

Review Article

A Dedicated Technocrat

A declamatory optimism is traditional in American life: it is the obverse, brighter face of the doomsday pietism hoarded by the earliest immigrants—as well as a competing currency of secular faith in progress, accumulating in an apparently unbroken advance of discovery, invention, and universal enfranchisement. In the sovereign popular culture accompanying that advance, religious and secular elements fuse in a complex order of sanguine expectation and recurrent dread. George Gallup's *The Miracle Ahead*,* in form as well as inspiration, continues along established lines of popularization. For all its announced novelty, it draws upon familiar modes of hortatory entertainment, echoing the dogged eclecticism of a century of modernist sermons, the informed naïveté of three generations of Lyceums and Chautauquas, and the philistine enlightenment of newspaper supplements without number.

In fact, the "miracle" he speaks of is reminiscent of the discovery urged upon the unreluctant in that most famous of Chautauqua "lectures", Russell H. Conwell's "Acres of Diamonds", wherein all the jewellery of material prosperity, social approval, and endless happiness were to be found right in one's own back yard—or front yard, other things being equal. Gallup asserts, praiseworthily, that man has not realized the full potentiality of his brain, and endeavours to assure his audience that techniques and technology now available can secure a future of limitless progress.

As an expression of the very latest in meliorist thinking—looking back, if Gallup would, at least to Helvétius, and forward to Teilhard de Chardin and beyond—this thesis requires some foundation upon argument for evolution as incomplete, and for an assertion of man's own inventiveness as a decisive factor in the natural process of change. There must follow an indictment of

**The Miracle Ahead*. By George Gallup. New York: Harper & Row, 1964
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the ways whereby man has trained and exercised his brain heretofore, with particular attention to the modes and content of formal education. As determined by one of his own questionnaire surveys, American education has been especially deficient, despite the fact that technical and professional training is "second to none" (p. 44).

Apart from faults in the past and present, new ways of thought and action are needed if all the wonders yet undone are to be made real. These ways entail changes in methods of teaching and learning on all levels, to "train students to be creative", while re-emphasizing the fundamentals of reading, writing, and "quantitative thinking". In so doing, the heaviest possible reliance would be placed upon all the new machinery, in particular upon devices for "programmed" teaching and learning. All methods, however, would be selected and practised only as they proved their direction towards the formation and guidance of all activity as "collective effort", or "problem solving by group action."

Proposals are made for developing ways for discovering and encouraging people of talent and public spirit, and for involving them in team efforts designed to surpass such older co-operative techniques as conferences, committees, and commissions—as well as to bypass much of conventional politics—in the solution of all public problems, national and local. And the "new methodology" to be wielded by these teams would be one developing generally out of the activity so closely associated with Gallup's own life enterprise: "the statistical analysis of mass experience".

By asking prepared questions of anonymous, putatively representative groups of people in order to ascertain what they are thinking and doing, then tabulating and projecting the responses, it would be possible to determine the problems needing to be solved, as well as the best ways of solving them. The process would be dynamic, moving towards ever advancing frontiers of knowledge and social and individual happiness. For the motion to begin, however, there would have to occur a certain cataclysmic reformation of society and its political functioning. It would be necessary, he suggests—with the usual specificity of his platform manner—" . . . to invent the kind of organizational design that makes ample provision for thinking and planning, and which also assures that thinking and planning are undertaken under optimal conditions" (p. 119). When these total arrangements are once under way, however, "Progress would be certain, and would be far less dependent upon the emergence of great creative geniuses" (p. 71).

As remarked, the book is popular by design, and its manner of ap-

proaching non-geniuses of today is integral with its plans for educating and organizing those of tomorrow. Gallup is properly critical of the inadequacies of education, both traditional and contemporary. But his own prescription of a goal of excellence may be judged by his uncritical appropriation of key terms, such as "change", "progress", and "happiness", out of popular discourse; or, by the demands upon readers made in sentences such as "The first man-apes or near men are now believed to be the australopithecines, a tongue-twisting word, which means South African apes" (p. 12).

The very tactic of popularization itself implies a certain notion of pre-ceptoral guidance, which is scarcely hidden in demeaning simplifications or by supporting dutiful exhortations of "the masses" to rise to educational leadership. What such "leadership" means precisely is far less clear than that Gallup is proposing another plan for the management of society by custodians and experts, here organized into teams of public-spirited opinion-takers and statisticians. To be sure, there are provisions for programming professional dispassion, dedication to freedom of the common man, and other unmechanized virtues, into the new civic machinery. But without more of those inefficient, tedious indeterminacies of political process that Gallup disdains, his safeguards are hardly as realistic as were the strictures put by Plato upon his designedly imaginary philosopher-rulers, so long ago. Moreover, the kind and degree of politics implied in Gallup's "organizational design" is small strategy for dealing with the dangers to freedom recognizable in all modern systems for applying organized science to social reform, since the *Idéologues* and Comtian positivists.

The question of who is to plan the planners surely has some place in democratic planning, and there is more to the asking than can be left to the outcomes of market research. Nor are bland acknowledgments of "unsolved problems" sufficient reassurance, in dealing with proposals—even of "new methodologies"—that can become, and would so easily become, devices for arrogating political authority. These may be advanced, to be sure, in the name of something hailed as "science". But, for all that there is any assurance here to the contrary, they would as certainly operate as still one more system for enforcing what the naturally or historically inevitable is to be.

The latent image of this dread landscape has long been visible, when those methods of polling and tabulating, so admired by Gallup, have been examined in the light of politics. Despite their virtues for informing the democratic process, the techniques he apotheosizes have given sufficient reason for suspecting their capacities for subverting it, often playing a greater part

in shaping than in objectively discovering the content of public opinion. Even more ominous, however, are the signs in *The Miracle Ahead* indicating just how deeply Gallup is committed to public opinion itself, and what he really means by "leadership".

It may be no surprise that so ardent a technocrat admires the Manhattan Project above all precursors of the organizational miracles to come. But it is sobering, at the least, to see the man whose name has become generic for the measurement of public attitudes grounding his admiration upon the monumental secrecy of the Project, that kept knowledge about the development and potentialities of atomic force from being public information for those ultimately responsible. The point, as Gallup makes it, is not one of wartime security but of renovating government to place the power of planning and execution beyond dependence upon disclosure and presentation as political alternatives. "Democratic procedures must constantly be brought up to date" (p. 130), and this involves arrangements for "political invention", for which, he avers, the framers of the Constitution made prescient provision.

Gallup may be the traditional popularizer of pulpit, podium, and feature pages, in preaching that "A constant search must be conducted to find new ways to solve new problems" (p. 131). And he may be no more than the dedicated technocrat in following these words with "The Manhattan Project found a new and important way . . ." But he is revealed as a menacing rhetorician of Newspeak, or an inexcusably unwitting ironist, in adding, "—however some may regret the result."

MARTIN S. DWORKIN

New York City