Childhood S End Essay, Research Paper

Two Paths Diverge In Human Progress

An Interpretive Paper on

Childhood s End

Can man go any further without assistance? This is the underlying question in the book Childhood s End. From the very start we are introduced to the Overlords who have come to earth in order to save man from self-destruction. Childhood s End is of human progress. In some way or other man journeys to contact with the unknown, and comes face to face simultaneously with the possibility of transcendence and the limits of his humanity (Slusser 155). This transformation is brought about by the Overmind.

A critic describes the Overmind and Overlord interplay as a reworking of the morality-play situation of the Devil trying to steal away from God the souls of men (Samuelson 104). This is a good idea and can a lot of explaining for the reader. The idea that the Overmind is a God-like being makes sense in that this is the reason for converting the children of earth into something greater perhaps so they can enter the Kingdom of God. With the Overlords help man quickly went as far as he could with science and technology, the price man must pay for continued progress is the human form divine (Slusser 153).

But what are the Overlords and Overmind trying to save us from? The way another critic describes it is Salvation is attained by an elaborate process by which man is delivered from the tyranny of matter (Lois and Stephen 104) This would work well with the above morality issue. The Overlords choose the path of technology over the mystery of the Overmind, however the Overlords have only been able to go so far with the technology. Perhaps that is why they represent the devil, they choose the path of technology but that path has only taken them so far and they have not found true happiness by going that path, they are envious of every race of people that gets to join the Overmind. The Overmind is God , true happiness and Salvation is obtained by choosing that path. However since they are not really God and Devils the Overlords work with the Overmind helping people make the right choices and join the Overmind.

The Overlords help us and put us on the other path towards the Overmind by coming to Earth just as we are preparing to penetrate space. By their very presence, Poverty, war ignorance and disease are eliminated: there is even an attempt to erase the resulting boredom by the development of universal education and participation in the arts (Lois and Stephen 104). However we are barred from research in the field of parapsychology. The Overlords contribute greatly to the human race all the while the Overmind is preparing us for the transformation we are about to undergo. The Golden age of mankind is disrupted when a young child begins having dreams which his mind leaves his body and travels to distant planets. Other children begin having similar experiences. The wandering child-minds develop the capacity to manipulate matter. Then as more children are affected, the minds begin to merge beyond the bodies. After a period of using their newfound power, the common mind leaves Earth, destroying it in the process, it ascends into the heaven to merge with the Overmind. The novel does not preach despair in my opinion even though mankind will now ceases to exist; it is more about the miraculous transformation of human into Overmind so that we are seen as mentally the same. The Overmind is both a mysterious transcendence and an expression of qualities potential in mankind (Huntington 105).

The gratuitous nature of transcendence and the fact that it always follows the technological state leaves man no choice but to pursue the technological vision, but with the important awareness that technological progress is not true progress, merely a test of man s moral and intellectual energies (Huntington 105). As we see with the Overlords technological progress alone leads to a dead end. True progress comes only as a kind of reward infused by the Overmind into man s history (Huntington 105). I feel sympathy toward the Overlords. We don t exactly know if the Overlords were given a chance to choose their path of science or transcendence but we see the result. They have all the answers technology can give them, but their shortsightedness for the need of science in their lives has left them feeling empty, because they cannot go any further down that road. Perhaps, as a way to experience a little of what they can never be, is to aid other races at the critical moment of choice between science and transcendence.

Many critics have noticed that Clarke uses the idea of transcendence or evolution in many of his novels, however it only seems to take place when his utopias are in the final stages of heat-death and once collective man no longer struggles or resists (Brigg 151). At this point mankind moves unavoidably toward a point of stasis, but when this happens the moment of transcendence takes place, thus further progress is made in a different form.

Technology accounts in part for the utopian social organization projected in this novel, and also points out the Overlord s failings. The technology brought about a Golden age to mankind but the elimination of real suffering and anguish, combined with the human s sense of inferiority, resulted in mild anxiety, resentment and lethargy (Lois and Stephen 104). To make utopia really utopian, an artist colony is established on the traditionally utopian, locale of an island. Just as technology cannot make everyone happy on Earth, so it has been found insufficient for the supremely rational and scientific Overlords. Their placid orderliness, their long lives, may excite our envy, but they in turn envy those species that can become part of the Overmind.

In closing I draw the following conclusion that science can only take us so far and that idea is personified in the Overlords. We need to be able to make the jump from science to faith so that we can further our progress and through this progress comes true understanding.

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