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The words “faculty sound-off” suggest a safety-valve to relieve pressure. I have no grievance. The pressure generated by my petty discontents is not great enough to cause even a small explosion, and I shall confine my remarks here mostly to some impressions of Rice University students.

The student body of every university I have known has a unique personality or flavor, but it is never easy to describe. Rice students seem to me distinctive in a number of ways, and I shall try to give my impression of several of these traits.

A FEW WEEKS ago my colleague Frank Hole and I talked about work, the work done by human beings. We hold identical opinions (which we think we can support with substantial evidence): during most of the recorded and unrecorded history of mankind most men have not worked.

Work, as we understand it today in the United States, and on the Rice campus, is a phenomenon limited principally to the last few centuries and to people of the Western world. By the standards of other times in our own past, and other places today, our modern conception of work is impossible, impractical, undesirable, or unthinkable.

But the idea of hard work has caught on very well indeed among Rice students. (I am aware that all or nearly all could work harder. The statements here are relative.)

WHETHER CATHOLIC, Jew, Protestant, agnostic, or atheist, Rice students as a group are afflicted with serious cases of what has been called the Protestant ethic, cases that occasionally cripple or kill. The eye of the average student seems firmly fixed on the main chance, and the main chance is a high grade (as individually interpreted) in courses and winning a degree.

The intense concern of Rice students over grades has been the target of much unfavorable comment. I shall add only that Rice students impress me as the most intensely grade-centered students of my acquaintance.

Since I have a romantic notion that attending college can and should be an intellectual adventure, this circumstance is disturbing.

BUT SURELY IT is unfair to lay blame on the students. Goals of this kind are learned. They do not spring from within. I doubt that the mainspring of

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(Continued from Page 2) the ethic in question is one's fellow students.

Instead, for the average freshman, it must lie in about eighteen years of training as a member of the American middle class prior to his admission to Rice.

The attitude is confirmed, probably intensified, for the incoming student by policies surrounding admission, contacts with upperclassmen, and, undoubtedly, by the behavior of Rice professors, including myself.

Students themselves, of course, frequently complain about these circumstances. It seems curious indeed that neither students nor staff can offer remedies or even effective palliatives for a condition from which both claim to suffer.

I HAVE SOMETIMES heard colleagues on the campus brand our students as mere test-passers, skilled regurgitators of fact and theory imparted to them by their instructors, but this idea I reject. I have no doubt that, given opportunity and encouragement, Rice students could reach impressive heights of creativity and independence. We have not valued these traits or given them the stimulus of substantial rewards.

As a matter of fact, Rice students seem to me to reach several heights. They are not only extremely compulsive in meeting formal obligations of the college curriculum, but they seem also to represent the highest development of other American virtues.

DESPITE SOME excursions into forbidden realms of behavior, Rice students impress me as extreme tractable, extremely well domesticated people who require little forceful guidance to make them conform with accepted standards of behavior.

I hear occasional rumors of illicit goings-on in the dormitories. I see the occasional couple on the campus at night that bears an unmistakable resemblance to a pair of salmon intent upon going upstream.

Once, at a campus dance held in rooms so dark that it must have been difficult to tell whom one was fumbling (a democratic gesture toward togetherness?), I witnessed several couples indulge in unsightly necking on the dance floor.

IT IS IMPORTANT to note that all participants seemed emboldened by having imbibed some sort of super-ego solvent. Without condoning this and other similar behavior, I nevertheless think it represents only minor deviation from the straight, narrow and secure path.

The students whom I have known on the campus impress me also as most polite and most considerate (tolerant?) of their professors.

These are not words of condemnation. I mean to say only that the selective factors—whatever they may be—that result in admission to Rice seem at the same time to bring forth young men and women who stand in the upper percentiles in qualities besides demonstrated scholastic competence.

LIKE SCHOLASTIC ability, these qualities represent a striving to meet ideals that demands self-discipline.

If, as I have suggested, it is true that Rice selects the scholastically competent conformist, we are faced with several vexing questions.

One of these concerns the value of conformity. Does it demand too high a price in the loss of creativity or originality? The answer is not forthcoming, at least for me. I can only wonder, and be perplexed.

I wonder, for example, if a high degree of creativity or individuality may not also be seen as conformity.

I wonder if we would find these qualities springing to quick, rich blossom if the attitudes and policies of our school made them a rewarded ideal?