

A cloistered virtue and virtue are not the same.

A hothouse rose grown for ornamental purposes only may not show the resistance and resilience of the wild one.

That is why I wouldn't join the rush at Conway, Ark., to kick Beavis and Butt-head off cable television there. Those two textbook examples of splendid young American dolt-hood need to be kicked somewhere else — by parents watching the show with their kids and hooting, or maybe even doing a little analyzing if the kids can bear it. Or by brighter teen-agers who know that these two cases of arrested development represent the adolescence they can't wait to grow out of, yet must go through.

Beavis and Butt-head are not without redeeming social value; they would make irresistible case histories in sociology and psychology courses.

Kids need examples of what not to do, too, and a little vicarious stupidity on the tube may help them avoid the real thing. Going through a stage is less painful if cartoon characters will do it on one's behalf. Isn't the aim of moral education to learn from others' experiences, rather than have to pay the price for bad choices?

"Experience is a dear school," goes the old saying, "but fools will learn in no other." Clearly that was

Paul Greenberg is editorial page editor of the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* in Little Rock and a nationally syndicated columnist.

Beavis, Butt-head and society

Isn't the aim of moral education to learn from others' experiences, rather than have to pay the price for bad choices?

said before television, which has proved the greatest teaching device ever invented for fools — not just for their production but possibly even for their prevention.

Educational programs like "Sesame Street" may one day offset the damage done by "adult" entertainments on the tube. Beavis and Butt-head have their uses, too. They would surely be shocked to hear it, if they were capable of being shocked instead of just sniggering, but watching the two B's could be educational.

Huh? Huh? Yes, in educational terms, Beavis and Butt-head represent a kind of "Lord of the Flies"

for slow readers, and as convincing a response as pop culture may offer to Rousseau's recurring myth of the Noble Savage, who usually turns out to be about as noble as these two debrained specimens.

What are the two B's but older Calvins denied a Hobbes to watch over them? They are reduced to being taught by experience, which can be less merciful than a kindly tiger.

If the subjects of Louis XVI could have been exposed to the naked cynicism and naivete of Beavis and Butt-head, instead of the same qualities so seductively rendered by Voltaire and Rousseau, perhaps there would never have been a French Revolution, an episode it has taken the Western world a couple of hundred years to see through.

Our two exemplars of Western civilization circa 1993 also represent the folly of Manichaeism: Everything either sucks or is cool. Those who think their show sucks may need to step back and look at the B&B phenomenon from a distance, which may be the most comfortable way to view these two. There is something to learn from almost anybody, even if it's how not to behave.

Besides, the drawing in the B&B Show seems as primitive as the ideas, and the film as slow and jerky as the principal characters — all of which gives their performance a certain resemblance to art, however boring after a time. Say, the first two minutes.

Others can watch it longer. One 16-year-old girl says she likes the show because it reminds her of so many 16-year-old boys. Another 15-

year-old won't watch because, he says, B&B are too much like a lot of the other 15-year-old boys he sees in school. He doesn't need to see them on television, too.

What is the fascination with Beavis and Butt-head? What's the point? Part of it has to be trying to figure out what the fascination with them is. Part of it is morbid curiosity, like driving past a ghastly wreck by the side of the road and not being able to avert your glance.

There must be something fascinating about the two B's because they've just gone from the cover of *Rolling Stone* to a *Marvel* comic of their own. But if it's their satire, how come they seem to appeal most to those whom they satirize?

B&B are kind of Ren & Stimpy in (sub) human form. Which pretty well sums up one aspect of adolescence. And they'll make parents newly appreciative of their own teen, who doesn't seem nearly so bad after a half-hour with these two masterminds.

Then again, B&B are never subtle or superior. And they never condescend, having nothing to condescend about or with.

A cloistered virtue and virtue are not the same. Amidst the weeds and broken glass of this vacant lot that is our mod, neo-pagan culture, wild flowers do sprout; manhood and womanhood do develop amidst all the trash and discards. Hothouse plants may get carried away by the first touch of vulgarity. But sporadic exposure to a low-grade infection like Beavis & Butt-head may not always be harmful; sometimes it's an inoculation.