

The Underground GRAMMARIAN

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Influxing Fun in Florida

Welcome to the twilight zone of professors. To put it politely, these guys are different. To put it bluntly, they are, at times, downright strange. But however strange or bizarre their methods might seem, they are as dedicated to teaching as anyone in their profession. . . . Even though these profs have been known to smack ice cream cones into their foreheads, drill holes in desks, and dress up as Elton John, there's something serious going on here, something they take pride in—education.

From *Today*, a glossy PR poopsheet published for some reason or other by the University of Florida

IN the twilight zone of professors at the University of Florida, you will find, for example, David Denslow, or Dr. Dave to those who sit at his feet. He teaches in the College of Business Administration. He “teaches one live class in the morning, which is videotaped and replayed throughout the day.”

Sometimes he breaks off his spiel and says, “Boy, there’s something out there that’s really destroying my concentration.” (Pause.) “That jacket, that yellow jacket out there. Could you please take that off?” Then, a student planted in the back of the room takes off a jacket. But that’s not all. The student then “speaks to the TV, telling Denslow his tie is too loud. Timing it perfectly, Denslow replies, ‘Oh, my tie is too loud? Sorry,’ he says, taking it off.” Then the tape is replayed through the day.

Denslow has also planted students instructed to hold up rutabagas, in which act they may well have found some pleasure not exactly anticipated by Dr. Dave. He sounds like the right man to hold up some rutabagas *to*. He has also jabbed himself in the forehead with an ice cream cone while

doing his imitation of Gerald Ford, which deed may well have left some of his students not entirely displeased.

“I think I do it because I enjoy it,” he says. That’s what we think, too.

But he also has a “professional” justification: “The off-beat stuff I try to work into the very standard lectures, those that might get boring.”

Well, Heaven knows, there are all sorts of things that might bore a student of business administration. It’s probably best not to take any chances, especially where the dissemination of mere information is concerned.

The pain of study is also mitigated by Richard Lutz, a marketing teacher who is said to be “thirsting for a closer relationship with his students.” So he brings his tool to class and drills a quarter-inch hole in the podium.

“They’re completely blown away by the fact that I’ve drilled a hole in university property,” he explains. “What this illustrates is a key marketing idea—that people buy quarter-inch holes, not quarter-inch drills.”

Well, every discipline has depths of its own, and marketing may well have a few that are both key and obscure, and thus, apparently, utterly beyond the power of mere discourse to clarify. So what else is a man to do—especially since he is “as dedicated to teaching as anyone”—but to bring his drill to class and blow his students away? And who knows?—he may even have a little piece of the outfit that markets podiums to the state of Florida.

The list goes on. Sidney Homan brings down the house when he throws his bookbag to the floor and illuminates a passage from *Romeo and Juliet*: “What he’s doing is trying to make out with her. Nowadays it doesn’t take so long, it’s ‘your place or mine.’”

Julian Pleasants breaks them up by going to class dressed as Clint Eastwood, complete with Colt .45, “to let the students see how long and heavy it was, and it was also a focal point from which to discuss violence in the Old West.”

And then there is Stuart Schwartz, special educationist, and one of those people who has his students play video games with their feet so that they can relate to the handless. (As to whether he also has them play video games with their hands so that they can relate to the footless, we are not informed.) Schwartz tosses out small change to

whichever of his students will laugh at his jokes, thus rolling them in the aisles whenever they roll in the aisles. When he runs short of change, he passes out coupons worth five points toward a student's grade, and seems to be trying to excuse himself for something or other by saying, "Besides, I pass out more coupons than money."

"To me," he explains, "if a professor doesn't influx some fun or humor or activity into the lecture, then he's not really tapping the learning that can take place."

Why the University of Florida would want such facts known, there is no knowing. Perhaps it has something to do with a perfectly justifiable, and even praiseworthy, institutional death-wish. Or perhaps the weighty right hand of deliberate mindfulness that surely dwells in the president's office just doesn't know what the left hand of flackery is doing down in the cellars of public relations.

No matter. The whole business is a comforting display of the benefits we reap from the First Amendment, by whose power fools are so easily led into foregoing the protection offered them by the Fifth. And, unlike the antics of the twilight zone profs, the account of same is truly educational.

In the dialogue called *Gorgias*, Socrates defines flattery, which he calls a knack learned by experience, and contrasts it with medicine, which he calls an art derived from principles. The aim of the flatterer is to provide pleasure, without any consideration of whether the recipient *should* have that pleasure, and that of the physician, to provide what is *good* for the recipient whether pleasant or not.

Of the latter, the true teacher is the most complete example; of the former, the competent whore. When the teacher fails, the good that was to be done is left undone, and that's bad; when the whore fails, some good that was never intended suddenly appears, and that's great. It's funny, too.

All The Books They Have

The curse word's in this book is not fit for kid's to read. If this is all the books you have, heaven help..... I never let my kids hear these word's around my house. Why should they read them in your book's? Your book is not fit to even talk about.

THAT IS, of course, a letter to a teacher from an Irate Parent. Countless thousands of such are sent every year, and the schoolers are at a loss to answer them. The only right answer would require of them conscious and thoughtful devotion to Truth, but their principles, and their principals, do not permit Truth.

Although those few schoolers on whom it has actually dawned will never mention or admit it, there is, at the heart of government schooling, a great theme on which everything done there is a variation. It is simply this: Almost everything that is done in the schools, everything from teaching children to tie their shoes to leading them—should such a possibility ever arise—into the powers of thoughtful self-knowledge, is intended either to make up for some deficit in their parents or, in many cases, to intervene between helpless children and parents who are just no damn good to them at all

We approve that theme. And so too would any thoughtful and honest parent. Who is without deficits, both of character and knowledge? Who is, alone, capable of bringing his own children or others into the power of rational discrimination informed by the widest possible acquaintance with the measureless range of human experience? A thoughtful parent can be nothing but grateful to a teacher who, in some respect at least, truly knows better, and more.

There is, of course, a truthful answer to that Irate Parent. But, by the power of a deficit in him that might have been remedied by the schoolers he now castigates, but wasn't, he will take no betterment from the answer. It is too late—too late both for him and his child. And, in any case, it is not an answer that a government agency can dare to give to one of its patrons. Had he sought out and hired a teacher for his child, that teacher might well say: Having chosen me for this work, you will either have to trust that I know better than you how to accomplish it, or go and find some other teacher for your child. But an agent of government can not afford to commend the competition.

Thus it is that such Irate Parents must be answered with weaseling, or silence, or politic obsequiousness, or, which is most customary, by pious slogans about "censorship." And thus it is, too, that when an Irate Parent makes a truly

important point, it is neglected and lost. Faced with a page-by-page count of the words said to be “never used in *this* house,” the schoolers can turn, even if they have to hire consultants to help them, to “literary” appreciations, but when a man asks, “Are these the only books you have,” they seem not to notice.

There are some questions that even a thoughtful and informed parent would ask: Must there really be four-color advertisements for pop stars on the music room wall? Do the children really have to relate to the Bushman experience? Do you really have to provide the sixth-graders with rap-sessions on abortion and displays of break dancing? And are these really the only books that you have?

We found that letter in an elegant journal called *Aristos: The Journal of Esthetics*. It stood as an epigraph to a piece called “The Misreading of Literature,” by one Michelle Marder Kahmi. The book to which the letter referred is an autobiographical novel by Robert Newton Peck, *A Day No Pigs Would Die*. Kahmi begins with a careful and convincing defense of the book, which we have not read, and goes on in similar vein in a consideration of the currently notorious *Catcher in the Rye*. It was all familiar and expectable stuff, and directed, of course, to the great, and certainly present, danger posed by ignorant “would-be censors,” who have indeed, as the author puts it, “demonstrated a failure in overall comprehension of the text.” Having ourselves failed in “overall comprehension” of more texts than we can count, we find her analysis reasonable, and her commentary on those works that we do know useful and correct. We would therefore like to be more sympathetic to her work than we are, but she too, just like the schoolers, has neglected the important question in the letter. In her case, furthermore, the fault is the greater, for, while little understanding should be expected of the schoolers, Kahmi stumbled over the truth, picked herself up, and went on.

Having disposed, we presume, of the “curse words” in Peck’s book by commending “a prose style finely tuned to the spirit of the narrative,” she goes on thus:

Moreover, *A Day No Pigs Would Die* is in every respect a highly moral story, celebrating time-honored American values: respect for

moral order and productive work; family solidarity; individual courage, independence, and integrity.

We believe her, although we wonder how those time-honored values can be so particularly specified as “American.” She has probably been infected by the typical obsequiousness of the schoolers, saying, in effect, to a hostile opponent, “Goodness gracious, don’t you see that the values in this book are just what you, as a good American, would prize?” This is not a minor fault, for it shows that her intent is more polemic than esthetic.

Those virtues, however, are indeed virtues, and while their mere display or favorable mention is not enough to make a book a good book, their deprecation will, far more certainly than “curse words,” make any book a bad book. We are convinced that Kahmi is right and Irate Parent wrong, that *A Day No Pigs Would Die* is not a bad book.

But is it really the only book they have, the only book that celebrates a respect for moral order and productive work, and family solidarity, and individual courage, independence and integrity? Are there, perhaps, other books, equally mindful of those time-honored virtues, that might have also the virtue of proving, if incomprehensible, nevertheless inoffensive to ignorant and illiterate parents who can make out little more than the four-letter words?

But it takes little imagination to guess what would happen in the junior high school now reading *A Day No Pigs Would Die* if someone were to suggest that it be replaced, for instance, with *My Antonia*, a novel to which, judging from what Kahmi says of it, Peck’s book might well be related, and which has the further merit, in these days, of having been written by a woman, Willa Cather.

It won’t do. It is old. Not relevant. Insensitive, its author notwithstanding, to the plights of women and other oppressed minorities. It is not written, in any case, at an appropriate reading level, and it is not to be expected that the children will, or even should, look up words, or concentrate on figuring out the meaning of any passage that is not immediately clear. And, whether it has them or not, the opposite qualities, perhaps much to the author’s chagrin, will be

claimed for *A Day No Pigs Would Die*. But in fact, the demerit in *My Antonia* is that it will not serve pour *épater* anyone.

It is not because it is a “highly moral story” that Peck’s book is so often assigned to junior high school students in the government schools. Nor is anyone in the school business surprised when some Irate Parent objects to it. It is chosen so that some Yahoo out there *will* object to it, at which time its moral qualities will provide the high ground on which the schoolers will stand, defending themselves from the Yahoos they gave us in the last generation, and wringing their hands about censorship.

For a government agency with an agenda for social management, it is not enough quietly to intervene between children and parents. It must also be *seen* to do so. Thus, every ignorant griper can provide new proof that we *need* government agencies with agendas for social management.

Fighters For Peace

Sparked by research in the early 1980s on youth’s reaction to nuclear issues, the idea of teaching peacemaking has now filtered down to the youngest levels. But where older grades tend to focus their peace curriculum on the nuclear issues, the younger children are taught peacemaking on a more immediate level. For one thing, “there aren’t a lot of kids who are afraid of a nuclear threat,” says Nancy Carlson-Paige, an early childhood specialist at Lesley College, Cambridge, Mass.

Christian Science Monitor, Dec. 22, 1986

FROM TIME TO TIME we have these moments of placidity, in which we forget that we live in a land where it is necessary to build high steel mesh fences, concentration camp style, on highway overpasses, so that children will not be able to drop concrete blocks onto cars passing below. But something always comes along to remind us that there is, in the way we live, and in the way we rear our young, some mysterious and seemingly ineradicable wrongness.

This time, we have been brought back to what is unaccountably called “reality” by Ms. Carlson-Paige, early childhood specialist, and enterprising educationist. Like many of that breed, she

apparently makes a living not by teaching anybody anything, but by cooking up programs by which schools can achieve at least three attractive goals at once: the displacement of dull discipline with the chummier, and significantly unmeasurable, pursuit of consciousness-raising; the demonstration of new and pressing needs for money, bodies, equipment, and lots of “instructional material” as turned out by Carlson-Paiges; and a new set of tassels for the Garment of Righteousness in which the school people love to be clothed.

Peace Education, however, seems to be in trouble, and in need of what the schoolers call a new “population.” The young teenagers, of course, were suitably terrified by Hiroshima and Nagasaki without being confused by Warsaw or Pearl Harbor, but the littler kids remain obstinately impervious to fear of the nuclear threat. In that unseemly oblivion, they constitute, perhaps, a threat to perpetual peace, and, certainly, a threat to the prosperity of the drawers-up of Peace Education Curricula.

So Carlson-Paige and one Diane Levin, also a fighter for peace, have cooked up a swell “peace curriculum for preschoolers,” to be dished up, we have to presume, in preschool. One of its ideas is that, wherever little children are gathered together, there should be made available a conference table at which disputes over crayons and blocks must be settled. This will demonstrate that “negotiation is not a wimpy, but a valuable thing to do.” It serves also to “empower the weak one” and “to show the bullies alternative ways to meet their needs besides pushing and grabbing.”

Since all of this peace education business puts itself forth as a way of ensuring the peace of the world at some time in the future, it depends on the possibility that some of the kiddies will grow up to be powerful politicians, and that when they have to confront the great issues of war and peace, they will proceed forthwith to the nearest conference table, there to meet “their needs” without pushing or grabbing, unless, of course, pushing and grabbing *are* their needs, as is often the case with bullies.

And, in that day, what big teacher will require of them that they sit and talk peace, and share out the crayons and blocks that they want to keep? What else but power itself will “empower the weak one,” and where will he find it when the

omnipotent preschool peacemaker is no longer around to enforce peace?

When the bully and the sissy go to the peace table, someone stronger than both of them together will prove the worth of war. They will negotiate by command of a power with which there is no negotiating. By coercion, they will be prevented from coercing one another, for now. They will hear from their preteacher the sweet talk of compromise and peace, and see in her deeds the awesome, and oh, so seductive, benefits of *la force majeure*. And when school is over, the bully is the one who can now exercise the power that the teacher was not reluctant to use in the schoolroom, and the sissy will either have to learn to keep a low profile or give thought to carrying around a big rock. And the teacher will go home full of the glow of virtue, having done her bit for the peace of the world and the future happiness of all personkind. And the Carlson-Paiges will have sold another packet of learning materials.

It is too simple to say that those school people don't mean what they say when they preach. In fact, they don't *know* what they are saying. They are not hypocrites, just fools. But to the children they seem to be liars, and thus the opposite of what they say might just be the truth. So some children will be unable to see any reason to *refrain* from dropping blocks of concrete onto the cars passing below.

Brief Notes

You should find, enclosed with this issue, an announcement of the first two titles in what we intend to be a continuing series of Leaflets for the Masses.

Leaflets for the masses will be devoted to the following:

☞ Reprints of selected Grammarian essays since the time of those reprinted in *The Leaning Tower of Babel*. We are running out of back issues.

☞ Occasional pieces of our own, either written originally for other journals, or too long for a regular issue.

☞ Reprints of older works likely to be of interest to our readers, who are unlike most people. The first will be, of course, the Ben Jonson text from which our motto comes: "Neither can his mind be thought to be in tune,

whose words do jarre; nor his reason in frame, whose sentence is preposterous."

Leaflets for the Masses will be in the form of stapled folio booklets with covers, and we will keep them both as handsome and as inexpensive as possible.

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entities of any sort, \$25, or even more.



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The Polyphemus Fallacy

He answered from his den: "By craft, nor might,
No-Man hath given me death." Then they said: "Right;
If no man hurt thee and thyself alone,
That which is done to thee by Jove is done.
And what great Jove inflicts no man can flie..."

Chapman's *Odyssey*

WE often hear from people who want us to tell them how to write "better." We suspect, and sometimes truly know, that by "better" they mean "more profitably." They want to "get into communications," or "turn out copy that sells," neither of which we know how to do in any case. And bad cess to them all.

The goodness of good writing is not a question of such things as the difference between *less* and *fewer*, or the placement of punctuation with respect to quotation marks, or even of the discovery of zippy adjectives. All such things, even the zippy adjectives, are effects, not causes. Good writing comes of attentive thoughtfulness in the service of truth. If certain failures of technique

preclude good writing, it is because they first preclude thoughtfulness. For such failures, there is quick and easy remedy in some book or other. Those who need may read.

But there is no easy remedy for the greatest impediment to good writing, the failure not of technique but of thoughtfulness itself, a failure that can often be traced either to the writer's motive, or to sloth, out of which the writer is disinclined to weigh either his motive or his words.

Thus it is that the worst writing is usually committed in what the writer takes to be a good cause, so good a cause, in fact, that it seems not to need any thoughtful examination. How can his motive, and thus his writing, be other than pure and correct, who writes in a worthy cause? Thus it is that the worst writing in America is found not in the drivel of the educationists, but on the editorial pages of the best newspapers.

Here come a few excerpts from an editorial essay in *The Christian Science Monitor*, a very good sheet. The editorial, however, was a very badly written self-congratulation for a series of good pieces called "Exiles among us: poor and black in America."

- * The presence in America of a black underclass, apparently so cut off from hope, is morally unacceptable.
- * The black poor, like all other human beings, need to be valued and to value themselves.
- * The notion of some sort of race-based "ghetto pathology" needs to be extirpated from people's thinking.
- * The concerns of black men—particularly their need for jobs—demand attention.

What a dilemma. The issue is likely, and rightly so, to arouse emotional responses, and the writer so plainly on the "good" side, that we are ready to approve his words without analysis. Indeed, analysis itself seems a bit suspect in such a context. Why, except to refute what ought not to be refuted, would anyone want to analyse such noble sentiments?

And therein lies the frightening power of such mindless writing. The emotional strength of its informing cause is so great that the minds of both writer and reader are blinded, and we imagine that we must either agree or disagree. The choice is

not hard. But, in fact, refutation is not at issue here, any more than verification, for neither is possible. The question is simply: What can these statements mean?

Perhaps we can, in fact, give some advice as to how to write better. Be always mindful of what our founder used to call the Polyphemus Fallacy. It appears when, by an unconsidered choice of words, exclusively human powers or attributes are implied where none can exist. The name comes, of course, from the sad story of Polyphemus, blinded, as he thought, by No-Man. When he called upon the other Cyclopes to avenge his hurt, what else could they do but remind him that he who is injured by no one can hardly expect redress.

Consider all of your words. Many of them name deeds or states that are possible only to human beings. When you use them, attach them to persons. Give names and addresses wherever possible. When you assert that there should be more love in the world, or more peace, all you do is praise yourself as virtuous, in favor of good and against evil. Be specific. To whom, exactly, is your admonition directed? If you require yourself to say that Henry should love Martha, or that Oscar, who is white, should live in peace and fellowship with Hal, who is black, then you will find yourself obliged to make some sense, for someone who does not think those propositions self-evident will want to ask some questions. He may also require you to provide some pretty sharp definitions, since Henry and Martha happen to be married one to Floss and the other to Bob. He may want to know exactly what "love" you have in mind for Oscar and Hal, who have never met, and never will.

What can a man possibly mean, who says, of the very fact that impels him to speak, that it is "morally unacceptable"? Only a person can accept morally, whatever that might mean, or not accept morally. If the writer means that no person is able to bear the existence of the fact he names, then he is talking bunk. Many can bear it. Some even approve it. And if some great social remedy depends on the truth of his strange assertion, it will be slow to come. If he means that *he*, perhaps out of greater moral sensibility than some others, can not bear the existence of some fact, then let him say *that*. And let him then describe the effects upon the world of his inability to bear, and

meditate for a space on the provocative fact that the unbearable stubbornly persists just as though he *could* bear it, and, for another space, on a new editorial in which he can tell us exactly who it is that has brought this unbearable (but nevertheless borne) pain on our fellow man, so that we may seek him out and bring him to justice, as the friends of Polyphemus would surely have avenged his injury—if there were any way to do that. Is the culprit, by any chance, that same fellow from whose thinking something “needs to be extirpated”?

What sort of *deed* is a man doing when he is valuing the black poor, or the white rich, for that matter? When he answers a concern’s demand for attention, does he straightway give some black man a job, or does he sit down to “face the issue” at his typewriter? What do you suppose he has in mind for that extirpation? If we chose to go and *do* what he advises, could he give us a list of the people from whose thinking a notion is to be extirpated, and tell us further exactly how to extirpate it, now that he has done the hard part of the work by showing us his virtue?

Who talks about everybody talks about nobody, and remarkably much to his own convenience. Who has humanity in mind has not a single living human being in mind, and his talk is cheap. Still, we pay a lot for it.

The Living End in View

...For all the desires that we have to make undergraduate education viable, creative, and civic, we have nevertheless allowed the undergraduate experience to become the cash cow for whatever it is that...meets the short-term revenue goals of the institution... The absence of a sense of definition, the substitution of the desire to manage, as opposed to lead—these have become the sources of, homes for, attitudes that (colleges) had, historically, been founded to combat...The constant assertion of a goal—civic or commercial, marital or social—as the purpose of the undergraduate education flies in the face of the very ideas that the (college) wishes to promote, which is the liberal notion that there is no end in view.

UNTIL you come to think about it, the building of the Egyptian pyramids seems a tremendous and difficult enterprise. But it wasn’t. The men who really *built* the pyramids didn’t do any heavy lifting at all. Slaves did that. The big men, the real movers and shakers, probably didn’t even come around until it was time to cut the ribbon.

And if you think building pyramids was a big deal, just think for a minute of the tremendous enterprises that we have taken on, one half of which may be put under the heading of Maintaining Our Power as Leader of the Free World, and the other under Competing with the Japanese. Not easy, and a lesser nation would have no chance at all, but the Land of the Free might just bring it all off, if only we can get up the moral courage to take a lesson from the Egyptians.

It was the passage quoted above that got us thinking about slavery. We found it in the *New York Times*, in one of those Gatherings of Informed Opinion. Big expert “educators” held forth on the current trend toward commercialism in the colleges and universities. The author of the comment above was Bartlett Giamatti, who happens just now to be big in baseball, but who had to serve a long apprenticeship in Academe. He even had to put in a few years as president of some school in New England.

What we liked best about his remarks was his old-fashioned, and *right*, use of the word “liberal.” The capital *L* Liberals seem to construe the word otherwise, but Giamatti seems a real liberal, who uses the word as though it were related to “liberty.” And we take “end,” as we think he intended, in both ways. There is no graduation day upon which a liberal education is completed, and there is no other goal than itself to which it is dedicated. It is a condition which is a good, not a means to the achievement of something else, not the power to do something that one could not do without it, but the power to be something that one would not be without it.

In short, it is liberty.

It is thus best understood by contrast with whatever condition will appear in its lack, a condition that must be called slavery. We do have the notion, to be sure, that slavery went out long ago, but in fact it is still not only common among us, but even far more common than it used to be

when it was legal. Our failure to see it is brought upon us by the belief, which is instilled by *our* version of education, that society is more important than the individual, and that the meaning of things is properly to be defined out there in the “real” world rather than in persons, who are apparently somewhat less real than the world. If slavery is just a provision of the laws, then we don’t have it. But if it is a condition in persons, then we don’t see it.

What would we do if slavery were to come back as a provision of the laws? Right here, at the Underground Grammarian Megacomplex, of course, where there is always work to be done, we would shop around and buy a couple of slaves. Young ones. Not only would they be cheaper than grown ones, but they would also be more amenable to training in exactly those useful skills that suit our purpose. Slaves, after all, are an investment in the future, and if we are to compete successfully with the *Reader’s Digest*, we need some basic minimum competences. So when the time comes to send our slaves off to school, we are going to be very careful. We do want them to be able to balance a checkbook, which is exactly one of the things that we can’t seem to get right. We would like them, someday, to learn how to read proof, and even to explain all those funny little markings to the rest of us, so that we might at last turn out an issue without a single typo. And we would definitely want them to learn, and as soon as possible, to relate well to self and others, with emphasis on others, and to understand their immense obligation to serve the common good and keep America great by competing with *Reader’s Digest*.

You can be damn sure that we would feed them well, and see to it that they brush three times a day, and make sure they have all their shots, and keep them warm and dry. After all, they would be getting more valuable every day, and all the more expensive to replace, but we would like the school people to take over the job of scaring the hell out of them about drugs and AIDS, either one of which would wipe out our investment. We would like those school people also to keep reminding them that the purpose of “education” is to equip them to do some kind of work. And we surely don’t want them to get any ideas that might disturb that notion.

So we would, of course, send them to the nearest government school.

When it comes time to send them to college—this work does require a diploma, you know—we would have to be a little more careful. We would try to find a place where they have a strong business program, or maybe a multimedia concentration in the art of Communicology, a coming field. A few courses in advertising wouldn’t hurt, and a smattering of accountancy would be a necessity, as would some grasp of the arcane art of marketing, and the knack of skillful product perception enhancement for the maximization of profit potential.

We wouldn’t begrudge a nickel of the tuition. It would be, in any case, a deductible business expense. But we wouldn’t want to invest a nickel in anything that will not make them better workers. Foreign languages they do not need, especially since we will surely, from time to time, want to say, in their presence, things that we don’t want them to understand, but also because such studies will leave them less time for useful courses. Of Plato or Jefferson, they need know nothing but what can easily be found in our biographical dictionary. Where geography is concerned, we would like them to know zip codes, and of sciences, all they need is elementary computer science, which pretty much means the ability to type in data on a keyboard. That’s very important! And of such things as music and painting, they need know nothing, nothing at all. They have work to do, and they are not going to be traipsing around to museums and concerts on our time.

As to reading, we are going to have to take a little risk. We do want them to read well enough to spot typos, and even misplaced modifiers, but we don’t want them to read well enough to spot non sequiturs or circular arguments. The one skill can indeed, if carried to extremes, lead on to the other, and the end result of that sort of reading could easily bring a slave to *understand* that he is a slave. That would be a financial calamity for us. In this matter, however, we are ready to put our faith in the standard American college faculty, by whose careful contrivance the first, safe kind of reading hardly ever *does* bring on the dangerous, anti-social second.

Where slaves are concerned, we don’t need any advice from Giamatti. The end is in view. And it

is the real living end—a life, a whole life, that is not *for itself*, but for the service and sake not even of some other person, but of some *thing*, some notion.

Only the free can afford a liberal education, but then again, only the free would want it in the first place.

The Great Booklets Society

OUR confederates in the Underground Tractarian Society report what we have long known: our subscribers are a rare breed. Every day brings a nice little batch of orders for Leaflets for the Masses. That in itself is not strange, but consider this:

A remarkable proportion of those who order send more money than they have to. Sometimes they say nothing, but often they give reasons. They are sure that the prices are too low. They want to help get the enterprise going. They want to subsidize our half-price subscriptions for those who need them. They want (no kidding) to buy drinks all around for the entire staff. They want to pay us back for the stamps that we stick on the return envelopes that go out with renewal notices. They are proof to us that MBA programs are all lies, and that the only decent way of doing business is to pay no mind to business, of which we are, in any case, incapable.

We conclude that they are people in whom a natural human desire has not been eradicated. It is nothing less than the longing for Justice, which is not the same as “knowing your rights” and insisting upon them. Whether what they do is Justice, is not for us to say, for no one knows another’s heart, but that it is so intended, we know. They would hardly behave thus out of the appetites and passions that are said to run the marketplace, or merely to solicit the approbation of others.

From that we can conclude many things, but one of them is of particular interest just now. Our readers must have read books and thought about them, for therein lies the best possible defense against the common belief of the world that there is no natural longing for Justice. And, taken all together, they have read lots of books, far more than any one of us will be able to read in a lifetime. They are just the people we need in our latest enterprise, an experiment in the search for

true education, for ourselves and any others who want it.

The other day, a junior member of our staff was neglecting business and reading Thucydides. He came to an illuminating and provoking passage that made him stop reading Thucydides. Long ago we said, in some now forgotten context, that reading, true reading, takes place not when we look at the page, but when we are impelled to look up from the page. It is true. The receiving of the letters is necessary but not sufficient. Reading happens later, in rumination and brooding.

The passage that arrested the idle fellow comes just before the end of Chapter X, where Thucydides describes the demoralization and the decay of character brought upon all of Greece by the Peloponnesian War, when rogues were accounted clever and honest men despised as simpletons. The passage is full of vexing, and remarkably timely observations, and our man, who had imagined that he had “read” that book before, now found it both wonderful and utterly unfamiliar.

Winston Churchill once suggested that a person who had no education—he meant the real kind—might get one by reading a good book of quotations. We think that was neither a stupid idea nor a frivolous gibe, but we do think that by “read,” Churchill meant what we mean by that word.

Augustine, for instance, wrote in some place or other, that we all want to be happy, while living in such a way as to make happiness impossible. It is exactly the sort of thing that might appear in a book of quotations. To read it with the reading of the schools takes a moment, but to read it truly—how long? To hear from the poet that the worst are filled with passion while the best lack all conviction is, without true reading, merely to overhear idle chatter, but who will truly read such talk, measuring by it himself and the world, will see some truth. If you have nothing else, a book of quotations will indeed do.

But not all writers, and not all books, and most certainly not all paths of thinking, are suitable for a book of quotations. While many elegant lines might be taken one by one from that passage of Thucydides, to do so would not provide any reader, however astute, with the weight and depth of his understanding. And likewise, the treasure in books is not always exactly the same as the book.

And then there are the Pilgrims. We do not hold that religionists have any special license to pronounce on the nature of the good, but conclude rather that they have traditionally put themselves forth as “knowers” who speak out of something other than knowledge, thus usurping the proper work of the mind and handing it over to the sentiments. Nevertheless, it can not be denied that religionists, like many other sorts of people from shoemakers to kings, have frequently been able also to do the work of the mind and thus to seek goodness. But even to mention religionists in the government schools is to run the risk of offending some other kinds of religionists, and thus it is that while the Pilgrims probably do have to be mentioned in the history text, they must be defined as “people who take long trips.”

It will be a long trip indeed to the land of Morals Education for the folk who have taught the last few generations of Americans to esteem themselves and diligently to neglect all the evidence by which they might be led to see themselves as less than estimable. Far will they travel from that glad land where the ability to discriminate between better and worse is called bigotry, and where self discipline is a mark of the aberrant over-achiever. But not to worry. Have they not already knocked off Thinking Education, which at one time seemed so little to be hoped for from the people whose “thought questions” usually begin with “How would you feel if...?”

Nevertheless, there grows among us these days some fuzzy notion that “the schools” ought to be “teaching values.” Nice ones. As to what “the schools” can do about the teachers who think it amateurish to “come from a position of right and wrong,” and theoretical educationists whose sensibilities are too highly developed to permit of coarse distinctions, there are as yet no suggestions. Well, don’t worry about it. There will surely be a commission. And a report.

The whole mess led us to brooding. And we wondered—What about the *students* in that high school? Are there any who would admit that their classmate had done the right thing, even the “good” thing, however unprofitable? Does that leading child psychologist suddenly find some distinction between virtue and vice when his colleague down the hall gets himself promoted by slandering the competition, or when his mechanic

polishes up his old carburetor and bills him for a new one?

And, as we brooded, we had news from California about Miss Silver. You’ve probably not heard of Miss Silver, a “teacher” of “applied economics” in Van Nuys. We heard of her in the magazine *Los Angeles*, in a remarkable piece called “Ben Stein’s High School Diary.” Stein, a reporter, went to the high school for the sake of an article, and spent a whole year there. His work combines skillful eyewitness reporting with thoughtful and kind understanding. Read it if you can.

Here is what Miss Silver says of her work as a teacher:

I want to be real in class and be a good human being. I try to make an example of myself. Plus, I like to have a good time. I want to set an example of being a good human being.

And here is a typical diary entry from one of Miss Silver’s classes, an honors class in applied economics:

Miss Silver then goes on to discuss the 1982 campaign between George Deukmejian and Tom Bradley for governor. “Why did the polls say that Bradley would beat Duke, and then why did Duke win?” she asks. The students all look at her expectantly. “Because,” she answers to herself, “the voters didn’t want to seem to be racists when they were polled, but they really were racists, so they voted as racists at the election.”

“I don’t buy that,” says Kevin, a lively student who sells plastic ties. “I think that maybe Bradley was beaten because the black voter turnout was so low.”

“That’s a good point,” says Miss Silver. “Now, do any of you know why the absentee vote is usually so heavily Republican?” Again, the students look blank. “Because rich Republicans are the kind of people who go on long vacations and plan ahead enough to get absentee ballots,” she says blithely, and no one contradicts her.

For the day’s final note, there is the briefest of discussions on what distinguished the Federalists from the anti-Federalists. Chris, an excellent history student, starts to give a

detailed answer in terms of states' rights and slavery and trade, but Miss Silver cuts him off. "Okay, all you advanced-placement history students, stop showing off. All we need to know is that some of them liked the Constitution and some didn't."

If you did want to understand why some people did not like the Constitution, who would you want for your teacher, Miss Silver or Chris? How about Kevin?

The content of Miss Silver's political notions is not to the point. If she were another teacher with another automatic faith she would say exactly the same things by filling in the blanks with different details. What is to the point is that she *has* political notions, and that she recites them—"blithely." They are, like all notions, unexamined ideas about value, about what is the better and what is the worse. So Miss Silver already is, not indeed a teacher, but certainly a preacher of morality, at least of *a* morality. Like preachers in general, she is not in the business of putting forth propositions that would be interesting (but tough) to test, but only of making assertions.

Another day, "the class goes into a long discussion of United States foreign policy,

...which Miss Silver thinks is selfish and hypocritical, but "nations almost always do just what they feel they have to do anyway," she says. "Nations rarely act out of altruism, even if they pretend to."

Randy adds, "Almost no one ever acts out of altruism, but then why should they? Where does it get you?"

"You're right," says Miss Silver. "People expect altruism, and hope for it, but it rarely occurs in a pure form."

"Robots are going to be the only ones to survive," says one boy. "They don't expect anything in return."

Suddenly we can see where some true and non-factional sort of "moral teaching" might begin. And suddenly, too, we see the real Miss Silver, wistful and puzzled, dismayed by the darkness and looking for some light, and, exactly like her poor students, finding no light, and so deciding that there is no light.

And we like her, and even have some small hope for her. She does not mind at all "coming from a position of right and wrong." Indeed, she wants to do that, to be a good person rather than another sort, and to present a good example.

But at the same time, she believes that she *does* see the light. After all, she knows exactly who is a racist, and who isn't. She knows that Republicans who plan ahead are slyly seizing advantage over Democrats who don't. Those are moral positions, and Miss Silver stands rooted in them. How did that happen, and, most important of all, how did Miss Silver come to think such beliefs knowledge, and to pass them on as such to children?

What she needs and doesn't have is exactly what her students need and don't have—a teacher. Had one been around that day, consider what he might have said of that idle talk:

Wait. Let us stop and think a while about what we have been saying. Is it really of any use to believe that meaningful deeds can be done where there is no person to do them, and to mean them? How can a nation be altruistic, or selfish, for that matter? Is that not exactly the sort of condition reserved to human beings—to us, who sit here and lament the woeful shortage of what we long to see and that we alone can provide?

And how interesting it is that we say that we *expect* and *hope for* that very inward condition that we also pronounce exceedingly rare, and to be depended upon only in robots. Is the hope of goodness only a foolish dream? If so, what point can there be in Miss Silver's condemnations of badness? If rich Republicans are to be condemned for serving their own interests through taking thought for the morrow, are poor Democrats to be praised for failing to do the same out of improvidence?

And why, if there is no good to be found, is this discussion so fascinating, and at once so saddening? Why do we all find these questions interesting, but tough? Why do we sigh a bit at the thought that only robots can do their work without expecting anything in return? Is that a reasonable thought at all? Is the utter and inevitable indifference of robots the same as what we mean by "altruism"? Is that what we expect and hope for? And, as to that question, and to all our questions, is Miss Silver going to say, "All we need to know is that..."? And if she does, what will that astonishing All turn out to be?

Miss Silver stands every day, like every teacher in the world, on the brink, not of teaching, but of learning about what she means by goodness. If she doesn't, and thus doesn't lead her students into the same, it is not because of what is in her head, but because of what is not in her head. Her head is brimming full of all sorts of stuff that was put there, as it is in all our heads, by the suggestions of environment and company.

Miss Silver is a bit disorderly and undisciplined, and given to putting aside the work of the day whenever she feels like it. Her knowledge of her "subject," admittedly a vague one, shows remarkable gaps.

However, and a big however it is, Miss Silver is probably very much like countless other teachers both in the schools of the government and the religious schools. She will not, like her oh so sophisticated colleague in New York, pronounce her lofty independence of mere questions of better and worse. She will not claim that she doesn't know what virtue is, but will rather lament the rarity of whatever it is that she supposes virtue. So, unlike the fashionable relativist poseur, she is sometimes bewildered, which is at least a beginning.

And if she has not gone past the beginning, it is because, as in her counterpart in the religious schools, her supposings about virtue are not the fruit of her mind's work, but its seed. In her school, she is Sister Silver, reciting precepts and dogma, and telling the better from the worse as though from a table of guidelines.

So the Great Government School Moral Reawakening can take only one path. It will be the noble, and relatively untroublesome, enterprise of telling other people to be good. It will not—for this is obviously beyond the powers, and even beyond the ken, of Miss Silver & Co.—bother itself with necessarily lengthy considerations of why to be good, and just what it means to be good. Goodness Education will be to Goodness what Sex education is to sex, not even a relative, but a tiresome in-law at best.

Plain English Strikes Again

The Oregon Adult and Family Services Division is looking for another word for "pregnant," one that an eighth-grade level reader might understand. The search is just

one result of a new law that goes into effect later this year. It requires that brochures and forms from the Adult and Family Services—the welfare office—be written in plain English. The thesaurus already has been getting a workout.

The Oregonian, January 30, 1987

FOR this piece, we had to get out the eleven-foot pole. It isn't easy, you know, to sit around brooding on the fact that eighth-graders in Oregon can not be expected to know the meaning of "pregnant."

Eighth-graders are usually about thirteen or fourteen years old, give or take a year or two. Would you like to have a nickel for every eighth-grader in Oregon who knows what "pregnant" means, even if you had to give back a dollar for every one who doesn't? How colossal a jerk would you have to be to imagine that a thesaurus will provide a simpler word? If you did unearth an eighth-grader who didn't know the meaning of "pregnant," which would you deem the better: coming up with an "easier" word, or explaining the meaning of the one he doesn't understand?

Your answers to such questions, of course, would simply make sense. But the agents of government do not want answers that make sense. They want answers that make jobs, and that justify the perpetual growth of the ranks of government agents. So it is that state after state has enacted these silly "plain English" laws, so that a job that might be done quickly and well by one good mind, as the box on the next page demonstrates, will be done ill and continually by no mind at all, but by committee.

Oregon's plain English legislation is not aimed, of course, at children who are actually in the eighth grade. It is aimed at children who left the eighth grade, if they ever saw it at all, long ago. And the law requires not exactly "eighth-grade English" in government welfare regulations, but an even lesser variety. "The goal... is to use a sixth-grader's vocabulary in sentences that an eighth-grader can understand." Tall order. Whole oodles of educationist reading experts will make bundles out of widespread poverty and ignorance, reaping where they have sown.

The revisionists of Oregon's Adult and Family Services division have a nifty computer program that counts the numbers of letters, words, and

syllables in a sentence and then determines (according to somebody) the “reading level a person would need to be able to read what was written.” It works like this. The first is not made out of sixth-grade words in sentences that an eighth-grader can understand; the second is:

“Shelter will be provided as required to meet the immediate need. The costs are not limited to ADC standards, but will not exceed the minimum necessary to meet the emergency.”

“Cash can be given to help with urgent shelter needs. The amount of assistance will be the smallest amount needed to meet the emergency.”

You figure it out.

And in Kentucky—for God’s sake be careful driving there—they hoked up a driver’s manual written at the sixth-grade level. Still too hard. Now they are working on a new one at third-grade level. But it’s not easy. It turns out that the State Police have some elitist notions. They say that a few real hard words, like “lawful” and “legal,” for instance, can not be replaced with any one of what must be a host of equivalents in any good thesaurus. So now the state apparatchiki, three school teachers with five thousand dollars of the taxpayers’s dough, are at work on a glossary that will “explain the more difficult terms” like legal and lawful. It will also be printed in “larger, easier-to-read type.” And someday, we have no doubt, in Braille. After all, is this the kind of nation in which citizens can be deprived of their right to tear along the highways in steel machines just because of some little incapacity beyond their control?

There seems to be some great Law of Nature at work here. We can all remember the March of Progress to the ninth-grade level, and then to the eighth. Now we have reached the third. Suddenly, we understand why the educationists are calling for more of that “preschooling.” It is not only so that more people will become wards of the state as soon as possible, but so that they will have some place to retreat to from the kindergarten level.

Plain English at Last

by John Sneil, *Oregonian* Reporter
without Thesaurus

Old brochures for emergency assistance, for example, told people who needed help that “if it appears the emergency might be met through another agency or community resource, the AES

worker will contact the agency or resource, determine whether help is available, and set up a definite appointment for the applicant before sending him or her from the branch office.”

The new form says “if the need can be met by another agency or community resource, AFS will contact the agency or resource.”

Both sentences mean that if the agency can find help from somebody other than the state, it will.

Brief Notes

THIS journal was recently written about in *Personal Publishing*, a computer magazine, as an unusual example of what is nowadays called “desktop publishing.” For an interview, the only one we could spare from his work was our Associate Circulation Manager, who seems to have said that the system of publishing that we use would be illegal in nine out of ten nations on Earth. Where he got his statistics, we don’t know, but then we never do.

We would have put it somewhat otherwise, and pointed out that private publishing of *any kind* is indeed illegal in many places, and much circumscribed in many others. But the great inhibitor of private publishing in this country is simply cost. And the greatest virtue of our system of publishing is that it is relatively cheap, and especially suited to those who can work for themselves without pay, and who therefore do not need to worry about the advertisers, who are the real masters of the press that likes to call itself “free.”

Freedom of the press, as Liebling put it, used to belong only to one who had a press; now it belongs, and also comes most easily, to one who has a Macintosh. That’s all we have. We do not have the elegant LaserWriter that makes our final copy, but we know places where that can be done—cheap, too. We do pay a printer to make litho plates, and print, and cut and fold the copy that we send you, but, if we had to, we could print the whole edition on same sort of duplicating machine. And we use marvelous software, with which anyone can learn, and quickly, as much skill as Tom Paine or Ben Franklin ever reached. Which was enough.

Furthermore, we teach all this to others whenever we can. We think that “desktop publishing” is bunk, and, so far, nothing more

than tricky typewriting in a venal cause, competing with the Japanese, perhaps, or some other such nonsense. Where is this age's William Lloyd Garrison?

Well, wherever he is, we hope he knows where we are. We can tell him all that he needs to know, even if he hasn't spent eight years setting type by hand, which is what we used to tell all would-be publishers. All he has to do is call us up here most any evening at (609) 589-6477. And if he wants to start out with the cub scout newsletter, that's just fine by us too.



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The Spin of Plato in His Grave

IT is no secret that philosophy, as a way of life rather than a subject to be taken in school, began and ended with Plato. Some few in every age, like Epictetus sitting on the curbstone, and Hoffer toting bales on the docks, have practiced philosophy as Socrates did, but the academicians know better. Philosophy is not just a subject to them, but a very hard subject indeed, and full of spiffy terms.

We had a letter from a reader, who sent us thanks for "slowing the spin of Plato in his grave," and we knew exactly what he meant. He, after all, was doing no less. In Plato, we see and hear people sitting around and talking. And, while their way of talking is not the same as that in which we reminisce and gossip, it was not all that special either. It was ordinary human talk called to order from time to time, and frequently sent off on long but essential detours so that a term might be thoughtfully defined and a proposition tested. And it is, therefore, especially for those who imagine that efficiency is the same as effectiveness, long and slow. And so it was that Aquinas argued the need for divine revelation, while holding also that

all Truth could be discovered by reason alone. No one lives long enough to finish the job, however, so God gives us hints. Socrates was not entirely in disagreement with that.

The talking of philosophy was also different in its matter, but not in any way foreign to ordinary human experience. We can distinguish it nicely by stealing an idea from C. S. Lewis. It is talking in which people pay attention to what they are doing, and not to what may happen. Therefore, contrary to popular opinion, it is not "speculative." Unlike the bull-session, it is talking in which the talkers will agree, even if they have to be driven to agree, by the logic that is so often called "mere," that such mental acts as guessing, and wishing, and believing are not useful in a search for understanding. Speculation is for economists and sociologists, for religionists and reformers, for psychiatrists and politicians, and, strange as it may seem, for scientists.

After all, it is anything but speculative to say that he who wants to hire a horse-trainer should judge a candidate for the job not by what he says of himself but by the behavior of the horses he has trained, any more than it is by guessing that we know that things equal to the same thing are equal to each other. Nor is it speculation, but simply a clarifying of meaning, to say that a stingy man thinks the liberal man profligate, and the profligate man thinks him stingy. It is out of the dawning of knowledge, not out of speculation, that a man may come to wonder whether he should want what he wants. And it is out of just such ordinary knowables that the talking of philosophy in Plato is built. We can all do it.

And we all do do it, if only for a moment, if only now and then.

The practice of philosophy in Plato takes it for granted that there is no understanding of greater mysteries for those who will not pass through the lesser, a notion no more arcane than our own well-founded suspicion that the way to get to Carnegie Hall is by practicing. If we have generally abandoned philosophy as a guide to ordinary living, it is not only because of the proprietary claims of academics, but also because it seems to us that philosophy has failed. Just look! All these centuries of philosophy, and Earth is not yet fair, nor all men wise and good! But the "philosopher," as Plato understood the word, knows that if Earth is ever to be fair, he had better straighten up his

yard; and that all men will never be wise and good until he is wise and good. He knows, therefore, which part of the Great Work of Making the Whole World a Better Place is For him to do. And that is enough to make a philosopher. Well, maybe there is one more little thing, perhaps the least of the lesser mysteries, but one that fewer and fewer pass through these days. He has to be able to make sense in language.

Courtesy Month in Baltimore

“Schools simply can not be neutral any longer on these issues,” said Larry Swift, executive director of the Washington State School Directors’ Association. “Without civility, democracy becomes a ‘mockocracy’... Democracy founded on freedom simply won’t work without a body of moral principles.”

The larger question, Swift said, is “Who’s (sic) values are we to teach?” He believes that there “is a body of values where there is near unanimous support, whether one embraces creationism, atheism, or any other -ism.”

“Compassion is a value of Christianity, but to teach compassion is not necessarily to teach Christianity,” Swift said.

...educators are at odds over whether school systems should incorporate values in existing curricula or establish a values curriculum. (Ah, what empires thus arise!) They wonder whether they should turn to the Bible or to the Bill of Rights for guidance. They agree on basic values such as honesty, integrity, and responsibility, but disagree over issues of sexuality, creationism, and even the definition of patriotism.

The (Baltimore) system began a program in 1983 based on values selected from the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Each school holds a “value of the month” promotion through student-made posters and class discussions. “Courtesy is contagious, discourtesy is outrageous,” was one student’s poster during courtesy month.

Boston Globe, April 19, 1987

GET ready. We have an exciting year or two ahead of us. By October at the latest, we expect that readers of this sheet will be sending in examples of Goodness Guidelines and teachers’ manuals for Values Inculcation Curricula. They will be very, very funny.

Contemplate this fact: Almost every schoolteacher in this land is a worker in a government agency, and sucking for sustenance at one of the hinder teats of the Great Sow of Public Policy. How do these people make their little ways in the world? They try to please. They compromise. They conciliate. They cut deals. They serve an interesting master, a master with no mind, no self, no soul. Policy. Whose policy? Well, society’s policy, sort of, whoever that may be. You know. So how do they do it? They take a little here, give a little there. One back scratches the other. What they lose on the peanuts, they make up on the popcorn. That’s why everything they do in their schools is so damned dull. They don’t want to offend anybody. They do their business in little herds, committees and task-forces, so that no one person can be held responsible for anything, so that no one mind will have to make any judgments or decisions, so that the buck, should one come bounding in, will have no place to stop. And all the while, they whine and whimper that they don’t get enough money for their highly professional labors, and that they don’t even get no respect. But they do agree, oh indeed they do, “on such basic values as honesty, integrity, and responsibility.” And now they will undertake the great and noble task of teaching all of the children of America to walk in the path of righteousness. Wow.

Oh, sure, it’ll be hard, But they’re used to hard work. It’s true. They do work hard, just as you would if you hadn’t the foggiest idea of how to do the job that you had put yourself forth as able to do. It’s not easy, you know. Just look at the magnitude of one of the tasks that these Civic Service Sages have nobly taken upon themselves. Here they are nodding wisely about honesty, integrity, and responsibility, and, hold on, here comes that ol’ devil Sexuality. Golly. What now?

So what would you do, you mere layman, without the inestimable advantage of education academy training in egalitarian humanisticism to meet the ever-changing needs of a multi-cultural society in the modern world of today? You, you

poor amateur, would probably say, Hold on a minute. If honesty, integrity, and responsibility are such great stuff, as we all agree, suppose we just go right ahead and agree that where sexual behavior is concerned, honesty, integrity, and responsibility are still great stuff?

Now that's dumb. If this weren't Courtesy Month, they would tell you where to head in with that kind of thinking. In the first place, they can agree on those three nifty "values" only because they are not going to be bothered with figuring out exactly what they mean by the words. In the second, and much bigger place, sexual matters are private, you know—which is why they recommend condoms to fourth-graders—and where screwing around is concerned we must think first of the inalienable rights of the individual in a pluralistic democracy. Now if you go around suggesting, for instance, that ignorant self-esteeming teenagers should be held responsible for the consequences of sexual self-expression, you are going to displease a lot of people.

And if you start getting down to mere particular cases, we may have to say that honesty, integrity, and responsibility ought to be concretely demonstrable attributes of the people who are going to teach *others* how to be honest, integral and responsible, and that will cause one hell of a ruckus in the teacher-testing business. So let's just leave that honesty, integrity, and responsibility stuff right where it belongs—on this neat new banner that we're going to wave where everybody can see it.

And then there's the Biggie, the Burning Question. Yeah, sure, we gotta have Values; but Whose? That is a question that only a jerk can ask. When a bunch of jerks come out in favor of honesty, we can be damned sure that next week they will wake up and start to say: Yeah, sure, we gotta push honesty, but Whose honesty? The Bible's honesty, or maybe the Constitution's honesty? Both neat honesties, for *some* people, of course, but let's face it, there's honesty and there's honesty, right? We've already got justice and justice, haven't we? There's social justice, and economic justice, so why not separate units on social honesty and economic honesty? And how about the Bushmen of the Kalahari? You never know when one of them might turn up. We might need a whole new curricular thrust, say,

Honesties in Global Perspective, maybe. Could probably get a terrific grant for that one.

And out of the marvelously convenient question—Whose values?—mighty new empires will grow.

And then there'll be the tests. The school folk do love to show how accountable they are. They will need to develop, through compromise and conciliation of course, big batteries—they always call them "batteries"—of standardized assessment instruments to find out who's been persuaded of what. There'll be lots of true/false and multiple choice questions, so that the scores from Bayonne and from New Gretna can be meaningfully correlated with norms and standard deviations. There may even be a couple of heavy "thought" questions, beginning with: "How would you feel if..." They will be scored holistically.

It's all bunk. Children don't need Values Education. They need the valuable. They need good books and stories. Every good story, from Gilgamesh to "The Karate Kid," has celebrated such things as truthfulness, loyalty, bravery, compassion, generosity, steadfastness, and love. Great works don't teach us virtue, they show us virtue, and we rejoice to recognize it, and we find it fair—but, and a big but, only if we can read them, truly and thoughtfully read them.

We're sorry. We have to end by quoting ourselves:

"Literacy is not a handy knack. It is a moral condition. The ability to read attentively, reflectively, and judiciously is equally the ability to be attentive, reflective, and judicious. For the sake of just and sane living, literacy is not an optional adornment. It is a necessity. It is *the* necessity. It is not a variety or portion of education. It is education. It is the whole thing, the wholesome nourishment of the mind, by which it may grow strong enough to be the master of the will and not its slave, the judge of desire and not its procurer, the censor of sentiment and not its tool, and the inquisitor of belief, and not its flack. It is our only path to whatever wisdom we can have, which is our only path to whatever goodness we can know, which is our only path to whatever happiness we can enjoy."

Neither can his mind be thought to be in tune, whose words do jarre; nor his reason in frame, whose sentence is preposterous.

D*A*V*I*D *W.* *P*A*R*R*O*T*T
Director of Life!

In the past, we have noticed that *The Chronicle* has exhibited a tendency to use the word “dorm” or “dormitory” when referring to on-campus living facilities... Please note, however, that the correct term is “residence halls.”

Contrary to the contention of some, (to say) that a residence hall is, in reality, nothing more than a physical structure is to ignore the human element... To refer to a residence hall as a “dorm” is to completely ignore the human component. Things such as an organized and active hall governance, participatory floor representation, comprehensive hall programming, differentiated living options, contemporary visitation policies, professional hall directors, highly trained supportive staff members, (and so forth on and on, in like jargon) are all tangible evidence of our evolution from archaic dormitory systems to the residence halls of today.

To professionals in the residence life area, the term dorm is one which we find derogatory in the same way as members of a minority find racial slurs to be derogatory...

The more progressive and conscientious members of the media use the term “residence hall” to denote on-campus students student housing facilities. It seems ironic that *The Chronicle* does not feel the need to conform to the same editorial practices and procedures currently utilized by the more established media in this and other areas around the country...

David W. Parrott
 Director of Residence Life
 Western Kentucky University

WHEN Molière’s *Tartuffe* was first played in 1664, it met with, to say the least, some disapproval. Although Louis XIV was forced to ban its public presentation, it is one of the better things we say about him that he also sponsored private readings of this delicious satire, in which an earlier version of our wheedling and sanctimonious TV preachers gets what he deserves. It makes the heart rejoice.

Molière had a hard patch to get through, of course, but he made it.

Today, we suspect, he would not make it. This is not a good age for satire. It is the business of satire to castigate fools and villains, and there is no castigation more effective than ridicule. Fools and villains usually take themselves seriously. But our Tartuffes have even more clout than the Sun King’s board of prelates. And even the humbler classes of fools and villains, the sort of which comedy has always been made, are beginning to discover that they can shelter themselves from the cold wind of laughter if only they can claim membership in the right club.

We do, we must admit, indulge in a bout of derision now and then. It seems to us good to show that a jerk is a jerk. It makes the heart rejoice. But what are we to do with David W. Parrott, director of life?

Here’s the problem. We have just heard about a college boy in California who got in a heap of trouble because of a comic strip he does for a student newspaper. It was about a rooster who got into school through affirmative action. He (the student, not the rooster) was enjoined against more of the same by the local Attitude Police, who also pointed out, in response to his feeble defense, that other campus publications *could* derogate people as long as their victims were only “Europeans,” who are not an ethnic or cultural group.

It’s a little scary. We would have liked, for instance, to say something funny about people who call themselves “professionals in the residence life area,” but suppose that Parrott fellow turns out to be an Eskimo, or something else? After all, there is that business in his letter about “racial slurs.” Is that a hint?

We would have liked to talk about the popular habit these days, especially in school people, of claiming the rank of “professional,” a word that used to be related to the idea of “professing.” It would have been fun to point out that Academe is clogged with people who were “professionals” in the residence life area until they got a chance to become “professionals” in the curriculum development area, and who are now trying to wangle themselves slots as “professionals” in the academic administration enhancement area. We would have liked to quote Thoreau, about those people who loudly protest the great importance of

the work they do, but who would abandon it in a minute for just a little more money or a slightly fancier title.

We would even have liked to talk about the strange magic of words, and that condition of mind that must prevail in a man who thinks himself injured when someone uses a word, and the tenor of our times, in which a man is encouraged not only to think himself injured by a word, but to demand redress for his injury.

We would have liked to wonder aloud: Do kids still answer taunts with “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me?” Are we more superstitious than we used to be?

And we would—oh, the shame of it!—we would have liked to come right out with it and call David W. Parrott what he is—the guy in charge of the dorms.

But we had a staff meeting and decided that we *do* want to “conform to the same editorial practices and procedures utilized (no comment) by the more established media,” so we have elected to say nothing about Parrott until we can get hold of his pedigree.

Summer Notes From Central Control

We recently sent out lots of orders for Leaflets for the Masses. They were arranged by contents in big stacks on the floor, of course. An animal came in and knocked some of them over. If your shipment contains more than you ordered, that is fine with us. Pass them around. But if something you wanted is missing, let us know. We’ll send it right on. The animal will lick the stamps.

By the end of the summer, there will be one more Great Booklet, and perhaps also another collection of pieces that have appeared since the publication of *The Leaning Tower of Babel*. Please keep sending us candidates for inclusion in Great Booklets. They don’t have to be short. Two or three pages can make a good read.

We know, from your requests for advice, that it is hard these days to find a bookseller who is willing to carry more than a whore’s memoirs and guides to dieting and getting rich. There is a good bookseller who deals, and promptly, by mail. His catalog is also, in part, a thoughtful little journal. Ask for it from: A Common Reader, 175 Tompkins Avenue, Pleasantville, NY 10570.

Yes, our half-price subscription for retired school-teachers, and anyone else who needs it, is still in effect, and always will be. It is underwritten voluntarily by readers who send more money than they have to. Please take advantage of it for whatever reason. We need as many friends as we can find.

In August, the Fireside division of Simon and Schuster will publish a new book by our associate circulation manager. It is unlike his earlier works, two of which—*The Graves of Academe*, and *The Leaning Tower of Babel*—will be reissued in paperback by the same publisher at the same time.

Someone wrote in to ask, “Who is the one who writes those charming notes on scraps of yellow paper?” It is, of course, Central Control herself, whose handwriting some happy few are able to read. She reads some strange books, and just now she is trying to find, and borrow, some readers copy of *Rural England* (1902), by H. Rider Haggard, of all people. She is convinced that one of our readers will surely have it.

Advice from Kafka for summer reading:

“If the book we are reading does not wake us, as with a fist hammering on our skull, why then do we read it? So that it shall make us happy? Good God, we should also be happy if we had no books, and such books as make us happy we could, if need be, write ourselves. But what we must have are those books which come upon us like ill fortune, and distress us deeply, like the death of one we love better than ourselves; like suicide. A book must be an ice-axe to break the sea frozen inside us.”

Neither can his Mind be thought to be in Tune, whose Words do Jarre; nor his Reason in Frame, whose Sentence is preposterous.

The Underground Grammarian

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**The Underground
 GRAMMARIAN**
 Volume Eleven, Number Five . . . September 1987

Uncontrollable Emissions

Kafka's Advice for Reading:

If the book we are reading does not wake us, as with a fist hammering on our skull, why then do we read it? So that it shall make us happy? Good God, we should also be happy if we had no books, and such books as make us happy we could, if need be, write ourselves. But what we must have are those books which come upon us like ill fortune, and distress us deeply, like the death of one we love better than ourselves; like suicide. A book must be an ice-axe to break the sea frozen inside us.

Really Swell News from Mrs. Hirsch's Little Boy:

It should energize people to learn that only a few hundred pages of information stand between the literate and the illiterate, between dependence and autonomy.

WE predicted, in September of 1985, that one E. D. Hirsch would emit a book. It seemed the politest apt word. He has now done it. What you see above is from that book, and the "few hundred pages of information" to which he refers will surely be emitted in the near future by some pack of educationists. Somehow, as dearly as we would love to put away dependence and learn autonomy, we are not entirely energized by the suggestion that some bits of information will set us free.

We first mentioned Hirsch in a piece called "Trivial Pursuits." He was, in those days, going around suggesting, much to the comfort of Albert Shanker, that the real problem in literacy was not that children were unable to discover and consider meaning in their reading, but that they just hadn't heard of enough stuff. He proposed what he called *cultural* literacy, to be achieved by giving the

kiddies more stuff to hear of, so that they would not go catatonic at the mention of Congreve or a paradigm, thus dooming themselves to perpetual illiteracy and dependence.

Just now, to be sure, Hirsch's list of stuff doesn't happen to include either Congreve or paradigm, but not to worry. That can be added to the next version. And so can something else, and something else. It could go on forever, with grant after grant, and emission after emission. Neat.

Here is a bit from *The Great Code*, by Northrop Frye:

There are two forms of half-reading that indicate how two processes are always involved. If we are reading a technical treatise on a subject we know little about, we can see that the sentences make grammatical sense, but we do not have enough external referents to complete the operation. ...If, on the other hand, our reading is lazy and inattentive, we recognize the individual words, but are not making the organized effort... to unify them syntactically. One point that is significant here is that this centripetal organizing effort of the mind is primary. Mere unfamiliarity with the referents, which can be overcome by further study, is secondary. Failure to grasp centrifugal meaning is incomplete reading; failure to grasp centripetal meaning is incompetent reading.

Anyone who has paid close attention to reading, and given effort in the search for meaning, can testify to the truth of Frye's observation, but Frye also contributes an idea that we might not all think of for ourselves. It is his assertion that the primary act of reading is the organizing work of the mind, and that the collection of referents, or stuff to hear of, is secondary. Clerk-work, we would say. Often essential, no doubt, and not always swiftly accomplished, but still a kind of clerk-work.

The list of stuff to hear about is, of course, infinite; but the number of things you have to have heard about to make sense of some piece of reading is usually surprising small. Indeed, in the most important reading of all, such things, as an essay of Bacon or a choral recitation from *Antigone*, require no special knowledge at all. If you put off reading *Antigone* until you have committed to memory your "few hundred pages

of information,” you will not only waste a good part of your life, but you will also find your fund of information utterly beside the point. If you do not understand, it will not be because you need yet more information, but because you need more of the *primary* power, the organizing power of the mind.

Frye makes another subtle point in his use of “centripetal” and “centrifugal.” The frenzies of our Hirsches are without understanding, but never without meaning, and the meaning is almost always related to some social agenda, some plan for the improvement of all those *other* people. There are supremely important differences between the gathering of information and the nurture of the organizing power of the mind. The first leads outward and away from the self, perhaps for all of a lifetime. It is, its obvious importance notwithstanding, a disintegration and a diffusion. The second integrates and concentrates, and leads within. If it is to grow at all, the mind must turn away from the chaotic world of information and look to itself, govern itself, choose and arrange. It must *mind* itself.

The first is clearly public and social. It lies on the ground like pebbles and shells, or, if you like the implication, (we do), like fallen leaves in Vallombrosa. (Not on Hirsch’s list. Next time, maybe.) The second is private and individual. It is not to be sought out, but must be made by the one who would have it. Countless thousands scurry to bring us information; it is cheap, and can be had for nothing more than the asking. Understanding is like living and dying; no one else can do it for you. It costs a lot.

The school people just don’t like to encourage private and individual enterprise. They do all they can to prevent solitude, the only condition in which the mind can develop powers. So it is that their readings (what child would want to read that tripe?) are either devised, or sanitized, to keep the mind looking away from itself, and occupied always with scraps of information unharmonized by principles. Hirsch’s oxymoronic term, “cultural literacy,” tells us more than he intended. Yes, that is what they want. Not literacy, but cultural literacy. It is to literacy what minimum competence is to competence, or what military music is to music. What else do you need if you have nothing to read but handouts of cultural literature?

We have repeated Kafka’s advice for reading for two reasons. For one thing, it provides an interesting test of a zany notion like “cultural literacy.” Imagine that you are teaching a class of children who are trying to understand what Kafka means. They are saying, let us pretend, “Huh? Wha?” And you, a with-it teacher, will send them to the latest list of stuff to hear of. There, of course, they will look for *fist*, *skull*, *ice-axe*, and *suicide*. And, yes, for *ill fortune*, and for happy. And behold! Autonomy!

But we reprint Kafka also because his words have taken on new meaning. While such “books” as Hirsch’s do not make us happy, neither do they come upon us like ill fortune, for they are not that important, and not like a fist on the skull, either. More like a boil on the butt. And they will pass. But it is important to notice that such a book will indeed make some people happy, and lots of them. Some of them will be desperate parents, who will be led to believe that now those school people know what to do, but most of them will be the people in whose establishment Hirsch makes his living.

Kafka is right. Such books as make us happy we can write for ourselves.

**I know not what course others may take,
but as for me,
give me Democracy or give me death!**

THE *American Educator* is the official organ (what a great word) of the American Federation of Teachers, a labor union. We don’t know why they send it to us, but they do. Indeed, the Fifth Amendment would clearly excuse them from sending it to *anyone*, but, fortunately for the rest of us, they seem oblivious to its self-incriminatory content.

The issue for Summer, 1987, like all the other issues, in fact, is an exercise in self-praise. It is largely devoted to the latest bandwagon, the Great Moral Re-awakening Through Values Education. The schoolteachers of the AFT, known to themselves as “educators,” have happily concluded that “democracy,” whatever they mean by that, is “the noblest political effort in history,” and thus the root and type of all the virtue that anyone needs, but not including, apparently, some

virtue that might be called “nobility.” Barred, no doubt, by the Constitution’s ban on titles.

The battle-cry of the government schoolteachers will be “Education for Democracy.” It can be read in several ways: Education *in favor of* Democracy; Education *for the sake of* Democracy, or *for the continued welfare and persistence of* Democracy. It can even mean, and to these people probably does, Education as some internal adjustment of the sentiments in favor of whatever can be called Democracy. But there is one way in which it can *not* be read: Education for *a person* who would like to make up his *own* mind about Democracy, or vegetarianism, or voodoo, or any other set of beliefs.

Like most sheets whose readers can’t keep their minds in order from one paragraph to the next, *American Educator* festoons its pages with inset excerpts in big, bold type. You can learn a lot about both the sheet and the readers, nothing else, by considering the excerpts that someone has deemed suitable. In “Education for Democracy: A Statement of Principles,” the first Helpful Hint for Slow Readers is:

“A majority of high school seniors could not identify Winston Churchill or Joseph Stalin.”

Wow. Neither could Socrates, come to think of it, but then he wasn’t all that hot for democracy anyway.

So what do Churchill and Stalin have to do with Education for Democracy? Easy. One was a good guy, and the other, the one to whom Pablo Neruda wrote two odes, was a bad guy. And one did his business in a place called a democracy, while the other did his business in a place called a republic. See? Now that will astonish and edify all those Me Generation kiddies and send them right out into the streets to interview the homeless. That’s virtue.

In fact, of course, Socrates knew all about Churchill and Stalin. He was ignorant only in matters of no importance whatever—their names and dates, and their party tags. And those are the very things that the schoolers have in mind when they want high school students to “identify” those two politicians, in a multiple choice test, no doubt. To bring students to an *understanding* of such perennial and universal appearances as Churchills and Stalins is in neither the power nor the plan of the schoolers.

Consider another of their bold-face captions for the reading-impaired:

“The kind of critical thinking we wish to encourage must rest on a solid base of factual knowledge.”

Yeah. The same solid base of factual knowledge that schoolers have always provided in mealy-mouthed textbooks concocted by peddlers to please politicians, and chosen through conciliation and compromise by committees. There is a charming irony in that pledge of allegiance to factual knowledge in the mouths of people who have built an empire on the “findings” derived from educationistic “scholarship,” which is done through the circulation of questionnaires in which hearsay evidence (as to their feelings, more often than not) is gathered from self-interested witnesses.

It would be interesting to discover whether the AFT schoolers would accept a slight modification of one of their “principles.” Would they be willing to consider a critical thinking that rests on a solid base of *all pertinent* factual knowledge? Wouldn’t anything less than that be better described as a porous base of factual knowledge?

We suspect that they would not consent. In the first place, they would say, of course, that there is no hope of ever having all pertinent knowledge about anything. And to that, we would say, Right! So stop pretending that there is any great lesson to be learned by *identifying* Churchill and Stalin. They would say that, in the absence of all pertinent factual knowledge, that they would just have to select the “right” factual knowledge. To that, we would say, Yeah. And we would be left with what they do in fact propose without defining: A real solid base of the *right* factual knowledge selected by people who, just like all the rest of us, don’t know all the pertinent factual knowledge, but who, unlike all the rest of, have a real solid agenda for the improvement of lots of *other* people.

And the improvement they have in mind is not one that will make those other people better in themselves, but one that will make them better for some purpose outside of themselves. It is Education *for* Democracy, which is simply the newest name of Life-adjustment. The great Purpose of this bold, innovative thrust is not only that that the government shall persist, which is probably not an unmitigated evil, but that the

desire to be governed shall persist in the children who ought to be learning self-government. That is not surprising, for the thrusters are almost all agents of the government, and obviously content to be governed by an anthology of collective beliefs.

It is a popular notion—and for some a convenient notion—that the root of virtue is to be dug up *out there*, and that the search for virtue, which is the only truly important business of life, is to be conducted in the world rather than in the self. This makes it possible, under *any* form of government, to imagine that we have fed the hungry and clothed the naked when we have merely handed over some cash to some agency, and that we are lovers of peace when we cry out in the streets against that one special kind of war that we can't afford to wage. It also makes it possible to imagine, under any form of government, that ours can provide *better* virtues than those provided by others.

What else can we mean when we speak of “democratic virtues”? Is this to suggest that some goodness was unavailable to people under the Bourbons, or that Marcus Aurelius could not seek out the meaning and worth of justice? If Stalin lied and murdered, was it because he was a communist? If Churchill did indeed refrain from such deeds (which, in the absence of all the pertinent factual knowledge, no one can say) was it because of democratic virtues? Or was it—oh horrors!—because of what he might have chosen to call, much to the dismay of the entire apparatus of government schooling, “aristocratic virtues”?

Education is one thing, not many things. It is not the content of the mind, but a Way of the mind. If the “democratic education” is different from the “socialist education,” it is because neither is Education.

We have one more slight change to suggest to the schoolteachers of America, and a patriotic one at that. Anyone who reads around in the documents of the Founders can see that they rarely used the word “democracy.” A word they used very often, however, was “liberty.” It is, for some strange reason, a word that we do not often hear either from politicians or social activists, or even from all those schoolteachers who claim to find this nation “the noblest political effort in history.” Would they agree, do you suppose, if only out of respect to the noblest political effort in

history, to name their latest bold, innovative thrust, Education for Liberty?

In a pig's eye. Democracy is for a state; liberty is only for a person. The schoolers like to Think Big.

Nor would it be of any use. The schoolers can give only whatever it is they have—a tidy smattering of nothing but the right factual knowledge.

Education for Democracy

IF you have tears, prepare to shed them now. And if you have any notions that schools are intended for the good of persons rather than institutions, shed those as well. And if you laugh with scorn at the letter reproduced below, go and spend a year attending classes at the local high school. Take the tests.

Don't bother trying to identify D. L. All the initials are phony. Besides, you already know his name. Legion.

He seems a nice kid, an energetic eager beaver. He may well have some of the artistic talent he claims, and he may even, someday, sweep to executive level. He will make a living, pay some taxes, buy some products, vote for the candidate of his choice, raise some children, send them to school, where they can learn all that he has learned, so that in time they too will make a living, pay some taxes, buy some products, vote for the candidates of their choice, raise some children... and so on, forever and ever, or at least as long as democracy, with the help of D. L. and his progeny, shall endure.

Many succeed very well in this life with no more than D. L.'s powers of language and thought. Once he finds the right spot, he will almost surely, like almost everyone else in this land, never have to think out another sentence, whether of his own or of anyone else's. He will in no way be disabled from exercising his “rights and duties as a citizen,” which are really no more than paying taxes and voting for somebody or other.

So ask yourself: For which has this decent and innocent kid been prepared—for democracy or for liberty?

Hello //////////////

CONGRADULATIONS //////////////

My name is D--- L-----. Iam a Senoir at F___ Sr High. Your place of business has been selected to recieve one of my letters, thus explaining the congradulations at the top of this expensive smelling letter. Iam writeing you because Icame across your business with interest-
ASTRONOMICAL INTEREST. I currently work 12-4 weekdays on the early release program at school. but Istill want a weekend job that doesn't have to pay anything. YOU DON'T HAVE TO PAY ME.

All you have to do is let me work at your place of business during the weekend. Why do I want this??? We'll, I want a Art-z, design, creative surronding. I will hopefully be attending the College of Associated Arts in P----- next year. So if you want to pay me you can but, a free weekend worker is writeing you who will do sweeping to executive level work.

Brief Notes

AS you know, we gave up hand-set type more than two years ago. We did that not to cut costs, which it surely doesn't, but because our cheap type-setter was getting old. At first, the best we could think of our computer typesetting was that it was at least typesetting, sort of. But we did miss, and so did many readers, the look of the page as it once was.

Now, however, we think we are close to the old look. This is partly because we have discovered that some of the techniques of hand-set type can indeed be reproduced on the computer by those who are willing to work very slowly. But it is due even more to our good fortune in discovering two geniuses of the new technology, in whom tradition and individual talent are lawfully wedded.

They are the makers of almost all of the type and ornaments that we use. Their work—the face you are reading, for example—has on it the touch of the human hand, for it is all done by eye, not as is the case with the typefaces now being made by the computer people, by algorithm. You can see what we mean by looking at the formula-generated face with which we began. *See?* Frigid.

As more and more of our readers reveal themselves as makers of small, private publications, and send along examples of their work, we begin to suspect that there might yet be

some good to come of the “desk-top publishing” fad. We urge all such to write to our type designers. (We think of them as “ours.” They could be yours.)

Richard Beaty
Poor Richard's Typecase
RD 1 Box 71
Chester, New York 10918

Judith Sutcliffe
The Electric Typographer
2216 Cliff Drive
Santa Barbara, California 93109

We commend also to your attention a journal published by one of our readers: **Spell/Binder**, 1527 Gilmore St., Mountain View, CA 94040. Very good on complications of grammar and syntax. Should be encouraged.

Neither can his Mind be thought to be in Tune, whose Words do Jarre; nor his Reason in Frame, whose Sentence is preposterous.

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The Underground GRAMMARIAN

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Wise Choices in Peoria

Here's something else for parents to worry about: the Peoria County regional superintendent of schools thinks there is no longer any need to learn arithmetic. Let kids use hand-held calculators, says Gerald Brookhart.

“Do you think kids twenty years from now are going to have to know the times tables?” he asked. “I don’t think so. They’ll have a hand calculator that’s as big as a credit card.”

...“The real illiterates of the future,” say Brookhart, “will be those who can’t make wise choices from a series of complex choices, not somebody who can’t read or write.”

Peoria Journal Star, August 8, 1987

HERE we go again. Every month or so, some reader sends us a newspaper clipping in which a school superintendent says something asinine. How long can this go on? Where will it all end? And when, oh when, will some school superintendent say something that is not only asinine but also *new*? And refreshing?

The printed circuits of the school superintendent network are slower than those of the pocket calculator. This Brookhart guy, for instance, is about fifteen years late in inventing his wheel. No matter. He’ll get some mileage out of it. It serves first as a sop to the sillier parents, when they ask how it happens that their children have spent nine years in schools and still don’t know whether seven times six is a two-digit number.

“Hey, hey,” says the all-knowing school superintendent, “don’t you lay persons realize that only X years from now nobody will be put to the trouble of multiplying at all?” And who’s to doubt the word of a “professional”?

And when X years roll around, sure enough, nobody is put to that trouble, because the schools still aren’t asking the children to learn the times table.

But the momentous calculator prophecy serves an even deeper purpose. It lays the groundwork for that day in which arithmetic teachers will disappear from the land—partly as a result of the educationistic prejudice against all courses in which right answers can actually be found, partly because education majors are exactly the kind of people who are delighted not to learn silly stuff like the times table, and partly because people whose minds are amenable to the disciplines of mathematics just don’t much care to hang around with the people you find in the schools. In that day, school superintendents can say, “No sweat.

For the money we used to spend on math teachers we can hand out calculators and hire whole slews of Wise Choice Facilitators and have enough left over to give my wife and children jobs.”

And, indeed, when “somebody who can’t read or write” has to make one of those “wise choices,” where will he turn but to a Wise Choice Facilitator, a professional fresh from an education academy, a government employee, a loyal union member, and, of course, a non-multiplier. The WCF will pass on to the poor sap whatever he needs to know to make a WC.

Brookhart, naturally, puts us in mind of Socrates, and the strange thing he said to Callicles, who thought himself a superior sort of person, and thus entitled to more wealth and power than he had yet acquired. “It is your neglect of geometry,” said Socrates, “that leads you to want a greater share than other men.” The Brookharts of this world, having never thought about it, assume that things like geometry and the multiplication table are taught in schools only out of tradition, and they are easily seduced into believing that such arts are useless to those who aren’t going to make some money from them.

But in fact the mathematical arts are the best studies in which to learn certain truths that are essential to the making of wise choices. It is in mathematics that we most readily see that the permanent relationship between principle and necessity is not subject to appeal, that every particular is a local manifestation of some universal, that there is a demonstrable difference between what we believe and what we know, and that experience can never do the work of logic. It is in mathematical studies that a child (provided that there be a true teacher, and not a Brookhart) can have his first inkling of Justice and Truth, and of the immense and momentous difference between the laws and Lawfulness.

In all mathematical studies, furthermore, there lies the answer (although that is not exactly the right word) to the most potent pseudo-question with which the values vampires like to show how liberal they are. “Ah, yes, of course, we must teach values, but we must decide whose values to teach.”

Bunk. Values do not vary from tribe to tribe. We do not properly say that dishonesty is “a value” among thieves and congressmen, but “not a value” among elderly Quaker ladies. We do not

say that treachery is OK if you live among traitors, or that cowardice is a value that you might like to espouse as an alternative life style. We might all do well to expel the word “values” for a while and look, not just for another word, which would surely be subject to the same degeneration, but for some other way in which to think.

It must be in that other way that Socrates was thinking when he ascribed the ambition and greed of Callicles to a neglect of geometry. Any man who has not done his geometry may not ever have seen the beauty of the just and proportionate relationship of the parts to the whole, and, thus, might well end up seeking not that estate in this life that is right for him, but that after which his appetite cries.

A child who has never explored the inexorable infinity of the times table may never see the difference between those things that are in his power to change and those that are in no one’s power to change. And a Brookhart who thinks that things unequal to the same thing are equal to the same thing is not the man whose help to ask when you need to make a wise choice.

Wise choices do not require us to choose between “values,” between honesty and dishonesty, courage and cowardice, sense and nonsense. No one asks: Which shall I do, justice or injustice? They require us rather to understand whether and why *this deed* is honest or dishonest, courageous or cowardly, *these words* sense or nonsense, *this thought* just or unjust. They require a clear, and truly literate, statement of principle, and a truly logical analysis of particulars, an accurate knowledge of the “given,” and a lively respect for all those laws against which there is no hope of appeal. And if the study of the mathematical arts does not in fact bring forth the habits and powers that would one day help anyone who is truly in search of a wise choice, and not just trying to justify what he has already decided to do, that is a reflection not on those arts but upon the teachers of those arts. Of them, as well as of all the Brookharts who govern them, there is really no point in saying of them that they are just not very good at what they do, at mathematics, or providing others with the best possible conditions in which to teach mathematics. The more important point, in fact, the only truly important point, is that they are obviously doing what they

do with something other than the love of wisdom in mind. Without that, a teacher is of no worth at all.

If that seems to you a preposterously unrealistic expectation in a government school functionary, you’re right. So which would we do better without: the love of wisdom, or herds of government school functionaries? Get out your calculator and make a wise choice.

The Amherst Bestiary

“It’s true,” I answered, “that... Euripides is not so successful with the gods as with humankind... But you will allow, I think, his skill in the second. He was the first to show men and women as they really are.”

“Say, rather, that he was the first to say they can be satisfied with what they are, and need try to be no better. ‘I know,’ says his Medea, ‘what wickedness I am about to do, but passion is stronger than good counsel.’ ‘I am helpless,’ says Phaedra, before she deceives a just king into killing his innocent son. Men are seldom helpless against their own evil wishes, and in their souls they know it. But common men love flattery not less than tyrants, if anyone will sell it them. If they are told that the struggle for the good is all illusion, that no one need be ashamed to drop his shield and run, that the coward is the natural man, the hero a fable, many will be grateful. But will the city, or mankind, be better?”

from *The Mask of Apollo*, by Mary Renault

IN a wild-life preserve on Sanibel Island there are many birds. Most of the visitors love birds. There are also many alligators, who make their livings by eating the birds. The bird-lovers are urged to be tolerant of the alligators, who are said to be doing nothing more than what comes naturally, to wit, “harvesting the weak, the sick, and the less alert.”

Well, so it must be. And, indeed, by contrast with what we do to the weak, the sick, and the less alert, it seems a positively decent and socially useful enterprise. If it weren’t conducted by reptiles, we would be tempted to call it “humane.”

With human beings it is otherwise. Not for us, the harvesting of the weak, the sick, and the less

alert. We have mastered the greater arts of milking and shearing the weak, the sick, and the less alert, of planting in their fertile (for a while) soil the seeds of crop after crop, and even of raising up unto ourselves for future use never-ending successions of the weak, and the sick, and the less alert.

Would you like to make a bundle? Don't send money to those reptiles who offer sure-fire shortcuts to big houses, fancy cars, and numbered Swiss accounts. We will tell you for free. Look around you for the weak, and the sick, and the less alert. Think of something, anything, that they would love to have exactly *because* they are weak, and sick, and less alert.

Look for the burdened and weary, the baffled and worried. Look for the people who just don't know where to begin to make sense of this mysterious life, and who fear death and sickness. Look for the lonely millions who suspect that they have somehow been passed over by happiness and fortune, which have, all unaccountably, been lavishly bestowed on the less deserving. Look for the people who simply have no resources of their own, who can not work unless some work is assigned them, who can not play without a recreation program, who can not laugh in the absence of a comedian, who can not sing without a radio or paint without the numbers. Look, in short, for the miserable multitudes who make up the rolls of the television preachers and who buy the lottery tickets of government. They will pay you for anything that makes them feel better, for they have no powers by which to distinguish pleasure from happiness, or hope from fantasy.

Look for children, children of any age, all the people who are governed by their appetites. There is no known limit to the number of appetites a person can harbor. Nor is there, oh happy fact, any permanent damage done to appetite by gratification. On the contrary, it is by gratification that appetite grows best. Tell the children that whatever they want is good, and that the wanting is good, too. Tell them that it is only natural to want whatever they want, and only fair to have it, right now. Tell them that it would be even better to want more, to want what they have not yet dreamed of wanting.

Remind yourself continually that if you do not provide the weak and the sick and the less alert with consolation and gratification, somebody else

will. That makes it OK. Furthermore—and this is the best part of all—be sure to remember that the weak and the sick and the less alert are really the *needy*, unfortunate victims of bad luck, or, even better, of the ineluctable and omnipresent force of “society as a whole.” You are, therefore, truly their benefactor. You can put it about that you are fighting misery and deprivation and only by accident making a small profit.

And even if the risky life of the entrepreneur is not for you, if you'd rather not face the thought of taking a loss, if you want a paycheck every week no matter how well you fight misery and deprivation (and the baleful force of society as a whole), you might nevertheless give some thought to becoming, not a high-flying Encarnacao, but a somewhat lower form, and keeping your head and so forth safely down as a Frizzle, perhaps. The pay is only so-so, but it sure is steady, and the benefits and job security are great. No Frizzle has ever been fired for incompetence or silliness, or for his efforts to help junior high school students to deal *positively* with sexually transmitted diseases. In fact, no Frizzle has ever been so much as reprimanded for not telling an Encarnacao to get the hell out of his office and go peddle his wares in the streets.

As a Frizzle, you will be able to mount an even higher moral platform than as an Encarnacao. In the first place, you have no chance at all of making a profit, and obviously do what you do entirely out of altruism. In the second place, without the self-sacrificing industriousness of the Frizzles, there would be no high moral enterprises open to the Encarnacaos. After all, it is by no means certain that Nature, if left to nothing but her own devices, can be counted on to provide always and everywhere a sufficient number of the weak, and the sick, and the less alert. And that is exactly why we need Frizzles, and also exactly why the Encarnacaos should be delighted to fork over at least some small part of their accidental profits for the continued prosperity of the Weak, Sick, and Less Alert Farms.

But if you want to take the Highest Moral Ground of all, and can afford to do it with no pay at all, you would do best to become a Hansen. Then you would be selflessly serving the whole shebang, and making the policies by which the Frizzles keep the Encarnacaos supplied with the weak, the sick, and the less alert, and the

Encarnacao support the Frizzles and even, once in a while, announce that the Frizzles should really get more respect. And you would deal with the important questions, like where to put the machines.

Robert Encarnacao wants to fight AIDS and teen-age pregnancy and make a profit at it.

The 16-year-old entrepreneur is proposing that Amherst Regional High School and Junior High School install condom vending machines that he would operate.

“My purpose is to provide a public health service,” said Encarnacao, a junior at the high school. “But with every venture there is the possibility of profit.”

Encarnacao pitched his idea to Superintendent Donald Frizzle on Monday, explaining that the condom vending machines would encourage teen-agers who engage in sex to take precautions.

“He’s selling the vending machine rights—he wants to have the franchise—and he feels this is a piece of our effort to help students deal positively with sexually transmitted diseases,” said Frizzle.

* * *

School Committee chairwoman Joan Hansen said yesterday that it was too early to determine how the community is reacting.

“There are a lot of questions. Where do you put the machines? In the boys’ and the girls’ rooms? In the cafeteria? At the front door? This is a problem.”

* * *

Encarnacao is president of Robert Sean Associates, which sells hundreds of items wholesale, he said, including toothpaste, cleaning and fitness products, housewares and jewelry.

The condom vending machines, which cost \$595, could bring a profit of between \$5 and \$7.50 per week, he said, based on a price of 75 cents or \$1 per condom, and the sale of 10 condoms.

The Boston Globe
Wednesday, July 15, 1987
By Steven Marantz
Globe Staff

Absit Omen in Leeds

SCHOLARS who are supposed to know such things tell us that in the Indo-European languages the word for “bear” is not really the name of the animal. It means only “the brown one,” and it makes a convenient handle for those who don’t want to touch the real thing. As pious Jews refuse to pronounce God’s name, our forebears apparently preferred not to take any chances on calling by name, and thus perhaps conjuring up in the flesh, such an awesome power.

We, of course, are past superstition, but some such motive does seem to have driven a woman in Leeds into a more than ordinary prophylactic prudence. Well, why not? She is, after all, in charge of a school in that city, and custodian, therefore, of the psychic welfare of all sorts of children. In such a calling, there can be no such thing as being too solicitous of the self-esteem of the kiddies, now can there?

Accordingly, she has driven all the bears from her school, and replaced them with cute frogs, cuddly little creatures who wouldn’t harm a... uh...well, cuddly creatures. OK? No more will those three horrible bears trouble the sleep of the children of Leeds.

Those children will read no more of the Three Bears, but rather of the Three Frogs. And as for Goldilocks, well, she’s kinda scary, too, come to think of it. She’s been replaced by Jackie. As the lady of Leeds puts it, is this any time of the world in which to “glorify a white little girl with blonde hair in a school which includes so many Asian and West Indian children”? (Yes, and we’ve heard quite enough about that Princess Di, too, thank you. Just imagine how bad those children must feel about that!)

That lady must be some astute reader. We’ve actually read that story, but, obviously, not well. We never noticed that it was racist propaganda, and that Goldilocks was being glorified. As a matter of fact, we were silly enough to get the impression that Goldilocks was a bit of brat, and that the bears seemed quite decent and forbearing, all things considered. But then, of course, we also admired Little Black Sambo, and have for years supposed that he had done a fine job getting butter from tigers, and that he deserved all the pancakes he could get.

We heard all about the lady of Leeds in a clipping from *The Yorkshire Evening Press*, which was sent in by one of our foreign correspondents. The writer of the piece did worry a little bit about those frogs, fearing that there might be some French children in that school, but pish tush, let's be realistic. How many could there be? However, his mild demurrer does give us a little more to think about.

The lady has also had the Baa-baa black sheep changed into Baa-baa white sheep. As to whether this emendation is intended to remove from the children's Weltanschauungs the invidious implication that black sheep may have *no* wool, or to lay to rest a gratuitous glorification of black sheep, we have a less than completely clear understanding. And we do have to wonder: How many children were offended by Baa-baa black sheep *before* the lady of Leeds washed them whiter than snow? And now that they are gone, and by official decree, how many children are going to wonder: What's so bad about black sheep, that we cannot even hear them named? Is there some fear that they might actually appear among us?

And then there's another thing, and we'd like to get a message to the lady of Leeds, which might save her a bit of trouble if the future brings what she seems to expect. There is only one motive to explain her actions: She is obviously preparing for her appearance before the Great Board of Review, where she will be asked, And what did you do for us in the Days of Transition?

How glad I am that you asked that question, she will reply. I am happy to say that I am that lady of Leeds who took Goldilocks out of my school.

And are you not also the one who felt that the Baa-baa black sheep were unlikely to have any wool, and that they should not even be mentioned? Did you not wash them white?

Our message is simple, and of the sort she can understand: Keep your fingers crossed, lady, and knock on wood.

Brief Notes

We have had a few letters—all of them, strangely, from the two Carolinas—suggesting that we might have been a bit too harsh with Hirsch. They were not intemperate. They said that, after all, the man was trying to do something,

and how bad could it be to know a few things, even if you start out by learning a list, and even that we ourselves have passed on Churchill's advice to the uneducated to go and read a book of quotations. Fair comment.

So far, we have not changed our view, but we do have more to think about, and will reconsider Hirsch in the November issue. Since we are always at the last minute around here, you still have lots of time to pass on to us anything you want to say in this case.



The Underground GRAMMARIAN

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The Age of Outformation

IT is true that Jefferson saw some connection between the freedom of the press and the informed consent of the governed by which, and only by which, this land was to be governed. But nowadays "informed" does not mean what Jefferson meant by it, nor, for that matter does "the press," which was given more, in his days, to reasoned consideration than it is now.

In the current use of the word "information," there is no hint of the process of forming, of putting into harmonious and coherent order, not only in the light of some set of facts, but equally by the establishment of an ordering principle. By the gossip that passes for information in the press, and in our schools, always seduced by fads and a mania for "current events," only an unusual mind is likely to be informed. "Cluttered" will better describe the mind that is full of bits of news of this and that, a junkyard in which everything lies where it fell, where nothing is chosen out to be set where it belongs, and where every useless piece of trash decays and is forgotten under the new heaps of trash. There, the fate even of the occasional treasure is no different.

Take Harriet Tubman, for instance. A recent survey conducted by the Department of Education revealed that an expectably large number of high

school students had no clear idea even of the approximate date of the Civil War, but that a majority of the same students had heard of Harriet Tubman. Far from a bad thing, but that “heard of” is less than entirely encouraging. Whether those students understood some relationship between the war and the lady, by which they might also understand some principle, the survey, as no one will be surprised to hear, did not bother to inquire. In another age—ours, we confess—we had not heard of Harriet Tubman. We had rather heard of the invention by Sir Humphry Davy of the miner’s safety lamp, and of the importance of substances called “naval stores.” We had tests in which those, and countless other bits of unrelated “information,” were the “correct” answers.

Where is Sir Humphry now? Where will Harriet Tubman be in fifty years?

Many supposed facts might be better thought of as phenomena, or ephemera. Facts, yes, but only by courtesy, as we might, if there is enough room on the program, list all the spear-carriers among the *dramatis personæ*.

Yes, there was last night yet another fire of suspicious origin in some abandoned warehouse, and yet another politician accused of devious dealings. Yes, certain selected portions of our “heritage” are just now thought, by certain selectors, to be more important than certain others. And yes, a certain kind of music, or of dress, or of religion, or of literature, or of thought, is just now considered important by those who think themselves the ones who can best determine what is important. But it is not by themselves, not just because they *are*, that such things *inform* a mind. They become meaningful elements of a larger structure only to a mind that is *already* formed. Some of those facts—will it not be many?—an informed mind will sooner or later stow in the attic, not because they are irrelevant, for the informed mind can always find relevance, but because they are redundant. After all, how many arsonists or crooked politicians do we need in order to contemplate the vanity of human wishes?

For the health and vigor of the mind’s life, there is no indispensable fact. What, you have never heard of Shakespeare, or of the Treaty of Paris? You can not locate the Persian Gulf on a map, or the return key on a computer? You remember neither the Alamo, nor the Maine, nor Pearl

Harbor? It matters not at all. Of all of that, Aristotle and Epictetus were uninformed, but only in particular; in principle, they knew it all. And so will many in coming ages, when all such things will at last have disappeared even from footnotes in obscure monographs.

It isn’t truly information that we now peddle so industriously, and for the sake of which our schoolers now want to make lists. It is outformation. It leads the mind away from itself. It provides the illusion that the *real* reality is all out there, and that it comes in an infinite number of flying quanta, infinitesimally tiny packages, but, some of them at least, oh so necessary to “know”—just now. The mind might be at them forever, never to turn and come home, and the eye too busy counting photons ever to look for the light.

And so to Hirsch. His defenders—of whom none are more than mild—have made the points that a), he is at least *doing something*; b), that it would do no harm for the children to *learn* something about something; and c), that he is at least *not* an educationist but an English professor.

As to the last, pfui! We have some experience of English professors. They *all* have little lists, and Hirsch’s is just a bit longer than most.

As to the first, a reader has already provided an answer. He’s doing something? Sure, he’s doing something. Tyrants are always busy. A bit rough, but it is also true that the educationists are always doing something, always cooking up a grant, always looking for an angle, always making excuses, and always thrusting innovatively. You would be always busy too if people were nagging you to get done that which you promised to get done without any clear idea as how to do it.

But it is because of the second that we have spent all this time getting to Hirsch. We have ourselves often whimpered about the astonishing ignorance of the young, and those social studies teachers of Minnesota who suspected that Mussolini might be something to eat. But the Hirsch business has had, for us at least, this great worth: it has led us to wonder whether we should have whimpered, and out of what motive, exactly, we did whimper. Was it out of the sort of arrogance, not rare in English professors, that says: Well, humph, you can hardly think yourself an educated person if you have never heard of... And then follows a list of the things he happens to

have heard of. Sir Humphry included. If so, Hirsch has instructed us.

We don't learn about things in order to read; we read in order to learn about things, and to make a form in the mind. We can understand little about those things that we have only heard about, but if the mind has taken form, we may well be able to understand a lot about—and *because* of—a surprisingly small number of things, provided that we have done more than just hear about them.

The Witching Our

*Pronominal and Participial Considerations
from our
Acting Adjunct Sociogrammatologist*

SOME person whose name I do not know has sternly admonished me, saying, "Recognize that it is up to you and me to protect our young and needy. The politicians and the experts will not do it unless informed citizen action demands it."

For some reason, incurable habit, no doubt, I am inclined to put aside for the moment the pressing social urgency that lies behind that admonition until I have given some thought to its pronouns. I think I know the identity of the "you," who can be none other than myself, but who is hidden in that "me"? Is it, I wonder, a man or a woman?

The difference is important. After all, if a man stopped me in the street saying, "It is up to you and me to protect our young," I would take one understanding from his words, but if it were a woman, I would take a very different understanding. The difference is again a matter of pronouns. In the first case, I would take one understanding of the "our" in "our young," but in the second, quite another.

And to the lady of the second case, I would surely exclaim: By God, madame, you speak the truth! I must admit that till this very moment I was quite unaware of the existence of our young, and likewise of their neediness, and for that I heartily repent. But now that I know of them, and know too, as you seem to suggest, that they stand in need of protection, let us go forth at once and protect them and supply whatever it is that they need. Surely, that is a duty laid on us not only by Nature and Custom, but also by our mutual consent—which may well have been given—to the very bringing of our young into this world,

where, as you so rightly divine, there is but little in the way of protection to be expected from politicians and experts, who are, in any case, the last people to whom I would willingly surrender the protection of our young. Let us, therefore, not wait upon that uncertain day when "informed citizen action" will do, maybe, what you and I ought to be doing in this very minute! Let us rather go at once to our young, wherever they may be, and protect them!

But to the gentleman of the first case, I would reply otherwise, saying: Your sentiment, sir, is surely well-intended, and does you, I suppose, some credit, but I fear that you have made some mistake. Your young and mine are unlikely to be the same young. I will admit, nay, affirm, that in the case of your absence and my presence, I would indeed think myself bound to undertake, should it be necessary, the protection of your young, or any other young, for that too seems a duty rightly laid on us all by Nature and Custom, but I confess that I find your stern admonition at the very least premature, and perhaps even a bit presumptuous. Do you mean to imply that should the occasion arise when your young need protection and when I alone am nearby, that, except for your admonition, I would probably *not* protect them?

All this spluttering has been brought on, of course, by yet another request for money in a supremely worthy cause, of which we currently suffer no lack. This one has to do with neglected, deprived, underprivileged, and trapped in poverty children. (Keep your eye on those participles.)

My admonisher is surely sincere, and, although history does not suggest that it is out of a lack of sincerity that tyrants and other monsters are made, I do believe that he believes that the result of his admonition, somewhere down that long, long road of consequence, will be of some good to some child. And that may be so. In other words, I do not suppose him a man who designs to deceive. Why is it, then, that he talks like a liar?

He knows damn well that he and I—or even she and I, should that be the case—can not accurately point to any small human beings on Earth and name them "our children." The children he has in mind, however, are real children, and for every last one of them there are two people on Earth who can indeed call them "our children." Now here is what I wonder: Of *those* people, the

parents of “our children,” how many has my admonisher admonished? Of how many has he asked contributions to this worthy cause?

In certain breeds of do-gooder, there is a prissy fastidiousness that ill becomes the adherents of a Great and Worthy Cause. I would find an unsettling but exhilarating refreshment in a solicitation for contributions toward the Great and Worthy Cause of Horsewhipping Politicians (or Experts) Through the Streets, and I would shell out at once should anyone undertake to act on Mencken’s plan for the improvement of education, to wit, the burning down of the colleges and the hanging of all the professors. But a man who claims that he wants to right a great wrong, while pretending through his pronouns that there are no wrong-doers, is a pitiable wimp, and not the kind of reformer on whom a contributor can depend. And when that wimp goes further, and suggests through those pronouns that it will be because of my neglect of duty should this great wrong persist among us, then he is a contemptible hypocrite as well. It is indeed true that I never raised a finger in defense of the infants slaughtered by Herod’s soldiery, but while this fact may properly arouse certain feelings in me, remorse is not one of them.

Which brings me to the participle. Neglected, for instance. It could use a name. The Disjunctive Participle might do, since it always serves to cut away from some verb the subject that ought to go with it, but I will rather name it the Exculpatory Participle, for it always takes someone off the hook on which he richly deserves to hang and swing.

This participle is much loved by the more devious and cowardly of our do-gooders. It permits them piously to deplore this dreadful Society as a Hole in which some wives and children are daily beaten into insensibility, without requiring them to say anything that might diminish the self-esteem or violate the civil rights of the beaters. I have often wondered about this strange inconsistency, but I do believe that this contemplation of the Exculpatory Participle has led me at last to understand it.

Something like this must be the case: In a building overlooking DuPont Circle, there is a fund-raising outfit that gathers in money for the care and feeding of wives and children who have been once too often beaten into insensibility. Not

a bad idea at all, in fact a good one, and some portion of the money probably does go to do just that.

Just down the hall, however, there is another fund-raising outfit, owned and operated by kissing cousins of the beaten wives and children’s fund, and devoted to the gathering of money for the shaping up and the legal defense of the beaters of wives and children, which is also, I must admit, not entirely a bad idea. Now I ask you, Does the right hand bite the left?

And should either one of these noble efforts actually do what it says it wants to do, and stamp out utterly the great evil that it so valiantly fights, would it not put both itself and its counterpart down the hall utterly out of business, thus throwing countless of America’s most sincere people right out of jobs, and bringing to an end the whole enterprise of fund-raising and social betterment as we know it?

For the prevention of such hideous consequences, the Exculpatory Participle is sovereign.

Now neglect does not drift in the air like soot particles. It originates in some person. And, since neglect is not simply the absence of care and attention but rather the absence of care and attention in who *should* give care and pay attention, I have some trouble in measuring the degree of my own culpability in the case of “our young.” For the health and happiness of some sad sick child in the streets of San Francisco, am I more, or less, responsible than Frank Perdue, for instance, or Mother Theresa, or Dan Rather? In those or any other cases, how is the “shouldness” to be weighed?

Reformers prefer (sometimes) not to consider shouldness; they want to avoid not only a High Moral Tone but even a Low One. But this puts them in a nasty bind. If you can’t argue from “shouldness,” then you can’t say what everyone knows to be true, i.e., that the Prime Neglecters of children are their parents, in whom there is more should-ness than in me, or in Frank Perdue, or in Dan Rather. But Reformers suspect, and in this they are uncharacteristically correct, that you might as well preach to the sharks as talk to the parents. Neither will listen till their bellies are full, and when their bellies are full, all they can do is snooze at the bottom of the sea.

Some dyspeptic old-time philologist concluded that mankind developed language only when its affairs had come to that sad state in which any fool could see how useful it would be to tell lies. It is a tempting thought. No bee, I suspect, has ever come buzzing home to send its pals off on a wild goose chase so that it could quietly sneak back to where there really *was* some honey. In any species other than ours, it is hard to imagine any profit in mendacity. But it just won't wash. If our language is the medium in which we tell our lies, it is also the medium in which we tell that we are lying.

We usually guess that it is by checking the facts that we can know a lie from the truth, and in many cases, the more trivial generally, this is so. But as to the truly serious lies, lies so false that the liar himself is nothing more than an agent of falsehood, we don't need the facts. All we need is a not impossible combination of the power to read thoroughly and the will to read thoroughly. That may be a Great Power, but it comes, at last, from surprisingly little things.

A verb is just a verb. Little children can be taught to spot one. And a subject is just a subject. From seeing that, it is no big jump to noticing that some verbs, in whatever form, look a little lonely without a person standing by, like orphans who have mistakenly wandered into the father-son picnic. And a thorough reader asks: Well, who is this missing person, and why is he missing? Why has someone left him out?

This works the other way around, too. The power to write thoroughly is the power to stick to the truth. It takes no great study of philosophy, just a little grammar. If the values teachers would just require of their budding little writers that they attach a person to every verb that names an act that only a person can commit, and go looking for the antecedent to every pronoun they commit, it wouldn't be long before those values teachers actually learned something.

To question all things; never to turn away from any difficulty; to accept no doctrine either from ourselves or from other people without a rigid scrutiny by negative criticism; letting no fallacy, or incoherence, or confusion of thought, step by unperceived; above all, to insist on having the meaning of a word clearly understood

before using it, and the meaning of a proposition before assenting to it,—these are the lessons we learn from the ancient dialecticians.
J.S.Mill

And furthermore...

WE have a footnote that we will pass on to our sometime sociogrammatologist when we can. The person whose admonition moved him, at last, to send us a piece may well have been a certain Marion Wright Edelman. She is a lawyer who is president of the Children's Defense Fund. We do not *know*, of course, that it was she who penned the words found in an unsigned solicitation for funds, but there is something about her language and thinking in general that makes us suspicious.

We read of her in the *Christian Science Monitor*. She was quoted as asking, of that little girl who was recently rescued from a well in Texas, "Why should she have fallen in that shaft anyway?" Then she answered her own question by saying that the nation was just not spending enough on child-care.

Now, as it happens, we know how it came about that that little girl fell into the well. Some damned fool neglected to throw a piece of plywood over it. That's all it would have taken. And it wasn't just any damned fool; it was a damned fool who had an immediately visible and indisputable responsibility for the safety of that little girl. And bad cess to him, or her, as the case may be.

Now here's what we wonder: If we spend enough money to root out and instruct every damned fool in the land to cover up all holes in the ground into which children might fall, shouldn't we also spend enough more so that each damned fool in America has a smoke-detector wherever children might burn? Well, of course. And then should we hire enough government agents to visit each smoke-detector when it comes time to change the batteries? Well, of course. Or should we, just maybe, see if we can come up with some way of preventing as many children as possible from growing up to be damned fools?

Around here, we happen to believe that might be done, and thus we are ready to call ourselves just as surely defenders of children as Marion Wright Edelman. A bit *more* surely, in fact, since we are ready to name those from whom we'd like to defend the children.

Edelman closes her remarks on the responsibilities of everyone with this extraordinary mind-boggler: “Until this society takes responsibility for all of its children, we make a mockery of all these pretensions about being an opportunistic society.” Just brood on that for a while in the still watches of the night.

And then brood on this: How long would it take you, do you suppose, to explain to Ms Edelman exactly why her pronouncement, surely meant as sincere, comes out to be so funny?

If we got up an Edelman Defense Fund, what would we defend her from? Would it not be the same casual thoughtlessness that makes children children, by nature, and that also, by something that is not exactly the same as nature, makes damned fools damned fools? And how much would we have to spend on that?



The Underground GRAMMARIAN

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The Uptight Straightshooters

A woman, a paranoid schizophrenic ate all her meals in restaurants because she was convinced someone was poisoning her food at home. Her 12-year-old daughter developed the same fears and likewise ate in restaurants. Her 10-year-old daughter would eat at home if her father was there, but otherwise went along with her mother. But the woman’s 7-year-old son always ate at home. When a psychiatrist asked the boy why, he said with a shrug, “Well, I’m not dead yet.”

New York Times, October 13, 1987

SO begins an intriguing article on yet another of those astounding psycho-sociological discoveries of what every thoughtful and attentive person has known since the appearance of mind in our species. Our psycho-sociologists have just noticed that some people, no matter how poor, or sad, or

abused, or oppressed in childhood, will nevertheless, just as Faulkner hoped, not only survive, but prevail.

The official findings now agree, as we have often observed, that not every child ends up saying “ain’t” because of the evil influence of the Nashville Songwriters Association; and that, do what they may, the school people will never turn all of their young victims into clods.

Now, of course, it is “official,” for the studies of experts have shown it, and the *New York Times* has found it fit to print. There really are Horatio Algiers. Here are some of the signs by which you can know them:

At birth, they are “alert and attentive.” This probably means that they can be prevented by mothers who do drugs.

By the age of 1, they are “securely attached” to their mothers, whatever that might mean, even if the mothers are still doing drugs. Now that is an especially interesting fact, for it points not outward, but inward; it tells us more about the child than about the world.

At 2, they are “independent and compliant”—an intriguing combination—and able to tolerate frustration and disorder without getting angry. It is almost as though they were taking advice from Socrates, and living in that moderation without which, he often said, no one, rich or poor, young or old, could hope to be happy.

By 3½, they fill the other half of the prescription of Socrates: They become cheerful. And also—*another* intriguing combination—“flexible and persistent.” At this age, too, they begin the practice of “seeking help from adults.” And finding it, too. They seem to know just where to look for the *right* adults. And here may be an important clue about schools and schooling. Perhaps the most important attribute of the teacher should be that “rightness,” and maybe we are wrong about teachers. Perhaps it doesn’t matter that they can’t write, or that they’re ill-taught in their subjects?

(Here, we suspect, is the open frontier of understanding both in the school business and the parent business. All of these children eventually single out one adult, who becomes a special friend and confidant. That one person is apparently not a sufficient condition, but surely a necessary condition. Now here’s what we’d like to know. What is the trick of being that person?)

And so it goes with these happy few on into their teens. Insulation from emotional turmoil. Healthy skepticism. Plans instead of impulses. Responsibility both sought and met, even in a dismal home.

We're happy to hear about them, of course, but they are a little scary. We have spent years and years now muddling towards an intelligent definition of "education." We know that is has nothing to with schooling, but rather with life; we know that it is neither a skill nor a subject, but rather a "way." But we have also been pretty sure that a true education does not simply come with the territory, the human endowment that we all have, but we have been even surer that the propensity for it does come with the territory, indeed, that a true education is everybody's natural destiny. Now here come these kids. What do they seem to know? Must it not be called a "way"? Surely it has nothing to do with whether or not they can read or write or name the capitals or the prepositions that take the dative. Is it not remarkably like that way of life that has been perennially urged, not only by Socrates and Jesus but *all* of the wise, whatever that might mean?

Now, to be sure, we don't know the important things about the idea of success according to these psycho-sociologists. Do these kids "succeed," as psycho-sociologists might well understand the word, through greed and acquisitiveness? Are their "good" lives also examined lives, or are they coasting on luck?

However, while we do not *know* the answers to such questions, the psycho-sociologists have given us, all inadvertently, a clue as to some probable answers. The psycho-sociologists, you see, are not entirely delighted with their own findings. And indeed, why should they be? They have, in effect, discovered the existence of some people who may not need psycho-sociologists, or any of their cousins, the guidance counselors, therapists, and attitude police.

We'll let Lyman Wynne explain just what it is that fills this silver lining with cloud. He's a psychiatrist at the University of Rochester, and he should know:

"From a distance, these kids look good, but up close, in their intimate relations, you find they are disagreeable and judgmental. They put down their siblings who are not doing as well, but they themselves are constricted and overcontrolled. Their

normality is based on being uptight straightshooters."

Yeah. Judgmental. A terrible thing. Just imagine going through life always deciding that some things are better, and some things worse. You just can't relate well to others with a bad attitude like that. What would this world be like if we all went around neurotically distinguishing between the worthy and the unworthy, and even withholding esteem and respect from people who want esteem and respect, just because we can't find in them anything estimable or respectable?

Uptight straightshooters, eh? Pretty bad. A psychiatrist, no doubt, would prefer the laid back crooked shooter. Is there, do you suppose, some middle ground between the straightshooter and the crooked shooter? What would we call him? A sometimes straight and sometimes crooked shooter? Of what do you suppose this psychiatrist would approve? What point on what scale will he show us, at which self-control turns into over-control? Can there be such a thing as too much control, too much self-discipline and self-government? Who would assert that there is, the rational adult or the infantile dreamer?

And disagreeable. That's the worst.

Remember Socrates, and his way of understanding, for instance, what we mean by a brave man. He is the one who, from the point of view of the coward, looks like a rash man, but, from the point of view of the rash man, looks like a coward. And the liberal man is the one thought profligate by the miser, and miserly by the spendthrift.

So we are inclined to suspect that the "disagreeable" child must have, way out to his right, some intransigent grouch who disapproves of everything, and, to his left, some limp wimp of a psychiatrist who is like with it, man, and who, in the best democratic tradition, disapproves of nothing, except, of course, for those disagreeable and uptight straightshooters.

More Friends Like These

This is a world that pays computer programmers more than essayists. Plumbers make more than journalists. High school dropouts run major corporations. Teachers borrow money from their mechanic brothers-in-law.

Only when educators realize the primary purpose of schools is not social conditioning but preparation for economic survival in a difficult world, will education reflect the realities and needs of the job market.

THE mail brought us, on the same day, two scraps of newspaper, each bearing what we think of as the worst possible news—the half-bakery of those who say what is almost the right thing, for the utterly wrong reasons.

One of them was a letter to the editor in the *New York Times*. It came from a certain Alfred Posamentier. Posamentier is a professor of mathematics education at City College in New York. In certain current events, he found a way to prove that his work is important.

The *NYT* had said that some little aeroplane had come “within 200 feet” of the presidential helicopter. Not so, said Posamentier, reasoning thus: “Your diagram caption says the plane passed 200-300 feet to the left of the helicopter, making the minimum horizontal distance 200 feet. With the vertical distance of 150 feet that you show, a right triangle may be formed, whose hypotenuse length is the actual distance the plane was from the helicopter. To apply the Pythagorean theorem ($a^2+b^2=c^2$), the one thing most people remember from high school mathematics, this distance is 250 feet—more than ‘within 200 feet.’”

So there you have it. Geometry as a trivial pursuit. And why not? After all, lots of folk take barrels of fun from their mastery of grammar, by whose power they can write snarky letters about the weatherman who says “between you and I.”

Posamentier finds portent in his findings; for he concludes, with a wonderful solemnity: “This is offered as the sort of thing mathematics teachers (and even parents) ought to point out to students who question the value of mathematics.” There. That’ll take care of all those Yahoo complaints about teaching geometry to little children who, once school is behind them, will never geomet again.

We wonder what Patrick Cox would want to say about Posamentier’s profound understanding of the purpose and meaning of education. Cox, who is a “political/economic analyst and writer,” is responsible for the passage cited above. We found it on a sent-in op-ed page from *USA Today*. The whole page was devoted to the Great Writing

Question: an editorial, four guest columnists, four “quotelines” from “experts,” and seven micro-interviews with persons-in-the-street.

Everybody said exactly what you expect, although Mary Futrell, one of the union people, did point out that a school teacher who takes in 150 student papers a week is not going to do much more than put a few x’s on “mechanics.” Except for Cox, everybody was all in favor of writing. Everybody thought it a Good Thing, of which the children could not have too much.

But Cox was willing to come right out with it: Listen up. It’s a jungle out there! Survival, survival in a difficult world! Hardly anyone needs to write, and those who do it for what they seem willing to call a “living” are people like those stumblebum journalists who never learned how to use a pipe-wrench.

He also points out that those “supposedly low test scores” simply mean that a bunch of “immigrant children” are still trying to learn English. And of them, he reminds us, and who would know better than a political/economic analyst, that “evidence shows that this nominally sub-literate group will eventually earn more *per capita* than the native born.” And he also points out, as every one of us should, to someone, every day, that the latest writing brouhaha comes in the wake of yet another expensive (to us) and lucrative (to somebody else) national report that tells us exactly what we have been told by all the earlier national reports, and that it will have only one certain result: It will engender yet other reports, and grants, and fees, and lots of publicity in aid of those who live by reports, and grants, and fees.

Well, we sort of like Cox. His crass and trashy commercialism is at least not a pretense. We would like him better if he would go further and clear his mind of the misconception that “preparation for economic survival” is something other than social conditioning, and we do wish he would tell us whether a political/economic analyst makes more than a plumber—after all, we can do that too—but the times are hard, and we need all the friends we can find.

And we can not help but wonder about some of the other folk who came out in pious support of more writing for children, especially those civilians and Mary Futrell. How much writing do you suppose those people do?

There ought to be in our language some appropriately derogatory word for that person who loftily complains that others ought to learn some excellence or worth that he himself neither has nor seeks. “Hypocrite” is not enough. “Prig” comes closer, but it has almost gone out of English. So we do not know what to call them, these schoolteachers and educationists who call for more and better writing by students, and whose writing we have so often and gleefully examined. We know not how, sufficiently to defame the Posamentiers, who urge more study of mathematics by children, that is to say, more patronage for people in his business, and seriously put forth as an example of the *worth* of that study the power to find a mistake in a newspaper.

This is the important question: What is the *worth* of writing? In all of those people who bewail the inability of the young to write, whatever they mean by that, what does *their* writing *do*, in and for their lives? What do those sanctimonious schoolteachers write, and to what end? Who are they to say that *other people* should learn to write?

Considering the obvious fact that those who write anything at all after leaving school are only slightly more numerous than those who geomet after leaving school, and the only slightly less obvious fact that such things as shopping lists and phone messages are no more to be thought of as pieces of writing than the letters inscribed on faucets or lavatory doors, and leaving aside the very few who get paid for writing something or other and who probably would not do it if it weren't for the pay, there is practically nobody in the land who can be said to take any *good* from writing, to become better through it.

Here at THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN megacomplex, the only thing we need less than another essayist is a political/economic analyst; a plumber, or better yet an electrician, we could use. And if the worth and point of writing are nothing more than the trivial skills that all of these pious lamenters have in mind, it could very likely have the effect of turning a good plumber or electrician into a thoughtless clod. A man who can't write or read *may*, at least may, sit around with a friend or two and consider whether it is better to suffer an injustice or do one; but a man who has been led to believe that writing is a profitable skill like soldering, or a means of communication like the

cry of the daw, or a vehicle for information that is bettered delivered in pictures anyway, or a social grace like eating with a fork, will probably have no inclination at all to make and test propositions, or to watch his (or anybody else's) language for false analogies, inapt metaphors, and failures of logic, for he will never have done any of those things. Epictetus, who couldn't read or write, is far more to be prized than Eichmann, who could.

If “learning to write” is understood as the acquisition of a certain skill useful to anyone, like balancing a checkbook, or a tool of trade for which someone might pay, it will, and *should*, disappear like butter-churning and type-setting. So let it. If it is understood as the practice of the mind in knowing and ordering itself, then the schools will never teach it in any case, and those who discover some need for it will do it. And the only important effect of writing teaching in the schools will be—as it has been—to prevent as many as possible from noticing that this difficult and unprofitable enterprise may be more valuable than all those skills for which the world pays money.

The Unbook Unreview

*An Irregular Feature of the
Underground Grammarian*

MODERN SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT. Robert E. Wilson. Written in lively and dramatic style. Reflects penetrating insights into experiences of modern-day school superintendent how he deals with responsibilities to those he works with/for. 232 pp. \$3

ADMINISTRATION AND THE TEACHER. William A. Yeager. Faces squarely the problems and complexities of administering teaching personnel. Covers selection, appointment, and adjustment of teachers, inservice, improvement, evaluations, social status, ethics, much more. With tables, index. 577pp. \$3

HOLISTIC EDUCATION: Teaching of Science in the Affective Domain. I. Sonnier. Teacher's guide for scholarly projects from middle through grade school. Serves teacher with rationale and encouragement to direct student-centered classroom. 126pp. \$3

WHAT to call our little list, we can not decide. Books We *Can* Wait to Read, maybe, or even Books We Wish We Had the Guts to Read.

Whatever, it will surely contain the three gems above.

Just think of it. Five hundred and seventy-seven pages of adjustment of teachers *et al.* We can't even imagine the enormity of a lousy two-hundred and thirty-two pages of "the school superintendent how he deals," although it may well be that the study of just such a book is one of our responsibilities to those *we* work with/for.

(We obviously can not know whether the language of the blurbs comes from the language of the books, but that "with/for" is certainly typical of the "lively and dramatic style" of standard American educationese. But of course, it may also be a splendid display of irony by a truly gifted blurbist, or perhaps a triumph of nose-thumbing—What, you don't like sentences that end with prepositions? Eat this, creep!)

If we had to read one of those books, we would, of course, choose the one hundred and twenty-six-pager, which probably shows that brevity is not only the soul of wit, but that it may also be the sole virtue of something else.

We found those books listed in one of those remainder catalogs, (Why Pay Full Price?), in a special section called "Scholar's Corner." They brought to mind a terrible and frightening vision. Is there, really, a world where people read such books? Are there people who sit around seriously to discuss "the problems and complexities of administering teaching personnel"? (And, concretely and exactly, what do you *do* when you administer personnel, or—even more bewildering—when you adjust teachers? Can that actually be *done*?) Are there people who want, who truly want, to know what somebody or other imagines that he has to say about such matters? Is there anybody anywhere on the face of Earth who has actually read and pondered five-hundred and seventy-seven pages of *Administration and the Teacher*? If there is such a person, would you want him to have anything whatsoever to do, however indirectly, with one of your children? And, most perplexing of all, is there a world in which somebody can not only refer to "scholarly scientific projects" in the affective domain, but also find people to take him seriously?

But, alas, there are such things. And if it seems to you that the study of science in the affective domain of feelings, sentiments, and attitudes is an idea whose time had better not come, that is

because you have not been paying attention. What else, after all, is the field trip to the zoo, or the film strip about those cuddly marsupials of Australia? What is the point of the ant-farm on the shuttle, but to make some kiddies, and countless watchers of television news, feel real good about themselves, and about us, and about some "great adventure of the mind" in which not one mind in a million has any real part at all. Why else does the NEA endorse television shows about the Endangered Species of the Month, or, as the case may be with the fruit-fly and the killer bee, the Dangerous Species of the Month?

Although we were at first surprised that even an educationist might propose such an absurdity as the study of science in the good old affective domain, it was because we just weren't thinking. With few exceptions, these people "teach" *everything* in that sunny land. Their geography is really "geography," the inculcation in children of "right feelings" about people who live far away, for instance, and their "history" is ditto with the substitution of time for space. In like fashion, almost all of their "subjects" need quotation marks. Some of them—think a minute about "social 'studies'"—need inner quotation marks.

Here is a test by which you can know whether something being "taught" to your children is a subject or a "subject," and even discover in these latter days of bold, innovative thrusts, whether a subject has suddenly become a "subject."

Imagine a book whose title is: *Holistic Education: Teaching (you name it) in the Affective Domain*. For now, try French, and you'll see at once why the study of foreign languages is something the school people would rather not hear about. Just for the hell of it, try auto mechanics, or woodworking. And remember, when there actually *is* such a book, that's the day to head for the hills.

Don't be too skeptical. Remember, they're not like us. Those people can do anything, anything they like. Liking, after all, is big in the affective domain.

And go back and take another look at the descriptions of the other two books. Where there is no knowledge, there is nothing to do but adjust personnel and write 232 pages of penetrating insights.

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