

shrill attacks upon the existing welfare bureaucracies, the professional planners, and the proponents of consensus politics and desegregation are a transparent attempt to evade the poverty of their social analysis and the nihilism of their disruptionist strategy. Robert Shrank, one of the more perceptive critics whom they include in their collection, summed up much of their problem: "Having spent a lot of years in both the labor movements and political movements that were expert at creating crises, I know that the whole problem in creating a crisis was to have alternatives for what happens after the crisis. That's the key and I don't think you can have an alternative unless you have an ideological base."

Chester Hartmann, another perceptive critic presented in the volume, offers an alternative in the form of "political action" that "derives from a radical analysis of the reasons why the system has not produced adequate [results]." Socialists would of course see that analysis uniting the organized struggle for reforms with the long-range solidarity of all workers, aiming at the abolition of monopoly capitalism and the creation of a workers' state. Such a strategy would be worth serious risks, for it offers oppressed national minorities and desperately poor whites a chance to end their pariah status and achieve liberation with the rest of the working class rather than the bloody circus of disruption that Cloward and Piven propose.

way to an unknown divine power." In contrast to these modes of spirituality Clebsch describes a heritage in which "our relations to nature and to humanity and to God are inseparable."

Edwards is presented as the unconscious and indirect initiator of this American heritage. Thus, while conceding he never denied the orthodox Christian worldview, Clebsch maintains that Edwards started the shift from theology to religious thought. This distinction between theology and religious thought is central to Clebsch's thesis, and it is unfortunate that he does not articulate it more fully. What he seems to be saying is that "theology" centers upon church doctrines, dogmas, and documents, while "religious thought" focuses upon the religious dimension of human experience.

According to Clebsch, these three thinkers brought forth a sensibility which was more aesthetic than theological or moral. Again, I wish that Clebsch had explained more explicitly just how he understands these categories.

Each of these terms — aesthetic, theological, and moral — is weighted with a history and range of meaning which precludes their being presented as self-evident. In any case, it is clear from his usage that Clebsch does not understand "beauty" in any superficial or subjectivistic sense. Nor is he suggesting that this reality played exactly the same role in each of the thinkers under consideration. For example, though Edwards in his later work made beauty the central category, Clebsch insists that this was not a negation of Edwards's theological orthodoxy. It was, however, a step in a new and different direction, and it was Emerson rather than the "Edwardean theologians" or the revivalists who carried this new spirit forward.

In presenting Emerson's "vision of religion" Clebsch is able to make the strongest argument for his thesis that the distinctive American spirituality is aesthetic. Emerson describes a world in which man and God are intimately bound together without being identical. Clebsch

American Religious Thought by William A. Clebsch

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This is a "history" in a very special sense. It makes no attempt to present even a semiexhaustive treatment of the figures, movements, institutions, and ideas relevant to the religion of Americans. Rather, the author has chosen the more difficult, imaginative, and controversial attempt to grasp the vital thrust of American religious experience as it is manifest in, and created by, three key thinkers. In an illuminating "Prelude" Clebsch states his thesis: Jonathan Edwards, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and William James resisted the drift of American spirituality toward moralism "by translating the religious impulse into being at home in the universe."

Clebsch contends that there is a distinctively American mode of spirituality which was initiated by Edwards, developed by Emerson, and brought to a fulfillment (though not final realization) by James. This spirituality or religiousness is the

lived awareness of being in a fundamentally hospitable universe (though not one free from pain, suffering, and struggle) in which "God is for us, nature is in us, humanity is our métier."

While Clebsch avoids chauvinistic special pleading, he does not hesitate to affirm the positive possibilities of this American spirituality and to offer it as a corrective to the dominant contemporary modes of spirituality. He maintains, correctly in my opinion, that we are at present offered three kinds of spirituality. The first might be called biblical or doctrinal religion, in which God's law is believed to have been presented in a final and definitive form. The second is dedicated to social reform, which can be realized only through a spirit of rebellion. The third is that which calls for "sensitizing the soul to its wider range of feelings either as the core of reality with which it deals or as the door-

persuasively argues that Emerson avoids a superficial optimism which denies the reality of evil. "Rather the relation of evil to good and of ugliness to beauty was a harmonious, balanced relation, one that enhanced the general final beauty of the universe." Clebsch is here insisting that Emerson asserted a universe which was basically harmonious and, in spite of pain and suffering, profoundly hospitable to human selves. Thus he cites a text from Emerson which states: "Religion . . . is the attitude of those . . . who see that against all appearances the nature of things works for truth and right forever."

It is William James who, according to Clebsch, brings to a still unfinished fruition the seeds of this distinctive American spirituality. Since his task is to stress the continuity of Edwards, Emerson, and James, Clebsch emphasizes less than he might the most crucial feature of James's worldview, namely, that we live in an "unfinished universe." Clebsch, of course, acknowledges this evolutionary perspective when he states that "for James, reality grew" and "participatory believing made new reality." Further, by properly understanding the processive nature of reality and belief in James, Clebsch is able to respond forcefully to those critics who think that for James "to believe" is "to make believe." Still, I would like to suggest what I hope is a refinement of Clebsch's central thesis concerning the aesthetic character of American spirituality.

The heart of this aesthetic worldview is that we find ourselves in a hospitable world. While Edwards, Emerson, and James would all affirm this, they do not all do so in the same way. For Edwards the world is hospitable because an All-good, All-sovereign God has created it so. Hence, as Clebsch points out, "spiritual beauty" is "to be grasped by God, not to grasp God." The task of humans, then, would seem to be to allow themselves to be molded by the "divine artist" so that they will feel at home in an essentially beautiful, that is, harmonious world.

In Emerson the aesthetic proclivities of Edwards are immeasurably heightened. By means of his key doctrines of oversoul, compensation, and self-reliance Emerson describes a world in which God is intimately present to all modes of reality, in which good and evil are intrinsically balanced in every particular experience as well as in the totality, and in which self-reliance does not isolate us from, or place us in, conflict with God/Nature, because the true self is but a particularized manifestation of this reality. Thus the task Emerson sets for humans is to ~~see~~ things as they really are—essentially one and eternally harmonious.

As is evident from Clebsch's description, the hospitable world affirmed by James no longer includes either the All-powerful God of Edwards nor the eternal harmony underlying phenomena posited by Emerson. Absent also are Edwards's religious certainty and Emerson's intuitive certainty. James's world is hospitable because it is open to our acts of creative transformation. Inevitably, then, the role assigned religion and faith will be more dynamic, experimental, and risky than in the worlds of Edwards or Emerson. Clebsch has grasped exceptionally well James's experimental humanism, which is explicitly non-Promethean. James sees the human situation as one in which we are invited to *share* with the divine in the creation of a better world.

Though he did not leave us with a fully developed philosophy of God, the Jamesian texts cited by Clebsch suggest the possibility of viewing God in a way distinct from *both* traditional theism and humanism. James denied that either metaphysical objectivism or psychological subjectivism were adequate to our experience of God. In his effort to remain as faithful as possible to human experience James would not even affirm monotheism unequivocally. He held that the long testimony of religious experience affirms the reality of a "more," which is designated variously as "God" or "the gods." As Clebsch notes, "deity," for James, "was contingent and plural so far

as it entered our perceptual flux."

At the same time James insisted that this "more" of religious experience is "*literally* and objectively true as far as it goes." James denied any possibility of "knowing" the essence of the divine, but this did not render him mute concerning the kind of god-beliefs consistent with human experience. Clebsch describes James's position in this way: "A God must also be *other* than ourselves, the profoundest power in the universe (and therefore capable of commanding *loyalty*, and He also must be *like* us enough to be in commerce and communion with us (therefore capable of *commanding loyalty*)."

Clebsch has concentrated on Edwards, Emerson, and James as the chief exemplars of American religious thought. He has also, however, included several transition chapters in which he gives fine brief descriptions of a number of thinkers such as Horace Bushnell, Henry James the Elder, and H. Richard Niebuhr. While scholarly in the very best sense of the word, this work is accessible to a broad readership. Historians, philosophers, and theologians interested in American religious thought will find it especially provocative. While some will differ with both Clebsch's overall thesis and his specific interpretations, I doubt that anyone can read this book without being impressed by the author's erudition and insight. More important, Clebsch has surfaced distinct resources for the future development of religious experience.

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