.

Domhoff argues that there is a caste that rules America. Domhoff's concept of such castes is very reminiscent of Max Weber's concept of status groups. In the status order, according to Weber, people are grouped by their prestige and their life-style.

Similarly, in all Domhoff's books, the emphasis is both on power and on the cohesiveness of the powerful, based on their shared life-styles.

Domhoff's approach to analyzing who was responsible for the growth of the American Leviathan is a non-Marxist approach.

Neither for Domhoff nor for sociologist C. Wright Mills, Domhoff's intellectual mentor, is the power of the ruling class based directly and narrowly, as it is in Marxian doctrine, on the decision-making relations resulting from the ownership of property in the realm of production.

The central thesis of Domhoff's *Bohemian Grove* is that informal, face-to-face relationships between the powerful rich gives them a cohesiveness as a

group that is necessary in working together to control the society.

The thesis is spun out in three steps in his chapter entitled "Do Bohemians, Rancheros and Roundup Riders Rule America?"

First, Domhoff contends that institutions like the Bohemian Grove retreat (a two week gathering of influential men in an encampment along the Russian River in northern California) facilitate social ties among a nation-wide set of powerful individuals. "Once formed, these groups become another avenue by which the cohesiveness of the upper class is maintained." Domhoff provides some testimonial evidence for the operation of this cohesion effect.

Second, Domhoff contends certain business groups like the Council on Foreign Relations, the Committee for Economic Development, the Business Council, and the National Municipal League perform the important tasks of policy-articulation and consensus-building in corporate-liberal America.

Third, Domhoff contends that there is a large overlapping of membership in government and corporate leadership, in the business policy planning groups, and in the social retreats like the Bohemian Grove. His appendix of over one hundred pages in this book is designed to display that overlap.

But why care at all about the high-society retreats? As Domhoff himself notes, "retreats are held by just about every group you can think of—scouts, ministers, students, athletes, musicians and even cheerleaders."

What is important is that the retreats of members of the governing caste bind the participants together. Whereas pluralist sociologists and political scientists see discord and disharmony when they look at political and business elites, eventually these elite groups do seem to unite to back national policy. Domhoff sees the retreats as a sort of social lubrication that helps make such ultimate consensus possible. Reviewed by Bill Evers / *Political Philosophy* / LR Price \$7.95