

The Underground GRAMMARIAN

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Heretics and Malignants

To ye aged and beloved Mr. John Higgenson:

There be now at sea a ship called *Welcome*, which has on board 100 or more the heretics and malignants called Quakers, with W. Penn, who is the chief scamp, at the head of them. The General Court has accordingly given sacred orders to Master Malachi Huscott, of the brig *Porpoise*, to waylay the said *Welcome* slyly as near the Cape of Cod as may be, and make captive the said Penn and his ungodly crew, so that the Lord may be glorified and not mocked on the soil of this new country with the heathen worship of these people. Much spoil can be made of selling the whole lot to Barbadoes, where slaves fetch good prices in rum and sugar and we shall not only do the Lord great good by punishing the wicked, but we shall make great good for His minister and people.

Yours in the bowels of Christ, Cotton Mather

THERE is no doubt that Gorbachev was the most visible and effective benefactor of mankind in 1989. He will surely win, and should win, the Nobel Peace Prize along with other awards and recognitions. His wife, furthermore, is adorable. He has our best and warmest regards and wishes.

He is not, however our own Man of the Year for 1989. For that honor, and for the First Faltering Footsteps Prize for 1989, we have chosen a man who has been called, by no less an authority than Jerry Falwell, speaking no doubt from those very same bowels, “the No. 1 enemy of the American family in our generation.” He is, furthermore, a man who calls himself a “civil libertarian,” in a well-known phrase which seems to derive from a popular belief that the idea in the word “liberty” really ought to be sanitized with some adjective, lest naughty folk get “the wrong idea” about liberty. And he is also a man who has surely provided Americans with much that they didn’t need in the form of cute and inane entertainment.

As to all that, we say, all the better. It makes his breakthrough all the bigger. Some of you will probably have heard of him. He is Norman Lear, who is quite well known in the world of television as the producer of some comedy shows whose occasional and socially useful didacticism was impenetrable only to the likes of Jerry Falwell.

In November of 1989, Lear spoke to a gathering of members of the American Academy of Religion. His unshaken commitment to the separation of church and state notwithstanding, he told the assembled scholars that it was time for the public schools “to nurture the sense of the sacred that underlies all religions.”

“While we civil libertarians have been triumphant in most of our legal and constitutional battles,” he said, “I am troubled that so many of us remain blocked or blind to the spiritual emptiness in our culture which the televangelists exploited so successfully.”

Lear did not drop his opposition to organized prayer in schools, and neither did he espouse such nonsense as adding alternative creation myths to satisfy the true believers of this or that persuasion, but he did say, in effect, that the purging from textbooks of anything that might offend anybody was a dumb idea. Pathological thinning of the skin is one of the inescapable side-effects of spiritual emptiness, and we wish he had made that point, if only to himself. He might then have noticed some degree of spirituality less than fullness in some of the religious scholars.

From them, he won that sort of praise that Israelis measure out to the possible unification of the Germans. They were not, apparently, about to take the risk of letting anyone suggest that religions could be “reduced to a common denominator,” lest ardent parents complain about the “relativizing” of religion. And a certain Mrs. Haynes “stressed the need to teach about religious differences and how society could learn to live with them,” believing apparently—probably her stock in trade—that it will take only a few lessons to reconcile Islam with Shamir and to bring such as the warring tribes of the Irish to detect some naughtiness in blowing up each other’s Sunday school buses. (Of course, on this point we could be very wrong. By “live with them,” she might have meant that such as the Christians and Moslems of Beirut could come to a socially acceptable appreciation of diversity, and liberally

grant each other the *right* to lob shells across the city, just so long as that's what they truly believe in.)

Against such views, apparently, Lear could only suggest that he would like to make some distinction between "religious" and "spiritual," which seems to us a very intriguing thought, but the newspaper account of the event reports no further consideration of it. We guess that it is not a distinction that Scholars of Religion even want mentioned, never mind made. And, not surprisingly, all Lear could imagine that the schools might actually do to nurture the sense of the sacred was to teach about "the role of religion in history."

Well, that's a good place to start. The role of religion in history. Quite a role. So we have provided the first lesson above, in the form of a letter from Cotton Mather. We'd like to see it in the textbooks. We'd like the seventh graders to relate to it, and rap a bit. We'd like to listen to the schoolteachers telling the kiddies all about the appreciation of diversity, and the need to be tolerant of alternative life styles. And we'd like to hear from the parents too, those who have bitched about the lack of attention paid in the schools to our great Christian heritage, and who now must bitch about the paying of attention. We'd like to hear from the organized atheist parents, whose delicate children are injured and insulted by the mention of a Christian pirate, and from the Moslem parents, whose delicate children are injured and insulted by the inclusion of *only* a Christian pirate.

As to "the role of religion in history," Cotton Mather is every bit as relevant and informative as Mother Theresa. In that role, and in every religion in that role, you can find everything, all that is fair and all that is foul, the best of us and the worst, the edifying and the horrid.

Children should certainly know a lot about it, but the school people are in no position to handle it. They serve too many masters, and they are themselves but little informed in those matters. But we will not leave Lear out on a limb. He is, after all, right, however confused he may be about the meaning of his rightness. And his confusion has been built into him, and into millions more, by the very people to whom he spoke.

As we think back through the last few years of this sheet, we see something that we never

intended. More and more we see ourselves talking about an emptiness, a soullessness, that seems, to us of course, to be a condition regularly and deliberately induced by the government schools. It masquerades as tolerance and liberality, but its real name is the Loss of the Good of Intellect, as you may recall from that discussion of Dante in "The Curriculum from Hell." It is a condition not the same as stupidity, not even the same as deliberate stupidity, but a highly specific disorder in which the mind can contemplate no convincing way in which to distinguish between the better and the worse, so that it abandons the task as futile, and is indeed pleased to do so, for the habit of such distinguishing is certain to bring, probably ten times a day, bad news in the form of self-knowledge. Notice, for instance, that the on-going craziness about self-esteem in the schools seems never to contemplate the obvious and unsettling question: What would we have to say of self-esteem in one who has little or no self-knowledge, and who knows no principle but emotion out of which to distinguish what is estimable from what is not? And, in any case, the school people don't even like to hear such words as "estimable." They just don't sound democratic.

It is out of something akin to the loss of the good of intellect that we are not able to think of some important distinction that can be made between religion and the religions. Strangely enough, this sort of mind work would be easier to come by and do if only we saw to it that all children in school studied some foreign language, and the schoolers' distaste for such study has, therefore, an interesting, nasty smell. Anyone who studies another language comes to grasp a strange fact, the fact that there is some fascinating difference between the languages and language itself. And language itself can be contemplated.

Likewise with religion. Here again we now see the tendency of an earlier piece, "The Great Divide," where it was said that while religions need the Tao, which term was used there in a special narrow sense, the Tao needs no religion. People, especially people who call themselves tolerant, are fond of pointing out that "there is good in every religion." To say that makes you sound big of heart, because you are not required to say what must follow, that is, that there is also that bad from which you have chosen out the good. We can also say, and with more justice and

completeness, that what is good in every religion is just about the same in all of them. No religion, whatever subterfuges its adherents may devise, preaches treachery or cowardice or even piracy. All of the religions, like all of the seers, say the same things: Love each other; share things; take care of each other; try to stop wanting so much; know yourself.

There's more, of course, but not much more. Not an encyclopedia full. Not even a prayer-book full. Now this is puzzling. If you encountered in the forest twelve different animals which, for all their differences, shared nevertheless one remarkably prominent and beneficial attribute, would you not think to have detected some kinship? Would you not think to have detected also some common ancestor, or at least something that was prior to all those beasts? And if all that is good in all these religions did not turn out to precede them, but had to be accounted coincidence, would you not be much surprised? And can you imagine that, after the inevitable disappearance of all the religions that we now know, that there will arise new ones in which there is no trace of that to which we point when we say that there is some good in all religions?

Mrs. Haynes did not at all like Lear's attempted distinction between "spiritual" and "religious." The reason is clear. There was religion long before any of these religions were dreamed of, and there will be religion long after they are gone, but the adherents of the religions don't like that thought. If it's religious, dammit, it's ours, and we're not going to let some entertainer get away with the spiritual either. That's also ours.

The religions are always local and temporary. They are institutions. They are outside, out there in the world, not in us, and at time's mercy. That's why they're so feisty. They fear death. And diminution smells of death. So they recruit. If you join one today, you'll hear all sorts of fascinating assertions, and you'll hear what good it has to offer, which is the same in the religions that you don't join today, but just about the only hard fact you'll get is your own copy of the Enemies List. Now you'll know who to spit at in the street, who to despise as an evil-doer, who to recruit, and where to lob your shells.

Lear is right, but he is wrong. There is indeed an emptiness, but it is not the religions that will fill it. It is Religion.

In the root of the word "religion" is the idea of tying back together. It's too bad we don't have the word as a verb, for it becomes most useful when seen not as an abstraction or the name of this or that club of believers, but as something that you can do. Strictly speaking, the religious view is the one that sees the connections, and, seeing them, tries to see others, and even suspects that all things may be connected in some way.

Lear stumbled on this understanding when he said that we seemed unlikely to be able to solve environmental problems without "a fresh examination of what we regard as sacred in the universe." He is right. But it won't fly. We are not allowed to use that word; the people in the God business have convinced the people in the school business that "sacred" belongs to them, and such is the nature of the people in the God business that even teachers are embarrassed to be associated with them. It's not really the church and state business that keeps spiritual concerns out of the classroom; it's a perfectly respectable disgust at the thought of standing forth in an ostensibly intellectual enterprise and sounding like one of them. And so it is that not even the liberalest of activists can say that Earth is the Holy Mother of us all, who gave us life and nourished us, and to whom all honor and respect are due. It is precisely his "liberalism" that puts him "above" such ancient "superstition," so he has to make vile appeals to those who suppose that the longer empty life is more to be prized than the shorter. The people we call ignorant savages, however, can say that, and can even seek to live by it.

This is the great achievement of the religions in our time: they have at once pre-empted and besmirched what was once understood to be the proper business of all people: the consideration of our meaning and the contemplation of the good life. So it is that the schools are playing it safe by sticking to the consideration of our employability and the contemplation of successfully competing with the Japanese. And if that is life, then emptiness is meet and right.

But you do not have to be a member of any of the religions to live as though your deeds and your destiny were tied together, and that, not even through belief but through choice, by distinguishing between the life that is led as though it were meaningful, and that which is led as though it were not. You need no membership to

ask whether the children may be right when they say that life is a bitch and then you die, and to consider accordingly how to live. For yourself, without benefit of clergy, you can consider whether there would be any virtue in holding instead that life is a ball and then you die.

Young people, however, do not truly believe such propositions. They say such things because they need to prove that they are cool. But, like all the rest of us, they do not know what life is, but they do suspect, because it is in us to suspect, that there may be more to life than its bitchery, which they can see all around them, and more, even, than the “success” of competing with the Japanese, which seems to have brought neither happiness nor peace to their elders, and at which, by the way, their teachers have failed most dismally.

T. S. Eliot, who remained a religious man in spite of his membership in the Anglican communion (it can be done, of course, but it’s harder) has put the whole religion business in a way that Norman Lear would find useful. “For us,” he said, “there is only the asking. The rest is none of our business.”

As to whether we should turn in the money to the lost and found, choose to go without something that we want, take pleasure or profit from the manipulation of a friend, and as to whether life is a bitch and then you die, there is only the asking. As to whether the burden of our misdeeds is intolerable or not, there is only the asking, and likewise as to whether or not it should be intolerable. The asking is the religious part of life. It is the failure to ask that is emptiness.

But where Religion does its work by provoking questions, the religions do theirs by pronouncing answers, which is bad enough, and then, which is much worse, insisting on assent to its answers, relegating dissenters to a place “outside of the faith.” If young people, or any people, find something less than satisfying in this arrangement, it is much to their credit. But the resulting judgment that they must make of the pronouncements of the religions leads them into cynicism also about those few remnants of truth that the religions have taken from Religion, which are—and this is most important—not based on faith, but on something that seems to be permanent and universal to human beings. It’s a kind of suspicion.

We will tell you a secret, but, when you hear it, you will know that it is no secret, that you have always known it. It is just something that nobody wants to say. Here it is: No one believes in God. Lots of people say they do, but the Bishop of Rome gnaws his knuckles in the still watches of the night. And so too—let’s give him some credit, does Falwell.

Here’s another secret: No one disbelieves in God. Again, lots say they do. And here’s one more: No one knows how to choose. The Bible has it one-half right when it tells us that “the fool has said in his heart, there is no God.” It does take a fool to have it either way. Wittgenstein had it right. Whereof we can not speak, let us have the good sense to keep our mouths shut.

A belief in God is of crucial importance to the religions. They have a big investment, and a lot to lose. Not so for Religion. It is the God question that is part of Religion, not the answer. It is a very interesting question. If you ask it, you live one way. If you don’t ask it, you live another way—the empty way.

It is the master question which governs all the others. Is life indeed a bitch, out of which you die? Is there anything else it could be? Does it really matter a damn if we throw all our filthy refuse into the ocean, or if we take all we can get of comfort and pleasure, or if all we worry about is not getting caught? If we rule the world in loving wisdom, or just get drunk alone, does it make the tiniest bit of difference?

That last question, some of our readers will have noticed, is, roughly, from Sartre, or, more accurately, from one of his characters. It gives us a clue that we’d like to pass along to Norman Lear, just for the unlikely possibility that he will be asked once more to suggest what the schools might do to fill the emptiness of spirit in the young. It’s easy. He should have thought of it.

Have the children read books, dammit! Throw away all that silly and uninspired social conditioning pap. Books are the questions. Sartre asks, Sophocles asks, Swift asks—they all ask. And they try out this and that answer, always saying, in effect, something very much like what Socrates says in *Phaedo*: “Well, either this, or something else like it, must be so.” And some of the children won’t like one answer, and some won’t like another, and some will like them all, and some won’t like any, and that’s exactly the

way it should be. For now. And then let them live and reconsider, having given them exactly what you are now withholding from them—the raw material of wondering.

But that too has been pre-empted, this time by the educationists, the religionists' most valuable but quite unwitting confederates. The children can not read books. Even the brightest can do little more than receive some scrap of communication here and there, and in them the act of reading is not in any important way different from that act in which they can identify a stop sign as a stop sign. They are ill at ease in metaphor, and often simply blind to it; and the “answers” of books are, and must be, metaphors. Our books tell us that this life is a great, walled city whose king loses sight of justice, or a war in which some may choose to run and some to fight and die, or a dark forest in which we are abandoned by our parents and left to make our own ways in the world. Such are the assertions of all the arts, and, since they are easily construed as patently “untrue” by the literal mind they can not be read with the reading of the communication receivers.

This strange relationship between Religion and certain disorders of “reading” was remarkably well explained by Joseph Campbell in some television interview. The atheists are those who can not read in metaphor anything more than a “lie,” however fine or beautiful. The theists want to make of metaphor “the truth,” but all that they can think of as the truth is historical fact, so they are required to insist that myth is to be read as fact, and so led into much nonsense. Had Dante been around to hear Campbell, he would have used this perfect, symmetrical coupling of the atheist and the theist in one of his elegantly balanced metaphors of the hellish life. But he is gone, and we must do it for ourselves; but we can not do it without the power to read metaphor, which, has nothing to do with the letters. Epictetus could not read, but he could read.

Nor can the children read the other kind of metaphor. Those “silent forms that tease us out of thought” do not say anything at all to those who have been consistently deprived of the beautiful all their little lives. In the standard curriculum of the schools, there is no more provision for the beautiful than there is for the good and the true. The cathedral tells us more about Religion than the canons, but we suspect that the contemplation

of a cathedral would no more be permitted in the schools than the elucidation of the canons.

Nothing can be used in the schools simply because it is beautiful, or wise, or good; it must first be socially appropriate. And what is socially appropriate will be used no matter how ugly, foolish, or bad. But this doesn't matter to the school operators, who hold that such ideas as beauty and ugliness are merely matters of nultural necessity and individual whim. If Lear was once a vigorous defender of the ideology which imagines that the consideration of a cathedral in a government school is contrary both to the Constitution and to the self-esteem of the students, as he may well have been, he now has his reward.

Just as there is an environment of birds and beasts, there is an environment of ideas, in which it is also impossible do one thing. There is certainly a relationship between those triumphs in civil rights of which he speaks, and which often involved the mysterious power of symbols and metaphors whose mere visibility was supposed to offend someone, and that spiritual emptiness that he now laments. If you say long and loud enough, and especially if you say it to the little children, that nothing is really worthy in itself but only to some people in some estates and conditions, and that one sort of life is just as good as any other, sooner or later you will live in the world that you have helped to make. If you find it a smelly mess, where something even more important than the wildlife is dying, you should add to your discomfort a nasty dose of guilt.

Well, sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Lear now wants to clean up another environment. Where once he was a heretic and malignant to the Self-righteous Right, he will become the same to the Loose-thinking Left. Good. We welcome him to No-man's Land. It beats joining the ignorant armies, but it does not mean beating them. That can't be done. The future is theirs.

Here, of course, we are not reformers. The best we hope is to paddle our little boat and maybe take some friends along for the ride. But a man like Lear has a very big boat. And he obviously knows how to paddle. We'd like to hear more from him, and, if we can find him, we'll send him this issue, which is, alas, all that there is to the First Feeble Footsteps Prize. We eagerly await that day in which Jerry Falwell's equivalent in the other ignorant army calls Lear the No. 1 enemy of

something—anything. When that happens we'll come up with an even better prize, the Heretical Malignant Medal, maybe. Till then, all we can do is cheer. *Vogue la galère*, Norman.

Brief Notes

HERE we begin the fourteenth volume of THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN. While you are surely astonished when your copy gets to you in the month whose name appears in the masthead, we are astonished when any issue gets out at all. Every one seems to us the last, and this has been true since the first. Nevertheless, experience suggests that there will be another issue, and even that we may be back on schedule by September. But maybe not. We are easily distracted.

CENTRAL CONTROL is thinking of having a picnic in Delaware in August, and inviting to it all readers who find themselves within a hundred miles or so. The site she has chosen is splendid, and well worth a couple of hours of driving. More of this later.

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

MANY have told us that they were unable to find George Steele, who puts out an interesting sheet, *Individualist Journal*. We may well have been at fault, for we called it the *Individualist Newsletter*, thus presenting the postal people with a problem beyond their solving. The address is: 4512 47th SW, Seattle, Washington 98116.

The *Individualist Journal* for March 89, contains, among other intriguing pieces, an account of the virtues of hemp both as a cash crop and as a generally beneficial vegetable with many uses. We had never heard any of that, and, somehow, we felt a little better.

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The Ordeal by Fire

“The curriculum in the public school system seems to me to be anti-family,” she says. “It invades the privacy of the family in the primary years particularly, and in later years it encourages children to challenge the authority of their parents.”

By all accounts Mr. Harris’s early life was a nightmare of physical and psychological terror at the hands of his parents. He was born three months premature to an alcoholic mother who delivered him after being repeatedly kicked by his father. For years he suffered severe beatings at the hands of his father, who also threatened to shoot him and sometimes choked him until he convulsed, witnesses said.

THE “Mr. Harris” named above is Robert Alton Harris, who is just now enjoying a stay of his execution in San Quentin. He was convicted of a notably callous double murder, but his defenders are now reminding the courts of his dismal childhood, citing, and we believe them, incapacities such as “organic brain disorder, fetal alcohol syndrome, and post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of being severely abused as a child.”

It is an interesting case, but not in the least unusual. Harris’s real name is Legion. While our courts will surely have some trouble finding its justice, we suspect the ordinary citizen will not need the wisdom of Solomon to send both the father and the son to the gas chamber, and perhaps, after some further investigation, the mother as well. The courts can’t know, because they are not people, but people do know, that all our picky arguments about deterrence and rehabilitation are just not to the point. If there is to be civilization, there is, there must be, what e e

cummings called, in absolutely perfect and irreplaceable language, “some shit up with which we will not put.”

The first epigraph quotes a certain Lavinia Greenwood, who seems to live a normal, decent, conscientious life in the Province of British Columbia. She spoke to the Social Concerns Unit of the local Anglican diocese. She said much more, of course, but life is short; we stop there for now.

And here is Michael Laurence, who is one of Harris’s attorneys: “Robert Harris wasn’t born evil; he wasn’t born a monster. If anyone had intervened when he was a child, I don’t think he would be on death row today.”

And here, not even the wisdom of Solomon would be enough; we need also the omniscience of the Sybil. There are uncertainties in Laurence’s sad observation. What, exactly and completely, is the effect of that “organic brain disorder”? What, exactly and completely, is monstrosity in human beings? Is it, perhaps, something like the effect of that fetal alcohol syndrome? Would that mean that, born one or not, that he now is a monster who should be kept alive in his monstrousness? And would the intervention of just *anyone* have kept Harris off death row, or would it need someone special? Who would that be, and in what way special?

And what would Lavinia Greenwood have to say to Robert Harris, or to that imagined intervener who did not intervene? Had Harris been encouraged to “challenge the authority of his parents,” would two boys have been spared a terrifying and fatal encounter with someone who, exactly like the compliant and dutiful child that so delights certain parents, went forth into the world with all the very values, attitudes and beliefs by which his parents lived? Or would she be willing to concede, in certain cases at least, in cases unlike hers, that the best thing a school could do for its pupils would be to inculcate rebellion?

Here is the question at the heart of this consideration: What can we say of this “authority of the family,” to which both Lavinia Greenwood and Harris’s miserable father are presumed to be entitled? Where does that authority find its legitimacy and its license? Is there any rational connection between the production of offspring, of which just about anyone is capable, and the rule of another’s life, of which it may well be that no

one is capable? Does the authority of the family obey, in turn, some higher authority, lest it fall into foolishness or vice? And what is that, and whence does it derive its legitimacy?

Of course, we all know what people mean when they invoke the authority of the family. They mean that they want their children to believe what their parents believe, and they mean also that they have a *right* to want that, and even a right to achieve that.

But there’s more to it than that, and to point out that Harris *did* believe what his parents believed would not bring authoritarians to think again about what they want. They also believe that what *they* believe is true, and that it ought not to be questioned, or, as they call it, “challenged.” Whenever you hear laments about the undermining of family authority, you can be pretty sure that some religious sectarianism is at stake.

All religions, of course, endow parents—right thinking parents, that is—not only with the authority, but with the obligation to keep their offspring in the fold into which they were born. It is the domestic version of missionary zeal. In a larger context, however, that same zeal accords not only the authority but also the obligation industriously to set about the pious work of undermining the authority of *other* parents, in Tahiti or Timbuktu, perhaps, or any parents anywhere who hold *wrong* beliefs. If, through some quirk of destiny, Lavinia Greenwood had been able to bring little Bobby Harris to despise and utterly to reject the example set for him by his parents, her co-religionists would surely not accuse her of intruding where she has no business. She complains that the school people ask “a lot of questions about what home and family are like—who washes up, how parents behave, and so on.” And so they do; they are infernal busybodies, forever prying and preaching. But what would *she* have done had she, piously and properly, undertaken the task of bringing little Bobby out of what she must call darkness and danger? How else could she have discovered his plight? How could she preach until she had pried?

We do not intend, of course, anything even close to an exoneration of the manipulative and dogmatic agenda of the school people. We do intend, alas, to suggest that it is different only in particulars and not in principle from the

manipulative and dogmatic agendas of the religionists, the new-agers, the conservatives, the liberals, the atheists, or of any other sect of true believers, probably even the vegetarians. They are all the same, except for the particular content of their beliefs. Some break the big end, some the little. But all of them have one colossal belief in common; they all believe that they believe is true, and that other believers are mistaken.

And this—what a sad thing to say—is what the Harris family and the Greenwood family have in common. While the Greenwoods can surely express and elaborate their beliefs, people like the Harrises can only live by theirs. But they do, they do. Nor, in either case, are they easily to be dissuaded. Such is faith.

The Hubble Space Telescope is now in orbit. Some day, it may work. Of it, Timothy Ferris, writing for the *New York Times*, says this:

“It is a machine for subjecting our conceptions of the wider universe to an ordeal by fire, for hostaging theories to the verdict of fresh and better observations. The willingness to expose cherished ideas to such tests, indeed the insistence that we do so at every opportunity, is what distinguishes science from theology or philosophy.”

Well, there is a grain of truth in all that. Scientists besotted with ideology are not utterly unknown. For theologians, who can draw valid conclusions from premises that can be neither falsified nor verified, there can be no Hubble Telescope, no imaginable refinement of observation. And philosophy, except in the sense in which every Miss America contestant will claim to have one, seems to have been invented for the very purpose of trying ideas by fire. But it is surely true that some scientists have sometimes gone looking to find themselves wrong.

And theirs is a very different case from that of scientists who merely turn out to have been wrong. In their case, the fire has burned its way into their labs, as it will, given enough time, burn its way into every lab. Although science will probably have to stop some day, for the passing of its last practitioner, it will never be finished.

It is the scientist who sets the fire and then steps into it to whom honor and glory are due. Such a one says, in effect, In something, perhaps in something small, perhaps in something momentous, I may well be wrong. I *suppose* that I

am right, of course, but so too does anyone who is wrong. In fact, you can not possibly be wrong *without* supposing that you are right. If I am wrong then, I can at least do my best to discover my error, putting aside for now my suppositions as to my rightness.

Who could fail to admire such a plan, and to applaud its execution?

Who? We’ll tell you who. Lavinia Greenwood, for example. And all who can suppose that there is something evil about a challenge to the authority of the family, whatever that means. It does not take a scientist to suppose that he may be wrong. It does not take a learned jurist to consider what sort of “right” any one person might have to order and govern not only the ordinary social behavior but even the inner life of belief and conviction in another person, and whether the having of that right implies some corresponding responsibility, and what that responsibility might be. It does not take a philosopher to ask by whose authority it is that he now deems himself an authority legitimately constituted to raise up others by his rule. It takes no more than a single human person to say, I could be wrong.

But to some people all such considerations are impossible. They imagine they know the truth. With them there is no talking, no quietly asking and answering in turn, no giving of an account. They take testimony for evidence, and will not be moved. They can detect no difference between skepticism, which doubts, and cynicism, which denies.

Skepticism is a virtue. As bravery is the temperate middle ground between cowardice and rashness, skepticism is the sanity that lies between gullibility and nihilism. There can be no education where there is no skepticism, and children reared in authoritarian belief clubs must discover skepticism or move out to one of the extremes, believing either anything at all, or nothing at all.

So there’s your choice. If you insist that your child grow up in your faith, whether religious or political, you will either succeed or fail. If you succeed, you will have produced yet another gullible clod, who will be very useful not only to true believers but also to an even more numerous company, to hypocrites and charlatans who want either some votes or some donations, or both. If you fail, you will have rebellion in the family and

little joy of your life. If you ever do learn to question and doubt, it will be in the bitterness of your last days, when the tardy awakening of your mind will bring not wonder but fear, not comfort but pain, and the only virtue that never keeps company with peace—remorse. And your children will be polite, but they will not rise up to call you blessed.

If you don't like either of those alternatives, then try to come up with another. And when that proves impossible, try to imagine some sort of family life in which there is nothing to challenge, for the simple reason that the parents are themselves always challenging their own beliefs, always wondering, always testing. The children of that sort of family would even be able to challenge the challenges fostered by the schools, for they would have learned that the authority that comes from reason seems to have a natural and legitimate license, unlike the "authorities" of school or of family, both of which have to be claimed and fought over by those who want them. An unseemly and disquieting business, not unlike the self-seeking scramble for the "authority" of public office, which inspires—even in young people, and perhaps especially in young people—not reverence but contempt, and thus cynicism.

Here is some ancient lore from Lao Tzu, who had obviously the secret of true prophecy, which is nothing more arcane than the ability to distinguish between particulars and principles: "The best of all rulers is but a shadowy presence to his subjects. Next comes the ruler they love and praise; next comes the one they fear and obey; next comes the one with whom they take liberties." And, of the first and best, it is also said: "Hesitant, he does not utter words lightly. When his task is accomplished and his work done, the people all say, 'It happened to us naturally.'"

The school people make an excellent example of the Fourth Ruler, which is what makes *Ferris Beuler's Day Off* at once a delightful romp and a real lesson in morality, unlike preachments. Like all Fourth Rulers, the schoolers seem actually to have dedicated themselves to uttering all their words lightly, espousing now this cause, now that, and sponsoring the value of the month and cultural relativism at the same time.

The parents who worry about the authority of the family end up, if they succeed, as Third Rulers, who will, as they should, lose their

authority just as soon as the children are able to find jobs and compete with the Japanese. There are some clever politicians among us who have it in common with rock stars and other sorts of celebrities that they become, for a while, the Second Rulers. Oh how we love them, but when they are gone, how little they turn out to have made us better than we were.

If the First Ruler is a shadowy presence, it is because he is sitting quietly in a private place, passing through the fire of questioning and doubt, asking himself whether he should believe what he believes, considering the difference between what can be known and what can only be supposed, and wondering how best to bring his subjects into that condition which he has found, that is, into the fire. He knows that it will hurt them, but he knows too that it will cleanse them. And he never lets them know that he broods on it night and day.

Dust on Teachers' Shelves

But polls also show that most teachers object to the concept of morality education on philosophical or practical grounds; many fear that such programs will stir up controversy in classrooms where diverse student bodies already cause plenty of headaches. Even districts that have printed values curricula and issued teaching materials *at great expense* find that such items often gather dust on teachers' shelves. (Our italics)

SOMETIMES, let's be fair about it, the schoolteachers show lots of good sense. And, even more to admired than rubies in these days of hemorrhoid commercials and worse, an uncommonly delicate restraint. It takes, well, nothing less than old-fashioned gentility to cover up printed values curricula and teaching materials with nothing more foul than dust. They may not want to *teach* the distinguishing of the better from the worse, but they can do it.

The passage above is from the *Wall Street Journal*. It is more moaning and groaning about the whole values teaching business, dedicated mostly to the apparent reluctance of teachers, on whom Bennett is depending in his drug war, to get involved in the hassle. It's hard to blame them. It may even be that the morality mess has driven

them in the direction of the right conclusion, to wit, that the moral behavior of one person may be none of another person's business, and, even more important and interesting, that the moral behavior of the citizens is none of a government worker's *goddamned* business. We do suspect that if those curricula and teaching materials were designed to teach the children what is legal and what is not legal, the teachers would use them. And that would be exactly appropriate work for an agent of the government that makes and enforces the law. So we begin this brief consideration of a tangled and repulsive topic by letting the schoolteachers off the hook.

It's the people who *make* those values curricula and teaching materials who deserve the hook. They *are* the great expense at which such stuff is made. They are also astoundingly arrogant folk who imagine that they can answer questions that have been asked and mulled over for the whole history of humanity, and astonishingly ignorant folk who suppose that the questions answered long ago still need to be answered. Arrogant and ignorant people in the service of a government are not only a great expense, but also one of the four things that the earth can not bear—a servant when he rideth.

Cultural trivia question: Name the other three. Dare of the Month: Name the other three in public. Doubledare of the Month: Name the other three in a public school and stir up controversy where diverse student bodies already cause plenty of headaches. It's an interesting thought, and maybe a clue.

That little bit of perspicacious wisdom is not going to be found in the values curricula and teaching materials, of course, but we do wonder—if it were, and if it were typical of those materials, would teachers decide to take them off the shelf? After all, what we have here is a little poem: "For three things the earth doth tremble, and for four which it can not bear..." The schools do make use of poetry. They even encourage children to write it. What does it mean to say, absurdly, it seems, that the earth trembles, and that it can not *bear* something? Nonsense. And yet, and yet. Are there some things that people can be, and *are*, and with which children are not unacquainted, that just seem so perverse and unnatural that no less a power than Earth herself might at least be dreamed of as fearing their very existence? Who

are those people, and who are others like them. How do people get to be that way? How come they can't see for themselves how they look to the rest of us? Is there hope of cure? If you know one of them, is there anything you can do? And if there is, *should* you do it?

What a great discussion this would make for children, and for their teacher as well, provided only that the teacher is not a servant who rideth. The ordinary public school, to say nothing of the countless other agencies of social engineering to which all children are subjects, would provide students with examples beyond counting of exactly what is meant by a servant who rideth, a person who is supposed to serve but has gotten aboard a high horse and come to behave like one who was born to command and control.

And what is to be learned? Who knows? Maybe, for some, nothing, or, to be more accurate, nothing just now. For others, maybe a hint, a suggestion as to how not to live, one kind of person, at least, not to become. But the far more important question is this: What harm can come of such a deliberation? Will some be deceived or misled? Will some suppose themselves commanded or preached to by an unknown poet who has been dead for thousands of years and who has no intention at all of doing a number on a bunch of helpless children who need indoctrination? Will some ethnic or religious way of life be held up to ridicule? Will the guidance counselor and the assistant principal, who just happen to be servants on horseback, file a grievance and sue in the courts for an act of discrimination against the officious and overbearing?

None of that will happen. But here is something that will happen. The children, all the children, the rich and the poor, the quick and the slow, the black and the brown and the white, all of them will recognize that servant on horseback, and learn, not at all to their surprise but much to their edification, that he has been around for a long, long time, and that some ideas about right and wrong are permanent and universal, and that they, little children, already knew that. A great lesson.

But lessons like that will never be taught in the schools, because teachers, now back on the hook, have left something else on the shelves.

With those “materials” that deserve it, they have rejected the good books, which don’t.

Postscript on the Poem

The poem is from a good book, but it is one of those books that schools can not use. The school people imagine that its use would violate the separation of church and state and bring them into controversy. This book, of course, is claimed by at least three very large and powerful clubs of believers, Christians, Jews, and Moslems, of whom none will be displeased by the superstitious belief of the educationists that at least one of those crowds must own the idea that a snooty clerk is an abomination, and that to consider it would be to further the missionary effort of a religion.

That is a quaint notion, a modern version of belief in sympathetic magic. But it was certainly not a Christian or a Moslem who wrote that poem, and it may not even have been a Jew. Scholars allow the possibility of a Philistine, whose “church” is now out of business, and our own guess would be a Babylonian not unacquainted with bureaucrats. He, however, was not the first to notice the strange susceptibility of certain persons to degeneration of character as a result of promotion.

For some it seems impossible, but it is a good idea to give some thought to the difference between doctrine and wisdom. Out of a neurotic and finicky fastidiousness, the people who rig up such hokum as values curricula always end up not only throwing out all that we can find of wisdom in the books of thoughtfulness beyond counting, but also substituting for it tendentious and dogmatic teaching materials made up of doctrine—the new and trendy doctrine, of course, but still doctrine.

So, if you knew the other three things for which earth trembles, you would know that the poem can never show up in school. Here they are: A fool when he is filled with food; an odious woman when she is married; a handmaid that is heir to her mistress.

All of that comes from the thirtieth chapter of Proverbs, but even if it had come from John Dewey, who probably knew all that but would never admit it in public, the doctrine of our modern schoolchurch would not want the laity

even to have heard of it. Such ideas can only be one more occasion of sin.

Brief Notes

Central Control announces that the First Annual Underground Grammarian Picnic will take place, rain or shine, on the first Saturday of August, 1990. All who attend should feel free to bring children, friends, students, and even dogs. Also, something to eat and drink. Details and maps will be sent out with the next two issues, both of which, we do hope, will appear long before the day of the picnic. The UG phone number is 609-589-6477.

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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Timor Mortis in Academe

When Silber says back to basics, he means basics: We should begin by teaching children something that, in earlier times, reality taught them through the deaths of siblings and elders: “They are going to die.” Sound education depends on this contact with reality.

GEORGE WILL

*He alone is wise, who has pondered the end
of all things,
which is also the beginning of all things.*

THOMAS AQUINAS

JOHN SILBER is known to many in the school game as Long John Silber, which tells us more about the reading skills of school people than it does about Silber, who is as unlike that one-legged piratical dissembler as a man can be. Whatever else he may be, John Silber is neither a hypocrite nor a con-artist. He speaks plain. He is neither politic nor cautious, and not even the slightest bit obtuse. And he is, as you see, able to astound and not fearful of giving offense. It follows, therefore, that he will fail to win nomination as Democratic candidate for the governorship of Massachusetts, which he now seeks, and will have to remain president of Boston University. Too bad.

It has long been the intent of the educationists to make of government schooling a “preparation for life.” We have often argued the case for education as preparation against life, a strong defense against the random and the irrational, a rudder against the swirling currents of desires and passions. And Silber is in good company—the very best, in fact—when he holds, as we are sure he does, that the best education is a preparation for death. It follows, therefore, that he will fail to win large numbers of adherents among the school people, who fear death more than dishonor and asbestos more than asininity, and who share, and ardently promulgate, the currently popular belief that there is nothing more important than to live as long as possible, and that the “goodness” of the good life can be measured in birthdays. Too bad.

The school people, of course, did have a brief fling with what they called Death Education. Some of you may remember it. It had something to do with field trips to nursing home where the kiddies could relate to those about to die, although probably not right then and there. (A really good Facilitator of Field Experience, however, would have been able to arrange that, wouldn't you think?) The whole business was, in general, a warm-up exercise by which the children, in theory, might be strengthened against the impending death of relatives and instructed as to proper behavior at funerals. It had nothing

whatsoever to do with what Silber has in mind. It was just trivial.

Death is not trivial. It is mysterious and solemn. Mystery and solemnity, like wonder and awe, reverence and joy, and even respect and honor, are things not provided by curricular guidelines, and it is their absence that makes of schooling the empty experience that it usually is. On the other hand, their presence would make of schooling strong stuff as full of pain as of pleasure. If you want truly to educate a child, you could do no better than to take Silber's words and go from there. But you had better be brave. Such an education is not for cowards.

The divinities of Olympus, unlike the deities of later cults, never pronounced themselves lovers of humanity. They had their favorites, of course, but in general they seem to have looked on us as pests and miscreants. When Zeus finally made Demeter return to her proper work of bringing forth nourishment, it was not to feed us, but only to provide us with what was needed to make the sacrifices, and to send up nourishing smoke to the gods.

And when we look at the lives of those divinities, we can easily divine the cause of their dislike, which might better be called resentment. The immortals led very dull and empty lives. They ate and drank, they cared for their little patches, they slept around, they carried on vendettas, they stirred up wars among humans, and they thought up elegantly literary punishments for mortals who displeased them. When they had done all those things, they did them again. And again. Forever. Thus it is that, although we think to tell “stories” of the immortals, they do not truly live stories, as we can. Theirs is a life that only a thoughtless clod would want to live. It has no shape, no theme; it has no promise of growth or change, either for better or for worse. If the gods despise us, it is out of envy. We can do the one thing they can not do. We can tell, and live, our own stories, beginning, middle, and end. Our lives have frames. Within those frames, we can construct forms. A human life can mean something. It can also mean nothing. The gods are what they are, they can live forever, but they can not *become*.

Education can be usefully thought of as the art of becoming, which is also the art of story-telling in the heart. What they say now, we don't know,

but the Anglicans used to pray for protection against “battle, murder, and sudden death” for the simple and good reason that such misfortunes can ruin a good story, and will surely prevent some tale told by an idiot from ever turning into a good story. This is the question that life puts to every child, and that any sane education should put as well: Who will tell your tale?

The tale of the idiot is not truly told by the idiot. It is told by the world, by accident, by nature and nurture, the usurpers out there, and by passion and desire, the usurpers within. When pushed from the left, the idiot veers right; from the right, left. The idiot lives as everyone must live, in obedience to some principles. In the idiot’s case, though, these principles are invisible and involuntary, and unaccountably enforced, as though by the gods. The idiot is right, but not justified, as he thinks, when he claims to be a helpless victim of circumstances, more to be pitied than censured. That very claim is a fetter, which, in other circumstances, he might have stricken off. Those “other circumstances” are the whole of true education.

Such seems to be the nature of us all, that had we world enough and time without the certainty of death, we would see no reason to get ourselves together and tell our tales like sane and responsible authors, mindful of harmony and balance, of the permanent marriage of deed and consequence, of justice and injustice, and of that great and insoluble puzzle of freedom and necessity. It is only because Death will surely close the book that we scribble in it at all.

Well, we will try to be as blunt as Silber. *This* is the question put to every child: Just how long do you suppose you have to tell a sensible and serious tale? Have you perhaps been conned by your teachers into believing that if only you will watch your cholesterol and discover which brand of bran to eat you might, you just might, live forever? This is not a rehearsal, you know; even right here and now in the third grade, this *is* your life, your one and only real life. And it is passing, disappearing forever right before your innocent little eyes. So what do you plan to do about it, and when will you get at it?

Not long ago—you all remember—some little children playing in the schoolyard were shot to death by an idiot, an idiot like any other idiot, except in particularly hideous detail, living by

principles engendered in him by desires and passions, a helpless victim, no doubt, of nature and nurture. Thereafter, the survivors of the firestorm were assailed by crews of counselors, “professionals” of something or other. We wonder—oh how we do wonder—exactly what counsel those professional counselors gave.

We won’t denigrate them; we are sure they did the best they could, offering something beyond better luck in heaven, on the one hand, and life is a bitch on the other. But we suspect that no counselor advised the children to give some thought to the shaping of their lives, lest death take them when they have him least in mind. We might all be surprised at how seriously children, even little ones, would take that.

Death is not a “problem” to be “solved”. That is what makes it so fascinating, and makes it also a central consideration in all of our literature. Every hero from Gilgamesh to Batman fights with death, and with death’s other forms—dissolution and nothingness, meaninglessness and darkness. Every thinker thinks of the end, and wonders about the beginning. And all the same is true of every single child, still fresh from the cradle endlessly rocking. Just ask one.

And that is as it should be, for the contemplation of death, which will never solve the problem of death, is the natural source of all of our attempts to put into our lives some meaning some theme, even some plot. All seriousness taunts death.

To prepare for a life of productive work, as much comfort as possible, and the ability to compete with the Japanese for the sake of the gross national product, may indeed be a useful and important undertaking, but it is not serious. And from where death watches, it is just silly. As to that, the children obviously agree with death. It does them credit.

But the school people are so afraid of considering death that they won’t even let Jack kill the giant, and never will they do anything serious in school. There ought to be a law: On every teacher’s desk, a skull. On every blackboard, an inscription, “Maybe Tomorrow.” Let students and teachers behold and consider how they should live this day.

And the NEA would go to court to have the examined life declared unconstitutional.

The Uses of Audacity

I participated in this game. I taught high school Algebra II, a required course. In my class was a chubby loudmouth brunette named Debbie, who had the audacity to ask what she could use all this for. Because this was an excellent question, I shut her up with some sarcastic remark that got the class to laugh at her. Otherwise I'd have had to say that almost all of them would be better served by a course in critical thinking, so they could learn how to learn without schools. The school was not about to offer this course. I quit after one semester.

SOMETIMES we simply cannot decide which might better be driven into the sea with stings and nettles—the silly people who operate the schools, or the silly snobs who think themselves far better than the silly people who run the schools.

What you see above is from an op-ed piece in the *Orange County Register* and the author is a certain John Dentinger, identified only as “a writer in Los Angeles.” What he says here, he says only in passing, and to lend support to his thesis, to wit, that school is a form of child labor profitable only to the proprietors, and that most of the young would do better in real jobs. That is an argument worth making, but Dentinger makes it without noticing his own reference to learning without the schools, as though schooling and education were the same. And he threw away, out of pure and simple self-indulgence, an opportunity to subvert schooling with a jolt of education, pure and undefiled.

We have read and heard the words of countless promoters of “critical thinking.” We have never found one who could make, or who had even *thought* of making, any clear and useful distinction between that “critical thinking,” so nifty to pronounce and so elegantly technical to propose, and just plain ordinary thinking. Nor do we expect such a distinction to come forth in time, since it is preposterous by definition.

There is, of course, a clear and useful distinction to be made between thinking and the vast multitudes of other acts that can be committed invisibly in the mind, such as fantasizing and self-esteeming, for instance, but this is a distinction of which neither the school people nor their lofty

betters seem capable. Well, perhaps they haven't yet decided whether to make such a distinction through critical thinking or through mere thinking and, in any case, they would probably not want to make it at all, for it would blow away like fog and smoke all their darling devices.

So take a long look at Dentinger's class and the chubby loudmouth brunette, who is asking not for information, which anyone can look up, nor for indoctrination, which comes with the territory in school, not for stroking and buttering-up, the snake-oil of our age, but for an answer, dammit, or, at least for what Debbie would call an answer.

Sweet are the uses of audacity. She may indeed be asking to provoke, and as a challenge, and without even suspecting that she truly does want an answer, or even that there is one, but all of that can be said of every true and important question. The important question is the one that no one can answer, as we can answer questions about the principal exports of Brazil and the capitals of the states. The important question calls not for that sort of answer, but for thoughtful consideration. It calls for that thinking of which Debbie's teacher seems to have detected no trace in, of all things, the study of algebra! It is very interesting that a man who is taking the taxpayers' money for teaching algebra seems not to have considered a question more important than Debbie's—Why on earth would anybody teach this stuff to a whole bunch of children who will never again algebrate once they leave this place?

Here we can see the difference between the answering of a question and thoughtful consideration of a question. There surely is an answer, and an especially appropriate one in the case of a teacher who hasn't done any serious thinking about his work: Those who teach it can get some money from the taxpayers. While he would have provided only an accidental occasion of education in doing it, he would have won our praise for candor and good citizenship by the truth: “You have to take this course, Debbie, since it is required by law; and I am teaching it in order to get paid for putting you through your term of enforced labor for the state. So shut up and mind your QED's.” In his case, so far as we can tell, that is not only the truth, rare enough, but also the whole truth, rarer than rubies. And we would praise him for it, although, to be sure, we would not pay him to teach our daughters. We would

prefer that he remained a writer in Los Angeles. But that truth, we suspect, Debbie knew already. Her question means: I know what's going on here, but I can't understand why such an unaccountable system should exist at all. Can you tell me, Mr. Teacher?

It's a fine question, and a fair one. It is also a question that Debbie would probably not have had to ask at all had her teacher asked it first of himself and considered it. Had he done that, he would have been teaching in a way that would have led Debbie out of darkness and into light.

A specter is haunting the schools. The dead hand of problem-solving rules them. They can find no other justification for the study of algebra than the hope that some of the students will be able to solve problems in algebra. Sometimes they do go a little further and claim that such studies as algebra are pushups for the mind, exercises for the strengthening of something or other. But even this slightly better idea they trivialize by supposing no other possible power of the mind than the same old problem-solving. Well, of course, Debbie, we know that you will never again in your life have to solve problems in algebra, but you will have to be an "educated" consumer who can figure out unit prices in the supermarket, won't you, to say nothing of balancing your checkbook?

Such an argument is, of course, too puny, even for the school people, to preserve algebra as the "required course" that Dentinger would like to see ousted by critical thinking, as though Debbie would find that much easier than the thinking required by algebra. It is also, typically, an argument from particulars rather than principles, and any Debbie of our time could demolish it by whipping out her calculator. Here we can see the great mystery at the heart of the school mess. What is it with these people, that they scramble like demented trash-pickers after every newly noticed particular and never see the principles of which every particular is no more than an instance? AIDS comes along, and they need new programs, with funding. Cholesterol comes along, an old grandmother dying in a nursing home comes along, oat bran comes along, cocaine comes along, abortion, toxic waste, the fractional latchkey family... Particulars are always infinite. And they all need programs, and funding. But in principle, such things are never new; they are all local appearances of the permanent and universal.

Algebra is a world of principle, and a dramatic revelation of the power of principle. In fact, algebra, and even algebra alone, could provide a true and sufficient education out of which to understand the worth of living by principle in a life beset by a never-ending succession of nasty particulars, and at the same time provident of joy and goodness and thoughtfulness.

Listen, Debbie, and be comforted. There is nothing wrong with your impatience and chagrin. Your very objection proves that you can see, if only from a great distance, an important truth. Algebra is a strange study indeed. It doesn't even exist, in the sense most ordinary to that word. There is no algebra out there; you will not find it under a rock or washed up on the beach. Never will a little child bring it to you, asking what it is. Algebra isn't even as "real" as a poem or a song, which can be picked up in the world even though the world could never make it.

Algebra has its dwelling place only in a mind. We can not even say, as we can of our power of language, that algebra exists in the mind. It can live only in a mind that creates it anew for itself. That's why I can't really *teach* you algebra, and why I am, as you seem to have figured out, a bit of a fraud. But I can no more create something in your mind than I can take off a few of your chubby pounds by watching my calories. I can show you some tricks, but *you* must do the teaching. And, no matter what they tell you in the slippery world of pliable convictions and values, you will have it in your mind that you can know something—truly know it, and not just believe it, or be informed of it—and maybe, since that is so, you can truly know something else. It's interesting to wonder what such a something else might be.

I think you should learn algebra, because I wish you well, as a teacher, even a bit of a fraud teacher, should, and not because I want you to solve algebra problems. You will find that algebra shows you some truths. The first great truth is that there can be something real, and complete, and harmonious, and even, in some strange way, absolutely perfect right in your own mind, and made by you alone. You will see that you have a wonderful freedom not mentioned in the Bill of Rights, the freedom to decide what your mind will contain and how it will work. You don't have to copy the rest of the world.

Algebra tells sad truths too. Where there is no balance, there is no truth. What is equal is equal, and between the equal and the unequal there is no conference table, no convenient compromise. In this terrible law there is a hinting question for all of life. Are there other things like that?

Algebra will show you the inexorable, the endless and permanent chain of consequence, the dark thread of necessity that brought you to a wrong answer because of a tiny little mistake back in the second line. I know how unfair that seems, and how scary that what seems unfair is nevertheless justice. Is life like that too, as all of nature seems to be? How then shall we live? What are the laws of the algebra of our living, and where do they exist, where created? Who can show us how to learn them?

No prudent teacher would ever say such things to Debbie, of course; she is probably not ready to listen. It takes some serious living to see the truth hidden in algebra. But if he doesn't know such things, and teach as though he knew them, he does well to leave at the end of the semester and go to Los Angeles.

Brief Notes

EVERY three and a half years—which must have something to do with sunspots or the Van Allen Belt—we get a little spate of letters about *i.e.* vs. *e.g.* It is perfectly correct that, as every writer points out, our little message about subscription costs uses *i.e.* where it ought to use *e.g.* Here's why: When we first made that distinction between persons and not persons, we really meant *only* libraries, so we should not have said “of any sort”. Libraries are difficult. They nag for things we don't have, *e.g.*, invoices, and identification numbers, and whole years of back issues. They make us crazy. You will notice that we have cut the knot and come out right.

WE have had a plea or two for “more on language.” What can we say? For many years we did piece after piece on the language of fools and liars, but—and to us this was very important—we confined our attention to fools and liars who took money from the taxpayers for the work of their mind, and who demonstrated in their language that they had no minds to speak of. It was shooting fish in a barrel, of course, but the fish were of the piranha persuasion, so we never felt

guilty of poor sportsmanship. Furthermore, we never hurt a single one of them; “no creature smarts so little as a fool,” and no one in educationism has ever been fired for mendacity or inanity.

Little by little, we stopped doing such pieces. Once a principle has been discovered, what is the point of citing yet another particular? One set of buck-passing passives from the pen of a person who would rather not commit himself to the obvious lest he be held accountable for his own words is, except in its particulars, no different from another set. If we can learn something from the one, how many more do we need? Once we came to see that the splitting of the infinitive was a matter, like the celibacy of the clergy, not of doctrine but of discipline, we never bothered with another split infinitive. What for?

We know that many of the scrutinies of language were fun, but we're not sure that it was good, clean fun. It had in it more the spirit of cleverness than the hope of betterment. And little by little we wandered into other—but not unrelated—considerations. We have to walk the path that is newly opened by each issue. By now, we have wandered far indeed. For almost seven years now we have been saying, to any who asked, that, while we are not sure what this sheet is about, we are sure that it will not find much favor with people who call themselves “language buffs.”

YES, we are fooling around with another typeface. Old timers may recognize this one as Frederic Goudy's Italian Old Style, which we used occasionally in the days of hand-set type. This is a recreation in electrons, the work of Judy Sutcliffe and Richard Beatty, our indispensable artists. Those of you who print by computer should know of them. We'll tell you all for the asking. Just write.

The Great Picnic

THE PICNIC will take place on Saturday, August 4. Here is the map. We are counting on you to find your own way either to Philadelphia or Wilmington. At the gate to the park, a charming young lady will ask you for \$4.00, which pays for one car and its driver; each passenger costs another fifty cents. Dogs are not charged, but they

do have to be equipped with leashes. An excellent idea.

To reach the “approximate picnic site,” climb the stone wall to the north of the parking lot and head off downhill. There are some tables and some benches near a grove of trees down there, but not many. If you hate grass stains, bring along some blankets or other things to sit on. Bring along also children and other relatives, friends and colleagues, and anyone else who suits you.

The staff of TUG will be there by about 9:00 AM, messing about. If you get lost, you can call the park office at 302-571-3545. If you just know that you are going to get lost, or if you have anything else to ask about, you can call TUG at 609-589-6477.

The area shown by the map probably has America’s highest concentration per square mile of wonderful and beautiful places to visit. If you come to the picnic because you just happen to be touring about anyway, you would do well to plan to spend some time in this map. Longwood Gardens alone has kept our staff continuously refreshed and invigorated for more than twenty-six years. Go there.



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The Larger Order

I attended the Principals’ Institute the morning Louise Cowan was lecturing on “Prometheus Bound” by Aeschylus. Prometheus, I was reminded, stole fire and gave it to human beings to bring them enlightenment. This violated Zeus’ plan for the world. So he had Prometheus tied to a rock where birds of prey could attack him and all manner of evil befall him short of death. It seemed impossibly cruel punishment for a god as gifted and generous as Prometheus.

But Cowan defended Zeus as the protector of the larger order, the one who “envisions the whole of the thing.” Prometheus, she observed, was guilty of too much pride.

“Prometheus,” Cowan instructed, bringing home her point, “is about the tragic implications of knowledge, the danger in education. Teachers pull children from their familial safe harbor and thrust them into civilization. Prometheus, the teacher, can go too far and suffer persecution as a result.”

Lee Cullum, in the *Dallas Times Herald*

THIS must be given to the credit of the educationists of our time: unlike politicians and preachers, who always parrot a party line, unlike the athletes and other entertainers who can speak only of themselves, these educationists can actually and often astound us. It is very refreshing, entertaining and instructive as well, and we give them thanks. To be sure, as Emerson said of such folk, we “know not where to begin to set them right,” but that doesn’t matter. We are not appointed to be their teachers.

Louise Cowan, however, is appointed to be their teacher. It seems to be a pretty good job, too. One hundred and thirty-two school principals of Dallas were given a thousand bucks each to pay their expenses at a two-week seminar on World Classics and Effective Leadership, which was, and we quote, “masterminded by Donald and Louise Cowan,” who, with a little help from their friends, made up no less than “seven Ph.D.s from the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture” in an “effort (that) seeks to strengthen public education where it counts: in the head offices of the schools.” That comes to \$18,851 per Ph.D., but quality education is worth it.

In any case, it is not at all a bad idea to have some educationists read some good books. Nevertheless, Louise Cowan seems to have felt some need to excuse the enterprise by an appeal to pragmatism. “It seems so impractical,” she says “to couch leadership in the classics,” but, calling on “the larger context,” she explains all. “By analogy, literature can be applied to life.” Wow.

What it means to couch something in the classics, we can’t figure out. “Cushion” might have been a better word. One principal, for instance, obviously feeling no pain at all, came away from his studies having learned from the

wily Odysseus that there are “different leadership styles for different situations.” He somehow discovered that the cagey devisor of stratagems “started with an aggressive leadership style, but he learned to survey the situation before rushing into it.” In other words, he “learned” what he already “knew,” for just such bland and empty generalizations take up whole units of instruction in the schools of school administration.* A better teacher of course, might have asked such a student to speculate as to the appropriateness of the laid-back leadership of Odysseus while his men were cutting up the cattle, or as to whether his impious failure to bury Elpenor comes from aggressiveness or from situation-surveying, but no one did, we guess.

* Even in such a vapid understanding, however, there is the hint of opening into something deeper. Around here we also have a man who “teaches” those old books, whatever that might mean. He has, over the years, come up with the crackpot but provocative notion that in the *Odyssey*, and in the story of Eros and Psyche as well, there are hidden some clues as to what was learned by those who passed through the mysteries of Eleusis. All the extraordinary benefits conferred by that initiation we know from many sources, including Socrates and his friends, and they could easily and usefully be put forth as the proper goals of a true and universal education of the best sort, an education that could underlie the schooling and training of any time and place no matter what its particulars. But of the details, the “lessons,” of the initiation we know nothing. The initiates really kept the secrets, as they were always instructed.

Our friend suspects that Apuleius, like the author of the *Odyssey*, was telling tales out of school, albeit with the best of motives. At the heart of both stories we find a series of trials and passages. Both heroes triumph in rebirth—Odysseus washed ashore naked on the blessed isle where Arete (!) is queen, and Psyche in nothing less than apotheosis—the divine life of the soul. But they walk different paths, and it is instructive and mystifying at the same time to consider the differences. Why is it, for instance, that when Psyche gives up and falls asleep, the ants come to her aid, and when Odysseus gives up (his leadership?) and falls asleep, his men open the bag of Aeolus? We brood on it in the still watches of the night. That is the real stuff of education—whatever requires a lifetime of brooding, and reveals itself but slowly, slowly.

The leadership of Louise Cowan seems to be of the situation-surveying sort. After all, what have we got here? A bunch of school principals. So what do they want to hear? Well, of course. They want to hear about themselves, the protectors of that larger order who can “envision the whole thing,” which is a snazzier way of seeing the big picture. In every school in the world, the administrators see themselves as the doers of some grander and nobler work than the teachers can ever understand. It’s something they need to keep going, for they have all failed as teachers, and more and more of them, these days, have never even tried to be teachers.

Something bad will always happen if you try to teach for the students rather than for the books. There is all the difference in the world between reading a book because it is supposed to be good for you, and reading a book because it is good. If you “teach” history, for instance, with the intention of bringing about this or that political belief in the students, you will either have to lie or arrange that your “history” be written not by historians but by flacks, which is to say that you will have to invent “social studies.” Since it is hard to find the flack who can do a convincing job of writing *Prometheus Bound*, the one out of which you can bring school superintendents to “identify with Zeus,” you’ll just have to do your own lying. Sad necessity, to be sure, but quality education has *many* sorts of costs.

The lie promulgated by Louise Cowan, of course, may come not from intentional mendacity but from credulousness, from seeing only what her beliefs make her want to see. Credulousness always makes you blind. When she casts Prometheus as the brilliant but intemperate young teacher and Zeus as the wise principal and “protector of the larger order,” it may well be out of simple illiteracy, a blindness to what is said.

A full day would have been well spent at that Principals’ institute in brooding on what Prometheus says just after the departure of Ocean: “After all, who apportioned the privileges among these latter-day Gods? Who but I?” (II 625-7)

This is no vain boast. Prometheus was before Zeus was. He was one of the Titans, the children of the Mother and Sky, and, if you want some sort of metaphor, either the Marx or the Jefferson of the revolution by which Zeus and his junta came to power. Or, if you want some sort of truth, the

ordering intelligence that must exist *before* there can be administration of any sort.

That larger order which Zeus protects was not brought about by him, but by Prometheus. This is one of the most intriguing suggestions of all mythologies. They always tell tales of some third or fourth generation divinity who imagines that he is *the* creator, the ruler, the principal of principals. Zeus is the Greek counterpart of Marduk among the Babylonians, the Hindu Indra, and the Hebrew Jahweh. These “rulers of heaven” all have similar attributes. They are all given to legislation and codification, the devising of the mandatory and the forbidden. They all engender bureaucracies. And, most to the point right here, they all claim an absolute monopoly on the services—how could even the principals of Dallas have missed this?—of the two characters who play with Prometheus the very first scene of the drama. Their names are Power and Violence. They are the Police and the Army. Here, after all, is one truthful way of defining government: Government is whatever agency can both claim and exercise a total monopoly of power and violence.

We wonder this: Is there today in Dallas a school principal who paid attention to the reading and who meditates thus? All these rules and standards, all these guidelines, all these procedures and preordained processes by which I must principal this school, are they not all minute particles sifted down upon me out of the great, towering cloud of The Laws, gathered up always over all that I do or can do? Where lies their *true* justification; who gave them their license? Are they all rationalizations after the fact by that very power that makes them, or is there in them, behind them, perhaps even in spite of them, some prior power, some permanent rightness by which judgment itself is to be judged? Or might it even be that Zeus and Prometheus are both in the right, and both in the wrong at the same time and that there is, there *must* be if the world is to mean anything at all, some ultimate reconciliation, some unimaginable oneness hidden behind this seemingly absolute twoness? What does Prometheus* hint at when he says of Zeus, “He’ll

* We are using the Scully and Herrington translation from Oxford University Press. If that was used in Dallas, then the seven Ph.D.s decided to skip the introductory essays so that the principals could relate to

come to me, as a friend, I’ll love my friend again”? And why does he tell Io, another famous (and supposed) victim of the ways of God, “He’s bringing you back to your senses, stroking you with a hand you no longer fear”? There is some puzzle here that will not go away, some seed of a strange discontent with the way things are in the world. And, in the grip of this discontent, which looks as though it will last for a very long time, what shall I do, how shall I live, how shall I teach the teachers and the children?

(If you discover such a one, sell all that you have and move to that district in which your children can go to a good school. And don’t forget to send us your change of address, so that we may follow you there.)

It has to be because she has not meditated thus that Louise Cowan, in a startling new meaning of the word, can talk about the “tragic implications of knowledge, the danger in education.” It is perhaps inconvenient for some that children should be changed by education, but to call it tragic is just silly. And it is equally silly to speak of the “familial safe harbor,” but schoolteachers do like that sort of thing. It makes them feel like brave scouts, leading the oppressed kiddies forth into the real world, the larger order, from which their families have stubbornly and wrongheadedly sought to shelter them. They even like to imagine, as Louise Cowan surely does, probably without even knowing it, that it is nothing less than “civilization” into which they release the little savages from that safe harbor. Oh yes, they suffer for it, but that’s what a teacher is for, noble martyrdom. Even when they call Zeus the one who can see the big picture, they like to think of themselves as Prometheans, but Prometheans who are not, as Louise Cowan says of Prometheus,

the whole thing without any interference from people who had already given the work some thought, and who might not be sufficiently attuned to the needs of the poor or the learning disabled. Thus they missed this from Herrington, an elitist, no doubt: “Perhaps the greatest reward of a reading of the *Prometheus Bound* in any century since the fall of Rome has been that the reader has been forced by it to construct for himself some response to the play’s fearsome thesis on humanity, God, and government. So, where the ancient poem now abandons him, only one-third of the way through its course, an eternally modern poem begins: his own.”

“guilty of pride.” They’re too humble for that, and besides, they just *love* children.

It is not at all a bad idea to think of the work of Prometheus as education, but in doing that one should think of what Prometheus in fact did. He did *not* bring the children out of the familial safe harbor. He brought the children, and the families, *and* the tribes, *and* the nations, and, indeed, the whole of humanity, out of beastness, that condition which we can only suppose must have been ours at some strange, ancient time when we were. . . well... not yet “us.”

And even that is not quite right, because lacking the imagined work of Prometheus there are no such ideas as those of children, family, tribe, or nation. We can say that the zebras live in herds and the wolves in packs, but the zebras and the wolves don’t know that. They don’t care, either. In short, it was not art, or contrivance, or language, or anything else unique to humanity that Prometheus invented for us—it was *us* that he invented. And the “danger” in education is not a social or political inconvenience, not that we will come to disagree with our families or churches and get our teachers into the trouble that they say they are glad to suffer, but that we will come to know ourselves for what we are, and that knowing it will make us sad. *That* danger is real, so real that it almost justifies the lie in which we say that education is responsible social behavior and competing with the Japanese. But not quite, because lacking education in the Promethean sense, we lack humanity, we fail to be what we should be.

There is something in the educationistic mind, some deep failure of understanding, that corrupts and disables even the most elementary and accessible method by which even the smallest children can be led toward a true education, the inner liberation which Prometheus described thus: “I made them masters of their own thought.” We often imagine that intelligence, like the power of our telescopes or the efficacy of our drugs, increases by evolution from generation to generation. We can easily believe that the dullest clod among us is nevertheless much smarter than the smartest of our ancient and primitive ancestors. This is pure bunk, but it makes us feel good. In the myth of Prometheus, but certainly not in that alone, we can see a), that our not-so-ancient ancestors in Greece were not thus deluded,

and b), that the Greeks were not only aware that the power of ordering intelligence must come even before there can be such things as human institutions, but that its arrival is a tantalizing puzzle, a mystery. The story of Prometheus, in local versions beyond counting, is old. Very old. It is tempting to think it must be exactly as old as humanity itself for in that same moment in which there *is* intelligence, the mind’s power to consider its own working, the seed of the tale of Prometheus is planted and growing. And the mechanism by which the mind considers its own working is a very simple one and available to all human beings in all times and places, even to teachers. It is story-telling, the putting into order of the seemingly accidental.

That most elementary and accessible method by which even the smallest child can be led toward a true education, and by anyone at all, is the telling of stories. Just the telling. No commentary. The comment comes later, inwardly, again and again, and the comment on the comment. It takes a long time, but it can start in infancy.

The older the stories, the better. This is not simply *because* they are old, but because their age has inoculated them against tendentiousness, against the corruption of partisan political or social designing. Or, in the case of the old stories which did have their own political or social designs, as *Prometheus Bound* in fact did, time will have defanged them, leaving us free to consider their permanent themes rather than their programs. The wording of the Athenian law which condemned collusion in the establishment of tyranny is not a burning issue among us, nor, for that matter, was it more than a passing allusion in the play, but it is there. Now, it doesn’t matter. It does not loom up to overwhelm the permanent theme of the work, which is also to say that it does not bring about bad story-telling.

But even the old and good story can be defanged in another way by treating it, especially to an audience of poor readers, as though it were a social or political device. So it is, for instance, that the *Antigone* has recently been rediscovered as a feminist tract, long lying in wait for its hour to come.

And now comes Louise Cowan, blithely undoing the healing work of time, to emasculate *Prometheus Bound* into a bureaucratic eunuch blathering banalities about leadership style. “Zeus,

the principal, must hold everything in his compass and see justice and be the guardian of truth.” Yes, she did say that. It is an exact and direct quotation. Ah, to be a guardian of truth.*

Children, unlike the principals of Dallas, have no trouble in seeing that a story with an agenda is a bad one. Oh, I see, even a little child can say, This story is supposed to keep me from using drugs, and that one means to persuade me to worry a whole lot about some people that I’ve never even met. And here’s another one that wants to stop me from littering. Yech. And the “yech” is not necessarily a rejection of the thesis, but simply a natural recognition of a feeble attempt at trickery, which has the further fault of ruining what could have been a good story.

A good story is a good story because it is true, not because it is factual. Two tremendous errors are possible. The first is to dismiss the story of Prometheus because there never were any gods, and no one ever did what Prometheus is said to have done. This is the same as saying that neither Rodion Raskolnikov nor Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm ever existed. It just doesn’t matter. The second error is even worse; it is to insist that Prometheus did exist, and that *that* is why we must believe the story. It is interesting to speculate on what would happen to the faith of the standard street Christian should Jesus, somehow, be proved never to have existed. We can’t imagine. But it is certain that no one who ponders the truth in the Jesus story would suddenly suppose that that truth had disappeared or been proven false. The truth in such stories is shown by all human experience. The Prometheus story, when it becomes a story, must of course be said to have happened, but in truth, it is always happening, and must always have happened where there was humanity. Everything in it we reënact, both externally as a society and internally as individuals. We *are* Prometheus, and Zeus, and Power and Violence too, not only by turns, but

* Zeus’s “great plan for the world” was simply this: that humanity should eat its meat raw. It was Prometheus who offered Zeus a choice as to which of two hides full of pieces of a sacrificial offering he wanted. Zeus chose the one that contained only fat and thigh bones, which would be thereafter his only portions. Zeus was mad as hell, so he forbade man fire. Now *that* sounds a bit more like leadership style in a principal holding everything in his compass.

often at once, twisting ourselves into the sad and suffering creatures that we all see everywhere. And if there is that in the story that this one or that one has not yet done, just wait a bit. And this is the power of all good stories: they all tell the truth about all of us. And this is why it is best to tell the old, old stories over and over again: it takes time, sometimes a very long time, and serious attention to experience, to see that the old, old stories are true.

There is nothing elitist about *Prometheus Bound*, nothing that needs excusing for its “impracticality,” as Louise Cowan has found desirable, lest a reporter describe her institute as irrelevant ivory towerism. But, if you mistakenly think that children will be lost in Æschylus—they won’t—the same powers can be found in countless other good stories. We are all Hansel and Gretel lost in the dark wood, and we are all their parents, fearful that we will not be able to nourish—in either sense of that word—our children. We are all afraid of the dark wood, but we must go through it. And we all must go from here and leave our children behind to find their own lives, which dwell not back there with us—nature’s birds have wisely eaten the path of crumbs—but ahead, in the perilous and unknown. Brave and intelligent children, steadfast and honorable, will make the journey; others will end up transformed into mere matter. That is another way of understanding the nature and purpose of education; it is equipment for the journey that ends in the rule of your own kingdom. The training and indoctrination of ordinary schooling equip you only to live comfortably under the rule of someone or something else.

There is a strange, intriguing epilogue to the story of Prometheus. Contemplating it gives you that interesting suspicion that arises from the contemplation of any good story, the suspicion that you are *on* to something, but what is it? Anyone in the school business would do well to study and ponder both the hinted ultimate reconciliation of Zeus and Prometheus and the role taken in that story by the closest thing to be found in Greek mythology to a patron saint of teachers, Cheiron the centaur.†

† This tale has been retold, and much elaborated, by John Updike in a novel called *The Centaur*. The main character is a high school teacher of science, a

Many of the brightest and best were sent off in infancy, to be reared and taught by Cheiron. Asclapius, Herakles, and Achilles were probably the best known. Ordinarily we would expect to know from the careers of students what a certain teacher taught them, but Cheiron's graduates have so many diverse accomplishments that we can assign him no place in any imaginable curriculum, which ought to remind us that the very idea of "curriculum" is a social or political contrivance, not truly related to education, and a convenient (for some) fiction. Cheiron, apparently, taught his students either everything, or whatever it is that forms a firm foundation for anything at all. He started them young. Achilles was still an infant when Cheiron took him down to the shore to wave goodbye as Jason and his crew set off in the *Argo* for Cholchis at the uttermost end of the Black Sea, on which journey, by the way, they spotted Zeus's vulture on its daily voyage to lunch on the liver of Prometheus. Was that a "lesson"? What did it teach? Is there something here that we don't understand? Exactly how and when does education, as opposed to all the other stuff, start? Can it be that all these "early childhood education" boosters are right in principle, and wrong only in particular, intending to provide rudimentary instruction and socialization but omitting edification and exaltation?

Cheiron was eventually wounded, quite accidentally, by a poisoned arrow. Herakles, his student, fired it, and with good reason, at someone else. But it shot right through the intended victim and hit Cheiron in the left ankle, or foot, or leg, depending on which version we read. (Around here, we hold with ankle, because it was with another arrow from the same quiver that Paris was able to murder Achilles.)

The poison was blood from the left side of the body of the Gorgon, and, to a mortal, certain to cause hideous pain and, eventually, death. But Cheiron was not mortal, and was doomed, therefore, to live forever in agony. Many a schoolteacher will know what that means, and will

particularly appropriate choice. He is doomed. What does that mean? It is not a great novel, but it does give you the suspicion that you may be on to something. All schoolteachers should read it and wonder about it. They should have near at hand, however, some good reference books. Lots of allusions.

know, too, that it is always the result of an accident, or, perhaps, of a long series of little accidents. The interesting question is this: Is there some *rightness* in this? Is this perhaps the fit and natural destiny of Teacher—to be surpassed, or in some other way injured, but also, in time, put out of misery, by Student? And what would *that* mean?

(And what would we understand, if anything, if we were to read "Teacher" and "Student" above as "teacherness" and "studentness," supposing qualities that, like the masks of the drama, might be part of any human person? Would we then be able to test the proposition through the evidence of experience?)

As we can tell from a few lines in *Prometheus Bound*, and from the few fragments of *Prometheus Unbound* that exist, Zeus, unlike the all-wise principals guarding the truth in Dallas, will eventually see that he was wrong, and look for some way to rehabilitate Prometheus, and at the same time reestablish his own reputation for justice. (Robert Graves, with whom it is perilous to quarrel, supposes that all this is not truly a myth, but a fable invented by Æschylus. He may be right, but it may also be that every myth was once a fable invented by some poet. What else is a poet for?)

It's not all that simple, however. The "omnipotent" Zeus can not change the principles, the rules of the game. He too is bound by Law. He can release Prometheus only if someone already immortal will set the balance straight by giving up his immortality. Herakles, of course, very sorry for what he has done, knows the right candidate. So the deal is made, and Cheiron goes down to black death. Prometheus returns among the Immortals, and the universe, set spinning awry by wrongness, returns to the harmony and stability that is natural to it. This is always the end of tragedy, which is, really, the happier form of drama, setting the world back on her tracks.

If Æschylus did invent this ending, he did it because he was able to see truth. This is, after all, also the ending of the other great myths. The ascension of Œdipus in *Colonus* and the forgiving of Orestes are other reminders of a natural yearning for reunion and reconciliation, and they lift and comfort the heart even as they frighten it.

Education, if it ever arises, grows out of those things that have been long stored up in the heart.

Some things rot in the heart, and others blossom. Leadership guidelines are one thing, and the gift of fire is another.

Depending on Johnny

After a short interval he came back and told us to go in. When we went inside we found Socrates just released from his chains, and Xanthippe—you know her!—sitting by him with the little boy on her knee. As soon as Xanthippe saw us she broke out into the sort of remark that you would expect from a woman; Oh, Socrates, this is the last time that you and your friends will be able to talk together!

Socrates looked at Crito. Crito, he said, someone had better take her home.

Then his mother and his brothers came and stood outside and sent one in to summon him. The crowd was seated around him, and they said to him: See, your mother and your brothers are outside looking for you. He answered and said to them: Who is my mother and who are my brothers? And looking about at those who were sitting in a circle around him, he said: Here is my mother, here are my brothers; whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.

JESUS and Socrates are the biggest of big guns, but it is not simply for that reason that I have started our with a blast from each. It is rather because both of them have been mentioned in letters from readers as supporters of the idea that the family is, and ought to be, not only primary but perhaps even sovereign in the education of the young. Try as you will, you have little hope of interpreting the words of Socrates in such a way as to make of them a justification of home-schooling. When you put them together with the words of the personified “laws and Constitution of Athens” in the *Crito* you get instead, much to my discomfort and probably to yours, a justification of the very system of government education that so many of us find indefensible: “Have you any complaint against the laws which deal with children’s upbringing and education, such as you had yourself? Are you not grateful to those of us

laws which were instituted for this end, for requiring your father to give you a cultural and physical education?” To this, Socrates assents at once.

The words of Jesus are, of course, much interpreted. They are in fact interpreted to death by the common churchly reading which takes them to mean not at all a rejection of conventional family bonds but merely a sweet and charitable enlargement of them, oh so typical of gentle Jesus, meek and mild. Now it may be, of course, that Jesus never said such a thing, but it also may be that he did. And if he did, he may have meant just exactly what he said. It is certainly worth thinking about, especially for those who imagine that to profess Christianity is all it takes to be licensed as a fit guide of one’s own children.

In both scenes we see something shocking. In part, they suggest that apple pie and mom are trivial considerations. Even worse in these days, they are likely to outrage feminists and anti-feminists at the same time, not simply because of that bit about just what you would expect from a woman, but because of the easy dismissal of the role of a mother. Neither of our sages looks good in these little stories, and that we are able to see that more clearly now than we might have fifty years ago, is much to the credit of the feminist party.

Here you see a little picture. It is familiar, very familiar. Cut it out and put it in your wallet, or in a locket, as your gender may suggest. Get into your time machine and travel into the distant past of our kind. Go among the painters of the caves. Visit the tamers of horses on the wide steppes. Travel with the herders of the reindeer and the caribou. Seek out the gatherers of nuts and berries in the rain forests and on the high veldt. Don’t be afraid of them. They will recognize you, in spite of your outlandish speech and look, as one of them, except in detail. You will show this little picture wherever you go, and all who see it will say, “Oh, yes, we have such a picture too. It is...” And then they will fill in the blanks. Than this picture of a mother and her child, there is no more widespread and universal icon.

Now take another such journey, but this time carry with a used Christmas card, on it a crèche, with mother and child, and the gentle beasts, and, a little bit back and off to one side, patient Joseph. Once again the mother and child will be

recognized everywhere. And often the beasts as well. “Yes, yes,” they will say, “the animals are also hers.” Often they will ask, however, “But who is that up there with the mother?” And you will have to explain.

Uh, well, you will have to say, That’s sort of the father, not exactly the father, of course, but the one who is, how shall I say, sort of playing the role of the father, but, of course only that part of the role that comes after the fact of the fathering, you know. Or something like that. You know what I mean, don’t you? But they won’t.*

We are all so savvy that we all know about fathers and fathering. At the same time we are all so naive that we suppose that we know who our fathers are. But we don’t. All we have as to the identity of our fathers is testimony, and testimony of a not disinterested parry. The whole business of fathers and fathering is not self-evident; it has to be discovered. That, rather than the taming of fire or the coming of writing, may have been the most momentous discovery in the whole history of our species, the discovery that the women didn’t bring forth babies all by themselves, but that some man was needed. It may also have been the most direful day in our history, the beginning of war, of property, of government, of bureaucracy, and other plagues and spites beyond counting.

As to all that, of course, your guess is as good as mine, which is, like all guesses, no good at all. But as to something else, we need not guess. It could only have been after that discovery that the idea of “family” came into our lives. Before that, there could only have been something like “the people,” which is, in fact, what many so-called primitive tribes frequently call themselves, and the people could have consisted only of the men and the women and the children *of* the women. The children were *theirs* and everybody knew it, for they had seen them all born, this one to her, and that one to her. For all we know, marriage may indeed have been instituted by God, but it sure looks like something that was instituted by

* A naughty time-traveler would take the mother-and-child picture and show it to Jesus. His comments would be interesting to hear. The Jews very hot against all hints of female divinity, but so strong is that notion that the Christians have—not wisely, of course, but only inadvertently, and making a virtue of necessity—preserved the worship of the goddess.

men, by those men who had just discovered that without them there would be no babies, and who, with their newfound power, levered themselves into positions of authority and ownership.

Our troubles in education are not only not new, they are very, very old. Here is Joseph Campbell describing the beginning of those troubles:

For it is now perfectly clear that before the violent entry of the late Bronze and early Iron Age nomadic Aryan cattle-herders from the north and Semitic sheep-and-goat-herders from the south into the old cult sites of the ancient world, there had prevailed in that world an essentially organic, vegetal, non-heroic view of the nature and necessities of life that was completely repugnant to those lion hearts for whom not the patient toil of earth but the battle spear and its plunder were the source of both wealth and joy. In the older mother myths and rites the light and darker aspects of the mixed thing that is life had been honored equally and together, whereas in the later, male-oriented, patriarchal myths, all that is good and noble was attributed to the new, heroic master gods, leaving to the native nature powers the character only of darkness—to which, also, a negative moral judgment now was added. For, as a great body of evidence shows, the social as well as mythic orders of the two contrasting ways of life were opposed. Where the goddess had been venerated as the giver and supporter of life as well as consumer of the dead, women as her representatives had been accorded a paramount position in society as well as in cult. Such an order of female-dominated custom is termed the order of Mother Right. And opposed to such, without quarter, is the order of Patriarchy, with an ardor of righteous eloquence and a fury of fire and sword.†

† This is from *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology*, pp. 21-22. Campbell is thinking about Jane Ellen Harrison’s *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, which first appeared in 1902. She was one of the first to consider the immense consequences of the relatively modern notion that God is a *he*, rather than a *she*.

Whatever views we may have of the “nature and necessities of life” must lend their flavor to all of our institutions. Now it seems to me that all of our schooling is founded on some very trivial ideas of the nature and necessities of life. I think of it all in these terms:

I imagine a young mother with a brand new baby, a new person in the world. Since I have recently reread *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, all in the line of duty, I think of Mary, the young mother of Francie Nolan. If you have forgotten her, this would be a good time to mark your place and do your own rereading. Read especially those few pages in which Mary asks her mother how she, being young and ignorant, can hope to bring up a child to be thoughtful and good, wise and kind. She is frightened. It seems to her a tremendous undertaking—as in fact it is. And who is she to dare it such a mighty thing? Where will she turn for help? She knows, although she does not say this aloud, that “she cannot depend on Johnny.” Johnny is her husband, also young and ignorant, but charming. Sometimes he has work, and sometimes he doesn’t. But the center of gravity in his life is not here beside the cradle; it is out there, out in the man’s idea of the world, in the man’s idea of the nature and necessities of life. The camaraderie of men, the competitions and displays, his local and personal analogues of “the battle spear and its plunder.” He loves her, yes, and the child too, but, like Byron’s young and charming hero, his love is “of his life a thing apart.” In the long run, he will fail her and her child.

She is not even sure what it is that she wants for her child, but I am certain that she would recoil in astonishment and dismay should you say to her: Look, don’t worry about it. Hand her over to me, once she is housebroken, of course. I am a professional. I understand these things. I will see to it that little Francie can be made into an effective and productive member of society eminently capable of balancing a checkbook, writing a decent letter of application, avoiding dread venereal diseases, and competing with the Japanese.

That is not what she means. None of that, absolutely none is what she has in mind. To all such things she will surely grant worth, of course. Who wouldn’t? But they are not first things; they are second things, and third, and even twentieth

things, but they do not come first. And, in the life-to-be of this new person, she, the mother, stands first, stands right there and right now at the very gate into life, and no one else will ever be able to do what must be done now.

The scene is evocative. We see three women, maiden, matron and crone. They are carrying secrets down from generation to generation. The grandmother is also “ignorant,” that is, incapable of competing with the Japanese, which is to say, from the male point of view, utterly mistaken about the nature and necessities of life. But the men are wrong. She knows. And here, in secret, she tells. And what she tells, by the way, is well worth reading and pondering for anyone who wants to know how to educate children, although it will be little welcome to those who imagine that they have some sort of “right” to bring their own children, their “property,” presumably, into whatever set of beliefs they have adopted for themselves.

This is the continual cry of those who claim—and they are not mistaken—that there is something “anti-family” in the ethos of the government schools: “After all, whose children are they?” It is a fair question, but the burden of answer is to be laid just as heavily on the parents as on the schools. It is out of contrivance, not out of nature that we claim nothing less than possession of other human beings, and, at the same time, the “right” to form their innermost selves and thus the whole path of their lives according to our wishes. Such an enterprise, whether on the part of parents, schools or any other agent, is simply outrageous. Hideous.

Francie’s grandmother advises nothing even close to it. If there is to be some “master” of the little girl’s education, it is not this or that agent with this or that agenda, but nothing less than the whole of what might be thought of as the ancestral lore of our species, collected, mixed up, often obscure, often contradictory, and sometimes no doubt—but who knows when?—just plain wrong. Every sort of thing, from Santa Claus to *The Merchant of Venice*, from the tooth fairy to “the Bible that the Protestants read.” This last, she whispers.

Mary protests. She herself is not able to understand such things. She happens not to believe in elves or Santa Claus, or even perhaps, in God. No matter. It’s not for herself that she

must do this. She is not to make a little copy of herself. It is for the child, so that she may lay up treasures against future need, so that, when belief departs, she may be strong without it, and so that she will have a great store of words, a library of what has been said, to remember and ponder.

There are two very interesting things about this prescription for an education, which is founded on the complete works of Shakespeare and that “protestant bible.” Here is one of them: No one with a program of his own could fill it. If you decide to skip *Romeo and Juliet* because it is filthy, and *The Merchant of Venice* because it is anti-Semitic, or if you think that the butchering of Agag will encourage the use of violence and that God’s answer to Job might be left for later, then what you are teaching is yourself. You are providing yourself with your own version of the plunder of the spear. Ha, I am in charge, you say. I am strong enough, and wise enough, to do it, so I’ll do it. And fear not, you will have your reward when those whom you think to have educated will take up spears of their own as you have in fact advised them. They will, at the very least, remember you with distaste. Is it not usually so? From Sophocles to Freud, have they not all told us that that precious family, with its supposed values, is the breeding ground of our disorders and discontents? Was *your* childhood a joy and a treasure, or were you oppressed by somebody else’s mind and power?

And here is the other interesting thing. The education here proposed is available to all human beings in all times and places. In the caves of the painters there were stories to tell, songs to sing, poems and legends and fables. It could not have been otherwise. Where there is art there is art. And where there is a mother there is someone to use it, to sing and recite and tell tales.

I have brooded on all this off and on for a long time now, and I have occasionally talked about it in the context of some of the courses that I teach. Some of my students suggested that I read a book called *All I Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. I asked what sort of thing was in it. They said, Oh, you know, put things back where they belong, and stuff like that. I see that I must indeed read that book. I expect it to help me to understand and describe some useful way of understanding the whole business of education, training, and schooling. I am thinking that there

might be something that I want to call First Lore, the heart of true education. And it does, it must, include such things as the idea that it is good to put things where they belong. This seems ridiculously elementary, but it points to some great principles. It is a bow to order and harmony. And something like that is true of many apparently elementary things, the idea of taking turns, for instance, and the suspicion that whatever we do matters in some way. And, of the First Lore, this must be true: Our mothers are best situated to teach it, and the way of teaching it must be by model, not by precept, in the tales that they tell and in the tales which their very lives become as they tell them.

There must be also a Second Lore, and second in two senses. It comes later, and it is also of lesser importance. If you miss the First Lore, than you must miss whatever fullness is possible to humans. But if you miss the Second Lore of color-mixing you can still do well with the Second Lore of fish-catching. Or even, for that matter, with the Second Lore of competing with those pesky Japanese. And just as the First Lore seems natural to the relationship between mother and child, the Second seems natural to the men and the children. We seem to have mixed them up, and moved the first behind the second, or, worse yet, decided to dispense with the first because we can’t all agree as to every detail of its content, and because we want what we can never in this life have—certainty. Like the man that St. Paul condemns—just as you would expect!—the First Lore is “uncertain in all its ways,” full of ambiguities and contradictions and even mysteries, just like Shakespeare and the Protestant Bible.

Here is the decisive difference between Mary Nolan and our Early Educationists. She is ignorant, and she knows that she is ignorant. But the ignorant educationists imagine that they are wise, and out of their wisdom they have decided to depend on Johnny. The Big Johnny. The concocter of guidelines, the shaman of learning disabilities and cognitive styles, the perennial propounder of bold innovative thrusts in the affective domain. So Francie Nolan is left to reflect, some day, on the double nature and dangerous power of ambition and pride, while our children are persuaded, long before the evidence is in, to think themselves estimable, and

encouraged to go forth and beat somebody at something.

Francie is the proverbial “rich child who sits in a poor mother’s lap.” She is showered with treasures, treasures which are in fact her rightful inheritance, stored up for her by thoughtful ancestors beyond counting, by legions of mothers, and by the best of fathers, the artists and the poets who listened to mothers. Johnny’s orphans get to play the Lifeboat Game, and to read, if they can learn to read, *The Cat in the Hat*.

The best word for this Lost Generation for which there is much wringing of hands these days, is not “lost,” but “dispossessed.” They have been cheated of what is rightfully theirs, and by Big Johnny, who doesn’t even want it for himself, who, thinking himself wiser, despises it, and gives them, instead of wealth, baubles and trinkets poisoned with sociological and political stratagems for the modification of attitudes and behavior. And so our children, even the most “successful” of our children, perhaps *especially* the most successful of our children, are likely to be poor indeed, very poor. And *their* children... Well, look on the bright side. Maybe few of us will live long enough to see the children of their children.

For all of this there is no remedy to be hoped for in “family values,” which are almost always adopted from the teachings of some Johnny, and which, whatever their particular cultic beliefs, justify themselves with “the ardor of righteous eloquence and the fury of fire and sword.” Even mothers in such families have been co-opted; “the light and darker aspects of the mixed thing that is life,” they do not honor equally and together. They do not see life as a mixed thing, not at all. Like the fathers, they do not think that they are ignorant. They make no distinction between belief and knowledge. In this, except for the details of belief such families are exactly like the government schools, only smaller. The master gods of each claim monopolies on all that is good and noble, and hand down the tablets.

Here is a poet, Karl Shapiro: “To make a child in your own image is a capital crime, for your image is not worth repeating. The child knows this, and you know it. Consequently you hate each other.” I think it is a very wise father indeed, but only a perfectly normal mother, who asks: “Is my image worth repeating? Could there be a better?”

The Shape of Things to Come

THIS seems to be true: We all say, well, next year things will loosen up a bit. There’ll be more time for this and that. Why doesn’t it ever work our that way? Why is every year fuller and busier than the last? How long can this go on?

Around here, even in the heat of summer, there is an autumnal air. We are certainly not drawing wagons into a circle, but we do seem to be gathering in. The end of our fourteenth year is coming, and with it, the inevitable promotion of the associate CM to full. With tenure. He already shows the signs of a man who is practicing surly retirement. Our Central Control is still holding on, but there must be some loosening of her grip invisible to us, for many of our readers still persist in moving without telling her.

We are making some changes. We do intend to keep publishing and perishing at the same time, but we have to make it a bit easier. Here is what we intend.

The first obvious change, which really makes possible all the desirable changes, is what you have in your hand. You have seen that this issue is twice the size of the usual issue. We will publish henceforth only four times a year, but each issue will contain sixteen pages. Here are the benefits for us:

One of the greatest difficulties of the preparation of copy has always been our severe restriction of space. It has always been necessary to be brief, so brief, in fact, that we have usually felt some incompleteness in everything. We want to spread out a bit, as you can already see. This allows us to be a little less elliptical, and to provide concrete elaboration where we would otherwise have had to let a generalization float. And, since we now have at most only seven years before the ACM becomes utterly useless, we want to be as thorough as possible. It may be, of course, that the extra space will bring us to blather and windiness, but our readers are such that they will soon enough call us to order should that happen. The extra pages also provide—although this may seem a trifle to some—more room for the occasional picture or small decoration. We do have the notion that typographical folderol is a good thing rather than a bad one. And it is sometimes, at least, evocative. We can’t defend it, but there it is. Maybe it has something to do with

beauty, and we do like—doesn't everybody?—a handsome page here and there in any issue.

In this format, we will perhaps be able to do, at least occasionally, something that we have often wanted to do—to quote from some of your letters and say something about what you say. We get, we do believe, some of the most thoughtful and provocative Letters to the Editor in the whole world of publishing. Alas, we answer them rarely, but for a strange reason. When we get a good letter, we fall to brooding on it. We put it aside, then take it up and read it again, and brood some more. Such a letter seems to require not an answer but an essay. And sometimes, although far from often enough, the letters do generate essays, and the essays appear in these pages. But we would like to be more direct than that.

Recently, for example, we have had some excellent letters on the piece called “The Ordeal by Fire.” At least one of them was almost angry, but still, and this is what makes our readers so great, reasoned and sober. But all who wrote were at least a bit upset at what they construed, and rightly, as an attack on “family values.” Insofar as those family values are generally understood, it was an attack. And we meant it. But it is not a simple matter, and we certainly did not mean to grant approval to the educationists and *their* attack on family values. We'll do our own attacking, thank you. It is one of the great guiding principles of this sheet that when you see two gangs of rabble quarreling either in the streets or in the polling booths, you see two packs of fools, ignorant armies clashing by night. We intend to join neither. Accordingly, we have assigned the ACM to write, *in propria persona*, a commentary on that attack and on those letters. You have probably already read it. You'll probably write more letters.

This is a sad dilemma. On anything worth thinking about, there is always more to say. And, on that, still more. Trying to understand is very different from trying to find out some fact, it just has no end. It is in order to keep that in mind that we have here the habit of rereading fairly regularly some book of Freud. Unlike the Freudians, Freud always knew that he hadn't yet gotten it quite right. Each book arises out of something that failed to satisfy him in the previous book. And his last book, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, is, really, another first book.

We love Freud for that, and our love has nothing to do either with rejecting his views or embracing them. As to that, he is probably, like all the rest of us, all wrong about everything. We can live with that.

In *The Mansion*, V. K. Ratliff says “The poor sons of bitches, they do the best they can.” He's talking about Snopses, of course, but we take it personally. We'd like to see it done in crossstitch and hanging on the wall in the head office.

Four issues a year are much more likely to be sent out on time, and we are always depressed at being late. This way, there will be half as many envelopes to stuff and lick. Half as many labels to peel and stick. And, not to overlooked in these days, half as many envelopes to buy, and half as much postage to pay. We intend never to raise the price of THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN, and we won't, but we can't get the printer and the postal people to cooperate in this excellent scheme. So we will simply outwit them.

September and October renewal notices will go out with the Autumn issue, November and December with Winter, February and March with Spring, April and May with Summer. The issue that would have been May 1990, XIV:3, is, alas, forever lost. And that was the one with the answers!

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 Roman System

You and I, all of us, Curia and hierarchy alike, are the nearly perfect products of our Roman system. We never fought it. We marched with it every step of the way. We cauterized our emotions, hardened our hearts, made ourselves eunuchs for the love of God . . . and somewhere along the way, very early I think, we lost the simple art of loving. We bind heavy and insupportable burdens on men's backs and we ourselves lift no finger to ease them! So, the people turn away; not to strange gods, as we think; not to orgies and self-indulgence . . . but in search of simplicities which we, the custodians, censors, and governors, have obscured from them. If an honest, open, brave man sat in the chair of Peter and thought first, last and always of the people, there might be a chance. There just might be.

Morris West, *Lazarus*

WE have not read the novel from which that passage is taken, but, thanks to one Kit Reed, an astute reviewer for the *Inquirer* of Philadelphia, we may not have to. He has quoted the passage above, in which a very senior cleric speaks to a sick pope, and we suspect that he has shown us the very heart of the book, which is also the heart of other things.

We look now at Aeneas. He was a great hero of the Trojan war, and did quite well thereafter too, even though he fought on the losing side. We watch him making his escape, wading through the surf out to where his ships and men are waiting. He carries his crippled old father piggyback, and leads his young son by the hand. An exemplary father. His wife did not make it out of the burning city, where the victorious Greeks are gathering up booty and women and setting fire to whatever they can't use.

Aeneas's father, Anchises, once, in his youth, got to spend a whole night with the saucy and sexy goddess, Aphrodite. (It was *her* idea—he was just lucky.) But he made a big mistake the next morning when the dawn was breaking. He got a good look at the goddess, and, as punishment for that blasphemous glimpse, his legs were blasted; he never walked again. But he was never heard to complain.

The little boy is named Ascanius. Well, that's *one* of his names. He has another name, and a very interesting one. Most of what we have heard about Aeneas was told to us long ago by the Roman poet Virgil. Virgil was seriously patriotic. Piously patriotic, in fact. For him, the massive, sprawling Roman Empire was the greatest and noblest creation of the mind of man. It was the ultimate work of the fine art of civilization. And so it is that Virgil chooses to call the little boy Julius. He intends to make some connection between Aeneas's son Ascanius and the mighty Julius Caesar. It was Caesar who did what most men love to see done. He put lots of smaller things together into one big and complicated thing.

Aeneas, of course, isn't the bringer of civilization. There was civilization long before there was a Rome. But he is, or at least he can conveniently stand for, the bringer of the latest, and perhaps the last possible, refinement of civilization—the utterly inaccessible and unaddressable inhuman monster of the Roman System; the all-encompassing bureaucracy of laws and rules and guidelines and channels and standard operating procedures. Where this monster dwells, there are no persons, only its agents. But where it rules, and perhaps *only* where it rules, there can be *pax* of the *romana* kind, but that is the best it can do.

Now Virgil's poem begins with a famous first line. Lots of people who know no other Latin at all know this line: *Arma virumque cano*: I sing of arms and the man. Old time poets, even when they were writing very slowly and carefully, liked to fancy themselves as bards, strumming away on their lyres and singing along. And of what did they sing, who sang the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and other such beyond counting? They all seem to have sung of the very same things. Arms and a man. They were not ashamed. But it is an admission that tells us something that we really do

know but seldom think about: that if “civilization” is to exist at all, and if a great bureaucracy is to arise and to prevail, then some strong person has to bring it about by force.

Aeneas will go aboard and sail off into adventure after adventure. Anchises will die on the trip, but Aeneas will visit his shade in the Underworld, where he will be given his license, as it were, assured that he is the chosen creator of the Great System that Rome will become. In all of his trials and travels, he will be helped by Aphrodite, his dotting mother. And, thanks to her, he will establish once and for all not simply the Great System of the Empire of Rome, amazing as that is, but the Great System of Men and Their Ways.

He is, after all, a Real Man. He is strong and combative. He loves winning. He has bigger and better things to do than to hang around with Dido. She is only a queen, only a woman. He has a great destiny to fulfill. He has to become the progenitor of customs inspectors and license bureau clerks. He must father forth not only Big Government, with its concentric circles beyond counting of flunkies and subflunkies with titles, but also Big Religion, with its popes and its pardoners, with its decretals and bulls, with its endless labyrinths of discipline and doctrine, and its power. And, at only one tiny remove, he must engender also Big Business, Big Bread and Circuses, and, most to the point for us, Big School. And, taken all together, those things add up to something more than mere civilization: Big Civilization, maybe, or certainly modern civilization as we have come to know and love it. And we do love it. We really do.

The word “civilization” means something like “citified,” gathered together in one place, usually one protected place, and observing, whether you like it or not, one set of rules. On balance, most of us like it a lot. It will prevent us, once in a while, from doing unto others what we would really like to do, but it also prevents others from doing unto us what they would like to do. It’s a pretty fair deal, and so fair indeed that we can not imagine life without it as anything except ugly and brief, as Hobbes did in a line that is now so famous that we assume its truth without asking for evidence, which is lucky for Hobbes, since there isn’t any. Just like Hobbes, we always presume that those few specimens of miserable savages who can still be found must be well-preserved examples of what we all once were. It never occurs to us that

those people are just as old as we, and that what we see in them now could for all we know be the result not of some failure to learn civilization but of millennia of degeneration, by which we might also explain our own present condition. And we do believe those After the Holocaust movies in which hairy motorcyclists become barons and kings. Mostly, therefore, we are very glad that civilization came to be, and that modern soft and liberal civilization came along to discover the absence of God and thus to take away the power of those nasty kings who claimed their licenses from God. We are not at all ungrateful to the arms and the strong men who brought civilization upon us.

Most thoughtful people could probably imagine the coming of civilization for themselves and not be too far wrong. There is, however, an interesting old Babylonian myth that tells the story.

Did the Babylonians believe this story? That is, did they suppose that its events “really happened,” and that they are what you would have seen had you been there? I don’t know. I suspect that some did, and I doubt that it did them any harm. But I’m pretty sure that many of them, and probably even the priests who wrote them down for us, didn’t actually believe them as fundamentalists would believe. There is believing and there is believing. It is one thing to believe that these and these events really took place, and quite another to believe that if they didn’t take place, well, maybe they should have—it would explain a lot.

Lots of myths and stories are like that. To see some point in *Macbeth*, and to take some thought because of it, we are not at all required to believe that there really was a Macbeth and that he really did exactly these things. The story is not an account of the fact. It is, or is trying to be, an account of the truth. It is for us to judge about truth, and whatever judgment you make about the truth in *Macbeth* is your business. You can change it later. Good. That’s also your business, and you have all that it takes to do that business—an always growing human mind, and the always growing experience of living in the world and thinking about it.

Now, with the same tools, make some judgment of the truth of an old, old story:

In the beginning, the Mother of us all was alone. She created a mate for herself and set about the business of having a family. She gave birth to a

litter of gods and goddesses, and they in turn did likewise, until at last they became a great swarm. Unlike our Mother, who, having populated Heaven, was content simply with *being*, these divinities decided that they preferred *doing*.

So they started doing things. They held fancy-dress parties and drank. They married, and slept around, too. They quarreled, and, not content with quarreling over personal things, they created yet other things to quarrel over. In some versions, they created us and the Earth on which we live, and at once fell to quarreling over who should be in charge of what and why. At last, things got so bad that our Mother, far, far away and little concerned with the doings of the busy, busy gods and goddesses, noticed that there was lots of noise. The harmony of the eternal was being disturbed.

She consulted with her mate, and he, a quiet, thoughtful chap, agreed that she was right. Those noisy and unruly godlets would have to go. The whole idea had been a mistake. But they had by now developed so much power of their own that it might be not so easy to send them back into the oblivion from which they had come. So our Mother created a monster, a fabulous beast powerful enough to do away with the whole disorderly rabble.

Word of this spread quickly among the divinities. Whole banqueting tables fell silent. Picnics were called off. The gods and goddesses were terrified, for they knew that their Mother, of whom they hardly ever thought, was very powerful, and that her tame monster probably could destroy them all. In their despair, they turned to the one member of their numerous company who seemed, maybe, just powerful enough to save them. His name was Marduk, and he was big and strong. Furthermore, he was heavily armed. He carried, always, even at parties and in other godly activities, numerous weapons, and he knew how to use them. The divinities went to see him and asked him to take the field all alone against the Mother's avenging beast.

He thought about it for a while. Well, he said, I think I could lick that serpent, of course, but I'm not so sure that it would be worth my while. After all, look at the way we live. Is that really worth saving? We are, you must confess, exactly the disorderly rabble that our Mother thinks us. So how about this? Let's make a deal right here and

now. I will go forth and slay the beast, but only if you will all swear to me, in the holiest of holy vows, that when I come back we will get ourselves in order. And that means that there has to be one boss and only one boss—me. When the threat is past, you will all obey me, and I will be in charge of everything. Some of my powers, of course, I will hand out here and there among you, but everything that you do will be finally subject to my approval. I'm going to make some rules, and you are going to follow them. Anyone who disobeys will soon discover that he might have been more gently dealt with by that serpent. And this arrangement will last forever and ever. Amen. There's my deal. So how about it?

No one has to tell you how the story comes out. You know. Why do you know? Because Marduk's deal is a description of the way we live in this life. Sure, Marduk is here and there replaced, as in our case, by the laws and the constitution, as he was even in the Athens of Socrates. But even the laws and the constitution can survive only if there is some power standing behind them, a power that can and will defend them by force. Marduk, having been only one of numerous gods, becomes God. At the same time he invents civilization. He begins the Roman System, and every institution under whose shadow we all live. And it all depends on power.

Children would love this story. They already know about Marduk, but they, always looking over their shoulders for that invincible dragon, can not see in the usurper an arrogant bully who seizes the chance to tyrannize over a pack of scoundrels weaker than he. They must see him rather as the super-hero, the defender of the weak. They have to believe that the weak are right and the strong unjust. But alas, it is only the strongest of the strong who can save them, so that they also must believe in the rightness of strength itself. This is why it is vain to imagine that little boys can be brought to hate war and to put aside toy Uzis and ray guns. Comfortable middle-class Americans and their subsidized future-bright children in college can suppose themselves virtuous enemies of war by bumper-sticker, but Kurdish tribesmen and black South Africans know that their hope is in the strength to do violence and get away with it.

To whom was the tale of Marduk told when it was very young, if it ever was? The answer is probably, Everybody. It is unlikely that ordinary

citizens of Babylon checked out the tablets and brought them home to read. It is unlikely, in fact, that more than a small handful of specialists ever *read* it at all. It was surely told, as stories are told to this day in that part of the world, by tale-tellers in the streets. And they surely did what any good teller of tales will do—they made it better every time. More details, more dialogue, more gestures and tones of voice. No doubt, the teller who came up with a particularly gruesome description of the serpent held on to it, just as he would hold on, once he had perfected it, to the style of delivery and tone of voice by which Marduk is able to keep the others from stumbling on their best chance to alter the deal by pointing out that even without their concessions he would do better to fight the serpent, which was going to destroy *him* as well.

How could they have missed it? Were they stupid? Were they too frightened to think straight? Is Marduk taking advantage of them either because he is cunning, or because he really is better and braver than any of them and actually worthy to rule them? What interesting questions! What an interesting concept that is: *Worthy* to rule over others. Can we imagine some other set of the mind, something other than the Roman System, in which we would think it both preposterous and wicked that any person should rule over another?

Somewhere or other, Thoreau speculates as to the future of democracy. He sees in the history of humanity, a continuous progress out of tyranny and into freedom, each step taking us a little farther along the road. He sees, too, that the land in which he lives represents the best hope of freedom that the species has achieved so far. But he wonders why we should suppose that the progress stops here, and tries to imagine the greater freedom that may be nothing more than our natural destiny. It is a sweet dream. It may also be a pipe dream. Thoreau would not be delighted could he measure the freedom of an American today against his own. The Roman System is the most subtle of governments; it always looks benign.

Thoreau was surely thinking in terms familiar to us all. The present is better than the past. We know more. We are more decent and humane. We are moral. In our past, there are savages, brutal and stupid; and tyranny and oppression beyond anything we can know. The caveman and his club. The alpha brute of the Primal Horde. The Old

Man whose spear is not to be touched. The Emperors of the East. And so forth. By logic, then, we are required to suppose that our species had its beginning in the most absolute tyranny possible, supported by brute force.

Myths and legends like the story of Marduk are found everywhere. They all make the same point: Unless we are governed by power, we will behave badly. If we want “civilization,” that condition which permits us to grow in decency and humaneness, we must make the bargain with Marduk. In other words, “the price we pay for freedom,” which we ordinarily think of as a trifling inconvenience, something like Congress, perhaps, is in fact the surrender of freedom to force. And the story of Marduk reminds us that that’s the way it has to be, unless we want to run the risk of “reverting” to that dreadful “state of nature,” in which we will find ourselves dominated by a force that is far more visible than the force of the Roman System. The choice seems to be this: We can be dominated and comfortable in what we call civilization and call that “freedom,” or we can be dominated and uncomfortable in the state of nature. And this is why we have always been taught that comfort is the greatest of life’s blessings, and suffering the worst curse.

All the Marduk stories are told by Marduks. They all justify Marduk’s ways to man. We are inclined to nod when we hear them, even if we nod sadly. But there is another class of old stories that we are inclined to dismiss as obvious wish fulfillments and fairy tales. They are the stories of the Golden Age which once was, and which step by step fell into silver, into brass, and finally into the mud and muck in which we now squirm. Marduks, who also run the schools, don’t like such stories. Marduk after all, has no interest in restoring the universal peace and harmony which the unruly gods broke.

We have a faithful reader in Texas, a lady who was well known to us for her fruitcakes, but who will now be even better known for her acumen. After reading “Depending on Johnny,” she sent us a copy of *The Chalice and the Blade* by Riane Eisler, published by Harper & Row. We think you ought to read it.

Ashley Montagu says that is “the most important book since Darwin’s *Origin of Species*.” Well, time will tell, but, in truth, we

hope that he's right. Much good would come of such a success. The book is here and there a little shrill, and often a lot more "politically correct" than it has to be, but what it says in the main is worth serious consideration.

It arrived just a day or so after a letter in which another reader of "Depending on Johnny" had said that it had provided a useful idea about "the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy," and that worried us. We intended no such thing, but meant rather to speak not of the replacement of one -archy by another, but of the first coming of -archy into human life and culture. But this reader's way of understanding suggests one of the problems that modern feminism will soon have to settle. There will be no better ways of living brought either to men or to women by the replacement of one system of rank and rule with another. What Riane Eisler wants to imagine is a social order not based at all on the principle of domination. She does not think this a pipe dream, and even suspects that there was just such a social order in existence before the coming of the god-kings and the priests who gave us, and celebrated in writing, the order that we now think of as "natural."

Numerous recent archeological discoveries in Crete and in Old Europe have given her the idea and some substantiation for it. She might also have looked, and perhaps will look yet, to the very mythology which the god-kings and priests invented for their own ends. Like others who came after them, notably the apologists of the Roman System who only reluctantly admitted the Virgin Mary into their systems and failed utterly in their attempts to keep her in her place, *i.e.*, less than divine, the apologists of the god-king were unable to omit the universal peace and harmony of the Mother before there ever was a Marduk. And indeed, everywhere in the great body of lore called myth there are interesting shadows of the Mother cast on the self-assigned glory of the god-kings and their priests.

We hope to hear more from, and because of, Riane Eisler. We like feminism around here. But we think it is falling into dangerous inconsistencies. We would like to see feminists considering this sort of thing: When a mother gives her daughter to the schools, she sends her right into the heart of the Roman System. There she will take her proper, *official* place in a system

of rank and rule. She will be in "a grade," and will move "upward." Her marks will be "high" or "low" or in the "middle." Her teacher will stand before her, as the sergeant stands before his platoon, and she will sit in her place in the ranks. Her teacher is also in the ranks, outranked by coördinators, who are outranked by vice-principals, who are outranked by . . . and so on and on, even unto Skyfather himself. There is no guarantee, of course that the little child will learn such things as spelling and arithmetic, but one thing she will inevitably and permanently learn for certain: We live by rank and rule, and domination is necessary and righteous. And if that mother sends that child to day-care, her learning of that lesson will come all the sooner.

Nor is there any remedy for this in the token feminism now being preached in the schools. The Marduks long ago mastered the political arts of placation and coöption; they use them always to good effect in the device we call "education" just as they use them in the device we call "election." What teaching always takes place in the schools is not in the content of the courses, but in the power of the metaphors of that life, the unmentioned reminders of How It Is.

It seems to us that a true and complete feminism would seek not the adjustment of a government school system but its total destruction. Any human system is a Roman System; lacking the principle of domination, no system can *be*. On the other hand, if feminism is simply a movement designed to replace patriarchy with matriarchy and put women in the corner offices, which would probably be a teeny bit better than what we have, then its proper course would be the reform of the schools. We wonder which it is?

Is it merely sentimental claptrap to suppose that women are closer to that "simple art of loving" than men? Somehow, we do not think so. Nor does it seem right to suppose that the Roman System, or any other, can really have "lost" the art of loving as our fictional witness testifies. You can not lose what you do not have; by constitution and definition, a system can not love. It takes a person to do that.

It will help us not at all if some woman wields the sword of Aeneas. What we need to do is to go back and get his wife out of the burning city where he managed to leave her.

The Mysterious West

A fascinating chapter titled “Working Together” (in *Working for the Japanese*) offers a sympathetic portrait of the Japanese—homesick in a strange land, subjected to occasional nasty ethnic slights, and under intense pressure to get the \$550 million plant up and running. They were mystified by the Americans’ lack of fealty to the company. Why did Americans refuse to wear their Mazda caps? And why could they not see the wisdom of remaining a half-hour after their work shift to clean workstations?

Mary Walton, in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*

Every act of conscious learning requires the willingness to suffer an injury to one’s self-esteem. That is why young children, before they are aware of their own self-importance, learn so easily; and why older persons, especially if vain or important, cannot learn at all.

Thomas Szasz

THE Mysterious West. Just what is it with these people? Why won’t they drive at fifty-five? Why won’t they go down to the polls and vote for somebody? Why won’t they color inside of the lines? Why won’t they eat their oat bran? And why, oh why, won’t they wear their nifty little Mazda caps?

So we imagine the Japanese managers of American Mazda, strangers in a strange land, knowing that they are resented not only as colonizers, but as successful colonizers, and of another color at that. We see them brooding on the bottom line, and finding themselves, supposed to be leaders, at the bottom of some incomprehensibly constituted heap. There they stand, quiet little men in a solemn little group, wearing their Mazda caps, watching in bewilderment the rough and burly American workers cracking wise and guffawing in their baseball caps and Bart Simpson T-shirts.

Alas, they will never figure it out. They will never understand Bart Simpson. East is east and west is west. They have never read, and would recoil in confusion and despair should they try it, that astonishing and inadvertently revealing pop-psych best seller of a few years ago, *I’m OK*,

You’re OK. We can’t remember the date, and we can’t remember the author’s name either, but not to worry, we’re sure he’s OK.

You may remember the book. It was a bracing pep-talk of the kind that Americans do love. Hey, let’s love ourselves just the way we are! Let’s talk to each other as though we were all OK. And, what the hell, we really *are* OK, whatever we may be. Sure, some folk like one thing, and some another. So what’s wrong with that? Live and let live. Whatever turns you on. Everyone’s bag is his bag, and what’s not to like in a bag?

Our cultural baggage includes many such books. One of the earliest rose upon us in 1928, the gift of a French cleric. It was he who bestowed upon us the still famous mantra: Every day in every way I’m getting better and better. How interesting it is that that self-inflating formula has by now come to seem remarkably modest. Unlike I’m OK, it actually assumes not only the possibility of improvement, but also some need for it. Even the famous “power of positive thinking,” also provided by a preacher, implied that its adherents might actually stand in *need* of some positive thinking. Well, when we were children, we spake as children; now that we have become grownups, of course, we speak as grownups. We proudly assert that we are OK.

And that’s not all. When we spot some sorry little loser of a kid who can’t make it even in our super-simplified schools, we decide that what he really needs is a good con job that will convince him that *he* is OK. And there it is! Now he’ll learn his short division and his relating to self and others, and go forth to compete with the Japanese.

Let’s add this. It’s from a piece by David R Boldt, who is the editor of the editorial page for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. He has read the results of some research done at the University of Michigan on the burning question of the day, the differences between American and Asian schooling. He has noted that “on the math test only one of the 20 Chicago fifth-grade classes had an average score as high as the *lowest* score of the classes in Japan.” He has also noted (with “Isn’t that *sweet*”) that while Asian teachers prize most in their students the attribute they call “clarity,” American teachers treasure most their “sensitivity.” He goes on:

“The researchers then surveyed the attitudes of the children and the children’s parents, and here’s

where things start to get truly scary. The American kids and their parents all think that the American kids are doing just swell. In a typical finding, 75 percent of the Chicago first graders, when asked how they would do in mathematics said that they expected to be among the best students. Only 37 percent of the Japanese students were as optimistic.

“American mothers were similarly slap-happy. Only 7 percent thought their children’s academic potential average or below average, and they were successfully communicating this feeling of false complacency to their children. Almost nine out of ten American fifth-graders thought their parents and teachers were happy, or very happy, with their math performance. Asian parents were much less easily pleased.

“All indications are that American fathers are just as pernicious an influence. In one set of questions the fathers were asked what score they thought their child would achieve on a test, and what score they would be *satisfied* with. The American fathers were satisfied with a score *lower* than they thought their children would get; the Asian fathers would only have been satisfied with a score *higher* than what they thought their children would achieve.”

We do like his language. And his brass. It takes some moxie nowadays to call American mothers slap-happy and American fathers pernicious. This would be a good time to talk some more about the Great American Family Values, which are supposed to be so much better than those of the schools, but we haven’t the heart.

Unfortunately, Boldt hasn’t the space in which to characterize American teachers, although he does reveal the conclusion of the study that while “Asian teachers spend much more time teaching subject matter, American classrooms were way out in front in only one category: ‘vague discussion.’” It figures; how else could a teacher detect all that sensitivity? Well, let’s leave the teachers, for now, as merely silly.

Here’s where Boldt ends up: “When the American researchers ‘initiated a discussion of children’s tension patterns’ such as hyperactivity, hair-twisting, lip-biting, and headaches, ‘we found that we were describing types of behavior that were unfamiliar’ to their Asian colleagues.”

Well, that’s enough. We can now provide an accurate description of American government

schooling: It is a vast, highly bureaucratized, and astonishingly expensive government agency designed to bring about stupidity and neurosis in as many children as possible. And, unlike so many other state bureaucracies, it works.

The mail today brought us a slick little brochure called *New Teachers Speak Out*. It gives the results of a questionnaire answered by 1,002 incipient teachers. “If you had to choose,” asked one question, “which one aspect of teaching do you think is most important to helping students learn?” One percent of respondents were “Not Sure.” Six percent opted for “Order in the Classroom.” Eleven percent, clearly cranks, chose “Teaching Basic Skills (Reading writing and Arithmetic).” The remaining eighty-three percent came our for—you will have guessed it by now—”Instilling Self-esteem and Personal Growth and Development.” And that will surely call for hours and hours of “vague discussion.”

The Thomas Szasz quoted above, is, as far as we can tell, one of the few sane psychiatrists in America. And, like other sane people, he listens to the ancient lore and to the poets to see if they make any sense, which they often do. That he is not the first to say what he says is not at all to his discredit, but, on the contrary, testimony *to* his credit. He is thoughtful enough to listen and to ponder what was told us long ago, and again and again, and to refresh us and fortify us too by reminding us of what we know but prefer to neglect. What else is it in Creon, for example, but vanity and importance that makes him incapable of learning what his son is willing to consider? Dispatches from the interior always bring news of fresh disasters, disorders, routs, and the restlessness of the natives. Self-knowledge is almost never good news, and every time we get a little inkling of what we are really like, we desperately hope that no one else has had the same. Only the vain, or self-important, and maybe also the utter fools, which is to say, of all three categories, the truly “unconscious,” are safe from the injury done to our beloved self-esteem when we actually learn something and know that we have learned it. At the very least, we can see that we were ignorant, and yet self-satisfied. More often, we discover that we were just *wrong*, and still self-satisfied. It is this, and *only* this, continuous incurrence of injury to self-esteem that deserves to be called “education,” which is rightly

so named only when it does what its name says it does, only when it leads us forth out of some condition and into another in which we can be freer than we were before. (Caesar, we think we remember, uses *educare* in speaking of the release of prisoners.)

Maybe we ought to compete with the Japanese after all. All we have to do is send them—at no charge—about eighty-three percent of our schoolteachers. In ten years or less, they'll be making imitation cupie dolls.

Twigs, Trees, and Roots

I can trace my ancestry back to a protoplasmal primordial atomic globule. Consequently, my Family pride is inconceivable. I can't help it. I was born sneering. from *The Mikado*

To forget one's ancestors is to be a book without a source, a tree without a root.

A Chinese proverb

HERE is a strange, sad story: In Indianapolis, there is a schoolteacher named Pat Browne. She is a black woman who has become that city's leading Afrocentrist. An Afrocentrist is one who holds a), that the contributions of black people to the culture of today have been, whether by design or oversight, neglected or even suppressed, and b), that this fact is a primary cause of the apparent inability of so many black children to take much good from their schooling.

With the former, we would never quarrel, although we would like to add many more classes and categories to that list of the neglected or suppressed, or simply forgotten. But as to the latter, there are questions to be asked, wonders to be wondered.

We can never know how Pat Browne feels about racial ugliness, but we can make some reasonable guesses. She is angry and desperate. How long must this go on? Will these children never be saved? Is there no way, no way at all, to bring them into what she must see as a better life—a life like hers, a life of trying to think and to know, a life of good work and decency, and the relative security and comfort that such a life so often brings? Who can condemn her feelings?

Very few of us, however, can do our best work as servants of our feelings. Indeed, the white men who wrote history as the history of white men were doing exactly that. If there is a self-satisfying lie in the fact that our historians have usually omitted mention of black people in America before that time in which they began to arrive here as slaves, it is no less a self-satisfying lie to hint that the talented draughtsman who drew up Alexander Graham Bell's schematics, and who happened to be black, was the real inventor of the telephone.

And, apparently, that is the sort of thing that Pat Browne is inclined to assert in her teaching, along with such interesting, perfectly possible, but unupportable notions that black Africans were the first to invent writing and to sail to the New World. All of that has brought her some stern disapproval from Pats of the academic world. She has attracted the attention of formidable opponents. No less an authority than Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. says, "I don't think history is a form of therapy that should be used to improve self-esteem. I think history tries to be a serious study of facts."

He says it to Pat Browne, of course, but he probably knows very well that he would do perhaps even better to say it to numerous historians who *wrote* history as a form of therapy to improve self-esteem, whether their own or that of patron or public. That form of the art is not unknown, and Schlesinger must have it in mind when says, although without the appropriate italics, and mysteriously ascribing to history itself that which can only be ascribed to persons, that history *tries* to be a serious study of facts.

Still, in an imaginable quarrel between Pat Browne and Arthur Schlesinger Jr., we would not like to take either side. It seems to us that they are both right, and that what they need is not to settle their quarrel but to abandon it and to embrace each other. And it seems to us that they speak thus:

SCHLESINGER: The past is what it is, and we can never change it. If it is good to know about, then let us find and tell what we can know to be the truth about it.

BROWNE: Just so, but the past is also infinite. If we are to reveal it to children for some supposed good that the revelation will do them, we will simply have to leave some of it out, as we

have always done. Let us, according to the needs of the children, as best we can judge them, decide what might best be left out, or set aside for another time.

Now, if only Browne will agree to stick to the facts as best they can be known, and if Schlesinger will agree that only some portion of history less than all of it is the best that we can show to the children, then peace would break out between them, provided only that the facts *can* be known and that it is possible to determine exactly *which* of them are the best to show, and to which children. Hmm. Well, maybe peace will *not* break out between them.

In one way, of course, we are delighted to see a permanent state of war between the gingham dog and the calico cat, for we still dream that they may yet eat each other utterly up. In this battle, we can see the winners who write the history and the losers who want to rewrite the history, and bad cess to both of them. But there is no hope. Should the Brownes overcome the Schlesingers for a time, then they will *become* the Schlesingers, the winners who write history, and then some others will become the Brownes who want to rewrite it. When the Athenians and Spartans had beaten the Persians, they had to inquire by war as to which should become the Persians. The oppressed always claim to want nothing but freedom, but when they win we discover that what they really wanted was revenge, and the power to oppress where once they were oppressed.

We make a serious mistake if we imagine that there is any institution in society in which this war is not being fought. We often suppose that the dismal failure of American schooling is the result of, well, of some accident, or of some large concatenation of accidents. You know the argument: They meant well; they *all* meant well. But something went wrong, and then something else. Muddle and confusion. And then experiment and groping, wrong paths and blind alleys, all well meant. Ever-changing needs, and newly discovered difficulties. And by now, a Byzantine bureaucracy to the nth power, utterly beyond the power of any merely human agency to cure.

Almost all of that is true. Only one thing is a lie. They did not mean well. They meant ill, and they achieved it. As agents and servants of government, they meant to lay hands upon the consent of the governed as early in life as

possible. For all who came before them, all the young credulous and helpless, they had an agenda. They had adjustments to make, modifications of this or that behavior, clarifications of the values in vogue. They had appreciations to inspire, and aberrations beyond counting to ferret out and eradicate for the greater good of the greater number. The ultimate goal of their devisings was not in the person, but in the program, the plan. The health of the state. It was truly war. Of course there will be casualties, perhaps many, but the cause is worthy. Some few must die for the many. And indeed, just now, many die, and, as Pat Browne knows, an inordinate number of them are black. It is as though we were replaying Viet Nam in the city streets.

Among the educationists, education is not understood as an inward condition but as an extrinsic set of attributes. They see the process of “educating another”—should such a thing be possible at all—not as the opening of an ever-flowing spring of fresh water within, but as the labor of pouring bucket after bucket of something into a leaden cistern until it holds just enough for some useful purpose or other. (We steal the metaphor from Coleridge, a willing victim.) And so it is that, in this little battle of the great war, we are inclined to encourage and even to abet Pat Browne.

It is probably true that she tells some lies and makes some wild guesses about history. It is probably also true that she will pay to the work of Martin Luther King more attention than she will give to the reign of Idi Amin. But her lies will be far less subtle than the lies of establishment historians, whose “disagreements” so often reflect their ideologies, and her wild guesses wilder than theirs, and thus less likely to deceive for long.

And, for a little while, we must and do deceive our children. We tell them many things that are not true. We promise them that everything is going to be all right, and that we will always be there to care for them. When they discover that we have not told the truth, they will not call us liars. When the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus evaporate, they see that we were neither deceivers nor deceived, but rather comforters of those who must someday mourn. And if we tell them that the fathers of their fathers were wise and just kings long ago and far away, and live our own lives as though we were the children of wise and just

kings, is it likely that they will come to despise wisdom and justice—and us, too—when they learn that the fathers of their fathers were really farmers and fishermen?

No doubt, this sort of thing can be done in the wrong way, as Pat Browne will soon discover. If she tells her students that the Pharaohs of Egypt were black Africans as they may very well have been, then she will also have to deal with the fact that they lived in a now unimaginable splendor made possible only the obedient credulousness of their subjects and by the labor of their slaves. In fact, much good would come to her and to her students should she tackle such a knotty fact. Humanity's story is full of ironies, and the more we know of them, the less likely we are to rush to judgement and to make, of entire groups and classes of people, exactly the kind of invidious generalization of which Pat Browne's students have long been victims. Of every nation and people it can be said that they found out wisdom and beauty and did great evil.

Pat Browne will have to be mindful too of another danger. It is the DAR Syndrome, the notion that we can be virtuous by virtue of somebody else's virtue. The courageous, whether at Concord Bridge or Marathon, can give us only their genes, not their courage. *We* did not win those battles, and we steal their honor who did when we give ourselves the credit and call ourselves heroes in the great cause of freedom. The profligate son of the just king will someday be called the king, but that will not make him just. The idea of a hereditary aristocracy is surely repugnant to Pat Browne, but the preaching of some supposed hereditary meritocracy is different only in detail, not in principle. And to the black boy hanging on the corner dealing dope, there will be no increment of virtue even should you convince him that a black man once invented the telephone and that another ruled in Egypt.

One evening, Thoreau was making his way toward the lectern. He overheard one member of the audience asking his neighbor, "What does he lecture for?" Thoreau tells us only that he was shaken. Too bad. We'd love to hear his answer.

It is a question that every teacher should ask every day: "What do I teach for?" It will have, for every teacher on Earth, a number of answers. Most of them are disgraceful, melancholy acknowledgements of necessity. Yes, I do need a

job, and, to tell the truth, I probably couldn't do much of anything else. But, after all, I do serve society, don't I? I do tell these kids something about algebra, or pronouns, or something. And I do my share in the system; I give them grades, and that gets them credits and diplomas, which get them jobs, sometimes. Then more details, and more. And that's a life? It is for that that someone has chosen one calling rather than another? Shabby.

The question becomes no easier to answer when we put it in the context of "subject matter." What do I teach French for? So that my students will be able to chat with taxi-drivers in Paris? What do I reach geometry for? So that my students will be able to redraw the boundaries of their tomato beds after the flood? And, with Pat Browne in mind, What do I teach history for? So that my students will be able to name the Participants at the Congress of Vienna, whom they could easily look up, should life, by some cruel and utterly unimaginable twist, bring them into the need of such information?

It may be, of course, that there are some teachers so cloddish as never to have asked themselves what they were teaching for. And there may be more who can make only the shabby answers to the question. But, as hard as we are on schoolteachers, we do happen to know from the evidence of experience that there are very few who went into teaching so that they could do some harm. This can not be said of many other callings, lots of which have been invented for the doing of harm. Most teachers, if pressed, will agree, details aside, to answer thus: I am teaching so that these children may live in one way rather than in another, so that they may be trees with deep roots.

The study of history has many salutary effects. One of them is that it alerts us—in a strange combination of awe and terror—to the immense range of human possibilities. When we behold, side by side, Martin Luther King and Idi Amin, we learn once again that there seem to be no knowable limits to human possibilities; and if we want to put it that way, we can learn that there seem to be no limits to black human possibilities. The lesson will be the same, no matter which group we study, but it may well be true that black children will more readily study and learn it in the special context of race. So why not?

So we urge Pat Browne on. Unless she is planning nothing more than a warm black bath of self-esteem, an equivalent of the usual white bath of self-esteem, she may do good. She, and her students, may even discover that our histories are always the same.

The Great Picnic and More

CENTRAL CONTROL and the Associate Circulation Manager arrived betimes at the site of the First Great Picnic only to find that two men from Denver had gotten there ahead of them. We found them holding amiable converse under a tree, as God, no doubt, intended for all of us all of the time. Indeed, all the rest of the day was given to sitting under trees in amiable converse—a proper observation, we would say, of true religion, pure and undefiled. Of the forty to fifty or so who showed up, Ginger alone kept her own counsel and concentrated on eating, perhaps because she was the only dog present and knew something that the rest of us didn't, but the four people she brought us sat under the trees in amiable converse.

It turned out that the two men from Denver had never before met. And the next one to arrive, by motorcycle, was a young librarian who had traveled from Georgia. Then came a man from Mississippi, and next a couple and their children from Virginia. Another family soon arrived, stopping off on their way from North Dakota to the beaches of New Jersey. When the locals began to arrive toward the middle of the morning, they were hailed with special joy as though they, of us all, were most to be praised for surmounting great obstacles for the sake of the Great Picnic. (It is true that they lugged along more gear and stuff than those who had driven from father away.)

Fairly early in the day, there was some speculation as to whether there ought to be name tags. It didn't take long to reach unanimous agreement. No name tags. It just wasn't that kind of crowd. And in any case, there was nothing out of which to make name tags, since Central Control had rejected the idea long before the day.

There were interesting people there. No bores at all. In age, they ran from tiny little babies to elderly folk—one art professor brought along some of his students. Many seemed to be people in technical or complicated callings, but there was little talk of shop. There were enough physicians

to make the picnic site a pretty good place in which to have a heart attack, but no one did. There wasn't even a bee-sting. One of the physicians was also a psychotherapist, and *our* kind of psychotherapist. He refuses to call himself a psychoanalyst because he holds "analysis" an inappropriate and ineffective method in which to deal with things human. He is in trouble with his colleagues because he assigns the reading of books to his patients. Many of us did what we could to get a little free advice from him. Next year we hope he sets up a booth: Psychiatric Help—¢5.

Among the picnickers was one Warren Hope. We had met him and his daughter years ago when we once offered aid to any readers who wanted to print and publish their own journals. In those days, we imagined, vainly that the desktop publishing fad would bring forth hosts of independent publishers who had ideas and nothing to sell; the Hopes, *père-et-fille*, were among the very few that we found. They brought along, but left in the car, a few copies of *Drastic Measures*, their elegant little journal of poetry. They print the poems of the struggling young, of course, but they also revive the works of lesser-known favorites who have pretty much disappeared from school anthologies, either for stubborn adherence to form and rhyme, or for lack of political correctness. Almost everyone had a candidate to suggest. It was that kind of picnic. Warren Hope will be glad to send you your own copy of *Drastic Measures*. Write him at 310 Cherry Lane, Havertown, PA 19083.

By about six o'clock, we were down to a precious few. The art professor and his students stayed on, probably waiting for the sunset. The rest of us said goodbyes in the parking lot, trying to remember whether we had forgotten anything, and arranging to do it all over again next year. Same place and same time—all day on the first Saturday of August 1991. We hope you can come.

SINCE then, we *have* discovered another small, independent publisher with ideas and nothing to sell. We know not how better to describe it than by quoting from the scribbled note that came with it, and in a hand better than Central Control's:

Wild Surmise is an irregularly published newsletter about speculative matters. We are always looking for willing readers. (It is sent out

free.) (Oh, yes. We like to stay anonymous.) We propose to put you on our mailing list. If that is all right, take no action. If, after a glance at the accompanying sample, you prefer to be spared, please let us know.

“No apologies for spelling or grammar from us—we are free of charge, so we beg indulgence.”

It was signed by one “Ed.” The quotation marks are his. No indulgence was needed. We were too busy reading to notice spelling or grammar.

We dearly love to take no action, and we have taken none, and look forward to many more issues of *Wild Surmise*.

It is almost unbelievable. Where else can you find, side by side, instructions as to how to see the famous but elusive Green Flash at sunset, which even the art students surely missed, and an intriguing explanation of the surprising failure of the Maxwell Demon device? There was also a fascinating, but very challenging, piece on the attributes of knots, and a complete set of instructions that will allow those who have the fortitude to follow them the day of the week for any date of any year, or *vice-versa*. There is truly a good short story, and a provocative poem, and photographs too. All it lacks, in fact is the help of a Macintosh.

We urge you all to overwhelm that “Ed” and give it a look. It can be found at Box 217, Key Largo, FL 34649.

SHE who must be obeyed has decided to clean up at least one our many messes. She now offers all readers one last chance to ask for back issues, which are strewn here and there and always underfoot. We do not have all the back issues, but we do have many, and some of them are very old indeed. She will send you any that she has and you want. She will send as many as you like. Any that are left by about the end of January, she threatens to recycle. There is just no respect for the past around here.

As you do or should know, there is no charge for back issues. If you send postage, good, she'll use it. She is budgeting the whole project under Trash Removal Expenses. There is nothing at all that we can do to stop her.

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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