

The Underground GRAMMARIAN

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Comes the Revolution?

Gentlemen, you are now about to embark on a course of studies which will occupy you for two years. Together, they form a noble adventure. But I would like to remind you of an important point. Nothing that you will learn in the course of your studies will be of the slightest possible use to you in after life, save only this, that if you work hard and intelligently you should be able to detect when a man is talking rot, and that, in my view, is the main, if not the sole, purpose of education.

THOSE are the words of John Alexander Smith, a professor of moral philosophy at Oxford. When he spoke them, in 1914, to the equivalent of an entering freshman class, he neither outraged nor astonished his hearers. It was little more than common wisdom in those clays.

But a terrible wind out of the East was soon to blow away like smoke most of Professor Smith's youthful hearers, and from that day to this, we do suspect, no entering class, on either side of the water, has been told that simple secret. If there be professors, or presidents, or Secretaries of Education, who know that secret still, they speak of it quietly, only among close friends. To students, and to the world, they speak of appreciation and awareness, of marketable skills and problem-solving, of self-expression and self-esteem, of effective communication, of meeting the needs of an increasingly pluralistic society, and, of course, of competing with those highly "educated" Japanese.

Now is the season when excellence reports, mission statements, and proposals for improvement lie scattered on the land as thick as fallen leaves in Vallombrosa. Many, we have read. Countless others, we will never see. We are not curious. We know them already, we know

them all. Details, like apples, never fall far from the tree; they are always the fruit of principles. And such are the principles of our thoroughly institutionalized educationism, that its principals will not speak, may not speak, and, usually, *can* not speak the simple truth.

Imagine now that there exists an educated superintendent of schools, and that the disaffected parents of his district have demanded that he devise and institute a bold, innovative master-plan for the achievement of excellence through quality education, whatever they imagine that they suppose they mean by those trendy slogans, more or less. Now, in testy protest met and assembled, they are given answer in what will prove to be the last official act of the only educated "educator" in America.

Good people, he says, how happy I am to have not only your permission but even your command to do not what is customary or expedient or politic, but only what is right. For I must suppose that "excellence" can come only from the right, and never from the wrong.

We are all agreed, it seems, that the schooling of our children is less than excellent, which is also to say, since the "schooling" flourishes quite lustily indeed, always spending and always getting, that the *schooling* of our children seems rarely to provide what we would like to think of as the *education* of our children. Can it be that our schooling falls short because its fundamental ideas and principles are right, but not sufficiently funded? Or can it be that those deepest theories and beliefs are wrong? Unless I can answer those questions, how can I even begin the work that you have so rightly required of me?

Much will depend, therefore—can we not say that *all* will depend?—on the powers of my mind. I will have to reconsider every premise of schooling, and test for logic and coherence the theories that have made our practice. My conclusions will be worthless if they are declarations of what *I* suppose in contrast to what some *others* suppose, leaving you to suppose that one supposition *may* be the better. I must report to you, as our geometry books say, *quod est demonstrandum*, what can be shown, not guessed or supposed, but *shown*. To the powers of my mind, therefore, I must bring the aid of strict self-government, for I must dam up in myself the

babbling springs of supposing. I must put aside my habitual obedience to tradition and convention. My dearest notions and untestable beliefs I must detect and rigorously exclude from my considerations. My very intentions must be censored. I can not do this work as a time-serving bureaucrat who is justifying the existence of his job by filling up some pages, or as a public official who needs the approval of the public, or as an habitual innovator patching the leaks in last year's innovation, or as a lobbyist convinced that our salvation lies in the hands of his faction, or as a reformer who promises paradise when everyone else is as wise and virtuous as he. Of all of those, there are legions; their works are innumerable. But for that work you have asked of me, there is no one appointed in the entire organizational table of American educationism. It is a work to be done only by a person whose only cause is to find the truth, and whose only reward is to find the truth.

Nevertheless, I will do it. And all of you, of course, so ardent in pursuit of excellence, will thoroughly check my work, bringing to your study all the powers and disciplines that I will bring to mine. Your high resolve assures, and warns, me that you do *not* intend, yet again, to accept on faith the word of one who claims to be an "expert" in the work of the mind, the work that any mind, given, perhaps, some preparation and practice, can readily do for itself.

To put it bluntly, and most unsuperintendently, it will be my work to discover whether the theorists of our educationism are talking rot, and it will be your work to discover whether I am talking rot. If we are to have excellence, nothing less will do.

There is, however, something *more* that would do even better. It is, after all, for the good of the children that we undertake this work. If we don't know how to detect rot, we will not do them any good. The ability which enables us to do good must itself be good, and should it lead us to understand "excellence," shall we not find it excellent? How better, then, could we serve our children than by giving *them* that ability? Thus, as our long labor goes on, as I am detecting rot in what the theorists say, and as you are detecting rot in what I say, our children could be quickly learning to detect rot in what we *all* say, and in what their teachers and awareness facilitators say, in what the books and newspapers say, what the

politicians and preachers say, what the laws and customs say. Starting so young, they might even learn to do the one thing most needed for decent and thoughtful life: to detect the rot in what they themselves may say.

What decent and thoughtful parents you are to want such a blessing for your children, and what a contemptible churl I would be to withhold my aid and abettance. All we have to do is to repudiate utterly and dutifully disobey countless thousands of laws, regulations, and guidelines now laid upon us by municipal, county, state, and federal governments, and all of their innumerable agencies. All we have to do is reject every cent of their money, to which the rot is tied, and to withhold from them every cent of ours, which we will dedicate to an enterprise that is much, much smaller and far, far greater than anything the behavior modifiers have dreamed. In short, all we need do is to secede.

I must now reveal a secret that I kept too long. The work you ask of me, I have already done. I have been at it for years. Chapter and verse, I have studied and analyzed the sayings of the persuaders and manipulators who have made our schooling what it is. I have seen their mindless dependence on the undefined and the undefinable, their superstitious recitations of unexamined beliefs and unexamined slogans, and, probably most important, the *way of the mind* that is in them and that they foster in others, that convenient "logic" in which the unverifiable and the unfalsifiable, like a couple of one-legged drunks, grasp and clutch each other here and there, and manage at last to lurch around a bit.

Now I can *tell* you, and, if you will read, I can *show* you: those people are talking rot. How shall talkers of rot teach our children to recognize rot? Why would they *want* to?

But we want to, don't we? And we can. It is much, much easier than the clarification of personal values in the affective domain, or the enhancement of transpersonal awareness through intercultural appreciation. So let us begin. First thing tomorrow?

Poor fellow. Tomorrow his office will be empty, and a search committee will be formed to find someone who appreciates the importance of relating to others and writing letters of application for jobs. The parents, after all, were themselves

schooled by the same schoolers. They believe the rot, for they were never shown how—and how easily—it can be detected. In all the “excellence” outcry, there is only the demand that the schoolers do “better” those things that they say they want to do.

In the entire *apparat* of educationism, there seems to be no one who will, or can, detect the rot and show it.

There will be no revolution. Too risky. “Educator” is a damn fine job. We do have to be practical, you know.

The King of America

He who hath a trade, hath an estate
Benjamin Franklin

The Associated Press

SHAMOKIN, Pa. — A plaque etched with a lesser-known Benjamin Franklin quotation was removed from a wall at a vocational school here at the order of the state civil rights coordinator, who said the slogan’s use of “he” was sexist. The official, Glenn Dean Davis, was inspecting the Northumberland County Vocational-Technical School during the summer when he noticed the plaque, which reads, “He who hath a trade, hath an estate,” said school director James Buggy.

Davis contended the use of “he” discriminated against women and the school removed it, Buggy said.

If concepts are not clear, words do not fit. If words do not fit, the day’s work cannot be accomplished, morals and art do not flourish. If morals and art do not flourish, punishments are not just. If punishments are not just, the people do not know where to put hand or foot.

CONFUCIUS, *Analects*, XIII, 3

WHEN Ben Franklin came forth from Independence Hall, an old tale tells, he was met on the steps by an old woman who asked, “What are we to have, Mr. Franklin, a republic or a king?” “A republic,” he replied, “if you can keep it.” It was an answer perfectly typical of his most characteristic frame of mind, good cheer salted with skepticism.

He would not be astonished, therefore, to learn that the Americans had not, after all, been able to keep their republic, and had chosen instead to put their lives, liberties, and even their pursuits, into the keeping of a very nice king. Nevertheless, we would not like to have to explain to Mr. Franklin how that came to happen. He might ask embarrassing questions. But, armed as we now are with exemplary tidings from Shamokin, we would be happy indeed to elucidate for the elderly gent his doubtless unwitting, and surely *ex post facto*, but nevertheless egregious, transgression against the wise and kindly laws of our sovereign.

No man at any time hath seen the King of America, which is to say, of course, lest compassion cease among us, that no man, or woman, or child of either sex, born or unborn, hath at any time seen the King of America, or the Queen of America, as we would surely call him if he *were* the Queen of America, lest some little girl chance upon these words and suppose herself debarred, or even *deemed* debarred, from high and comfortable office in the land of opportunity, and suffer thus the admittedly unknowable but surely dreadful consequences of not feeling about herself exactly as she ought to feel if we are to remain a great nation with liberty and justice for all, and even, someday, be just like the Japanese, only more so.

You see, Ben, it *can* be done. It’s partly a matter of prose style. With a little more thought and diligence, informed, to be sure, by an enhanced social awareness, you too could have written well, rather than just blurting out, in such childish little words, what is, after all, nothing more significant than one man’s personal opinion, and a man, furthermore, who is known actually to have called fools “fools,” and knaves “knaves.” That’s discrimination. The trick is in the language, Ben, which is why it doesn’t matter at all that no one has ever seen him. He is the King of our language, and thus the King of our minds. We know him quite as well as we need to, and entirely by hearsay. Whatever he may say, we will hear.

He says, for instance, that one of his officers, a certain Glen Dean Davis, is a civil rights coordinator. We hear. And we obey, but not, as you might imagine, out of servility, oh no, but out of our enhanced perceptions of social responsibility. We are not a people who would leave our civil rights to languish uncoordinated.

Nor would we ask, as you seem about to ask, What *trade* hath he, who is a “civil rights coordinator”? What is *done* when his “work” is done, what made or mended, what worth increased or usefulness enlarged? Could he set up shop for himself, making prudent provision for all of his progeny not only of substance, but of its means, the life of decent industry and seemingly self-reliance that any free man would prefer to bounden service, and that any good father would want to bequeath to his sons? Should he hang out his shingle above his own door, would his custom be great, clients aplenty in pressing need of civil rights coordination, or can he do his “work” only at the bidding and pleasure of your King, whose pleasure, in another season, may change, leaving his faithful servant to live by a “trade” that is of no use at all to anyone but the King?

No more do we wonder, What *are* these “civil” rights? How are they to be distinguished from other kinds of rights? Can there be *kinds* of rights at all? Whose right to what is this man coordinating, whatever that might mean, when he removes some words from public view? Are there some words that your King would not have his subjects read, that he sends his servants far and wide to sniff them out? If there were other servants of your King, all tradeless men who could not live except the King employ them, and set to seek out witches, would witches not multiply marvelously among you?

Such questions, Ben, we know better than to ask. They have nothing to with the real necessities of real life in a real democracy. They are nothing but language questions. Just talk. And what would come of weighing them? More talk. That’s all. We are a nation of doers, Ben. We are not going to sit around and leave undone the vital work of the coordination of our civil rights just because we don’t happen to know what that means. We do have to be practical, you know. It is far better to set people free than to ponder, in unproductive idleness, the meaning of freedom, which can end in nothing more profitable than a collection of words. Besides, you can be very sure that, insofar as we need to know them, the meanings of such technical terms as “civil rights coordination” and “freedom” have already been dealt with in countless official documents prepared by official servants of our King, and in the official language of our King, which, you might take note,

scrupulously avoids the error of any form of discrimination. Would you not, to know the work of the mason, have gone to the mason? Who better, then, to tell us the work of civil rights coordination than those who do it? Who better to tell us about freedom than those who are paid to provide it?

Reflect for a moment, Ben, on Confucius, who was, as you must by now understand, an unmitigated discriminator. And a sexist. A disciple once put to him this question: What would be the first thing you would do if you were suddenly handed the reigns of government? To that, the wily heathen replied that he would first settle down to a good long bout of the “clarification of concepts.” The disciple, expecting something practical, was astonished, but we are not. We know all too well the ways of these elitists.

Consider, now, the inevitable consequences of that seemingly innocent proposal, and consider, too, how readily we would all be taken in by that cunning absolutist if we fell into the habit of considering seriously questions like those you are eager to ask. If we did that, our concepts might become clear. If our concepts were clear, our words would fit, and we would give a civil rights coordinator quite another name. His function, too, and the “civil rights” themselves, we would come to designate in terms other than official. Such looseness of speech must inevitably make thousands of the servants of the King, and their incessant labors in our behalf, seem little short of ludicrous, thus undermining our faith in Democracy.

And there’s even worse. If our words were to fit, the day’s work would get done. When the carpenter has built the house, the house is built; when Civil Rights Coordinator Glen Dean Davis has prudently hidden from the eyes of the exquisitely sensitive your unfeeling slur, no house is built. All of the work is still to be done. Making the world a better place for the greater good of the greater number may not be what you so quaintly call “a trade,” but if you can get paid for doing it, it makes one hell of a good job.

And if such jobs were not done for us by servants of our King, Ben, we would be left to *ourselves* to consider what is right and just, and should we want to live according to our considerations, we would actually have to *choose*

to do so. And should we form the habit of such choosing, of distinguishing the better from the worse, following the better, fleeing the worse, which is just another way of discrimination, there would soon break forth among us a calamitous plague of morals and art. Morals and art are just what we can expect from people who imagine that they *can* choose between the better and the worse, bestowing esteem only on the estimable, and denying tolerance to the intolerable. If such people abounded among us, could we remain the land of opportunity? How could the sellers sell, the convincers convince, the promoters promote? Are they not sellers, convincers, promoters, all of those tradeless detectors of better and worse in *other* people? Why should they suffer the cruel and unusual punishment of justice, ridicule, disregard, and unmitigated joblessness? Such would surely be their lot in a land where it is supposed that people can read your words for themselves, and consider for themselves, one by one, whether they are offended, and also supposed that whosoever *is* offended can find remedy both sufficient and salutary in saying, and thus in *learning*: Keep your advice, Mr. Franklin. I will figure out for myself, thank you, how best to live in this world, to what work I will put my hand, and on what path to put my foot. I will even decide for myself, Sir, where to put my thumb, which is, just now, as I wish you could see, firmly pressed to the tip of my nose.

And that, Ben, is exactly the sort of anti-social behavior that would afflict us as the result of the clarification of our concepts and the consequent loss of *all* of our coordinators. Long live the King, Ben, long live the King!

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An Unnecessary Evil

As few people as possible between the productive spirits and the hungry, receiving spirits! For the intermediaries falsify the nourishment almost automatically when they mediate it; then, as a reward for their mediation, they want too much for themselves, which is taken away from the productive spirits: namely, interest, admiration, time, money, and other things. Hence, one should consider the teacher, no less than the shopkeeper, a necessary evil, to be kept as small as possible.

THOSE are the words of the prickly Friedrich Nietzsche, little read in our soft times, and fallen into disfavor. Indeed, he goes much too far in his derogation of shopkeepers, without whom we wouldn't know where to go to nourish ourselves. As to the teachers he makes a better case, but still, to call the teacher a necessary evil is to make a "best case analysis." Could Nietzsche see what we have done, he would have found teachers an unnecessary evil.

He assumed, of course, that a teacher would in fact, however imperfectly, go about the business of mediating, of standing in some middle place between the hungry spirits of the students and the great, nourishing spirits at whose richness the students could not get, whether because of inexperience or youth, or for whatever reason.

Three further corruptions of the role of teacher are easily imagined. The first is that of the teacher who supposes *himself* a great, productive spirit but is in fact not. We ordinarily find such a one teaching something "creative," or devoting himself to some emotional therapy, whether arousing appreciation or enhancing self-esteem.

Then there is the teacher who fattens himself as an expert *on* some great productive spirit, so that the goal of his teaching is to display his erudition,



which meager fare some students are happy to gobble, mistaking it for nourishment. Unlike the sentimental manipulator, this one seldom troubles the young, preferring, in any case, students in whom there is little hunger but plenty of appetite.

The third corruption of teacherhood is what you might be able to find these days in Arkansas, and in who can say how many other states where the soggy sop of “teacher testing” is being passed out to any who will swallow it. He is the teacher who will prove his teacherliness, if he passes, in a test made up of fifty multiple choice questions each in mathematics and language, and an essay of about two hundred words. Or, if he prefers, a letter.

We don’t have to see the test that will determine which, if any, of the teachers of Arkansas will continue to mediate between the hungering spirits of children and the great productive spirits who can indeed nourish them. To know that there are people who imagine that there can *be* such a test is all we need to know. But it is entertaining to know as well that the teachers of Arkansas—for this is the case—would rather not take it, lest they reveal some ignorance of the multiplication table or of the past participles of some irregular verbs.

But, of course, it is not the intention of the legislators of Arkansas to find out whether the teachers are indeed fit to mediate between the hungering spirits of the children of Arkansas and the great, productive Spirits who can truly nourish them. Education, of course, is entirely the fruit of such nourishment, but schooling is something else.

And our teachers are something else, and meant to be something else. They are trained not as mediators but only as mouths. The work not in the service of the children but for the good of society, reciting, and enacting, the currently acceptable slogans. It is only for the sake of appearance, of public “perception,” that the legislators of Arkansas put the teachers to a test. Surely, if enough of them can choose some right answers to a few questions about square roots and pronoun agreement, then all can be perceived as being well in Arkansas. The teachers, in fact, should be delighted to have been offered such an easy out.

If there were some test by which we might discover how well they were suited to stand between the nourishing and the hungry spirits, they would not get off so easily.

The word “spirit” has an interesting place in the vocabulary of the school folk. It is held permissible, advisable, in fact, to use the word when naming some utterly unimaginable portion of collective non-entities. The “spirit” of democracy should be mentioned, and so should the “spirit” in which we are all adjusting ourselves in order to make the world a better place, in which the “spirits” of intercultural awareness and of trash recycling will inform, well, at least the *hearts*, of all mankind.

But in the one case where the word can actually apply, in the case of a person, the school people do not speak of spirit. They imagine that it would be religious, and thus non-public, to refer to the “spirit” of some great thinker or poet. They fear, perhaps, and for this it is hard to blame them, that some child will run home to report a violation of civil rights and a diminution of self-esteem. Thus, when the great, productive spirits make their rare appearances in class, they are put forth as examples of something *other* than the flame that burns in them—spokesmen for some thing, skillful masters of something, or purveyors of “culture,” and, worst of all, as object lessons: Jane Austen, my dear students, will enhance your awareness of the plight of women in a less enlightened age. For the working class, we will go on to Dickens.

“Long have you timidly waded, holding a plank by the shore. Now I will bid you to be a bold swimmer, to jump off in the midst of the sea.” Who says that? A free verse innovator expressing himself creatively? A fit subject for the Gay Rights rap session?

No. A man. A person. A spirit And he speaks *to* a person, to that child sitting right there. In the whole world in which that child dwells, there is no one who speaks, and directly *to* him and *for* him alone, with the pure honesty and intensity of Walt Whitman, not even a guidance counsellor. Unlike all parents, teachers, and preachers, unlike all the persuaders of which a child must think that the “real” world is made, Whitman has no hidden agenda. When he says, “I shall be good health to you,” that is exactly what he intends.

And, like legions other great spirits, he *would* be good health, but the child will never hear him. Should he chance on those words at all, it will be only as a coerced participant in “experiencing” literature, and enhancing awareness for the sake of

appreciation. He will not say, for his “teacher” has never said:

This is the voice of my brother in the Earth, long dead, but speaking still, and to me, to *me*, speaking the best truth he can find, and out of love, and for my good, and my goodness. I am hungry, and he feeds me. “Sit a while, dear son,” he says, “here are biscuits to eat, and here is milk to drink.” And I have never tasted better.

That child will never be fed. Before him stands not some great, productive spirit, not even a mediator, however ineffective, but an agent, an agent with an agenda, beliefs to inculcate, attitudes to implant, perceptions to alter, awareness to instill, and, of course, all those comma rules to bone up on for the big teacher test on Tuesday.

Who needs such “teachers”? In whose service can they be elevated to the rank of *necessary* evil? For whose sake will the schools be “reformed,” the hungry spirits, the great, or some other spirits?

The Preferization of Complex Relations

FOR almost two years now we have been brooding over a sinister document sent to us by a reader in California. It is a tattered Xerox of two pages from an article called: “Universities: Training for Policymaking and Research,” by a man who calls himself by the name of Yehezkel Dror.*

One of the pages is text, and the other is a table, most entries of which appear on the next page. The gist of the piece, or at least of the portion we can see, is—Well, of *course* universities can get into the business of public policy research and development, but they will, naturally, have to change some of their ways and put aside, for instance, their odd addiction to “freedom of research,” which sort of quaint custom is here characterized as an “ideology.”

The table is, in the words of Yehezkel Dror, a display of “a few main contradictions between

* From *Science and Absolute Values*, Vol. II of 3rd International Conference on Unity of Sciences, London, UK/International Cultural Foundation, 1974.

Our reader, who is scholarly as well as discriminating, had seen only the page he sent, but he did the bibliographical homework so that we could look up the whole thing. But we’d really rather not.

widespread (though not universal) university features and needs of policy-oriented research and training.” That “few” hints that there are many more “main” contradictions, and thus, no doubt, hosts of others that are somewhat less than main. If it were so, it would be a sign of better health in the universities than we would have supposed.

Dror clucks his tongue over the sorry weakness of academicians for “accepted scientific paradigms” and “rationality.” We have not noticed such a weakness. Indeed, since “schooling” is the biggest of all our academic enterprises, and an effluent, ultimately, from all the universities, where *that* particular public policy is spawned, it seems to us that the universities have a splendid record of “attention to extra-rational components” and surely of “innovativeness” where “basic paradigms”—like logic, for instance—are concerned.

Nevertheless, there probably are a few stubborn pockets of intransigent rationality left in some universities here and there. They do constitute, to be sure, a minor impediment to the smooth flow of public policy, and thus a potentially anti-social element. But the policy-preferizationists have obviously little to fear from the conservative elitists, who are, in any case, so confused about their own ideology that they don’t even care *who* they educate, and thus tend to neglect the creation of new professions for very select groups. That neglect is sure to undo them. The day will come, and that right soon, when those who have nothing more useful to do than to come as close as they can to truth and to know what can be known will find that they have *no clients*.

But the policy concoctors will never run short of clients. Rich clients, and powerful. Never will they lack the custom of very select groups, seekers after new professions, incipient facilitators, coordinators, and change-agents, or the open-handed support of the only master in whose service, and in whose service alone, those very select groups can ply their innovative trades. For there can be only one client with whom the policy devisers must maintain that “complex relation.” Idi Amin, for example. He had much need of extra-rational components, and a little flexibility, a touch of innovativeness in respect to basic paradigms, and of policy-preferization as a main goal, and even of a host of new professions to be practiced for the sake of policy-preferization

<i>University Features</i>	<i>Policy-Oriented Research and Training Features</i>
“pure knowledge” and “truth-approximation” as main formal goals	policy-preferization as main goal
conservatism in respect to accepted scientific paradigms	innovativeness in respect to basic paradigms
teaching for existing professions	creation of new profession part of teaching aims
freedom of research as overriding ideology	complex relations with clients
rationality oriented	attention to extra-rational component of policy as legitimate object for improvement
tendency towards mass-education	policy teaching for very select groups

by the members of a very select group. And there may even be other examples. Only some force of government, be it collective or individual, can take any profit from the work of the policy preferizationists.

The Drors of this world—how many *are* there?—always make us feel foolish and naive, and ashamed of having been so childish. There they all are, merrily flying all across the face of the Earth at somebody else’s expense—ours!—and smugly reading each other papers of hideous purport in posh hotels, relating, oh so complexly, to their clients, and contriving to peddle us the extra-rational in exchange for our pitiable dependence on “truth-approximation,” an archaic and rudimentary craft not suited to a convention of the policy-makers or to the cleverly coordinated control of everybody else’s world.

Here is the root of our shame: When we notice that someone is talking rot, we automatically assume that he would rather *not* be talking rot, that he does so only because he has somehow failed to talk sense. When we finally see that he does not *intend* to talk sense, that he wants instead to arouse preferization by plugging an extra-rational component into somebody’s accepted paradigm we are cast down and a bit embarrassed, as though rebuked by an elder. How silly we seem by contrast with the efficient cleverness and the breezy practicality of the Drors who make this world.

What sort of person is it to whom the idea that research should be left to discover what may be discovered in an “ideology”? What can we ever say to a man who promotes “research” designed to

reach only those conclusions that will make a certain policy seem preferable—or preferizable—and who deems such mendacity a more *useful* ideology than the first, especially with an eye to maintaining those complex relations with his client? Will he not, no matter what we say, reply, not only to us, but within himself, in the ultimate and utterly impregnable defense of all fools and liars? “Well, we do have to be realistic, you know.”

Those Drors are everywhere. They are the people who made American schools what they are, and who can be depended upon, in this latest fever of reform, to make them even worse. Every entry in Dror’s second column names an article of belief long held in schools of “education,” which is why Dror can rightly say that those “main contradictions” are “widespread” but *not*, he is glad to say, “universal.” For generations, now, our educationists have been in the business not of learning and teaching but of concocting policy-preferization, which is why every crazy innovation of the last seventy years has always been justified by that kind of “research” that Dror recommends, the kind that satisfies.

And, thinking of that, little by little we recover from our shame. Which of us is the child—the one who tries to find some truth, even if it turns out to be harsh medicine, or the one who will have what he wants at any cost? Which is truly “realistic”—he who would like to be governed by Reason, or he who imagines—pretends?—that Reason is just an alternate ideology, a paradigm which some may “accept,” and that he may reject for a “better” one?

But we also feel worse, for the Drors *make* the reality in whose name they justify themselves as “realistic.” We might prevail against *natural* children, but not against children with theories.

And Furthermore...

WE HEARD from an astonishing number of readers who seemed to know more than we would have dreamed about the wicked ways of the Nashville Songwriters. Many of them gave us the “correct” title of the song about the tears in the ears. Unfortunately, no two were the same. No matter. All were colorful and entertaining. So were many of the other, perhaps fake, titles, the best of which was: “I Got the Hongries fer You, and I’m Standin’ in Yer Welfare Line.”

We were not outraged, however, by any one of them. They were funny. If some were less than “good,” it was because they were less funny. The best of them showed what we would surely call, if he who spoke that way weren’t making a lot of money for speaking that way, a “flair for language.” And wit. Signs of poetry?

Some correspondents, however, not satisfied that we had indicted the Nashvillains only for whoring, urged that they also be named “a bad influence,” on the young, of course.

Somehow, it never occurred to us to point out that a public display of fabulously successful whoring could have a bad influence on the young, or the old. That seems not only a firm grasp on the obvious, but also a gratuitous slur on the Congress. But those who wrote, strange to say, did not mean that the example of the Nashvillains might lead the young in the ways of whoring, in any of its uncountable varieties, but only that they might bring children to believe that a real man would no more hold himself to a single negative than he would to a single beer, and that the schoolmarms are working a con.

While the particulars of this case seem just a bit frivolous, they do raise some serious questions about principle:

What, if any, is the responsibility of a songwriter, or a Congressman, in the education of children, or in the education of anyone else? Who is, in fact, a “good example,” and what makes him that? How likely are the children, or others, to choose and then follow the “good example” in the absence of any regular and conscious principle by

which to know the good one from the bad, and lacking the will out of which to pursue the “failure” that is understood to be an attribute of the first and disdain the “success” that is said to characterize almost any way of living that provides the latter?

We can find in all this only another way of understanding education: It has to be the power to know influences for what they are and to judge as to which should be followed. Without that power, appetite will rule, and that influence that pleases most will influence most. If children are influenced by some bad example in the world, there must be a *child* who suffers injury. Remedy must lie either in the eradication of the bad example or in so arming the child that he will suffer no injury. To seek the first is to walk a perilous path, and to undertake an impossible task. But to seek the second, that is, to prepare the mind of the child for the power of education, is neither perilous nor impossible. It is difficult, more difficult than lamenting the bad example of the Nashville song writers, which costs nothing, and has no other effect than the clothing of the lamenter in the costume of righteousness, but it can be done.

One of the most crippling illusions propagated by the supposed existence of a “system of education” is the belief that those attributes that can exist only in a person can be generated in groups. Out of that illusion we can imagine that “children” are influenced by “song writers,” or by “Congress,” or even by “schoolteachers.” All of those terms are the names of fictions. The question to ask is not: What are they doing to them? but: What does which one do to which one? Only a *person* has a mind that can influence or be influenced.

We don’t know a single Nashville songwriter, not even in that sense of the word in which we would say that we “know” Wordsworth or Donne. As to the powers and habits of the mind in any one of them, the ability and propensity to tell better from worse, the determination to find and speak some truth, in whatever form, we can say nothing. It may be that they are, each and every one of them, not only examples of the success of whoring and proofs of Mencken’s belief that no one ever went broke through underestimating the American public, but also peddlers of false and misleading understandings of the intense and

pressing pains of which our life is made. If so, then “they” are certainly a bad influence not only on children but on us all. In a list of the harms that might be done by such a bad influence, however, what position ought we to assign to the fact that they also lead children in the habitual use of double negatives?

As to whether children can be educated at all, in any important sense of the word, there are many doubts and questions, but it is obvious that not every child is in fact harmed by every “bad influence.” What makes the difference? Is the difference in the influence or in the child?

Pointing to bad examples, as the educationists always point to “society in general”—which they made—as the baleful power that they can hardly be expected to defeat, is to think education a feeble and uncertain condition, a delicate plant easily withered even by cool blasts. A true teacher is stronger than a Nashville songwriter, and stronger than a Congressman, too. If you know a child who is harmed by either of those bad influences, to which you are apparently immune, don’t waste time on the songwriters and Congressmen. Show the child how you came to be immune.

Dear Readers,

A Word from the Assistant Circulation Manager

You will doubtless have noticed that this issue of *THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN* looks different. We hope that you will come to like it, and we hope that we will come to like it, too. For now, though, it seems, well, just a bit “wrong,” and it calls for some justification.

“Justification,” in fact, is the reason for this change. As some few of our readers still know, *THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN* has, since its first appearance in December of 1976, been printed from hand-set type. As even fewer readers have ever known, it is “written” as the type is set. There is no copy, no manuscript, no “original” in any usual sense of the word. We never know, when a piece begins, how it is going to end. We only know, where it has to end—at the bottom of a page.

This method of composition is interesting and full of suspense, to be sure, but it has certain

disadvantages of which most writers have never even dreamed. That it is slow—very slow—does not bother us very much. But sometimes, when thirty or forty lines have been set, it becomes obvious that the piece is just no good. That sort of catastrophe might mean a delay of a week or more in what we don’t even bother to call a “production schedule.” Even one such false start, added to the fact that all the type used to print the last edition has to be redistributed for the next edition, can set us back for a month or more, as you have probably noticed. Sloth also arises.

And then there is the matter of justification. As the line of type approaches its end, the typesetter must reset all the spaces between words in such a way that the line is tightly filled, for otherwise the type form will not hold together in the press. But it is also necessary that the spaces be kept as small as possible, for widely spaced words are difficult to read, and make, furthermore, an ugly line. Most typesetting must occasionally permit such ugliness, for it is the first and great commandment of typesetting that the typesetter will follow the copy “even if it goes out the window.” Since our typesetter has had the privilege, rare indeed since the typesetting days of Whitman and Twain, not only of changing the copy but even making it up as he goes along, we have been able to print many handsomely set lines.

But he grows old. And slow. He wants to do his work sitting down. And we want to keep a regular schedule, and to publish nine issues a year rather than eight, as we did for our first seven years, and even the occasional supplement. But what we do not want to do—and obviously can not do in any case—is send our manuscript to a commercial typesetter. So we have decided to stand up undaunted for what is right—and compromise.

In just the last few months, as though they had had us in mind all along, the Apple computer people have brought forth exactly what we need. It is a kind of printing machine that takes a computer file and prints out not a scrappy mess of dots, but a real type face—in this case, a pretty good and traditional face, Times New Roman. We have not diverted your subscription money into such a printer, which is too expensive for ordinary mortals, but we have arranged for the occasional (but regular) use of one. We have, however, invested in what the computniks call the “front end” of such a system, an elaborate computer and

the necessary programs for composing and formatting.

We are a bit sentimental and sorry. We'll miss the taste of lead. But the choice, although painful, was not difficult. Our proper business is to get this thing out, and not to preserve a fine and ancient craft. We do promise, however, to do what we can to bring some of the lessons of that craft to the work of setting type by computer, which is often done, as a glance at any newspaper will reveal, very badly. We are happy to report, therefore, that the system we are using is both difficult enough to ensure slow and attentive work, and flexible enough so that we can apply to it at least some of the principles of traditional typesetting.

So much for that. There is another good reason for this change. We are interested, obviously, in what we publish, but we are also interested in publishing itself. We hold that the freedom of the press not only belongs to the man who owns one, but even that that freedom belongs *only* to the man who owns one. Newspapers and magazines enjoy that freedom, of course, but only insofar as the law is concerned. They are, by obvious necessity, bound—bound by the opinions and tastes of their readers and advertisers. And bound, too, by perfectly legitimate principles of impartiality and restraint. Even scurrilous publications are captive to that depravity to which they pander. But the private press, which is, we are convinced, what Jefferson had in mind, is free to be truly free. If it is free to be crazy and perverse, that is the price we must pay so that it will also be free to do what we always hope and intend to do, to curry no one's favor and to fear no one's disapproval, but to seek and speak the truth as best it can.

We would like to dream that this new method of typesetting that we have adopted will make possible the growth among us of small, private presses. Many readers, over the years, have asked our advice as to how to do what we do. In the past, we have told them to start out by learning how to set type—good advice, we still believe, but daunting. From now on, we may have better suggestions.

We have sent you, as you have probably discovered, two copies of this first computer-set issue. Please give one to someone who might like it, if you know such a person. We would like to

find a few new subscribers to pay for all this fancy hardware. Let all Xeroxing, however, continue.

Your in English
Richard Mitchell
Assistant Circulation Manager



**The Underground
GRAMMARIAN**

Volume Nine, Number Three April 1985



The Roll Model of Oregon

Thanks to Jonathan Nicholas, and others like him, if there are some others like him, we will soon be able to stick one in the eye of Godless Communism. Sure, they sent up the first Dog in Outer Space, but could it spell? Nosiree! But the first Teacher in Outer Space will be able to spell quite a few words.

Nicholas writes a regular column for *The Oregonian*, and he was one of the judges asked to select the best of the essays submitted by the teachers who wanted, for unaccountable reasons, to be Teacher in Outer Space. Like most journalists, he seems competent and decent—and a bit naive. He was actually surprised to discover that few teachers can consistently make their verbs agree with their subjects, and that a good percentage of them seemed to think spelling an instrument of oppression devised by the Dominant Class.

Poor Nicholas wrote a column citing some cases of teacherly spelling: “villans,” “canvassing,” “heresay,” “liazon,” “delt,” “cherrish,” and so forth. He cited also the teacher who said that he was active in “contract negotiations,” and the one who commended his philosophy of teaching as “very simplistic,” and the lady who pronounced herself a “strong roll model,” and even the deep thinker who wrote of the feelings “that all humans

are err to.” To us, just the usual stuff, but to Nicholas, a surprise.

His column brought him—was this also a surprise?—a “storm of protest.” He was accused of “casting a slur on the profession,” of “taking advantage of [his] situation as an examiner...to expose candidates’ deficiencies to the general public,” and even of “trading in errors of fact.”

The charges are more interesting and revealing than the transgressions they seek to excuse. A man asked to make judgments is accused of “taking advantage of his situation,” his obligation to judge, because he *does* judge, and in public, the level of learning in those who are paid by the public for the level of their learning. To those who know little of educationism, that seems an astonishing insolence, but among the educationists it is just “our thing,” a bureaucratic version of *omertá*.

Consider another such case: In New York City, schoolteachers are just now being asked to grade their administrators—by checking blocks on forms, of course. (Educationists know better than to ask of each other thoughtful deliberation in writing; they are so busy with quality education that they don’t have time to look up all those words.) The administrators don’t like it, of course, but they have been assured that the results will be kept in the club, lest a slur be cast on the profession. Where some change seems called for, private and quiet discussions will take place. In public, where the money comes from, it’s Three Wise Monkeys City.

The school people, all having been ground exceeding small in their values modification mills of the teacher-training academies, can see nothing wrong in that arrangement. They have been persuaded of that doctrine into which they assiduously persuade the children whose minds they are given to modify, the belief that one person doesn’t count for much, that moral force, if there be any such thing, is an effluvium of feelings emitted by a “peer group.” Thus it is that they believe also, all unaware, in the doctrine of Affront by Association, by force of which they can imagine what no competent electrician or plumber would ever imagine, to wit, that if some electricians and plumbers are known to be no damn good, a slur is cast *on the profession*.

The doctrine of Affront by Association has immense consequence. By its power, for instance,

girls are not supposed to be offended that it is Jack, not Jill, who can jump over a candlestick. Since girls seem not to know that by nature, it must be nurtured in them, and who better to do that than school people, who are affronted, *not* by their colleagues who can not spell, but by him who points them out?

Affront by Association engenders yet another superstition of collectivism, the doctrine of Innocence by Dilution. Well, if there are a few teachers who can’t spell, or make their verbs agree with their subjects, it doesn’t really matter. We should not judge *the profession* by a handful of examples. Which is to say, in a monstrous absurdity that doesn’t bother the educationists at all, Well, the important thing is that *the profession* can spell and make its verbs agree with its subjects. If this or that (merely) individual teacher is perhaps not the best “roll model,” that’s OK; *the profession* will serve.

But *the profession* can not teach a child to spell, any more than a profession can heal the sick or fly a plane. It takes a person to do such things. Every child in every school ends up learning, or not learning, from a person. So we are sorry to report that Jonathan Nicholas backed off in his next column by saying that “someone who writes an awfully poor essay may indeed be an inspirational educator.”

That’s the way *they* talk, in vague conditionals whose “truth” is not subject to any possible test, and whose negative form would be just as “true.”

When Nicholas writes a column specifying exactly *which* of those poor writers are the “inspirational teachers,” and, therefore, which not, he’ll find out what a *real* “storm of protest” is like.

G. K. Chesterton on Lost Lucidity

[As we ponder how to make some point, it often happens, by strange providence, that some reader, just for the good of it, sends in exactly the right quotation. Here is one of the most recent of those treasures.]

That style, or swift construction of a complicated sentence, was the sign of a lucidity now largely lost. You will find it in the most spontaneous explosions of Dr. Johnson. Since then some muddled notion has arisen that talking in that

complete style is artificial; merely because the man knows what he means and means to say it. I know not from what nonsense world the notion once came; that there is some connection between being sincere and being semi-articulate. But it seems to be a notion that a man must mean what he says, because he breaks down even in trying to say it; or that he must be a marvel of power and decision, because he discovers in the middle of a sentence that he does not know what he was going to say.

With Friends Like These

Together we can persuade our friends and colleagues of the wisdom of Lord Keynes, that practical men of affairs are often the slaves of philosophers long dead. We can break out of that bondage if we learn how to judge the live principles which do in fact filter our understanding of the present and the future. We can thereby become quite successful in our careers.

THOSE are the words of one who has himself been successful in his career, if being the director of something called a Council of Liberal Learning can indeed be thought of as a career. Anyway, that's what he is, and his name is Irving J. Spitzberg, Jr.

We found his words in a little piece sent around by the Scripps-Howard service. To what end he cites Keynes, we can not tell, for that point seems lost in what follows, but we can tell that he is trying to increase enrollment in "liberal arts" courses by reciting the latest pitch of the liberal arts hucksters, who do need more students if they are to escape the dismal futures as fill-in teachers of Remedial Writing 101.

Spitzberg's little essay is obviously a part of a larger PR Thrust, for it came out at just about the same time as the CLL's snazzy Liberal Arts Awareness Enhancement Poster. If the poster was in fact dreamed up by liberal artists (so what would *you* call them?), it makes a good case for studying advertising.

In big-headed (symbol?) cartoon-style caricatures, it displays six supposed examples of the benefits of liberal study, presumably. But their power as endorsers of the liberal arts is strangely mitigated by the fact that they are extolled not for

what they were, but what they *could* have been had they been students in today's schools.

One of the examples, for instance, is of Marco Polo! He is put forth as a man who "would have made his quota in international sales," and who *might* have been a geography major, with a minor in anthropology, which course of study would have provided his knowledge of other cultures and a global perspective.

Then there's Benjamin Franklin, who "had the key skills to be an advertising executive." Lousy luck. Born too soon. Just think what he could have been had he gone to one of our colleges.

Elizabeth I is presented as one who "would have been dynamite on the six o'clock news," which puts her right up there with Michael Jackson as an example of what the liberal arts can do for your career. She, of course, might have majored in foreign languages, and thus found a multi-cultural perspective.

If it has never occurred to you that Bach "had the chops to create computer software," or that Shakespeare "would have made a great corporate manager," it is entirely due to the fact that you are not an imbecile. And if it now occurs to you that Tolstoy would have been socko at getting out the newsletter, and that Alexander of Macedon would have done a bang-up job of organizing the annual picnic, you should have a great start on a poster of your own.

Strangely enough, the poster makes no mention of facts that students want to know. Exactly what courses did the Queen take? What was Marco Polo's grade-point average? Did Shakespeare develop his communications skills in a freshman composition course or in a creative writing course? And how about that Socrates? Did he really get his degree in philosophy?

Yes, and of course, Socrates is on the poster too. He is shown holding a mug of steaming coffee. He is praised for one "who had the wisdom for a career in human resource management." Human resource management.

What trade he hath, who manages human resources, we do not know. He may be a prison guard, or a gatherer of migrant laborers into buses. Perhaps Eichmann, in the still watches of the night, dignified himself as a manager of human resources. (So why isn't he on that poster, especially since, utterly unlike any of the celebrated six, he *did* go to college?) But this we

know: that Socrates held it an act of unreason and aggression to manage any human resources but his own, and that to treat a person as an object to be used or as an agent to be turned was not the act of a reasonable man, but a form of impiety, the injury of a soul. When he told the jury that he would rather lose his life after defending himself rationally than save it through manipulation and persuasion, he said, Gentlemen, it is not my place to “manage” your human resources, your minds and feelings and beliefs, but only to see to my own.

Business prospers not simply because people need things; if we bought only what we needed, business would be a modest and seemingly institution. If business is great, a mighty empire in whose service millions yearn to enlist, it is because people *want* things. Thus it is that business depends ultimately on the fact that wanting can be aroused, while the ability to make judgments about wanting has to be cultivated and practiced. Nobody has to learn to want, but everyone has to learn how to decide whether he *should* want what he wants.

The main business of business has to be, therefore, the arousal of desire, not an especially difficult task. It can easily be accomplished by flattery, cajolery, persuasion, intimidation, or any sort of appeal to the emotions, especially to envy, cupidity, vanity, ambition, and fear. Surely there must be, even in the world of business, serious and thoughtful persons who are troubled, realizing that their enterprise, like any other, has its roots in the soil of our frailties, and thrives, however good its intentions, in measure with folly and vice. Those are the people who should appear on that poster, for they are *truly* examples of the worth of education, in the world of business, or any other.

What would we say of a man who is not the least bit troubled about the way he makes his living, into whose mind has never crept the faintest suspicion that he lives by the weakness of others, and that he does them harm by encouraging and perpetuating their weakness? Should he, tomorrow, suspect for the first time in his life, that a “successful career” and a good life might not be exactly the same thing, would he have become better or worse? Among whom would you rather fall, those who have no doubts that what they are up to is right, or those who have doubts?

As the world is, we have all fallen among each other. It behooves us, each and every one, therefore, not to encourage each other in certitude, but rather to commend to each other a life of decent doubt and questioning. And therein lies the true worth of the study of all those so-called “liberal arts,” which might better be called, simply, education.

Here is a great, perhaps the greatest, difference between education and training. It is the right goal of training to provide, where certitude is possible, the means of discovering it, and it is the right goal of education to lead the mind into the strangely beautiful, disquieting realms of wonder and doubt, where no one can see either the big picture or the bottom line.

And what shall we say of a man, take Irving J. Spitzberg, for example, who demotes education to the rank of speed-reading or snappy dressing and urges it as a practical accessory for those who want to get ahead in business and have “successful careers”? What would we say of one who *had* the wisdom of Socrates, which Socrates said was nothing but the knowledge of his own ignorance and incertitude, and then decided to become a human resources manager?

If there is any coherent message in that silly poster, it is the curious advice to take up certain studies so that you can end up being far less than you might otherwise have been. The important understanding of “education” that we might take from the example of Socrates is not that he might have been a manager of human resources, but that he would certainly have turned down the job, no matter what the pay, as not conducive to the sort of life that he knew he wanted to live, and that he knew he *should* want to live.

In that fact, there is an intriguing irony, for our students would surely say, as most do, that, unlike Socrates, they do have to make a living, and do not have the “luxury” of living some life that they know to be good unless it happens to be sufficiently lucrative. He is an interesting pickle, who does not have the luxury of abandoning the pursuit of luxury, and who can not live well in one sense because of a desire to live well in another.

But that is the pickle in which we all find ourselves, whether we may be auditors of banks, or writers, or makers of pots. The need of getting and spending, all the nuts and bolts of life that the Greeks called Necessity, but *mere* Necessity, are

natural enemies to our abilities, *and* our inclinations, to distinguish, *and* to choose between the better and the worse.

While it is bad enough that we must live in the No-man's Land between the Necessary and the Good, it does at least serve us to keep alert and thoughtful. But there is a much worse condition not only possible to us but perfectly natural to us. Ignorance, the condition of those who don't know that they live in No-man's Land. They work hard, and get and spend, and scurry to produce, and dream of a future that will bring them happiness by securing and multiplying the very things that, all unaccountably, did not bring them happiness in the past.

Although, in these strange days, there are some who hold otherwise, we have no reluctance to assert that knowledge is better than ignorance. It is a conviction, no, a conclusion, to be discovered in exactly those studies now being put forth as handy and practical for those whose goal in life is to collect more of those things that will always prove, however large or numerous, not quite enough.

At first, the wealthy Vandals aped the Romans, and the poor Romans aped the Vandals. Later on, as the Vandals grew richer and the Romans poorer, *all* the Romans learned to ape the Vandals. There was profit in it. Long ago, the professors of the humanities discovered that there was profit in aping the educationists, but the star of educationism is falling. The profit now lies in hitching the wagons to businessism, especially since we still haven't caught up with the Japanese. If the businessists are as canny as they say they are, they will surely refuse the alliance. Who needs the feeble assistance of people who can think of Socrates as a human resources manager, or who can suppose, or *pretend* to suppose, that the career of Marco Polo is a triumphant demonstration of the power of humane studies? There is, in fact, no shortage in the business world of people who are a lot better educated than *that*.

They have better taste, too. You never hear them claiming that Lee Iacocca, if he had chosen, could have spent his life leading humanity in the path of reason.

**RENAISSANCE LIT!
ALWAYS A HIT!**

Brief Notes

WE DO BELIEVE that this was the last regularly published and internationally circulated journal in the world to be set in type by hand, and the first to be set on Apple Computer's do-it-yourself-at-home (or almost) combination of the Macintosh computer and the LaserWriter. It is not a bad system, and we intend to become experts at it. After a while.

The last issue, the first product of the new technique, did not delight us entirely, but it did teach us some things not to do, and a few things *to* do. It seemed a good idea *to* do the first such issue, for instance, entirely in the computer. That was not a good idea. From now on we will use the computer mostly for the setting of text; for titles, rules, and illustrations, we will go back to our own library of types and cuts. Many readers claim to like those old illustrations, however irrelevant they may be to the text. We are glad to report that we will be able to use more of them in the future.

IN OUR never-ending search for data for the formulation of a prologomenon to a definition of "education" as implied in the practices of the public schools, we have now unearthed datum number four hundred and seventy-two, which will remind some readers of an old favorite, datum ninety-six, the fact that in many kolleges nowadays it is possible to earn credits for having taken care of houseplants and gerbils.

If school officials in Haslett, Michigan have their way—and why wouldn't they?—high school students in that enlightened town will earn, if that's the word, credits toward their diplomas by "seeking treatment" for whatever nasty drug and drinking habits they may have been forced into by the influence of society as a whole. Those who actually take up residence for a while in a state institution *other* than their high school will get two credits, and the ones who can come up with a little "treatment of emotional disturbances on an out-patient basis at an approved institution" will get at least one credit.

"When the kids are going through treatment," says Richard Beal, a school official and educator of Haslett, "they are in a learning process."

How true. But what about the handicapped, all those aberrant loners who don't have enough group spirit to take up drugs and alcohol? It seems

only fair to provide them with an equivalent, one credit for a bubble gum cure, say, and two for the indubitable “learning process” in a long afternoon of root canal.

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The Underground GRAMMARIAN

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The Dawn of Posthistory

Except for American history, which was thought useful as preparation for citizenship, the place of history shrank in the schools. Even in the elementary schools, where earlier generations had studied biography and mythology as basic historical materials, the emphasis shifted to study of the neighborhood, the community, and preliterate peoples...

THOSE are a few words from an essay called “The Precarious State of History,” which can be found in *American Educator*, Spring 85. The author is Diane Ravitch, an active and influential member of a sort of new breed of educationists, whom we have come to think of, although they won’t like it a bit, as the New Right. They are discovering that the Old Ideas might indeed be best for the New Education and its goals of participatory democracy and industrial efficiency through mere literacy. Since some of them are readers of THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN, we find them not too bad a bunch.

They do, however, share with the common herd the oft-recited belief that no one ever actually *did* anything to bring the schools to their present state, but that, well, you know, problems arose, and needs sort of changed, and one thing led to another, and, somehow or other, things happened.

Even in the passage excerpted above, which enumerates some of the consequences of the report, in 1916, of an NEA Committee on Social Studies, Ravitch is careful to add that the report was not, of course, *responsible*, for its consequences, having “merely reflected the ideas, values, and attitudes of the emerging education profession,” a delicate distinction indeed, and one by which people paid for working in their minds are excused for having instead parroted the cant of popular opinion. But educationists do love to cop a plea, and their training is such that they imagine folly a lesser charge than vice.

Still, we give Ravitch high marks for having mentioned that singular obsession of educationists, the preliterate society. In an earlier time, all children had at least a glimpse of those ancient civilizations that made us what we are and bequeathed to us great and powerful ideas. In these days, they have all watched the Bushmen of the Kalahari making camp as close as possible to a dead giraffe, just as they did when Sophocles was at work on *Antigone*. Where once even little tykes had some sense of the relation of great events to one another, nowadays as to whether the War of Independence came before or after the Protestant Reformation, college students can only guess; but they do know that, even as we sit here, certain right-minded Polynesians are expressing themselves creatively and enhancing their self-esteem by having their buttocks tattooed.

The mental condition of preliterate people is not hard to imagine. All of their knowing and understanding, and probably even their feeling, must have been induced by collective influence. The wellsprings of their inner life are at once omnipresent and inaccessible, as impalpable as water is to the fishes. Whatever they suppose that they know, even should it change from generation to generation, they have to accept as, simply, that which is known. It can not occur to them that there are such things as propositions to be tested, and even if such a strange thought were to arise in some mind, it would not know how to take the next step, or where to look for instruction. In a

preliterate society, there is no publicly available example of the history of an idea, its growth and change, and thus no hint of its future possibilities. The life of the mind is everywhere bounded by the concrete details of experience and suggestion.

It is not enough to say that the wall surrounding the mind in a preliterate society is seamless and impenetrable, for that wall is also utterly invisible. In a literate society, however, the wall of experience and suggestion is broken in many places; there is no stone in it at which some mind has not chiseled. And, as the preliterate mind to which we are all born comes slowly into literacy, it sees first that there *is* a wall, and later, that it can be knocked down.

Now it is a simple fact that there is no child so dull who can not see that the society in which Sophocles wrote *Antigone* is *better* than the one in which the hunters are as inexorably driven as the game they hunt. Thus, if the educationists were to permit some study of history, however simplified, along with their films and slides of desperate people leading meager, narrow lives, they would not so easily engender in children the belief to which they themselves subscribe, or pretend to subscribe. It is nonsense to assert, as they do, that one life is as good as another, one society as good as another, one opinion as good as another, and one idea of *the good* as good as another. And it is more than nonsense, it is villainy, to celebrate before children the very life from which it is the goal of a true education to release them.

But the “education” of the educationists is well and truly displayed by the Bushmen of the Kalahari. It is made entirely of life skills, hands-on experience, show and tell, learning by doing, environmental awareness, adjustment to the needs of society, no end of problem solving, and of relating to self and others. The Bushmen do not study history; they have none. They need no books; they have learning materials. They do not study to magnify and perfect their powers of language, for the language with which they grow up is sufficient to their needs, a true case of “basic minimum competence.” They do not imagine the possibility of independent learning and thinking, for all they need to know, they know. They are content. They all have jobs.

Many of us, of course, are just like them, but alas, not all of us. What is it that bars us from their contentedness and effectiveness, that prevents us

from living in the amiable harmony of a people who all think the same thing, who all agree as to the nature of the good life? What but literacy?

It is literacy that brings the poison of discontent into our minds, suggesting that governors and counselors, and even the teachers and facilitators, might be wrong. It is literacy that astonishes us daily, and disturbs our repose, by putting questions we had never thought to ask. By literacy, we hear the voices of our brothers and sisters long dead, who say, to our amazement, what we have never heard, or dreamed to hear.

In the preliterate mind, no voice speaks but the voice of here and now, and in the prehistorical mind, all of life is the here and now, and in the schools, “literacy” is a job skill for the reception of communication, and history is current events and relating to the needs of self and society, just for now.

It is a neatly turned sentence but not a true one, which says that those who don’t remember history are doomed to repeat it. That is the doom of those who misunderstand history. We do not misunderstand history; to do that you have to *know* some history. We have entered the age of Posthistory, and of Postliteracy. The schools are working just fine.

Parasitology

HOW MANY TIMES have we done this same, boring little story? How many times will we have to do it again?

Here it is: Below you see an essay written for one of those damn minimum competence tests, this time from Maryland. As usual, the test is graded “holistically” by local talent coached by a crew of ex-educationists who have set themselves up in a nifty little business for which no one on the face of the Earth would have any need if it weren’t for the damage done by educationists who know that some day they can set themselves up in a nifty little business and reap where they have sown.

The little piece you see below is sent out to people, parents who complain, for example, who wonder what a child must do to receive a perfect score, four points out of a possible four. That’s right, a perfect score. What you see is considered perfect. Tops.

Dear Greg,

Recently I went to see Led Zeppelin in concert at Washington. We arrived early and the seats were filling up quick. You could feel a mood of excitement in the air and the clock headed for seven. Finally the lights went out and all was dark and quiet. Suddenly I heard a tremendous crash of sounds as lights flashed about the whole place. The band was pretty radical the music was so loud and it was pretty thrashable they played all my favorite songs the concert lasted three and a half hours. When the last song was playing there was a sad mood in the air like someone, had died. We were all so sorry to see it end so soon. I enjoyed it greatly Maybe we can go to a concert together in the future sometime

Yours truly,
Mike

I looked down from my window and all I could see was the Atlantic Ocean. It was so tiring and boring being in an airplane for such a long time.

I had no idea what North America was like. I was terrified and unhappy of the fact that I would never see my real family again. I was too young to realize what was happening and why.

Soon the airplane landed safely in the New York airplane station. I can remember standing on the top of the steps of the airplane to get down; I had no idea where to go. I got so upset that I started screaming, crying, and kicking as soon as I got off the airplane.

Then I saw these people walking towards me with smiles on their faces. They carried me to their car and we headed for Baltimore, Maryland. I never once stopped crying on the way to my new home.

On the top of the next column—we hate giving this stuff all this space!— you will see an imperfect essay, a failing essay, in fact. Some of its strange quality is doubtless due to the fact that the girl who wrote it is a refugee whose native language is Korean.

So there's a big hassle going on in Maryland. Lots of kids deemed talented writers by their teachers—and parents—flunked the test. Nobody knows why, and some flunky in the state's education apparatus slings the usual. "For the lay reader, for persons who have not received the training," he says, "it becomes difficult to make the scoring distinctions." Yeah. The lay reader.

Another state functionary points out that the test must be a great test. After all, why else would the state's language arts supervisors have passed a resolution saying the test is worthwhile?

We don't want to quarrel about which is the better essay. We want to ask a few questions of readers who send in stuff like this.

So what else did you expect? Do you imagine that government educrats and language arts supervisors and minimum competence consultants are a bunch of thoughtful intellectuals? Do you think that they have read lots of books, and can tell at once the prose style of Shaw from that of Sterne? Do you suppose that they are people of good taste?

Have we not shown you, again and again, how they write? What makes you think that they can read any more than they can write? Can you even call them literate, in any important sense?

In the Castle of the Mind, where will you find such people? Standing close by the King, giving wise counsel? Poring over books in the library, seeking out knowledge and forming understanding? Hell, no. You will find them sweeping out the stables and scrubbing pots in the scullery, but not doing a very good job of either. They are not the first class minds of our culture. Not the second, or even the fifth. They are the Lumpenproletariat of Academe, which is itself not the Castle of the Mind, but a tacky counterfeit. They are lucky beneficiaries of what is probably the biggest government jobs program for the handicapped in history. And, withal, exactly as we deserve for the cowardice and servility out of which we suffer them, they are arrogant and officious, brushing aside their stupidities as misperceptions of "the lay person."

They will not go away. They will not be "reformed." They are quite content with what they do, and those for whom they work are simply jumped-up members of the same confraternity. No one of them has ever been dismissed for mere stupidity. If you want to do some thing about them, go ahead, but you will have to think of it for yourself. We can think of nothing legal to suggest.

The Hand the Rocks the Helm

Writing about sailing, I had always used the word “helmsman” to describe the person who steers a boat. Finally seeing the light with my ninth book, I decided it was time to admit women can steer too, and changed the traditional, exclusive word to “helmsperson, or “steerer.” Every alteration, I felt, was doubling the size of my potential readership.

WE never miss the comics page of the Sunday *New York Times*, and it was there that we came across the Great Moral Awakening of one John Rousmaniere, from whose letter to the editor the passage above is taken. What a great moment in his inner life it must have been when it suddenly dawned on him, not only that women actually *can* steer, but even that his oblique admission of that hitherto unsuspected power, cleverly encoded in “helmsperson,” would increase sales of his ninth book on sailing.

We can hear the excited phone calls now: Hello, Madge, it’s Flo. Listen, you’ve just got to rush right out and buy this great new book, *Yet Another Book on Sailing*, by John Rousmaniere! You won’t believe this, but he actually says, well, not right out, but just as good as, that women can *steer*. Steer boats! I’m not kidding. Yes, women! I’d lend you my copy, but I think that every woman should have her own, don’t you? I mean, after all, it’s time we took a stand!

But it is only *en passant* that Rousmaniere make his astonishing discovery. He steers his course toward the undoing of an earlier letter writer who complained that he found ugliness and awkwardness in enlightened words like “helmsperson.” Ha! To that feeble whimper, Rousmaniere exclaims, in what must have been a sprightly riposte that somehow got garbled by a sub-editor, “Yet given a choice between the risk of a little phonetic barbarism and the fact of a language that in a few simple nouns and pronouns minimizes (if not oppresses) about half our fellow human beings, who can choose?”

Who indeed? Not we. (Or maybe yes we, depending on what that question might mean.) We do not care to be counted among the uncountable who have minimized (if not oppressed) all female human beings ever born in the whole history of

our species by falsely accusing them of the inability to steer a boat. And here and now, in print for all to see, we’d like to take a stand and join in the Great Affirmation, perhaps even doubling our readership thereby, by saying, “Women can steer a boat!”

However, while we would *like* to do that, if only for the sake of doubling our readership, we won’t. We can’t. We are ruled, and choose to be ruled, by the motto that we quote not often enough, the words of Ben Johnson: Neither can his mind be thought to be in tune, whose words do jarre; nor his Reason in frame, whose sentence is preposterous. That sentence is preposterous. It is neither true nor false; it is simply without meaning, which must also be said of “Men can steer a boat.”

Of making sense, there is one way. Preposterousness knows no limits. Its every appearance must be sniffed out anew, and the ability to smell the preposterous is alone worthy of the name of literacy. Anything less is illiteracy, at best the reception of communication, the recognition of the words. Nevertheless, preposterousness is most likely to appear in certain contexts, and one of those is what is called, and probably being taught in some school at this very moment, Social Thinking.

How sweet its sound, how kind and humanistic. But Social Thinking is in fact, both in and out of schools, a great inculcator of irreversible illiteracy, for it depends largely, and in the schools entirely, we would guess, on the recitation of seemingly amiable propositions of the sort that could not be tested even if the educationists wanted to test them, which they don’t.

Consider the Social Thinking of Rousmaniere. One day, he claims, he “sees the light,” and finds it “time to admit,” as though he had obstinately denied it in the past, that “women can steer too.” Wow. It is the sort of statement that seems at first, and here is the great snare of Social Thinking, too obviously true to be worth saying, and certainly indisputable. But around here we think enough of women to suspect that some Madge might find it neither.

Oh really? she might say to Flo. Well, that’s nice of him to say, but, to tell the truth, Flo, I *can’t* steer a boat. I know. I tried it for a while, and we kept luffing. You should have heard the

kids. I'm sure I could learn, but why bother? And in fact, I'm not the least bit offended when some purely hypothetical steerer of some equally hypothetical boat is called a "helmsman." As long as this fellow isn't talking about me, why should I care? But you know, I think that maybe I do care a little when he does talk about me and gets it wrong. After all, I am included in "women," and I think this guy has lots of brass to shoot off his mouth about what I can and what I can't do, which is, in any case, none of his damned business. So how about you, Flo? Can you steer a boat?

Language is not a person who can think and will and do, any more than "women" is a person who can think and will and do. It is preposterous to imply the presence of mind, will, and action in "women," or in "men," or in Eskimos or football players. It is just as preposterous to imply those powers in language. Pronouns do not minimize persons. Words do not oppress persons. Only persons can minimize or oppress, or praise or condemn, or lie or speak the truth. Such acts are possible only to individuals in whom there is, whether governed or not, the power to choose.

No sane person will find offense in the word "helmsman," whose equivalent was regularly used by plenty of Viking women who knew how to steer a boat. In the history of our species, no man before Rousmaniere has said "helmsman" in order to suggest that women can't steer boats. Nor did any woman imagine such absurdity.

If we can, and do, imagine such absurdity, it is because we are far more superstitious than our ancestors, which is to say that we are Social Thinkers. We imagine the possibility of agency in nonpersonal nonbeings, which is a step or two down from imagining agency in the spirits of the trees and rivers. Where a miscreant might once have had the good sense to blame his misbehavior on the Devil, a supposed person with a will and intentions, he now passes the buck to Society, a nothing, a word, in which neither will nor intention is possible. We are deprived where there is no depriver, oppressed where there is no oppressor, and affronted where there is no one who gives a damn whether or not we can steer a boat.

No one who knows any history at all can deny that many women have been subject to men and treated like property or dependent children, or

even domestic animals, for most of recorded history on most of the face of the Earth. Shall we now treat them like simpletons, to be cajoled with puny offerings of words like "helmsperson" and "herstory"? Are they imbeciles, that we can con them into buying our books, and anything else we want to sell them, by changing a word here and there? Are they so dim of mind that we must make allowance for the fact that the poor things do indeed suppose that the word "helmsman" is a slur devised by men in order to remind them of their inadequacies? Can we buy them off with a few he/she's?

In "helmsman" there is no contempt, for there is no contemnor. In "helmsperson" there is condescension, and a holier-than-thou condescender. If that is what "women" want, well, maybe the Patriarchs did know something after all.

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Straws in an Ill Wind

THIS issue is devoted entirely to one theme, but then, come to think of it, so is every issue. It is Literacy, by which we mean some thing very different from what is meant in the streets and in the schools, which are nothing more than training grounds for the streets.

The climate of the mind in which we all must live is not dictated by a hard reality to which we must bend, as flight through the air is dictated by the laws of Nature. Literacy is not, like gravity, just what it *is*. It is what we decide that it should be. If we decide that literacy is something trivial and shabby, then the mind's work in us will rise, at best, to the trivial and shabby.

But that is at *best*. We have done the worst. We have decided that literacy is one end of an elementary mental event that we call communication, something to do with filling out forms and figuring out the instructions for the filling out of forms, and to that level of shabbiness and triviality, somehow or other, we have not been able to rise.

Is there some hope that if we make of literacy something far higher and finer, we will at least rise to the reading of instructions and the filling out of forms? If we understand literacy not only as the ability to recognize the sentence that is preposterous, but the power by which the mind is kept in tune and the reason in frame, will eleven percent of Americans someday be able to notice circular argument and non sequitur, and thus destroy politics as we know it? If we understand literacy as the grasp of metaphor and analogy, an alertness to what is implicit in the explicit, will it bring an end to the Great Fundamentalisms of Educationism and Religiosity?

Yes. But that won't happen so long as we believe that schoolers know what literacy should be. To dispel that belief, we'll just tell you what they say.

A Sharing Time on the Rug

"Common sense suggests some connecting links between reading and writing," says Charles Chew, chief of the Bureau of English and Reading Education in the New York State Department of Education. "Yet, for at least the last thirty years, reading and writing have not been connected."

SELF-ESTEEM, as any educationist will tell you, is the highest goal of schooling. And that explains educationism's loyal devotion to what is surely the greatest support of self-esteem. Sheer ignorance. There is no stronger armor for fools.

The quotation is from a report in the *New York Times* on one more of educationism's already uncountable inventions of the wheel. Now, from the people who told us that children who spend more time in study will actually learn more, and that those who memorize will remember more, we have the stunning announcement that reading and writing have "connecting links."

The article is by Fred Hechinger, in whom we do occasionally suspect a bit of irony. He has a way of quoting, with a perfectly straight face, the silly words of people with silly titles, as would serve them bloody right. But we wish that he would ask some questions.

Well, Mr. Chew, if all that is nothing but "common sense," who, exactly, are the people to whom you must be referring in that oblique passive, when you say that "reading and writing have not been connected"? That can only mean that somebody refrained from connecting them, in spite of what must have been common sense for the last thirty years, too. Oh, by the way, just how long have you been the "chief" of this Bureau of English and Reading Education? And were you, for a while, before your enchiefment, one of the Indians in this tribe?

But the *New York Times* just doesn't work that way. It may have something to do with what isn't fit to print.

Whether fortunately or not, we have never been able to decide, but it is true that every time the educationists invent the wheel, they proceed at once to invent the broken axle. Now, having noticed that reading and writing have some "connecting links," they have also discovered—oh joy!—that such details as grammar and spelling do not require all that painstaking attention that teachers have been giving them.

One teacher in Maine, breaking ground with the new educationist manual on the startling connection between reading and writing, which is called, of course, *Breaking Ground*, has made of her classroom "a combination of literary analysis and gossip." Another, teaching second-graders in Calgary, Alberta, lets the kiddies "get their ideas across in 'invented' spelling." "Had I stressed spelling and mechanics," she says, as one of the contributors to *Breaking Ground*, "I wouldn't have observed the same high quality of ideas."

Well, who are we to say? It may in fact be true that, from where the educationist sits, the ideas of second-graders are worth a thousand “kats.”

A first-grade teacher in Pennsylvania describes her ground-breaking thus:

When the children began writing, I moved among them, listening to their pieces, and responded with encouraging comments. We concluded each day’s writing with a sharing time on the rug, in which two or three children presented their work to the entire group and received responses.

How sweet. And how expectable. No matter what wheel they rediscover, the schoolers will never let it roll, but only spin. Whenever they sniff the least hint that the mind’s life is inner and private, it’s right back to the old rug. Whenever they are reminded, however faintly, that thoughtful understanding is and can be only the work of *a person*, they arrange the desks in a circle and launch a rap-session, lest anyone suppose that he can work his own mind by himself, and discover, without the consent of “society,” what *he* thinks.

We are not deceived into the belief that little children have incisive and illuminating ideas. But we are no more deceived into the belief that children who have been trained to assume that the understanding of ideas requires no more than the corporate deliberation of the utterly uninformed will grow up to think for themselves.

There is, not only in the schools, but in the teacher academies as well, an unremitting, if all unwitting, conspiracy against solitude. In solitude only can the worth of reading and writing be discovered. So it is that reading and writing, to say nothing of their recently discovered connections, have been not simply neglected, but, to be more precise, *distorted* by schoolers.

In reading and writing, in literacy, which is more than reading and writing added up together, they care only for what comes *out* of the reader or the writer, which is subject to collective assessment and adjustment, and not at all for what takes place *in* the reader or writer, which is the important goal of either enterprise, and can be, and often should be, hidden from the world.

Writers do not write for the sake of passing on information, although they may well do that, but

for the sake of discovering some truth. Readers do not read for the sake of receiving some information, although they may, but for the sake of discovering some truth.

In this respect, the world of school is no different from the worlds of hotel management or waste disposal. All they want is some information; they neither write nor read. They just communicate. That sort of thing *can* be done on a rug.

Leaflets for the Masses

Sure I stole. Why not? Where I grew up you had to steal to eat. Then you had to steal to tip. Lots of guys stole fifteen percent, but I always stole twenty, which made me a big favorite among the waiters. On the way home from a heist, I’d steal some pajamas to sleep in. Or if it was a hot night, I’d steal underwear. It was a way of life. I had a bad upbringing, you might say. My dad was always on the run from the cops, and I never saw him out of disguise ‘til I was twenty-two. For years, I thought he was a short, bearded man with dark glasses and a limp; actually, he was tall and blond and resembled Lindbergh. He was a professional bank robber, but sixty-five was the mandatory retirement age, so he had to get out. Spent his last few years in mail fraud, but the postal rates went up and he lost everything.

HALF a century ago, in what we suppose education’s palmy times, and among students at Cambridge University, whom we suppose a vanished elite, I. A. Richards performed a simple test with devastating results. He asked the students to write brief commentaries on little readings, and discovered the principle upon which our understanding of literacy ought to be built: If reading is understood as a skill that goes beyond the ability to receive communication, then there is almost no one who can read. Richards’ evidence and conclusions can be found in his *Practical Criticism*, a good read.

More recently, Alan Powers, who teaches English at Bristol Community College, in Fall River, repeated that experiment, to show, as we

suspect that he suspected, that nothing had changed. The only important difference was that Powers' students brought to their "understandings" of the test passage (cited, in part, above) their own supply of preconceptions and social beliefs, through which they, just like undergraduates at Cambridge, could not see the text.

In schools, there is an easy way to test whether students can comprehend that passage. We can see it now:

1. Which did the narrator steal?
 - a) socks
 - b) underwear
 - c) dark glasses
 - d) waiters' tips
 - e) none of the above

After six or seven of those, there would be the "thought" questions: How would you feel if your father were forced into retirement even though perfectly able to successfully maximize his potential through his chosen profession?

The passage is, as many of you will have recognized, from "Confessions of a Burglar," by Woody Allen. It is also, as every single one of you will have recognized—we know our readers—funny. But Powers' students did not notice that. Far from it, they thought it sad, a sorrowful revelation of a society that forces innocent boys into crime. Here is a sampling of their understandings:

...a tough, somewhat smart person. I get the impression he was raised in New York. Back in the early fifties when people had to steal to get by.

I think the story is very sad. That a person would have to steal pajamas or underwear so they could have something to sleep in. I'm sure it's like this for many people... brought into this world with bad misfortune.

It's hard for me to believe that his father was a professional bank robber. I never knew that they had to retire at a certain age.

The person writing this seems to be a real weasel. What really convinces me that he's a

punk is that he always steals petty little things. I mean if you're going to go down the crooked road at all either go all the way or not at all.

Enough. It would make a stone weep. Just think: Someone has said, and said with all the weight of officialdom and "professionalism," that these unhappy children can read. They are not tykes. They are college students. And someone with a license has measured their "comprehension" and found it fine. But they can not read at all. Not at all. What they can do is exactly what they have been taught to do—the pseudo-reading of the schools. They can eyeball the text with the intention of recognizing vocabulary and getting the gist of it. Beyond that, they can wander not *into* the piece, but *out* of it, into the soupy social notions of the affective domain, buttressed, as they must be, by collective ignorance of the sort that understands the early fifties as a time when people had to steal in order to get by.

There is simply no important, rational definition of "reading" by which those poor children can be said to have "read" that passage. None. But there is, of course, a definition that serves somebody else's purposes.

Which brings us to Jonathan Kozol.

We like his work, although we think him a bit too meek and gentle a critic. For instance, in *Illiterate America*, his latest book, he guesses that about forty percent of American adults are "incapable of reading." (We quote from Neil Postman's review in *The Manchester Guardian*.) Over-optimistic, but no matter. The important question is still, Of reading *what* are they incapable?

Kozol is concerned with far more important things than the filling Out of forms and the construing of instructions, although he does not overlook those little problems. Rather, while he does not put it exactly that way, he is more interested in the general inability to read and understand political platforms, in which context "understand" seems to be another word for "believe," provided, of course, that it is the true political platform, and not the other one. When he says, therefore, that millions are disenfranchised by illiteracy, he obviously doesn't mean that they can not vote, but only that they can not understand why to vote one way rather than the other. He does not dream our dream, which is that truly

understanding people would refrain entirely from choosing between evils of supposedly different magnitude. Kozol does dream, however, of a “national” solution to the literacy problem, a government policy bigger and better than current government policy.

(Whatever else can be said of Kozol, he does make the one best possible suggestion as to what to do about illiteracy. Stop whining and teach someone to read. Do it now.)

Which brings us to the work of a lady who has recently, although she doesn’t know it, joined us as another unpaid staff member. All she does is send us copies of her own works, thoughtful and illuminating, too, in order to show us where we are wrong. Good stuff. We steal from it.

One of her recent pieces is a hilarious review of a school geography text, in which students are informed that “the oceans supply the earth with a steady source of water, which seems to be necessary to support life.” But her most telling observations are of the fact that this text, like so many used in schools, seems rather a *pretext*, a “teaching” of something other than geography. After a brief description of South and Central America, for instance, the book suggests that the “geography teacher” ask the students what *they* would do to stamp out poverty in those sad regions of Earth. Since no one, not even a textbook maker, can imagine that some child will come up with exactly the right answer, the only purpose of such a non-academic diversion must be recruitment for the Children’s Crusade against Cardinals and Colonels, and also banana companies.

Elsewhere in the text, the teacher, who is presumed as little interested in geography as the students, is told that “this would be a good time to discuss with the class how little of the world’s area our country occupies but how much of the world’s resources we consume.” As to whether there is also a good time to discuss how much of the world’s nutrition we grow in so little of the world’s area, the text is silent.

Why they do such things, we can not fathom. Educationists are forever weeping, as publicly as possible, over every evil but one on the face of Earth. It is as though they wanted us all to believe that they could, of course, have been movers and shakers, since they know best how to move and shake, but that they humbly chose to serve, only

to discover that the movers and shakers consider them nothing but servants. They seem to suppose that children are somehow improved by being brought to weep along with them.

But we do know *how* they manage to do such things. They themselves provide the shabby non-literacy that makes it possible to get away with that sort of “teaching.” And from an induced sadness about poverty in South America, the path is short and straight to that sort of “reading” that looks not at meaning but at some imagined psychological or sociological force out of which a writer writes. To come away from Jane Austin with a raised consciousness as to the sorry plight of women is no less silly than to read Woody Allen as an unwitting witness to “bad misfortune.”

Every member of our staff liked *Reds*. Perhaps we only imagine it, but it does seem that radical reformism has, in the past, often been lively and thoughtful, and productive, if of little else, of some awakened minds. Postman’s review, for instance, refers to the fact that *Common Sense*, within a year of publication, had sold half a million copies, equivalent to twenty-four million in today’s population. And early in this century, Little Blue Books (who remembers?) proved that “the workers” both could and would seek understanding from Emerson and Marcus Aurelius as readily as from Engels and Spencer.

In our time and place, the largest and most visible reform movement is government schooling itself, which seeks the reform of every institution except itself. It does not take its chances in the marketplace of the mind, standing on street corners and handing out leaflets for the masses. It shows flashcards, and promotes the notion that understanding is the result of “exposure” to the *right* flashcards, rather than the result of the sustained and orderly thoughtfulness that comes of literacy. Educationists simply don’t *need* any readers.

Theirs is a reform movement that puts its hopes not in wider-spread and better understandings, not in seeking the consent of thinking adults, but in the inculcation, in children, of feelings, which seem to need no judging so long as they are “sincere,” and which are very easily aroused in children of any age. To such a reform movement, the remarkable general literacy on which Paine could depend would be quick death. And that is why the schools will not teach true reading.

Nor could they. By now, the educationists have made a mass of themselves, and a mass that has never read anything but its own leaflets, written at the right grade-level, and printed large.

Brief Notes Shame at Last

WE once did a little piece suggesting that schoolteachers, like anyone else, might be better at their work if, rather than esteeming themselves all the time and for everything, they would consider the possibility of being just a little bit ashamed of some of what they do. All the rest of us are, as is right. Caught a lot of flack. Nevertheless, one Mary Futrell, leader of the land's biggest teacher's union, has agreed at least to *consider* shame. Like this:

Many cannot read a classified ad or the warning on a bottle of medicine. In a great democracy, this educational underclass is nothing but a badge of shame.

Wow. A badge of shame. How true. But it's a funny thing. We have been looking all over for the badge of shame, which ought to be a pretty big one in a great democracy like this, but we can't seem to find anyone wearing it. Maybe it's something like the E. F. Hutton thing—oodles of malefaction, but not a single malefactor to be found.

THE summer months have brought in a surprising number of new subscribers. We can't figure it out. We more or less agree with Reynolds Price, who guesses that, leaving aside guides to real-estate investment, sex and diet how-to's, and the memoirs of whores of all sorts, there are about three thousand people in the land who read books. We thought we already had a good share of them on our mailing list, and we're surprised and delighted to find a few more.

Many of them, however, ask for lots of back issues. Some want a complete set. *We* don't have a complete set. But we do send whatever issues we still have to anyone who asks. There is no charge, but we would be happy if you send some stamps.

We urge new readers who want to see old pieces to notice the existence of *The Leaning Tower of*

Babel, which is a collection of articles from roughly the first seven years of this sheet. It is published by Little, Brown, and, no matter what they tell you in the bookstore, it remains in print.

We plan also a reprinting of a few more recent pieces. We'll let you know.

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The Underground GRAMMARIAN

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Yet Another Losing Season

In the fight between you and the world, back the world.—Kafka

ONE of our most respected readers has sent in his annual letter of condolence. He says that we seem still to suppose that we can win, but that he knows we can't. He also knows, however, and this is most important, that it doesn't matter.

But we are not out to win. We can't imagine what that would mean. What is there to be won? If there is an enemy, it is nothing but Folly, mindlessness, the allure of the unexamined life. Who overcomes Folly wins all that can be won, and on the only field where that adversary can be brought to battle—in the mind. Who can say to himself, Now, right here, in these very words, I can understand the difference between sense and nonsense, has all that can be had in the fight with Folly.

Many of our most faithful readers do lament from time to time that we have no solutions to offer. That is true. But solutions go with problems, and not merely in a manner of speaking, but in a fixed and logical relationship, and the vast ideological establishment that calls itself Education is not a “problem.” It is a fact. It is a human reality, like war or vice. If we can consider it under the name of “educationism,” it is only because that is our choice of one particular rather than another, but that particular is only one manifestation of a great universal, which is folly, or, as we often call it, Unreason. It is not a person, but an *it* that lives in persons, and can not change or be changed without a change in persons.

We are not reformers, who usually seem to us persons who suppose that all would be well if only they could change other persons. We have enough trouble keeping our own minds in order, without trying to change those who seem to have no interest in doing the same for themselves. If we see, in them, the clues by which to order our minds, have they not already served us, as though we had conquered and subjugated them? What further should we require of them?

We think the poet right: Fit work for fools is the betterment of fools. The only fool we can make better is the fool who lives in us, the fool who shoots off his mouth without thinking, who stubbornly recites precepts and slogans, and who supposes that Earth would be fair and all men wise and good, if only we could “do something” about all those fools.

We think Aquinas right, too. In his famous refutation of Siger of Brabant, he provided an indispensable rule of thought, pointing out that he had refuted his opponent not by citing “documents of faith,” not simply by asserting B instead of A, but by his opponent’s own reasoning and out of his opponent’s own premises. If the “reform” of his opponent was his intention, he had an advantage we will never have. The opponent was himself capable of Reason, and given to it, and inwardly able to know it, and honor it, when he saw it.

We can, and do, engage the educationists on their grounds, as Aquinas prescribed. With the words of their own mouths, with their own premises and propositions, we reason, discovering what is there to discover—Absurdity. We have done it again and again. They are not interested. It

is not in their set of cultural attitudes, as they would call such imposed limitations of the mind, to work by such processes as validation and refutation. And thus we always find ourselves standing alone on their own grounds. They are not there, where, by the feigned expertise of their language, they pretend to be. They will not “put up,” as one officer of the National Education Association has put it, with demands for “docile rationality.” And in their absence, to tell the truth, *we* are not interested. They are not our work.

It is not in their habits of mind, and perhaps not even in their powers of mind, to know that a premise dictates consequences absolutely, and that propositions can indeed, and should, be tested by logical discourse rather than the demands of convenience or the cries of the heart’s desire. They are not troubled by contradiction, for Truth is to them just a matter of feeling, or utility, or even of the predilections of social class, and knowledge, which is permanent, they do not distinguish from information, which changes ever. To their grounds, which are simply the grounds of all human thought, the grounds of considered statement and discourse, and of “quietly asking and answering in turn,” as Theatatus put it, we can go, but to their dwelling place, the misty Affective Domain, we can not go. We should not go. We *will* not go. In that land, there are no rules of thought. It is a bad place.

Aquinas would have understood, for it was he who warned us that of all opponents the only one invincible is Ignorance. Argument and analysis will not prevail against our educationists, who have yet to arrive at Education.

Many of our readers do wish that they, if not we, could indeed do something about the crippling mental disorders brought on young children by schooling. They have good reason to wish that; they fear, quite naturally and appropriately, for their own children. Or, sadly deeming the first generation already lost, for their children’s children. We do not, because we have no hope for the change of a fact of life, counsel them to despair. We urge them rather to mind their grammar. There is no point in asking the question: What is to be done? That is a buck-passing passive, which implies the possibility of a deed without a doer. The correct question is: What can I do? So ask it.

Someone, Santayana perhaps, has said that the best any philosopher can hope for is to row his own boat, taking, maybe, a few friends along for the ride. That is also the best any teacher can do, the best any parent can do, the best any one of us can do for any other.

You say you are not a philosopher? Piffle. And fie, too. When you bow down to schooling, you present your hind end to education, for the two stand over against each other. It is schooling that pretends to know what a philosopher is, and education that makes one out of any person who pays thoughtful attention to the meaning of deeds and the worth of doing, quietly asking and answering in turn. It is schooling that invents and licenses “experts” in guessing, who find a little truth only when they happen to lift it from poets. It is schooling that devises “disciplines” for the interminable searching out of the obvious, and makes “subjects” out of sentiments.

There is a persistent contagion in the orderly discourse that arises from the practice of thoughtful attention. A single case of it can, in time, infect the world. How better can we then endow, or compliment, each other, than by talking sense together? If some child of yours is taken in by the schoolers, it is perhaps because he hears no other voice. So watch your mind and your mouth, and wash them of precepts and slogans, and study good sense in his company.

Trivial Pursuits

A few weeks ago, I wrote about an important new theory which explains that millions of American students and adults are illiterate not so much because they can't sound out or recognize words (although some can't) but because they don't have the background information they need to understand what they're reading.

ALTHOUGH modern educationism imagines itself the result of “research” and what “the studies have shown,” it can itself be shown as the result of what Plato understood as the least and lowest form of all the mind's attempts at understanding the world—Guessing, the only sort of “science” possible to dreamers, children, and madmen.

What you see above is a comment from one Albert Shanker, a teachers' union leader, in which yet another half-baked educationistic guess is dignified as “theory,” a distinction that is itself the result of guessing that there is no need to distinguish between a theory and a guess.

Educationists do, however, find it useful to distinguish between guesses that they like and guesses that they don't like. Nowadays, they like especially any guess that will permit them to cook up something easy and call it the Secret of Literacy. The “theory” in question has been put forth by a certain E. D. Hirsch, Jr., a Porseffor of Eglinsh at the University of Virginia, where Jefferson no longer has any influence. Hirsch's convenient notion of literacy permits Shanker to lament the sad but hypothetical case of “a perfectly literate Englishman [who] may not be able to understand . . . the sports page in an American newspaper . . . because he doesn't know enough about baseball, football or basketball.”

Hirsch recommends what he calls “Cultural Literacy,” which will easily be achieved by telling children the names of various things and people. He provides sample menus—“Water and Mountains,” “Patriotic Songs,” and, most entertaining, a tiny alphabetical list (up to H) of “Pre-1965 People.” For perfectly literate Englishmen, of course, “Baseball, Football, and Basketball” can be added. Even porseffors of Eglinsh might be brought into some modest version of literacy by conning long lists of the terms used in waste disposal and poultry management.

We would admit that a perfectly literate Englishman might well be left utterly uninformed not only by an American sports page but even by a Hittite inscription or an operator's manual for a cyclotron. We would not say, since careful thought demands careful talk, that he does not “understand” those things. That is true, of course, as it is true that an Englishman who is not moving is also not running; but those who would teach runners, unless they have degrees in Phys. Ed., of course, do not spend much time in trying to convince us of their “theory” that running requires movement.

To one who can not receive what is plainly on the surface, literacy is still many steps away, and so too is understanding. To one who *can* receive

what is on the surface, literacy is one step closer, but only one step.

One of the “findings” of Hirsch is, however, absolutely correct, since it is also absolutely obvious. He seems to have noticed that the land is swarming with children who seem never to have heard of anything, although he makes no mention, as far as we know, of the equally obvious fact that some of those children are remarkably long in the tooth. (That’s for the Englishman, lest he fail to understand.) Our countless children of all ages know the mighty deeds of neither Alexander Haig nor Alexander the Great. As to David and Goliath, the Princess and the Pea, the name of that ocean over there, and even the first stanza of America the Beautiful, they are uninformed. Everybody knows all that.

And there are many reasons for all that. It is not an unrelated fact, for instance, that every day of the year forty American teen-aged girls who have never heard of anything can nevertheless manage to give birth to thier children, helped along in that endeavor, no doubt, by years of sex education and exercises in the enhancement of self-esteem. The children of those mothers, who make only one tiny entry in a list of children whose parents have never heard of anything, and don’t much want to either, may well be under-nourished in more ways than one. That is no exoneration of the schools, however, for it is the schools that made the mothers. And the mothers of the mothers, too.

It is a long time, now, that schooling has been devoted most energetically to the non-academic, the persuasive and manipulative ceremonies of the arousal of feelings and attitudes. It is a simple fact, and one upon which a decent sort of education depends, that the knowledge of facts has the power to change feelings and attitudes, and even the dearest beliefs. Facts do not take sides. If they are to be used in the persuasion and manipulation of feelings, they must be chosen very carefully indeed, and even then there is always the danger that one safe little fact may suggest, if only to one dangerous, alert little mind, some small possibility of another fact that is not so safe.

For those who would inculcate feelings and beliefs, therefore, the safest policy is first, to do whatever is needful to preclude alertness of mind, and then to make as little use of facts as possible, taking care to call them, even the tame ones,

“mere” facts. And so they are called by educationists, who “recognize the point of view,” as Bloom’s *Taxonomy* phrases it, “that truth and knowledge are only relative and that there are no hard and fast truths which exist for all times and all places.”

(Whether to “recognize” a point of view is also, in their minds and language, to espouse it, we have to guess, but other evidence suggests that they mean the latter. In subduing alertness of mind, they start with themselves.)

Now, poor Hirsch is going to emit (“write”, of course, is not the apt word) a whole book of hard and fast truths that don’t exist, including a list of the names of some Pre-1965 people. We can hardly wait to scrutinize it. (“Read,” of course, is not the apt word.) It will “list thousands of words and concepts,” Shanker reveals. Just what we need.

And sure to be a hit, too. The school people will buy it because it will leave them free to relate to self and others by saving them the trouble, small as it is, of teaching history, geography, science, literature, foreign languages, and mathematics. (Hirsch will probably list Euclid and Newton along with Tolstoi, Cardinal Richelieu, Evel Knievel, and all of the Marxes from Harpo to Karl). And trivial pursuitists of all sorts will want to keep it right next to the *Guinness Book of Records*.

All of this is standard practice among the schoolers. First, they guess. Then, out of their guessing, in this case, their old guess that the learning of facts is a sterile exercise in the “mere,” they do serious harm to countless children. In time, but far too late for *those* children, they notice, when outsiders make some noise, that serious harm has been done. (They always put it in the passive.) So they guess again, and take, as they always do, profit from their guessing. A bold, innovative thrust is expensive, but, golly, we do have to pay if we want “quality education.” This time.

The next guess is already on the drawing board. “Future lists,” Shanker asserts, “will undoubtedly be less male, Anglo-Saxon, and white.” He says that not, as mere logic would suggest, out of clairvoyance, but rather out of intention. No matter what the facts, no matter who it is who does what among the ranks of the Post-1985 people, the schoolers will make what lists they

please, for whatever purpose they guess to be useful.

And that is why they can never teach reading. They do not care for the worth *in the book*. They care only for what they want to happen *in the reader*. Thus it is that Shanker can say, “. . . there’s a legitimate need to provide reading materials [not books, of course] to enhance the image of groups.” Thus there will be a “legitimate need” for the right *kind* of list, to replace once and for all the academic disciplines out of which children might hear of something.

But, “until we can change the literate culture,” Hirsch admits that his lists will seem biased, having to depend on what is merely so. The italics are ours.

The Epistle to the Civilians

From the emphasis you put on castigating the educationists, I suspect your readership is primarily teachers. I am a civilian. My preference is for the pieces that encourage, explain and demonstrate (usually by horrible examples of its lack) clear thinking. Your piece on the father whose literal reading of the Bible led to the death of his small child was very moving and, in my opinion, a far more telling indictment of the failure of education than recounting grammatical errors.

SHE is absolutely right, the lady from whose letter those words are taken. The piece to which she refers is “Hunger in America.” and it is exactly the sort of consideration of the *meaning* of illiteracy and diseducation that we most want to provide. The mere display of the grammatical errors of the self-styled educated is not any more interesting to us than to her, and we never intend it. It is only when they are clues to meaning and the mind’s work that we find passives and participles worth any mention at all.

But she is wrong when she supposes that most of our readers are in the education business. Far from it. Some few there are, and many of them are careful to ask that their issues not be sent to the schools in which they work. If we do seem to castigate educationists, it is a strange sort of castigation, for, with a very few exceptions, they have no idea that they are being castigated. And

their betterment is not our aim. For us, they are merely useful examples of the work of the mind done badly. That the work of the mind is done so badly by so many people who claim the title of “educator” is, of course, an interesting irony, but we think it more important that their mindlessness be revealed not as a ludicrous foible in the pompous, but as a poison that is spread wherever their influence is felt—which is everywhere.

In last month’s issue, there was a case in point, which point was there set aside for the sake of another. The Chief of Literacy in New York had said that “for at least thirty years, reading and writing have not been connected.” We can say one supremely important thing about his saying—It is a lie. Had he spoken for himself—“I have (or have not) connected reading and writing”—he could have told the truth.

His saying is not only a lie; it is an arrogant and presumptuous lie, airily dismissing as of no worth countless legitimate members of “we” who have indeed, for more than thirty years, *not* failed to connect reading and writing. It is as though all the rest of “we” were not licensed to connect or disconnect in such matters, and that only the word of his “we” counted, the very “we” that got it wrong. Such an exclusion would surely be his defense against the charge of lying. He would say, Oh, I didn’t mean *other people*, I meant we who do know about these things. And that is cause to speculate as to the entertaining possibility the he and his literacy tribe were in fact the *only* disconnectors of reading and writing. Could be.

That leaves him in an intriguing position. He is either a liar, or a man who, having called himself an expert, and taken his pay accordingly, points out that he was *not*, after all, an expert *then*, but has now become one, at our expense. And it is now, therefore, that he deserves the confidence of those who have been paying him all these years, which is to say that in the past, he didn’t. Was he a liar in the past, willfully embracing a wrong understanding of literacy, or was he simply a fool, ignorantly embracing a wrong understanding of literacy, and an understanding that, as he now says, is utterly contrary to “common sense”? Is there some third possibility? We can’t think of it.

It is not because of his deceptive pronoun or his thoughtless passive that what he says is worth attention, but because those events are visible clues to what is invisible in the mind of the sayer.

His “remediation,” should he seek it, lies not in avoiding passives, but in understanding his own mind well enough that he *notices* passives, and considers whether, in this one or that one, he has chosen wisely, with an eye for accuracy and clarity. That is *not* a “question of style,” or of “communication enhancement.” It is a concern for Truth. Any one who has the colossal brass to call himself an “educator” had damn well better demonstrate, in his every saying, that his first concern, like his second and third, is for Truth. He who does not care to measure and judge every single word that comes out of his mouth may easily do surgery or design microchips, or show someone how to do surgery or design microchips, or make his way to the top of any bureaucracy, but he is not fit for the betterment of others.

Our kind of concern for language and its meaning has, as far as we can see, nothing in common with the mania of word-buffs or the frenzy of grammatical vigilantes who just can’t stand to listen to television weathermen or to players of third base. Nor would we say that we just can’t stand to listen to the unwitting mendacity of the schoolers. We can stand it. What such language tells us about third-basemen is of no importance. They do not put themselves forth as leaders of minds. What it tells us about schoolers is of tremendous importance, for it helps us to understand why things are as they are, and we hold it an axiom that to understand is better than not to understand.

That, truly, is our whole endeavor. We are just trying to understand, trying to tell plain sense from rubbish. So we go, of course, to where the rubbish is.

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In the Year Zero

We must honor the comrade children
who are uncorrupted by the past.

THAT sentiment is from *The Killing Fields*, a movie about the recent, and apparently perpetual wars and disorders in Cambodia. It is one of the slogans recited in the “schools” of that land, the re-education camps, where those who were once adjusted to the wrong life are re-adjusted to a different life. They live in the Year Zero, where there is no remembrance of things past, no history. And the children, who have never had any history, are appointed their mentors, accusers, and judges. The executions, however, are seen to by some of their slightly older comrades.

In their particulars, the re-education camps of the Khmer Rouge are somewhat different from the government schools of the United States. In principle, however, like the Hitler Youth Movement, or like any “education” provided by an agency of government, they are the same. Both are instruments of policy, social programs of manipulation in the affective domain, and intended not just primarily but entirely for the good of the state.

And, while the particulars *are* somewhat different, they are *only* somewhat different. All government adjustment programs must, by their own logic, have it in common that they do not look with favor on the study of history. Knowledge impedes adjustment, and understanding makes it impossible. It is important, therefore, that Japanese children remember Hiroshima but not Pearl Harbor, and that the young people of West Germany suppose the story of some pact or other between Hitler and Stalin is a transparent lie put about by elderly war-mongers. Among us, in these days, children remember the Datsun rather than the Death



March, and when it comes to be the other way around, we will all know what to expect.

And in England there is Pamela Pullen, educatress. She goes by the title of Divisional Primary Inspector for the Inner London Education Authority. The libraries trouble her. She has actually found in them certain dangerous and illiberal books more than ten years old, dating from the bad old days that the young should not remember. There is nothing but the corruption of Classism to be taken from illustrations showing neatly dressed children, thus flaunting before the eyes of the slovenly poor the arrogant pretensions of the (once) ruling class. There is nothing but Sexism to be learned from musty tomes in which girls help their mothers in the kitchen while the boys and their fathers play ball. There is only the incentive to Handicappism and Racism in any story that does not include a West Indian hunchback who swims the channel in record time.

In short, according to Pamela Pullen, any book more than ten years old is just “not relevant” any longer, and not suitable in a school library.

There was a time, and less than ten years ago at that, when we would have been astonished and outraged to hear of the doings of a Pamela Pullen. Now, not so. We are a little surprised at her pretense to moderation—after all, why ten years rather than two?—but now we recognize such doings for what they are, nothing but Politics as Usual. She is, like everybody who takes pay from a school system anywhere on the face of the Earth, a government agent, a loyal member of the New Servant Class, which has discovered the joys of working for the most indulgent of Masters. She does not work *for* the children committed to her charge; she works *on* them.

Which brings us to Bill [*sic*] Honig, California’s Superintendent of Public Instruction. He has concluded, presumably out of either sheer ignorance or astonishing opacity, that the public schools are “values-neutral.” That passeth all understanding here, where we have documented regularly for almost ten years the Great Program of feeling inculcation and attitude manipulation which has almost entirely replaced academic disciplines in the public schools. It is one thing to conclude that the values preached in the schools are intellectually incompatible with each other and all too obviously designed to form a certain society rather than to inform a certain mind, but

who finds them “values-neutral” is either blind or up to some values-inculcation scheme of his own.

The latter is what we suspect. Honig has written a book called *Last Chance for Our Children*. If his title is accurate, then we can stop worrying about the Nuclear Winter, which would bring at least the benefit of the closing of quite a few government schools, and the consequent escape of whatever few children might survive. Maybe in the frigid Aftermath, some of them might find reason to wonder whether there is some difference between having been *taught* the values in whose service their parents blew the world up, and having *learned*, as they didn’t, how to distinguish in principle the truly valuable from the recycled trash of social and political ideology.

Honig, of course, wants the schools to “teach values,” which is exactly what the schools have been doing. He just wants them to teach some other values. He has met opposition among “educators,” of course, who call him “reactionary,” substituting, as usual, labeling for rational argument, and who suspect that what he really has in mind is prayer. That’s always the way it is with cranks and zealots. They always come, like matter and anti-matter, in reversed reflections of each other. And, like matter and anti-matter, they meet each other in terrible explosions that blow the rest of us up.

Honig does stumble across the truth, but, like any educationist, he gets up and hurries on. “Children,” he says, to the outrage of the romantic wing, “are not automatically moral or ethical.” He supposes that is so because they have not been *told* what is moral or ethical. Aristotle knew better. Children are those of any age who *can not* be moral or ethical, being under the governance of their appetites. They do in very fact live in the Year Zero. The aim of education is to bring an end to childhood. That is not accomplished by telling them what is good, but by showing them how to govern themselves and distinguish for themselves the good from the bad. Or we can leave them in Year Zero forever.

The Evidencing of Realization

Educators are dissatisfied. They have no specifics, but intuition tells them that something needs to be done. Realization of neglected human potential is evidenced

when we use single factor tests of general intelligence. Emphasis on mental abilities points vaguely at the need for a more comprehensive program. It may become acceptable to assume that cognitive ability cannot be nourished apart from affective and/or psychomotor consciousness. The range of criteria in the process of assessing giftedness needs to consider differentiated programming.

EVERY year, as Turkey Time draws nigh, we like to find some truly deserving member of the academic tribe upon whom to bestow the exclusive and prestigious Order of the Steaming Bird. The competition this year, as in every other year, has been ferocious. So many worthy candidates, and, alas, only one Steaming Bird of 1985.

But choose we must, and this year's winner is a certain Pat Swanson, who is something or other at the Campus Laboratory School of Minot State College in North Dakota. You see above a small but superbly typical example of Pat's really swell and bird-worthy work. We found it in *Perspective*, a poopsheet emitted by that state's Department of Public Instruction. Her little essay is called "The Development of Immediate Criteria to Indicate Giftedness, Precocity in Children." The comma alone is worth a little slice of the bird.

Pat is into giftedness. It's the coming thing. It's also the going thing. Lots of dough to be shelled out there, especially now that giftedness has at last been officially defined by no less an authority than the United States Office of Education. The gifted, we now know, are "those children, as identified by professionally qualified persons, who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance." Pat is, *ça va sans dire*, a professionally qualified person.

Even her prose is professionally qualified. Out of no specifics, realization is evidenced. Emphasis points vaguely at a need, in true professional fashion, while range, the range of criteria, needs to consider. Now is that qualified, or is that qualified?

Qualifying, in fact, is their specialty. Notice how carefully Pat tells us non-professionals that we'd better brace ourselves for the day when "it *may* become acceptable to assume that cognitive

ability cannot be nourished apart from affective and/or psychomotor consciousness." Educationists, of course, have never had any trouble deeming it "acceptable to assume" where no certain knowledge can be had; but, like a kind teacher of slow children, Pat does no more than hint that soon the rest of us just *may* want to join them in that darling form of convenient irrationality. And, in the unlikely case that we prefer to do without the assumption by which the Affective Domain has been made a mighty kingdom, well, all she said was "may." Neat job.

As for the educationists, though, they're going to stick with it no matter what. Intuition tells them, even without specifics, that the DOE is right, and that giftedness is to be found in:

general intellectual ability
specific academic aptitude
creative or productive thinking
leadership ability [neat, eh?]
visual and performing arts
psychomotor ability [even neater!]

Is this, or is this not, a Great Democracy? Can there be anyone here who is not gifted? Surely, as even the apostle says, there are gifts and there are gifts. Why should the kid who has a great jump-shot, or a wonderful way with a spray-can, be left out of what Pat so aptly calls the "more comprehensive program," at whose obvious need emphasis points vaguely?

"Our nation's most valuable natural resource" she says, "is demanding an education. The response has proven successful. As we provided programs for individuals to achieve their exceptionality, the youth population has demonstrated potential. The lack of a rigid definition of giftedness preceding the program may assist the developers. The definition can be altered to fit the differences of each individual."

Splendid. What could be better than a definition that can be altered as qualified professionals find convenient? As to whether such an arrangement can truly be called "creative thinking," we can hardly say, since we can not speak as qualified professionals. We incline a bit to the unqualified side. But "productive" it certainly is. It could easily produce as many Giftedness Enhancement Programs as there are kids in the schools.

In fact, these educationists are pretty damn gifted themselves, and we would urge some special and appropriately expensive program just for them, if it weren't for the obvious fact that they already have one, the one we call School.

The Knowledge-Acquisition Component of the Experiential Continuum

Intelligence is the mental capability of emitting contextually appropriate behavior at those regions in the experiential continuum that involve response to novelty or automatization of information processing as a function of metacomponents, performance metacomponents, and knowledge-acquisition components.

THERE be two things, yea, three, which trouble the earth, and three for which the mind is bogged; the freshman composition, the exculpatory clarification of the official spokesperson, and the Definitive Findings of the Highly Qualified Professional of the Insubstantial.

What you see above is a quotation from *Beyond IQ: A Triarchic Theory of Human Intelligence*, by one Robert J. Sternberg. We found it in Science, in a review of said book. We are interested in intelligence, and would like to read anyone's speculations about it, but since we were unable to understand the review, we have no hope of understanding the book. We must rest content with the reviewer's summary:

The general message of *Beyond IQ* is that theories of intelligence have been dictated by available measures of intelligence and that a broader view must be taken. The locus of intelligence is not only in the individual, or only in behavior, or only in the context of behavior. The triarchic theory attempts to direct attention to all of these.

Our own "theory" of intelligence, we must confess, is not exactly triarchic. It isn't even biarchic. It is Monarchic. Whatever else the intelligent mind may be, it is surely a ruled mind, and ruled, furthermore, by some consistent and absolute sovereign, who favors no party and whose laws do not change with fashion or whim.

That isn't truly a theory, of course, but a metaphor. There is a difference, and the mighty quackeries of our time, which Peter Medawar has called "the unnatural sciences," are preached and practiced by those who don't understand the difference, lacking, perhaps, the intelligence to understand it.

All the thinkers of the past thought about thinking, but the notion that intelligence can and should be "defined" has only recently come among us. It is mostly the invention of the psychologists, and especially the pet preoccupation of the educational psychologists, who want, like all educationists, not truly to know what something is but how to do *something* to other people. So it is that the reviewer can state as though it weren't preposterous the astonishing fact that "theories of intelligence have been dictated by available measures of intelligence." That is to say that those who have been busily "measuring" intelligence have consistently done so in the absence of any clear idea as to what they should choose to measure. It is as though a man should presume to tell us all about seashells by pointing to the collection he assembled before he knew what seashells were, and claiming as well that his tin cans and candy wrappers were examples of various different sorts of seashells, which might even be seen as components, and the very stuff of metacomponents, of the capability of emitting contextually appropriate behavior in some as yet unknown species of clams and oysters.

And then there is that business about the "locus" of intelligence, which Sternberg has detected, if the reviewer has read him aright, "not only in the individual." A diverting thought. It almost makes us want to read the book. What other "locus" could he have in mind? Could his own thought about that locus be somewhere other than *in mind*? Is he, like the educationists, asserting that understanding an idea is like dragging a great block of stone up the side of a pyramid, a job that even very feeble people can bring off if only there are enough of them? Is it something spooky, like a *Sinngeist*, perhaps, an invisible vapor of intelligence that can be detected, but only by a Highly Qualified Professional, seeping forth from

* "Unnatural Science" is one of the many intelligent essays in *Pluto's Republic*, a good book for those who want to think.

the assembled minds of the sixth grade rap session, or of Society as a Whole, or even, on a good day, of the House of Representatives?

What *person* needs to “define” intelligence, or compassion, or honor, or any other insubstantial and exclusively human attribute? For *a person*, it is enough continually to consider how to live in accordance with what he means by those terms, and whether he makes sense in his considering. That is already a mighty work. He who would instruct the rest of us as to what those insubstantials are, must have something other in mind than searching out the best truth he can discover and considering how he should live. He must be getting ready to tell us, and with “scientific” authority, how we should live.

Definers of the insubstantial are always agents. Their imagined definitions—whether of intelligence, or tolerance, or good citizenship—are always tendentious, always the groundwork for some agenda. Or have we missed something? Is there some other use than the social manipulations of schooling to which all intelligence testing and defining has been put? When the Great Triarchic Theory gains acceptance, will the understanding of some child be deepened, or will some Innovative Thrust be funded?

The wolf published his definitive findings as to Prudence, but the doe, wiser than we, chose not to read them.

Brief Notes

IN FACT, we did have a little mail about a certain Jane Austin, an author hitherto but little known to most of our readers. We would love to give you the titles of some of her major, one might even say “pivotal,” works, but we just don’t happen to know of any.

To tell the truth, it was Jane Austen, with an “e,” whom we had in mind. We are heartily in favor of the reader who wrote to say that we deserved all the cries of Fie! that we would get. We’ll say it too. Fie!

It is a strange and interesting sort of mistake. A proofreader who misses it misses much more than a typo. An editor who lets it get by commits what is best understood as an irreverence, an act of

disrespect. It could be excused only by the same ignorance that would disqualify him from his work. Had we discovered him out there in the world, we would speak thus to such an editor:

Think, continually, twerp, of those who were truly great. For your sake, for your goodness and for your joy, the great nourishing spirits, all of them mothers and fathers of us all, sought out truth, and left it here and there for us to find. Long dead, they speak to us still, and we, their dutiful children, are nourished by their words—by their very *words*, the signs they made on paper. We read, we mark, we learn, their words—nothing but their words. And the words are enough. All that we can know and understand comes from their words, and the words that we can come to speak by their teaching. Without the words of the truly great, we are brutes, and dumb.

Their very names command respect. Truth we love, but the truth-teller we love and praise as well, for there is no Truth but what some *person* has found and told. It was not out of heedlessness and haste that Jane Austen found and told you some Truth. But it was out of heedlessness and haste that you deprived her of praise and gave it to someone who isn’t. Don’t do it again.

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Near the snow, near the sun, in the highest fields,
See how these names are fêted by the waving grass
And by the streamers of white cloud
And whispers of wind in the listening sky.

—Stephen Spender—

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The Year Zero Forever!

The future of the world depends on our willingness to suspend our own judgment of thoughts that we do not as yet understand, feelings with which we are not yet able to identify, and actions that we do not as yet approve.

ONE of our staffers has a job at a nearby State Mental Institution. He is not exactly one of the inmates, which is to say that he is not at the policy-making level, but he isn't exactly right in his head either. All of that stuff rubs off, and on.

These days, his mind is bewildered by Critical Thinking, one of the latest trends in the treatment of mental cases of every sort. It is now clear—at the policy-making level—that such courses of cure as Mathematics Treatment and History Treatment and Language Treatment must have been conducted entirely without thought and have thus not provided any Thinking Treatment. That much, our man can understand. What troubles him is the difference and how to detect it—between Thinking Treatment and that *Critical* Thinking Treatment. Is the latter a special case of the former, and a threat of things to come? Will it be

only one of the many future offerings of the Thinking Treatment Department? Will that soon-to-be flourishing department also provide, along with Creative Thinking and Business Thinking, such nifty novelties as Tolerant (*uncritical*) Thinking, Family Thinking, and even Career Development Thinking? And what's to be done about staffing? Can just anybody come bopping in and dose out the Minority Thinking, or will it have to be a fully qualified Minority Thinker? And will Mother Theresa really agree to serve as a consultant for a minor concentration in Compassionate Thinking?

Such is the state of his mind. Nor is he consoled by the intriguing fact that Critical Thinking is taught, at his state mental institution, in accordance with the customary logic of such institutions, only to the sufferers who have conclusively demonstrated that they are utterly unable to read, write, or cipher.

We would like to tell him, Pooh. It will all blow over. But we're not so sure, for we have recently come to see, if not to understand, the looming of a new Thinking. A big one.

The epigraph above is from a truly remarkable essay by a certain—all too certain—Julia To-Dutka, who is yet another assistant professor of education at Montclair State College.* Exactly what assistance, and to whom, an assistant professor is supposed to provide, we have never been able to figure out, but this one has certainly assisted us into Fear and Loathing, and gloomy forebodings about Global Thinking, of which mysterious and baleful aberration her essay is a perfect example. It can be found (and we urge the finding, for we can never do it the justice it deserves) in the New Jersey section of the *New York Times*, September 22, 1985.

Global Thinking, like its apparent progenitor, Ethnic Thinking, seems to derive from the notion

* Long-time readers of this sheet may remember that many years ago our work took a serious turn, from which it has never fully recovered, in the course of examining the words of a man named Weischadle. It was he who led us to ask: Is there something more than "grammar" to be understood in the fact that a man would prefer not to say that A is B, but would rather choose to say that A "may be perceived as being B." It led us into many thoughts. Weischadle, like Julia To-Dutka, is an assistant professor of education at Montclair State College.

that we, on the one hand, would be enormously improved morally by studying the mating customs of the Ainu, and trying out some of their recipes for blubber, but that, on the other hand, the Ainu can learn from us nothing but crass materialism and callous indifference to the suffering of others, deficits of character to which the Ainu, thanks to their ignorance of us, are immune.

To that sort of general understanding, Julia To-Dukta adds the specific caveat that nothing less than “the future of the world” will depend on our readiness to “suspend judgment of...actions that we do not as yet approve.” Should it prove the case, for example, that we deem the mating habits of the Ainu as disgusting and reprehensible as their recipes for blubber, we must remember that we are culturally blind, and that we must *learn* to approve.

(Do you remember Alvarado? He was School Chancellor of New York until he got caught in strange dealings—big loans from pals and interesting jobs for ditto. At one point, he suggested that the only wrong-doing in the whole mess was really on the part of the reporters, whose parochial ethnocentricity had led them to misunderstand the folkways of Hispanic culture. Global Thinking.)

Another notion of the Global Thinkers is that “the world is no longer insular.” What that means, we don’t know. It should mean, of course, that the Martians have landed, but, if they have, no Global Thinker has mentioned it. If it means only, as Julia To-Dukta says, that “individual countries no longer can insulate themselves from the affairs of other countries,” then it is a distinction of dubious value, revealing also the fact that Global Thinkers feel no need to study history. Indeed, they imagine, and very much want to imagine, as this lady puts it, that “In a human sense, we live in a world severed from its ties to the future, as well as to the past.” She dreams not only of the Year Zero, but of a *permanent* Year Zero.

Even in that day when the Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold—whose fold would that be, Julia?—the world was “no longer insular.” But Global Thinking is simply the newest version of Current Events Education, the trivial pursuit by which millions of us were convinced that particulars pop into and out of existence at random, and blinded even to the possibility of suspecting that history might unfold in obedience

to some principle, and that events are the children of ideas.

Suddenly, we understand Thoreau’s contempt for newspapers. There is some absolute difference between those who are what they are by the force of events, and those who can make themselves what they ought to be by having ideas.

And Furthermore...

The great ambition professed by public school managers is, of course, education for citizenship and self-government, which harks back to Jefferson’s historic call for “general education to enable every man to judge for himself what will secure or endanger his freedom.” What the public schools practice with remorseless efficiency, however, is the stifling of self-government. When 58 percent of the thirteen-year-olds tested by the National Assessment for Educational Progress think it is against the law to start a third party in America, we are dealing not with a sad educational failure, but with a remarkably subtle success.

Walter Karp
Harper’s, June 1985

The Bright Angelic Mills

In a world where wands are waved over uniform product codes in supermarkets and where kids have personal computers...just why are we spending billions to teach arithmetic in the schools?

—Anthony Oettinger

Wise men say, Callicles, that heaven and earth, gods and men, are held together by the principles of sharing, by friendship and order, by self-control and justice; that, my friend, is the reason they call the universe “cosmos,” which is to say “order,” and not disorder or licentiousness. Clever though you are, you seem not to have paid enough

attention to these matters; it has, in fact, escaped you what a mighty power is exercised, both among men and gods, by geometrical equality. And it is your neglect of geometry which brings about your opinion that one should strive for a larger share than that which other men possess.

—*Socrates*

THAT Oettinger fellow also asks, “Exactly what is the meaning of penmanship when keyboard skills are becoming more important?” We are abashed. For all the attention and thought we have given to reading and writing, we do have to admit that we have never elucidated the “meaning” of penmanship.

Oettinger is just as expert in history as he is in the art of writing. “In 1100,” he tells us, “educated people talked, only menials like clerics wrote. So the snobbery of writing only began around 1300. Before that snobs only spoke.” So there.

But that Oettinger fellow is not, as you probably suspect, a taxi-driver in Hoboken. We have the word from the *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* that he is a teacher of “applied mathematics” at Harvard, and a consultant to Ronald Reagan’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, as well as a member of the Scientific Advisory Group of the U. S. Defense Communications Agency. That tells us a lot about the state of our Republic, in which menials like clerics have been made obsolete and replaced by menials like consultants. And his words, along with many other such, were spoken—not penned—to a conference put on by the Canadian Institute for Research on Public Policy.

It is, of course, unlikely that we would be able to explain anything at all to a mind that equates writing with penmanship, thus easing enormously the work of literary criticism by making it possible to prove conclusively that Flaubert, for instance, was by far the very worst writer of his time. There is no hope of rational discourse with a man who holds that the “modern workplace” no longer needs “the people who could write and do arithmetic” in the “dark satanic mills and the Dickensian counting houses,” and that even “keyboard skills” will prove dispensable once the computers have learned to understand and produce speech, like the snobs of yesteryear.

While Socrates would at least give it a try, we know not how to seek the betterment of the Oettingers of this age, and we have to leave them to that work for which they find themselves best suited, the making of public policy for the rest of us.

Callicles, the principal adversary in the *Gorgias*, was at least amenable to rational discourse and aware of the need to define his terms, although certainly neglectful of geometry. But even he, to say nothing of Socrates, would have been astounded by the proposition that the *purpose* of learning arithmetic is to be discovered in the bright angelic mills of the modern supermarket, where anyone who can wave a wand finds himself free from the need to cipher.

It is true that those who have learned arithmetic can, usually, calculate; but the idea that we should learn arithmetic *in order* to calculate is one of the many convenient notions of the schoolers, who will surely be delighted to hear from Oettinger that they will soon be relieved, by pocket wands, we suppose, of the tiresome work of teaching little children to balance their checkbooks. To those who can not understand mathematics—to say nothing of reading and writing—as anything more than “life skills,” Socrates’ mild rebuke of Callicles must prove mystifying indeed. For Socrates, and even for Callicles, although he didn’t like to think about it, the study of mathematics was nothing less than the soul’s discovery of order and proportion, of permanent and essential relationships, of rightness. And the idea of Rightness as revealed in mathematics provides understanding of the idea of Justice among men.

It was out of just such an understanding that the poet deemed Euclid alone the beholder of Beauty bare. Socrates would have nodded approval. And it was for his desire to live “out of proportion” that Callicles was rebuked. He was, as it were, an angle of the great polygon who supposed that he could gobble up more than his natural share of degrees without twisting the whole thing out of shape, or, even worse, without caring that he would twist it out of shape.

That such an ancient understanding of the study of mathematics should seem to us at least unusual, if not downright quirky, is, of course, the result of our schooling, and likewise a measure of the shallowness of our education. The schoolers like

to think of themselves as “humanists.” They suppose that the study of mathematics—and of the hard sciences as well—is in some unspecifiable but nevertheless real way an inhuman enterprise, and not noticeably conducive to feelings of tolerance and kindness, and the burning desire to feed those of the hungry who happen to be very far away.

There is also the unhappy fact that mathematics, unlike relating to self and others, is both hard to teach and, for education majors, hard to learn. Ditto for chemistry and physics, of which Socrates, had he studied them, would have had some interesting things to say, and that entirely without regard to the daily work of the chemist or the physicist.

Thus the educationists find themselves in a pickle. On the one hand, they choose to see mathematics as a life-skill most particularly useful in the “modern marketplace,” and thus feel obliged to teach it as essential to their great mission, the production of employable workers who may some day be able to compete with the Japanese. On the other, they find the teaching of inhumane subjects a galling diversion from their even greater mission, the inculcation of “right feelings.” And so it is that they have sold us on the idea of *minimum* competence in subjects like mathematics, by which they mean just enough study for the needs of the modern workplace, but not enough to bring on the suspicion that Goodness, Truth, and Beauty are to be discerned not by the feelings but by the intellect.

From their dilemma, Anthony Oettinger will deliver them, and, noble fellow that he seems to be, at no small cost to himself. What work will there be for a teacher of applied mathematics when no one has to apply mathematics any more? His loss, however, will be the schoolers’ gain. Those who used to struggle with the teaching of writing will be able to justify the much easier task of teaching basic minimum keyboard skills, and, to replace the few and rapidly disappearing teachers of mathematics, the gym-teachers will stand forth as providers, even to tiny tykes, of just enough dexterity out of which to wave a wand over a checkout counter or a checkbook. It’s all in the wrist.

Things equal to the same thing, we seem to recall from somewhere, are equal to each other. Makes sense.

And that, of course, is another way to understand the worth of all sorts of studies not just now popular. Mathematics *makes* sense, and it makes sense in anyone who contemplates it. Wandwaving does not make sense in the waver; it merely works. It is interesting that the latter is progress in the world, and the former, betterment in a person.

Stillness Education

It is my belief that Physical Education is movement education, and it is the ability of students to think critically in a movement context that distinguishes Physical Education from other disciplines. Therefore, all Physical Education classes should focus on maximizing constructive movement time (“learning by doing”) and minimizing the verbal components of the lesson.

—M. Lazar, *Assistant Principal*

SUDDENLY, while thinking critically in a stillness context, we understood just why it is that, utterly unlike Dinah Shore, or even Patti Page, the pop singers of our time can not hold still. They have all been to school. And their productions, also unlike those of Dinah Shore, are intended to please children by maximizing movement time while minimizing verbal components in the great cause of thinking critically in a movement context. And most children, although they do have enough sense to despise gym and to feel the appropriate mixture of pity and contempt for gym teachers, do not have enough sense to withstand the influence of “learning by doing.” Horses and dogs have the same problem, luckily for some of us.

In every schoolhouse, the aroma of gymthink seeps upward from the dank locker-room into the libraries and the classrooms, and even into the office of M. Lazar, the Assistant Principal, who may well be, like so many other holders of that exalted rank, an erstwhile gym teacher who also felt the appropriate mixture of pity and contempt for gym teachers, and, having no papers to grade, easily found time to attend night classes in Ed. Admin., and fulfill the American Dream by rising from lowly status into the aristocracy of the mind. And so it is that his mere *belief* is authority

enough upon which to found the “discipline” of Critical Thinking in a Movement Context.

Like the rocking rollers, those school people can not hold still. They wriggle and twitch to the latest sound and, just now, they are gyrating prodigiously to the hot, pounding rhythms of Critical Thinking, an electrifying group, particularly adept at the minimization of the verbal component. Well, you know how it is. Some, to be sure, are born to boogie, but some, like the aristocrats of the mind, must learn to boogie, and others, especially all of the children in schools, will just have to have boogie thrust upon them. For their own good.

The conditions necessary for thinking, as for writing, are stillness, silence, and solitude. In schools, they are all accounted signs of deviance, which can only lead to Deviant Thinking. Their opposites are classroom activities, participation in group discussion, and relating well to others, all of which produce warm, cozy Nondeviant Thinking.

The Hinterback of the Debate

Now that writing as a tool of thinking is about to return to fashionable consciousness, instructors everywhere are rushing to the forefront of the debate on how to encourage writing assignments in the regular curriculum. —*Martha J. Pierce*

So I beheld, and lo! an ensign borne whirling, that span and ran, as in disdain of any rest; and there the folk forlorn rushed after it, in such an endless train, it never would have entered in my head there were so many men whom death had slain.

—*Inferno*, III: 49-54

ONE of the most entertaining one-page frequentlies in America is *Innovation Abstracts*, a little poopsheet put out by an educationist welfare organization called the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development, which seems to be one of those countless shelters from the stormy blast dreamed up by, and for, people who like the cozy and uncompetitive comfort of the academic life, but who have no academic interests, convictions, or powers. Such folk are always hot for “development,” of what, and why, they don’t

care. All they need is the semblance of work in the shop. It is largely to the existence of their ilk that we owe the never-ending succession of fake and zany innovations that disorder our schools and our minds three or four times a year.

It was in *Innovation Abstracts* that we found Martha Pierce’s despatch on the late, breaking news of the coming of the Great Writing Revolution to the sleepy (we guess) campus of North Harris County College in Houston. We thought, at first, that her writing needed a little help, but now we’re not so sure. Her opening sentence does sound as though it might have come from a *Glamour* piece on the return of the skirt, but it may be that she has found just the right voice in which to announce yet another twirling of the “fashionable consciousness” of which schooling is always made.

She has it right. It’s all a question of fashion. Schoolers are people who rush from time to time to the forefront of this or that debate. An endless train of folk forlorn, sometimes they suppose that the deliberate ordering of facts and ideas is a “tool of thinking,” and sometimes they suppose that it isn’t. They are consistent, but without knowing it, in only one thing, and that is in supposing that supposition is the Way. And why not? Their neglect of geometry has led them to suppose that there can be no such thing as Knowing.

Or maybe it’s all political. There is a whiff of the absolute in Knowing; the free and democratic way is Guessing.

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