

THE AMERICAN PSYCHE IN SEARCH OF ITS SOUL

A Meditation on Government, Business, Science, Education, Media and Family

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Includes Bibliographical References

Today, at a time when the nation is becoming more and more divided, when anger and antagonism are percolating everywhere, plenty of exploitative politicians, writers and media personalities are cheerfully stirring people up with sarcasm, calls to arms, and simplistic, half-baked 'solutions' to America's problems.

That is not the purpose of this book.

From the early Reviews:

“This learned and inspirational book rescues philosophy from the mathematicians, sex from the hedonists, religion from empty sanctimony, and science from barren materialism. A must read.”

– *George Gilder*, noted social commentator and author of *Wealth and Poverty* and *The Israel Test*

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– *Peter O'Lalor*, professor of history and author of *The Never Realized Republic: Political Economy and Republican Virtue*

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For Megan

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After all the fire and storm of the historical process, the struggles between good and evil, progress and reaction, the long and difficult climb from barbarism and slavery up into the light of civilization and finally of free civil society, at last and at length we struggle up to the peak of the mountain to encounter the culmination of generations of human striving: Homer Simpson.... The world turns into a big mall, and we all go shopping: forever.... Were all the heroism of the past, all the suffering, all the passionate faith, the sacrifice, the religious and political contests, simply to build a shopper's paradise?

- Walter Russell Mead
in *God and Gold*

INTRODUCTION - THE SOUL

What is happiness? We all seek it, but what exactly is it?

Some associate happiness with pleasure, others with fame or worldly achievement, still others with the attainment of money or possessions. Some think of happiness in terms of good health, the enjoyment of leisure activities, or basking in the affection of one's family.

In ancient Greece, people had similar ideas on the subject. But Socrates startled the people of Athens by rejecting these opinions and claiming that happiness was to be found in the perfection of the soul. The soul was immortal, he claimed, and its welfare should be our chief concern, since its fate after death would be determined by how one lived one's life on Earth. "[A]ll other ends which men desire were strictly of no value in themselves. If they were worth pursuing at all, they were so only as a means to the perfection of the soul."¹ This was the spiritual task to which Socrates relentlessly enjoined anyone who would listen.

But exactly what *is* this thing he called a soul, and how is one to 'perfect' it? In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates describes the soul as being composed of three parts, and he demonstrates that these parts are most often in a state of utter chaos. To perfect one's soul begins with understanding what these parts are, what they are doing, and what they ought to be doing. We can then take steps to improve their individual functioning, and bring all three parts together into a well-ordered harmony.

To clarify these points, Socrates compares the soul's inner reality to a city's outer reality – that is, to the political state. Much of the *Republic* is in fact devoted to developing a theoretical model for a utopian society, but the essence of the book is its symbolic comparison to the *inner* life of humanity.

In a good Republic, Socrates tells us, there would be three basic classes of citizens: the Merchants, the Soldiers, and the Guardians:

The *Merchants* would be those citizens whose interests and abilities best suit them for a life devoted to the creation of wealth and material well-being. They *support* the Republic.

The *Soldiers* would be those citizens whose interests and abilities best suit them for a life devoted to ideals of courage and honor. They *protect* the Republic.

The *Guardians* would be those citizens whose interests and abilities best suit them for a life devoted to the pursuit of wisdom, justice, and truth. They *govern* the Republic.

In a well-ordered society, each citizen would thus have one job to do, and would aspire to do it as well as possible. A merchant would not also try to be a soldier, a soldier would not try to partake in the governing process, a guardian would not attempt to run a business. Such abuses of individual ability would clearly be futile or even dangerous, and only lead to chaos.

Furthermore, everyone in this utopia would respect and appreciate the hierarchical nature of the system. That is, the Guardians, by virtue of their attainments in wisdom (not by right of birth, military might, or popular election), would be recognized as the true rulers, the Soldiers would enthusiastically support them in their efforts, and the Merchants would happily embrace their task of providing for society's material needs under the guidance and jurisdiction of the Guardians.

But actual States, like actual souls, are not so well ordered: few citizens do what they are best suited for, everyone wants to interfere with everything, and only buffoons are typically in charge. Socrates narrates a wonderful parable to demonstrate his point.

Imagine then a fleet or a ship in which there is a captain who is taller and stronger than any of the crew.... The sailors are quarreling with one another about the steering – everyone is of the opinion that he has the right to steer, though he has never learned the art of navigation...and will further assert that it cannot be taught, and they are ready to cut in pieces anyone who says the contrary. They throng about the captain, begging him to commit the helm to them; and if at any time they do not prevail, but others are preferred to them, they kill the others or throw them overboard.... [Finally, having put the noble captain out of commission] with drink or some narcotic drug, they mutiny and take possession of the ship....²

After this, the sailors “make free with the [ship's] stores”, and “eating and drinking, they proceed on their voyage in such a manner as may be expected of them.”³ They love and compliment whoever approves of their behavior, and accuse all others of being fools and good-for-nothings – including of course, the captain.

This, then, if Socrates is correct, is precisely the terrifying condition of our unperfected souls: The rightful authority has been narcotized, the staff has mutinied and is running amok, and the elements of wisdom and conscience are belittled, ignored, or even destroyed.

Like his description of the State, the soul of Socrates also has three parts:

Corresponding to the Merchant class, the soul contains our *Appetites*: all our desires for food, sex, pleasure and comfort, represented, according to Plato, by the stomach and genitals. This is the level of the soul where efforts must be made to overcome the vices of gluttony, greed and lust, with the virtue of Temperance.

Corresponding to the Soldier class, the soul contains our *Will*: all our power, our great

loves, our aspirations, represented, according to Plato, by the heart. This is the level of the soul where efforts must be made to transform negative emotions such as anger and envy into the virtue of Courage.

Corresponding to the Guardian class, the soul contains our *Mind*: our conscious awareness, our ability to seek knowledge and truth, represented, according to Plato, by the head. This is the level of the soul where efforts must be made to overcome pride and intellectual sloth, and replace them with the love of Wisdom.

Temperance requires that the appetites be controlled by Wisdom. Courage requires that the passions also be controlled by Wisdom. Justice (the chief characteristic of a superior Guardian or a superior Mind) is a combination of Wisdom, Temperance, and Courage, working together in an appropriate, harmonious relationship.

But like the sailors on Plato's ship, the elements of our souls are not doing their jobs faithfully and are not in right relationship with each other. Decisions are made based on appetites, the emotions are running wild, the mind is uninvolved and passive. Our souls are in a state of complete disorder.

To perfect one's soul means to bring order to one's inner chaos, to get each part to do its own appropriate job as well as possible, to overcome the soul's anarchy by arousing and reinstating the rightful authority, the mind.

The Garden of Eden

In the story of the Garden of Eden, which is a parable of our inner life and the need to evolve and perfect the soul, Adam represents the human mind, Eve represents the heart and the emotions, and the Serpent represents the appetites and the material body. In their proper harmonious alignment, the Mind would be the *Active* principle which governs the soul. The Body would be the *Passive* principle which supports and is governed by the Mind. The Heart would be the *Reconciling* principle that listens to the wisdom of the Mind and then integrates and unifies the complete internal triad.

But what happened in the Garden of Eden is that this order became inverted. The serpent (the Body) interfered, took the active lead, and persuaded the Heart to go along with its wishes. The Mind, unnaturally passive, silently acquiesced and joined in.

*Now the serpent was more subtil
than any beast of the field
which the Lord God had made.
And he said unto the woman,
Yea, hath God said,
Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?
And the woman said unto the serpent,
We may eat of the fruit*

*of the trees of the garden:
 But of the fruit of the tree
 which is in the midst of the garden,
 God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it,
 neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.
 And the serpent said to the woman,
 Ye shall not surely die:
 For God doth know that
 in the day ye eat thereof,
 then your eyes shall be opened,
 and ye shall be as gods,
 knowing good and evil.
 And when the woman saw
 that the tree was good for food,
 and that it was pleasant to the eyes,
 and a tree to be desired
 to make one wise,
 she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat,
 and gave also unto her husband with her;
 and he did eat.
 And the eyes of them both were opened,
 and they knew that they were naked.
 (Gen.2.25-3.7)*

Adam's behavior in this story is completely passive. Throughout the scene, he is 'with her' (that is, with Eve) but silent. The Serpent and Eve have their discussion, she decides to eat the fruit, she gives some to Adam, and he eats it too. The story does not say that Eve tempted him, and nothing in the narration or in his silence suggests that she did. There is no indication that he is reluctant to eat the fruit, that he vacillates or frets about what he is doing, that his better judgment is overwhelmed by treachery, or even that he thinks about it at all. He says nothing and takes no initiative. It is merely a passive act of acquiescence.

This was the real 'sin' that occurred in the Garden of Eden, and that *recurs* within the soul of each one of us. This is the fundamental (i.e., '*original*') sin – *the sin of an inverted soul*. We are all committing this sin right now. Our soul has been turned upside down, hypnotized by the world of matter, beguiled by the serpent. The demanding Body has become the active force in our lives and is completely in charge. Wisdom has been belittled, truth has been relativised, and the Mind has retreated into passivity. The Heart, mesmerized by all the gluttony and vulgarity that surround us, fawns over the cravings of the Body.

To perfect the soul, 'Adam and Eve' (representing all of us) must first return to a natural balanced state. So God tells the serpent, "upon thy belly shalt thou go" – i.e., the Body must focus its attention on the earth. To Eve He says, "Thy desire shall be for thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." This is not a literal sexist statement. It means that rather than remaining 'wedded' to the mundane material world of the serpent, the human Heart must turn upward and recognize the Mind as the proper authority. Lastly, God turns to Adam, the Mind. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." The *face*, that is, the head, represents the Mind. The '*sweat of thy face*' indicates the required *active efforts* of the Mind.

This advice is as important and relevant today as when it was first given.

The Eye of the Soul

Just as we all have many different appetites and emotions (which are usually in conflict, and which can be interested in all sorts of healthy or unhealthy objects), we also have many different, and often confusing, mental functions: we have random thoughts, images, and memories; we have stored facts and data; we have logical processes; we have practical knowledge about how to do various things; we have theories and beliefs and opinions and all kinds of prejudices, etc.

Where, in the midst of all this mental clutter, is the ‘Captain’, Socrates’ so-called ‘rightful authority’ the True Ruler of the human soul?

Socrates believed that no one does evil consciously. Our thoughts and notions may certainly be irrational or even foolish, but we always *believe* that what we are doing in any given moment is the right and proper thing to do: if we knew that what we were doing was ‘evil’ we could not keep doing it. So the ‘True Ruler’ of the soul, that *ought* to be making decisions, would have to be that part of the mind which absolutely knows, beyond any mere opinion, the difference between good and evil – the part of our soul that is capable of unerringly discerning ‘the Good’. Plato calls this part of the soul *Nous*.

Nous is that special place in our intellect – beyond the confines of imagination, belief, and even reason – that arrives at knowledge by sudden, uncontradictable, *insight*. Such an insight (we have all had them) may follow in the wake of a long and painstaking period of questioning and pondering, or it may appear inexplicably out of the blue, but when it arrives it arrives in a flash. In general, these are rare and involuntary events, for this is a potential human faculty that usually lies dormant. But Socrates believed that it is possible for this faculty to become conscious and deliberate. In fact, ‘awakening’ *Nous* – not merely studying or thinking – is the highest task of anyone who wishes to perfect his or her soul. It is possible, even easy, to have a keen and clever mind, to know a great many facts, and to be filled with practical and theoretical knowledge, and yet to have no authentic Wisdom because one’s *Nous* has never awakened. Such a soul is always like that ship whose captain has been narcotized, a ship which is either in a state of endless anarchy, or which has been taken over by one or another tyrannical usurper: some harsh or foolish passion, appetite, belief or prejudice, which ‘rules’ and ruins one’s life.

For Socrates, then, Wisdom is not about knowing many things or understanding difficult ideas. It is always and only about awakening one’s soul to wonder and insight.

Plato refers to *Nous* as the eye of the soul. *Nous* is that which “sees” into the nature of essential meanings and values. To have an awakened *Nous* is to be led by an inner eye of the soul which others lack, no matter how intelligent or well informed they might be.⁴

Relativism

But this is the 21st century. Is there such a thing as what is really 'Good'? Is there such a thing as absolute Right or Truth? Or are these just words whose meaning varies for different individuals, in different cultures and situations, at different times?

It has become the standard in contemporary America to believe that it is morally offensive to consider anyone's personal opinion of what is right, good, or true, to be more accurate or more valid than anyone else's personal opinion. We are taught to be 'open' to the beliefs and opinions of everyone. Everything is relative, and no decent person would question this.

The paradox here is that if we must be tolerant of any belief system, then we must necessarily be tolerant of an *intolerant* belief system. This leads to the nightmare of being unable to defend ourselves morally against any sort of evil or tyranny, which is why relativism is essentially incoherent and, in the end, morally bankrupt.

However, there is another form of 'openness' that encourages us to use reason to seek the truth, free of the constraints imposed by previously assumed (or enforced) beliefs. This kind of freedom and openness was demanded by the American Founders – the freedom of an unencumbered mind. This is quite a different matter than the kind of 'openness' that has become the philosophical basis of today's popular culture, which really just functions as an excuse for denying reason's power altogether and thoughtlessly accepting anything and everything that happens to momentarily sway us.

The result is that this popular 'openness', which we have accepted as a great virtue, just leads to indifference. We approve of this indifference because it safely and comfortably respects everyone else's opinion, no matter how sublime or ridiculous, and because it promises us in return that we can 'do whatever we want'. But the consequence of such indifference is that, having no real principles of our own we become the slaves of fashion and whim, and we revere whoever or whatever is the most popular that day. Tolerance of everything leaves us weak and submissive, prepared to surrender to anything.

Relativism, then, is deeply entwined with the roots of our modern sense of meaninglessness. Plato and Socrates, on the other hand, counseled humanity that the world has meaning, and objective absolute values have a real existence. Our soul has descended from the divine, and it has come here with an attainable purpose – a need for awakening and for perfection before it returns once again to the divine.

This is the foundation of the Western Tradition.

Science and the Tradition

The Tradition presents the visible world as grounded in a higher order of reality, which is the source of life and life's meaning, and which is only accessible through higher levels of Mind. But this is a complete inversion of today's dominant scientific view. Rather than the reductionist analysis of science, which takes for granted that the smallest material phenomena are the 'real' constituents of the universe, and that they explain and cause all the larger and higher-level phenomena, the Tradition presupposes that the lower can only be understood as issuing from, and caused by, the higher: The 'whole' is primary, not the parts.

But we as a culture have lost the deep intuitive understanding that creation exists on many levels. We have succumbed to the scientific viewpoint. Nothing characterizes ‘the modern world’ more completely than the loss of faith in Transcendence, our arrogant lack of any genuine appreciation for levels of reality above our little everyday affairs. The deepest wounds to the human soul have been caused by our lack of appreciation of levels.

According to the Tradition, a human being stands at the *center* of creation – grounded in matter, but potentially capable of intuiting meaning, truth and divinity. This is the quintessential human quality. This is what makes a human being human. But by shutting the door on transcendence, we have cut off any light from that world that might have illuminated this one, leaving us in darkness, leaving us with nothing but a dead world where scientists are merely performing an autopsy.

The Tradition lives on, of course, and most of us retain at least some vague feeling that there must be some sense and significance ‘behind it all’. But we are hesitant to allow these vague feelings to carry the same weight as scientific facts, they are not really considered to have anything to do with authentic ‘important’ knowledge, and we may even feel somewhat ashamed to harbor such ‘irrational feelings’. Yet there is no rational justification for such an unexamined attitude – it is just a symptom of our indifference, our deeply ingrained submissiveness to the current scientific vogue.

Socrates declared that the soul is immortal. This may or may not be true. But the truth of this statement cannot be decided one way or another by anything scientists have to tell us. A purely quantitative science contributes little to the great questions of human existence. Explications of the ‘lower’ do not explain all the complexity and miraculousness of the ‘higher’. A reductive analysis of the ‘parts’ will never grasp the meaning of the ‘whole’. Quantitative measurements cannot explain our essential human qualities. If the great questions and issues still move us, we cannot turn to science for much help. This responsibility cannot be delegated.

Eros

Eros, the Greek god of Love, represents the passionate *desire* for all that is good, true, beautiful and meaningful. *Eros*, who traverses all levels of creation, is the Guide on the passage from the ‘Below’ to the ‘Above’, the Messenger between Earth and Heaven, the *means* to the perfection of the soul. *Eros* is the driving force and motivation behind all the great discoveries of science, all great art, all great social endeavors, all the magnificent efforts of the human mind, heart, and spirit.

In Plato’s *Symposium*, Socrates says that the mysteries of *Eros* begin in youth, when we find ourselves passionately attracted to one beautiful girl or boy. As a result of this experience we begin to entertain beautiful new thoughts and feelings.

These soon lead us to an appreciation of beauty in other forms as well, and we begin to see that the beauty of one is akin to the beauty of another, and there is something magnificent and wonderful in the essence of all of this loveliness and beauty which attracts us.

Love then leads us to discover for ourselves that the beauty of a mind is even more precious and admirable than the beauty of outward form, and we find ourselves desiring friends and lovers of character, who have beautiful souls, and together we seek to bring to birth beautiful ideas and sentiments which may improve ourselves and each other.

Thence, in our converse with beautiful minds and souls, we become conscious of the beauty which exists in living well and righteously, in observing just laws, admiring excellent institutions, and meeting our responsibilities with honor. We begin to understand that the beauty of all of this is of one family, and personal physical beauty is but a sweet and fleeting trifle.

Eros then leads us further into deeper realms of the mind, where we discover the beauty of knowledge and science and reason, and we begin to desire the splendid loveliness of wisdom.

And then, being lured by Love to surpass the limitations of reason, we begin to contemplate Universal Beauty. No longer enslaved to the attractions of just one form of beauty, *Eros* reveals to us a vast sea of beauty, and we find ourselves creating noble and majestic thoughts and emotions.

Finally, having been tutored and disciplined by all these experiences of Love, having gradually ascended this 'Ladder of Love' and thoroughly experienced and contemplated all the many aspects of the Beautiful, *Eros* leads us forth until we suddenly behold that wondrous noetic 'Beauty' that is no longer subject to death or decay, but is pure, divine, and eternal. In this sacred communion, beholding Beauty with the awakened eye of the soul, no longer seeing mere images or relying on human reason, but actually *knowing* Reality, we become a 'friend of God' – having purified and perfected our own immortal Soul.

The Great Longing

Socrates often said that he had no wisdom at all, that he knew nothing either beautiful or good. In Plato's Symposium, however, he announces that he is an expert on Love. These two statements only appear contradictory. Love, for Socrates, meant longing, and this state of longing is what he meant by being always *between* ignorance and wisdom, *between* ugliness and beauty, always seeking and questioning and desiring. Socrates understood *Eros*, and lived passionately and erotically, precisely because he acknowledged that he knew nothing, but was always an adoring lover and seeker of beauty, goodness, and truth.

Plato and Socrates taught the West that these longings – for passionate relationships, for wisdom, for beauty, for immortality, for God – are what make human life meaningful. *Eros* is the key to the development and fulfillment of our souls. *Eros* makes possible the hope for human warmth, the hope for a deep connection with life and eternity, the hope for an understanding of the sense and meaning of existence.

But *Eros* has been badly wounded, just as the ancient myth of *Eros and Psyche* described so long ago, and he has taken wing and flown away – perhaps never to return.

CHAPTER ONE - SCIENCE

We are the heirs of ‘Logical Positivism’, a philosophical endeavor that seeks to impose scientific thinking into every aspect of our lives by suggesting that all forms of human knowledge should aspire to the same sort of rigorous rationality as science. According to the canons of logical positivism a statement is meaningful only if it can be determined, through sense observations or scientific experimentation, to be either true or false: anything that cannot be analyzed in this simple manner is considered meaningless, unworthy of the concern of serious people. Thus do we attempt to reject all the wonder and mystery of life, which means, on the one hand, that we are lying to ourselves (under the guise of being rational and intellectually sophisticated), and on the other hand, that our constricted minds have seceded from our emotions and intuitions, shattering the soul into fragments.

This viewpoint separates the visible world of matter (which we can supposedly analyze objectively and which therefore is considered exclusively ‘real’), from the invisible world of mind (which cannot be analyzed objectively and is therefore considered ‘not real’). The ‘real world’ portrayed by this positivist science has quantities but no qualities, and is without significance. *Quantities* are objective characteristics which can be measured, weighed, or counted. These are not matters of opinion. But *qualities* can be debated: a person coming in from a snowstorm into a sixty degree room might say ‘it feels warm’, while a person coming out of a sauna into the very same room might say ‘it feels cold’. Subjective qualities impart meaning and color and significance to our experience, but meaning disintegrates in a world where everything – even our thoughts, emotions, inspirations, etc. – are believed to be nothing more than measurable quantities.

Yet no one has ever experienced such a world, dense with numerical calculations but devoid of meaning.⁵ We experience ourselves as emotional beings living within a colorful, fragrant, sensual Nature, and we experience purposefulness everywhere. Our arms do not rise up due to mere laws of mechanics: we raise them deliberately because we desire to take hold of something. Even a lost dog seeking its home is not moving its legs aimlessly. A sharp division between consciousness and the physical world is annulled by these fundamental observations, and a rigid obsession with such distinctions only serves to distort the truth of our actual experience.

Nonetheless, science can find no purpose intrinsic to nature. It only finds formulas of succession⁶: this event causes the next event. By themselves, none of these formulas offer any reason for their own existence. Why should material objects attract each other with a force of gravity proportional to their mass? Why should light travel at a speed of 186,000 miles per second and not some other speed? There is nothing inherently necessary or rational about these natural laws. “Of course”, notes Alfred North Whitehead, “it is always possible to work oneself into a state of complete contentment with an ultimate irrationality. The popular positivistic philosophy adopts this attitude.”⁷ If these mechanical laws and formulas of succession do exist for a reason, if they do testify to any sort of importance or meaning, this cannot be disclosed by a science which simply gathers the data.

Reduced to mere objective data, devoid of understanding and wisdom, knowledge leads to what Douglas Sloan has called “our exquisitely stupid cleverness”.⁸ Our knowledge may lead to exquisitely clever technology, but rarely is it put to the service of human dignity or conscience, since, under the influence of logical positivism, we presume that statements of ‘conscience’ do not carry the same weight as statements of ‘scientific fact’. This leaves us with very little motivation for considering the consequences of our actions on humanity, life, or creation in general. The scientific imperative, ‘if it *can* be done it *must* be

done', replaces any moral imperative, as well as most common sense. Our cleverness remains exquisite, but put to the service of vulgar consumerism and endless war, it indeed becomes 'stupid'.

For several hundred years, the scientific examination of the world has been dependent on two primary assumptions:

- 1) Individual bits of matter can be isolated and studied objectively, unaffected by other matter and unaffected by the person making the examination.
- 2) In making observations, our senses provide us with accurate, trustworthy information.

Both of these assumptions have been proven false. Oddly enough, modern physics (the parent science) and logical positivism are now found to be incompatible.

First of all, the assumption that one single detail can be studied in pure objective isolation is a fiction. Bits of matter cannot be extracted from time and space. There is always a context, there is always an environment which ceaselessly flows and changes. Every supposed 'objective fact' which scientific experimenters attempt to study in a quiet laboratory, is rushing through time from its past actualities to its future potentialities, is vibrating wildly and exchanging energies with all the atomic particles in its environment, and is being affected by whatever experimental devices the scientist is employing for purposes of study. In fact, every act of observation is itself an intervention: merely shining a light on the object we are looking at bombards it with countless photons; a small movement of our eyes is enough to set off a chain reaction affecting millions of nearby atomic particles in the air.

In other words, every act of *studying* the world *alters* the world. Therefore, scientific experimenters take steps to isolate a bit of matter *as much as possible*: that is, they remove as many variables as possible from the experimental environment. But in doing so, the material they are examining is artificially withdrawn from its real nature. For instance, when researchers consider the effects of a chemical that is found polluting a stream, they attempt to measure only its effect on human health. But no such chemical can ever affect human health except in combination with other chemicals and the whole myriad of physical, psychological, and environmental factors that are all simultaneously affecting health, including all of history and the ongoing passage of time. Such isolation is therefore only partially possible, never completely possible. This is not simply because of technical difficulties that may one day be overcome. This is because of the nature of the world we live in, a world of endless movement, process, and inter-connectivity.

Secondly, there is no such thing as a pure perception, passing directly from the external world of visible matter into the internal world of conscious awareness, unchanged and unaffected, and yielding pure, accurate and complete information. On the contrary, all of our perceptions are colored by the state of our sense organs, our memories and beliefs, and our various attitudes and feelings.

Initially, the sense organs themselves determine what can *be* perceived. Amongst the infinite number of electro-magnetic wavelengths, for instance, only a very few find receptor cells inside the retina of a healthy human eye: other creatures have receptor cells for other wavelengths, and infinite alternatives are theoretically possible. Only a very limited number of vibrations cause a reaction inside the human ear: higher and lower vibrations can cause reactions in the ears of other creatures. Even within the human

species there are many variations: for instance, some people can taste certain substances which others cannot. The information about the world which our five senses provide for us is a very small and specialized part of a very big picture. If Nature had seen fit to develop our retinas with receptor cells that responded to other electromagnetic wavelengths, we would 'see' a different version of the world, just as certain animals apparently see a different version of the world. The particular limitations of our senses can hardly be said to determine what the world 'really' looks like. They only determine which few components of this immense reality happen to be apprehensible to us.

In addition to realizing that the make-up of our sense organs determines the amount of information that can potentially be received, we have also learned that before we can *perceive* anything we have to be able to *conceive* it. In other words, nineteenth century scientists assumed that our mental functions are not part of the world we are observing, and that whatever we look at we will see. But this is clearly not the case. There is a famous report that when one of Captain Cook's sailing vessels was moored off the coast of a certain primitive society, the natives could not see the ship. They saw something of course, perhaps a large animal or a cloud. But they had no conceptions, and no words, to describe such a thing as a gigantic floating vessel, and without this prior conception they *simply could not see it*. The ship's crew, on the other hand, saw a familiar sailing vessel – because that is what they were able to perceive in accordance with their prior conceptions.⁹

Albert Einstein understood this point clearly. After entertaining the idea that scientists should deal only with objective measurements, he came to realize that when scientists look into the world they can only see what their prior concepts, beliefs, and thoughts, *allow* them to see – and this is precisely the opposite of the traditional scientific assumption that first we observe the world as it 'really is', and then we figure out our theories about it. When Werner Heisenberg claimed to have restricted himself to observable magnitudes in developing his own discoveries, Einstein said to him, "You don't seriously believe that none but observable magnitudes go into a physical theory?" But, protested Heisenberg, that is what *you* did! "Possibly I did use this kind of reasoning," Einstein continued, "but it is nonsense all the same...on principle it is quite wrong to try founding a theory on observable magnitudes alone. In reality the very opposite happens. It is the theory which decides what we can observe."¹⁰ In other words, our prior conceptions decide what we can (or cannot) perceive. Einstein's genius was his willingness and ability to reconsider his theoretical assumptions and previous conceptions, much as Socrates taught his students to do, and to open his mind to other possibilities no matter how strange or impossible they seemed.

The world we actually perceive is a joint function of physical features (the object being observed and our sense organs themselves), plus mental features (our ideas, beliefs and concepts). This raises the core question of *how* two such dissimilar occurrences – an *external event* that affects one or more of our senses, and a cognitive *inner experience* of 'awareness' – somehow converge and blend together?

In other words, what precisely *is* a 'Sense Perception'?

We know that through the intermediary activity of one of the five sense organs, we become aware of some aspect of the environment: we see, hear, smell, taste, or feel, some thing which is outside of our awareness itself. We see or touch a tree, for instance, and we therefore become aware of the tree. This seemingly obvious statement actually conceals one of those precarious occasions when we casually speak of something spectacularly ineffable as if we knew what it meant. When we say we 'become aware' of a tree, what are we talking about? What does this mean?

To clarify the question, consider the act of vision. We say that we 'see a tree': that is, we perceive it by means of the eye. We can scientifically analyze this event quite substantially as follows:

A ray of light bounces off the tree and enters the eye. The light traverses the lens, which, due to the laws of optics, flips the light ray upside down and focuses it on the back wall of the eye chamber. This inner wall is lined with tiny nerve endings called rods and cones. The rods and cones are stimulated by the energy of the light, and they respond by sending electrical transmissions down the Optic Nerve. This nerve reaches its endpoint deep within the brain in a section we call the 'visual area'. The multitude of brain cells that comprise the 'visual area' now receive the electrical stimulation transported to them by the optic nerve, and they respond with a great flurry of electrical activity of their own. We can then analyze this activity at the profound level of the atoms and molecules that comprise these brain cells and organelles, and we discover that their constituent protons, neutrons and electrons react to the incoming electrical impulse by changing their positions and rates of vibration. And then we see the tree.

And then we see the tree? *When? How?* When our atoms start to vibrate differently? But we do not see vibrating atoms. We see an object 'out there'. What does the *cognitive experience* of envisioning a tree have to do with vibrating atoms in the back of the skull? Where is the link between these two utterly disparate things? Our description of physiological phenomena deep within the tissues of the brain has only gotten us further away from the tree itself.

We have learned about many physiological and electrochemical processes that occur concurrently when we see something, but in no way does this explain what 'seeing' *is*. There remains a huge and critical *gap* between our knowledge of vibrating particles and our 'awareness' of a tree.

This inscrutable gap lies between *Matter* (which includes the tree, the sense organs, and the vibrating atoms in the *brain*), and *Consciousness* (an invisible 'experience of awareness' occurring within the *mind*). Objective scientific analysis can provide no logical connection between the two – once we speak of invisible subjective experience, we are completely outside of its realm! Neither can Reason explain it away.

We find ourselves between worlds, between the Mind and the Senses, between the unmanifest realm of Consciousness and the manifest realm of Matter.

How does a 'sense perception' cross over into 'mind'? How does an impression pass beyond the senses and the vibrating atoms, traverse the mysterious 'gap', and sink into the awareness of consciousness?

Could there be something which fills this gap, something that is unique and distinct yet partakes of both Mind and Body, something that can guide an impression through the mysterious passageway between them?

Plato gives us a clue. In the *Symposium*, Socrates states that the 'Messenger' who transmits messages between gods and humans, i.e., between Heaven and Earth, is *Eros*. *Eros* is *desire* – the desire for all that is beautiful, good, and true. In Plato, then, the messenger-between-worlds is found in the realm of human passion, feeling, and emotion.

Twenty-four hundred years later, Alfred North Whitehead¹¹ would recognize that within the human microcosm the *very same thing* happens in the 'gap' between the external world of the senses and the internal world of consciousness: that is, when a sense perception enters the body, resonating memories immediately arouse *feelings*. Feelings are partly of the tangible body and partly of the intangible mind.

Consider the emotion of fear, which contains worried and uneasy thoughts combined with sensations of a ‘pit in the stomach’; or sadness, which combines thoughts of sorrow and regret with a welling up of tears and pain in the solar plexus. Like *Eros*, these emotions can travel back and forth between the two domains. These mediating feelings then transform the physical perceptions within the brain into conscious awareness within the Mind. How they do this may always remain a mystery.

Following this sequence in the opposite direction, Whitehead saw that when the mind conceives an idea it assigns it some gradation of importance. This awareness of importance arouses interest, which again brings in *feeling*. Once apprehended by feeling, the idea is ferried across the ‘gap’, from the mind to the body, where it can then be expressed outwardly. (Words being but one form of expression. Some ideas are better expressed by images, by gestures, by music, by silence.)

Thus, the state of our emotions is also critical to the kind of world our minds perceive.

In summary, we see that our ability to receive impressions from the physical world into consciousness, holistically depends on the natural history of the species, the general health and genetics of the body, the memories, beliefs and conceptions within the mind, and perhaps most importantly, the emotions of the heart. This is why the sharp division between mind and matter, between body and soul, is an illusion. It is yesterday’s science. In modern science a world of flowing energies, complex relationships, and essential interdependence has taken the place of the dead, mechanical world of separate little particles banging around in empty space. The ‘onlooker’ stance of earlier scientific thinking, which saw man as an irrelevant spectator of this dead universe, has been completely altered by fresh understandings of flowing patterns of mutuality and wholeness, since even the simplest act of observation is itself an intervention, with repercussions throughout the natural world and reciprocal repercussions throughout the observer’s mind.

Beyond Reason

We have seen that when science has learned everything it can possibly learn about eyes and neurons and electrical energy, it will still not be able to explain what sight *is*. It may ultimately be able to give us a complete description of the biological, chemical and physical events that occur when we see, but the miracle itself will remain outside its understanding. This is not because there is something wrong with science. It is simply a consequence of what science is all about. Science is descriptive only. It ultimately explains nothing. It can describe how things happen (formulas of succession), but it is not the concern of science to ask *why*. That is *our* job. The dignity of men and women – what makes it possible for us to be different from other creatures – lies in our individual concern with this question.

When we fail to recognize the limitations of science, we fall prone to the worship of science. To pronounce with pompous certainty that something has been ‘proven scientifically’ and must therefore be accepted as the last word on the subject, is inconsistent with the meaning of science itself as well as with human reason. There are two excesses that must be avoided: to exclude rational thinking, and to admit nothing but rational thinking.

As science and philosophy continue to examine and unravel the mysteries of the relationship between the inner experiences of mind and the external events of matter, we stand in an ideal position to begin a fresh examination of the universe. But Reason finds itself still stymied by the stubborn refusal of ‘actual reality’

to reveal itself. As Plato knew, if one wishes to know actual Reality, *reason has to give way*. This has always been the stance of mystics, but it has also had adherents in western science. “Reason’s last step”, wrote Blaise Pascal, “is the recognition that there are an infinite number of things which are beyond it. It is merely feeble if it does not go as far as to realize that.”¹² The kind of realization that Pascal is referring to here is not ‘irrational’ or ‘anti-rational’. There is no question that many critics of science do argue from a tiresome and fatuous standpoint of irrationality, but Pascal is talking about something else, something that the West seems to keep forgetting: he is recognizing the possibility of reaching a *higher* form of wisdom.

Socrates knew that *Eros* is required to lure Reason to its final extremity, where it recognizes its own limitations. Along the way, at its most productive, Reason accompanied by *Eros* is grounded in feelings of interest in the subject, feelings of devotion to truth, enjoyment in discovery, and an appreciation for beauty and mystery. But Reason without *Eros*, dried up of feeling and separated from any worthy aim, becomes preoccupied with pointless scurrying about, busily ripping apart the tapestry of life, analyzing all the pieces, classifying them, but unable to remember why or how to put them back together again.

All truly ground-breaking knowledge comes from noetic insight *beyond* reason. Old thought patterns dissolve and something new appears. Discursive reasoning, logic, experimentation and classification, can all help to prepare the ground for the soul to awaken and for insight to occur, but they do this by simply rearranging what is already known. Only erotic longing, in the fullest sense, can lead us beyond such circular processes and open up new possibilities of awareness. When we cherish this longing, remembering what it is and what it means for our lives, we see that *Eros* is the link between meaningless data and meaningful wisdom. All those subjects that teach the soul about meaning – philosophy, art, music, literature, religion – are enlivened and refreshed once again. They provide genuine, indispensable knowledge that is essential for the mature pursuit of science, a knowledge that carries far more ‘weight’ than mere technological knowledge. And then this technological knowledge gains a context of meaning and purpose that allows it to become, appropriately, the highly regarded servant, but not the master, of humanity.

CHAPTER TWO - ECONOMICS

In the years immediately following WWII, a remarkable shift occurred in American economic life. For the first time in history, we reached a stage of prosperous development in which we could produce far more goods and services than anyone needed. Various factors combined to create this new situation, including advanced industrial technology, wartime expansion of the economy, the destruction of Europe's industrial base while our own remained unscathed, and women added to the workforce. To sustain all this growth, to continue paying wages and continue expanding profits, it was deemed necessary to stimulate our habits of consumption, to artificially increase the public's appetite for what was being produced. No longer were manufacturers content with simply determining what people wanted and needed. Thenceforward, to a degree never witnessed before, it became necessary to learn effective ways of persuading people that they wanted and needed all sorts of things that they had never wanted or needed before. As a result, the public was soon being bombarded with non-stop messages to fall into line and do what we were being told: the duty of Americans, it became clear, was to go shopping. The 'good life' had been confused with the 'goods'.

Just as advertisers were beginning to seek out scientific advice to help them develop more effective methods and procedures for what was casually dubbed 'engineering consent', television appeared on the scene. Soon the nation became practically catatonic. Consumers became targets rather than individuals, and the professional persuaders began using heavy artillery. Rather than explaining a product's quality or usefulness, they concentrated on ways to manipulate our suggestibility, our fears, our least becoming motivations. Using every technique they could garner from science, advertisers soon computerized vast amounts of information about our personal lives and buying habits as discerned from focus groups, psychological interviewing techniques, brain-wave measurements, studies of reactions to various sounds and pictures, etc.

But it continued to become increasingly difficult to reach people in the midst of the exploding carnival of marketing and promotion, so as consumers became more jaded the marketers became more aggressive. To accommodate the ever-increasing number of things to be sold, advertisements had to become ever briefer. The effect of this was to shorten the public's already meager attention span: an image has to hit home deeply and instantly or it will never be noticed. It soon became apparent that this is best accomplished by evoking negative emotions such as anxiety, fear and envy – which is a far cry from simply distributing useful information about products, which required time and thoughtfulness. The goal was clear: consumers needed to think less and buy more.

A further consequence of this new consumer culture was that it became necessary for us to become a nation of waste-makers. With so much being produced, we have to continually discard the old to make room for the new. The promise of instant gratification is necessary, but the economy will stall if products satisfy us for too long. It is therefore necessary for things to break down quickly and need to be thrown away and replaced often.

With the general public virtually hypnotized into supporting these trends, more and more wealth was accumulating into fewer and fewer hands, giving big American business immense power to determine conditions here and around the world. This awesome financial power linked up with exuberant postwar feelings of patriotism and manifest destiny, and soon the American public was convinced that anything

that interfered with the expansion of American corporate power was un-American, and thus began the incessant and peculiar identification of Capitalism with Freedom.*

To maintain overwhelming public support for corporate America, public relations experts were brought in. The public needed to receive the appropriate messages, not just from advertising, but from the arts, entertainment, government, schools, museums, libraries – in short, from all avenues of modern culture. Now, in consequence, our lives are immersed in a steady stream of repetitive, continuous propaganda, perpetuating the various myths of economics, politics and science, and steadily eroding our individuality.

Propaganda is not concerned with what is best in men and women, it is not concerned with noble feelings or admirable goals. “Propaganda”, writes Jacques Ellul, “does not aim to elevate man, but to make him serve.”

It must therefore utilize the most common feelings, the most widespread ideas, the crudest patterns, and in so doing place itself on a very low level with regard to what it wants men to do and to what end. Hate, hunger, and pride make better levers of propaganda than do love or impartiality.¹³

For these and many other reasons, we now live in a culture in which style has achieved primacy over substance. Although the original conception of democracy meant that social equality was more important than a social elite, and therefore the symbols of an elite were rejected, we now take the contorted alternative view that the symbols and styles of elites should be mass produced and made available to everyone. The American ideal of equality has come to mean that we all have an equal right to possess the same stuff. Of course, this mass production implies mass standardization, and thus any genuine uniqueness which was available when production meant handicraft has now been replaced by the ‘sameness’ of what is available to everyone. In response to this, there are always those few whose need to be noticed causes them to present themselves in a manner so bizarre as to stand out in the crowd. This never lasts long, however, since whatever stands out in the crowd typically becomes the next trend, the next standardized fashion.

We see the powerful mesmerizing effects of advertising, public relations, and fashion, in the pursuit of the perfect car, the perfect body, the perfect house, the perfect mate. We see it in our participation in certain activities, and our passive adherence to certain beliefs, that make us acceptable to whatever crowd we wish to join. We continue to speak sentimentally of our great respect for ‘rugged individualism’, but large-scale contemporary production, trade, and consumption require centralized authority, massive planning, and a willingness of so-called individuals to become cogs in the economic machine. A community of genuine individuals, held together by love, is thus transformed into an efficient ant hill, held together by money and power.

In addition to any legitimate help we may be offering to politically oppressed people in their struggles against totalitarian regimes, we insist that they emulate our strange way of life. As part of the bargain for receiving our military aid, we rip apart the tapestry of their traditions and culture, sweep away their customs and individuality, offer them ‘modern technology and free trade of consumer goods’ in return, and thus ensure that their lives can soon become as trivialized and alienated as our own: “For a zoned-out,

* For America’s Founders, the principle of freedom primarily meant *freedom of thought* – the freedom to pursue knowledge, truth and wisdom for oneself, without any religious or political constraints.

stupefied populace,” notes Morris Berman, “democracy will be nothing more than the right to shop, or to choose between Wendy’s and Burger King, or to stare at CNN and think that this managed infotainment is actually the news.”¹⁴

But contrary to the complaints of many critics of capitalism, the chief responsibility for all of this does not lie with Madison Avenue or the lords of corporate power. The responsibility lies with *us*, with our own ‘suggestibility’, the astonishing ease with which we abdicate all efforts to think and reason for ourselves, and believe whatever we are told. This is all a consequence of the inverted soul: the demanding Body is active, making acquisitiveness the only goal of life; the Mind is passive, benumbed by all the images and messages; and the Heart is shut down, the victim of pornography and brutality. As a result, just as the appetites have taken *control* of the soul rather than *supporting* the soul, so Plato’s ‘Merchants’ have become the usurping rulers of our political and cultural life, while the ‘Guardians’ remain silent and asleep. And *Eros* is nowhere to be found.

This is not how a soul is supposed to be governed, and it is not how an economy is supposed to be conducted. As Jacob learned from Laban, and as Christ taught in his parables, it is good to increase material wealth and abundance (to be ‘fruitful and multiply’), it is *necessary* and *honorable* to learn how to take care of ourselves, our families, our neighbors, our posterity. But the impulse to do this cannot come from ‘Below’, it cannot come from meaningless greed. The impulse has to come from ‘Above’, from the creative Mind, from the Spirit. The responsibility of Plato’s ‘Merchants’ is to *support* society, to improve the material well-being of the citizenry, to be of *service* to Life under the guidance of what is highest and best in Life.

Prosperity, both personal and cultural, results from a combination of effort, excellence, intelligence, and good fortune. It is certainly true that luck and serendipity will often play a role, giving some players an inexplicable and unearned advantage. But the other qualities are usually far more important, and they ought to be respected and admired, not envied and despised while we exalt mediocrity.

In feudal times, the wealth of the nobility was just about always unearned, and the poor had a negligible likelihood of ever improving their lot. It is often overlooked that the rise of capitalism was part of the Enlightenment’s agenda of bringing prosperity to everyone. And although it is far from perfect, although it can certainly be abused by corporate greed, Ponzi schemes, and so forth, it is still far more promising than any other economic system so far devised.

Unlike in the feudal system, wealth can move from one person to another in a capitalist system. A successful business not only accumulates wealth in the hands of its owner, but also serves as a source of opportunity and prosperity for others: employees, vendors, even competitors and imitators. This is not just theory. I am by no means a ‘supply-side economist’, but I have had the experience of starting a small business, employing a couple of people, and dreaming of doing well and employing more. And I’ve had the experience of seeing the business fail, and having to lay people off instead. This is a fairly common experience in America. One can certainly, even unavoidably, extrapolate from these experiences that when such businesses *do* succeed they give employment and increased wealth to *many* people. Failing in business is of course disheartening, but business is to a great extent a matter of accepting risk. It is certainly true that if government policies have no safety factors built in (from corporate laws that allow people to separate their personal belongings from their company’s assets, to regulations that protect novices from unfair business practices, to the right to file for bankruptcy if everything collapses) few people would be willing to take such risk. On the other hand, *too much* regulation – forcing business

owners to spend all their time filling out endless forms, and all their money meeting the demands of countless well-intentioned administrative agencies – also puts a chill on entrepreneurial activity since the scant remaining profits are simply not worth the effort.

Wealth is not a static quantity. If it *were* a static quantity, it would be true that the prosperity of one person can only come at the expense of someone else. But in a capitalist system, new wealth can be *created* and *increased*, through brilliance, innovation, and effort. This statement is proven by the negative: that is, in a capitalist system it must also be true that the total amount of wealth can *decrease* and *evaporate* as a result of stupidity, ravenousness, and short-sightedness. The economic catastrophe of the Fall of 2008 has given us a powerful and undeniable proof of the dynamic quality of wealth. The dollars that Bernie Madoff’s clients lost are not hidden somewhere in a drawer. They simply do not exist.

In far too many ways, it is clear that the Enlightenment agenda of open-minded scientific inquiry and the unfettered exercise of human reason has been overwhelmed by commercialism and turned into scientism and group-think. When massive corporations seek only to maintain their own power by artificially stimulating consumer demand and then stuffing the consumer’s face with everything they now imagine they want, our souls and our civilization continue to devolve and decay. But when entrepreneurs, through shrewdness and innovation, create wealth by benefiting others as well as themselves, this increased prosperity improves all of life and serves God’s purpose. This is why the Master in Christ’s parable welcomed the slave who had ‘turned five talents into ten’ back into His joy, but threw the slave who merely maintained the status quo back into the outer darkness.

Prosperity *is* the goal of economics, and it is a *worthy* goal. But for society as a whole, economic prosperity is a means to an end – and all too often we have perverted this ideal through envy and greed, making the accumulation of wealth an end in itself, making it the cold relentless motive for all the decisions we make as a nation and as individuals. The result of this is the emptiness and drudgery of the human ant hill, increased poverty and misery, and ever more violence in our cities and across the world, rather than the magnificent cultural flowering of Beauty, Wisdom, and Spirit, that was the dream of the American Founders.

Poverty

People go hungry in America. Children are homeless in America. Millions of Americans struggle for bare economic survival each day.

Fortunately, Americans are a basically compassionate people. We do not let people suffer and starve without at least making some effort to help. Individuals often help those in need. But for a problem of this magnitude we need more than just the efforts and contributions of generous individuals. We need effective political and economic policies.

No one begrudges welfare for the disabled, the elderly who are poor and alone, or mothers with young children who have no other means of support. But the issue that confronts the government when it seeks to alleviate poverty is this: How do we provide necessary help for people who need it, without perpetuating a *culture* of welfare for people who *no longer* need it. This question is of crucial importance because the American welfare system, as it stands today, is a potent *cause* of poverty – as well as being a major cause of all the broken homes, fatherless children, suicides, health problems, drug trafficking, and violence, that virtually always accompany poverty.

American society used to assume that poor people were ‘different’ than the rest of us, that poverty was somehow a natural and unavoidable condition for certain predisposed persons: blacks, for instance, or Indians, or immigrants. Poverty, broken homes, violence, etc., were thought of as unfortunately inevitable for such people. As society became more enlightened, however, these ideas eventually became politically incorrect, so we searched for new reasons to explain why these people were poor. One major excuse, grounded in our egalitarian principles, was that black people’s psyches had been so damaged by slavery and discrimination that they really could not help themselves – which is as much as to say that even though they were not *born* ‘inferior’, *now* they are. So the government is obligated to step in with welfare and other programs (which is only fair because the rest of us are *guilty*).

And so began the degrading habit of treating poor people in general, and black people in particular, like children, incapable of taking care of themselves.

And yet, when white middle-class people are ravaged by economic catastrophes like sudden job loss, they often resort to drink and drugs, violence and depression, and their children are often neglected and end up in trouble of their own. Divorce, the death of a loved one, and other family catastrophes, often initiate the same chain of events. It does not matter what color one’s skin happens to be or where one’s ancestors came from. The rich and the poor are not different species, and the only way today’s poor will rise to a higher standard of economic life is by the same means that yesterday’s poor did the same thing: not by being degraded and emasculated by government coddling, but by working hard.

Giving Blacks, Hispanics or anyone else, the incessant cultural message that they cannot ‘make it’ in America without extra help and unearned entitlements *only perpetuates poverty*. Poor groups of people in America, usually newly-arrived immigrants, have always ‘made it’. Yes, the *history* of black Americans is clearly, and horrifyingly, different. But black *people* are no different than these other people. And the many (and growing) numbers of black success stories invariably show that African Americans can rise out of poverty by the same means as everyone else. Typically, one generation works exceedingly hard, allowing the next generation to get an excellent education, and fairly quickly the entire group moves up the economic ladder.*

It is often noted that the gap between the rich and the poor is growing. From 1977 to 1993, for example, the wealth of the top 1% of American families grew 78% and they owned 40% of the nation’s wealth. By 1995, according to Robert Reich, they owned 47%. On the other hand, according to the Census Bureau the *bottom* 20% of American families in 1970 received 5.4% of the national income. By 1994 this had dropped to only 4.2%.¹⁵ This is apparently an unprecedented redistribution of wealth in favor of the rich, which MIT economist Paul Krugman refers to as a “spiral of inequality”.¹⁶

But these figures can be deceptive because many of the ‘poor’ are rising up the economic ladder and increasing the numbers of the ‘rich’. Then *new* people enter the country, typically replenishing the ranks of the ‘poor’ (but only temporarily). The assertion of a widening gap would be far more meaningful if these groups were static – if the poor were condemned to eternal poverty and membership in the ranks of the ‘rich’ was eternally closed. But this is not the case (though, as we shall see, current welfare policies do *slow down* the normal upward progression for many people).

* One thing this pattern tells us is that there will *always* be poor people in America, unless we become hysterical in our foolish and shameful antagonism toward ‘aliens’ and shut off all new immigration. But history shows clearly that this poverty need only be *temporary*. In addition, as we have always recognized, America *needs* new influxes of immigrants – to stimulate the economy, to stimulate culture, to bring new ideas, new innovations, and new life. As the population ages, and more and more people live longer healthier lives, new young Americans are always needed and should always be welcomed with open arms.

If these two groups *were* fixed and changeless it would make sense, both ethically and economically, to take much of rich people's money and redistribute it to the poor. But since poor people can and do 'make it' on their own, this makes no sense at all beyond providing a limited safety net. On the contrary, redistribution beyond a certain level simply serves to dissuade people from working hard. From the point of view of someone who is currently poor, why bother working when money is to be had for free? From the point of view of someone who is rich, why bother working when the bulk of the earnings will just be taken away? Most people tend to be charitable when asked, but it is only natural to resent it when one is *forced* to turn over the fruits of one's labors.

If, instead, we truly encouraged and allowed ambitious people to succeed economically and enjoy the rewards, *more* wealth and *more* jobs and *more* opportunities would be created for everyone, and more of the currently-poor would use their intelligence and talent to create *more* wealth for themselves and others. But in the current welfare system, despite all its good intentions, everyone just loses.¹⁷

So if hard work is the way out of poverty, and this is not a secret, why are so many poor people in contemporary America having such difficulty moving up the ladder? It is not because poor people are inferior. It is not because of discrimination.* And the poor who remain poor do not stagnate in this condition because of any sort of moral weakness. They remain poor because *they are paid to do* so.

Various studies (as well as obvious common sense) demonstrate that married fathers, on average, spurred by the need to take care of their families, work more and earn more than single men. Studies also show that these men, on average, work more and earn more than working mothers. Relatively few mothers of small children make jobs their top priority. But if a mother is taking primary responsibility for the children, fathers typically *can and do* make jobs a top priority – for exactly the same reason that mothers don't: i.e., to take care of their children.¹⁸

And this indicates that a key to eliminating poverty is to encourage strong ties between men and their families. But due to a tragically misplaced 'compassion', governmental anti-poverty programs demoralize men, encouraging a state of affairs in which fathers recognize with horror that their families are better off without them! A mother raising young children by herself is eligible for a bonanza of government benefits that are taken away if an able-bodied husband is in the home. So off he goes – feeling hurt and angry and aggressive, seeking once again the pleasures of drinking, fighting, and promiscuous sex that he gave up when he got married. Soon he fathers yet more children that he won't take care of. His daughters grow up seeing that husbands and fathers are expendable, though having babies brings them free money. His sons grow up without a father to teach them what being a man really means – so they try to learn these things, wrongly of course, from equally immature friends who gather in the streets.

Eventually the government – always looking for a band-aid instead of curing the problem – goes after these men and demands Child Support. But few men are willing to keep paying for the care of children they never see, who are being raised by a mother who is most often living with another man. So they find jobs that pay under the table, or disappear altogether, and sponge off other women who collect welfare.

As long as the wages of employment are not as valuable as the seductive combination of welfare, food stamps, Medicaid, and the enjoyable leisure time that these bestow, the problem of a hopeless dead-end welfare culture will not be corrected. Going after dead-beat Dads (fruitless), prosecuting outright welfare

* Which does not mean that discrimination does not exist. Racism and bigotry persist, as do many forms of human stupidity. But in an America ruled by law – an America filled with black executives, black professionals, black artists, and even a black President – it is no longer reasonable or justifiable to use 'discrimination' as a cheap excuse.

fraud (which is actually a relatively rare occurrence), and insisting that mothers leave their children at government-sponsored daycare facilities while they are herded into artificial ‘work-fare’ programs, are all just illusions of reform and utter wastes of time.

Most people who initially enter the welfare system have had legitimate catastrophes – sudden job loss, devastating accidents or illnesses, death of a bread-winner. The goal of the system should be to help them out as much as needed (without burdening them with piles of paperwork and ‘waiting-times’ precisely when aid is most necessary), and then help them get off the rolls and back into a safe, satisfying, successful life. But if the system treats temporary problems as if they were permanent problems, the likelihood is that this will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The way to alleviate poverty is to make life *without* welfare more alluring than life *with* it. This would mean:

- 1) Slowly but steadily *lowering* the value of welfare payments (at *least* by *not* having them ‘keep up with inflation’), but *not* so fast as to suddenly dump unprepared catastrophe victims into an untenable situation;
- 2) Encouraging entrepreneurship and business growth through tax incentives and a reasonable lessening of unnecessarily stifling bureaucracy;
- 3) Replacing Medicaid with Universal Health Insurance, so that workers starting out in low-paying jobs, and entrepreneurs starting a new business, do not have to give up their ambitions in order to provide health coverage for themselves and their families;
- 4) Finding multiple ways – in the media, in governmental policy decisions (especially in welfare regulations), and in the education system – to *encourage* families to stay together and to have respect for both fathers and mothers;
- 5) Including ‘Child Allowances’ in the tax system for *all* children, not just fatherless children on welfare.

There is one more step as well. Work has to include a vision, a meaning, beyond itself. It cannot be viewed as mere drudgery, a necessary-but-hateful way to barely subsist while making corporations and their investors rich. This just kills the spirit. Work must include a genuine aspiration for personal success and achievement that can only come from *Eros*.

Human beings are three-fold creatures. The foundation of our worldly life is work and money. Without these, financial instability and material suffering spoil all the other aspects of life. At the apex of our life is our relationship to that which is higher and more important than ourselves. Binding and connecting this all together is the central feature of our lives – the love of family and friends.

None of this can be neglected without harming the entire human being, without destroying all the pleasure, all the fulfillment, and all the meaning of life.

CHAPTER THREE - CULTURE

Life in ancient and medieval times was not enviable. Life was awash with poverty, disease, early death, endless work, crime, cruelty, and war. The ancients talked about virtue and happiness, but they never found a way to achieve it for more than a few aristocrats. The political concern of the Enlightenment was to alter this. Rather than a world of countless suffering serfs, and a few princes living in luxury off of everyone else's labor, a great humanitarian endeavor was undertaken to lift suffering humanity and provide a good life for all.

To bring about this enormous change there would be a cost, with losses as well as gains. To attain security and prosperity for everyone we would have to stop talking about unattainable *virtue* and focus instead on accepting, understanding, and caring about human beings *as they are*. In other words, it was necessary to have a philosophical change as well as a change in material conditions. Instead of thinking about ways to transcend the mundane realities of life, philosophers would have to become the allies of the day-to-day efforts taking place in the world. The human Mind would have to come down off its lofty perspective and stop seeking after virtue, truth and beauty, so that the Body of humanity could be lifted up to a more suitable material state.

The value of this endeavor is undeniable, and we rightly continue to this day to make efforts that will hopefully bring about its fulfillment for all human beings. This is the task of modern commercial society, struggling toward freedom, equality, and prosperity.

But the cost has been enormous. While our human appetites and cravings still persist, the virtues that ruled them have been abandoned, leaving the body and its needs to fend for themselves. The only remaining virtue is *self-interest*. Everything else has been debunked. Our actions can only be judged according to their *utility*: do they help preserve and bring comfort to the individual? "Life, Liberty, and Property" were not the concern of ancient philosophers. Their concern was with the perfection of the soul. But as philosophers and political scientists became exclusively concerned with alleviating worldly human suffering, the soul disappeared.

Life was better, but somehow empty. People needed more. So a new concept was invented in response to the banality of a purely commercial life. It is called *Culture* – a vague concept that refers to aspects of life that are somehow 'higher', more intellectual, or *at least different*, than the merely physical and economic aspects. But 'culture' is not a commensurate replacement for what has been lost. In the hierarchy of importance, commerce replaced religion, patriotism, art, etc. People are willing to strive and fight and even die for God, for country, or any of several other virtues. In many ways, we are better off as these fanaticisms die down. But the new hierarchy leaves little in life to be passionate about. No one is willing to die for culture.

But 'enjoying culture' is how we are now expected to alleviate the meaninglessness of our mechanical, commercial lives. Since it never denies the far greater importance of commerce, however, culture carries no real weight. It is *pleasant* to include a bit of religious piety in our lives, and a Sunday afternoon visit to the museum is often refreshing and fun. But come Monday morning, we must get serious once again and immerse ourselves in commerce. Higher values used to rule our lower values, but this has all been reversed. God is now made in the image of man. To believe otherwise is deemed groundless and childish.

Over the past few centuries, there has been a veritable explosion of admirable examples of social betterment. But, as Max Weber noted, we have chosen to stake our lives on solid but low ground. A society dedicated to self-preservation does not provide fertile soil for beauty, nobility, or greatness of soul. Such things have little place in our world – and if anyone suggests otherwise, the Press will quickly come swarming, looking for titillating bits of dirt to help squelch such notions. So the effect of the Enlightenment has been to raise mankind economically while lowering us intellectually and spiritually. As a consequence, we have learned to live with coarseness and vulgarity. This is what many people around the world see when they look at America – a veritable circus of consumerism and obscenity, a godless criminal system of unbridled greed, theft, exploitation and vulgarity, a society that is materially strong but morally and intellectually weak. Mass production and advances in technology and communications have only magnified the impact of this impression.

Alexis de Tocqueville

In the early days of our Republic, Alexis de Tocqueville warned us that even though Americans were free, as no people had ever been free before, to pursue new paths of thoughtfulness and wisdom, it was also possible that the principles of equality and majority rule would one day lead citizens to stop thinking for themselves and simply accept the opinions of the majority as their own. In the United States, he wrote in *Democracy in America*, despite the spirit and intent of the Enlightenment which venerated the power of individual reason, “the majority takes upon itself the task of supplying to the individual a mass of ready-made opinions, thus relieving him of the necessity to take the proper responsibility of arriving at his own. Thus, he accepts without scrutiny a great number of philosophic, moral, or political theories on the word of the general masses.”¹⁹ He feared that Americans could end up more oppressed by mob mentality, more enslaved to the whims of trite popular ideas, than previous people had ever been oppressed or enslaved by kings. Of course, Tocqueville realized, people living in a democracy would be ambitious, and their lives would necessarily be busy and complex with little leisure time. There would only be limited time for thinking. In our external commercial life as well as our internal intellectual life we would be tempted to “wish for immediate success without expending great effort.”²⁰

Among all the emotions fostered by equality, he went on, one in particular “is set deep in the heart of man, namely the love of comfort which forms the prominent and indelible feature of democracy.”²¹ This, he foresaw, might cause Americans to plunge headlong into a vortex of empty material pleasures. One solution to this is religious faith, which aims to “restrain the overly fervent and exclusive taste for comfort which men experience in times of equality.” But he advised religions not try and completely destroy the love of comfort, since this would simply cause hostility. “They will never succeed in turning men away from wealth but can still persuade them to grow wealthy by honorable means.”²²

But when faith is diminished, as is the case in much of our contemporary life, Tocqueville knew that “doubt takes a grip upon the highest areas of intelligence, partially paralyzing all the others.” The result is confusion and vacillation, a lessened ability to form intelligent opinions and stand by one’s convictions, a despair of ever being able to meet the demands and difficulties of the world, and eventually “a cowardly retreat into not thinking at all.”²³ In such conditions, he warned, citizens are ripe for slavery. “Not only do the latter allow their freedom to be taken from them, they often give it up.”²⁴ We have to serve something, he concluded. If we wish to remain free, we had better serve something higher than ourselves.

Tocqueville, however, had no use for the kind of fundamentalist religion that has become the rage among some of our citizens, and certainly no admiration for the foray of religion into politics. To maintain freedom and equality, he knew the spirit must reject dogmatism, and religions must remain within their proper bounds, “In wishing to stretch their powers beyond matters religious, they risk losing their credibility in all other spheres as well. So they must, with care, draw the circle within which they intend to contain the human spirit, while outside the circle the mind should be left entirely free to guide itself.”²⁵

Compared to Europe, Tocqueville noted a paucity of great art in America. Denying that democracy *per se* must cause a dimming of artistic light, he pointed out three American peculiarities which had led us temporarily to this result. The first cause was our puritan heritage – an austere religion that was hostile to symbols, pomp and ceremony, and gave little or no support to the pleasures of art, music, dance, or even literature. The second was our enormous emphasis on the pursuit of wealth, which constantly diverts the mind from the pleasures of the intellect and the artistic imagination. And third was our intellectual connection with England, which allowed Americans to feel that *we already share* in great artistic achievements, produced by the leisurely aristocracy while we were busy developing a new economy on this side of the Atlantic.

The principle of equality, he noted, does not tend to draw all citizens upward into an equal state of high nobility, but rather to draw us all downward, reducing everyone to a low common denominator. Fortunately, America also incorporates the counteracting principle of freedom, which allows and encourages all citizens to strive upward and to escape the common morass: when citizens in an egalitarian society are enlightened by freedom, “they have no difficulty in realizing that nothing restricts or pins them down, nothing forces them to limit themselves to their present state of wealth.... The legislature grants no privileges, it is true, but nature does. Natural inequality being very great, fortunes become unequal from the moment each man uses all his talents to get rich.”²⁶

As a result, America will always contain a great number of wealthy people (probably more than in the old aristocracies) with increasing amounts of leisure time that can potentially be devoted to the pleasures of the intellect and the arts. And they will certainly do so, according to Tocqueville, who believed that the human mind always has this inclination: “Physical needs keep it pinned to the earth but as soon as the tie is loosened, it will rise again of its own accord.”

Still, he foresaw, a frenetic commercial society would retain a low regard for the leisurely life of the mind, and the arts and sciences of America would likely be of a practical nature with an emphasis on artisanship, invention, and commercial application, rather than the Fine Arts or knowledge for its own sake. In aristocracies, people seek the pleasures of the *mind* from art and science. In democracies, they seek the pleasures of the *body*. Nonetheless, Tocqueville acknowledged, it is a definite advantage that a democracy will encourage far more people to *become* artists and scientists – since free and equal citizens are not confined to predetermined classes, and may pursue whatever careers and endeavors they choose. Some of these people will certainly hear the higher calling of pursuing truth and beauty, and not mere practicality. This may well be lifesaving, for he warns us that *practical* science and art, without *higher* science and art, is dead. Cut off from meaning and inspiration, they retain their tools but they do not know *why*. They end up monotonously imitating the past, with no way to envision a different future.

In aristocracies, artisans worked to sell their goods to a small number of wealthy and conservative nobles. These nobles, who pretty much had all the money, wanted only the best: their life of leisure had made them devotees of beauty and perfection. Artists and craftsmen always knew that their livelihood depended mainly on the perfection of their workmanship. But things are very different in democracies. In democracies, everyone is a potential customer, and democratic tastes clearly lean more toward the useful

than toward the beautiful. The livelihood of democratic capitalists depends on selling large quantities of goods, and Tocqueville knew that this would mean a tendency to find shortcuts, a tendency for shoddy workmanship, a tendency for making goods that appeared to be more valuable than they were: “When only the rich had watches, they were almost all of excellent quality; now, mostly mediocre specimens are produced but everyone possesses one. Thus democracy not only directs the human mind to the useful arts but also persuades craftsmen to produce many second-rate goods and consumers to put up with them.”²⁷ Work multiplies, but all too often quality and merit decline. Sublime beauty succumbs to petty prettiness. We surround ourselves with ugliness and triviality, and as Tocqueville noted so long ago, we ‘put up with them’. A society and its economy are in tough shape when most citizens cannot distinguish quality from garbage.

In conceiving his famous symbolic allegory of humans as slaves chained to their seats, staring forever at images flickering on the wall of a cave, Plato could never have imagined how fantastically real his vision would one day become in a world where people sit for hours each day in their chairs staring at images on their television and computer screens. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that television and internet programming and advertising assume an audience of morons who each have an attention span that can be measured in milliseconds. Tocqueville warned us that art in a democracy could easily become crude and shoddy and facile. Even he would never have dreamed that we would be so willing to stare all day at an endless procession of brutal, obscene, degrading, and smarmy shows and commercials that focus chiefly on over-consumption and titillating entertainment.

Imagine a thirteen-year-old boy sitting in his living room doing his homework, plugged into his earphones and watching MTV. “He enjoys the liberties hard won over centuries by the alliance of philosophic genius and political heroism,” notes Allan Bloom, “consecrated by the blood of martyrs; he is provided with comfort and leisure by the most productive economy ever known to mankind; science has penetrated the secrets of nature in order to provide him with the marvelous, lifelike sound and image reproduction he is enjoying. And in what does progress culminate? A pubescent child whose body throbs with orgasmic rhythms; whose feelings are made articulate in hymns to the joys of onanism or the killing of parents; whose ambition is to win fame and wealth in imitating the drag-queen who makes the music. In short, life is made into a nonstop, commercially packaged masturbational fantasy.”²⁸ We evidently cannot control or reverse this, so we simply deny it. We launch plenty of ‘inconclusive studies’ about the effects of sex and violence on television (as if we needed the outside authority of a scientific study to tell us the most obvious truths), we pretend our children will get over it, outgrow it, not have their guts or their souls or their future relationships permanently spoiled by it. Anyway, so we say, the schools are teaching them healthy values, and it is not the job of parents to inflict their morals on their children.

Postmodernism

The Modern Age is considered to have begun with the Enlightenment, when medieval religion’s oppressive grip on the human mind was relinquished, and reason was set free. The real crux of modernism is the belief that we can know and understand the universe by applying objective reason to the material world. The knowledge we obtain by this method, called ‘science’, is Truth. Reason is assumed to be the highest form of mental functioning and is therefore the proper judge of what is True, and consequently it is also the proper judge of what is Good (ethics) and what is Beautiful (aesthetics).

This point of view persists today as the prevalent way of thinking. On the positive side, it has led to

magnificent achievements in medicine, technology, industry, agriculture, aeronautics, and communications, to name but a few. On the negative side, it has led to pollution of the environment, weaponry that threatens total annihilation, mindless consumerism, and an empty sense that life on earth is nothing but an insignificant fluke.

We have already seen that much of the scientific worldview of modernism has been abandoned by recent science, but it remains deeply ingrained in our psyches and continues to affect all aspects of our daily lives. For instance, our fascination with taking things apart, examining and classifying the pieces, and not carefully considering how to put them back together, applies to our relationships with family and community just as much as to the objects of laboratory study. This way of thinking leads to the fragmentation of our social lives, especially today when technological advancements enable us to leave our homes and roots at a moment's notice and resettle in distant parts of the planet by the end of the day, maintaining superficial relationships through phone lines and computers. Thus the coherence of community decays.

Not that freeing oneself from the confines of a stifling environment is a bad thing, or that the pursuit of individual freedom and personal growth is a bad thing. But there is a vital distinction that is often missed between genuine positive freedom and the unsalvageable destruction of meaningful human connections. An inner spiritual state of detachment *enables* conscious love, but a self-absorbed emotional detachment from other human beings merely causes alienation, not freedom, and is just a sign of the *inability* to sustain love, commitment, or responsibility. The flowing-process image that describes material objects in a laboratory applies equally well to people in a society: we are connected to each other in a web of mutuality in space and time, and cannot separate from each other any more than a bit of matter can separate from time, space, or its environment. When community no longer nourishes, and it becomes necessary to break communal links, new human relations must be established. Personal freedom *grows* when the individual is nourished, sustained, and supported by love, when idiosyncrasies are cherished, and communication is warm and plentiful. But freedom corrodes and perishes in the anonymity of standardized mechanical mass culture, where conformity masquerades as equality, and we are free to make whatever life choices we wish to make but have no healthy criteria for making them.

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The movement called 'Postmodernism' begins as a reaction against Modernism, brought about by disenchantment with classical science and rationalism, and the kind of civilization that these things have wrought. Postmodernism takes its cue from the scientific dilemma regarding subjectivity and objectivity that we discussed in Chapter One. As we saw there, the classical assumption that it is possible to conduct a purely objective examination of matter, is untenable. This raised the question of whether external reality even exists, or whether it is only an image constructed by a subjective mind. The postmodern answer is that it really does not even matter, since it accepts without question that our perceptions are all we can know of reality anyway. This interpretation means in turn that only subjectivity has any actual significance for us, since everything, from matters of taste to religious belief to scientific truth, can be nothing more than personal opinion.*

* Since science can no longer be explained as a search for truth about reality (there being no such thing), but is only a matter of personal opinion, the only kind of knowledge that can possibly be of any use is simple, functional 'data'. Here is the perfect philosophy for the computer age: if it isn't data that can be put into a computer, it isn't real knowledge. The opposite of knowledge is no longer ignorance; the opposite of knowledge is "noise" – something that is unrecognizable by the machines.

This being so, every opinion must be accorded equal respect, since each opinion is just as subjectively true as any other. Thus, postmodernists have to maintain a strangely paradoxical absolute faith that nothing is absolute, and they have to be tolerant of anything and everything. Knowledge is demeaned, morality is belittled, and every notion, whether thoughtful or insane, is given equal credence. Relativism becomes postmodernism's moral imperative, and this means that postmodernism, like relativism, is morally bankrupt and incoherent. The new twist, however, is that moral bankruptcy and incoherency are not problems anymore! They are just as good as anything else, and we might as well enjoy ourselves and revel in the absurdity. Modernist artists often recognized the tragic emptiness that the worldview of positivistic science had spawned, and sought in their art to provide some sense of meaning and comfort. Postmodern artists see exactly the same emptiness, but they do not call it tragic. They are satisfied with the meaninglessness and eager to make the best of it.

Meanwhile, anyone who disagrees with this analysis, and continues to insist on the possibility that some things might be objectively true, is merely revealing their deep-seated sexist, aristocratic and racist motives. Everything thus becomes political for postmodernists, who are suspicious of anyone claiming to know anything, and intolerant (paradoxically enough) of anything claimed to be true for anyone other than the speaker, and possibly a very small, specific, local environment of listeners.

All civilizations, we are told, have been wrongly based on what postmodernists call 'grand narratives' – comprehensive theories and stories about reality that claim to be necessarily true, and that form the foundation of a society's general beliefs and practices. Greek mythology, religion, modern science, stories about America's Founding Fathers, are all examples of grand narratives. Postmodernism is a critique of grand narratives, attacking them as being essentially nothing more than festering sexism, racism, and exploitation, full of contradictions, inconsistencies, and lies.

One interesting consequence has been the rise of fundamentalism as a kind of resistance to the questioning of the grand narratives of religion, and the rise of conservatism as a resistance to the questioning of the grand narratives of politics – hence the two movements become bedfellows in their common distaste for postmodernism. On the other hand, the postmodernist willingness to accept anyone's opinion attracts many radicals and liberals. Thus the dualisms return with a vengeance, the arguments get more heated and more vicious, and the rifts just widen ever more.

Closely related and intertwined with postmodernism is the cultural critique called 'deconstructionism'. Originally a method of literary criticism, deconstructionism has been expanded into a strategy for analyzing and interpreting science, philosophy, religion, history, politics, art, and ultimately all aspects of contemporary cultural life. Resembling the reductive method of science, it consists of breaking things down into fundamental elements that are considered more 'real' than the whole – in this case, the fundamental elements turn out to be *psychological motives*. By analyzing language, deconstructionists strive to uncover and expose the hidden ideological biases that reveal what the author's words 'really' mean. Any claim that a work of art expresses something noble, true or meaningful, is easily discredited by the analysis of sexist, racist, ethnic, and other base motivations that are unearthed by applying the method. Only small specific details can be accepted as valid, since there are always deceptive political, cultural, or economic assumptions lurking behind any suggestion of a big general truth. Details which the author does *not* include are particularly subject to suspicion: any use of such words as "all men believe", for instance, does not include "all men *and women* believe", and since this clearly indicates sexist inclinations any possible value in the words that follow must automatically be precluded.

Thus the spirit of truth and reason is denied, and our horizons get narrower and narrower. Everything once considered beautiful, meaningful and sublime, whether in art, philosophy or politics, is now subject to

being deconstructed and debunked, scientifically reduced into scattered fragments of negative personality traits, deception, and bad faith, exposed as nothing more substantial than a handful of ugly, dangerous and politically incorrect motives. And like scientific reductionism, once something has been deconstructed it most probably can not be put back together again.

The lazy wish to remain ignorant and apathetic is given the stamp of approval by this phenomenon, since what poets and thinkers actually say or intend is of no importance. If Shakespeare had had the benefits of modern therapy and postmodern philosophy, he would never have had to write Macbeth, so why bother reading it?

In the end, very little is left:

- 1) The only things that are *real* are subjectivity and personal opinion;
- 2) The only things that are *important* are functionality and personal comfort;
- 3) The only things that are *honest and genuine* are our base motivations.

There is no recourse, so we might as well enjoy the absurdity. At least modernism held out the hope that science would create a better world. Postmodernists view that as hopelessly naïve nonsense.

The great irony is that all this postmodern analysis and psychological cynicism is just an elaborate and pretentious recurrence of ancient Greek sophistry. The Sophists were philosophic teachers who taught that there is no such thing as absolute truth, but only subjective truths that hold for a given person at a given time. Like Socrates, they sought to liberate young minds from uncritical assumptions (they did this by using rhetorical skills to demonstrate that for any rational argument there is always an equally skillful rational counter-argument.) But unlike Socrates, they stopped here, concluded that ‘truth’ must be relative and subjective, and having wiped out everything that had guided their students’ lives, simply left them empty.

Socrates, on the other hand, showed his young followers that by dropping their unfounded assumptions about what is true, they arrived at the *beginning* of their quest for knowledge. Postmodernists, like the sophists, are already finished. Spiritual emptiness and intellectual collapse are the end of the road. Just add a little modern self-centeredness and a hefty dose of political correctness, and ancient Greek sophistry becomes postmodernism.

As always, our human possibilities seem severely limited because there is no appreciation of levels. In modernism’s *objective material* world, only one level of existence was recognized. In postmodernism’s *subjective flowing-process* world, everything still remains on that same solitary level. Postmodern philosophers took up the challenge when contemporary science began questioning our fundamental assumptions about objectivity, perception, and reason. But rather than acknowledging the shortcomings of reason and then searching for something higher, they merely maintained that nothing is higher, that there is nothing worth longing for: they shrank before the threshold.

Plato knew that *Eros* could lead us through this threshold and beyond the limitations of reason, to a realm of meaning and objectivity that transcends this visible world of matter. But *Eros* has fled, leaving nothing behind but a self-absorbed, mean-spirited and passionless sexuality, the kind that is endlessly being glorified in magazines and music videos, a perverted fraudulent *Eros* who can only be used to relieve stress or exert power over one’s partner.

CHAPTER FOUR - FAMILY

America was founded by thinkers, serious thinkers who struggled with new theories of how things ought to be, rather than resting content with the way things were. They believed that the old political relationships between the rulers and the ruled were falsely based on pretended rights of strength, wealth, birthright and tradition. They concluded that these connections were manmade rather than natural, and therefore they were not morally binding. They then decided that the only morally binding relationship between a government and its people would have to be based on the consensual agreement of all the parties. These 'contracts' would have to be freely entered into by equal partners, and rationally negotiated for everyone's benefit.

But family relationships were a different matter, for it seemed evident that these relationships *are* based on nature. Rulers and ruled are not drawn to each other by any natural longing or love, but lovers and families are. It was therefore expected by the Founders that family relationships would remain intact, and this in itself would be a good thing for the new state. When loyalty and devotion to a divinely ordained king was replaced with a dispassionate political contract, there would be far less emotional force to make citizens remain loyal during times of difficulty. Instead, people would turn their passions toward their loved ones. Because the state protected families and kept them safe, however, this would provide a powerful incentive for remaining loyal.

But American history is the story of the continuing forward march of our twin goals of freedom and equality, and this dual mission has now reached deeply into our family relationships. Husbands and wives and children argue about 'freedom' and 'equality', and establish relationships based on agreements rather than nature, negotiating these agreements (marriage agreements, financial agreements, etc.), with due regard to individual rights and sovereignty. The issue remains on the table, however, of whether the intimate relations between men and women, parents and children, are fundamentally shaped by rational choices or natural impulses.

Personal freedom now speaks the same language, and demands the same destiny, as political freedom. As a result, the old tension between the longing for personal freedom and the longing for intimate attachment, between individuality and mutuality, once understood to be the permanent condition of human life and a source of much serious thought and creativity, no longer troubles us very much. There is hardly any tension left. Freedom won. This is where *Eros* takes flight, and once he is gone erotic men and women degenerate into nice persons.

The complementary struggle for Equality has put an end to much injustice, but along the way it attacked all the legitimate differences amongst people as well as all the illegitimate ones, and political correctness now makes it dangerous to even discuss whether there are any legitimate differences that ought to be reinstated.

This vast extension of our political project into our personal lives first appeared in two successive waves during the 1960's – the sexual revolution and feminism. The first championed Freedom, the second championed Equality. They traveled together for a while, but freedom and equality are always somewhat at odds with each other.

The sexual revolution freed us from the remaining residues of Puritanism. No longer were any obstacles in the way of the free expression of our sexuality. Making love, not war, was to become our primary activity, and this was promised as the key to true happiness. For this new project, men and women would necessarily become more emphatically men and women.

But it did not turn out that way. When sex became 'easy' it became 'no big deal'. The most striking effect of the sexual revolution, as Plato could have foreseen, turned out to be passionlessness. Making sex easy trivialized it, de-eroticised it, demystified the relations between the sexes, just as Plato had predicted in the *Republic*.

It also removed the need, which in the past had been especially important to women, who had the most at stake, to invest serious emotions into sexual relationships. Soon, among the young, convenient coed 'roommate' arrangements became the norm. Everyone became comfortably unisexual, reverting to males and females only for the sex act. There was no desperate, hot-blooded yearning here. There was no illusion of eternity. There was simply "no problem".

After the sexual revolution liberated us from convention, feminism entered the scene to liberate us from nature. Biology was no longer destiny, though this required a stunning assortment of new laws to help repress some apparently natural instincts that could no longer be tolerated.

While the sexual revolution had aimed at bringing men and women together bodily, feminism aimed at helping women realize that they did not need men at all and could easily get along without them. Free of male tyranny, women were free to do other 'more important' things than develop deep emotional relationships with men and create and care for a stable home and family. This whole notion was contradictory to the original aim of the sexual revolution, which was to invigorate life with endless sexual passion. So the two movements parted ways, leaving conservatives paranoid about both sides, and liberals in a jam trying to figure out which side to support.

Meanwhile, male sexuality became 'sinful' once again, not because of religious sentiments but because of political ones. To liberate women from the effects of sexism, men had to be re-educated to recognize and repress machismo – a word which, it turned out, did not mean erotic male passion and pride, but meant possessiveness, domination and chauvinism. This new sex education was about control, not passion. In earlier times, the education of male desire was intended to make men into gentlemen who would protect women. Now the object was to liberate women from the oppression of men, by controlling male lust and ending the forms of male courtship, which were viewed as sexist and intimidating. It is clearly a virtue of the first order to teach men to neither brutalize nor patronize women. But this new education has little left of beauty or eroticism. Is there no better way to adjust the relations between men and women?

Despite the many successes of egalitarianism, nature continues to weigh more heavily on women than on men. If a woman wants children, and recent statistics suggest that this is one place where nature might now be reasserting itself, nine months of pregnancy will continue to get in the way of her career. We can legislate paternity leaves as well as maternity leaves, but we cannot pretend that we do not notice the difference. In addition, a woman today is less likely than ever to receive help from a man. The male drive to protect women was certainly sexist and patronizing, but it did accomplish the useful task of encouraging many men to participate in the life of the family, reconciling the tension between their desire for freedom and their desire for attachment. Now that this incentive has been discredited, these men are given license to be irresponsible, to be passive when they should be active. The problem can be attacked by rational negotiations and legal procedures, but if men do not *feel* it these contracts will be broken. In this sense, among others, the promise of equality has turned out to be not quite fair to women.

With the dwindling of mystery, enchantment, and longing, we have also lost much of our willingness to risk falling in love. Sex is fine, but why muddle it up with emotions and all that nasty baggage? Self-protectiveness certainly advises against it. And material science, invariably the final authority, gives 'love' no real credence anyway. So our new facsimile of love is the 'relationship' modeled on the business deal, in which parties protect themselves and haggle for benefits in an environment of conflicting selfish motivations. There is plenty of communication, during much of which the modern male is being instructed, and there is plenty of honesty as personalities express their needs and their demands. But there is little real connection between *souls*. Plato's description of love in the *Phaedrus*, as mad passionate delight, as the wing that can power our flight from Becoming all the way to Being, is now regarded as a preposterous fantasy that can not be taken seriously by modern persons.

But Love is mad and exciting, overflowing with hope and happiness, tasting of eternity, and quite able to take care of itself. 'Relationships', on the other hand, are problematical, presenting issues and difficulties that have to be worked out. Affairs of the heart ought to include both, the former making the latter worth all the struggle. Relationships without *Eros*, however, are *just* difficult. They are not worth the effort. Of course, they can always be replaced when the significant other becomes too annoying. But *conscious* love is about commitment, as the old words of the marriage vows clearly described. It is about the soul's joy in willingly dedicating itself to the happiness of another, to the challenge of endlessly renewing feelings of passion and compassion, and to remaining steadfast in the face of difficulties. Our self-absorbed culture no longer finds much joy in this. We take advantage of each other, make demands on each other, and call it love. Perhaps we really are just unsuitable for each other.

When we tire of the wars, we seek peace by making deals and temporary truces. Still aching for human attachment, we have no other recourse but to reduce our relationships into contracts: I'll do this if you'll do that, and we'll continue with this arrangement for as long as both parties find it satisfactory. Relationships are based on reciprocal benefits rather than natural inclinations, on legalisms rather than trust, on self-protection through negotiation rather than self-perfection through love. Everything here is simply the result of the unwarranted expansion of democratic political theory into the bedroom, mixing up governmental relationships that are necessarily about power, with human relationships that ought to be about love, compassion, and aspiration.

All of this has ended up in dismantling the family structure. Child-bearing is again somewhat in vogue, but children are to be had on the mother's terms, with or without fathers, who are not to get in the mother's way. So we have reproduction without family, all of which ironically feeds into the old complaint of women that men do not want to make commitments and do not want the responsibility of raising a family. If such commitments *are* made, either side is free to break them at a moment's notice.

The important lesson that children once learned in the family, even unhappy ones, was that there was always going to be this one unbreakable bond, for better or worse. With the decomposition of the family and the continually soaring divorce rate, children learn instead to fear relationships and to trust nothing. As they grow up, Allan Bloom noted, these children "are full of desperate platitudes about self-determination, respect for other people's rights and decisions, the need to work out one's individual values and commitments, etc. All this is a thin veneer over boundless seas of rage, doubt and fear."²⁹

But this is a paradoxically two-sided fear: the fear of being alone, coupled with the opposing fear of attachment. Either possibility arouses anxiety and leads to self-protective responses, with the result that enthusiasm for life is cooled, youthful confidence and hope for the future begin to fade, while self-doubt and cynicism take their place.

So we turn to the therapists to help our children ‘adjust’, to tell them that everything is all right and here is what they should think and feel in place of what they do think and feel. After all, they are better off this way than in an unhappy home, and their parents still love them. But however reasonable this may sound to adults, children do not believe any of it. They just feel the pain, the indignation and the fear, and they are confused by always being told to feel something other than what they feel. An all-too-common way to cope with this is to learn to feel nothing.

Children have always expected to leave the family, and spend much of their childhood excitedly planning the long awaited exit. But today it sometimes seems as if everyone, parents and kids alike, are itching to get out of the gate and be ‘free’. So children learn early on that bonds are made to be broken and love leaves – not just by death, which is eventually forgivable because it is involuntary, but by choice and intention. The family, once considered a constant in life, is now just temporary, so children realize at a young age that they must plan and prepare to be alone and self-sufficient, and must not count on anyone or risk falling in love. Life thereafter becomes dry, empty, and fearful, for *Eros* has fled.

Past forms of relationship between men and women, filled with lies and distortions, injustice and unhappiness, are best left to die. But as these old forms have disintegrated, nothing has taken their place but confusion. Our erotic feelings have been dampened, dismissed, or re-defined to toe the line with political ideology. As a result, our souls cry out for a chance to discover what we actually feel and desire, what we actually *are*, before we ‘explain’ it and ‘correct’ it.

Taming the Barbarians

The question still remains: Are the societal differences between men and women artificial and dispensable, or are they natural and unavoidable?

In a culture bent on equalizing everything, we want to believe that anthropology has proven that the traditional ‘sexist’ model of *male-as-provider* and *female-as-nurturer* is merely an unnecessary cultural convention that we can change at will – that we can voluntarily transform the psychological habits of thousands of years now that we have recognized a better way. But what anthropology has actually shown, according to Margaret Mead (arguably our most famous and most respected anthropologist), is that the role of men, “in every known human society, is to provide for women and children.”³⁰ As evidence that these roles are nonetheless reversible, we sometimes hear about matriarchal societies from long ago, or even some surviving group today where women possess all the power. However, Mead has pointed out quite clearly that “all the claims so glibly made about societies ruled by women are nonsense. We have no reason to believe that they ever existed.”^{31*}

But it is a distortion of reality to believe, as many people certainly have believed, that political power, or brute physical strength for that matter, somehow demonstrate that the male of the species is ‘superior’. In fact, regarding the differences between the sexes, there are two particular things we need to consider: first, the fact that the feminine quality of passivity is of a higher nature than the masculine quality of activity,

*My own survey of several of these claims about historical matriarchies suggests that these writers are speaking of cultures that worship a feminine form of deity, a goddess. But ‘matriarchy’ means a social system in which women are recognized as the head of the family or tribe. It does not refer to the gender of an object of religious worship. Claims of *current* matriarchal patterns, in the inner city, neglect the fact that the real power – a power to terrorize and force compliance – lies with the gangs of males in the streets.

which means that men can be connected to the realm of the Spirit only through women; and second, that men are connected to their children – and hence to the *future* – only through women.

(1) A defining characteristic of the Masculine is the need to think things through in a linear, step-by-step manner, to experience a reality that is limited and finite and therefore straightforward, controllable, and ‘knowable’. A defining characteristic of the Feminine, on the other hand, is the ability to experience reality in a holistic, open-ended, all-at-once manner, to take in and accept limitlessness and infinity. Needless to say, we each have a share in both of these characteristic abilities.

God, however, by definition, is endless, infinite, timeless Being, and as such is inherently undefinable and unknowable. Because of the feminine ability to experience and accept inexpressible limitlessness, the feminine aspect of life is in closer touch with the spiritual aspect of life: she is the necessary vehicle through which the divine can be expressed in our finite world.

Another defining characteristic of the Masculine is that it expresses the *Active* force within the Creation, and as such it is always involved in doing, fixing, making, and acting. The Feminine, on the other hand, is the *Passive/Receptive* force of Creation. This quality of passivity has been given a very bad name in our frantically productive society, where it has been saddled with negative and destructive connotations of weakness and submission. But if the truth be told, passivity is the higher quality. *Action* is the emblem of the realm of Life: the Masculine ‘does’. *Passivity* is the emblem of the realm of Spirit: the Feminine ‘is’. It is this ability to be passive, to ‘be’ without having to ‘do’, that allows the Feminine to receive pure, endless, unknowable Being, without having to limit it or define it through any agenda of her own, and then to bring it to birth in the world.

(2) A man’s sexual identity is tied to a single act, finite in time. But a woman’s sexual identity comes from a life-long, endlessly unfolding process – menstruation, sexual activity, birthing, breast-feeding, raising children that come through her body. A man’s sexual identity is fragile, and can only be affirmed by external sources. Men lust after lots and lots of women, with whom they have no genuine connection, simply for the thrill of the chase and the affirmation of the conquest. They fight and compete with each other for no other prize than the ‘winning’ itself. They chase after fame and money and power as ends in themselves. Through all the bluster, however, they mostly fail to notice that there is no real meaning in any of these activities. A woman’s sexual identity is far more secure.* Much of the power of women comes from this sense of security, and even more comes from her role in overcoming the self-defeating foolishness of men. Only she can give him the sexual affirmation his fragile identity demands. Only she can give him the spiritual connection that his soul so desperately seeks. Only she can give him the children that his unconscious yearning for immortality requires. But nothing in this world is free. He will have to *earn* this.

In fact, the crucial process of civilization is to tame the disconnected, aimless, aggressive sexual impulses of the male, and align them with the long-term, future-oriented, meaningful sexual nature of women.³² This can certainly be distorted into the now-classic scenario in which the man goes out into the world and experiences excitement, personal success, and psychological fulfillment, while the ‘inferior’ woman must remain at home as his servant – cleaning up after him, raising his brood, serving him meals, and servicing his sexual demands. But this is a farce, a tragicomic imitation of the meaning of sex, home and family, brought about in part by women *abdicating* their real power and allowing their husbands (and themselves) to actually believe that the male is the superior species and that male activities are the superior way of life.

* Women cannot ‘fail’ at lovemaking the way a man can fail, and only women can give birth. Women can certainly have all sorts of anxieties, but men are much more prone to feelings of insecurity about their sexuality.

Most adolescent boys and young men will relentlessly seek sexual activity at any and all times. This, too, gives women enormous power (as was shown in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, a play that should be shown every year to every high school student). By *managing* this power – by saying 'no', by demanding certain behaviors, by taking charge of sexual choices – women tame and civilize men. Of course, women can abdicate this role and allow men to remain little boys, endlessly screwing around with no self-discipline, endlessly fighting and abusing others, jeopardizing the safety of women and the entire fabric of civilization. Unfortunately, this act of female abdication occurs easily and often when a relentlessly pornographic and violent media convinces women that they want to be 'just like men', and that (hidden underneath all the artificial 'repression') they have the same short-term irresponsible cravings as immature boys.

The fundamental requirement of civilization, then, is to transform male lust and wanderlust into love and responsibility, to transform the immature 'player' into a responsible husband and father. It may be that this is 'artificial', a cultural invention. Men are not naturally like that! But true culture, progress, freedom, and much human happiness, depend on a strong connection of a man to his family. Running with gangs, sharing tales of drunken promiscuous sex, can briefly give a man a sense of at least belonging to *something*. But at a huge cost. Only love for one's own family, one's own special woman, and one's own specific children, can connect a man to life and to the future.

The *husband-as-provider* role is the unavoidable consequence of men's need to serve the Feminine in order to earn this new life. And what woman needs or wants a man who cannot be a good provider? Despite all the prattle to the contrary, women look for strong successful men. And men know this.

Once a man begins to see all of this, he stops viewing women as sex objects, playthings to satisfy his ego, and begins to see one woman as a much richer source of real eroticism – lasting, continuous and meaningful. He realizes at last that he must keep her: he must marry her and provide for her. Marriages are not built on *lessening* the distinctions of the sexes, but on uniting their *differences*.

But now we have debunked and deconstructed all of this, telling women to be more like men and men to be more like women. The end result of this social experiment is a lot of unfulfilled women, a lot of fatherless children, and a lot of violent and immature men.*

Nowhere is the breakdown of the family as conspicuous as in the inner city, with all the predictable exaggerated consequences. The cause of these problems is not racial. Wherever the integrity of family disintegrates we see the same results. It does not matter if the families are black American city-dwellers, poor southern whites, or suburbanites shuffling from one divorce to the next.

Pouring money into inner-city communities, to enhance education and create new jobs, is not a sufficient response. As for 'education', the boys find themselves in schools where most of the teachers are women (*white* women) who spend most of their time merely trying to keep order, and most of the best students are girls. All of this just demoralizes and angers them even more, leading to ever-spiraling disruptive behaviors (the only sure way to get the attention of the girls), in schools where state and federal regulations forbid any real punishment. When they get home, if any adult is there at all, the lack of discipline continues. As for 'job creation', the other utopian cure-all, such jobs are never as exciting as street-life – the dangers of crime, the thrills with easy women – and are usually less financially rewarding

*An incidental note: If the cause of male violence against women was that married men believe they have the right to dominate and control their wives, we would expect to see a decrease in such violence over the years that marriages have been declining. But just the reverse has happened, even though more women are living without husbands. (see Blankenhorn David, *Fatherless in America; Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem*, Harper Perennial, NY, 1995, p. 34)

anyway. So while government studies find more and more ways to spend more and more money, nothing of any real consequence is accomplished. All the correct forms are properly filled out and all the bureaucrats are happy. But the boys will not ‘calm down’ and ‘fall into line’ in response to a government program or an after-school activity. They will not become responsible fathers and productive members of society unless someone *makes* them. And that ‘someone’ is *woman*.

But the woman is in no shape to do this. Having grown up without a father to tell her how *important* and *beautiful* and *wonderful* and *loved* she is, she has diminished feelings of self-worth and is insecure about relationships. Needing the attention of men to fill the void, she learns from TV, movies, music, and friends in the street, that the way to get affirmative attention from men is to degrade herself by dressing like a slut, by raucously joking around with the boys, by being ready and willing to have lots of sex.

Now imagine this troubled teen-age girl hating high school, constantly fighting with her mother, afraid of all the ‘uncles’ parading through the house. Fortunately, she sees a way out. Have a baby! Then the government will give her an apartment of her own, steady money, food stamps, and free health care. Later, she can have a second child and get even more. And it’s fine if she wants to have a boyfriend, as long as she doesn’t marry him: she would lose everything if she did that.

It does not take an excess of critical thinking to realize where these welfare policies are leading us. What *is* remarkable is that *we know* it, and do nothing to stop it.

Now that we have succeeded in taking fathers out of the lives of children, there are programs aimed at removing the mothers as well. We force young welfare mothers out of the house and into ‘work-fare’. Then we farm out the children to government-sponsored day-care facilities. So the system encourages mothers to enter the work force while discouraging fathers from doing the same, and the children are left to be raised by strangers – who carefully follow all the legal standards and bureaucratic regulations.

Poverty is not simply a problem of people lacking money, and it is not caused by racism. The main cause is a lack of strong men encouraged and allowed to assume their manly role as a provider for their wives and families. Countless influences in contemporary society – from ill-advised government programs, to a media bent on disparaging masculinity and the importance of the family while glorifying sexual irresponsibility, to political and philosophical misunderstandings of the true meaning of equality – all conspire to drive men out of this role and into confusion.

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But there is more to this story than just the need for women to tame and civilize their men. Shakespeare, after all, who understood much about human psychology, wrote a play called *The Taming of the Shrew* – not *The Taming of the Barbarian*. Is it really true that men are, by nature, completely uninterested in loving a woman and loving their children, and will only do so if they are forced into it?

I remember one afternoon when I was a single man in my early thirties walking up First Avenue in New York City. A man walked passed me in the opposite direction, with a little toddler riding happily on his shoulders. As he passed, I felt a tinge of jealousy.

It made me stop short. What was that?! I had never felt such a thing before. I was young, happy and single, having the time of my life. The thought of wanting to be tied down with a child had never crossed my mind. I was on the hunt constantly – some successes, plenty of strikeouts, but it was always exciting. Where on earth had this alarming new sensation come from?

At that moment in my life, no one was ‘taming’ me. This feeling had arisen within me all by itself. It took a few more years, but I finally did get married and become a father. And contrary to the expectations of my youth, being a father has been far and away the greatest joy of my life.

So I personally cannot quite agree that fatherhood is a completely unnatural state for a man, a state that only becomes important when a woman tames him and forces him to accept it. It seems more likely to me that this instinct, while probably less evolved than the maternal instinct, nonetheless exists – but it has been forced into hiding by a culture that conditions men (and women) to relentlessly seek sex without responsibility, and then bombards them with sitcoms and movies and advertisements that routinely portray fathers as low-grade morons. As David Blankenhorn writes, “the idea of ‘being a man’ is increasingly identified with violence, materialism, and predatory sexual behavior. I am a man because I will hurt you if you disrespect me. I am a man because I have sex with lots of women and my girlfriends have babies. I am a man because I have more money and more things than you do.”³³ But the standard of good fatherhood – *I am a man because I cherish my wife, I love my children, and I take good care of my family* – simply does not enter into the equation.

The result is that boys grow up thinking that responsible fatherhood and ‘real’ masculinity are at odds. In such a culture, most boys will choose masculinity. It then becomes true that for civilization to exist, women will have to tame and domesticate men.

But this effort will be increasingly futile unless contemporary men revolt against the insipid and demeaning lies about masculinity that are being propagated. A good father is a ‘real’ man. A real man does not run away from responsibility. He sticks around. He loves his wife and children, always and unconditionally. He knows that his children need him, and he strives to give them all that they need. He does not become ‘more like a woman’: he is a father, not a mother. The children’s mother has the primary responsibility for nurturing them and keeping them away from the dangers of the world. Their father has the primary responsibility of preparing them to go out and *face* the difficulties and dangers of the world. These tasks are certainly shared, just as doing the dishes is shared. And one parent alone, if absolutely necessary, can assume the other’s role with more or less success. But on the whole, children with two parents are happier, emotionally healthier, and more successful in life.

The story of Adam and Eve is the foundation of western civilization. Perhaps it is not just a deceptive misogynist fairy tale. Could it be that one intent behind the story of the apple – which we have mistakenly interpreted to be about ‘good’ and ‘evil’ and ‘blind obedience’ – was to show us that Eve, for all the right reasons, *had* to hand Adam the apple, to turn his attention away from God and back down to earth? Without this help, Adam would have remained as he was forever: a starry-eyed dreamer who never achieved his dreams. Without a woman in his life, without the help of the Feminine, perhaps a man is so disconnected and self-defeating that he is incapable of knowing *how* to achieve his aims. Likewise, without a man in her life, without the help of the Masculine, perhaps a woman risks becoming aimless and ‘earthbound’, because there is insufficient influence to remind her of *why*, to inspire her to *dream*.

These reflections are not meant to define the final differences between men and women. They are only mentioned in the hope that we, as a society, in the face of all the social upheaval we are experiencing, can begin seriously to ponder what it means to be a man, what it means to be a woman, and what relationship we ought actually to have with one another. And it is my belief that the richness of thought that lies within the literary, philosophical, and religious tradition of the West, can be drawn upon to help us with this effort.

In the meantime, American men and women are free, but free to do what? We are equal (whatever that means), but there is no guiding principle to link us together, no common good to motivate us. With *Eros* departed, our paths are now flat and parallel, no longer pointed toward each other, and no longer pointed upward. If *Eros* does not return, if an intelligent respect for Masculinity and Femininity is not restored, then our admirable principles of freedom and equality will only be realized at the cost of all that is noble, excellent, beautiful, and worthwhile.

CHAPTER FIVE - VIOLENCE

Americans are fond of saying that we are a civilized and peace-loving people. Violence, however, has been one of the most consistent aspects of the American experience, and is deeply rooted in our national life: the torture and slaughter of Native Americans; the ruthless beatings heaped upon each new wave of immigrants; the sadistic violence of slavery; the brutal strike-busting riots of the early labor movement; the gunfighter culture of the old west; the vigilantes; the lynch mobs; the streets of Chicago during Prohibition; the assassinations; the continuous stabbings, shootings, and rapes on our city streets.

Children are expert imitators. Children who are loved, learn to love. Children who are humiliated, learn how to humiliate. When children see grownups filled with hatred, they learn how to hate. And children who are violently abused, learn how to violently abuse others. So it is not surprising that our history of violence is perpetuated from one generation to the next.

In *My Bloody Life: The Making of a Latin King*, a repentant ex-gang member, Reymundo Sanchez (a pseudonym), describes some of the events of his earlier life. His first experience with gang violence, as a 13-year-old new member, was about a sweater, with his gang's colors, that a rival had stolen.

Mouse took the gun from my hand and shot the guy in the leg twice. Morena also opened fire. She was shooting anything that moved. Papo also joined in the shooting party. Mouse took the sweater from the guy, stood over him, and prepared to shoot him again. There was a girl on the ground next to him clutching a wound on her arm. The guy noticed that Mouse was about to shoot him again and tried to cover himself with the girl's body. Mouse pulled the trigger. I watched in shock as the bullet entered one side of the girl's face and came out the other. Mouse again pulled the trigger and again he hit the girl, this time in the chest. Blood splattered all over the place when the second bullet struck her.³⁴

Another time, Sanchez wandered accidentally into a white neighborhood and was beaten nearly to death by members of a rival gang, the Gaylords. After getting out of the hospital, "It took me about two months to fully recover from my injuries.... One would think that I had learned my lesson about gang-banging, but in truth my reaction was completely opposite."

Nine days of unconsciousness in a coma caused by hate and ignorance. I almost died at fourteen. At an age when I should have been experiencing the joys of being a teenager I was desperately trying to survive. I was lost with no safer days in sight. Those who came to my side and supported me were lost themselves. Although they meant well, they came talking only about revenge. It was the only encouragement I came to know.³⁵

Later on, he found the gang-banger who had beat him. He and his friends got their revenge.

I had lost my mind. The more blood I saw, the harder I hit him. Suddenly I heard gunshots. I snapped out of my crazy spell and noticed that Papo had shot one of the other Gaylords and was getting into position to shoot another one. The guy was standing too close to me so Papo hesitated. He must have been so scared that he couldn't move, because he had the chance to run away but didn't, I stepped out of Papo's way and he shot him. The guy fell toward me and I busted his head with the pipe.³⁶

What could possibly drive people to act like this? Why would children batter and kill each other over something as trifling as a sweater? Why are teenagers willing to torture and murder someone who has done nothing more offensive than to live a few blocks away in a different neighborhood? Why must innocent bystanders die, simply because they unknowingly put on clothes of a certain color or stood in the wrong place?

These horrifying problems are not restricted to certain communities. For instance, as Sanchez notes, "The gangs continued to grow. New sections were being formed in the surrounding suburbs. Suburban kids driving new cars and spending lots of money on gang activity became common.... So-called well-bred, well-raised girls thought it was the coolest thing to have a gang-banger for a boyfriend."³⁷ Even in communities without youth gangs, elderly people throughout America are often prisoners in their own homes, preferring to go hungry rather than walk to the store. We all leave our lights on, lock our doors, watch where we walk, and live in fear of muggers, burglars, murderers, and terrorists. *Why?*

Alice Miller, a psychoanalyst, believes that the roots of violence can be found in the cruel treatment that is all too often suffered during childhood. Many people, perhaps all of us, have experienced some form of childhood violence – whether spankings, emotional humiliation, or full blown beatings. And we have all witnessed countless vivid scenes of cruelty and viciousness as part of what we call 'entertainment'. Nonetheless, it appears that most of us have turned out ok. "Yet it would be just as false," writes Miller, "to deduce from this fact of survival that our upbringing caused us no harm as it would be to maintain that a limited nuclear war would be harmless because a part of humanity would still be alive when it was over."³⁸

Beatings, which are only one form of mistreatment, are always degrading, as well as frightening, painful, and psychologically devastating. Not only is the safety and security of the world collapsing, not only is the child unable to defend himself or herself, but he or she is then expected to be silent and respectful, and to repress any anger. The child may even be threatened and ordered to never speak a word about it. "The scorn and abuse directed at the helpless child, as well as the suppression of vitality, creativity, and feeling in the child and in oneself, permeate so many areas of our life that we hardly notice it anymore.... And this is what we are accustomed to call 'child-rearing.'"³⁹

What becomes of this forbidden and unexpressed anger? It does not disappear. Rather, says Miller, it is "transformed with time into a more or less conscious hatred directed against either the self or substitute persons, a hatred that will seek to discharge itself in various ways permissible and suitable for an adult."⁴⁰

[The need to lash out] arises only for people who must always be on their guard to keep the dam that restrains their feelings from breaking. For if this dam breaks, everything becomes unpredictable. Thus, it is understandable that some of these people, fearing unpredictable consequences, will shrink from any spontaneous reaction; the others will experience occasional outbursts of inexplicable rage directed against substitute objects or will resort repeatedly to violent behavior such as murder or acts of terrorism.⁴¹

Can this theory help explain the brutal violence committed by Sanchez and his fellow gang members? In his book, he relates that his father died when he was barely five years old, and his mother quickly remarried a man he had never met:

Perhaps I was too young to remember or maybe she never stopped to think that what we thought of him was important. I do remember being beaten, almost tortured, by my aunt and cousins when my mother went away on her honeymoon.... For some reason that I'll never comprehend, my aunt allowed her kids to brutally beat us. At any given moment we could be kicked, punched, or made into a bloody mess for no reason at all. My cousins were not punished; in fact, I remember laughter from the adults.⁴²

His oldest cousin raped him. Then he grabbed him by the neck and said, "If you say anything, I will kill you like a dog."

At last, the mother returned with her new husband, Emilio. Soon there was a new child in the house.

Whether it was money problems, the baby crying, or an itch he couldn't scratch, we were beaten for it. Why my mother let him do those things I'll never know, but I'm sure it had a lot to do with avoiding my stepfather's anger.⁴³

Then Emilio got into some kind of trouble and disappeared. "No goodbyes, no 'I'll be back'; he just left and never returned. My mother, a very attractive woman and somewhat ignorant for a woman of her experience, was alone with four kids and on welfare.... I guess she used the only survival skill she knew. She found another man."⁴⁴

This one was named Pedro. At first, he seemed like a decent enough stepfather, but this did not last long.

He became very abusive.... [The neighborhood kids] knew me as the guy who was always getting his ass kicked by his parents. They had seen my mother slap me around on the street in front of our house on several occasions. They had seen her and Pedro beating me through the window.⁴⁵

So years later, as Miller might have predicted, he found himself enmeshed in a life of hatred, terror and bloodshed. At last he was accepted. "The Latin Kings became my new family. They praised me for doing things I had gotten beaten for by my previous family."⁴⁶ Still a child, he would take up a gun and would shoot and kill when he was drunk or high. He earned the nickname 'Lil Loco'. The boys respected him, the girls loved him.

But when he was sober he didn't like the gang life, he was frightened and felt like a coward. So he learned to get high all the time. "I was too weak, too scared, too much of a coward to live the life of a gang-banger without getting high."⁴⁷ As long as there was plenty of weed, everything went along just fine. "My life was just one big party. Promiscuous sex, heavy drugs and alcohol, dodging bullets – what more could a sixteen-year-old boy ask for?"⁴⁸

A couple of times, a girl tried to save him, tried to tame him.

China said she didn't want a hard-core gang-banger for a boyfriend. She also said that she had decided to make love to me but now that was an impossibility. ... She said she would leave me if I didn't change.⁴⁹

But she didn't leave, she did have sex with him, and her speech had little effect. Most of the girls, including China, were in no shape to save anybody. They all had their own problems. At first, Sanchez couldn't figure out why China hung out with a gang. She was shy, she didn't smoke or drink, she talked about her dreams of going to college and becoming a nurse. But there was more.

China's tears were now rolling down her cheeks. She cried hysterically as she told me that she had to sleep with well-fastened clothes because of the time she was sleeping and felt someone touching her legs. She awoke to find her stepfather kneeling naked over her and trying to pull down her panties. She began screaming as he tried to rape her. When he heard her mother coming, he jumped up and started saying things like, 'If you didn't want it, why did you tease me?' China believed that her mother knew in her heart what was going on, but pretended to believe her stepfather anyway. She began treating China badly. China's mother suddenly started making comments like, 'Get your own man' and 'Maybe if you didn't act like such a bitch you would get respect.' China told me that her mother didn't care if she didn't come home but her stepfather would get pissed. He knew that as long as China stayed out of the house he would not have the opportunity to rape her.⁵⁰

Later on, another girl had more success with him. Sanchez was eighteen years old now. Her name was Cindy. Unlike the other girls he met, she never would have sex with him.

“Don’t be stupid,” she said one day when he called her. He’d been bragging about all the wars he’d been in with his ‘brothers’. “If they were really your brothers they wouldn’t be giving you drugs, alcohol, and then a gun so you could prove yourself. If they were your friends or brothers you wouldn’t have to prove yourself.”

What hurt most about Cindy’s words was that she spoke the truth. For the first time in my life someone had taken the time and cared enough to tell me the truth. But I ignored it, classified it as bullshit, and took it as an attack against me. I thought I had control of everything around me, but I was the one being controlled.⁵¹

Around this same time, he had the opportunity to meet some of the older Latin Kings who ran the gang’s citywide operations. “It was then that I realized the wars between gangs were not about colors or revenge but about drug turf. The Latin Kings was not just a street gang run by local thugs; they were a drug empire run by adults who were rarely seen. These people were getting rich while kids were being shot on street corners thinking they were fighting for some honorable cause.”⁵²

Soon thereafter, in the wake of this awareness and Cindy’s tirade, Sanchez finally got his first job, passed the GED, and found the courage to leave the Latin Kings.

The One Unmistakable Lesson

There are plenty of causes of youth violence. Miller has undoubtedly pinpointed a major source in our shameful abuse and neglect of innocent children. Other causative agents certainly include: (1) poverty; (2) drug and alcohol abuse; (3) violence on television, in movies, music videos, and video games; (4) inadequate health care; (5) access to guns; (6) prejudice and discrimination; (7) poor education; and (8) lack of sufficient community services.

But the single most important factor is a lack of strong and mature family ties, and the resultant lack of discipline and guidance from decent, loving, hard-working fathers.

Some analysts suggest just the opposite, and place the responsibility for youth violence on the *presence* of fathers, blaming them for instilling male values of competitiveness, toughness, etc. These commentators would have us believe that children are better off being raised without a father in the home. Violence, they say, is the result of traditional masculinity, and it is *this* that has to change: men need to become more peaceful, more gentle, more like women. But in fact, while exceptions certainly exist, sons with fathers in the home are rarely the ones committing violent crimes. Fatherless boys commit far, far more.

To become a man, a boy must separate from his mother and attach himself to a man, preferably his father, who guides him into the community of men. When a boy cannot do this, he will often experience confusion as well as rage toward his mother, toward women in general, or toward society as a whole, though he probably cannot understand or articulate why he feels this way. Another common feature of this lack of male guidance, notes David Blankenhorn, is hypermasculine posturing: “the unrestricted aggression and swagger of boys who must prove their manhood all by themselves, without the help of fathers.”

For these reasons, if we want to learn the identity of the rapist, the hater of women, the occupant of jail cells, we do not look first to boys with traditionally masculine fathers. We look first to boys with no fathers.⁵³

Reymundo Sanchez understood this intuitively. “My father passed away when I was very young,” he writes. “I wish he could have been there to guide me through life, to give the advice that only one’s father can give.”⁵⁴

Studies repeatedly demonstrate that children living apart from their fathers are far more likely to be expelled from school, to have emotional and behavioral problems, to have difficulty getting along with their peers, and to get into trouble with the law.⁵⁵ This has nothing to do with race, and it has little to do with poverty. In fact, according to a 1990 study commissioned by the Progressive Policy Institute, “[the] relationship between crime and one-parent families [is] so strong that controlling for family configuration erases the relationship between race and crime and between low income and crime.”⁵⁶ Meanwhile, always in search of band-aids, conservatives are adamant about the need for more prisons, and liberals are adamant about the need for more social programs, but no one is adamant about the need for more fathers.

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It is not just gang violence that is a concern. Domestic violence and child abuse are also grave issues in America.

From 1979 through 1987, according to a Department of Justice report⁵⁷, approximately 57,000 women per year were assaulted by their husbands. In 1994, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a study⁵⁸ which found that each year about six percent of all *pregnant* women are battered by their “husbands or partners”.

This certainly does not speak well of men. Men are clearly, and abhorrently, more prone to violence than women. Men need to be taught to control their aggressive impulses. We unquestionably need stricter laws and stricter enforcement.

But these statistics are deceptive. Yes, the Justice Department study showed that 57,000 women per year were assaulted by their husbands. During these same years, however, 200,000 women were assaulted by their boyfriends. In other words, *married* men were almost four times *less* likely to be guilty of domestic violence than their single brethren. Another 216,000 assaults were committed by former husbands. And as

for the CDC report regarding assaults on pregnant women by their “husbands or partners”, eighty percent of these perpetrators turned out to be unmarried “partners”.

This does not excuse the married men who do these detestable things. But it is clear that male violence toward women is far more likely outside the bounds of marriage. By reducing the likelihood of sexual jealousy, by redirecting male energy toward the support of his family, marriage dramatically curbs the tendency among men toward violent behavior. In fact, according to the CDC report, “marital status is the strongest predictor of abuse in this study – stronger than race, age, educational attainment, housing conditions, or access to prenatal health care.”⁵⁹

Perhaps even more sickening than spousal abuse is child sexual abuse. And some married fathers – one is too many – do molest their own children. But the weight of evidence is clear, notes Blankenhorn: “What magnifies the risk of sexual abuse for children is not the presence of a married father but his absence. More specifically, the escalating risk of childhood sexual abuse in our society stems primarily from the growing absence of married fathers and the growing presence of stepfathers, boyfriends, and other unrelated or transient males.”⁶⁰ Most stepfathers and boyfriends do not molest children, but they are far more likely than fathers to do so.⁶¹

We saw an example of this in Sanchez’ story about China, whose stepfather tried to rape her. Cindy, on the other hand, who was able to have a positive effect on his life, grew up with two committed parents. Unlike China, and virtually all the other girls in his life, “Cindy earned my respect by demonstrating the respect she had for herself to others and to me. Any inappropriate action, such as an attempt to touch her, would cause Cindy to walk off.” Girls who grow up without fathers are far more likely to be sexually abused, and even without this their propensity for promiscuity is vastly increased. Many will even imitate the boys and join in the violence.

There are many reasons why the number of fatherless homes is increasing. It is a problem throughout all levels of American society. In 1986, Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote, “From the wild Irish slums of the nineteenth century Eastern seaboard to the riot-torn suburbs of Los Angeles, there is one unmistakable lesson in American history: a community that allows a large number of young men to grow up in broken families, dominated by women, never acquiring any stable relationship to male authority, never acquiring any rational expectations about the future – that community asks for and gets chaos. Crime, violence, unrest, disorder – most particularly the furious, unrestrained lashing out at the whole social structure – that is not only to be expected, it is very nearly inevitable.”⁶²

Once again, this is most evident in the inner city. We have seen that one major reason for this is a welfare system that pays women and girls to have children without fathers. There is perhaps no greater instigator of violence than this system, a well-intentioned government program that demoralizes men, sends them angrily out into the streets, and deprives their children of a stable and loving father.

When someone speaks out against welfare, it is easy to become indignant and to assume an appalling lack of decency, caring, and human kindness. But shallow sentimentality must give way to a deeper and more intelligent form of ‘loving one’s neighbor’. In 1978, George Gilder warned us against treating blacks as if they were children – unable to be told the truth, unable to understand the basic facts of a market economy, unable to use their own talents and abilities to rise above a system of fantastic expectations, indulgences, and entitlements. “This is the worst kind of racism in America,” he wrote, “the respectable kind – that will only acknowledge blackness if it is holding a gun or applying for food stamps.”⁶³ Like Moynihan, he knew that the welfare system would unman black men, belittle them with pity and charity, and destroy their families.

But no one listened, and today we have reaped the harvest of all this ignorance and condescension. Teenage boys, wishing to be acknowledged as men, but completely unneeded in the traditional male roles of husband, father, and provider, find other ways to be acknowledged – they act out violently, they join together in predatory gangs, they rape and degrade their women. Teenage girls, with no appreciation for their sacred value and importance as women, give themselves shamelessly to these boys and have as many unwanted babies as possible. The prisons fill to overflowing and the inner city moves toward a police state.

Eros Perverted

All of this is a twisted perversion of *Eros*: men abusing women, women degrading men, adults beating and violating children, girls looking for sex without love and making babies without families, boys going on killing sprees in order to feel some kind of acceptance and some kind of meaning in their lives. Without *Eros*, without a higher vision guiding the mind, the soul inverts – the heart is then easily defiled, and the longing for money, sex, and power over others, is all that remains.

Our souls are so estranged from the guiding light of *Eros*, our minds and hearts – like men and women – are so fragmented and antagonistic, that our inner and outer worlds have vividly become what the poet Yeats expressed a century ago:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed,
and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction,
while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.⁶⁴

This rupture – the broken soul directed earthward and the fleeing of *Eros* – leads to all the barbarism of today. The mind becomes obsessed with heartless rationality, reason becomes a tyrant, and scientists accumulate data without meaning like squirrels gathering nuts. The heart becomes obsessed with obscenity, the body's cravings masquerade as the heart's longing, and love is analyzed and belittled by logical positivists, deconstructionists, and all the other champions of meaninglessness. The rulers of the world degenerate into shopkeepers on a global assembly line, churning out mediocre goods for a debased humanity. The once living universe, filled with passion and informed by God, becomes a dead mechanical universe, filled with violence and informed by the Void.

If *Eros* does not return, it is probably 'lights out'. We will continue to demean and corrupt ourselves and each other, until no light is left or even remembered. Tocqueville warned us: "Everything – his passions, needs, education, circumstances – seems to unite in inclining the native of the United States earthward."⁶⁵

But no matter how empty, hopeless, or violent life becomes, a return to meaning, wisdom, and love, is not

impossible. There has perhaps never been a more debased state of humanity than what was endured in the Nazi concentration camps. Yet even here, according to survivor Victor Frankl, one could be stronger than one's conditions. "The experiences of camp life show that man does have a choice of action."

Man *can* preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress....
[E]verything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.⁶⁶

CHAPTER SIX - ENVIRONMENT

The art of forgetting has become an essential part of our lives. By forgetting, we more easily become comfortable with our lives and situations, and this quest for personal comfort is in many ways our modern-day substitute for the ancient quest of the sacred. So we forget any personal emptiness, we forget the sufferings of other people, we forget our unmet responsibilities. And this insidious comfort does indeed bring with it a certain kind of happiness. But such happiness, in the midst of pain, meaninglessness and cynicism, is certainly nauseating. And it never quite alleviates the discomfiting suspicion of inner nullity, the conscience-pricking fear that there was something we forgot to do.

Notwithstanding our attempts to forget, we all know that apathy, material greed, intellectual passivity, bigotry and hatred are endlessly spoiling our experience of life on earth and even threatening our very existence. What keeps us from changing this? It is as if, deep within us, we carry an odious hidden secret, hidden even from our own selves: the secret that we are not merely willing to give it all up, but are in fact rushing toward our own final destruction. Something in us wants to die.

But this is not really a secret at all. The ancient Greeks believed that, after death, souls descend down a cavernous path where the River Acheron, the river of woe, flows into the River Styx, the river of lamentation. The souls are then ferried across the Styx into Hades by the somber boatman, Charon. Many centuries ago, both Virgil (in the *Aeneid*) and Dante (in the *Divine Comedy*) described the souls on this shore as frantically pushing and shoving, desperate and eager to get onto the boat as quickly as possible, thus depicting the great horror of our existence: our overwhelming desire to be asleep and dead.

The politicians, the corporate magnates, the oil and drug and chemical companies, the over-eager military leaders, the terrorists and criminals, are not so different from any of us. They are part of us. They are simply the agents for carrying out our own program, the one we have set for our own destruction. Because death will relieve our blandness and boredom, it will end the emotional pain and loneliness, it will end our burdensome responsibilities. But being alive means taking responsibility – for ourselves, for one another, for the world, for the future. The passion to do that, however, is harder and harder to find. The longing for death, the devil within, is winning. And it is winning with incomparable ease.

It would be pointless to dwell indulgently on negativity about our ecological predicament. A positive attitude would take us further toward solutions, but only if we are aware and informed. We cannot allow a morbid negativity to masquerade as the whole truth, and neither can we allow blind trust to obscure harsh realities.

Consider what it cost nature to prepare this planet for human habitation: the eons of growth and decay, experimentation and change, so that we might have the opportunity to live. And what do we do in return? “We behave in the family of Nature,” wrote A. R. Orage, “like self-indulgent children whose only object is to enjoy ourselves. If you will only ponder seriously for half an hour on the way we exploit natural resources, land, forests, and animals, for the gratification of abnormal desires, you cannot help but be appalled.”⁶⁷ This, again, is all a result of the inverted soul: material desires reign over our lives while our intelligence and better judgment passively acquiesce. And yet, we pride ourselves in being ‘scientific’. At the very least, science requires evidence. What does the evidence of our exploitative behavior say?

A half century ago, Rachel Carson observed that “given time – time not in years but in millennia – life adjusts, and a balance has been reached. For time is the essential ingredient; but in the modern world there is no time.”⁶⁸ Life on the planet is now expected to adapt to hundreds of new chemicals each year,

chemicals that are totally outside the limits of evolutionary experience. We are told that these substances have been ‘tested and proven safe’, a comforting half-truth that overlooks two crucial facts: first, there is no possible way to prove the *long-term* safety of any substance that continually accumulates in our tissue, and second, there is no way to test for *all possible interactions* among so many new and uncontrollable factors in the environment.

Just as the overuse of antibiotics threatens us with super-resistant mutant species of bacteria, so the overuse of pesticides threatens us with super-resistant mutant species of insects. This then leads to the search for more powerful medicines and more powerful insecticides, all of which sets off terrifying spiral escalations. But no miracle poison will rid the world of these forms of life – and if one ever did it would probably initiate the final ecological disaster, since all forms of life serve the complex purposes of nature. So we just keep finding new and harsher ways to poison our environment. On the one hand, it is important to study the evidence impartially and make sure we are not falsely presuming that every chemical intervention is dangerous, since innovative chemical research can often lead to all sorts of economic and health benefits. But keeping the big picture in mind is also important. For instance, the world already apparently produces enough grain, vegetables, fruit, and meats to make everyone on earth overweight. But people need economic systems and opportunities that provide jobs and money to buy this unsold food.

Agricultural chemicals seep underground and contaminate the sources of our drinking water. Directly, through the water itself, and indirectly, through the ingestion of contaminated plants and animals, these toxins find their way into our bodies. And they are not the only poisons there. Rainwater accumulates airborne toxins before it reaches the ground. Industrial chemicals, road salt, sewage, hospital wastes, gasoline, etc., are just some of the substances that find their way into our drinking water. Sometimes a poison in a lake or stream ceases to be detectable after some period of time. But it has not necessarily vanished. It may still be found in the vegetation and animals that the lake supports. Even though the relative concentration may originally have been safely low, it can rise significantly with each step up the food chain. That is, a low concentration of a toxin spread out in the water may lead to a moderate concentration within individual plants as they absorb it over time. As numerous small aquatic animals eat these plants, the concentrations in their bodies become quite significant. A large fish that feeds on many of these creatures will then end up with a high concentration of this poison. Finally, when you or I eat two or three of these fish, the public relations experts’ assurances of ‘safe, low water levels’ become meaningless.

Power stations that burn coal pour millions of tons of sulfur dioxide into the air, a pollutant linked to smog, acid rain, and aggravated asthma and other respiratory problems. Because it is released from enormously tall smokestacks (which keep the blackening pollution at a comfortable distance from the public’s eyes) it is dispersed by the wind over wide ranges. The resulting acid rain destroys trees and other plant life all across the planet, rendering lakes and streams uninhabitable, thus breaking the thread of life in two major ways.

In June of 2010, the EPA issued new standards on sulfur dioxide emissions for the first time in 40 years. The agency claims that the health benefits of the new ruling will result in savings between \$13-\$33 billion annually by preventing from 2,300 to 5,900 premature deaths each year and 54,000 asthma attacks each year. (The estimated cost of full implementation by 2020 is estimated at \$1.5 billion.)

Synthetic chemicals like these do their work with spectacular power and rapidity. As Rachel Carson was aware, they provide “a giddy sense of power over nature to those who wield them, and as for long-range and less obvious effects – these are easily brushed aside as the baseless imaginings of pessimists.”⁶⁹ It often astounds me when I hear some people insist that, contrary to the assertions of evolutionists, God

created the world, and yet they are quite ready to damage and poison His creation and cavalierly destroy various of His ‘unimportant’ creatures when it is economically convenient to do so.

These, of course, are only a few of the many environmental challenges we face. Can we survive the violence with which we have learned to deal with anything that inconveniences us? The food supply is not only *enhanced* by chemicals, it is in many ways *threatened* by chemicals. Hunger is not caused by scarcity or accident, and it will not be relieved by scientific attacks on the delicate balance of nature. Disease is not realistically controlled by ever more and stronger chemicals: it is all too often *brought on* by the excessive use and abuse of chemicals. Always, when we try to thwart nature – which is not the same thing as studying, appreciating, and working *with* nature in creative and innovative ways – we end up the loser. Our technology is unquestionably brilliant but it has not sufficed. What *may* suffice is a deepened understanding of the short-term and long-term principles of natural balance, and a much deepened sense of humility.

And this brings us, somewhat ironically, to the issue of human effects on climate.

Global Warming

In his award-winning film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore showed the world some satellite images of Lake Chad in Africa – a once giant lake, and a critical water source for millions of people, that has rapidly shrunk. The movie makes it clear that this shrinkage is due to global warming, and suggests that the resulting water shortage has had much to do with recent famine and violence in nearby Darfur. The warming, of course, is blamed on the overuse of fossil fuel by energy-obsessed humans.

But actually, Lake Chad has passed through *many* cycles of fullness and dryness over the millennia, long before human beings began using oil to heat their homes and drive their cars.

Later in the movie, Gore warns us of the likelihood that we will soon be facing an increase in infectious disease, because the insects that carry the germs of fifteen horrible illnesses (including malaria, ebola, SARS, west nile virus, a drug-resistant form of TB, legionnaire’s disease, lyme disease, etc.) will soon be able to expand into new and vaster habitats that are warmer and more hospitable.

But actually, as Mellie Gilder, MD, noted shortly after the film was released⁷⁰, only four of these diseases are carried by insects. One of them, lyme disease, far from being a tropical illness that will now spread northward, is a disease that originated in temperate Connecticut and has been spreading to the south and west. Another, Malaria, *is* typically seen in certain tropical climates, but this is mostly due to the effects of poverty rather than climate – malaria was once prevalent in the cold regions of northern Europe and Siberia. A third disease, west nile virus, is carried by a mosquito that is found in every temperature zone and on every continent on the planet save Antarctica. There is no evidence that the appearance of west nile virus in the United States was due to global warming that allowed the host mosquito to suddenly thrive here.

Gore’s movie, and the entire global warming movement, is filled with this sort of dramatic but questionable information that gives science a bad name but sways politicians and voters. The public has been convinced that global warming is unquestionably being caused by our irresponsible overuse of fuel oil, which, when burned, releases excessive carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, and this high level of heat-trapping carbon causes world-wide warming. We are then treated to vivid and spectacular assertions

that the glaciers are going to melt, the oceans are going to rise, our port cities will be deluged, and it's the end of the world. It is hard to question this frightening scenario since the press assures us that 'there is scientific consensus' and 'no credible scientist disagrees'.

But quite a few credible scientists do disagree, or are at least open-minded enough to question the politicized assumptions and to remember that causality is a complex concept, especially in imprecise sciences like climatology. In any case, science does not run on consensus. Claiming that a consensus already exists, and that debate ought therefore to be stilled, is a cheap maneuver to avoid the continuous questioning that good science demands.

Gore's movie claims that the presence of excessive amounts of carbon in the atmosphere causes the earth's temperature to rise. He presents a graph that compares temperature and carbon levels during thousands of years of Earth's history, and viewers can easily see that these two measurements rise and fall together. It is very tempting to jump quickly to assumptions about causality simply because two events occur together. But the mere *correlation* of two events does not prove *causality*. Sure enough, there is ample evidence on the very chart that is used in *An Inconvenient Truth* to suggest that increases in temperature cause increases in atmospheric carbon, rather than the reverse. The basic evidence is a simple matter of timing: in the rising-and-falling cycles that the chart depicts, close analysis reveals that on many occasions throughout history the periods of increased levels of atmospheric carbon have been *preceded* by overall increases in planetary temperature – and this strongly suggests that rising temperature is in fact the driving cause of rising carbon (which is most likely released by warming oceans and land masses).

I am not trying to suggest that there is no possibility that human-mediated carbon release could be leading to dangerous global warming. But there are huge and complex factors involved in climatic events, from oceanic dynamics to solar dynamics to long-term patterns of the earth's complex movements in space, and we really do not know what is going on. An average rise of about one Fahrenheit degree over the past century or so is not in question, but what still is in question is (1) the *cause* of this rise, (2) the *results* that may or may not ensue because of it, and (3) whether anything *we* do is going to change the future of weather. Exaggerations, personal attacks on opponents, and disingenuous pretensions of knowledge are the bane of science and can only serve to discredit the valid ongoing attempts to impartially and accurately understand and evaluate the effects, if any, of manmade heat-trapping gases. (Both sides of the debate, of course, are guilty of this same blather. Plenty of opponents of the global warming theory spend their time attacking the integrity of its proponents, and insisting that one or another favorite piece of anecdotal evidence about a cooling trend somewhere that day is incontrovertible 'proof' that global warming is a hoax.)

It will be objected that, in the meantime, we should err on the side of caution and prevent the release of more carbon by whatever means we can employ. There is value in this precautionary principle, but there is another equally important precautionary principle with which it must be balanced. Limiting the consumption of fossil fuels will be a great nuisance to most Americans, but it will be *devastating* to the economies of poor and developing nations. Readily available and affordable energy is crucial to these struggling economies and there is a clear connection between thriving national economies and its citizens' health, life expectancy, happiness and security. Increased wealth brings with it opportunities for better nutrition, better education, better medical care, cleaner environments, and safer more-peaceful societies. Before Americans casually presume to tell the world that we have ever-so-nobly decided that everyone must now limit their energy consumption, we need to err on the side of caution and consider the harmful effects this will have on the lives of others, and not be so surprised and offended when other countries do not fall in line.

Why the ease with which this alleged problem has been accepted? There are several reasons behind it. It provides a wonderful diversion from more pressing matters, including more pressing matters of ecology as well as economic renewal and the improvement of our foreign relations. It allows the far left to challenge the rule of capitalism, since our American economy is very much based on energy. It allows the far right to claim they are 'green' and uniquely concerned with saving lives and saving the planet. And in the face of all the propaganda there is once again the matter of our common 'suggestibility', the astonishing ease with which we abdicate all responsibility to think for ourselves.

Instead of so quickly jumping on the bandwagon, some healthy skepticism is in order. We do not know very much at all about global warming, and that is perfectly alright. To reiterate what was said earlier in the Introduction, Socrates often claimed to have no wisdom at all, but in Plato's *Symposium* he says he is an expert on love. There is no contradiction here. Love, for Socrates, meant longing, and this state of longing is what he meant by being always *between* ignorance and wisdom, always seeking and questioning and desiring. This is what science should really be about. Socrates understood *Eros*, and lived passionately and erotically, as we all should, precisely because he acknowledged that he knew nothing, but was always an adoring lover and seeker of beauty, goodness – and truth.

CHAPTER SIX - EDUCATION

To make our economy stronger and more dynamic, we must prepare a rising generation to fill the jobs of the 21st century. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, standards are higher, test scores are on the rise and we're closing the achievement gap for minority students. Now we must demand better results from our high schools, so every high school diploma is a ticket to success. - George W. Bush. *State of the Union Address, 2005*

Millions of Americans have been persuaded by this kind of rhetoric that the purpose of education is to prepare our children to score well on standardized tests so that we can have more well-trained workers. As the standards movement gets stronger, we convince ourselves that being a useful employee is the key to a happy and successful life. Rather than nurturing a sense of wonder and a passion for learning, our schools are increasingly devoted to standardizing knowledge into lists of data, telling students what is appropriate for them to know and think, and then 'scientifically' measuring how well they regurgitate this data on assessment tests. What is truly important in human life consists precisely of those things which cannot be measured; love, decency, joy, all the great virtues and passions. This is what the education of a human being should be about. But America no longer seeks to educate thinking, feeling, human beings. We seek to educate servants. The new rallying cries are 'Raising Standards' and 'No Child Left Behind', which we all know are just euphemisms for job training.

All of this is just a prescription for an efficient human ant hill. And it is worth remembering that in the ant hill an individual life does not count for much. There are always plenty of replacements who can do the same job.

The corporate world gets involved in education, worried that their businesses will not be able to compete in the global economy if the workers being produced by our schools are inferior. They then insist that schools should be run like any other enterprise in a competitive marketplace, and the rules of quality control, managerial efficiency, and good marketing technique, should be applied in exactly the same way. Thus, we need (1) a common set of standards for the end-product, (2) a scientific test for measuring how well the students and schools are meeting these standards, and (3) an advertising campaign to convince the public that a meaningful education of their children means getting them to score well on these tests. This latter is easily achieved by appealing to parents' worries about the financial future, and then ceaselessly sending them the message that our schools are in a 'crisis'.

But the economic system is not floundering because of badly performing schools. The American economy rises and falls, as it does in every nation and in every era, in response to numerous and profound market and social forces that bear no relation at all to the day-to-day functioning of our educational system. Meanwhile, the insistence on greater 'accountability' of schools does not lead to greater achievement by our students. It leads to greater stress, fear, and alienation, it leads to a dumbing-down of curricula, it leads to pain and stigmatization for many children who do not do well on standardized tests regardless of their intelligence or their classroom efforts, and it helps to deepen the rifts between diverse and antagonistic elements of society.

This certainly does not mean that there is no room for improvement in the school system. But narrowing our vision and stultifying our minds is not a very admirable reform, and it is merely degrading and destructive to base our educational system on the corporate model, treating our children as nothing more than future workers and consumers who are to be counted, measured, and evaluated.

Americans are used to the entrenched system of educational experts using test scores to label us as smart or not smart, worthy or not worthy. Yet such tests have little ability to predict either academic or worldly success: rather, the scores tend to be highly correlated with socioeconomic status, and they reward the superficial learning of meaningless rote data rather than critical thinking, creativity, or depth of understanding. There is ample evidence that these costly examinations tell us little about intelligence or competency. They simply measure one's ability to do well on the test, a worthless skill in the long run.

After a thorough study of the accuracy and usefulness of using SAT scores as a predictor of academic success, prestigious Bates College dropped the SAT requirement for their applicants more than twenty years ago. Their report concluded that "there is much in the data that would call into question the policy of requiring any standardized test scores, given how poorly they predict academic performance at Bates."⁷¹ Even a federal government report on *Testing in American Schools* issued by the Office of Technology and Assessment in 1992 stated that "It now appears that the use of these tests misled policy makers and the public about progress of students, and in many places hindered the implementation of genuine school reforms."⁷² But the general public continues to believe the propaganda that the tests are important indicators of the quality of our schools. The result is the further stratification of society along racial* and economic lines, the further erosion of individuality, and the further fragmentation of the soul.

Wonder is the characteristic expression of *Eros*, such as we see in great art, poetry, music, and literature, and this is the true essence of education: the wide-eyed longing for wisdom, meaning, and completeness. But this has all been deconstructed and debunked, and we have deprived our children of the opportunity to take mystery seriously, to yearn for discovery, and to experience the excitement of not knowing. Our complacent acceptance of cultural directives that tell us what to think and feel has opened the way for the mass degradation of our children by subjecting them to 'scientific measurements', as if they were soulless mechanical devices that needed to be repaired and upgraded. And thus our schools have been forced into the business of cloning mediocrity, churning out obedient servants for the economic system. But our schools are not in a 'crisis'. It is our souls that are in peril.

Moral and Intellectual Inferiority

This whole idea of testing the intellect began with the Eugenics Movement in the early twentieth century. 'Intelligence Tests' were originally concocted as tools for demonstrating the moral and intellectual inferiority of immigrants, blacks, Jews, Native Americans, etc. "The nation's pioneers of intelligence tests provided lawmakers with the scientific rationale they needed for policies that are now roundly

* Public schools, especially those in affluent neighborhoods, now have incentives to resist accepting students with educational deficiencies, since they will bring down the scores: lowered scores lead to schools being labeled as 'failures', which means that reputations are ruined and jobs are lost. From this perspective, it is better for the schools if these children drop out. Or perhaps they can be referred to a commercially run 'Job Corps' for a GED, where the corporate degradation of education reaches the extreme of absurdity. In a Job Corps where I once worked in New York State, the students – living, human children, most of whom were Black or Hispanic and came from inner city communities – were officially referred to as the 'inventory'.

condemned....Tens of thousands of army recruits, including recent immigrants, were subjected to IQ tests; bizarre but supposedly scientific conclusions about the natural laws of intelligence were drawn; and eugenically appropriate public policies were enacted in several states.”⁷³ All of this was expected to be useful toward the goal of selecting better people to become citizens, “and even for the right of having offspring,” as one of the founders of the movement wrote in 1927.⁷⁴

According to Lewis M. Terman of Stanford University, the developer of the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale:

It is safe to predict that in the near future intelligence tests will bring tens of thousands of these high-grade defectives under the surveillance and protection of society. This will ultimately result in curtailing the reproduction of feeble-mindedness....⁷⁵

Here was faith in mechanical science gone mad. Today we have altered the language, of course. We no longer speak of ‘social defectives’, ‘morons’ and ‘imbeciles’. We speak instead of people who have ‘special needs’, or any number of ‘learning disabilities’. But the game is the same – the worthy are separated off from the unworthy. “The eugenics movement may have faltered, but it nevertheless formed certain habits of mind that have been institutionalized in the American belief system.”⁷⁶ These habits of thought continue to exacerbate the wide differences between socioeconomic groups.

This is not meant to suggest some sort of evil conspiracy, consciously spawned by a depraved cabal bent on reducing men and women into sheep. Rather, it represents an unconscious cultural trend that persists by its own overwhelming inertia, and will continue to lead us into the appalling degradation of the human ant hill if we as individuals continue to passively submit to it.

The development of these mental tests coincided perfectly with the needs of the newly emergent American middle class. The question of how to devise new rules for allocating wealth, based on merit rather than ancestry, found its answer in the modern world’s fascination with science and technology. Measuring minds with technology, and using this information to assess merit, was an ideal solution! The old aristocracy used to perpetuate itself on the basis of birth and parentage. Now our nation’s new elites could perpetuate their class privilege with tests legitimized by pseudo-science.

This is another example of the ideal of freedom finding itself at odds with the ideal of equality. ‘Freedom’ demands that all citizens have the right to a successful life, regardless of the circumstances of their birth, if they work hard and do their best. It is then assumed, conveniently but with scant evidence, that standardized tests of intelligence are a valid scientific way of guaranteeing this freedom, by assigning people to their proper place within the meritocracy. ‘Equality’ then asserts itself in *opposition* to this economic hierarchy which distinguishes one person from another rather than making everyone the same. So the rules of Equal Protection come into force to balance out the situation, by insisting on new requirements of ‘inclusion’ in the classroom and ‘accommodations’ during testing for all children with ‘special needs’. Unsurprisingly, the number of kids diagnosed with ‘special needs’ has grown exponentially in the years since the standards movement began. The final result is that almost everyone graduates from High School anyway, so that the assessment tests become little more than an expensive

annoyance, distressing students and degrading their education.* The remaining claim that the tests cause schools to raise standards is also untrue. Just the reverse occurs: a ‘dumbing down’ is the inevitable result when community and political pressures force schools and teachers to restrict teaching time to details and question-types that are most likely to appear on the standardized tests. Creativity, innovation, imagination, and in-depth thinking, are all relegated to the category of ‘fluff’ so that children’s minds can be focused exclusively on test details.

Of course, there are ways that schools can succeed in raising test scores, and many have done so. Deprive our children of recess and sports, eliminate art and music, forego time for interesting discussions, offer less time to read books for pleasure, cut back on field trips and interesting projects, offer fewer electives, and waste a lot of valuable time teaching test-taking tricks, and it is fairly easy to raise scores and thus inspire Presidential speeches like the one quoted above. But the results are meaningless at best. At worst, they numb our children’s minds, narrow their vision, and kill their spirit, by turning education into a boring, frightening, drudgery. Recently there have even been calls for the elimination of childhood summer vacations, since ten weeks of fun and fresh air get in the way of preparing for the tests, and threaten our position in the global marketplace. Meanwhile, we find ourselves falling into a hellish world in which more and more high school students respond to the pressures of college admission by committing suicide, elementary school children become ill and obese from lack of recess and play, and kindergartners require therapy to recover from stress disorders.

To reform our schools in a meaningful way would mean to restore the notion that education is rooted in wonder, not economics. Wonder is not merely curiosity. It is a blending of enchantment, mystery, love and respect, with thoughtfulness, willingness, and intuition. It reveals to us the intimate relationship between our inner self and the outer world. But as we have already noted, our outmoded but persistent scientific viewpoint has led us to take the self *out* of life. We insist on remaining onlookers, believing that ‘real’ life only exists in external things, and our ‘real’ need is to accumulate more of them. In addition to devastating our souls, this has utterly crippled our educational system. Like bits of matter in a laboratory or human beings in a community, it is a fiction to believe that knowledge and ideas can be isolated and objectively measured. They grow, develop and change as they pass through time, they are intertwined with other ideas and interwoven with subjective minds. Knowledge, intelligence and ideas are not scientifically reducible ‘things’. And neither are our children. Children are not meant to be assessed like commercial products on an assembly line. Schools should not be in the business of manufacturing ‘things’.

Teaching

Openness to ideas and possibilities, an expanded vision, a willingness to explore, a passion for discovery, a genuine appreciation for wisdom and beauty, and a full life of the emotions, body, mind and spirit – these should be the goals of our educational endeavor. But none of this can be preplanned, measured, counted, and assessed. Trying to do so is silly and inappropriate.

* Relying on the American ideal of ‘freedom’ as a justification for testing intelligence and divvying people up into a meritocracy, is a conservative project concerned with maintaining a healthy economy. Relying on the corresponding American ideal of ‘equality’ as a justification for more rules and regulations to assure identical treatment of everyone, is a liberal project concerned with maintaining social fairness. Neither is primarily concerned with the education of children or the perfection of their souls.

Planning lessons is a useful tool for teachers: reflecting on content, comparing alternative ways of approaching the material, considering possible questions that might arise. But forcing teachers to rigidly adhere to pre-planned ‘objectives’ and specific measurements of ‘learning outcomes’ has the effect of forcing teachers to be insensitive to where children are at that moment, to shun innovation, and to close down inquiry. *Good* teachers know that the classroom, like the rest of life, rarely sticks to the plan, and teaching requires improvisation, sensitivity, and countless unexpected turns. *Great* teachers *use* this unpredictability to unlock minds and confound expectations: if Socrates had focused on achieving measurable pre-planned objectives, his Teachings would have been meaningless and quickly forgotten. But under pressure from school boards and regulators to specify ‘learning objectives’ and ‘means of assessing outcomes’ – that is, to isolate and name in advance specific behavioral (scientifically measurable) goals – teaching becomes a mere mechanical transfer of data. But education is not the passing of information from someone who has it to someone who does not. That is called ‘programming’.

The Lost Longing of the Soul

Eros, as Socrates knew, is the real key to education, but this longing is precisely what is missing from our students’ lives – and this only reflects the reality that it is missing from all of our lives. Without the hopes and dreams aroused by *Eros*, children are left apathetic, disrespectful, and empty. American students are obsessed with the questions: “Why do I need to know this? When am I ever going to use this in my real life?” Since they have almost never heard that inner development and inner wisdom are important, that their soul is their real life, this kind of dry utilitarianism is all that makes sense to them. They want to be assured that the only things they are being taught are things that will help assure them of a good job. Otherwise, or so they believe without question, they have more important things to do. And as far as their vision allows them to see, adult society agrees with them. Thus, we reduce life to a base minimum.

Among animals, puberty is the pinnacle of maturity. There is nothing to be accomplished after that. But among humans, puberty is just the beginning of adulthood. The greater and most interesting part of learning – emotional, intellectual, moral, and spiritual – follows afterward. The enthusiasm and energy required for this endeavor comes from a newly awakened *Eros* – not the sexual act, but that sacred force within us that seeks warmth and connection and meaning, that strives to link the lowest with the highest, the erotic longing for all that is beautiful, good, and true. But we customarily think that we, like the animals, have nothing much to learn after puberty, other than the details that enable us to obtain a good job. We are all finished with wonder by the age of perhaps fourteen. After that, we train to become competent specialists but otherwise do not change very much. We are content with mediocrity, and smile with a mixture of bemusement and embarrassment at any mention of our naïve childhood hopes and dreams. Again, a dejected *Eros* departs.

And why should he stay? Children have already learned everything about love and sex from TV, video games, music, and movies, long before their bodies feel the sensations of puberty. They then attend sex education classes where they are taught about diseases and condoms and respect for one’s partner, but nothing about love or the yearning of the soul. As a result, young people no longer feel any guilt or shame about sex, but neither do they feel much genuine passion. Their conversations about love and sex sound about as erotic as a discussion of accounting practices. The pleasure of sex is routine and no longer includes any hint of mystery.

Walking through the halls of a High School today, one is constantly confronted with pretty young girls, barely clad, desperately seeking attention, leaving little to the imagination. But what is most astonishing is to watch the young boys who pass them by with no hint of notice, who are already so jaded by the environment, so oppressed by political correctness, that there is nothing left to see. It is all just an actualization of Plato's extreme suggestion in his utopian Republic that the best way to persuade people to give their deepest loyalty and devotion to the government rather than their families is to have men and women exercise naked together, till the whole sexual arousal thing becomes old hat and boring.

Given the smug arrogance they witness in our 'scientific' society, it is hard to convince students that theirs is not the first generation to understand the real truth about the world we live in. They simply do not know that real intelligence means openness – not the current vogue that any silly opinion must be granted the same respect as any other, but real openness to ambiguity, possibility and wonder, an attitude toward life that combines genuine common sense with the innocence of a child, that does not bow to the hypnotic enslaving effects of cultural propaganda and fads, and does not justify or revel in ignorance, vulgarity, and boredom.

Part of the explanation for the current situation is that our schools are now scrutinized as if they were totally responsible for the success of their students – as if parents and the kids themselves bear hardly any responsibility for this. The result is that a substantial number of children come swaggering into the classroom having no reason to be polite or respectful, and no incentive to make any serious effort. It is the teacher who must be endlessly patient and tolerant of their behavior, and prove his or her own worth to parents and school boards by coaxing, cajoling and begging the students to study and do well on the tests. Children today have been led to believe that they deserve a great deal of respect, and they are adamant that no one be allowed to 'dis' them. But most of them have never been taught that they must earn this respect by making serious efforts of their own. We have tried so hard to imbue them superficially with self-esteem, that we have crippled their ability to accomplish anything on their own. And so, instead of studying and working and taking any interest in learning, far too many of them sit in their classrooms passively, talking with each other, listening to music on their headphones, and at semester's end expect a good grade and a good test score. If these do not occur, teachers and administrators are readily blamed. They then take all these attitudes and expectations along with them into adulthood.

It must be noted that there is nothing magical about the age of eighteen, and there is no good reason to keep forcing the same testing and programming down the throats of every child, at the same time, in the same way. Some of our children who are languishing in High School, suffering miserably and distracting their peers, should have the nearly-vanished option of attending a vocational school and learning a trade: precalculus and advanced creative writing are simply not for them, and why must they be? Others are ready well before the age eighteen to enter a Community College. Some would benefit enormously from entering the Service, or going out now, without any 'drop out' stigma or repercussions, and getting a job: if these kids later decided they *wanted* to return to High School – mature and ready to succeed – they should be welcome with open arms. And some of these kids, bored out of their minds, are ready at sixteen or seventeen to enter an early liberal arts college environment.

In Socrates' time, youngsters flocked to him, aching to share in his wisdom, wanting to be challenged and taught. Crowds of disciples followed Christ everywhere, so that sometimes he had to get on a boat and sail away, just to find a brief respite. Why do we have no such ache? Or do we, but we have nearly deadened it with what we now call 'education'. Is *Eros*, the passionate desire for all that is truly good and meaningful, completely dead in ourselves and our children? Or is it just too hard to brave the ridicule of acknowledging that he still lives, hidden somewhere inside our crust-encovered hearts?

EPILOGUE

Nothing characterizes ‘modernity’ more completely than the loss of faith in transcendence, our arrogant lack of any appreciation for levels of reality above our everyday affairs. In *The Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche observed that we have effectively abolished the transcendent world, the world that Plato, Moses, Christ, Muhammad, and many other great Teachers, have always recognized as the ‘true’ world. He then asked, “Which world is left? Perhaps the apparent one? Certainly not! Together with the true world we have also abolished the apparent one!”⁷⁷ In other words, by shutting the door on transcendence we have cut off any light from that world that might have illuminated this one, leaving us in darkness, leaving us with nothing. Pan is long dead. God, at least according to Nietzsche, has been dead for over a century. Now *Eros* appears to have joined them. Humanity no longer understands divine madness, the breathtaking quest to overcome our incompleteness, the longing for eternity.

Since God is gone and the light of meaning has dimmed, and our purpose in life is to be a conforming worker ant for forty hours per week and then watch advertisements and go shopping during the time remaining, there is little time and even less need for actual thinking in any sort of active, creative, or spiritually meaningful way. Public opinion, represented by our polling madness which tells us what our opinions are, has conveniently spared us any need to think intelligently for ourselves, by giving us an opportunity to accommodate our beliefs to the prevailing nonsense before we open our mouths and embarrass ourselves. And if we do not have to think for ourselves, then an empty education which strives for uniformity of thinking is both natural and obvious.

But ‘emptiness’, when understood in the right way, is not always a bad thing.

*A Zen master invited his student to tea, and kept pouring
hot tea into the student’s cup, spilling it all over the table.
“Master,” the student said, “the cup is already full!”
“You’re right,” sighed the master, “and I cannot fill a cup
that is already full.”
The student understood and departed.*

For Socrates, too, the first step was to help his students realize the need to empty their cups of all the assumptions, prejudices, and useless information that prevented them from using their minds properly. Only then, when they realized that they really knew nothing at all, could a meaningful life begin, for only then could *Eros* awaken their desire to obtain wisdom.

Happily dancing toward the ant hill, we deconstruct everything along the way, from ourselves to nature to God, and leave ourselves with nothing but an impoverished soul. Can this emptiness be filled without contradicting our hard-earned rationality, our scientific achievement, and our demand for social justice? *Eros* represents the hope of human connectedness on all levels, the cure for our broken, fragmented lives. If *Eros* is completely dead, if we have used up all our emotional energy deconstructing love, beauty and meaning, then there is no hope for this, since there is no more aching need for wholeness, wisdom or eternity. But if *Eros* is only wounded, then Love still holds the key to helping the soul heal the rifts between mind and body, between men and women, between nations and peoples, between heaven and earth.

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