

# Against Scientism

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ENDEAVORS IN PSYCHOLOGY Selections from the Personology of Henry A. Murray. Edited by Edwin S. Shneidman. 641 pp. New York: Harper & Row. \$35. By JOSEPH ADELSON

In writing about Henry Murray it is nearly impossible to avoid falling into clichés. A Renaissance man. A legendary figure. One of the pioneers of contemporary psychology. And so on. They are all true.

What is most dazzling about the man and the career is his extraordinary versatility, the protean nature of his talents and achievements. He has been the following, in (rough) chronological order: an athlete, an undergraduate student of history, a playboy, a physician, a surgeon, an embryologist, an anatomist, an orthodox psychoanalyst, an unorthodox psychoanalyst, the co-inventor of the Thematic Apperception Test, the director of Harvard's Psychological Clinic, one of the fathers of the experimental study of personality, our Government's chief selector of undercover agents during World War II, the prime developer of complex assessment methods in the study of personality, an adoring student and scholar of the life and works of Herman Melville.

When someone has done so much, we assume he has done it easily, that he has moved gracefully from triumph to triumph. But in the compelling autobiographical narratives included in this book, we learn that Dr. Murray developed quite slowly, even haltingly. He tells us that he was not an especially gifted student, that he received below-average grades during most of his formal schooling. We also learn of the traumatic and bungled eye surgery performed on him during his childhood - performed without warning, and on a dining room table - which left him handicapped in certain athletic skills and probably caused the stammer that tormented him during much of his life. We learn how difficult it was for him to attain academic recognition, those very qualities we find so admirable - the richness and breadth of mind and experience proving deeply offensive to the academic Philistines of the time, so much so that he was not granted tenure at Harvard until he was 55 and world famous. Fifty-five!

It is not clear in what spirit Dr. Murray endured these setbacks, but endure them he surely did. No doubt it helped that he was born to wealth (his mother, he tells us, had ... [text not archived by the NY Times])

Joseph Adelson is professor of psychology at the University of Michigan and editor of the "Handbook of Adolescent Psychology." "seven domestics" to supervise) in a Manhattan milieu strikingly reminiscent of that occupied by the James family; hence he was never constrained by economic anxiety. One also senses that he developed a strong inner confidence in being deeply cared for by an indulgent father and fussed at and over by a brisk and perhaps overattentive mother. That confidence might also have been responsible for the intellectual risk-taking we see throughout his career. The career did not evolve. It was marked by disjunctions and epiphanies, by fortuitous encounters that led to radical shifts of interest - e.g., his meeting with Carl Jung, which left Dr. Murray transformed; or his being asked by the ship's surgeon on a trans-Atlantic

voyage to assist at an emergency operation, which led to a discussion of Melville and in turn to Dr. Murray's passionate absorption in that author's work.

We soon become so entranced by the Murray personality and career that we lose sight of the occasion -this excellent collection of his writings, intelligently selected and introduced by Edwin Shneidman, one of Dr. Murray's most distinguished students and a celebrated scholar of suicide. "Endeavors in Psychology" includes all of Dr. Murray's best-known papers and beyond that provides a representative sampling of the scope of his writing, no easy task in view of his remarkable range. Among much else we are given the following: his biographical-cum-critical articles on Melville, some brilliant polemics against sectarianism in psychology, two charming and revealing autobiographical essays, examples of his pioneering work in personality assessment, and the seminal writings designed to develop a theoretical framework for a psychology of personality.

Not since William James has there been an American psychologist so versatile, nor has anyone else written with equal verve and boldness. Who else but Dr. Murray could have prepared an address for the American Psychological Association entitled "The Personality and Career of Satan" - an address ranging in tone and topic from the teasing of the audience for its "immaculate Scientism" to a bravura display of erudition in biblical studies, church history, medieval philosophy and almost everything else under the sun (and moon). That address strikes me as quintessentially Murrayan in its display of the grand and good-natured impudence that has marked his public career: drawing upon profound humanistic learning for the sake of American psychologists, who are as a group not noted for humanistic attainment; talking about theology to an audience relentlessly secular in its outlook; and treating the question of evil before listeners whose sensibility is deeply though unconsciously anti-Manichean.

And in choosing to discuss Satan, the archetypical figure of rebelliousness, Dr. Murray is also telling us something about himself and his place in the history of psychology. He has devoted much of his career to creative opposition against the mindless positivism that academic psychology can never quite seem to disavow once and for all, and, in that respect, for psychoanalysis; and yet also against psychoanalysis for its insularity and reductiveness. From the first, Dr. Murray's ambition has been to devise a psychology of personality open to the many domains of knowledge that can clarify the human condition - psychoanalysis, the biological sciences, anthropology, literature and the humanities. I think that struggle - so bitterly fought during the 1930's - is now largely won; it is hard to imagine our slipping back into "immaculate Scientism." That such an idea did not triumph we owe in no small measure to the example and practice and preaching of Henry Murray.

A critique of his ideas & actions.



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